

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**May 20, 2026, at 12:30 PM**  
**19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

Tammy Holloway, Northampton Co, Vice Chair  
Karin Rush-Monroe, Accomack Co Appointee  
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton Co, Appointee  
Joanne Moore, Chincoteague C of C, Appointee

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director  
Megan Lawson, DODD  
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant  
Anna Huff, Director of Marketing  
Sally Williams, Southern Gateway Welcome Cnt

Commissioners – Absent

Jon Dempster, Northampton Co. Supervisor  
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Chair

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street  
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center  
Lee Pambid, Deputy Co. Administrator, CZA -Z  
Grace Woodworth, Admin. Assistant  
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street  
Kelly Donnell, ESVA Chamber of Commerce

Chamber of Commerce – Observer

Ace Seybolt

Ex-Officio Non-VTC Representative

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

- At 12:30 p.m. Holloway called the meeting to order. Holloway welcomed Anna Huff to the ESVA Tourism team and congratulated the ESVA Chamber of Commerce team on a successful Chamberfest.

2. Public Comments

- Ace Seybolt announced this is his last meeting as lesion to tourism. Jay Abella will be taking this position. Ace continued and stated as a business owner there is a looming issue. Ace pays \$600k tot tax, Chincoteague has decided they want to add \$1,000 a year to homeowners' expense on the business licenses rental property. That adds another \$150k running total to Ace Seybold's business expense \$750k. The county now wants to add a tangible personal asset tax for businesses that have rentals. That brings the amount up to \$800k My business is now working to pay the county and municipality taxes. That is not a good incentive for property owners to want to have rental property. Chincoteague is having a public hearing but have already put these new tax revenue numbers into their budget.
  - Holloway suggested to have Chincoteague not have a public hearing the same day they are voting on these tax issues. Holloway would also like tourism to focus on lodging promotion in July and August. Visitors are slow to book stays in advance and those months look very light right now.
  - Lawson informed the commission that ESVATC has switched social media plan of action from planning your stay to; book your trip. We have travel guides that we will be putting into publications in areas that are trending strongly to our region.

- Karen Zamorski reported that Love Run was a huge success. Cape Charles capped sign up for runners at 550. Between 7 am and 2 pm there were 2,200 people in town. Restaurants reported the weekend of Love Run was busier than the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Main Street is now preparing for Sail Fest. Karen gave the number attending Chamberfest at 6 pm the volume of people in the area was 4,000 the address used was for Shanty. We are coming up with a venue POI for the Chamberfest site to make that number more accurate. For the whole weekend we had 6,000 people in Cape Charles. Saturdays total for the weekend came in at 9,000 people. There were two big weddings in Cape Charles which adds to that number.
  - Jay added that Chamberfest is a regional event where they traveled within 125 miles. This can be what we are going to see this summer season with high gas prices, and last-minute bookings.
  - Ace added we are in a K economy high end people are doing well; low-end middle-income vacation housing is not doing well.
  - Cherron added the New Church Welcome Center is experiencing the last-minute traveler. Travelers are telling us the weekend looks great, we don't know where we are going can you help us plan our trip and we don't want to go over 50-75 miles. That is what we hear multiple times from people that come into the welcome center. Having events that we can suggest are a plus. Marketing the Shore as a one tank of gas away was used 20 years ago. The Shore had a circle drawn around it on a map showing how close we are to major markets within a tank of gas.

### 3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:55 p.m. Moore made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

### 4. VTC Updates

- Laura directed everyone to her monthly report in the google docs. Laura and Lawson did a presentation at the Onancock business workshop. MMLP grant of \$20k was awarded to Onancock Main Street, Cape Charles Main Street was awarded \$9k. VTC research observation in domestic travel looks good for travel for Virginia 2026. This year is shaping up to be a year for road trips and regional travel. Media news clips are all featured in the statement that Laura provided on google docs.
  - Rush-Monroe asked which feeder markets should Onancock be looking to. Laura answered Lawson should have an Arrivalist report for specifics on travelers. Laura will assist also with data from VTC.

### 5. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Updates**

Williams reported there has been a big jump this spring at the Southern Welcome Center it is 6 % above last spring and continuing to trend up. Musicians will be playing on Saturdays and donut holes from Quail Cove will be given away one weekend. The staff went on a FAM tour to Chincoteague and new work shirts for staff have been ordered. We have been seeing travelers for the past 2-3 weeks couples coming from California and out west traveling around the country by car. Williams asked these travelers if they were camping, they said no staying in B&B's but eating cheap and relaying great stories of what they are seeing. Most of the day visitors come from VA B and Williamsburg they are visiting for 5 days, and they get bored and want to cross the bridge and see what's here. The VA 250 trails have been great.

- **Director of Destination Development**

Lawson asked if anyone knows of musicians one or two to a group that would be interested in playing at the welcome center please give her information to them. Lawson's report is in the google docs highlights are travel guides have been delivered all over the Eastern Shore. Huff delivered the guides up to Chincoteague yesterday. Huff has been here for a week and feels like family. Huff is getting acquainted with social media tactics. Chamberfest was great, Lawson was set up at the airport and New Kent visitor center last week and spoke to 250 people during those events. It was good to see how many people knew about Sail Fest events on the Shore. Advertising: ESVA did a full-page ad in Local Pallet about road trips. Another ad on VA 250 promoting activities, we also have banner ads running. The promotions running are a mix of VA 250 history travel and book your trip. A full-page ad VA 250 is in King Tide. Local app use is up 95% March vs April. The most popular app on the website is the Revolutionary driving tour. Eastern Shore region had 34 new media mentions. Social media was down a little last month. There were fewer social media collaborations with influencers

- **Director of Marketing**

Huff commented it has been a good first week spent time driving around Chincoteague which was a great experience to see so many places. Huff spent wo days driving up and down the Shore stopping at memorable locations taking videos with the new travel guide the videos were posted on Instagram and Facebook.

- Holloway added if there is anything anyone can do to help you with any questions just let us know there are great people here that will be good resources.

- **2027 Tourism Summit - Speaker**

Sabbatini asked for feedback on speakers for the 2027 Summit. Lawson said at this point there is not one clear person in mind with a theme we just want people to start thinking about it.

- Rush-Monroe thought that the person that did the AI talk was well received. Sabatini responded the AI presenter at the summit will be back to do another presentation with the Chamber in the fall. AI is a field that is changing fast. Sharing the data that we have is an amazing resource that businesses don't know we have.
- Lawson said summit feedback was on AI and tactical skills.
- Holloway thought maybe the theme could be partnering on the shore.
- Laura added that the data that VTC currently has may not be available in the future. Laura will be pushing for the data sources to continue but isn't sure how available it will be in future. Government may be putting restrictions on the tracking and data gotten from cell phone sharing some regulations are on the horizon.

- **2026-2027 Draft Budget**

Sabbatini shard the draft budget and went over it with BOC. Sabbatini explained that he presents a balanced budget but as the BOC knows there are opportunities that happen which creates a surplus because he structures the budget conservatively.

- Holloway would like to see promotions with local TV programing.

## 6. Matters by Commissioner

- MacGarvey shares the town of Exmore and is getting ready for Juneteenth, which will be celebrated on June 20<sup>th</sup>, noon to 4 pm. Music, contests, food, parades are held in the Exmore town park.
- Rush-Monroe, shared Town of Onancock has hired a new town manager, Wesley Wootten. He has managed a couple small towns in Oregon, and he is from the Delmarva region. Onancock Main Street looks forward to meeting Mr. Wootten and talk to him about tourism and the

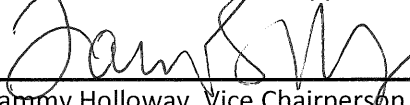
consistency of messaging. The tourism workshop that Onancock put on was great thanks to Lawson and Laura. Town of Onancock received a VTC Grant for \$20k

- Moore shared visitation in the Chincoteague visitor center is up 8 % year to date we had a great Seafood Festival the events calendar is full of events and Pony Penning is almost 2 months away. Pony Center, Beebe Ranch is up and running, Lighthouse will be open Friday a Saturday starting Memorial Day weekend. Moore added the ESVA new visitor guide looks wonderful.
- Holloway shared in Cape Charles the meals and tot tax are both up. A new Mexican restaurant open in the Distillery build called Del Sol another new business that has opened is called Wild it is a plant shop. The big news in Cape Charles is we are getting closer to workforce housing plan. It has taken years to obtain 4 proposals on workforce housing. The development is divided into phases; the first phase is affordable housing. Second phase affordable town homes for first time homeowners. There are still several more meetings to work through to obtain good agreement. Only one proposal made sense and would be held accountable to the town, and the vision of what Cape Charles wanted. The land is town owned which gives leverage to what can be developed in the proposed development. It is not section 8 housing this is active workforce housing the time line is 2-3 years.
- At 1:40 p.m. Tarr asked for a motion to select Moore as Treasurer of the ESVA Tourism Commission. MacGarvey made the first motion, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

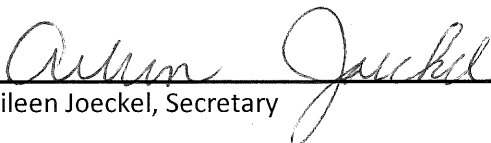
7. Adjournment

- At 1:55 p.m. Moore made the first motion to adjourn, seconded by Rush - Monroe and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

  
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Tammy Holloway, Vice Chairperson

6/17/26  
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Date

  
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Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

6/17/26  
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Date