

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 17, 2025, at 12:30 PM
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

John Coker Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair
Billy Joe Tarr Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair
Joanne Moore, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council-Z
Matt Spuck, Accomack Co. Appointee

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Megan Lawson, DODD
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant
HH Scott, Southern Welcome Center

Commissioners – Absent

Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton Co. Appointee

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street
Maggie Grant, Onancock Main Street-Z
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street

Chamber of Commerce – Observer

Ace Seybolt

Tourism Consultant

Evelyn Shotwell

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative-Absent

1. Call to Order

- At 12:30 p.m. Coker called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street reported Cape Charles Love Fest had attendance of over 2,800 people thirty percent higher than last year. Cape Charles is beginning to prepare for Festive Fridays. Last Monday night was the Main Street Connect meeting with business leaders; Lawson attended and reviewed the spending figures from Zartico. Businesses are slightly up in some areas and a little down in lodging. Dollar spending was up twenty to twenty-five percent higher in many cases.
 - Coker added NHC TOT tax is down, but the Meals tax is way up.
 - Jay Abella added, TC - Lawson was asked for some last-minute data which was needed for analysis for MSC meeting, Lawson was right on it and provided it quickly. Zartico subscription is running out, Jay is concerned about what is going to replace that system of data collection.
 - Lawson added Zartico information is important on understanding the quality of visitors that is coming to the shore including the average spend per check that a retail operation is receiving. You can drill down to income levels of spender. Then also put that against the age level and gender that is spending money. A lot can be profiled for a visitor coming to Cape Charles or any visitors that come to the shore if we request it.

- **Director of Destination Development**

Lawson reported the google listing on all levels are up over last year. The summer music at the welcome center on Saturdays has finished. The music was very well received, it brought more people into the center, and they stayed longer. Ad sales are happening now. Eleven ad spots closed. Last year we had twenty-five. Cover design of the travel guide is in progress you can see a couple designs on the table in front of you. This is the Kalmar Nyckel Sailing vessel from Holland. It came to Cape Charles in 2014 for Sail Fest. These are Chris Glennon photos, the Kalmar Nyckel is returning to Cape Charles in June for Sail Fest 2026 the 250 anniversary. We are focusing on VA 250 in the travel guide, and visual of the Kalmar Nyckel Sailing vessel as a cover photo of the travel guide would be a great way to represent the historical events happening on the Shore.

- Coker asked how long the ship would be here. It's a tease that it is only here for a couple of days, not a yearlong stay, it is false advertising.
- Joeckel added VA 250 is a yearlong list of events that can be participated in on the Shore.
- Evelyn agreed if it is only going to be there for four days it does not merit a cover.
- Holloway added if there is a connection to VA 250 it looks like history is on the Shore and it could be valid. One of the beginning pages of the travel guide will explain VA 250 and list things to do.

Lawson continued, there is an ad in the Post promoting the travel guide and media kit. The back cover ad is placed. Two historic trail pages are placed for Northampton Co and Accomack Co is being worked on. The New Church event was great for the TC. We have a blitz going on at New Church WC right now. ESVA TC blitz has various stations which include an historical station for VA 250, Rail Trails, all our rack card trails, and a large photo of seaside as back drop behind counter. There are photos everywhere that explain everything to do on the Eastern Shore and dedicated sections for the towns of the Shore. The blitz will move to Bracy Welcome Center next month for Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance (CVTA). We are also promoting the mobile museum stops on the Shore. On October fourth the VA 250 mobile museum will be at the Agi fair.

- Sabbatini added we will be putting together a reception for the VA 250 mobile museum on Friday October third at the Old Machipongo Middle School, the location of the Agi Fair site. Both County Board of Supervisors, County administrator, Chamber of Commerce board, as well as the Tourism Commission are invited. Food and drinks are provided plus a sneak peak in the VA 250 mobile museum at 4 pm on the third of October. Shore History, Northampton Preservation Society, and Northampton VA 250 are sponsors of the reception.

Lawson is offering as many marketing opportunities as possible by bundling specials which include blog posts and email blasts to make this affordable for our partners to participate in the travel guide. The ad for the Virginia Travel Guide magazine has been submitted for 2026. The look is totally different. TC is promoting holiday happenings on the Shore. The first marketing ad is with Style Blueprint. They have hundreds of thousands of views, it is a very affordable buy in. This group is ranked first in google search and includes eblast. TC has sent our March events to AAA magazine to be published. Marketing website traffic is still down with the social and paid search media lapse. TC is back online things will pick up as fall adventures are promoted. The Outdoor Channel will be filming The Complete Obsession of Carter Andrews, on the Shore September 30th through October 6th. Carter's show is featured weekly on the Outdoor Channel. Carter has a huge following and is known as Anthony Bourdain of fishing. Carter is coming to fish in Cape Charles with Tidewater Charters and Captain Tyler Nonn. The group is hosted in Wachapreague so that he can see more of the Shore. Carter is being flown into Chatham on a sea plane, a party will be hosted at Chatham, the Exmore dinner is providing crab cakes, Carter will have his catch cooked at the Island House, tour of VIMS, might get to the Agi Fair, Dock Dogs.

- Evelyn asked if they would be coming to Chincoteague.

Lawson responded that Carter is not planning to but if Evelyn would send fishing adventure for a day, Lawson would pass them on. It is a crew of four cameramen, one land, one aerial, one underwater and a second shooter. TC will get all the content that features the Shore regionally. Carter does great voice overs he is passionate about culinary, history, fishing, and outdoor adventures. This is his fourth trip to the shore. Carter's plan was to just fish in Cape Charles, but he fished there three times before TC intervened and pulled Carter up the shore to be more regional.

 - Evelyn added there is a white dolphin in the bays of Chincoteague right now.
- **2026 Visitor Guide**

Sabbatini reported the travel guide committee will be meeting right after this meeting. As we discussed we are working on the cover photo. This is just a quick update that work is progressing on the travel guide.
- **Welcome Center Love Sign**

Sabbatini asked everyone to look at the Love sign submissions that are taped up on the wall outside the board room. If anyone has an idea on or thought for the Love sign, please let us know. We want to start putting a design together so that we can decide what we want to do.

 - Lawson added we do owe the artist lots of recognition they are very anxious to find out what the next steps are.
- **2026 Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini reported the 2026 Tourism Summit will be hosted at the Rosenwald school. The school also assured Sabbatini that parking at the school could accommodate parking for one hundred plus people.

 - Holloway added that the side street Cassatt Rd is not heavily used that it would be capable for parking if there is overflow.

Jon Shallert has agreed and is available to return as keynote speaker for the summit. The focus of the workshop is to help established businesses get to the next level. New businesses will also be addressed in the presentation. Jon will meet with business owner in advance; Jon is excited to be returning.

 - Lawson added the six businesses he will be working with in advance should also be a part of the panel in the afternoon moderated by Jon for a live session.

Sabbatini suggested to have folks that Jon has helped in the past, Eric Hawkins of Tiny Livin give a testimonial for Jon and the Tourism Commission. Jon has offered to do a video teaser which could include Eric Hawkins who attended his boot camp in Colorado.

 - **Miscellaneous** - Quick update on the building. Lizzy Webb and Steve Lawson have submitted drawing for the bathroom renovations. There will be a family/handicap bathroom, it will be ADA compliant. There will be new fixtures, lighting, vanity. Sabbatini will share full details. The technological upgrades that were discussed at the last meeting will be installed soon.

6. Matters by Commissioner

- Moore shared the Plein air and Poker Run events were held the same weekend. The island was rumbling for four days with the motorcycles. September 20 will be the second POW MIA Car Show which Moore and her husband sponsor. There will be over one hundred cars and twelve craft vendors attending. The event is held at the carnival grounds from 9 am – 2 pm.
 - Sabbatini suggested to Moore to apply for the ESVA Tourism sponsorship next year.

Fall Pony Round up is September 26th and 27th, Oyster Festival is October 11th. Moore thanked the Tourism Commission for sponsoring this year's Oyster Festival. Pumpkin Trail, and Trick or

Treat on Main Street are scheduled. VTC Fall in Love with Chincoteague Island getaway winner has been announced. August visitation is up thirty-nine half percent over last year. Year to date up eight percent.

- Tarr added the crowds for the carnival were down except for the fourth of July, which were the largest crowds on record. On the other nights from 9:30 pm to 10 pm everyone was gone but the money was up every night. It was an outstanding record setting year. The beach parking lot has A, B and part of C open.
- Spuck reported Onancock was up eight percent for August, which is good because we were down year to date. Lodging is down but meals are strong. Spuck passed out Halloween cards with all the festivities for Halloween. This weekend the pavilion at Historic Onancock school will celebrate its grand opening.
- Holloway shared Cape Charles has had the best audit ever. Lodging TOT tax will come in strong. June was down but August was up, that was a switch. The last concert in the park had nineteen hundred people. Concert attendance normally is four hundred to five hundred concerts in the park has reached a new level. Love Fest is up 30 percent in attendance. Dock Dive in the Park is October 3rd, 4th and 5th. Halloween Hootenanny will be the weekend before Halloween. The Rails to Trails project are coming along nicely. The Rosenwald School is going to be called the Impact Center. Things are great in Cape Charles.
- Evelyn, shared as a regular citizen, the town and beach did not seem to be overly crowd but numbers are up. On another note, there must be a way to improve customer service across the board through tourism and all businesses here on the Shore. It needs to be a constant reminder that customer service is important. Everyone that services people could use training.
 - Ace added that with hospitality we start training new hires in March. We need to have 30-40 housekeepers a year.
 - Holloway added we need to talk to businesses owner in Cape Charles Onanaock and Chincoteague to find out what their need looks like and what types of programs are needed. It is best to have input from business owners. Also, it needs to be ongoing not just a class at a summit.
 - Cherron added that there are ambassador programs that the state puts on, one in the spring and one in the fall. Everyone that attends are certified.


7. Adjournment

- At 1:41 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to adjourn, seconded by Spuck and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

 11/19/2025

John Coker, Chairperson Date

 11/19/2025

Aileen Joeckel, Secretary Date