

## **Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**January 27, 2016 at 2 p.m.**

**25-A Market Street, Onancock, Virginia 23417**

#### Commissioners in Attendance

Larry LeMond, Northampton County Board of Supervisors, Chairman

Steve Potts, Bill's Restaurant, Vice-Chairman

Paige Addison, Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel

Laura Belle Gordy, Accomack County Board of Supervisors

#### Staff Present

Kerry Allison, ESVATC Executive Director

Allan Burns, ESVATC Welcome Center Manager

Laurie Chamberlain, ESVATC Operations Specialist

#### Guests Present

Pennie Rew, Tourism Relations Manager, Virginia Tourism Corp Welcome Center, New Church

Jean Hungiville, Executive Director, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce

Evelyn Shotwell, Executive Director, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce

#### 1. Call to Order

LeMond called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

#### 2. Consent Agenda

Gordy moved that the consent agenda be approved. Potts seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

#### 3. Public Participation

Shotwell invited the ESVATC to the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce annual General Membership meeting on February 25 at the Chincoteague Center. The speaker will be Staci Martin from VTC. The Easter Decoy show will be 3/25-26. Recent storm damage was less than Hurricane Sandy. Addison mentioned having received email to purchase advertising in a 2016 Chincoteague Island Information Guide, which Shotwell said was not sanctioned.

Hungiville reported that the ES Chamber of Commerce passed its new budget for the year. They are kicking off a new Eastern Shore foundation and holding quarterly lunch and learns. They are setting up Business After Hours meetings for 2016; the ESVATC is having one March 22 at the Welcome Center.

#### 4. Welcome Center Report

The Welcome Center's 2015 visitor counts were 1% ahead of 2014. The Welcome Center floors had a restoration treatment over Thanksgiving. Burns has updated the Training & Operations Manual, including personnel policies and position descriptions. Burns is distributing the 2016 Eastern Shore of Virginia Activity Guides to local businesses, promoting rack spaces and weblinks, highlighting the combination offer and Spotlight Display. Burns detailed the value of printout discount coupons from the lobby interactive kiosk. Addison asked had he been able to compare redeemed coupons to unused ones. Burns said he had not but was getting some data from business who have coded coupons. Addison mentioned the value of knowing the results as a way of driving sales. Sunset Beach is being completely reworked by the new owner, Blue Water Development from Berlin, MD and will open July 4. The Sunset Beach Grill will be renamed the Jackspot at Sunset Beach, a sister operation to the Chincoteague Jackspot. Rittenhouse Motor Lodge is for sale and there has been serious interest from several investors. Maplewood Gardens will be completely out of business by April. Kiptopeke Inn will reopen March-April as the Chesapeake Inn. Volunteers are phoning all lodging facilities on the Eastern Shore, obtaining and updating info on lodging capacities (rooms, sites, units, amenities, capacity) for upcoming events and festivals and Burns hopes to report on that at the next meeting. Burns mentioned that Kirk Mariner stopped in at the Welcome Center and likes the Artisan Trail brochure. Mariner will be updating *Off 13*. Should

he make reference to specific locations or should he refer to the Artisan Trail brochure? Allison said she would contact Kirk Mariner and also bring up the Oyster Trail.

#### 5. Executive Director Report

Allison presented a 2015 Analytics Summary: Guides: Requests 2015/2014 +=200%; Website: Unique Visitors 2015/2014 = +26%; New Visitors 2015: 76%; Top Five Cities 2015: Washington DC, Va Beach, Norfolk, Richmond, N/A, Suffolk; Top Five Pages 2015: Home, Calendar, Map, Stay, Eat. Social Media: Facebook Likes are over 15,000 -- 2015/2014 = +79%. She reported that Facebook postings have received interest from Kentucky and Massachusetts; "6 beaches, two coastlines, discover the undiscovered" postings are going gangbusters. Likes are costing about eight cents apiece. Allison will give tourism economy presentations on the increase in tourism numbers beginning with Chincoteague Town Council next week. The Tourism Commission is now leading the Oyster Trail fundraising effort on the shore, and she wants to pull together Artisan Trail, Oyster Trail and Allan's role into an integrated strategy for fundraising and development, with a meeting at the end of February or early March, after which she will report on the strategy. Allison is working with Coastal Virginia on several editorial projects this spring. Allison is providing an itinerary for a freelance writer for the Boston Globe and USA Today. Allison will be giving a budget presentation to Accomack on February 10. Karen Crockett has been doing forensic work to pull together the financial documents between Northampton County and the ESVATC; she expects to have a balance sheet completed by February. Aging accounts receivable have been reduced from \$12,000 to about \$800. The February billing cycle is in motion. Official gas reimbursement rates have gone down from \$57.5 cents/gallon to \$.54 cents in 2016. Allison looked carefully into the contract between ESVATC and VistaGraphics and found that they are not obligated to distribute Activity Guides locally on the Shore. LeMond asked where VistaGraphics did distribute and Allison said it included Highway Information Media, the military bases, AAA's and VTC sanctioned visitor centers, as well as some out-of-state visitor centers. Allison is working with Staci Martin to plan the Tourism Summit on April 5. Since VTC has tasked the ESVATC with development in addition to marketing, the Tourism Summit needs a business development focus. Allison referred the Commission to the document on Stronger Economies Together. LeMond reported that part of SET was to look at economic impact of land under conservation and he said it results in a loss of \$1.6 million in taxes in Northampton Count, which would require \$.7 or .8 to make up. SET's goal is to develop the economy on the ESVA. VTC recommends that after SET, the ESVATC do its own strategic process early in 2017

#### 6. Old Business

Paperwork for the 501(C)(4) has been completed and sent to the IRS.

#### 7. New Business

FAM tours for VTC Visitor Center personnel have been proposed for 2016. Allison is working with Cherron Davis for a September 2016 FAM for 30 people with emphasis on getting people out on the water. Donations from local entities will be needed. Virginia's governor is in favor of mid-Atlantic Ocean oil exploration and drilling for economic reasons but tourism and chambers on the East Coast are submitting letters against it. Shotwell mentioned the position of NASA and the space industry as against; LeMond said that Northampton County is considering a letter against; Gordy said Accomack County has voted against it. Burns reported on gun reciprocity as a tourism issue: 31 states have concealed weapons carry reciprocity; now with Virginia wishing to opt out, problems are created for tourists either driving through the state or coming here to hunt. LeMond reported Northampton County Board of Supervisors is taking a position in opposition to the new law, and suggested the ESVATC do the same. Potts said it would be too political for the ESVATC to take a position. Addison suggested the ESVATC rely on the Virginia travel industry lobbyists to respond and would find out their position. Allison reported on new marketing spending budget availability and has been investigating having a greater presence at the New Church Welcome Center, which has a glassed-in display case available for \$3,000 per year. Potts added that it would give the ESVATC a presence on both ends of the shore. Davis will make a presentation of all the advertising options at the next BOC meeting. Shotwell mentioned the one-month blitz they do which costs \$500.00 to promote the decoy show and the seafood festival in spring. Addison said the Tourism Commission could also display different venues, activities or businesses it wishes to promote. Allison reported the Burnhams have been hired to do a wedding blog and have proposed managing a monthly blog at \$300 each, a total of 10 blogs for the year, \$3,000. Content costs about \$1.00 per word with very little editing time required on Allison's part. Allison will need board approval for this expenditure. Allison's top three priorities for the next month are finalizing the oyster grant, Stronger Economies Together, and beginning work on the 2017 Activity Guide.

#### 8. Matters by Commissioners

Potts reported that the Chincoteague Christmas by the Sea celebration was the most successful ever, with 1,200-1,500 people attending the horseshoe drop and 1,500 -2,000 at the polar plunge. They are planning some new events in 2016: a home tour and fireworks by the fire department. Addison mentioned the two bridge truck accidents in the last month. She spoke to Christina Close of the Hampton Roads Show who wants to do more TV segments on the Eastern Shore the week of April 18 and are looking for ideas and feedback. It is very affordable publicity. Some timely events are the Garden Tour, the Chincoteague Seafood Festival and Camp Silver Beach.

#### 9. Adjournment

LeMond stated the next meeting of the ESVATC will be Wednesday, February 24 beginning with a workshop at noon. Key dates are Tuesday, March 22/Business After Hours at the Welcome Center; April 5/Tourism Summit. LeMond asked for a motion to adjourn and go into closed session to discuss personnel matters and business opportunities. Addison so moved, Potts seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 pm.

#### 10. Closed Session

LeMond entertained a motion to go into closed session to discuss personnel matters at 3:41 p.m. The motion was seconded by Addison.

#### 11. Open Session

LeMond entertained a motion to go into open session at 4:32 p.m. All board members certified that only personnel matters were discussed.