

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
March 28, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.  
25-A Market Street, Onancock, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

Carol Evans, Cape Charles House, Vice Chair  
John Coker, Northampton County Supervisor  
Monika Bridgforth, BIC  
Ace Seybolt, Chincoteague Resort Realty  
Paige Addison, CBBT  
Laura Belle Gordy, Accomack County Supervisor

Staff Present

Kerry Allison, Executive Director  
Laurie Chamberlain, Operations Specialist  
Sarah Barban, Content Producer  
Mary Lena Mears, Welcome Center Manager  
Allan Burns, Industry Relations Manager

Guests Present

Robie Marsh, Eastern Shore Chamber  
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber  
Martina Coker, Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife  
Penny Rew, Ne Church Welcome Center

1. Call to Order

- Evans called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

2. Consent Agenda

- Gordy made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Coker seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Public Participation

- Martina Coker made a presentation about plans to promote birding tourism on Virginia's Eastern Shore.
- Rew said the VTC Visitors Center Seminar was well attended.
- Shotwell reported on several events coming up. She also said she had been interviewing and hiring for several jobs. Visitors numbers had been picking up, she said. She also reported on several business openings.
- Marsh reported that *Essentials* was in the final stages. He also talked about several upcoming events.

4. Welcome Center Report

- Mears reported that staffing and volunteer numbers were still a challenge, especially as the busy summer season approached because many welcome center workers had summer trips planned. The new gift shop in the welcome center had been selling lots of birding books, she said.

5. Industry Relations Report

- Burns reported that Tammy's and Johnny's had closed and the Chincoteague Pony Center had changed hands. He also reported that he had been given a tour of Cape Charles Brewing Company. He learned that the second building on the property would be an event venue and that a golf car path had been built to connect the brewery and the town of Cape Charles. Burns also reported that Heather at Karen Crockett Inc. had informed him that she had not been automatically sending notices for invoices that were 60 days past due. Burns explained to her that those have to be sent, otherwise he will appear at a person's business and they might not know that their invoice is past due.

6. Operations Report

- Chamberlain reported that registration for the tourism summit had been closed and a waiting list had been started. She also encouraged any staff and board members who could to volunteer for the summit. She reported that Watkins Litho had made progress on getting a digital flipbook for the guide. Allison explained that the way she got Watkins to create the flipbook was to agree to give them the guide job next year if they met certain requirements. Chamberlain also reported that she had spoken to board member Blake Johnson about a potential location for the board retreat.

## 7. Content Producer Report

- Barban reported that she had started work on Survey Monkey to gather information for the new website. She wrote a press release about the summit and a blog about thrift/antique stores, flea markets and consignment shops.

## 8. Executive Director Report

- Allison reported about plans for the tourism summit. She also reported that they were fine tuning the inventory control for merchandise. The first checks for merchandise sales had been received. She also reported that print guide requests were down and digital guide views were up. For the first time, new versus returning website visitors spiked into the 80% for new. Allison said she attributed the gains to an article in *Outside Magazine*. She also said they had seen a drop in Facebook followers, which could be tied to the controversy.

## 9. Old Business

- Free Welcome Center Advertising Policy - Mears reported that a reciprocal agreement had been set up with the Outer Banks and Ocean City. St. Michaels still had to put the matter before their board. Mears said someone had called from Ocean City to say that they loved the Eastern Shore guide.

## 10. New Business

- Northampton County Tourism Grant Application Process - Coker said that currently applications for the Northampton County Tourism Infrastructure Grant were due in May, the awards were decided in June and money was distributed in July. He hopes that in future years the process be backed up by a quarter so people can get money and projects done before summer.
- Industry Relations Manager- Addison made a motion to allow Allison to evaluate the current industry relations position and develop a job description to meet the growing needs of the tourism commission. Bridgforth seconded and the motion passed unanimously.
- Top Three Priorities- Allison said her top three priorities were budget, the summit and the website.

## 11. Matters by Commissioners

- Addison announced that the naming contest had been launched for the tunnel boring machine and the process was moving forward to select a name.
- Seybolt said his rentals were up 17 percent year over year, even with fewer properties and colder weather.
- Bridgforth reported that the Barrier Islands Center food film had premiered. A film crew from Richmond had been on the Eastern Shore working on a story about Hog Island figs, she said.
- Evans asked if Allison had thought about taking the DVDs to the tourism summit. Allison said that would be a good idea. Evans also said a very old building was being torn down in Cape Charles after the parcel was purchased.
- Coker said John Kent who owns Royal Farms is working with a partner to develop an 80-room hotel in Cape Charles with shops and restaurants.

## 12. Adjournment

- Addison made a motion to adjourn, Gordy seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

These minutes have been approved by:

/s/ Steve Potts

April 25, 2018

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Steve Potts, Chairman

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Date