

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.
25-A Market Street, Onancock, Virginia 23417**

Staff Present

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

Commissioners in Attendance

Larry LeMond, Northampton Cty Board of Supervisors,
Chairman
Steve Potts, Bill's Restaurant, Vice-Chairman
Paige Addison, CBBT
Carol Evans, Cape Charles House B&B
Blake Johnson, Island House Restaurant

Guests Present

Elizabeth Dodd, Northampton County Chamber of
Commerce
Karyn Belknap, Ten Good Sheep
Karen Rush-Monroe, Onancock Business and Civic
Association
Robie Marsh, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce

1. Call to Order

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

2. Consent Agenda

- LeMond asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda and financials. Potts made a motion, Evans seconded and the consent agenda was approved unanimously.

3. Public Participation

- Shotwell said year-over-year visitation was down for March, but comparing the week before Easter and the week after Easter year – 7 year-over-year showed an increase of 25 percent. The Easter Decoy show went well. The chamber is working to prepare for upcoming events.
- Belknap reported that she resigned from the Eastern Shore of Virginia Artisan Trail.
- Marsh reported on several upcoming events the chamber was holding.
- Dodd reported that the chamber was working on a new website and several events. She attended an agri-tourism conference in Richmond.
- Rush-Monroe reported about upcoming events in Onancock.

4. Welcome Center Report

- Mears reported that visitation was starting to increase at the Welcome Center.
- Planning is underway for the spring fairs.
- She thanked the commission for sending her to the annual VTC visitor center seminar.
- Staffing levels and volunteer numbers are an ongoing challenge and she is working to recruit new volunteers. Allison said she and Barban have talked about plans for a volunteer training program at the WC to increase product knowledge among frontline staff.

5. Industry Relations Report

- Allison informed the board that Burns' half time job is running high at about 65% time because of complications with accounts receivable. These A/R challenges are being resolved with KCI.

6. Operations Report

- Chamberlain is working to determine an exact inventory of visitors' guides with Chocklett Press so the second half of their bill can be paid. Allison reminded the board that Chocklett Press sent flat visitors guides to welcome centers around the state instead of folded.

- The Artisan Center of Virginia asked the tourism commission to find storage here for the Artisan Trail brochures. Chamberlain secured free storage with the town of Onancock. ACV decided instead to deliver inventory via ESVA partners at regional meetings, as has been done in the past, instead of incurring shipping charges to bring all 30,000 brochures here at one time.
- Signs at the Welcome Center and on Fisherman's Island are being redone.

7. Content Producer Report

- Barban presented a plan to hold a photo contest where visitors would submit their photos in hopes of winning a free trip to the Eastern Shore. Johnson asked if there was a way to filter out locals from entering so they wouldn't be winning a trip to their own community. Barban said there was. Addison argued locals may have good images as well – perhaps run a second contest just for locals. Potts proposed a partnership with another destination to send Eastern Shore locals to their destination and locals from that destination to the Eastern Shore.

8. Executive Director Report

- Allison reported on key performance indicators. Print guide requests are down but this decrease is expected as digital guide requests increase. Unique website visitors were up 37 percent. Wordpress feature story views were down 26 percent, but there hadn't been any new posts; Barban will add new content soon.
- The ESVATC has received a request to write a letter in opposition to offshore drilling. The board agreed Allison should submit a letter.
- The issue with accounts receivable is that, of the roughly \$80,000 Burns sold in ads for the visitors guide, only about \$63,000 had been collected and some invoices have not even been generated. This breakdown in the invoicing process will be corrected for 2018. Johnson recommended that, in order to reduce interchange fees on credit card processing, Burns should encourage payment with checks.

9. Old Business

- Tourism Summit: Sixty nine people registered and 60 people attended. Zach Miller's presentation got good reviews based on attendee surveys, the panel of town leaders from across the shore was well liked, but the group discussion was the crowd favorite. The survey sample size was about 35 attendees. LeMond commended Allison on what he said was the best summit so far. Potts agreed, but said he was disappointed there was no representation for Chincoteague on the town panel. Potts also pointed out this year's summit was close to spring break and suggested avoiding dates around spring break in the future. He also recommended having a networking time after the summit. Rush-Monroe said it was nice to see so much passion from the tourism industry. LeMond asked how to increase attendance and Allison suggested increasing the marketing budget. Johnson suggested changing the name and the branding around the event because it might lead people to think the summit was about space tourism. Potts suggested keeping the title as the tourism summit but picking a theme each year. Dodd commented that getting business owners to leave work can be hard. She recommended making the summit later and adding a cocktail hour. Rush-Monroe suggested having it on a Monday when many businesses are closed. Johnson suggested doing it on a Friday when people know they don't have to work the next day. Potts suggested collecting data from the state and promoting tourism trends and adding a "did you know" segment.

10. New Business

- 2017 Birding Festival: Allison reported that new leadership had taken over the Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival and the event was well on its way. She explained that Sunset Beach Resort would host the festival. New management could lead to growth for the event.
- Artisan Trail: Johnson reported he had resigned from the Artisan Trail board. His business was still a trail member. He commented that there was some frustration because a lot of time was put into building the Artisan Trail and board members did a lot of work to recruit fellow partners to join the trail, but there was a sense that there was no support from the Artisan Center of Virginia and that a lot was put on Karyn Belknap's shoulders.

Johnson also said he felt it would be a challenge to get the businesses that originally enrolled to re-enroll without showing them results. Belknap commented that the trail brochures, which are the keystone of the trail, had been pulled from VTC welcome centers because of a billing issue with ACV. Johnson said as a member of the trail he felt he wasn't getting out of it what he should have been. Belknap added that after the launch party ACV told the management team that ACV would take over from there, but Belknap said she felt the ball had been dropped. Johnson also said that if his leaving the committee did nothing else than bring awareness of a problem with the Artisan Trail then so be it. Allison commented that Sherri Smith, the executive director of the Artisan Center of Virginia, recently requested that the ESVATC take on a larger role with the trail because DMO's like the ESVATC should be focusing on community development. Allison commented that the ESVATC does not have the resources to manage programs like the Artisan Trail.

- Top Three Priorities: Allison said the top three priorities were budget, working on a new website and content development.

11. Matters by Commissioners

- Potts reported that the upcoming Chincoteague de Mayo raises funds for the Chincoteague Island Museum.
- Johnson announced he would be opening a food truck in Cape Charles open seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. He had a recent conversation with Donna Bozza about making sure businesses are ready for the Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore Bike Tour. He encouraged her to partner with the chambers.
- Addison reported she was excited to see so many applications for the Northampton County tourism grant program. She said a bus tour had come through the welcome center and staff had helped to point them towards different activities.
- Evans informed the board that she gave a tourism report at the most recent Cape Charles Town Council and plans to do this monthly. She said that interviews for the community enhancement board are underway.
- LeMond announced that transient occupancy tax revenue increased quite a bit in Northampton County so an extra \$22,500 would bring Northampton County's contribution to \$144,000. LeMond said he just wished Accomack County would follow suit. He said that, although Accomack is increasing funding every year, Northampton was increasing funding at a faster rate. He pointed out that funding increases had helped to hire a full time content producer and helped with marketing.
- Evans asked where the commission stood with appointing an additional commissioner from each county. LeMond said he believed the Accomack Board of Supervisors had passed a resolution to do so and once he got confirmation of that he would notify the Northampton Board of Supervisors to advertise for an additional member and Accomack would need to do the same.
- Shotwell asked how much funding Accomack contributes to the ESVATC and how much of it comes from Chincoteague. LeMond explained that in the current fiscal year Northampton County committed \$121,500 and Accomack committed \$86,800. He said that these amounts are derived from TOT collected outside incorporated towns. And as this amount increases, the ESVATC shares in this increase, which is rising in both counties. An incorporated town like Chincoteague does not fund the ESVATC unless the town itself shares TOT revenues like Onancock does, or defines a budget line item commitment like Cape Charles or Exmore. Shotwell said her organization receives a percentage of Chincoteague's meals tax. Potts commented that in the case of Northampton County he felt he could really see things growing there because revenue growth is designed to be reinvested in the tourism economy and the ESVATC, the engine that's marketing it. He said there is no such commitment from Accomack County. LeMond explained that Northampton County increased their TOT from two percent to five percent around 2007 and follows the state mandate that this additional three percent revenue be invested in tourism. Forty percent of that TOT goes to the general fund, 45 percent goes to the commission and 15 percent funds the tourism grant program, now totaling \$80,000. Potts pointed out that when you compare the size of the two counties and the amenities in Accomack versus Northampton the difference in funding seems astronomical. Potts said he asked the town of Chincoteague to commit funds to the ESVATC in the past, but nothing ever came of it. Johnson proposed organizing hotel and motel owners in Accomack County to go to a board of supervisors meeting to encourage the supervisors to give TOT money to the commission so the funds could be used to further promote tourism on the Eastern Shore. Allison reported she has asked Accomack County for a breakdown of where TOT is derived -- which campgrounds, Airbnb and

hotels and motels – since marketing those entities would help the ESVATC grow its budget. She hopes to have that information in the future.

12. Key Upcoming Dates

- May 24: The next meeting would be on May 24 with a noon work session and a board meeting to follow at 2 p.m.
- May 10, 17 and 31: Staff fam tours across the region.

13. Adjournment

- LeMond asked for a motion to adjourn, Potts made a motion and Evans seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

These minutes have been approved by:

/s/ Larry LeMond

May 24, 2017

Larry LeMond, Chairman

Date