

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
May 25, 2016 at 2:00 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, CBBT

Carol Evans, Cape Charles House B&B  
Laura Belle Gordy, Accomack County Board of Supervisors  
Blake Johnson, Island House  
Staff Present  
Kerry Allison, ESVATC Executive Director  
Laurie Chamberlain, ESVATC Operations Specialist  
Sally Richardson, Welcome Center staff  
Guests Present  
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce  
Mark Usry

1. Call to Order

LeMond called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m.

2. Consent Agenda

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

3. Public Participation

- Shotwell reported on upcoming events. Visitor numbers were up 17% through April with business and school groups visiting; an Antares launch is planned for mid July. LeMond commented on rainfall 20 out of last 24 days which has impacted tourism; Evans said their business was off in May due to rain.

4. Welcome Center Report

- Visitor counts are 1-2% ahead of 2015, and staff are seeing a marked uptick in international visitors. A new computer was installed after a six-year-old laptop died. Additional staff training is underway in preparation for transition to a new Welcome Center manager, with paid staff learning to perform key website and dbase maintenance. FAM Tours were conducted for Welcome Center staff across the region during May.
- The Welcome Center has no emergency first aid kit; the CBBT staff can respond within a few minutes to an emergency. The ESVATC will purchase first aid kits for both the Welcome Center and the Onancock office.

5. Executive Director Report

- The reorganization of the ESVATC under its new nonprofit status continues, and an IRS issue has come up that needs resolution; Karen Crockett will provide a letter with details to the board.
- Allison and Johnson attended a new Northampton County business roundtable with the goal of promoting economic development in the county. Allison also attended another meeting, a SET offshoot, to develop a market center.
- Allison had a meeting with Blue Water Development, Todd Burbage's group, which wants to build an Eastern Shore regional tourism website. Addison asked if instead of two websites, perhaps ESVATC and Blue Water Development could pool resources to redevelop the ESVATC website.
- Allison reported that guide requests and website unique visitors are down for the month, year over year. This is to be expected as the dramatic increases of the past are unsustainable. Addison commented that better weather may impact traffic. Johnson asked for a definition of unique and new visitors (repeat visits by the same person are counted as one unique visitor; new visitors are users who have never visited the website before). Richardson said the response time for guide fulfillment is 1-2 days, except for VTC requests which are delayed and could be mitigated by running labels internally instead of waiting for them to be sent.
- Analytics Summary – Apr 2016 compared to Apr 2015  
Guide Requests = -42%  
Virtual Guide Views = 207 in April 2016 (new stat, prior year totals: 2014=304; 2015=1519)  
Website Unique Visitors = -48%  
Website New Visitors: 77%

## 6. Old Business

- Bylaw Revisions: LeMond reported he had contacted both counties to inform them the bylaws being updated this year are in working paper format, not official; he and Gordy said the ESVATC needs to keep pushing both counties to approve the bylaws.
- Approve \$1000 Capitalization Threshold: Audit recommendations include establishing a capitalization threshold. Karen Crockett had suggested \$1,000. After discussion, LeMond asked for a motion to approve a threshold of \$2,500. Gordy so moved, Potts seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

2017 Marketing Plan: Marketing plans for 2017 are predicated on profits realized by bringing the 2017 Activity Guide in-house and Vista Graphics has agreed to turn over the 2016 source file to save the cost of building the file from scratch. Revenue from this new venture will increase marketing dollars although it remains to be seen what the ESVATC will clear, since Vista Graphics does not share actual financial data. Marketing plan goals include growing the shoulder season, focusing on oyster events, culinary, artisan, shopping, ecotourism, culture and conservation. The first phase of marketing spend will focus on the fall, determining what works best, then focusing on spring 2017. Options discussed include:

1. The VTC travel guide which has a separate Eastern Shore section of 4 pages and the ESVATC buys 1/3 page ad. LeMond suggested the ad needs a photo.
  2. A presence in a new magazine, *Coastal Style*, similar to *Virginia Living*, out of Maryland and Delaware which is interested in a partnership with the Virginia Eastern Shore.
  3. A 3D clear glass tower display at the New Church Welcome Center to give the ESVATC a larger brand presence at the north end of the peninsula. Potts added that it is important to have a presence there.
  4. The VTC consumer email (300,000 people on distribution list and increasing rapidly).
  5. A *Washington Post* email done in partnership with VTC (135,000 opted-in DC area readers).
  6. *Recreation News*, which reaches government employees in the DC area, is another good opportunity for marketing spend, especially because the ESVATC gets sales leads from it, which helps build the consumer email list. Addison mentioned they will do editorial if given ideas. They have VA Beach and Eastern Shore sections.
  7. Advertising in *Coastal Virginia* is not a good fit for the demographic the ES is trying to attract: High end or young visitors.
  8. Johnson suggested 5-8 businesses pooling funds to reach Hampton Roads area in a sustained way, such as 30 second TV commercials, and the costs were discussed. Addison mentioned that Camp Silver Beach is doing early-morning TV ads. Evans inquired if VTC would give assistance and Allison said that VTC is very encouraging and would like to award grants into the ESVA.
  9. Advertising in *Virginia Living* could be done as an advertorial. Frequency discount possible.
  10. *Southern Living* has a major partnership with Bay Creek and there is a possibility the ESVATC could leverage that program. Evans said she thought it would be worthy to do that.
  11. Underwriting on WHRO NPR could be a way to push fall oyster festivals in Hampton Roads and depends on how expensive it is.
  12. Run a sweepstakes, it's a good way to build consumer database and doesn't cost anything if industry underwrites housing, restaurant and activity costs.
  13. Tourism Summit advertising costs are \$1,000 per year through local media.
  14. Billboards in Hampton Roads are an option, cost \$5000 a month; Johnson said building a coalition of partners to fund this would be a way to afford it.
  15. A dedicated vacation channel in hotel rooms and timeshares in Virginia Beach might be a good presence. Evans thought that was worthy and Allison said she would do more research on this.
- Approve FY 2017 Budget: LeMond brought up the proposed 2017 budget for discussion. Allison said she was concerned about the Welcome Center revenue. LeMond asked for a motion to approve the 2017 budget. Evans so moved, Johnson seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

## 7. New Business

- Industry Relations Manager: This new position will be assumed by Allan Burns and research is ongoing on the best combination of iPhone, tablet, laptop and/or printer to acquire. Burns will sell the Activity Guide and Welcome Center advertising, the Virginia Oyster Trail and Artisan Trail and the website once that is monetized, and can distribute Activity Guides to local businesses. Johnson mentioned that Karyn Belknap has offered to train his restaurant staff on the Artisan Trail. Evans said Allan will be a brilliant face of the Tourism Commission.
- NHC Sign Fee: LeMond reported on a group of citizens that raised the money to replace their aging town sign on the same footprint, only to be told by NHC it would cost \$165 for a permit. The NHC BOS will review.
- Top Three Priorities: Allison stated her top three priorities for the coming month: Finalize marketing plan. Activity Guide campaign launch, get media packet done, Allan marketing plan finalized, and his job fully defined, and start bringing in sales and signed contracts. Johnson suggested he get a magnetized sign for the side of his car.

## 8. Matters by Commissioners

Potts reported that street construction is going on in front of his restaurant. Evans said the Farmers Market in Cape Charles has a rack card at Welcome Center and has launched successfully; beach replenishment is on hold. Le Mond reported Sunset Beach will open July 1; as of last week reservations were at 50%. Beach-restaurant has an unusual set up: a \$10 wristband is available for purchase to use the beach for the day and can be redeemed for food and drink.

## 9. Adjournment

LeMond stated the next meeting will be Wednesday, June 22 at 2:00 PM, preceded by a luncheon workshop at 12:00. The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

## 10. Closed Session: Personnel Matters

LeMond asked for a motion to go into closed session at 4:10 p.m. Addison so moved, Potts seconded. The closed session was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. LeMond asked for a motion to certify that only personnel matters were discussed; Johnson so moved, Evans seconded.

/s/ Larry LeMond  
Larry LeMond, Chairman

6/22/16  
Date