

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 28, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.
25-A Market Street, Onancock, Virginia 23417**

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
Laura Belle Gordy, Accomack Cty Board of Supervisors
Blake Johnson, The Island House
Ace Seybolt, Chincoteague Resort Vacations

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

Elizabeth Dodd, Northampton County Chamber
Robie Marsh, Eastern Shore Chamber
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber
Caroline Bott, Accomack-Northampton Planning District
Commission
Shannon Alexander, Accomack-Northampton Planning
District Commission
Shelly Vallone, Accomack-Northampton Planning
District Commission
Clarice MacGarvey, Town of Exmore
William Roy, Immerge Technologies

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. Gordy made a motion, Evans seconded and the consent agenda was approved unanimously.

3. Public Participation

- Bott discussed the Arts, Entertainment, Recreation and Visitor Industries Regional Action Plan that is part of a large effort to create a regional planning document for Stronger Economies Together.
- Alexander said the ANPDC launched an adopt a highway program so businesses can help with litter problems on the ESVA. A project is underway to update a self-guided bike tour on Chincoteague. Alexander introduced Vallone, their summer intern from UVA.
- Shotwell reported that June had been busy on the island.
- Marsh reported that attendance at Le Tour de Shore was up 33 percent and 88 percent of riders came from off the shore.
- Dodd said Cape Charles had been very busy. She has been appointed to the Community Enhancement Board for Cape Charles Main Street Program.
- MacGarvey thanked the board for their role in awarding Exmore one of Northampton County's Tourism Infrastructure Grants. They intend to use the funds to turn their Shakespeare in the Park event into a three-day weekend.
- Roy presented a proposal to build a new regional tourism website. The project cost is between \$35,000 and \$45,000 and would create a more mobile friendly, easily searchable website that would be integrated with a VTC data feed.

4. Welcome Center Report

Mears reported that visitor numbers were a little low. A new volunteer recruitment program was underway. She and Sally Richardson attended a customer service training in Hampton.

5. Industry Relations Report

Burns reported that several businesses had closed, but overall partners report that it was the best season they'd seen in a long time. He said the process of collecting on unpaid invoices was ongoing. Only about \$25,000 in invoices were outstanding. He is prepping for 2018 guide sales. His goal is to sell \$100,000 in ads for the guide. He also reported that he had sold all the WC ad space for the rest of the year.

6. Operations Report

Chamberlain reported that she was looking for an alternative place for the 2018 Tourism Summit because the price to rent the Eastern Shore Community College has increased seven-fold.

7. Content Producer Report

Barban reported the top three Facebook posts of the month. A travel writer was visiting the area that week and that she and Allison had dinner with her the night before at Holly Bluff, a private island on the seaside. She is exploring the idea of having local photographers do an Instagram take over on the #visitesva account.

8. Executive Director Report

Allison reported that print guide requests were down and digital requests were up. Get Outside was the top visited page on the website in May, which made sense because most of the Wordpress blog content was devoted to outdoors. The new website would enable partners to input their events into the VTC platform and have them feed to the ESVA website. Allison has been looking at top websites for ideas. Staff are planning dream vacations on other destination websites as a way to identify what makes other websites work well. Allison said many pages on the current website need to be overhauled or taken down. Roy said that the project should take between six and eight months total.

9. Old Business

- Accounts Receivable - Burns said that KCI was sending reminder invoices to partners who received an original invoice for guide ads, but had never received a reminder invoice. Progress is slow; they had only sent about four reminder invoices out of a list of 15. More mistakes were made than what should have been, Burns said. Burns said he sends an invoice list each month with all the details, there should have been no question about the status of invoices. Evans said that perhaps the board should review how a new process that Burns will implement for invoicing is going and evaluate whether the KCI relationship is working well. Johnson said it's important to hold businesses feet to the fire. Burns explained that some of the businesses he had been hand delivering invoices to had never seen their original invoice because they don't check their email frequently, so sending a hard copy invoice might help with that. LeMond suggested that maybe after 30 days a hard copy invoice could be sent. Addison said that as the season for sales of the next visitor guide approached perhaps the commission could consider adopting the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce's policy of pulling ads from the visitors guide before it goes to print if they aren't paid for.

10. New Business

- FY18 Budget - Revenue from funding partners was increasing, LeMond reported. In FY17 the commission had projected that Accomack County would contribute \$87,000 to the commission and they contributed much more: \$95,000, an increase of about \$8,000. Cape Charles reduced the amount of funding to the commission from \$15,000 to \$3,000. LeMond explained there could be several reasons for that. One was funding the Main Street Program -- he thought the town was also holding back money in order to fund Cape Charles events. LeMond said he was sorry to see that reduced, but Cape Charles was still in line with the other towns. Northampton County was increasing their funding from \$121,500 to \$144,000, a \$22,500 increase. That helps to offset the reduction in funding from Cape Charles and was used to provide a 2 percent increase in pay for employees and allowed the commission to have a full-time content producer. Welcome Center revenues were projected to be about the same. The budget was tight, but it was in the black, LeMond said. LeMond asked for a motion to approve the budget. Evans made a motion and Potts seconded it. The budget was unanimously approved.

- Welcome Center Storefront - Addison said the commission needed to provide the CBBT with a list of potential items for sale in the Welcome Center storefront. Addison also pointed out that it would take money to get the project off the ground, so the question was how much money to invest in it. As far as costs, 10 percent of sales would be kept by the concessionaire, who in turn would pay that back to the CBBT. Virginia Originals would staff the storefront. Addison also said she would be looking to Mears to point visitors towards the shop. Addison said she and Allison had run some math. On average the Welcome Center has about 10,000 visitors a month and if just a small portion of those visitors buy something then there is the potential to make some money. Seybolt asked if Virginia Originals would have to give the okay if something the commission wanted to sell was in competition. Addison said that was all still in the works and being negotiated. She said the commission had been tasked with creating a list of items they wanted to sell, now and in the future, to give to the district to review. Addison said her main concern was budget; inventory costs money. Addison said her instinct was to keep it simple. The commission previously sold hats out of the WC, it was already templated and a local vendor could be used to produce them and they could be restocked as needed, she said. She also recommended a T-shirt that would really represent the region as well as post cards and magnets. Addison also said she didn't think items like postcards would compete with any Virginia Originals had because those would be specifically CBBT focused. Potts suggested taking a product like an oyster knife and branding it. If the oyster knife cost \$5 and the retail would be \$10 the commission could go to partners and sell them for \$7 to the partners, who would turn around and make a few dollars by retailing them for \$10. That would allow the commission to make a little money, get products out and buy in bulk to get a lower price. LeMond said he thought the idea had great possibility. Allison said she had been approached by people who said that if the commission got branded items they would sell them in shops on Chincoteague. LeMond asked if the committee set up to explore the storefront idea could bring a business plan before the board. Allison said she already had one, but they wanted to have a broader discussion and talk to the community. She also said she and Addison ran some numbers and if 5 percent of the visitors to the Welcome Center in a year spent \$25 the yearly gross would be \$135,000. In a conservative scenario if 5 percent of visitors spent \$10 the yearly gross would be \$54,000. Virginia Originals would pay transaction fees for credit and debit cards. The project has a rapid turn – the new retail space is expected to open in late August. Evans agreed that they needed to be boots on the ground when the new store opened. Addison said they would soon need a T-shirt design. Allison said Mona Cossitt should do the design to ensure uniform brand articulation. Allison said she would look at Mona's cost, wholesale costs, sourcing and come back with a plan. Potts asked if the commission would be able to display the T-shirt and just stock a few since the space was so small. Potts asked where the inventory would be stored. Johnson said T-Shirts could be rolled and stored in plastic bins and kept in the office at the Welcome Center. Chamberlain said there was still some space in the shed at the Onancock office. Addison said there would more than likely be storage available at her office, which would make it key that the person running the shop make sure it was stocked for the weekends when her office would be closed. Mears said post cards were frequently requested, while she had only had about six requests for T-shirts. Mears also said KOA had been giving away items at the Welcome Center and fly swatters, key chains and koozies were flying out of there.
- Top Three Priorities - Allison said the retail space, the visitors guide and prep for ad sales and the website were her top three priorities.

11. Matters by Commissioners

- Potts said he was just waiting for the Fourth of July and was gearing up for no days off until September.
- Addison said she was gearing up for the new tunnel. The restaurant's last day in operation would be September 30 and preliminary work would begin in July. Allison asked if there would be any visible activity with the new tunnel that tourists might be able to stop and see. Addison said it would all be underground. Seybolt asked if the restaurant would be closed permanently and Addison explained that it would, because of the way the new tunnel was being constructed there was no need to expand the island and therefore there wouldn't be any extra space for a restaurant. The fishing pier would come back, she said. Addison explained that cameras would be placed out at the worksite once things really started moving along, but once the tunnel boring machine got going there wouldn't be much to see.

- Evans said she picked up a flyer for an event that was a partnership between the Artisan Center of Virginia and Experimental Film Virginia for the annual film screening of the Experimental Film Virginia short films. The event would also showcase members of the Eastern Shore Artisans Trail and the Virginia Oyster Trail. Evans said she was excited because it would be layered with oysters, music, beer and wine. She said she thought it was a great opportunity. The event is called Reel and Raw and tickets were \$15. Evans also announced that she had been placed on the recommended list for the Community Enhancement Board in Cape Charles. She was interviewed and she made sure they understood she was interested in the partnership with the Eastern Shore Tourism Commission. Evans said she felt that was a table at which the commission needed to be represented. A meeting on July 6 would announce board members.
- Johnson said catering revenue for May and June was through the roof and he felt it might be worth looking at how to market the shore for destination weddings. Allison said that Barban is working on a wedding blog with links to services. Allison also said that on the new website weddings would be surfaced on the homepage to make those services more visible. Roy said the new website would mimic VTC's taxonomy for how the website is organized. Allison said she knows events have been taking off and weddings and catering have been going crazy. Dodd said her wedding venue business was listed on VTC and she asked when the commission got a new website if her listing would automatically be pulled into the new website. Allison explained that the first priority is to pull events from VTC and evaluate before creating an API to pull business listings. Allison explained that currently commission staff is responsible for keeping business listings up to date on the ESVA website. If a change is made to pull business listings from VTC, industry would take over that responsibility. Shotwell let Potts and Johnson know they are listed as caterers on the Chincoteague Chamber website. Johnson reported that about 50 percent of the weddings he catered are for people from out of the area. Johnson also reported that his food truck was up and running in Cape Charles. An all-female flounder tournament was held in Wachapreague, with 50 people in attendance.
- Seybolt said he was very impressed by the first meeting and that it was very well organized. He said that this year's sales had already passed the previous year's total sales for his vacation rental business. He said he noticed that with all the new hotel construction on Chincoteague his rental business was losing first -time visitors, who were staying in the chain hotels instead. So he had to figure out how to get first time visitors. He also mentioned that his newspaper, the *Eastern Shore Post*, was doing a summertime issue called the *Hitching Post* with about 5,000 distribution and a dedicated news reporter just for Chincoteague to give updates about what's going on.
- Gordy said she had nothing to report.
- LeMond reminded the board that there was no meeting in July and that officers would be elected in August. He also reminded them that his term would end December 31 so they needed to be thinking of a new chairman. He mentioned that the Northampton County Tourism Infrastructure Committee received 21 grant applications and 15 were awarded. A total of \$38,500 was given to various organizations for tourism projects.

12. Key Upcoming Dates

- LeMond announced the next meeting would be Wednesday, August 23 at 2 p.m. He also reminded the board that the fall tourism workshop is Monday, October 23.

13. Adjournment

- LeMond asked for a motion to adjourn. Addison made a motion and Gordy seconded it. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

These minutes have been approved by:

/s/ Larry LeMond

8/23/17

Larry LeMond, Chairman

Date