

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 21, 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
Blake Johnson, Island House

Kerry Allison, ESVATC Executive Director
Allan Burns, Industry Relations Manager
Mary L. Mears, Welcome Center Manager
Laura Davis, Content Producer
Laurie Chamberlain, ESVATC Operations Specialist
Guests Present

Cherron Davis, VA Welcome Center at New Church
Elizabeth Dodd, Northampton Chamber of Commerce
Clarice MacGarvey, Town of Exmore
Karen Rush Monroe, Christmas in Onancock
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce
DeQuan Smith, Eastern Shore Community College

aff Present

1. Call to Order

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

2. Consent Agenda

- LeMond asked that the consent agenda and financials be approved. Evans so moved, Johnson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Public Participation

- Shotwell reported the Chincoteague Oyster Festival has sold out. August numbers were lower but up overall for the year. They are working on their membership drive, travel guide sales, Christmas parade. She is looking forward to VTC FAM tour next week.
- Smith introduced himself. Johnson commented he has been working with Smith, who has lots of ideas for community development through hospitality customer service training.
- Dodd reported on the annual Oyster Crush in VA Beach featuring oystermen from the ESVA. Great opportunity to promote the ESVA at the event next year ; Addison mentioned they allow outside promotions to display there. The Ag Fair is October 15 at the old middle school, 10 am to 2 pm.
- Karen Rush Monroe introduced herself. She is in charge of the Christmas Homes Tour in Onancock which will be held for an entire weekend this year. She is looking for ideas and better ways to promote it.
- Clarice MacGarvey introduced herself. She is the part-time marketing director for Exmore. She is interested in leveraging tourism grant opportunities.

4. Welcome Center Report

- Mears reported visitor counts are currently 1.8 - 3.4% behind September 2015.
- They have a new volunteer, Mary Beth Eye.
- Mears is working with the staff to engage visitors in conversation about the Eastern Shore since many visitors don't know where they are.
- She is compiling a "good news" report and working on building team spirit.

5. Industry Relations Report

Activity Guide Advertisements

- Guide sales started August 1. Start-up slowed due to WC transition and putting systems in place. Recommend starting July 1 next year
- Personal visits are now almost complete
- October 1 is target date for space commitments

- \$40,000 has been received or committed
- Addison inquired about artwork on Visitor Guide. Allison said it was downloaded from Visa Graphics successfully but they have some issues with font translation.

6. Executive Director Report

- Technology and Google maps have automated mileage and expense calculations for Burns.
- Cape Charles has requested that we tie funding request to direct benefits to the town.
- The VTC 2015 data shows the ESVA dropping from first to second place behind DC/Northern Virginia. Allison has recently run a campaign which showed primary responses were from 25-35 age demographic. The Eastern Shore's growth rate was 2.6 compared to DC at 2.8. Northampton lodging grew faster than Accomack. Shotwell said that the Fairfield was new in 2014 which might account for that. Johnson noted that the Outer Banks is down 8%. Allison mentioned most people would be happy with 1-2% growth.
- Discussion on replenishing ESVATC on Fisherman's Island sign was postponed until the next meeting.
- 2017 meeting dates were discussed and agreed upon by consensus.

Analytics Summary (visits to the WordPress blog are not reflected in Website Unique Visitors) August 2016 compared to August 2015

- Guide Requests: -1.5%
- Website Unique Visitors: -2%
- Website New Visitors: 77%
- Website Top Five Cities: VA Beach, DC, Norfolk, Suffolk, Richmond, with New York in the top ten.
- Website Top Five Pages: Calendar, Stay, Maps, Explore, Eat
- Wordpress: +28,000% August 2015 – August 2016.
- Facebook: 21,303 likes to date, negligible growth in August

7. Old Business

- LeMond asked for a consensus to approve the FY 2016 financials. They were unanimously approved without discussion.

8. New Business

- Allison discussed her three priorities for the coming month: FAM Sept 27-30. Activity Guide. Website. Allison commended staff on their efforts during a very challenging late summer with lots of change and demand for staff.
- FAM tour itinerary was passed around. Allison said she was looking forward to seeing Michael's crab picking – Saxis. Johnson will be taking 20 people on a boat tour of Wachapreague. Dave Burden volunteered to bring 35 kayaks to Onancock harbor for the visitors to try. Davis volunteered to come to Onancock and take pictures.

9. Matters by Commissioners

- Potts is entering his "Chili Chowder Cook-off" dish, Chicken City chili. He is producing a dinner for the VTC FAM at the Chincoteague Museum. Christmas by the Sea rack cards are printed.
- Johnson reported on the oyster roast in Wachapreague in November has 100 tickets left. He asked Allison if she will be sharing local photographers' work on Facebook. Davis mentioned the hashtag #visitESVA with images posted to Instagram. There was a discussion about how best to utilize amateur and professional photography in the new environment. Allison mentioned Johnson's iPhone photo ending up as the cover of the Artisan Trail brochure.
- Evans recommended the White Boots Blog on the Virginia Oyster Trail site. She also thanked Dodd for promoting a Travel package contest including a stay in Cape Charles at the B&B, meals and a golf cart. She has asked the B&B's to provide desserts for the VTC FAM oyster roast. She suggested that advance notice on tours like this

should include the town council, business association and all partners. Allison said biggest challenge in her job is industry relations and suggested a strategy session on how to reach the most partners.

- Dodd mentioned the Hollywood movie filmed in Cape Charles, "Inlawfully Yours", opening soon.
- Addison reported that the CBBT's parallel tunnel will begin construction October 1, 2017; the type of construction cannot allow the existing restaurant and shop. Construction will take five years. The CBBT will host the VTC FAM next week and welcome them to the Eastern Shore. Oyster Crush is a longtime Rotary event in VA Beach, is their huge fundraiser and has already benefited the Shore through camp scholarships, but the ES connection to them can grow.
- Burns mentioned the new executive director of the Arts Enter is Sue Anglim; Shotwell commented the Chincoteague Museum has a new executive director, Maria Grenchik, focusing on architectural history. MacGarvey mentioned the Exmore Rotary oyster roast October 21 is half sold out.

10. Adjournment

LeMond stated the next meeting will be Wednesday, October 26 at 2:00 p.m., with a workshop at 12:00 p.m. LeMond asked for a motion to adjourn. Addison so moved, Evans seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

____/s/Larry LeMond_____
Larry LeMond, Chairman

10/27/16 _____
Date