

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
November 15, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.
25-A Market Street, Onancock, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

Steve Potts, Bill's Restaurant, Chair
Larry LeMond, Northampton Cty Board of Supervisors
Laura Belle Gordy, Accomack Cty Board of Supervisors
Ace Seybolt, Chincoteague Resort Realty
Paige Addison, CBBT

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
Elizabeth Dodd, Northampton Chamber
Deb Christie, Scott Taylor's Office

1. Call to Order

- Potts called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

2. Consent Agenda

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

3. Public Participation

- Shotwell told the board about the recent launch at Wallops Island and offered an update about several events.
- Dodd offered an update about Festive Fridays and the efforts of the Community Enhancement Board.
- Marsh offered updates about several events and about the chamber's progress on *Essentials* and a new buy-local search engine.

4. Welcome Center Report

- Mears reported that visitor counts were up and that staffing was still an issue at the Welcome Center. She had a new volunteer, but was losing a staff person. The Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center would be closing in March 2018. Christie said her office was aware of it and that they had an inquiry in with the Department of the Interior. Christie explained that because of the federal hiring freeze they couldn't replace people when they left and were relying on volunteers. Mears suggested that the refuge welcome center closing might be a good time to take up the issue of the broken refuge monitors. Addison said ultimately the installation of the monitors was an agreement between the bridge-tunnel and the refuge.

5. Industry Relations Report

- Burns reported that the number of accounts that were 90 days past due in accounts receivable was level because of new invoices coming from ad sales in the guide, below \$8,000. He expected that ad sales for the guide would come in roughly \$5,000 under the previous year for several reasons. The Oyster Farm pulled their ad in favor of business listings. Bay Creek also pulled their ad. Burns also announced that he wanted to reduce his working time and move in the direction of someone taking his place. Around the first of the year he planned to back off. He said he did not want to be involved in the 2019 visitors guide.

6. Operations Report

Chamberlain, Barban and Allison looked at an office space in Onley Town Center as potential office space. Seybolt proposed the idea of considering the Eastern Shore chamber building. Marsh said he would be very open to an initial concept discussion about space and layout. Gordy said the commission had tried that before and it didn't work. Potts said that his concern would be confusing the public about the two roles of each organization, which has been an issue for a long time. Addison said she felt it didn't hurt to look at pros and cons. In other matters, Chamberlain said volunteers from the Welcome Center would be distributing guides on

the lower shore. Chocklett Press had won the bid to print the guide and that she had solved the issue of ED healthcare by setting up a group policy, and that Barban would pay her own premium.

7. Content Producer Report

Barban attended VA1 and made some good contacts at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. A workshop with VTC's digital team alerted her that Google Analytics needed to be integrated with the blog. A session on how to attract people of color gave her some good ideas about how to reach out to digital influencers from diverse backgrounds.

8. Executive Director Report

Website visits were down YOY and one theory is that fall marketing pushed people to the blog, rather than the website. VA1 top takeaways were a new tool to look at brand search engine rankings; Pinterest is more important than she realized; secondary realms in Google Analytics are critical to understand. VTC urged all VA tourism marketers to attend the Digital Summit D.C.

9. Old Business

- Free Rack Card Space Policy - Mears reported that their research into free rack space at the Welcome Center was ongoing. Staff members were going through rack cards to get a clear picture of what spaces were paid and which were free.
- Guide Sales - Burns said he had covered everything about guide sales in his report.

10. New Business

- Web Contractor -- Allison recommended awarding the contract to Otto. After hiring the firm Allison learned that Pete Leddy, the president, has a depth and breadth in travel and tourism she had not known prior. The new website will bring significant changes. Partners will upload their events to the VTC site and then they would be fed to the new website. Currently, TC staff does this for them. The new website will be soft-launched at the April tourism summit. Top Three Priorities- Website, the grant and the guide.

11. Matters by Commissioners

- LeMond reminded everyone it was his last official meeting and told them it had been a pleasure to serve with them. The new Northampton County appointee would start in January, he said. Addison said she had nothing to report. Seybolt said he was just gearing up for the next tourism season. Gordy said she was going to miss LeMond. LeMond went on to say he felt they had gotten a lot done in his time on the board. They had passed the joint resolution and began getting the bylaws updated. Allison announced the first ever joint staff and board Christmas party would be at Brownsville on December 8 at 12 p.m. Potts announced that the Savor the Season Homes Tour would be on December 8 and the Polar Plunge would be on New Years Day at 1:18 p.m.

12. Adjournment

Gordy made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Addison seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

These minutes have been approved by:

/s/ Steve Potts

1/24/18

Steve Potts, Chairman

Date