

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
July 17, 2019 at 12 p.m.
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23410**



Commissioners in Attendance

John Coker, Northampton Supervisor, Chair
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Supervisor, Vice-Chair
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council -by phone

Staff Present

Robie Marsh, Executive Director
Christy Betz, Assistant ED
Susannah Morey, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Commissioners in Absence

Adman James, Accomack County Appointee

Guest Present

Curt Smith, A-NPDC Director of Planning
Laura Dodson, Northampton County Chamber
Christy Clark, New Church Welcome Center
Barbara Johnson, Main Street Onancock

Ex-officio Non-voting Member in Absence

Staci Martin

1. Call to Order

- Coker called meeting to order at 12:07 p.m.

2. Public Participation

- Clark reported that the 50-Year anniversary kick off celebration held at the New Church Welcome Center, June 29th, was a huge success. The attendance was over 2,200 visitors, a normal summer weekend draws 350-450 visitors. Clark thanked everyone that helped, and stated it was an amazing turning out of towns and business participation.
- Dodson announced an exciting new Northampton County Chamber event. Northampton County Chamber will co-sponsor with Bay Creek Resort a Holiday House Tour on Saturday, December 7. There will be at least 5 homes decorated for the holidays in Bay Creek. The entrance fee will be \$25 including refreshments. Also, included is a pop-up event held at the Beach Club, with Chamber members selling holiday items along with local Bakeries. The event will be a self-guided tour with maps available at the Beach Club. Also, there will be a Christmas door wreath competition that anyone in Bay Creek can participate in and will be ballots for the wreath competition. Program cards will be made describing the homes on the tour. The program card will also sell ads for local businesses on the Shore. Dodson said the weekend is coordinated with Festive Fridays. Their hope is to have visitor stay for the whole weekend. It is anticipated that the event will begin late morning and run until early afternoon so that people will have time to go out to lunch afterwards with visitors staying on the Shore and enjoying other activities that day and night.
 - Coker commented that the intent is to have Festive Fridays (5 Fridays starting Thanksgiving weekend) to become a weekend event encouraging over-night stays.

- Holloway shared that in the evening that day there will be the Grand Illumination of Cape Charles and Golf Cart parade.
 - Shotwell mentioned that is also the night of the Christmas Parade in Chincoteague.
- Smith congratulated the Commission on the launch of their new website. Smith would like to have a discussion with the Commission on what our vision is to incorporate some of the resources he presented at our last Commission meeting into our new website. Water trails, Local Scoop, and the Birding website to name a few. Smith believes these are lacking in our new website. Smith would like to be a part of our big picture plan so that A-NPDC will know how to build out what they are working on in both Counties.
 - Marsh pointed out that we do have the Birding website listed under Experience section of the website. Marsh has talked with Sara Baldwin, of Local Scoop, and we will be having reciprocal links on each website.

Smith also commented that the Economic Development Plan has a goal to build a user-friendly app or website for recreation on the Shore. Smith inquired, "does the Tourism Commission want to incorporate these resources into the tourism website and make a one stop shop for everyone or do we want to develop separately?" A-NPDC came up with a domain name that has not been taken, PLAY ESVA which compliments VISIT ESVA. We envision this new app as a connection to all trails, including water trails, and public access points to water, etc. The cost for the domain "Play ESVA" would be \$15 a year.

- Coker commented, for that dollar amount we could brainstorm and come up with the top 5-10 domain names that make sense for us and just book them, if we don't use them just throw them away.
- Marsh responded that we do want to tie in with A-NPDC resources. The Tourism's new website has a long list of businesses that missed the deadline to get their listings on the new website and we are working to get 80 new listings up right now. The Play section on the tourism website would be the place for the different trails to exist.
- Morey stated that it would be ideal to also do a blog on the water trails on the Shore. Next week Morey will be talking with Tom Bunino, owner of Onancock Sailing Adventures, and writing a blog on sailing with Bunino.
- Coker added this is just a beginning phase for the tourism website. Our first goal was to go live, second goal to increase business participation. There are things that we want to integrate better with both counties, towns and the resources Smith has mentioned. Coker stated we need to start this conversation and make it happen. Also, grow what we have and everything we have link to what is available and not leaving anything out, but most importantly maintain it.
- Holloway added we need the website to be the end all be all and have everything drive to it. We need a strategy for the next step and adding some of those things Smith is talking about and be sure we are not working in silos.
- Coker continued that we have so many cool things floating around the Eastern Shore, the email newsletters from Northampton County Chamber, Exmore, and Cape Charles, continue to remind us of this. We need to get to a point where we are pushing off the Shore so that those off the Shore see what we have going on here, the Tourism Commission is for reaching those off the Shore. Coker suggested, if Marsh wants to consider in the next quarter to get together with a couple of stakeholders and look at the website and think about how it's working, the website will be ever evolving. Marsh agreed.

- Marsh commented that he, Coker and Morey could get together and begin those discussions now. Marsh stated that the Experience section of the website is designed for many different topics. Morey added the Experience section and different topics can be shared on social media also.

3. Administration

- Coker announced a change to the structure of the agenda; we will move the approval of financials and minutes to the consent agenda so that we can make one motion on these items.
 - Marsh reported that there will be year-end adjustments to financials we may not want to approve the financials.
 - Coker stated that the financials can still be voted on because there are always adjustments made at year end.
 - Marsh reported the good news is that we will finish with a nice net positive income for the year. Under the unusual circumstance we were under for fiscal year 2019, he used as an example, the visitor guide as a huge concern not having advertisements sold to pay for the guide, the fact that we finish out the year with net positive income was a personal goal Marsh set for himself.
 - Coker announced that the month was better than planned and the year-end was down from what was budgeted but we ended Fiscal Year 2019 in positive territory.

5. Consent Agenda

- At 12:25 Holloway made the first motion to approve the financials and minutes, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.
 - Coker asked if there were any changes to the Consent Agenda, none where announced. Coker asked for approval of Consent Agenda and the moving of financials and minutes approval to be placed under Consent Agenda going forward.
- At 12:27 Tarr made the first motion to approve the Consent Agenda and moving financials and minutes to Consent Agenda section, seconded by Shotwell, and passed unanimously.
- Staff reports
 - Coker asked if there were any comments on staff reports, there were none other than a question about the Marketing Director report stating that our Facebook posts have been filter to the bottom the more frequently Morey posts. Morey explained that the algorithm raises the less frequent posts to the top and the frequent posts filter to the bottom. Morey is adjusting how we implement paid advertisements to better fit Facebook's algorithm.

6. Status of New Initiatives in 2019

- Marsh added 2020 Visitor Guide to Status of New Initiatives list.
- 2020 Visitor Guide -
 - Marsh stated we need to begin a discussion on the upcoming 2020 Visitor Guide. Marsh added that there was a lot of positive feedback on the size and ease of reading the current 2019 Visitor Guide which was all content an important feature missing was a directory. We need to have advertisers' ads, but balance needs to be addressed so that the guide doesn't become hard to read as past guides have been. Another issue that needs to be addressed is if we want to offer a discount to the past advertisers that were not featured in the 2019 Visitor Guide but were in the 2018 guide? The Commissions

feed-back and guidance will help as Christy and Marsh start to strategize selling ads for the upcoming guide.

- Coker commented that he spoke to 20-30 different people and they all loved this year's guide, it was easy to read without the clutter of the advertisers. Is there a way to add the advertisements yet keep it simple?
- Shotwell commented that when you add advertisers you add pages and the guide becomes bigger, but that off sets the cost of the guide. Chincoteague guidebook is 52 pages and cost \$32K to print. The sale of ads pay for the cost to print and creates a revenue stream for Chincoteague. A few years back we tried to simplify the Chincoteague guide and have everything up front and the directory in the back, we liked that. Keeping it simple, and have separate sections, Chincoteague is set up by accommodations, dining and shopping. The ads are listed with each group that they fall under and keeping recreational part separate.
- Holloway stated that the upcoming Visitor Guide is an important issue, we need to create subcommittees to present different options and what different goals we achieve with each option.
- Coker stated we want to learn from experience and not keep doing the same thing over and over just because we have done it that way in the past. Coker suggested that Shotwell has the experience we are looking for to help guide us.
- Shotwell replied she would be happy to work with the Commission. Shotwell has given the past Commission the Chincoteague advertisement forms and paperwork to use as examples. Shotwell continued; print is declining but there is still a need for it. Chincoteague always prints 110,000 guides and they always have request for that number of guides. Chincoteague's guide is also online, as they want everything to drive to their website.
- Holloway repeated we need to decide what are our goals. We need to drive people to our website where our information is the most accurate.
- Marsh remarked he would like to have Shotwell be on the committee with him, including Christy as she will be selling the ads, and Susannah who will be designing the guide. Marsh will look back to 2018 visitor guide and see the breakdown of pages to ads and dollar amount sold. Marsh will create a couple of different scenarios' ahead of the meeting.
- Shotwell stated that last year they found that several people downsized their ads. Print isn't king like it was in the past digital has a bigger place in the marketing world but there are people that do want that hard copy. She stated they always say for more information go to our website or call us. Shotwell clarified the difference with Chincoteague guide is that we are also a Chamber, so our businesses also list in our guide.
- Coker pointed out there are so many things to do here on the Shore we need to have easy availability for people to find these things. I would like to see all the boat ramps listed and where they lead to.
- Joeckel added that older people like paper and they have more disposable income. She stated her experience at her last job was when they did away with mailings she personally took at least 3 dozen phone calls asking for their latest calendar when she let her customers know they could get all their recipes online, they were not happy and

their response was they would never make a purchase from us again if we could not send out a mailing.

- Morey added that we can find a way to keep it smaller, staying simpler, yet meeting a profit margin that we want that makes it work for us.
- Marsh commented that a possible scenario is that we charge for listings. We already have the Shore divided into Upper, Middle and Lower sections and have the directory listed with each section and all that pertains to that section be listed there.
- Shotwell stated she will be happy to assist us, Coker thanked her.
- New Website –
 - Marsh informed all that the website is live, but we are still adding business listings. As we mentioned, many businesses missed the deadline of June 13th for adding their listings with the website designer. We are now having to add the late returned listings ourselves.
 - Smith inquired if the listings on the website are just Chamber members. Marsh answered that all tourism related businesses can have a free listing on the website, they do not have to be Chamber members. Coker stated he would like to see all businesses on the tourism website, adding that tourism is what drives our economy and all businesses do relate to tourism.
 - Morey added that when Christy sells rack card space to a new business, she gives the new business a quick reference guide on adding their business to our website.
 - Coker asked Morey when website promotions were being planned for and how many? Morey responded that she is doing organic posts and we will be doing billboards. We have not discussed paid ads yet.
 - Marsh added that we do have billboards in the 2020 budget set to promote the new website. Marsh commented that he is waiting on feedback from the Commissioners on the working of the website, we have just finished correcting some loading errors and we are working to get all listings up so that the website looks full. Christy does have the 3-4 ads on the electronic billboard at the Norfolk airport up and circulating.
- Social Media/ Analytics
 - Morey reported that all the analytics are positive which is to be expected because we didn't have anyone posting online for a while. Last month our Facebook reach was 5,000. This month our reach 46,500, a big improvement. Instagram is growing. Morey is working on strategies to increase the average post and engagement, rather than just have followers. We have posted VTC paid advertisements for 50 years of love. Morey found that the second time we posted our Foodie ad it performed the best with 728 people visiting the blog and learning more about our upcoming event. We ran a paid ad for Chincoteague and a paid ad for Cape Charles will release this coming Monday. She has a few other blogs that she has completed with several more blogs that she is working on with upcoming release dates. If anyone has any specific questions or wants to look at the report, please contact her.
- 50 days to explore the Shore
 - Marsh reported 50 Days to Explore the Shore begins October 1 thru November 19. We are starting the design work on the tri-fold pamphlet that will act as the game piece for the scavenger hunt. We have met with Shirley Deeds from Deeds Graphic Services who

will assist in the design process. Morey added that next week we will meet with Jim Baugh on doing a video for the Shore. Marsh stated that the video being done will be an update of the entire Eastern Shore of Virginia which we will be able to utilize at the Welcome Center, on our website, and through social media. Part of the video was budgeted into the 50 Years of Love grant. Baugh will be attending festivals, museums and different sights of the Shore. We will be printing 20,000 brochures. Our main push will be paid Facebook ads and blogs to promote this event.

- Shotwell asked if all our materials will be on the website. Morey responded yes. Morey will be creating an experience page on the website for the 50 Days to Explore the Shore, which will be our landing page with the VTC video. All the rules on the scavenger hunt, and how to submit your completed form will be online. Marsh added there will be a link to download the PDF version of the tri-fold brochure so everyone has access. Shotwell responded she will be promoting the event in her newsletter.
- Shotwell shared that the Literacy Council is having a restaurant week during the 50 days to Explore the Shore. Marsh responded he has spoken with Diane Gladstone about her participation in this event. Any event that is taking place during this time period will be in our brochure.
- Coker inquired if the Analytics from July be our starting month as a base for the website. Morey stated for the website July will be the baseline and for all the other promotions she will use the date when she stated posting.
- Shotwell added to be sure google analytics is counting the old website in your data numbers so that you have a true growth count.
- 2nd Strategic Planning Session- Fall 2019
 - Marsh reported that immediately following the October 16th BOC meeting our strategic planning session will begin. Marsh stated that close to the end of August, notes from the 1st strategic meeting will be handed out for preparation before the meeting. If there are any topics that you would like to discuss, please send to Marsh so that the topics can be added to our agenda. Coker requested that Smith participate in the planning session and asked if Dodson would also like to represent Northampton County Chamber at the planning session, Dodson placed the date on her calendar.

7. New Business

- Trademark renewal
 - Marsh stated it is renewal time for "You'll Love Our Nature" trademarks. Marsh is asking for input from the Commissioners on this renewal. There are three different styles of the trademark that are up for renewal. The renewal date is October 21st for two trademarks, \$750 plus late fee of \$100 for each trademark. Another trademark comes up for renewal August 25th, \$750 there is no late fee for that trademark. The trademarks licensing is good for 3 years. He asked if there was any feedback from the Commissioners? Shotwell commented that if we wanted to change our brand it would come out of strategic planning and until we are at that point, she suggested we renew now.
- At 1:08p.m. Tarr made the first motion to renew the three trademarks that are up for renewal, seconded by Shotwell and passed unanimously.
- Expansion of "You'll Love our Nature" tag
 - Marsh stated during the Chamber branding sessions, Mills Wehner brought up an idea to expand our tag, "You'll love our (fill in the blank), piggybacking on what VTC has done with Virginia is for Lovers, example: Virginia is for Kayak Lovers. Expanding our tag, You'll Love our Nature, example: You'll Love our Kayaking, You'll Love our Ponies. Marsh would

like to see an approved list of tags from the Commissioners so that when other entities want to use the expanded tag it is one that has been endorsed. Marsh continued that he would like us all to come up with a list before the August meeting, and by the time the October strategic planning session arrives we will have gotten a firm grip on what we would like to do.

- Shotwell commented we need to have good control of the tags and monitor it so that we don't dilute the brand. We don't want people to use it in a negative way.
- Marsh stated right now if someone wants to use our brand, they must fill out a form and apply for permission to put our logo on their product.
- Shotwell questioned if someone does hijack our brand how are we going to know, and what are we going to do.
- MacGarvey asked if we have guidelines for using our logo.
- Marsh stated our website has the forms to fill out for permission
- Holloway commented we need to have a full discussion on this during our October strategic planning session, this could get out of hand. This is very important how this compliments our brand and the extension of it. We need to make sure our trademark is protected and the extension of it.
- Marsh asked Shotwell if she was aware if the state tagline "Virginia is for (fill in the blank) Lovers" allows entities to fill in the blank?
- Shotwell answered that there is a sub brand of 5 or 6 additions that you can request permission to use. Steve Potts got special permission for, Virginia is for (fill in the blank) Lovers, to cover things he was doing. Steve Potts received permission to use 50-years of Love from VTC, he went through the right channels to do this. VTC does have their logo out there with fill in the blank, it has worked for them in regard that they haven't given permission for anything untasteful.
- Marsh continued we do have that process in place currently. Also, permission must be given to use our logo. Marsh then asked Holloway, to clarify if she was suggesting we wait until October planning session before we create a list of add on tags?
- Holloway answered, yes. She believes we should because that is a strategic part of our brand. We need to start small and not be too wide with our brand. We need to have a strategy on how we launch this out. If we find someone misusing our brand, we have a standard line on what we say and this all must be thought out.
- Coker summarized, "what I'm hearing are two things. One, we have several ideas of things we should be including and we ought to create a list of those ideas. The list may be 25 tags long. Second, I agree with Holloway we need to figure out which ones were going to focus on to make sure they are right. This goes back to what Smith said earlier if we are going to link to something and push it out, make sure it links to our website and make sure it works well for us. At the October meeting we can boil down to the best 5 that are good".
- Marsh added that this plays into what the Commission came up with at the last planning session with a list of individual rack card pocket topics.
- Marsh informed the Commission that before we renew the trademarks he will inquire if You'll Love Our (fill in the blank) is also trademarked and if not what about doing that from a trademark perspective.

8. Matter by Commissioners

- Shotwell shared that the Blueberry Festival starts this weekend. Misty's birthday party is Friday from 2p.m. – 4p.m. The Pony Swim is between 8:30a.m. and 10:30a.m. on Wednesday July 24th.

Swiss TV will be on Chincoteague covering the Pony Swim this year. Someone is coming from Utah to learn about pony management.

- Marsh will be attending the Pony Swim and hopes to live stream or have pictures during the Pony Swim.
- Holloway shared that Cape Charles kick off "Summer of Love" went well. Cape Charles had the largest amount of people that they have ever had for a kickoff event about 1,100 people in Central Park. The park was packed, the gazebo was wrapped in tie-die towels which gave it a nice tone to complement their Summer of Love kickoff and the travel writers got to see that. Their golf cart parade had 25 golf carts. The travel writers where in the first flower power golf cart that began the parade. The parade ended up at the beach with a picnic and bonfire. The biggest surprise was the excitement over the mural painted on the outside of a dilapidated building. Everyone is so pleased over it. They have t-shirts ordered with the mural design on it and they are selling nicely. The brewery has a Summer of Love brew, the travel writers also were able to sample it. Businesses are doing well with their events that are a part of Summer of Love activities. We have two new businesses opening in Cape Charles: an eye doctor and another jewelry store.
- MacGarvey shared that Exmore has two new businesses. A dry cleaner has opened next to Food Lion. The dry cleaner is planning on expanding the site into a clothing shop also. An Italian Deli will be opening on South Main Street hopefully before the CBES Bike Tour. Our hotels are very busy and full. Quality Inn is in the process of remodeling. Holiday Inn has finished remodeling. Exmore is planning a live remote for the CBES bikers on their return. The Exmore's Love sign is on its way from the state. The town is still working on re-branding, and their tagline will be "Exmore, The Shores Hometown". The town is reintroducing their Resale Trail. They have a mannequin that they will have all dressed up at different events and openings. Their mannequin's named Sal and she will be attending different venues and wearing costumes from that venue and will be sending out messages; "Where is Sal today?" Sal will be promoting our resale shops in Exmore.

10. Upcoming Dates

- August Board Meeting – Wednesday, August 21, 2019 at 12p.m.
- Tarr will be Chairing this meeting Coker will be out of town.
- Our Strategic Planning Session will be after our October 16th Board meeting

11. Adjournment

- 1:33p.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, MacGarvey seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:


Vice Chairman


Date

Billy Joe Tarr