

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
November 20, 2019 at 12 p.m.  
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23410**



Commissioners in Attendance

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

Ex-Officio Non-Voting Member

Staci Martin – by phone

Commissioners in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee

Staff Present

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

Guest Present

Laura Dodson, Northampton Co. Chamber  
Karyn Belknap, Ten Good Sheep  
Karin Rush-Monroe, Onancock Main Street

1. Call to Order

- Coker called meeting to order at 12:05 p.m.

2. Public Participation

- Dodson announced an open invitation to everyone to attend the Northampton Chamber of Commerce Holiday Party tonight held in Cape Charles at, At Altitude Gallery. Dodson continued, the pre- ticket sales for the Bay Creek Holiday Tour are going extremely well. The tour will be Saturday, December 7, from 9a.m. – 12p.m. There will be six houses on the tour. The tour begins at the Beach Club with a holiday pop-up including local vendors, a wreath sale, and light refreshments. Dodson has rack cards promoting the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Bay Creek Holiday Tour.
- Rush-Monroe stated that Onancock Main Street Initiative is trying something new this year called Four Fab Fridays. Onancock wanted to brand the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fridays differently. Every business within walking distance of the downtown area has committed to being open at least some of the Fridays. Onancock will be doing radio and print ads promoting, Four Fab Fridays.
- Belknap informed the Commissioners that the group designing the LOVE sign for the ESVA Tourism location in Melfa met a few weeks ago. The groups focus is to creatively express what the Shore is about through a design that will catch the attention of travelers.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:09 Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

4. Status of New Initiatives in 2019

- New Website Updates  
Marsh turned the session over to Morey. Morey announce that the Tourism Commission was in discussion with Mix and Shine and Fresh Look to find a better match for our website SEO. The

conclusion was that Mix and Shine was impressive but too expensive, priced higher than what we have been paying Otto. Fresh Look was affordable but not compatible to our needs. The Tourism Commission will continue with Otto for the foreseeable future.

- Shotwell stated that had used Inter Coastal Net Design (ICND), and they were more aggressive with getting all analytic numbers up. Chincoteague has experienced tremendous growth during its engagement with ICND. ICND is out of North Carolina, their specialty is vacation rental websites.

Morey is beginning to aggressively promote our URL on Facebook, social media and possibly a press release. Also, our plan is to have an intern from the Community College in place to focus on getting more listings onto our website. Right now, the most frequently visited page is the event page. Tourism's goal is to elaborate on more event postings.

- 50 Days to Explore the Shore

Morey announced that 50 days to Explore the Shore came to an end November 21<sup>st</sup>. The deadline for turning in completed brochure forms will be December 6<sup>th</sup>. At this time, we have 6 brochures turned in. Overall it was a positive experience with one participant writing Morey a thank you note.

- 2020 Visitor Guide

Betz announced that the ad sales for 2020 Visitor Guide has come to an end and we exceeded our goal of 50K in sales. Morey is working on the content for the visitor guide and layout. Morey added that there are only 3 businesses that haven't finalized their ads as of today. Shotwell suggested to copy and paste the ads together over the old brochure to get a feel of how it's all coming together. Morey presented cover suggestions for the visitor guide for the Commissioners to view. Commissioners consensus was the photo with the kite had the most positive feedback. Morey has reached out to Gordon Campbell for a photo for the center fold cover.

- New Billboards on Route 13

Marsh stated that the new billboard is scheduled to be up as we speak, we are waiting for verification that it has happened.

- Coker asked about the southern billboard location search.

Marsh responded that he had contacted Granville Hog about his billboard space location in Northampton County. The billboard needs work to be done to it before it is ready for leasing. The pricing of Granville billboard is higher than the New Church billboard, but it is also larger. Several months ago, Marsh spoke with Ellie Cackowski, from Blue Crow Antique Mall, about the billboard north bound in Keller. Ellie stated that someone was interested in that space. Marsh reached out again to Ellie seeing as no action has happened on that site. Ellie has promised to get back to Marsh with pricing. Marsh has a preface for a Middle Shore billboard to be in a south bound lane in the Onancock area. Marsh sees value in continuing the marketing theme, *Still Driving - you could be here in 5 minutes*, as used on the New Church billboard. He feels it gives a second touch point to south bound drivers.

- Coker inquired what are the decision points for the visitor guide. Marsh responded that we are shooting for the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of December to have the final content to the printer if we stay on target, we could have the Visitor Guide by the first week of January. Coker mentioned that a few Commissioners ask to not have a December meeting. Coker continued that if any help with decisions are needed don't hesitate to reach out to the Commissioners. Marsh stated that once we know the final page count, we will then identify the full number of guides to print.

- Social Media/Website /Analytics

Morey reported that google analytics are slightly down this month. Instagram's are all up and we gained 65 new followers in the last 4 weeks. Morey stated a popular article on The Corner Bakery had 700 shares and 94 new Facebook followers. Overall social media platforms are up.

- Coker would like to create a trend analysis to see how things trend. Go back as far as you can with data that is meaningful to watch. It will help us going forward to see where our areas of growth are. Morey mentioned that we have not been able to find much data from the past Commission.
- Shotwell suggested an easier format for the data so that it is quickly deciphered.

Marsh reported he is gathering sales tax data and tot tax from both counties and major towns. Marsh plans to be able to breakout numbers into monthly tax data to show growth in specific areas and towns on the Eastern Shore. Marsh recognized there will be challenges with towns, counties and the state reporting data of tax collection at different times. Marsh stated that showing the tax data by quarters may be an alternate answer with the timing of tax collection reporting so varied. Marsh wants to be able to show growth by region and town by town.

- Shotwell commented that for the two county Board of Supervisors presentation the breakout data will be a good way to show return on investment to the County Supervisors.

#### 5. Strategic Planning Action Items

- Martin announced that the strategic planning session produced a vision draft and a mission draft. In a Google drive document, that Martin sent to Marsh, there is a list of the top 20 items of importance with the top 12-line items being the ones the Tourism Commission should consider working on. The Tourism Summit being number one on the list. Martin would like to get together in January or February and list goals for the top action items. As a group we may want to invite the public to comment on our goals and work their ideas in. Possibly by April or May we could have strategic plan in place.
  - Coker suggested to review, at the January meeting, the vision and mission draft to make sure everyone is on board with it. Coker suggested to send out a reminder of the top priorities listed and include that with the BOC packet.

Martin continued that the VA1 Tourism Summit was great, the focus for 2020 will be: Couples, Families and Children. The suggestion is to have itineraries predesigned so that they are simple to absorb for families that are in the area. Having child-care and parks designated as part of vacation plans would be a plus.

#### 6. Discussion on December Board Meeting

- Coker asked if there was interest in a December meeting.
- At 12:57 Shotwell made the first motion to approve the cancelation of the December BOC meeting, seconded by Tarr and passed unanimously.

#### 7. Matters by Commissioners

- Coker asked if the BOC Chairmanship is a 1- or 2-year position, Marsh commented that the position is 1 year or until removed. The appointment is made at the annual meeting which is the first meeting of the fiscal year. Fiscal year begins July 1.
- Tarr shared Chincoteague has slowed down but there are still visitors on the weekend. The new Fire House Open House drew 1,100 people, restaurants ran out of food that day.
- MacGarvey stated Exmore was full, as well as Northampton County, for CBES "Between the Waters" Bike Tour. The feedback from the bikers was fabulous. They loved their time on the

Shore. Exmore has 2 more events in December. Exmore downtown businesses will be open and serving refreshment to the shoppers on Thursday evening December 12 and the annual Christmas Parade will be December 14<sup>th</sup>. MacGarvey stated the Rails-to-Trails plan, which was presented by Virginia Outdoor, is very encouraging for all of us on the Shore. The number 1 trend for travelers today is physical activities. The outdoor component of tourism is exploding which includes high tourism dollar value. Marsh added that the spine of the Eastern Shore was created by the railroad. Having a Rails-to-Trails path would reconnect the towns on the railroad line with bikers visiting the towns and breathing life into them.

- Shotwell shared her excitement in attending VA1 Tourism Summit. Shotwell came away with three ideas they are using to help write content pages for the Chincoteague Visitor Guide. The inspired ideas are, ready itineraries, sharing blogs, and storytelling. Chincoteague holiday schedule of events includes, Christmas by the Sea, Christmas tree lighting, Holiday Market and National Wildlife Refuge week, all in and around November 30<sup>th</sup> also Holiday Home Tour December 7<sup>th</sup>. A press release on December activities is in the works for the month of December, which will also include some January events. The office visitor numbers are flat, website hits up 66%, Facebook reaches up 139% which equals 3 million new Facebook reaches. These stats are year to date. The merchants are happy, restaurants are happy as well as the hotels. It has been a good year on Chincoteague. Marsh added that Morey sent out a newsletter announcing different holiday events happening up and down the Shore. Marsh will be on WESR next Wednesday, November 27<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 for the Chamber's Holiday Edition of Chamber Chat. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual "buy local" radio tour of the Shore, promoting holiday happenings up and down the Eastern Shore.
- Holloway mentioned that the Artisan Guild Open House & Vineyard Tour will be this Thanksgiving weekend it is a great regional connection to local artisan. Holloway also inquired what steps need to be taken for a creative rep to formally join the board? Coker stated he is fine with adding another talented member. Coker will inquire through the County how to make it happen. Holloway shared that Festive Fridays in Cape Charles are gearing up, including Santa's house arriving yesterday from the North Pole. Every Friday and all weekend long Cape Charles will have holiday events planned. The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Bay Creek Holiday Tour is December 7<sup>th</sup> we are looking forward to this event being adding to our weekend festivities. Cape Charles has marketing metric in place for the holiday season. The goal is to track increases seen in our guest accommodations to see if our marketing reach has been successful this year. Holloway also congratulated Christy with the millionth visitor visit. It was an exceptional experience for the couple from Missouri and the press received on this event was great.

#### 6. Upcoming Dates

- No December Board Meeting
- January Board Meeting – Wednesday, January 15, 2019 at 12p.m.

#### 7. Adjournment

- 1:25 p.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, MacGarvey seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Coker, Chairman

1/15/2020  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date