

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
August 19, 2020 at 12 p.m.
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**



**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns, this Board Meeting was held via a publicly advertised Zoom Call to avoid exposure to the virus.*

Commissioners in Attendance

All by Zoom Online Meetings:

John Coker, Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice-Chair
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C-
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council

Staff Present

Christy Betz, Assistant Executive Director
Susannah Morey, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Ex-officio Non-voting Member in Absence

Staci Martin, VTC Rep.

Staff Absence

Robie Marsh, Executive Director

Commissioners in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

Guest Present

None

1. Call to Order

- At 12:12 p.m. Coker called meeting to order

2. Public Comments

- No public comments

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:13 p.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Martin was not present for meeting. Coker stated that if Martin does arrive late to the zoom meeting BOC will give her the floor.

5. Status of New Initiatives

- **Gateway Welcome Center - Update**

Betz announced that the Welcome Center is now fully open. The tables have been removed from the doorway to allow visitors to enter. The plexiglass shields have been moved to the counter tops. The staff feels comfortable with the changes. The Welcome Center numbers have increased since the change. Two weeks ago, on Saturday, over 300 people were assisted in the Welcome Center. This was the Welcome Centers largest attendance since the closure due to the pandemic out break and state shut down orders. This month more volunteers have returned to work. Staff safety is a priority. Hand sanitize must be used before visitors enter the Welcome Center and mask are available if a visitor is not wearing

one. The first of September procedures will be reviewed again to make sure staff continues to feel safe and comfortable with how things are running. Most of the people coming into the Welcome Center have never been to the ESVA before. Betz stated that every tourism partner she has visited with this month has confirmed that the travelers here on the Shore have never been here before. Tourist that planned to travel to the Outer Banks, Nags Head, Ocean City, and similar locations have changed their plans and come to the Shore looking for smaller less populated places to visit.

- Holloway reported, this morning at the Bay Haven Inn breakfast table, 3 couples who had planned different trips overseas where surprisingly staying at the Inn at the same time. The guest commented how thrilling it is to get away and find some place within Virginia to visit.
- Coker commented that the numbers show more visitor guides have been given out at the Welcome Center. Betz responded that normally the visitor guides are not placed outside of the Welcome Center for travelers to pick up on their own. The preferred practice is to have the traveler come into the Welcome Center so that staff can engage the tourist and sell the Shore and different experiences. Having the guides available outside the Welcome Center insures no one is missed if entry into the Welcome Center is not desired during these unusual times. That is one reason for the higher visitor guide count.
- **“Local’s Choice Contest” - Update**

Morey reported that over 1,600 people filed out the survey with a 100 percent completion rate. There were 34 categories, 3 different winner placements. All winners were announced on Facebook last Friday. Decals have been designed for Local’s Choice winners to place in their establishment window. The first-place winner has “Winner” printed on the decal and the category they placed in. Second and third place decals just say, “Local Choice” and the category they placed in. This week the decals will be handed out which will give longevity to this marketing initiative. The Welcome Center staff will be handing out flyers to interested travelers wanting to experience local choice preferences. Betz continued that the Local’s Choice Contest has created a lot of enthusiasm.

 - Coker commented that people that he talked to enjoyed taking the survey. Make sure the Local Choice Contest is in the sales pitch when seeking new partners.
 - Holloway stated for a first effort to have 1,600 participants is a success. It will be even better next year.
- **Marketing Plan Updates:**
 - **Virginia Pilot – Visitor Guide Insert**

Morey announced the Virginian Pilot insert is happening this Sunday August 23rd. Morey picked out specific zip codes that the paper is delivered to for the 25,200 visitor guides to be inserted into. The paper will also send us a report on the distribution.
 - **Radio Ads: “One Tank Trips”**

Morey stated the radio ads will begin next week, August 24th – August 28th. The text for the radio ad on 94.9 FM-The Point:
*“An adventure in paradise is just across the bay-
Visit Virginia's Eastern Shore- home to secluded beaches and charming
coastal towns with beautiful accommodations.
See the sun rise over the ocean, watch it set over the Chesapeake Bay in the
same day.*

In between, enjoy amazing food and locally crafted beverages, and find inspiration in some of the most pristine natural beauty on the east coast. When you vacation this fall, go where social distancing comes naturally- The Eastern Shore of Virginia. Find out more about the paradise in your back yard at visit esva dot com"

- Holloway commented that we need to get all the marketing projects that are happening into a newsletter and send to our industry partners. Morey responded that it will be done ASAP.
- **VTC DMO Grant: WanderLOVE**

Morey announced that ESVA Tourism was awarded the WonderLOVE grant. The main theme of the grant will be a concentration on six new trail experiences that have been developed.

 - 1) Bike and Hike: Breath of Fresh Air Trail.
 - 2) Outdoor Education: Love and Learning Trail.
 - 3) Lovin' on the Water Trail.
 - 4) Sun and Sand Trail.
 - 5) Love on the Coastline Trail.
 - 6) Fresh from the Water Seafood Trail.

These trails will have blogs, video's, and rack cards created.

Morey went through all the trails:

Bike and Hike: Breath of Fresh Air Trail – Showcasing hiking trails including trails that have water views and good for biking. These are nature driven experiences.

Outdoor Education: Love and Learning Trail – Destinations that have value for kids. A Butterfly trail, WWII Cannon, Cutis Tomb, Ayer Hall, Court House Green and more. Elana Hurwitz has a blog called, Toddlin' Around Tidewater. Elana writes and promotes travel experiences for children that are inexpensive activities in the Tidewater area and region. Elana has expressed interest in writing about this trail and possibly doing other blogs about the ESVA as well. Morey stated this collaboration with Elana is an opportunity to get information out to our targeted audience.

- Holloway commented that these might be the articles to pitch to the Virginian Pilot and Richmond Times after a couple of weeks of the articles being posted. Parents will be looking for things to do to supplement their children's virtual classroom experience and education.

Lovin' on the Water Trail – The focus will be water activities. Emphasis will be on rentals, eco-tourism, guided tours, kayaking, launch sites, fishing trips, fall hunting guided tours. Also incorporating in this trail will be nearby towns that have food available for take-out or dine in.

Sun and Sand Trail - Beaches of the Shore will be featured. This trail will be like ESVA past blog, "Six Gorgeous Beaches on Virginia's Eastern Shore". The push for this trail will be in the Spring to prepare for the summer.

- Holloway commented that Bay Creek Resort and Club has agreed to adding lodging partners in Cape Charles to having access to Bay Creek's amenities which includes the beaches. Lodging partners are identified as, renting a house through a rental agency, staying at a B&B or hotel in the town of Cape Charles.

- Coker asked to explain the travel writer list that the BOC received in their meeting packet. How was this list created? Morey explained that a portion of the list came from a conference that Betz attended. These writers are more traditional and write for publications. The list also included bloggers and Instagram orientated writers. Also, writers reach out to the Tourism Commission wanting insight on a specific area they are interested in writing about. Other times Betz and Morey reach out to writers who have written favorable articles on the Shore and suggest other areas to consider on a return trip to the Shore. Coker stated keep doing what you are doing and add to the list.
- Betz stated that joining associations of travel writers is a goal she has. Also, Readers Digest reached out to Betz this week. Susannah is assisting Readers Digest with pictures for an article on, up and coming small towns.

Love on the Coastline Trail – This trail is meant to create beautiful Instagram feeds of photos. This trail is broken down to include sunrise, sunset, dark sky, and moonrise spots. There will be a list of great locations where these types of photos can be taken. The goal is also to use these photographs for content for future use.

Fresh from the Water Seafood Trail – This trail focuses on places where you can purchase seafood which you take home and prepare for yourself. Included in this trail will be waterfront restaurants that serve fresh seafood and offer waterfront dining experience.

- Coker commented anything we can do to help the restaurants on the ESVA is essential. All commissioners agreed. Susannah stated that she will also do a blog featuring restaurants. Coker stated that when the new trails are completed and promoted this will create enthusiasm for both visitors and locals making it easier to plan things to do and discover on the Shore.

- **Social Media/Website Analytics**

Morey reported overall numbers are good. There was a slight decrease of 8% in website views in July. August had a 62% increase on website views, Google ads have produced positive results for the website. Instagram has had a 4% increase and has stayed flat which is good.

- Coker asked why the Instagram reach number goes up and then stays flat. Morey answered, an Instagram user may have encountered our content, seen ESVA on their feed, yet they may not be a follower of ESVA Tourism. This viewer is only counted once. Impressions are similar but every time an impression encounters a viewing even if it is the same person it is counted.

Facebook has had a 14% increase in our reach since July. The video continues to be a draw for viewing. Morey will be pushing out the video again to promote fall travel. The Local's Choice Contest and VTC sharing WonderLOVE content and tagging ESVA in articles has pushed our engagement up expediently this month over last August.

- Holloway commented that the new ESVA Tourism staff has been in place for 1-year, and the new Commission now established for 1 1/2 years. The quality and content of what ESVA Tourism is delivering far surpasses what could have been dreamed of just a year ago. This team works very well together and compliments each other. Betz stated that the efforts of Morey and the social media post created have played a big part in getting new people to the Shore. Betz continued that we need to push out what the Tourism Commission is doing so our partners are aware why this is happening and why businesses are seeing people who have never been to the Shore before. Holloway agreed, good things are happening our numbers show it, our partners are benefiting, people may not know why this is happening. Sharing this

information is important with the right audience: partners, town councils, and especially the supervisors from both counties. The Commission needs to create a mechanism so that quarterly ESVA Tourism shares these numbers to help educate the counties supervisors and council members. Doing a report once a year when the Tourism Commission goes to the counties for funding is not enough. Holloway continued it may be a good idea to get the Tourism Commission on the agenda for the upcoming Cape Charles Main Street meeting in September. Showing what is going on behind the scenes and putting this information on a screen when talking to the Cape Charles group is important. Cape Charles Main Street has no idea what the Tourism Commission does. Business owners believe the visitors they see just magically show up and drop a \$100 into their gift shops or business. Businesses need to know what reach the Tourism Commission has and the results are walking the streets of Cape Charles. Coker added this is very true what Holloway has stated. The Tourism Commission is making good progress, yet no one knows what we do.

- **November Strategic Planning Session**

Coker reminded the Commission that the Strategic Planning Session is scheduled for November 5th from 11am – 2pm. Coker would like to see the session held at the Chamber of Commerce building in Melfa. The Chamber has a great space available for us to be together.

6. Matters by Commissioners


- Holloway shared that Cape Charles is in the process of redoing the town website, *Cape Charles Virginia's Cape*. The launch date is expected to be in October. The Map that is being created, of the Eastern Shore, is almost finished. Everything is at the designer right now. When the proof is back final edits will begin. Holloway continued a Delmarva TV station is doing a TV shoot about the Shore. The program will be about the pillars of Cape Charles in 6 segments. Filming will be on August 31st. Cape Charles was awarded the WonderLOVE grant, a couple of businesses have applied for grants, Rebuild Virginia, and Virginia Main Street. Other exciting news, Cape Charles will have its last hearing on the application for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). This could be a significant amount of money for businesses in Cape Charles including some business in the county. Each business could receive up to \$15,000. Right now, Cape Charles is busy. The town has concerns that some of our partners will have tough times come November to March 2021. The lost season in the spring is the revenue that is needed during the off season. Coker asked if there is help, he can supply. Holloway suggested to send a letter of support expressing the importance to the economics of Cape Charles and Northampton County these grants will provide. Holloway also suggested a letter from the Tourism Director to be read into the record would not hurt either. All responses must be received by the Cape Charles clerk's office by tomorrow at 4 pm. Coker responded, let us do this.
- Tarr shared that Coker and Tarr sit on the Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee. A week ago, John Joeckel, Chairman of this committee, sent out an email describing how critical the navigable waterways are to tourism. When Marsh gets back from vacation, he can forward the email to the rest of the board members, stated Tarr. ESVA Tourism Commission needs to endorse these recommendations that John Joeckel has sent out. If tourist that come to the Shore for fishing and birding cannot use our waterways because there are no markers (aid to navigation) and the waterways are shallow, because of not being maintained, this is devastating to the tourism economy not to mention dangerous. The Coast Guard has requested public comments concerning the removal of aids of navigation and lack of maintenance of waterways on

the Eastern Shore, Chesapeake Bay and everywhere else. It is so important to tourism that our waterways are marked so that they can be used for water activity like birding, eco-tourism, boating, fishing, etc. We are promoting our waterways to be used for so many activities yet without markers how do you know where you are. Coker added he was boating out of Red Bank where the aids of navigation have been taken up, it is dangerous. Coker agreed that we do need to endorse the recommendations sent by John Joeckel.

7. Adjournment

- At 1:04 p.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Holloway, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:



11/5/2020

John Coker, Chairman

Date