

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



Commissioners in Attendance

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

Staff Present

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

Ex-officio Non-voting Member- by phone

Staci Martin

Guest Present

Karyn Belknap, Ten Good Sheep  
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center  
Fernando Derzard, ESVA Tourism Intern

Commissioners in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee

1. Call to Order

- Coker called meeting to order at 12:01 p.m.

2. Public Participation

- Davis announced VTC is hosting a Visitor Center Seminar in Virginia Beach on March 16<sup>th</sup>. The seminar will also host a FAM Tour. It is a great networking event with other visitor center from across the state.
  - Betz stated she is registered to attend the seminar.Davis stated January numbers were up and February numbers have started out up also.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:05 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Tarr and passed Unanimously.

4. Strategic Plan Action items

- Martin explained the formatting of the strategic plan outline. Martin also stressed the importance of public input into the regional tourism economic development section. A community buy in is necessary with town's expressing local gaps in town and business needs. Martin would like to develop a 15 -20 question survey that could be taken at the summit. The information received should give us good data to consider in the gap section of the strategic plan. Martin will assist Marsh in coming up with questions for the survey in hopes to have the survey ready for the March BOC meeting to be reviewed.

5. Status of New Initiatives

Tourism Summit 2020

- Marsh asked for comments on the draft agenda for the upcoming summit that was sent to the BOC. Comments given:
  - Holloway stressed that during Morey presentation on Tools of the Trade, VISITESVA website and other tools to promote local businesses there should be emphasis and step by step directions on how to go onto Virginia.org website to list local events. Holloway also suggested that the number count of 98,000 people who enter the Southern Gateway Welcome Center a year needs to be brought to attendees' awareness. The impact of touching that many travelers is what directs these visitors to places they would not have known about.
  - Holloway also stressed the importance of having a folder with a tourism logo sticker on it. It was agreed that the Tourism Commission would provide stickers for the folders. Martin would be donating white folds for the summit.

Marsh shared that Martin's counter parts at VTC will be holding their annual staff retreat on the Shore. The timing has worked out that 16 staff members from VTC will also be attending ESVA Summit. The VTC group will be available to help facilitate the Tabletop Breakout session and be resources during the summit. VTC has also offered sponsorship dollars for the summit. Marsh continued; the section on Benefits of Regionalism will be a panel discussion of three to five partners who actively promote cross regional tourism.

- Coker asked for examples of cross promotion. Holloway mention Paddle your glass off, Chatham and Southeast Expeditions working together. Holloway asked Belknap if she could assist with some examples from ESVA Creatives. Belknap will go back to her team and work on ideas.
- Martin added the water trail program promotes water trails Shore wide.
- Coker agreed B&B's and ESVA Creatives would be good examples we need a few more like that to be on the panel. This panel showing that working together has visitors spending their money in different areas helps more businesses be successful. Cross promotion shows how much more there is to do here. Marsh added if visitors explore different regions of the Shore the likely hood of a return trip is greater.
- Holloway stated that the next step would be to share regional cross promotion ideas during lunch break. If that exercise is for a different time slot during the summit, the lunch break should be for taking the survey. Marsh added that it was a good idea to have a topic during lunch for the tourism partners to discuss and share ideas.

Marsh continued; the next section of the summit could be an update on Rails to Trail plan. Even though the plan is in the beginning stages having our tourism partners aware of this future initiative would be important information for tourism partners to hear. Champe Burnley who is spearheading rails to trails has agreed to attend and speak about the Shores ability to be a part of this opportunity.

- Holloway added, this could add to tourism partners getting actively involved in attending meetings and learning firsthand the process and successful benefits that these types of trails have had in communities.
- Coker added we need to be very aware that the rail to trail path is not called a bike trail. It is a trail not limited to one activity. The Tourism Commission needs to come up with the right terminology of what this trail will be called. Marsh added it is important to not brand this as a rail to trail path. The rail will remain in place on this path. ESVA Wellness Trail was suggested.

Marsh continued that the next section could lead into, Tourism Trends on a national scale. This could be VTC presenting the national trends in tourism.

- Holloway suggested that VTC first discusses the 4-year growth of tourism on the Shore. Framing it so that the tourism partners see the big picture of Virginia tourism and the niche we play in that picture. After that discussion the VTC speaker could go into the national trends of tourism. Martin added she could add a visitor profile information sheet with stats to the folder packet that is handed out. Marsh stated he will have in his presentation the traditional facts of tourism on the Shore and current TOT tax.

Marsh continued the next session will be a Table-Top Break Out. We will strategically have attendees assigned to tables with different industries and different towns sitting at tables together. The goal would be for each table to create a, 1 day, 3 day, and 7-day itineraries for families, couples and empty nesters. The goal is to come away with lots of different itineraries and experience throughout the Shore.

Marsh added the last session could be to have a digital marketing expert or bring in an influencer or travel writer to talk about what they are looking for when writing articles, blogs and trends they see. The consensus was an influencer would be a good direction to go. Marsh will work on narrowing down who it is that will be available to present with Martins assistance.

- Martin suggested that a couple of dates be set aside to go over the flow of the summit, identify how we set up the tables and fill the folders with information. It was agreed the tourism team will meet March 20<sup>th</sup> at 10 am and April 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Davis suggested that we close with an inspirational speaker. Someone who is not dry, a speaker that leaves a message of inspiration and encouragement. Someone like Bobby Walker is good or Lynn Lochen. Marsh commented that it could be possible to add another speaker
- Holloway would like to see a change in the summit flow. Move Table-Top Break Out to take place before Rails to Trails. Another suggestion from Holloway, while Betz is out promoting the summit, she could take a short video of our partners expressing their enthusiasm for the upcoming summit. That will help the momentum of the summit to grow. Betz added that Morey has created a card promoting the summit that Betz is handing out. Other suggestions, a press release and an announcement on WESR about the upcoming summit. Holloway suggested to include a printed sheet of paper saying: *List of my takeaway today are*. This will be in the packet of information the partners will be receiving with their folders.
- Davis added, the Tourism Commission could offer a drawing for a free ad in 2021 Visitor Guide. Betz commented that we will be doing a drawing for a free ad and rack space at the Southern Gateway Welcome Center. Betz is hopeful that VTC might be able to offer a drawing for a free ad in the Virginia Travel Guide also.

Marsh will put all suggestions together and begin securing speakers for the summit.

#### 2020 Visitor Guide

- Marsh stated, 2020 Visitor Guide is being delivered and we have received a lot of positive comments.
  - Betz stated that she is selling the guide as she is delivering it. Betz has been pointing out the museum and historic site page and map, boat launch map and the events section in the guide. Partners can now sell what's happening on the Shore immediately with their travelers when asked what is happening on the Shore.
  - MacGarvey and Coker stated they have received nothing but compliments on the 2020 Visitor Guide.

#### Social Media/Website Analytic

- Morey stated all numbers have increased this month. Website has had a big up tick, Instagram up, Facebook is way up. Black History Month has been very popular on Facebook, a blog will be released shortly. Three articles from January are still influencing this month's numbers on Facebook. Morey introduced ESVA Tourism Marketing Intern, Fernando Derzard from the Eastern Shore Community College to the BOC. Fernando works Tuesday and Thursday morning. Fernando has assisted with eblast and working on other things.

#### 6. Matters by Commissioners

- Holloway shared information about the Discovery Map that Cape Charles is working towards. Ad sales for the map are about to launch. There is an automatic digital feature to the map. When you scan over the QR code it will take you to the Cape Charles website and you will see pins, a similar feature seen on google maps. Travelers hover over a pin and that business location will pop up. If the business has a website or Facebook it will take you there. Cape Charles is working on a new website, which will be completed in 4 months, making the new website and map compatible. Cape Charles is now gearing up for the season and working on building up its workforce needs. Cape Charles Main Street is in the final stages of applying for, Main Street Designation. Hopefully Cape Charles will be officially designated a part of the Main Street program. Many opportunities including grants and larger marketing venues through Main Street programs will be available to Cape Charles.
  - Marsh added that the ES Community College and ES Chamber will be putting on a Workforce Summit May 1<sup>st</sup>. More information to come on that.
- MacGarvey shared Exmore is working on walking trails with signage. A new business has opened in Exmore called, The Gig. The Gig has meeting space and high-speed internet available.
- Shotwell shared the power of Facebook, during the rocket launch last week Shotwell took a 2-minute video of the launch and it received 3.8 thousand views and 53 shares. People just want to see what is happening here on the Shore.
- Martin shared that she is working with the rural coastal PDC's to promote a burning of the socks at different water trails, in Coastal Virginia on the same day. VTC is working on getting travel writers from Texas, New York and Atlanta to cover the event. Martin will send more information on this later.
- Coker shared there are so many things to do, to many at times, on the Shore. If the visitor guide can have all the major events listed, then other events can try to avoid the major ones. Another important issue for ESVA Tourism is to create a clearing house where we capture all the activity, magazines, and TV shows produced about the Shore. Once we receive any type of press about the Shore, we need to figure out how that happened so we can create those opportunities again. Coker continued; we need to keep looking for ways to promote the Eastern Shore's uniqueness. We are completely different than Virginia Beach and Ocean City. Our messaging needs to always stay new and fresh. The Tourism Commission needs to come up with new material for promotion. Holloway added #OFF13 is one of the ways to promote the Shore that takes travelers to our hidden treasures off 13. MacGarvey shared that while attending the last rocket launch MacGarvey was standing in a farm field with an old farmhouse that hadn't been lived in for years. MacGarvey realized she had one foot in the past and one foot in the future as the ground rumbled and she could feel heat from the launch. That is what we have going for us where the past and future meet. It would make a great blog.
  - Morey commented that she does keep a list of articles about the Eastern Shore. Many articles come from Google alerts. Morey shares articles that are solely on the Eastern Shore. Holloway mention that at the summit the Tourism Commission should remind our partners to

bring it to the Commission's attention when an article is in the press about their business. Maybe at the summit have a sheet of paper for the partners to list where their businesses have had media attention. Morey continued that there is a spot on VISITESVA website where articles written about the Eastern Shore are listed.

- Belknap shared a conversation she had with Martin. The term: Virginia's Natural Coast, is a great descriptive phrase for the Eastern Shore. It can also be changed out to, Virginia's Wild Coast, Virginia's Historical Coast, Virginia's Creative Coast. The tag line can work for new branding of the Eastern Shore in a new way. Marsh added the Commission also had conversations for using You'll Love Our Nature and changing it up to "You'll Love Our Art", the tag line becomes endless also. Coker remarked that these ideas should not be lost, and we should go back to it soon.

#### 7. Adjournment

- At 1:29 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, seconded by MacGarvey, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

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John Coker, Chairman



8/13/2020

Date