

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 20, 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 conference call:

John Coker, Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Supervisor Co. Vice-Chair
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C-
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, Executive Assistant

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Staci Martin, VTC Rep.

Guest Present

Laura Dodson, NHC Chamber of Commerce
Jessica Steelman, A-NPDC

Commissioners in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee

1. Call to Order

- Tarr called meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. and noted Coker would be arriving later, due to a sudden Verizon outage at the moment.

2. Public Comments

- Laura Dodson, of Northampton County Chamber of Commerce, commented on Post Covid-19 Marketing Strategies that was listed as an agenda item. Today Laura was in contact with Tony Conti, Marketing Specialist with Entercom Broadcast Media which manages the radio stations in Hampton Roads. Tony will be promoting a new campaign when travel is permitted again called, *One Tank Trips*. The intent is to promote areas outside of Hampton Roads as day trips or weekend getaways. Laura was asked by Tony to introduce this campaign to ESVA TC and see if BOC would be interested in partnering with them. Laura sent the information to Marsh. Laura thought later in the Summer into the shoulder season would be a good time to launch this type of promotion. Shotwell commented that she also was approached by Tony Conti. Shotwell will be doing some similar promotions with press releases. Morey also spoke with Jake from the same organization yesterday. Marsh commented that the, *One Tank Trip*, campaign is a good promotion to add the list of possibilities that ESVA TC are considering doing.
- Jessica Steelman from A-NPDC asked the question if Virginia has any guidelines for paddling that the CDC has published? Martin will address this later in the meeting.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:11 p.m. MacGarvey made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed Unanimously.

4. Status of New Initiatives

- **Gateway Welcome Center Re-Opening**
 - Betz stated many of the paid staff are ready and willing to come back. Betz has begun calling the Welcome Center volunteers which have requested to wait another month before they come back. Betz supports their concerns and wants whoever is working at the Welcome Center to be completely comfortable with the processes that are in place to protect everyone's safety. The reopening plan for the Welcome Center will be two eight-foot tables at the entrance of the Welcome Center doors creating a triangle with a sneeze guard for each table. Out of safety, no one enters the Welcome Center room. There will be 2 X's on the floor 6 feet apart, two travelers can safely be engaging with staff at a time. We have bags ordered with our website printed on the bags. Welcome Center employees are the only ones handling materials creating a touchless system. Welcome Center staff will be following the VTC guidelines during phase 1 opening of the state. The Welcome Center staff will be provided, gloves, hand sanitizer, and mask. The planned opening for the Welcome Center will be June 1, with limited hours in the beginning. There will be paid staff only to start with, the second staff member will come in 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. which is the busiest time of the day. The Southern Gateway Welcome Center will be open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The arrangements are on a trial and error basis and changes will come as we see how busy we are.
- **New Tourism Video**
 - Marsh showed the revised Tourism Video to the Commission and asked for comments. Holloway was disappointed that the edits requested to remove the B&B scenes were not done. She felt it is a waste of footage to have scenes of empty bedrooms and a kitchen. She recommended that people on a porch enjoying an experience speaks volumes. Cape Charles beach footage was also missing other than the closing shot of Love sign at the beach and an aerial shot of the empty beach. She wanted to see more action footage with people at the beach. Holloway stated she represents Cape Charles the lack of footage other than an aerial scene of a parade on main street Cape Charles is disappointing. Holloway went on to say, the first 60 seconds of the video is great including the vibrance of the pony swim showing action is fantastic.
 - Marsh stated option 3 covered reshooting the B&B's at multiple locations at the cost of 5k to 15k. Any edits that are added to the video will cost additional money and the Commission at the previous meeting voted to only move forward with option A and B. The Commission does own the video and Morey has the files on her computer.
 - Holloway suggested to have the B&B interior scenes cut from the video, Coker agreed.
 - Marsh added that the video has both a video and soundtrack that are looped together editing out interior pieces will involve remastering the soundtrack, there would be a charge for that.
 - Coker suggested to find out how much it will cost to get the B&B interior edit done.
 - Holloway commented she did not want to spend more money to remove 2-bedroom scenes and a kitchen.
 - Tarr commented that the consensus seems to be that we go with the video we own it and check to see if we can get the B&B edited out. Tarr made a move to motion, but there was no second.
 - MacGarvey asked if it is worthwhile to get an estimate on the takeout of the B&B shots. It will make the video shorter too.

- At 12:40 Coker asked to have the motion amended to have Marsh and Coker negotiate with Jim Baugh to take out the B&B shots at no charge, to very little money, second by MacGarvey. Roll call vote:
 - Tarr yea
 - Shotwell yea
 - Holloway nay
 Motion was passed with one descent.
- **Local's Choice Contest**
 - Marsh stated that soon we will be rolling out the, Local's Choice Contest. The intent is to get locals to support local business and vote on their favorite places for: crab cake, orange crush, mules, accommodation, kayak experience, etc. The final list will be sent to the commission before it is released to the public.
- **Neck Masks with logo**
 - Marsh reported that Dave Burden, who now lives in Hawaii, has a new business venture creating neck mask/gators that are popular with fishermen and kayakers. This product design can be customized to promote the Eastern Shore with our logo. Also, a pocket strategically place so that a filter can be place in it taking the place of a face mask. After COVID is over this item can still be utilized. Marsh thoughts are that this would make a nice give-away promoting the Eastern Shore and it is something that people would use.
 - MacGarvey liked the idea of a neck mask, this is useful timely swag.
 - Coker thought it was a cool idea, he had been fishing with friends that wore them.
 - Holloway concerns are the budget resources are better spent on marketing and recovery. There are too many unknowns now.
 - Shotwell agreed we need to spend our resources on marketing at this time.
 - Through consensus, it was decided to hold off on any purchases.
- **Social Media/Website Analytics**
 - Morey stated that across all platforms we are up from last month. Instagram is up 27% on reach, with an increase of 43% on impressions more people are seeing our content on their feed. Facebook is up also solely as an organic reach.
- **Post-COVID-19 Marketing Strategy**
 - Marsh stated that during our weekly Thursday phone conference calls with the BOC we have been discussing marketing. The plan right now is to focus our marketing dollars on the fall travel season. Marsh wants to make sure that everyone is still on board with that decision. Marsh and Morey will begin putting together a strategy for a fall marketing plan which will start in September to promote the ESVA.
 - Martin explained VTC's next steps for marketing. Research shows that people are reluctant to travel and see it as their civic responsibility to stay home. Martin asks, "How can we promote civic responsibility and supporting small businesses"? VTC knows that things are unknown currently and plans must be nimble. State marketing will possibly begin June 2020 to August 2020 with just digital, social and search tools in the markets of Baltimore, Greensboro, Raleigh, and Washington D.C. Then transition, mid-August, expand to border states to markets in Philadelphia and New York. VTC will start to do some TV advertising, if timing looks right, with kick off around Labor Day promoting long weekends and driving trips. Steve Galyean from VTC is finalizing the new leverage grant program. It will be like the 50 Years of Love and Crush Friday campaigns. Only DMO's can apply and there will be no match dollars required. Martin stated there are 4 DMO's on the Eastern Shore, if all DMO's

participate these funds could stretch out for a year of ongoing promotions. VTC is putting all grant funding into recovery funding for localities. Martin reminded everyone that we may be going in and out of different phases of opening and shutting down for a year. This afternoon Martin has a call with Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Ball. There is concern that store fronts could go empty because of loss of revenue for businesses. A cycle of blight could follow when the pandemic is over. VTC is hoping for assistance on underwriting small business rents to help prevent some of these situations from happening.

5. Matters by Commissioners

- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce is opening back up this coming Friday and Saturday which is Memorial Day Weekend. It is a huge blow to Chincoteague Island with the cancelation of pony swim. Everyone will feel the effects of the cancelation, but everyone understands. The Chincoteague Chamber is worried about the Oyster Festival, which is held in October. She said that time will tell how and if that event will be canceled or not. Chincoteague hotels will be able to open at 20% occupancy. The beach is not opened other than for exercise and fishing. Dinning is still takeout and delivery.
- MacGarvey shared that, Brown Box Theatre Project production company has canceled fall 2020 performance in Exmore and has rescheduled for summer of 2021.
- Coker reminded MacGarvey to let Janice Williams know that the event has been delayed so that the funding that Exmore received can be held over for 2021.
- Holloway shared that Cape Charles entered Phase 1 last weekend. Merchants were geared up with preparations for the new normal of handling customers. Main Street Cape Charles has been working with merchants to help them with preparing. Sales where good and merchants could manage the 50% customer occupancy safely. Not everyone did well but some merchants were excited that normalcy was coming back. Cape Charles Town Council voted to open short term lodging last Thursday. The four B&B's and Hotel Cape Charles are not open. The latter group will be opening on a staggered basis. Cape Charles has launched our Care campaign, which consist of an image of the Cape Charles water tower wearing a mask, as well as an image of the LOVE sign at the beach with a mask on the tire. Cape Charles is trying to send positive images of staying safe while visiting Cape Charles.

6. Closed Session

- At 1:10 p.m. Holloway made a motion to go into closed session to discuss, Personnel Positions, seconded by MacGarvey, and passed unanimously.
- At 1:20 p.m. Holloway made a motion to reconvene in open session, second by MacGarvey. All members were polled, and the commission came out of closed session.

8. Adjournment

- At 1:23 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tarr, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

John Coker, Chairman

8/13/2020

Date