

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
September 16, 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:**

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  
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

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 Representative

Guest Present

Laura Dodson, NHC Chamber of Commerce  
Matt Spuck, Onancock Town Manager

Commissioner in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comments

- Dodson announced that the Northampton County Agricultural County Fair, scheduled for October 3, has been canceled. Dodson continued; the Bay Creek Holiday Tour is being considered but with a different approach. There will not be home tours, but Bay Creek has other options that are being considered. Once Bay Creek Development has formalized how the holiday tour will be presented, Dodson will inform the Tourism Commission.
- Matt Spuck was present and introduced himself as the new Town Manager of Onancock and the owner of Inn at Onancock.

3. Consent Agenda

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

4. VTC Updates

- Martin congratulated the towns of Cape Charles and Onancock on the Main Street Community certification that was just announced in a press release by Governor Northam today. Also included in the press release, Tappahannock in the Coastal Region and Tazewell in the Southwest Region of Virginia. Main Street designation will open new lines of funding for these communities. Water Funding became available yesterday Martin has the link if there is interest. VTC Recovery grant applications are due tomorrow. A Spring MLP (Marketing Leverage Program) round is subject to VTC receiving EDA (Economic Development Administration) funding. VTC is still in the

running for a significant amount of money through EDA. If funding is awarded from EDA it is possible that the MLP funds could be used towards a bike trail website and logo design for the proposed bike trail. VTC is interviewing a new research director with a start date in October. Research is going to be key to evaluating traveler sentiment during the ups and down of the pandemic. Knowing where travelers are coming from will be essential to a recovery plan. 400-mile road trips as well as 1-2-day- day trips for city dwellers to rural areas continues to be our working goal. The Drive 2.0 initiatives has the involvement of Marsh, Dodson, Holloway, and Shotwell in on conference calls explaining the 5-year tourism plan, which was developed pre pandemic. A bridge guide is being created and if EDA funding is awarded a resilience guide will also be created. The program is for communities to apply to be a 2.0 community. A total of 30 communities can be funded, the first round will be 10 communities. A variety of workshops and consensus meetings will be held to come up with tourism development, advocacy, or marketing projects. The winning communities will have \$10K grant awarded to fund those projects. Martin added an economic impact study for the proposed bike trail could be eligible in the Drive 2.0 project funds. The first round of workshops would start February through June of 2021. Grant checks cannot be issued until July 1 of 2021 because of budget cycle. The Tourism Commission could integrate the Drive 2.0 workshop with our strategic planning so that the same people can be attending one meeting. The workshops can be held virtually or in person. There will also be a survey component which has not been developed yet. Martin continued that it is not believed tourism will ever go back to the normal that we knew pre-Covid-19. Economic impact numbers are being looked at and it is believed that it will be a few years before we are at 2019 level again. 2023 is a goal to shoot for to achieve tourism growth past 2019 revenue numbers. Dates for a virtual VA-1 orientation have not been set yet, but it will be held over 4-days. VA-1 has not decided if it will be in person or not. Martin will let the team know when a decision has been made.

## 5. Status of New Initiatives

- **Bookkeeper/Payroll Admin – Updated**

Marsh informed the BOC that Shannon Wessells, the Tourism Commission Bookkeeper/Payroll, and monthly financial preparer, is focusing on getting into law school and will transition away from the Tourism Commission. Shannon has agreed to assist Joeckel in the transition of taking over these duties. Joeckel has always assisted Shannon Wessells with all aspects of the bookkeeping. The newest version of Quick Books has been installed onto Joeckel's computer. Shannon was in the office earlier this week to start the training. The last step will be converting the payroll aspect of the program. Shannon's version on Quick Books/payroll has a glitch which Shannon is addressing. Once the glitch is fixed Shannon's files will be inputted into the Tourism Commission's new Quick Book version. It is anticipated that by the next board meeting the transition will be fully in place. It is the hope of the Tourism Commission that the financial packets sent to the BOC will arrive much earlier for review.

- Coker commented that Shannon Wessells has done a great job with financials and he will be sorry to see Shannon leave. Joeckel will take over bookkeeping and do just fine.

- **ESVA Healthy Recreation Trail Working Group**

Marsh gave an update on the rails to trails project. Marsh is part of a small working group of 8 people. The goal is to help the trail project move along. At this time, a mission statement is being worked on, a name for the trail, and a timeline. The next step will be for the group to seek funding for an economic impact study for a potential rail/trail study to be done for its viability here on the Shore.

- Coker asked who is on the working group. Marsh reported Jill Bieri and Jim McGowen from TNC, Clara Vaughn from A-NPDC, Laura Dodson from Northampton County Chamber of Commerce, Matt Hart the Mayor of Onley, Hali Plourde-Rogers from Eastern Shore Land Trust, and George Mapp are in the group. Marsh continued, the theory is to have a small working group and keep to the ball moving. The two Counties have control of the bigger picture in what it will take to make this happen. Coker stated that VDOT is doing a consulting study to figure out what it could/would look like in a grand scale and what it would cost. Teaming up with different parts of Virginia government and possibly the DRC (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation) makes sense. Coker continued, this is a huge undertaking with a large amount of money needed to make this project a reality and the funding is not in the picture. Coker continued that this could be a great economic development driver especially for tourism. Coker thanked Marsh for working on this project and maybe there will be some answers from the Counties and A-NPDC but not much is expected soon.
- **Gateway Welcome Center - Update**  
Betz announced that the Welcome Center is running smoothly. The visitor numbers are overall lower than last year, but visitor numbers for September is slightly up over 2019. Betz reported that most of the businesses that she meets with have had more business the week after Labor Day than last year and most accommodations are booked through October. This Fall season is looking very good for the Shore. The Welcome Center continues to keep the guides on outside racks. Last year some weekend attendance was set at 800 people entering the Welcome Center. This year we have had 400 people a couple of days which is a manageable number for the Welcome Center staff considering the COVID-19 concerns. Having the guides outside the Welcome Center has kept visitor access to the guides high with many guides flying off the racks and engagement in the Welcome Center at a number staff is happy with.
- **WonderLOVE Promotion**  
Morey presented the WanderLOVE trails and destinations, brochure, video, blog review list:
  1. Bike and Hike: Breath of Fresh Air Trail
    - a. Southern Tip Bike and Hike Trail at ESVANWR
    - b. Kiptopeke State Park
    - c. Brownsville Nature Preserve
    - d. Onancock Native Plant Nature Trail
    - e. Wildlife Loop at CNWR
    - f. Savage Neck Dunes
    - g. Mutton Hunk Fen State Natural Area Preserve
    - h. Magothy Bay State Natural Area Preserve
    - i. Seaside Walkway
  2. Love and Learning Trail
    - a. Butterfly Trail at ESVANWR
    - b. WWII Cannon at ESVANWR
    - c. Arlington Plantation and Custis Tomb
    - d. Eyre Hall Gardens
      - i. Open dawn-dusk
    - e. Eastville Courthouse Green

- f. Barrier Island Center
  - g. Tangier Island Crab Shanties tours
  - h. Scott Hall Cemetery
  - i. Railway Museum
  - j. Makemie Park
  - k. NASA Wallops Flight Facility Visitor's Center
    - i. Currently closed.
  - l. Assateague Lighthouse
  - m. Ker Place
3. Lovin' on the Water Trail
- i. *Note\* We are using icons and color as a key to show where there are kayaking lunches, boat launches, where people offer ecotours, fishing trips, and coastal hunting.*
  - b. Onancock Wharf/Onancock Creek (fishing, ecotour, kayak tour, kayak rental, boat launch)
  - c. Cape Charles Harbor (fishing, kayak tour, ecotour, boat launch)
  - d. Wachapreague Harbor (fishing, hunting, kayak tour, kayak launch, ecotour, boat launch)
  - e. Bayford Harbor (kayaking tour)
  - f. Church Creek (kayaking tour)
  - g. Chincoteague (kayak tour, fishing, hunting, ecotours, boat launches)
  - h. Willis Wharf (boat launch)
  - i. Quinby (boat launch)
  - j. Morley's (boat launch)
  - k. ESVANWR area (kayak launch, boat launch)
    - Coker asked to add a note that there are fees for launch sites in both counties and on Chincoteague Island.
4. Sun and Sand Trail - Beaches
- a. Barrier Islands
  - b. Cape Charles Beach
  - c. Assateague Island
  - d. Kiptopeke State Park
  - e. Tangier Island
  - f. Savage Neck Dunes
5. Love on the Coastline Trail (sunrise, sunset, dark sky spots, etc.)
- a. Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Overlook
  - b. Magothy Bay State Natural Area Preserve
  - c. The Concrete Ships at Kiptopeke State Park
  - d. Cape Charles LOVEworks
  - e. Oyster
  - f. Redbank
  - g. Wills Wharf overlook
  - h. Wachapreague
  - i. Onancock Wharf

- j. Tangier Island
  - k. Saxis
  - l. LOVEworks at Robert Reed Park
  - m. Assateague Island
6. Fresh from the Water Seafood Trail
- a. Northampton County
    - i. Cherrystone Aqua Farms
      - 1. <https://clamandoyster.com/>
      - 2. Easy check-out process, shipping and curbside available
    - ii. Dinkum's Seafood
      - 1. <https://www.dinkumsseafood.com/>
      - 2. We are an online order and delivery business. Go to our website [www.dinkumseafood.com](http://www.dinkumseafood.com) to place your order. From the boat to your door!
    - iii. Lambert Shellfish
      - 1. <https://lambertshellfish.oystercommon.com/>
      - 2. Delivery, pick up, and shipping
      - 3. Oysters only.
    - iv. Marker 6 Clam & Oyster
      - 1. [https://www.facebook.com/Marker6clamandoysterco/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/Marker6clamandoysterco/?ref=page_internal)
      - 2. Dig Wednesday and Thursday's year round
      - 3. Pick up available year-round in Nassawadox, Machipongo, and sometimes the CBBT
      - 4. Text or call 757-710-8878 to place orders
    - v. Nottingham Seafood
      - 1. <https://www.facebook.com/clamsandseafood/>
      - 2. [nottclam@verizon.net](mailto:nottclam@verizon.net)
      - 3. Open for retail May-Labor Day, does not have anything fresh available in the off-season for retail and focuses on wholesale.
    - vi. Pearl Market
      - 1. [pearlmarketcc@gmail.com](mailto:pearlmarketcc@gmail.com)
      - 2. Various vendors
      - 3. Emailed 9/9/20
      - 4. "We are still testing out our hours into the off-season. We are hoping the market can be open year-round. Right now, we are open Saturdays, 9 am-Noon. These hours will be extended in the future. We have two seafood vendors at the market: Bay Atlantic Seafood and Heath Seafood. They offer a wide variety of seafood products and

Bay Atlantic Seafood even offers pre-orders through email [bayatlanticseafood@gmail.com](mailto:bayatlanticseafood@gmail.com)"

vii. R & C Seafood

1. <https://www.facebook.com/R-C-Seafood-113606378661599/>
2. Facebook Message to order, pick up only, cash only

b. Accomack County

i. Eastern Shore Seafood at Onancock Market

1. <https://onancockmarket.com/collections/eastern-shore-seafood>
2. Place order online, Saturday morning pick up at 20 Market St
3. Clams and crabs.
4. Season? (emailed 9/15)

ii. Edward's Seafood

1. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Edwards-Seafood/142669559112163>
2. Pick up in store only

iii. Gary Howard Seafood

1. <https://www.facebook.com/garyhowardseafood/>
2. Pick up in store only

iv. Ricky's Seafood & Produce

1. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Seafood-Restaurant/Rickys-Seafood-Produce-467008830017198/>
2. Pick up in store only

v. Susan's Seafood

1. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Susan's%20Seafood/139003872945403/>
2. Pick up in store only.

vi. Tangier Island Oyster Co.

1. <http://www.tangieroysterco.com/buy>
2. Ships, but you must submit an inquiry first.

vii. Tom's Cove Aquafarms

1. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Farm/Toms-Cove-Aqua-Farms-169139090449026/>
2. <http://www.tomscove.net/contact.html>
3. Call ahead and order or come to the parking lot and call and they will bring it out to you (COVID protocol.) Shellfish only.

WanderLOVE Photo Shot List

Morey spoke with several different people about the shot list below and the consensus was 4-6 production days would fit in our budget.

- Chincoteague
  - Family biking the wildlife loop
  - Family kayaking with the ponies OR hunting off Assateague
- Tangier
  - Family enjoying trip out to the island (ecotour)
  - Family experiencing crab shanty tour
  - Family on the beach
  - Sunset
    - Parent taking a photograph/video of the sunset with a nice camera
- Wachapreague
  - Couple enjoying trip to the barrier islands (ecotour)
  - Barrier Island beaches, couple exploring & relaxing
  - Sunrise or sunset
    - Couple photographing
- Cape Charles
  - ESVANWR: Family walking down butterfly trail
  - ESVANWR: Family at WWII Cannon
  - Cape Charles beach
    - Natural crowd (socially distancing)
    - Family playing in the water, relaxing, sandcastles, etc.
- Seafood Trail: Family making a seafood dinner
  - Generic market shot
  - Film in an accommodation that tourists can stay in
  - Clams, oysters, crabs, fish-the whole 9 yards
  - Cooking, shucking, picking, eating
    - Holloway commented that the fall season is dominated by older couples without children, and asked to be sure to include diversity in the ages that are being photographed. Coker asked to have an oyster roast included. Holloway added paddle boarding would include a younger diverse group. Shotwell added crabbing is huge in Chincoteague and always draws all types of people. Shotwell added that Eric Dennis of Rocket Science is a videographer that might be worth getting a quote from for filming.
- **Fall Marketing Plan Review**

Morey announced the WonderLOVE promotion is getting started. Rack cards are being developed that coordinate with the blog themes that are being written. A separate ad campaign to promote the WonderLOVE attractions will be on Facebook and Google. In addition to WonderLOVE being a big part of our campaign this Fall there will be the continuation of the ongoing Facebook and Google ads which were started in June and run throughout the year every month. A budget is set for travel writers for the Fall and possibly ongoing into a Spring outreach. Toddlin around Tidewater is another travel writer we expect to have visiting the ESVA this fall. New Church Welcome Center tower display is continuing. Organic earned media is

always in play with postings online. Onancock was featured in a Readers Digest article on, *Up and Coming Small Towns*. Onancock was listed number 10 out of 25 small towns.

- **Social Media/Website Analytics**

Morey reported that Google is very static right now. There was a slight decrease from last month but for the year-to-date numbers are up compared to last year at this time. Instagram fell last month but is still higher compared to last year. The plan is to continue posting to create upward movement on Instagram. Facebook fell but that was anticipated. Last month Facebook had two campaigns still going on. The ESVA tourism video was reposted and the Locals Choice Contest helped to keep Facebook numbers up. Online advertising between the first of September and yesterday showed Facebook reached 88K people and had 105K impression which is great. We are reaching mainly younger people aged 25 – 34-year old in this ad and they are mainly from NY, NJ, and VA. Over the life course of this ad, which started in June, there have been over 1MM impressions and 410K unique accounts have been reached. Pictures and text on these ads are updated every month so that the ad remains fresh.

- All BOC were surprised by the younger demographics that were being reached and the analytics that are happening are impressive. Holloway suggested to be sure to include younger demographics in our images that we are creating. Families and couple imagery should be diverse. Morey agreed that is our goal.

The last Google ad which started in July had 911 people click on ESVA and 60K impression, 232 searches on Google maps to find our location.

- **November Strategic Planning Session**

Marsh reminded the Commission that the Strategic Planning Session is scheduled for November 5<sup>th</sup> from 11am – 2pm.

- Holloway asked if there is an outline of what we want to accomplish. Marsh reminded the BOC that the last time we met and discussed the strategic plan it was pre-COVID. The question is do we want to go in that directions or draft a new plan. Coker suggested that Marsh and team draft an agenda of what Tourism wants to accomplish and send it to the BOC for review before the next meeting so BOC will be ready to discuss.

## 6. Matters by Commissioners

- MacGarvey shared that the hotels in Exmore are happy with good traffic. It is down from last year but more than what was anticipated. A new business opened in Exmore; it is a new restaurant on HWY 13 which is family style. Exmore is planning a Halloween event for children. Nassawadox has a new yoga studio/massage business and a garden center.
- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague businesses have had a good summer. September and October are booked solid. Accommodations are very happy, but it has been tough with the demands of the tourist. Travelers are spending money which is appreciated very much by all the businesses. Chincoteague will be having something for Trick or Treat but it is not known yet what it will be. Chincoteague will have an Oyster event this year, but it will be different than past years. It is called DYI Oysters. The Chincoteague Chamber will be selling bags of oysters, pints of shucked oysters, T-shirts, and souvenir trays. It is suggested to order in advance, and it will be a drive through service for people to take their oysters home to prepare. Chincoteague's Board has decided to have a Christmas Parade, but it too will be different. Ideas are still developing. There is no word on, *Christmas by the Sea*. The August



numbers on the website show that 93% of the users are new. Most folks that come into the Chamber are new to Chincoteague. Chincoteague will be doing a print travel guide for 2021. Shotwell continued, all the advertising efforts that ESVA Tourism is doing is paying off. The economic impact study for 2018 over 2019 put Coastal Virginia at number one over all other regions in the state.

- Martin wanted to express that ESVA Tourism Commission team is a group of leaders in tourism marketing and tourism development. Several Southwest Virginia communities completely dissolved their tourism program because of Covid and tight budgets. Martin thanked everyone for what happens every day in keeping tourism growing on the Eastern Shore. Martin stated that the ESVA has an opportunity to grow faster than other areas of Virginia.
- Holloway shared that Cape Charles has received Main Street designation. Cape Charles has worked on Main Street initiative planning since 2017. The ES Map is days away from final print. The new Cape Charles Cape website will debut in November. Cape Charles did receive the \$845K Recovery Grant from DHCD (Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development) that was applied for. This grant will be able to provide grants to Cape Charles businesses as well as Northampton County businesses. Cape Charles will be holding Festive Fridays this upcoming holiday season. The planning committee has just begun working on ideas to bring this all together in a safe way. Cape Charles has a new business coming that will be located beside the water tower. Ground has broken at the site with an anticipation of 9 months to build. The business will be an upscale gourmet grocery store which will also serve sandwiches and similar items. Cape Charles has been busy all season. It has been exhausting with the added precautions that have been put in place because of Covid. Business owners are tired but extremely grateful.
- Tarr shared that about a month ago Chincoteague won first place in the USA Today 10 Best Coastal Small-Town contest. Tarr is now helping spray for mosquitoes on Chincoteague Island, Tarr has discovered million-dollar homes and roads he never knew existed. Coker added building is going on everywhere in both counties. Holloway added that many part-time residents have pushed up plans to make Cape Charles their main residence. The ESVA is busy.
- Coker shared that Northampton County is now offering Covid small business grants. Grant applications can be found on Northampton County website. The grants must be awarded by end of 2020. Funds not used by the county go back to the federal government January 1, 2021.

#### 7. Adjournment

- At 1:15 p.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Holloway, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

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John Coker, Chairman

  
Date

11/5/2020