



**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 28, 2021 at 11 a.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
Matt Spuck, Accomack 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

None

1. Call to Order

- At 11:04 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- No public in attendance

3. Consent Agenda

- At 11:05 a.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Martin shared a screen shot of a graphic showing sentiment of travel by Virginian's and out of state residents over the next 12 months. The top concern for out of state travelers is the COVID-19 case numbers are so high. She suggested the Tourism Commission needs to market health mitigation and the uniqueness of the Shore. The Eastern Shore is a special place with social distancing naturally practiced. Nature is the biggest asset for the Shore with its vast outdoor environment to explore. An idea was suggested to consider doing a competitive type of campaign with Virginia Beach. ESVA Tourism Commission would target people that have liked Virginia Beach on social media and promote to that group of followers the uniqueness of the Eastern Shore. Martin is part of a joint marketing meeting next week to discuss the outlook for the next 6-9 months. Martin is also looking into the USDA Recreation Economy Resource Guide plan, which also offers grants, the guide could be a resource that might be useful in a couple of years to go after funding. Currently A-NPDC has a full schedule with grants they are overseeing.
 - Holloway asked Martin if the WonderLove program has been put on hold. The Town of Cape Charles does not know if they will be able to spend their funds by the deadline of June 30, 2021. Martin answered that if Cape Charles needs an extension to spend funding, contact Angela Wiggins at VTC.

5. Commission Updates

- **New Church Billboard Facing - Update**

Morey went over the selection of photos for the New Church billboard refacing. Image #6, by consensus of BOC members, was selected with the following suggestions.

- Shotwell suggested the sky and water needs to be made bluer so that there is more color in the billboard. The fonts in the billboard need to be consistent, "Still Driving", can remain a different font. The two logo's need to be solid lettering not in a fade out box.
- Holloway and MacGarvey agreed.
- Spuck commented that the read time on a billboard is 2-3 seconds for VISITESVA.COM to be readable it must be above the height of the two-side logo's rather than at the same level. The cursive font of, "Still Driving", may not be legible to everyone.
- Martin suggested to shorten the phrase: "you could be here in 5 minutes" to: "be here in 5 minutes".
- MacGarvey suggested to shorten to: "be here in minutes".
- Holloway comment that the goal of the billboard is to get people to visit our website, the visual on the billboard is the inspiration to make it happen.
- Marsh stated that once the changes are made several mock-ups will be sent out again for BOC to comment.

- **February - Take-Out Month**

Morey informed the BOC that the Take-Out Month campaign will begin February 1st through February 27th. Morey has received a lot of great feedback on the new campaign. Betz and Sally, from the Southern Welcome Center, have added 35 new restaurants listings to VISITESVA website. As the new restaurants are being added Betz is encouraging business owners to share the contest on their Facebook page. Shotwell will also be sharing the campaign on Chincoteague's Facebook page once a week. Morey has worked up a templet for sending e-blast at the end of each week using photographs submitted by participants in the contest. The goal is to show takeout dinners, displayed artfully and creatively, enjoyed at home or out. Photos will be shared on Instagram and Facebook also.

- **Ready, Set, Go Taskforce – Update**

Marsh reported that the taskforce met yesterday for the first time and created a timeline and game plan. A survey is planned to be sent out region wide to all the different industries on the Shore by February 9th. Announcement of the overall event theme, with a save the date notice, will be sent out the week of February 5th. An anticipated scheduled roundtable discussion, held virtually, the week of March 8th. These are scheduling goals for the taskforce with details being worked out. Third step, creating online tool kits, training, and quick reference guide. The Eastern Shore Community College will be coming up with specific training according to the outcomes from the needs found in the survey and roundtable discussions. A potential fourth step is in discussion possibly resiliency training.

- **Gateway Welcome Center - Update**

Betz announced the loss of a beloved Welcome Center employee, Miss Myrtis Ames. Betz is in discussion with the CBBT to dedicate a tree in her honor and place it at the Welcome Center. The Welcome Center will purchase the tree and the CBBT will provide a marker. The plan is to have a dedication memorial sometime in March. End of year Welcome Center tourist numbers are down in 2020 because of the pandemic. Only 5 people at a time are allowed into the Welcome Center. Travel Guides are kept outside the Welcome Center so that 24 hours a day traveler have access to travel information. Last year almost 9,800 travel guides were taken from outside the Welcome Center entrance. Betz announced many of the WC staff have had their first round of vaccination.

- Martin informed Betz that the Virginia Beach Convention Center where vaccines are being administered has a wait time of 3 hours with lines wrapped around the convention center. It may be a good idea to see if the visitor guides can be handed out as people are waiting. These folks will be able to travel in 60 days after being vaccinated. Betz thanked Martin for the great idea.
- **2021 Activity Guide – Update**
Morey reported that the activity guide is basically done the guide was proofed by Betz sister who is an English major. Some photographs in the guide have been switched out for better images.
 - Marsh added that as soon as the updated files are received, the guide will send to the printer to create the final proof for review.
- **Social Media/Website Analytics**
Morey asked to screen share the new social media report which was revamped for 2021. Website viewing was up over last month as well as last year. This can be attributed to new users and ads. Facebook reach is up again this month. There was a lot of high hitting post this month, engagement increased also. Instagram growth was extremely good this month with 189,211 impressions, content interactions increased with good comments. Facebook ads this month reached 147,136, this platform is growing a lot. The main demographic is still young people in the 18-24 bracket. Morey is considering narrowing down our target audience, the younger demographic may not have the ability or affluence to travel. The top search by states are still New York, New Jersey, and Virginia.
 - Holloway and MacGarvey commented that the new report was nicely done.
 - Coker stated that the report shows that we are making progress.
 - Marsh added that we are at a stage where a year-to-year comparison can be made.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Coker spoke about the presentation by Jon Richardson of the Eastern Shore Health District. The big issue with the COVID-19 vaccine is that the Shore is not getting enough vaccines. It is a waiting game as the Shore waits for more vaccines to become available. Coker stated that in another quarter or by the third quarter we will have made it through the pandemic and be vaccinated.
- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague Chamber is working to get a health care representative to speak at the general membership meeting February 25th to update and inform the public about the COVID-19 vaccines. Bryan Rush, Director of Emergency Services Emergency Management Coordinator – Chincoteague, will be the guest speaker. Bryan will talk about COVID-19 on the Shore and Chincoteague's response. Bryan will also be introducing the resiliency workshops that will be starting back up in March. Chincoteague travel guide is being proofed and getting ready for the printers. The travel guide will not have any dates for events, it will be very generic. Some of the merchants on Chincoteague have decided to have a modify, Death by Chocolate on February 12th and 13th. The health department has given their approval for this event to be held with safety protocols in place. Chincoteague's board is discussing upcoming events, the Decoy Show April 2nd and 3rd and the Seafood festival the first week of May. Those events may not happen, alternatives are being considered.
- Holloway shared that the new Cape Charles - Cape Website, which will also host the Cape Charles Main Street micro site is almost ready to launch. The hope is that the site will be up and running by the end of March. Map distributions are all being lined up so that they will be at welcome center sites in time for the beginning of the upcoming season. Cape Charles biggest endeavor right now is getting the VACDC Recovery Grant money, \$15K, into the

hands of business. Cape Charles will also reach out to specific zip codes in Northampton County and businesses that are on HWY 13 including businesses south of Cape Charles that need help. The recovery grant process is very long and grueling not what was told to the town at the beginning of applications. Holloway continued It is worth all the work the town is going through to assist businesses that lost revenue from early last year.

- Spuck spoke about the same struggles as Cape Charles with the bureaucracy of the VACDC grants. The positive side is that \$15K is available to business right at the time they need it. Onancock has already distributed \$100K of County grant money to local businesses in need including local grants and utility assistance. Onancock is looking toward spring and putting a new advertising campaign together promoting the wharf and marina. The plan is to get as many travelers as possible that travel by water to Onancock. The campaign is looking to working with, Spin and PropTalk, Chesapeake Bay Magazine, Virginia Living and Waterways Guide. Onancock is working on continuity of image and words between all of these magazines. Onancock is starting a social media and Google campaign. Onancock Main Street has been working with economic development and empty store fronts partner which has begun to bear fruit. Our goal is to make sure all our businesses survive so that when the pandemic is over the town will spring back to life.
- MacGarvey shared that Exmore is just starting to work on a new website, VisitExmore. The new website has no timeline on it yet. Plans have begun on the Juneteenth festival and to turn it into a 3-day event if it is safe to do and COVID-19 cooperates. The Shakespeare festival is on for fall, the contracts have been signed, if safe gatherings are allowed. The plan is for Shakespeare festival to also be a 3-day event with an artisan festival the next day and then a music festive the following day or something compatible on day 3.
- Tarr shared that he is grateful for all the work everyone puts in. The Governor has extended the 10-person limit through the end of February. Chincoteague is like all other towns trying to make decisions about upcoming events. The Carnival and Pony Swim is in question right now. If mask only were the mandate, there could be a carnival and pony swim but a limitation on crowd size makes a large event impossible. Tarr thanked Spuck for agreeing to join the Commission. Spuck's representation of Onancock is what is needed to make the middle Shore a driving force.

7. Adjournment

- At 11:57 a.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Holloway, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by

John Coker, Chairman



3/1/2021
Date