

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 21, 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

Matt Spuck, Onancock Town Manager

Commissioner in Absence

Adam James, Accomack County Appointee

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comments

- No public comments

3. Consent Agenda

- Coker commented that he is pleased to see how well the Visitor Guide sales are going after looking over the financial reports.
- At 12:04 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Tarr and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Martin reported the VA-1 Tourism Summit is November 16th and will be held in Richmond at the Omi. Martin will not be attending the Summit she will be doing a presentation at the Virginia Economic Developers Association (VEDA) the same day. The Drive 2.0 program will be unveiled at the VA-1 Summit. December 2, the online seminar for the Drive 2.0 will be presented along with the \$10K incentive program which is open to DMO's and will be only be awarded to 30. All state and regional plans will be released to the public also at this time. An update will be given on EDA funding for VTC in 2 weeks. If VTC does not receive funding, there will be no spring MLP offered. All recovery grants have been scored there were 180 participants. There is only funding for 60. The goal is to let Recovery Grant awardees know by the end of October to start the spend down. Martin reported that visitor sentiment is down again because of the increases in Covid cases. Surveys, taken by travel survey groups, are hearing that visitor experience the most reliable travel

information from state and local DMO's tourism websites. This information is important data to take to local leaders at budget time. Martin continued that VTC is scheduling marketing plans in 90-day increments because of the volatility that the virus presents. The Rebuild Virginia roll-out which is for small businesses to receive up to \$10K grant money has been increased to \$100K. If a business has already applied and received funds, they can reapply for added funding. This program is still a very complicated process. The goal is to get the entire 70MM allocated by the end of December.

5. Commission Updates

- **Bookkeeper/Payroll Admin – Updated**

Marsh informed the BOC that transition is in process with the hopes that it will be completed by the next BOC meeting.

- **Gateway Welcome Center - Update**

Betz reported the Welcome Center numbers through October 18th are 3% higher than the month of September same time frame. The Welcome Center is getting a lot of nighttime travel. This is based on the number of travel guides taken at night and the custodial staff having a huge clean up from nighttime travel. The walk-in count is still lower than last year but that is to be expected. The Welcome Center is still receiving high traveler counts on Saturdays.

- Coker asked how the staff and volunteers are doing. Betz stated that all the volunteers are back. Some volunteers only want to work 1 or 2 days a month.
- Holloway asked how recruitment is done for volunteers. Betz replied it is mostly word of mouth. Holloway suggested it might be worthwhile to get a story in the Eastern Shore Post featuring the Welcome Center volunteers.

Betz continued that she would like to do something special for the Welcome Center staff and volunteers to say thank you. Waiting until Volunteer Appreciation Day in April is too long of a wait. The Welcome Center work force represents our front-line workers. A random surprise is overdue for this group who are the ambassadors to the Eastern Shore. This group never complains especially with the extras that are going on to keep everything clean.

- Holloway suggested to put together a budget for showing our appreciation to the Welcome Center work force. Coker commented just do it, this group is outstanding. Marsh commented that both he and Betz will get together and plan it out. Coker thanked Betz for all that she does and the difference that she has made.
- **WonderLOVE Promotion**
 - **Video-** Morey stated that Jim Baugh was the best option for videography of the WonderLove campaign. Jim will be filming 3 days on Tangier even though our budget cost will be for just 1 day. Three separate videos will be produced. This is all agreed to in our contract. If extra filming is needed it would be at 50% off Jim Baugh daily rate. Marsh sent out a shot list for BOC to approve.

Tangier Filming:

- Beach with family
 - Sandcastles, bathing suits, exploring, chairs, towels, umbrella
 - Parent taking iPhone picture at the beach
- Sunrise
- Sunset
 - Film set up (tripod, camera, etc.)

- Dark sky
- Crab Shanty tour with family
 - In boat approaching crab shanty
 - Inside the shanty with guide showing the crabs, talking about crabs
 - Crabs in shedding tank
- Crab Shanty tour with older couple
- Ferry approaching, passengers getting off
- Older couple kayaking creeks/marshy areas
- Flying overhead of the island
- Watermen pulling crab pots from the water

Extras

- Bed and breakfasts
- Museum
- Food/seafood/restaurants
- Golf carts
 - **Holloway emphasized that the contract states that we have rights to comment and have edits done before we see a finished product.**
- Video shot list for the whole WonderLove campaign

Bike and Hike

- DJI_0716 (existing footage)
 - Family biking at Southern Tip trail, cold weather
- MVI_7015 (existing footage)
 - Single mom two kids walking CNWR to Lighthouse
 - **Shotwell stated it is important to have video done with the Assateague Lighthouse seen in the background.**
- Onancock Native Plant Trail (commission film)
- Kiptopeke State Park (Rachel video from spring)
 - OR re-film to incorporate diversity
- CNWR (commission film)
 - Water at Wildlife Loop OR
 - Ponies at Woodland Trail

Love and Learning

- MVI_6939 (existing footage)
 - Kids walking through rail car at railway museum
- Rocket launch (footage in 50YOL video)
- MVI_8288 (existing footage)
 - NASA Visitor's Center sign

- **Coker asked if the NASA Visitor Center will open. Morey stated that right now there are virtual tours. Shotwell added that the Visitor Centers on Assateague island are also closed for Covid.**
- DJI_0686 at 2:39 (existing footage)
 - Shot of BIC kitchen, exterior
- DJI_0687 (existing footage)
 - Exterior BIC
- Crab Shanty Tours Footage (Jim film)
 - Filming on Tangier with family and couple
- 20191012_111629 (existing footage)
 - Assateague Lighthouse looking up
- XX (existing footage)
 - Older couple looking out from lighthouse, view from top
- MVI_7248 (existing footage)
 - Ker Place interior, foyer

Lovin' on the Water

- Kayaking on Tangier (Jim film)
 - Filming
- Tangier Onancock Ferry (Jim film)
 - Filming
- MVI_7555 (existing footage)
 - Kayakers kayaking away from the camera at ESVANWR
- Aerial shot kayakers ESVANWR (existing footage)
 - Jim 50YOL
- Jim Fishing Footage (existing footage)
 - Red drum, cobia, marlin
 - Duck hunting? (commission film or Jim film)
 - **BOC commented on missing shots: paddle boarding, pontoon boating, crabbing, birding tours on the water and a trip to the barrier island. Holloway added there are videos up on You-Tube that are done here on the Shore featuring what is lacking in the shot list. Marsh stated that he can find out what DPI is required for film that is in existence and share that information with the Commissioners.**

Love on the Coastline

- Tangier Filming (Jim film)
 - Sunrise, sunset, dark sky
- Kiptopeke Ships (existing footage)
 - Time lapse sunset in 50YOL
- CC Loveworks (existing footage)
 - Time lapse sunset in 50YOL
 - **Shotwell also suggested the Chincoteague Loveworks sign**

- Wachapreague (commission film)
 - Film
- 20191012_175717 (existing footage)
 - Peaceful sunset on Bayside shot, birds flying low

Sun and Sand

- DJI_0727 (existing footage)
 - Kiptopeke Beach
- Tangier Beach (Jim film)
 - Filming
- Barrier Islands (existing footage?)
- MVI_7022 (existing footage)
 - Family at shoreline, Assateague
- MVI_7020 (existing footage)
 - Family at shoreline, Assateague
- CC Beach (existing footage)
 - Jim footage 50YOL film
- Surfing at Assateague? (existing footage?)
 - Film
 - **Shotwell maybe able to help with surfing shots. Holloway shared that Jim has film of kite boarders in Cape Charles. Marsh agreed and stated that we used Jim's kite boarding video in our longer video we recently released.**

Seafood

- DJI_0737 (existing footage)
 - Willis Wharf, Chesapeake Deadrise at wharf
- MVI_8280 (existing footage)
 - Watermen handing off buckets of oysters
- Edward's Seafood, shot of product in market (commission film)
 - Filming
- Family making seafood dinner (commission film)
 - Filming
 - **Shotwell asked if the film is owned by the ESVA Tourism Commission. Morey stated the film is owned by the Commission.**
 - **Coker stated that the next step is to link these experiences seen in the video to the services that provide them. Morey stated that is what the rack cards will do.**
- Trail Rack Cards
 - **Marsh displayed an example of one of the rack cards that are being created that will go with each video and blog.**
- **2021 Tourism Summit Planning**
 - Marsh started a discussion on the planning for the 2021 Tourism Summit. The 2020 Summit was canceled because of Covid.

- Martin suggested to wait until late February maybe things will have settled down by then, but it is important that something is planned.
- Shotwell stated Covid is still a big question.
- Holloway feels March is a better time and April is too late. The planning should start now with plans to have the summit virtually and if it can be in person that is great. Also create incentives for the attendees, free ad space etc. Coming up with a strong platform for getting this out virtually. Zoom, google meet, there are lots of ways to do these meeting now.
- Martin is hearing that fall of 2022 will be a time when things may return to normal. Heard immunity and children having to have the vaccine before they will be able to go back to school will be a game changer.
- Holloway, MacGarvey and Coker agreed just plan the Summit to be virtual. Look at dates for February and early March for the board to vote on.
- **Social Media/Website Analytics**

Morey reported that Google analytics had a dip on usage down 6 %, session were also a little lower. Instagram's reach is up 358,474 unique accounts up 89% from last September report. Impressions 448,709 up 61% from September report. Facebook (Organic) reach 387,915 which is an 70% increase from September. Engagement is up as well 38% from October. Our Facebook posts are doing well. Our demographic was a surprise this month featuring an up-swing in 24-year-old women. The content must have been what they were attracted to and liked. Google maps stats showed most people click on the Welcome Center; people want to see where we are located. Most of the users this month were new to our website.
- **November Strategic Planning Session**

Marsh inquired about the draft agenda that was sent to the BOC to review for the up-coming strategic planning session on November 5th.

 - a. Coker would like to add brain-storming ideas for the upcoming summit.
 - b. Martin wants to stop at # 5 on the draft agenda. During the Summit we can unveil the Vision Statement and Mission Statement that will be finalize during the strategic planning session. It is not necessary to send out a survey to industry partners now that we are still in the middle of Covid. In December we will have a better idea of what we want to ask the industry partners as to what their needs are.
 - c. Marsh stated he would like to see the strategic plan be set for the next two years rather than the next 5 years because of the uncertain times we are in. Martin commented having a short-term plan makes perfect sense. For year 3, 4, and 5, Drive 2.0, the VTC initiative, would give a road map for those additional years.
 - d. Coker would like to ask industry partners what their biggest needs are. The belief is that there will be another stimulus package and knowing what the community's needs are will help us to be ready if a new CARES funding package is presented.
 - e. Holloway stated that we need to take our industry partners beyond survival to thriving.
 - f. Coker would like to see "Survive to Thrive" as the theme for the Tourism Summit. Coker also stated he would like to have more emphasis on the younger

age demographics that are showing up in the analytics that Morey presented. The key is to figure out how to reach them.

- g. Martin stated a balance needs to be made in the marketing plan for the tools that each group uses to plan get away trips. Martin stated that the follow up strategic planning session should be in December, with review in January. March 1st we should finalize the plan and be able to release the plan publicly sometime after that meeting.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague is still very busy. There will be Trick or Treat and a Christmas Parade held this season on Chincoteague. Shotwell reminded the BOC that it is renewal time for the Virginia Travel Guide issue. A thought is to have the ESVA Tourism Commission take a bigger ad and incorporate more of the towns on the Shore in that ad. Have an iconic symbol of each of the towns featured in the ad so to market the whole Shore experience. Individual towns cannot afford ads in the state travel guide. Shotwell stated she does not know if Chincoteague will do an ad this year.
 - Holloway stated that Cape Charles pulled their ad out a few years ago because of the expense.
 - Coker commented that this would be Eastern Shore inclusive having all larger towns being represented.
 - Martin suggested getting Nell involved, from the Virginia Travel Guide group, to see what can be done so that this could be possible. Possibly there may be some wiggle room on pricing.
 - Holloway stated if there could be a full-page ad maybe Cape Charles could contribute a little towards it.
 - Marsh stated that he will have a conversation with Nell and see what is possible. The Tourism Commission is already committed to 1/6 of a page at \$4,500. The budget for advertising has been reached so there is no wiggle room left in the budget. The decision will have to be made by the BOC if we move forward with a bigger ad size. He made it clear that if the BOC decided to increase this ad, it would put us further over budget during a time when our funding had been cut.
- Holloway wanted to congratulate Marsh on a wonderful job representing the Tourism Commission at the last Cape Charles Town Council meeting. The Council was very pleased with what is happening and how the Shore is being promoted. Holloway is hopeful that the funding support that Cape Charles removed from the Tourism Commission will be put back. Holloway continued that Cape Charles like Chincoteague is very busy. The TOT tax is up but the meal tax is not. Cape Charles is having Trick or Treat but not Trunk or Treat. Cape Charles and Onancock did receive Main Street designation. Cape Charles Main Street was featured on Delmarva Life TV segment presented by WBOC. Cape Charles will have Festive Fridays this season. Things will be different; movies will be shown outside rather than in the theater. Santa will be in a workshop not available for children to sit on his lap. There will be a mailbox for children to leave letters to Santa in. The Cape Charles/ Eastern Shore maps are in, all 30K of them. The Welcome Center already has a stack for distribution.
- MacGarvey shared that the hotels in Exmore are still busy on the weekends. The Exmore Rotary Oyster Roast was canceled but turned into a takeout order of BBQ. The Challenge of doing things differently has been embarrassed on the Shore and shows a lot of creativity by our communities.

- Shotwell shared that the DIY Oyster Roast went extremely well in Chincoteague.
- Tarr shared that things had turned out better than thought on the Shore during COVID in terms of tourism revenue. Some people expressed to Tarr that this was the best year they have ever had. Tarr also brought to the Commission's attention that he and Marsh have received a letter of resignation from Tourism Commissioner James. James had hoped his schedule would have allowed him more time to be a contributing member of the Commission. Tarr would like to recommend, at the Board of Supervisors meeting tonight, Matt Spuck as the replacement for Adam James as a board member to the Tourism Commission. Tarr asked if there were any comments on this recommendation. Holloway knows Matt and Kim well and highly respects them both and believes there needs to be a voice from Onancock on the Tourism Commission. Tarr also agreed with those sentiments that the middle Shore needs representation and whole heartedly believes that Spuck will be a valuable member of this team.

7. Adjournment

- At 1:43 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, seconded by MacGarvey, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

John Coker, Chairman

Date

3/1/2021