

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 21, 2021 at noon
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-
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee
Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Christy Betz, Destination Development Dir.
Emily Machen, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Staci Martin, VTC Representative

Guest Present

Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center
Elizabeth Lankford, Blue Crab Bay Co.

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comments

- Cherron Davis, from New Church Welcome Center, reported that tourist are on the Shore. The WC staff is making sure the travelers are informed of the gems found on the sideroads and little towns that are off 13. The volume of visitors this early in the season is a good sign.
- Coker welcomed the new Executive Director, Robert Sabbatini and New Marketing Director, Emily Machen to the ESVA Tourism team.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:04 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Martin reported on the workforce issues that are being experienced this 2021 season. The lowest number of 16-year old's entering the labor pool is happening right now. 2005 was the lowest birth rate year on record. These low numbers will continue to be at record lows until 2011. Businesses are going to have to learn how to adapt with lack of workforce and find creative ways to sustain business. Martin informed ESVA Tourism that she can be available on the Shore May 6, 7, 10, 13, or 14th to help Sabbatini, Machen, and Betz get up to speed on the programs that VTC has available to assist Tourism. A new Marketing Leverage Grant program will open in 2 weeks. The new grant must be for new initiative only. VTC is changing over from Data Share to Simple View platform. There is a cost associated with the new connection to the VTC website. The new marketing grant would qualify for some reimbursement of cost. Private businesses can also apply for the new round of marketing grants. In August we should know the criteria for Senate Bill

1398. This new fund captures the online travel industry booking fees for transient taxes. This funding can only be used by DMOs. The money will be allocated by Go Virginia Region. American rescue plan, VTC is making a request to have some of those funds to be used by Tourism. More on this in August and September. Wander Love will be restarting in May and will focus on waterfronts. If there are any waterfront blogs that can be posted that would layer with the promoting of waterfronts that VTC is doing, please post them.

5. Commission Updates

- **FY20 Audit Completed**

Sabbatini reviewed the audit and stated that the audit looks good. There were a few recommendations which were requested by the auditor, the adjustments will be reviewed and addressed.

- Coker commented that he also reviewed the audit and is satisfied with it.

- **New Church Billboard Facing-Update:**

Sabbatini shared the computer screen with the roadside photo of the new face of the billboard in New Church. Betz reported the new billboard has more color and pops visually. The BOC agreed that this was an improvement.

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

Betz reported that the leadership group of, Ready, Set, Go, had two post round table meetings before Marsh left. Sabbatini has been brought up to date on the program. The next meeting will be May 18th and 19th which will discuss Eastern Shore business resilience training. The outcome from those discussions will be used to develop a resource data base reference guide which will be made public to assist local businesses.

- **Gateway Welcome Center- Update:**

Betz announced that the numbers at the welcome center are fantastic for the month of April. There will be a memorial service on April 26th for Myrtis Ames, who passed away in January. Sabbatini and Machen will meet all the staff at that time. The WC will be fully staff with employees and volunteers as of next month. In the past 3 weeks Betz has acquired 13 new tourism partners. The towns have been busy, and businesses are reaping the benefits. Next month Betz will begin town blitz/promotions at the WC. Betz shared with the BOC how impressed she is with the new marketing director Machen, she is very talented beyond her years as well as personable and outgoing, a true asset for tourism. ESVA Tourism is very lucky to have Machen join our team. Betz went on to say how thrilled ESVA Tourism is to have Sabbatini on board as well.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics:**

Machen reported overall the analytics were down this month over last month. Although engagement and followers on Facebook are up. Increasing our video marketing and other new things are planned to improve our numbers and reach. Especially including the reach to younger demographics on Facebook.

- MacGarvey was very impressed with the marketing report but was curious why Instagram went down. Algorithm change is the thought that Machen had.
- Spuck comment that, La Tour the Shore, video was very engaging.
- Martin added that VTC has started a Tik Tok channel which has gone viral with a beginning engagement of 2K views to 22K views in a day. Machen is looking into a tik tok account also.
- Coker added that any new ideas from Machen are welcomed, especially to attract younger visitors.

- **Virginia Found:**

Betz reported on her experience with Dave Parker, a DJ at 106.1. Dave reached out to Betz in 2019 on getting access to Eastern Shore specific locations for filming short stories on Cape Charles, Onancock and Chincoteague for a program called "Virginia Found". The airing of the program was to take place in the spring of 2020 which was scrapped because of Covid-19. Dave has shared a teaser of the program with Betz and asked if ESVA Tourism would be interested in advertising on the program. The sponsorship is \$5K, Betz thought would be to partner with Cape Charles, Onancock, and Chincoteague to pool their money together for a sponsorship spot in the program. It would include a 15 second spot shown at the beginning of the show and a 15 second spot shown at the end of the show. As of this morning Blue Heron Realty has signed up to be a sponsor on the program. WHRO has guarantee to broadcast this program, WETA PBS Washington DC Metro area has signed on, which broadcast in a 5-state radius. Baltimore PBS has also signed on. If a sponsorship is purchased early the sponsorship will follow the program with no additional funds requested as the show grows to more PBS markets.

- Holloway added she likes the idea of sharing cost, but TC needs to kick in a sum also. Holloway suggests if this is to be pursued to have TC kick in \$2K and \$1K from each of the 3 towns. A marketing leverage grant would be a good source for funding. Holloway did take Dave around Cape Charles and stated that he is a very dynamic personality. Holloway also saw the show teaser and states Dave represents the Shore extremely well.

Betz reported that this would be a 100% match for the marketing leverage grant.

- Coker added that this is a great idea, the decision is how would this be funded.
- Martin stated that it may be applicable for a look back grant that can be used for an upcoming grant application.
- Coker stated we should go after this opportunity now knowing that we can have a future grant pay for it.

Betz added that the invoice can be held back to be paid for later when funds are available.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Coker opened discussion on the ESVA Tourism Commission Bi-Laws and Personnel Manual review requested by the auditors. Coker reviewed both documents and has outlined areas that he will rewrite. Coker asked if any other BOC have comments that need to be addressed.
 - Tarr stated that the section of the personnel manual that states if an employee leaves and has earned vacation time it is lost time earned and not paid out. Tarr researched Virginia labor law and it is not mandated that earned vacation must be paid out at employee resignation. Tarr suggestions to have at least 2 weeks of earned vacation time be paid out at employees' resignation. Coker agrees with the change.
 - Martin stated to officially state, in the By-Laws, that the Ex-officio is a non-voting member.
 - Coker stated to change how the BOC members are selected and appointed to the Commission. The By-Laws states that 3 members each are appointed by each County. Which is not the case with some seats being appointed by the Town Councils in each County.
 - MacGarvey stated the By-Laws state that the strategic plan and the marketing plan is to be reviewed every year. MacGarvey questions if that is too long with things shifting so quickly as has been experienced during Covid-19. Holloway added that for the By-Laws to add that the Strategic plan and Marketing plan is a living breathing document

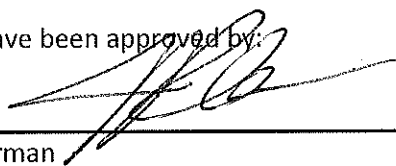
that is updated and reviewed multiple times during the year. Another thought of MacGarvey is to have the Mission statement and Vision statement updated into the by-laws and personnel manual. Also, hiring of the Executive Director should the position be outlined on how the Commission interacts with the Chamber. Coker explained the executive director is not an employee of the Commission.

- Coker will look deeper into both documents to be sure all the additional thoughts are addressed correctly and bring back both documents to the BOC to review.
- MacGarvey shared that Juneteenth will be an in-person event. Work is being done on a new Exmore website and a Juneteenth website also. Gerald Boyd is working on Juneteenth being the portal for all things African American in development of African travel on the Shore. Juneteenth is the largest festival of its type in this part of Virginia.
- Holloway added Cape Charles experienced an amazing spring break season. Workforce is tuff and will be an ongoing issue for everyone. Main Street Cape Charles is working on employment with the county to come up with a plan for today and in the future. Tourism needs to be a part of the plan in working with workforce needs. DHCD grants are still being given out. Holloway informed everyone that all short-term rentals are book through Labor Day.
- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague is forecasting the busiest year ever. The visitors are coming sooner in the spring and staying longer into the fall. The online auction was last week. This event replaced the Easter Decoy Show. The event was not as profitable but well attended and fun to participate in. The replacement event for the Seafood Festival will be next week. The name of this event is, Around the Tent in 3-days. The goal is to get visitors to our restaurants and retail shops and make the experience a fun engaging experience. Chincoteague is waiting for guidelines for event size from the Governors office. The hope is to have the size limit be great enough so that the Oyster Festival can be held in the fall.
- Martin shared that workforce is going to be an ongoing issue. Besides extended unemployment the state of Virginia is giving free-2 years of college for some degrees. Hospitality will be hit hard with these state programs that are extended to the unemployed.

8. Adjournment

- At 1:10 p.m. Spuck made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tarr, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:



John Coker, Chairman

5/25/21
Date