

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
June 16, 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  
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council  
Ace Seybolt-ESVA Chamber of Commerce-Observer

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director  
Christy Betz, DDD - Absent  
Emily Machen, Marketing Director  
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Staci Martin, VTC Representative

Guest Present

Elizabeth Lankford, Blue Crab Bay Co.

Commissioner in Absence

Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee

1. Call to Order

- At 12:05 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- MacGarvey asked how the public is made aware of the ESVA Tourism Commissions monthly board meeting. Joeckel responded that industry partners request to be invited to the BOC meeting an email announcement is sent to each personally. Holloway suggested to place a notice on the Industry Facebook page. Coker suggested to place a notice on the Chamber of Commerce community bulletin board.
- Sabbatini explained the agreement with the ESVA Tourism Commission and the ESVA Chamber of Commerce board is to have a board member from each board sit on the others board. Ace Seybolt will be the ESVA Chamber representative for the Tourism Commission board and Matt Spuck will be the ESVA Tourism representative to sit on the Chamber of Commerce board.
  - Coker added the idea is to have each representative let each board know if there are any conflicting priorities, be transparent, work together, and help each board be more effective.

3. Consent Agenda

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

4. VTC Updates

- Martin reported tourism is busy in Coastal Virginia unfortunately the traffic is heavy and slowdowns in many places are due to road construction. The new Virginia.org website should be

up and running June 17th. Any listings that have been placed on the VTC website should be checked for accuracy. The new VTC website will give free analytics specifics to businesses that list on Virginia.org. There is a need for more information from towns and cities for their pages on the VTC website. New co-ops are posted for social media advertising with 25% rebates. The rebates are given on a first come basis, there are forms to fill out and to send in to qualify. VTC bought down Trip Advisor advertisement slots from \$5K minimum to \$500 minimum. Rita Mc Clenny, President/CEO of Virginia Tourism Corporation, made a presentation to the Senate Finance Committee at a public hearing stating that the Tourism Industries has needs for a good portion of ARP money. The Historic Onancock School will have a ribbon cutting September 25<sup>th</sup>, Rita has committed to attending and the governor has been invited. It is possible that the entire VTC team may come for a retreat during that time and will also attend the ribbon cutting.

- Coker stated that while on vacation in the Northeast tourism was booming.
- Martin added that hotels are holding back inventory because of lack of staffing.
- Holloway added that things have been booming since Memorial Day and by the look of things everyone will be exhausted by the end of July.

#### 4. Commission Updates

- **WanderLove Campaign**

Sabbatini thanked everyone on feedback on the WanderLove videos. The videos are rolling out and received good social media attention. Rack cards look great and have been distributed. Machin added that one trail a week will be launched on social media. Supplemental videos around the shore will be added to bolster the trail that is being highlighted each week.

- Sabbatini stated there has been great feedback on the trails especially the Seafood trail.
- Coker asked if there will be a tracking mechanism for how many people see the videos. Machin responded that using Evergreen content means if the video takes off even after it is launched results are continually reported.

- **Welcome Center Update**

Sabbatini reported Betz is attending the Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College in Macon, Georgia. Betz will report on all the new information that she acquired at the next BOC meeting. The Welcome Center hours have been adjusted from 8:30 am – 4:30 pm to new hours of 9 am - 5 pm. Masks are only required if you have not been vaccinated.

- **Virginia is for Shore Lovers**

A postcard has been put together by Machin promoting Virginia is for Shore Lovers new logo. The postcard will be distributed at the Welcome Center. There was also a Virginia is for Shore Lovers ad in the Eastern Shore Post and a projected press release this Friday in the Eastern Shore Daily News. The Welcome Center attendance numbers have increased nicely the month of May.

- **Locals Choice**

Machin reported that the Locals Choice contest has been well received. Seeing tourism partners pushing out the survey to their email list has been rewarding. The Island House has been pushing out the survey with added paid boost. There have been 772 responses to the survey. The survey will be reshared again this week and next week to see if we can reach the 1800 number achieved last year.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini reported that the Tourism Summit is on the Tourism Commissions radar. The keynote speaker has been booked. Eric Terry, President of the Virginia Restaurant Travel and Lodging Association has agreed to be the speaker. Sabbatini thanked Martin for the help in arranging the contact. The Tourism Commission will be looking for sponsorships in the upcoming months. The date of the summit will be February 28<sup>th</sup> which is a Monday.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported the website is seeing an increase in users. Facebook has seen an increase in everything from, reach to engagement and followers. Instagram overall is doing well; content interaction seems to be a little down. Machen is doing a little bit of experimentation to produce an increase on Instagram with more savable content and shareable content. Tweeter, Pinterest and Tik Tok are doing well. Overall things are looking very positive.

- **Recovery Marketing Leverage Program Grant**

Sabbatini reported Machen has done a great job putting together the MLP grant. The application has been sent to Martin for review. The application will be submitted well before the deadline.

- Coker asked if there is anything that is not being done that should be. Sabbatini responded that all efforts are being used to lure folks to the Shore including personal invites from Sabbatini to contacts in Central Virginia. The Charm of the Shore should not be overlooked as the Shore is promoted. Sabbatini had a conversation with a visiting tourist from Nashville, Tennessee, who was visiting Williamsburg and added a side day trip to Cape Charles. This fellow was captured by the charm of Cape Charles and the people. He has booked a return trip to the Shore in September for a week of fishing.
- Machin shared she is videoing local stories of businesses and people capturing the charm aspect of the Eastern Shore.
- Holloway reminded everyone the importance of the shoulder season. In the past a program that helped was Wine and Brine promoted by Church Creek Vineyard. The Wine and Brine rack card was very popular in promoting the Oyster Roasts on the Shore. Holloway suggested to reach out to Mills and see what the vineyard plans are for this fall.
- Shotwell added that Chincoteague has the first Oyster Roast October 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Coker added that people have enjoyed the blogs done on the Shore. Machen added that the blogs have been moved to a page on the website which will make it easier for website users to find the blogs and use them.

##### 5. Matters by Commissioners

- Shotwell stated that it has been crazy in Chincoteague and businesses are just trying to make it through. The Oyster Festival is being worked on in hopes that it will happen this fall. The rocket launches are drawing crowds and there continues to be a lot of new first-time travelers coming to Chincoteague.
- MacGarvey stated there is a new business in Exmore, an organic donut shop. Two other new businesses will be opening. This Saturday is the Juneteenth Festival which will begin with a parade down main street Exmore. September has Shakespeare in the Park with a festival being held the next day. A Car show in October and the Rotary Club will have an Oyster Festival.
- Tarr announced mosquitoes are very bad on Chincoteague Island. To control the outbreak there has been consent spraying. Tarr is glad to see that Seybolt will be representing the Eastern Shore Chamber on the BOC board.
- Holloway shared that the town of Cape Charles is kicking off the new weekly event called, 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday. Each Thursday from 5 pm to 9 pm, at the love sign on the beach, there will be food trucks to help alleviate the stress on the restaurants. Music will be performed at the beach front along with beverage sales. Five new businesses have started and another on the way. Concerts in the park will start July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. Cape Charles will hold festivities on July 4<sup>th</sup> including fireworks. Cape Charles new website will launch this week.
- Coker shared his experience during his travels last month. New York, Maine, and Boston, where Coker traveled, was busy with people everywhere and purchasing everything. Shop owners said

they would be out of merchandise before summers end. Coker continued that taking advantage of this hot travel season and helping our members when they reach out to the Tourism Commission is essential.

- Coker announced the July Tourism Commission meetings will be in person at the Chamber of Commerce building in Melfa.

6. Adjournment

- At 12:51 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

7/21/2021  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date