

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2021, at noon
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns, this Board Meeting was held as a hi-bred in-person or by Zoom Call for comfort level of participants.

Commissioners in Attendance

John Coker, Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair
Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C-
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

Staff Present

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

Chamber of Commerce- Observer

Ace Seybolt

Guest Present

Mike Mason, Accomack County Administrator
Meredith Lusk, Moonrise Jewelry, owner
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street

Ex-officio Non-voting Member in Absence

Staci Martin, VTC Representative

Commissioner Absence

Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair

1. Call to Order

- At 12:04 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.
Coker moved agenda item 5.d. VTC ARPA Money to Counties: presented by Mike Mason Accomack County Administrator to present ahead of Public Comments.
- Mike Mason explained the American Rescue Plan-Tourism Recovery Program funds (ARPA) are earmarked for all of Virginia counties and cities. The ARPA package is the latest round of Federal funds developed to assist tourism in the state of Virginia. These ARPA funds are noncompetitive funding. The amount allocated to Accomack County for tourism will be \$260K. The amount has been designated but not received to date by Accomack County. The funds can only be used for tourism marketing & development. The funds cannot be used for administrative costs, payroll cost, maintenance or retroactive spending. Accomack County is to work with the 3 Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) which are: Tourism Commission in Melfa, town of Onancock, and town of Chincoteague. The three DMO's are to develop an expenditure plan to use these funds. When the expenditure plan is presented to the state the DMO's must supply letters of support for all funding plans. Incorporated towns that are not DMO's can also create an expenditure plan and apply to use these funds. Once the plan is uploaded to the state and approved 50% of funding will be released. The remainder of the funds are on a reimbursement basis. All receipts and expenditures have until December 31, 2023, to be submitted for reimbursement. Mr. Mason went on to say that the county does not have any staffing for tourism support of this program. The county will rely on the Tourism Commission to administer the program.
 - Coker stated Northampton County funding will be administered the same as Accomack County though the Tourism Commission.

The first phase is developing a proposal for spending the \$260K. Accomack County has requested assistance from the DMO's and incorporate towns to put together the proposals. The second phase will be getting all the expenditure plans onto one document that will be uploaded to the state for state approval. Accomack County will continue to be the conduit for the funds to flow through.

- Shotwell asked if the DMO's can write their own plan or does this have to be one plan. Mr. Mason responded that all plans must be uploaded into one document.

- Coker added that Northampton County will do the same and create one plan with input from the two DMO's. Coker asked for the program time frame.

The earliest the state can receive plans would be January 2022, which would be very swift action on a DMO's part. The first quarter of next year the DMO's should start getting thoughts together on proposals. The spend down time is very significant so there should be no rushing in putting a plan together. A well thought out plan that is impactful for the region is very important to make use of this opportunity.

- Coker asked if this could be done in steps?

Mr. Mason responded that we must upload one plan to receive funding from the state.

2. Public Comments

- Meredith Lusk, from Moonrise Jewelry, will be attending the Virginia Tourism Board Authority meeting in December in Charlottesville. Meredith is here today to listening in on the BOC meeting.
- Cherron Davis, from the New Church Welcome Center, reported she has just gotten back from the VA-1 State Tourism Conference. Tourism is doing well in the state of Virginia. The numbers of travelers coming to the Eastern Shore have returned to normal. The Welcome Center has a blitz going on the month of November and December for Chincoteague - Christmas by the Sea. Virginia Beach will have a blitz for January and February. The new state visitor guide will be out in February.

- Holloway asked how the blitz program works.

Cherron answered that an event or program can take over the advertising space at the Welcome Center at the cost of \$500 per month.

- Karen Zamorski, from Cape Charles Main Street, commented on the ARPA funding. Cape Charles will be researching sustainability and marketing plans that can be built on through the years.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:21 p.m. MacGarvey made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

4. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz stated the numbers at the Welcome Center are very good. The touch screen kiosk had been down for a few months but is repaired and now working. A new volunteer has started, the Welcome Center could use one more volunteer. Fall daylight saving time as changed WC closing hour to 4:30 pm. Visitor Guide sales closed at \$59K surpassing the budgeted set amount of \$47K

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported the numbers have stayed very consistent. The video views continue to be down because of the one video that was posted on boat docking that hit over 2 million views. Machen

is working vigorously on the photo library for tourism. Many of the events photographed are outside showing that travelers can be safe and comfortable on their trip to the Shore.

- Coker asked how can we repeat the docking video hit?

Machen answered, it is hard to predict a hit when filming an event. Machen goal is to create videos that are authentic experiences of what you can expect when visiting the Shore.

- Holloway stated that Machen is doing a great job of capturing video on the Shore and it has been improved by 1,000 percent. The increase in the YouTube channel has been growing. During the ESVA Summit playing the VA Found show would also be a great way for those who have not seen the show to experience it.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini reported on what the summit day will look like.

9:30 am – 10 am check in and networking.

Videos will be playing

10 am – Introduction by Sabbatini and Coker and introduction of the board members and staff.

Give an overview of what is happening with tourism on the Shore.

Introduction of Rita Suiter of Five Star Customer Service, a graduate of Disney school of quality service. Rita will give a presentation that will appeal to the restaurant and lodging businesses and touch on workforce as well.

ESVA Tourism Commission staff will speak on the Welcome Center and social media.

Staci Martin of VTC will give a presentation.

Lunch will follow with Johnny Moe playing music.

Meredith Lusk from Moonrise Jewelry will be another speaker focusing on resiliency, perseverance and community.

The day will wrap up at 3 pm.

Save the date post cards are being wrapped up and will go out.

- Holloway comment that one of the challenges in the past is getting people to attend the summit. Holloway has been disappointed with the town of Cape Charles attendance. It is hard to get restaurant owners to these events as well as some business owners. At the December meeting we should be concentrating on how we can motivate businesses to attend.
- Betz thought is to promote the summit as we would promote a party. There will be live music, food provided, oysters, Island Creamery ice cream.
- Holloway suggested to have giveaways and promotions for ads in ESVA Visitor Guide, Virginia Travel Guide magazine, brochure space at the Welcome Center, WESR promotional air ads.
- Coker stated we need a strategy on selling the summit so that the attendance is high.

Sabbatini added that the date for the summit is Monday February 28th, 2022

- **Visitor Guide Covers**

Sabbatini began the discussion on the Visitor Guide 2022 covers. Betz took several cover options to the New Kent Visitor Center on I-64 for travelers to view and give comments on the mockup versions of guide covers. The mockup versions were also shown at the Southern Gateway Welcome Center at the Bridge Tunnel.

- Holloway mentioned that the covers did not do anything for her, Spuck said the same. The fonts need to be consistently the same for the front cover. Holloway stated that you either have a picture of the target market who you are trying to attract, or you have an image so that no specific type of people are in the photo.

Betz will continue to work on the cover photo.

5. Matters by Commissioners

- Coker asked each Commissioner to talk about their view on spending the ARPA funds. Coker has requested Sabbatini to meet with each town manager in both counties. The purpose is to find out what type of publicity each town is interested in pursuing. The DMO's on the Eastern Shore represent less than 20% of the whole Eastern Shore. The Tourism Commissions job is to hear from the towns to make sure each town is given an opportunity to be participants in the funding.
- Shotwell stated she is trying to comprehend what other towns might need or want to promote when they do not have an infrastructure nor services in their towns to invite tourist. How far reaching are the ARPA funds supposed to be Shotwell questions. Chincoteague does have ideas on how to spend the funding. The concern is how do you structure one plan that is for the whole Eastern Shore and benefits everyone. Shotwell also questions how the funding should be divided. It is hard to develop a plan if the distribution funds have not been decided.
 - Holloway suggested that each town needs to have an application that they submit that states how each town wants to use the tourism funds. This way towns that have tourism related projects are applying with a specific goal in mind. Other towns may not want to drive tourism to their town nor have any infrastructure for tourist to come to their town.
 - Coker added that what he sees happening is the Tourism Commission visits with the towns in both counties and asks what vision each town has and what the Tourism Commission should be selling to promote the Eastern Shore as a whole. All the funding cannot be used on only what the large DMO's want to do, which is just 20% of the population.
 - Shotwell went on to say that knowing what funding dollars can be used will determine what can be planned for. \$20K allotment or \$100K allotment will created a different working budget in putting a plan together. If Chincoteague does not know what amount they will receive how can Chincoteague begin to put a plan together.
- Holloway suggested each entity would develop a wish list of what their entity would want to spend ARPA funding on. The Tourism Commission would also do the same thing by creating a marketing strategy and marketing brand. All DMO's want to give themselves all the oxygen before they help the other entities on the Shore. The Eastern Shore needs a regional plan first that will feed all of the Shore and then the DMO's take their share.
- Spucks thought process would be to give each DMO \$50K leaving the Commission \$100K to further the Commission mission work and messaging on the Shore. The balance would be left for the rest of the 2 counties to do what they want or can submit a plan for. The numbers mention by Spuck for the DMO's spending is an example of a carve out of funds not a set goal of funding. Having DMO's create a plan which must have letters of support from all DMO's creates control over the plan. Plans from the smaller towns would be submitted to the Tourism Commission also gives control over the projects.
 - Coker stated it is hard to determine what a carve out would be for each DMO because the DMO's are different in size.

Spuck announced the holiday schedule for Onancock begins with Fab Fridays starting on November 26th going until December 24th. Lights on the lawn at the Kerr Place begin with 30 luminated and decorated trees December 3rd. December 10 Noel Night with caroling and music. Saturday December 11th has a full day of events planned. At 11 am Santa arriving by boat at the Wharf with kayaking reindeer, 10 am – 3 pm Holiday Artisans Market at Historic Onancock School, 2-5 pm Historic Cokesbury Church Music Festival, 4-6 pm Christmas Driving Tour starts at Historic Onancock School and proceeds throughout the town with Santa leading the driving tour in a fire truck. December 12 Christmas parade at 5 pm.

- MacGarvey view on the ARPA funding is that there is value in a regional plan that benefits everyone. There are other towns that visitors visit that are not the three DMO's. Having the TC

visiting with towns and getting their town input is valuable. DMO's sending visitors to other towns takes the pressure off the businesses that are struggling with maintaining a workforce to accommodate travelers. MacGarvey stated Exmore has three large hotels and would like to be involved and receive funding as well. Spending as much money as possible on planning and marketing materials that would carry the Commission forward for years to come is important.

- o Spuck added a vibrant map put together with points of interest is a great way to expose the smaller towns that don't have management abilities for writing grants.

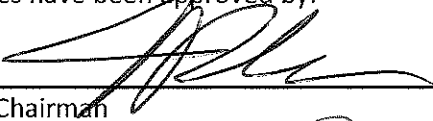
MacGarvey stated the town of Exmore Christmas parade is December 11th. A new café on Main Street has opened and other new businesses are in the works.

- Holloway announced Festive Fridays kicks off next Friday and ends December 17th. December 4th the lighted golf cart parade, grand illumination and lighted boat parade will take place ending with a big party at the Oyster Farm with the DeLorean Band playing. Cookie trail is on December 11th. There will be a lot of good things held at the theater the rest of the holiday season. The year-end, New Year's Eve, will be the dropping of the Crab Pot. The Discovery Map is going into reprinting, selling of ads on the map has begun.
- Coker announced there will be a meeting December 15th, 2021

6. Adjournment

- At 1:41 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

12/15/2021

Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

12/15/21

Date