

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
July 21, 2021, at noon
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

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

Debora Christie, Northampton Co. C of C

Commissioner in Absence

Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair

1. Call to Order

- At 12:10 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Consent Agenda

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

3. VTC Updates

- Martin reported VTC staff hopes to be back in the Richmond office 3 days a week starting September 7. VA-1 Summit will be held in Leesburg, VA November 14-17. The Governor and Governor Elect will both attend the VA-1 Summit. STS (Southeast Tourism Society) National Travel Expo will be in Virginia Beach at the Convention Center February 13-15. VTC will have a booth and will reach out for rack cards from local tourism partners to populate the booth. Betz mentioned the idea of the Eastern Shore of Virginia hosting an oyster bar, details will be investigated. Martin stated that there may be Fam tours set up with a possibility that a group could come up to visit a few spots on the Eastern Shore. The 2022 Main Street Now Conference, in Richmond, VA will be held May 16-18. Martin commented that the Eastern Shore now has 2 Main Street communities with Parksley and Chincoteague hoping to come on board. The Main Street Conference would be a good conference to attend. WanderLove will continue through November with a possibility that it may be continued. Brand webinars are available on the VTC website. Marketing Leverage Grants had a record 146 applications. Only 40 applications will be awarded \$20k each in this application round. VTC hopes to open additional grant rounds in December or January. New grants will be coming on board that will be for sport and event focus. The new Senate Bill 1398 funding will be for DMO's only. Martin stated sending staff to grant writing training and grant management training would be a wise idea. ESVA Tourism needs to advocate for the PDC to receive funding for more staff assistance. There many more opportunities of funding from other government agencies.

- Coker asked Martin if there has been any discussion on obtaining staffing help and housing for workforce which also includes housing for teachers new to the Shore. Martin replied that VTC is talking to VRLTA (Virginia Residential Landlord & Tenant Act) on workforce issue. The problem with staffing issues is that the state is putting a lot of money into training and technology certification but not hospitality. Martin added that turning short term motel renting units into seasonal housing, for newly employed to the area, could be a possibility if the counties have funding for that. Martin would like to see Eric Terry, President of Virginia Restaurant Travel and Lodging Association, brief the Board before the February Tourism Summit on workforce issues.

Martin suggested that she would be available to facilitate a brainstorming session. There are many opportunities for funding and to discuss what is on the table. The Northampton and Accomack Counties need to be involved along with the Community College, two Chambers and Tourism. The PDC right now is understaffed. The brainstorming session would discuss what is needed on the Shore, what is close to being possible. Discussing what parts of these multi complex issues are connected to tourism, community needs, EDA, VDOT. A vision needs to be created for the ESVA and the low hanging fruit obtained. Martin went on to state that Short Term Rentals (STR) are also an important part of lodging. Virginia Beach just put the hammer down on STR and not allowing any new permits and looking into how the grandfather clause will look. To allow a STR in a neighborhood it will take 75% of the residents to agree. There will be different rules on owner occupied and absentee owner STR. Absentee STR have not been working out in residential areas. Holloway reported that Cape Charles is looking into managing the STR better through parking passes per unit and how many trash cans a unit has. STR are much harder on the town services then the town residents.

- Coker shared a conversation that he and Sabbatini had that by January the summer season is sold out, that includes golf cart rentals. The question was asked when do you start to push the shoulder season? Holloway stated that Cape Charles is booked through November. It appears that Easter is the beginning of the season. Martin would like to see a photo library created for the winter months. Promoting mid-week trips that are work then play could be developed as get-a-way packages. Martin suggested to encourage small shops to stay open on Thursday through the weekend on the Shore during the off season. Holloway shared Main Street data that 70% of purchases nationwide are made after 5 pm. Cape Charles businesses close at 5 pm. Shops opening later in the day then closing later is not a bad thought. Holloway suggested to Cape Charles businesses to try to stay open 2 days a week until 7 pm. The data will be in by November. Many of the businesses are hobby/second career businesses which adds to the difficulty in extending hours. Coker added that the pandemic has placed a light on increasing employee pay which is a good thing.

4. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported that Virginia Found, which was filmed in 2019, will now be aired in September on WHRO. First episode will be on Cape Charles and Kiptopeke, Second episode Chincoteague, Onancock, and Tangier. It will also be shown in Washington DC which includes a 5-state range. The ESVA TC will have a 15 second clip at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program. Johnny Mo has allowed us to use his tune, Living on the Eastern Shore but no lyrics. Chesapeake Bay Magazine is doing a huge spread in the August edition on Onancock. The TC will have a half page ad in the August edition and the September edition. The three ESVA marinas on Bayside, Cape Charles Yacht Center, Eastern Shore Yacht and Country Club and Onancock Wharf &

Marina will now be listed on the Chesapeake Bay Magazine marina map which is featured in CBM internet bulletins.

- Holloway asked Betz to investigate the pricing to have the ESVA visitor guide as an insert with the Chesapeake Bay Magazine. Betz will investigate pricing. Martin suggested to keep track of the cost of the sponsorship of the TV episodes and remember that the value of a broadcast reaching so many people has a value of at least \$20K to \$30K. The next grant round these values could be used at that time for an in-kind match. Holloway added that when reporting to towns for funding request remember these numbers that ESVA TC is reaching, and the dollar amounts that are being spent.

Betz reported that the Welcome Center numbers are beginning to climb and starting to get closer to the 2019 numbers. The CBBT numbers are above 2019 as well as the businesses in Cape Charles and Chincoteague. Machen has designed an Eastern Shore post card that is being handed out. There is a sign on the bathroom stalls stating to come in the WC to receive a free post card. This is done to increase traveler numbers. When the weather cools down a table with visitor guides will be placed outside the WC for travelers that do not enter the WC. A new computer will be installed next week at the WC. CBBT will be replacing the sliding glass doors soon.

- **Local's Choice Update**

Betz reported that the Local's Choice contest has finished. The decals for the winners of the local choice contest have been ordered. Machen is working on a news release of the winners for a social media announcement.

- Martin suggested to do a press release to regional media that links to our web page. Virginia Beach and other local markets might pick it up. Also create a shareable graphic for download to Trip Advisor for local businesses to use.

- **Digital marketing Analytics**

Machin reported everything is growing. ESVA videos are doing well. The boat docking video from Cape Charles had 166K views. A video on the Blueberry Festival, just posted an hour ago, has 14K views. A comment is added to the videos that if you can't make it this year plan on next year. WanderLove is near completion with very good feedback on the rack cards. The WanderLove videos have been received well. The website host has recently been changed. Two grant applications have been submitted. One for MLG the other is for Drive 2.0. Wine and Brine promotion done by Chatham Vineyard is done all digital now. TC will investigate promoting that event on a digital platform.

- Holloway would like to see Tourism Commission develop a rack card promoting all Wine and Brine events on the Eastern Shore during the fall and winter months.

Machen has a meeting with VTC webmasters to connect the ESVA website events to the VTC website.

- **FY2022 Budget**

Sabbatini reported on the proposed FY22 Budget. Sabbatini wanted to thank all supporting towns and Counties for their contributions and an added recognition to Northampton County Supervisors for reinstating the Tourism Commission with full funding status. Bulking up the advertising budget to move toward a \$75K budget line, is an on-going goal of the TC. Another big increase is the wage increase for the WC employees to follow the minimum wage increases.

- Shotwell had questions on the proposed budget. Visitor guide revenue budget is lower for FY22 than last year. The cost portion of the visitor guide, printing, and graphic design, has the numbers breaking even. Shotwell views are that the visitor guide should be a revenue stream as it is for the Chincoteague. The BOC believe the budget line for visitor guide should be \$50K

Sabbatini agreed that the visitor guide should be a revenue stream but with coming out of covid and having a false high budget line that is not obtainable could blow up the budget.

- Shotwell questioned distribution cost of the visitor guide. Joeckel responded that the drop ship cost to large distribution centers is on the printer invoice and has not been removed and added to distribution item line.
- Martin would like to see the item line for Professional Development increased. There are many opportunities for training ESVA staff that is available and should be taken advantage of. Martin also comments that getting a list of businesses that received Rebuild Virginia funding would be a good group to go after for visitor guide ads. Holloway added that Recovery Grant recipients would be good leads for ads also.

Sabbatini will make changes to FY22 budget.

- **Updates to the By Laws**

Sabbatini went over the updates to the By Laws with the BOC.

- Coker asked to have all BOC read the updated By Laws before the next meeting so that it can be approved. If there are any additional questions let it be known in advance of the meeting. Sabbatini reported the binder will be completed for BOC at next meeting. Tourism Summit has sponsor packets completed TC will be seeking sponsorships for the Summit. Sabbatini gave his view on the first 3 months of being in his position. "The Chamber and Tourism works very well together and promoting both are a hand and glove fit".

5. Matters by Commissioners

- Holloway shared that the distribution of the Recovery Grant is going extremely well with close to \$600k being awarded to Cape Charles and lower Shore business owners. Cape Charles has started Third Thursday on the beach front. Food trucks, drinks and a band will be playing the third Thursday in June, July, August, and September. It is difficult to get enough food trucks to be involved. Three new businesses have opened. Cake Charles, this group does cakes and cupcakes. Cravings, opened in Table and Tonic serving to go sandwiches which are named after different streets in Cape Charles. A breakfast and lunch place has opened within the Hotel Cape Charles.
- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague is very busy. The Blueberry Festival is this weekend. Antares rocket launch August 10th. Oyster Festival October 9th, half of the tickets for the event have been sold. Lots of visitors are booked through September and October with lodging. There are a couple of new food trucks, Black Fin which sells Poke Bowls. Molly's will be opening a second location on Chincoteague. A new rock wall climbing center is opening. Keys West cottages that are being built have a waiting list for next year.
- MacGarvey shared Exmore has one new business a sweet and breakfast shop on Occohannock Road, Manazia's Marvelous Desserts. A new retail shop will be opening before Christmas. A thirty-acre bike and skateboard park will be opening next year. Five 3-D printed homes are being built in Exmore. The homes will be in the New Roads community.


6. Adjournment

- At 1:54 p.m. MacGarvey made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Shotwell, and the meeting was adjourned.

7. Closed Session

- At 1:55 Coker made a motion to go into a short-Closed Session.

These minutes have been approved by:



John Coker, Chairman

01/10/2021

Date