

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 20, 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
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
Matt Spuck, Accomack 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

Elizabeth Lankford, Blue Crab Bay owner

Ex-officio Non-voting Member in Absence

Staci Martin, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

- At 12:06 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- No public comments. Elizabeth Lankford was in attendance to take notes for the Onancock Main Street.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:07 p.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Martin reported that VA-1 Tourism Summit will be November 14th through 16. Several funding programs will be coming online. The list is as follows. American Rescue Plan Funding online seminar has begun. The ARPA funding are Federal dollars passing through the state. The County will create the spend down plan. The enrollment period is until December of 2022. Martin recommends not to rush through the application. These funds are to take the towns and DMO to the next level of marketing. The funds are not meant to replace current marketing budgets. VTC will be opening funding grants programs from revenue generated from online travel agency transactions, VA SB 13987. A Marketing Leverage Grant round will be opening in early 2022 for funding up to \$20K with in kind match for private industry and DMO. There will also be a DMO only grants up to \$20K plus in-kind match feature which will open February/March. A few weeks later a new grant will be open for Special Event Festivals. This will not be for start up events, there will have to be 2 years of event data to apply. This grant is to help take festivals to the next level and can be used for operations and marketing expenses. Another new grant called, Tourism

Improvement District, is where retailers and restaurants agree to add a transaction fee to every transaction. This fund is specific for marketing.

5. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz stated that two large light boxes have been replaced for the Island House and Bay Creek at the Welcome Center. The kiosk is being worked on it has been down. The WC numbers have been doing very well. Out of precaution the WC is being fogged every day. Betz is interested in doing something special for the WC staff. Travel Guide sales are at \$40K as of yesterday. There are several ads for the visitor guide that are still coming in.

- Holloway mention the Chesapeake Bay Magazine as an outlet for the leftover visitor guides. Betz answered that we did go to CBM for pricing, which was very expensive, more than double what the Virginian Pilot cost and less than half of the distribution. Machen will be sending the quote from CBM to Holloway.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported it has been a good month all around for digital marketing platforms. U-Tube shorts have seen good growth with the resharing of Instagram and Tik Tok post. ESVA Tourism attended the Surf and Turf event and educated the public on what tourism does for the Shore. Also, as a group, tourism attended Third Thursday in Cape Charles. Photos were taken for our photo library of families enjoying the beach front. Virginia Found airs Monday on WETA in the Washington DC area.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini reported that organizing save the date push out is happening for the Tourism Summit. The graphic design of the invite is being put together and an email list is being created. The Date is February 28, at the Community College. Betz added that Johnny Mo will be performing for the Summit. Mallards will be catering the summit, potato chips from Quail Cove, Island Creamery donating ice cream cups, Alex Lampert will be donating oysters.

- **Virginia's Natural Coast**

Sabbatini announced that ESVA TC has submitted a trademark for: Virginia's Natural Coast. The purpose is to secure the phase which seems like a natural fit for ESVA Tourism.

- Holloway responded that logo and branding is a big deal. The Commission does not want to create confusion over the brand.
- Martin stated that to have a geography descriptor in your logo is a good thing. Banking the URL is a good idea. The bigger conversation is the direction that ESVA TC and the community wants to go in the future with new branding. Martin continued that bringing in a professional branding facilitator will help guide ESVA TC. Betz stated that ARPA funding can be used toward paying a company to help with rebranding. Martian also shared that the local artisan group is also interested in the phase, Made on Virginia's Natural Coast.

Sabatini asked if this is a direction, the commission wants to pursue with grant funds that are available?

- MacGarvey stated that timing is right to investigate a refresh of the brand.
- Coker responded that there are groups that are very wedded to the logo and brand, and we do not want to upset any group of people if avoidable.
- Holloway responded that a branding company would do a study and create focus groups as part of the leg work process. After that is done a strategy on how to go about rebranding is created. Holloway believes it does make sense to develop a refresh of the

brand. A new direction to identify ESVA as a geographic location is important as Martin stated. "You'll Love Our Nature," could be anywhere. Holloway commented that Shotwell would know of Chamber or Visitor Bureaus that can give leads to a network of professionals that do this work.

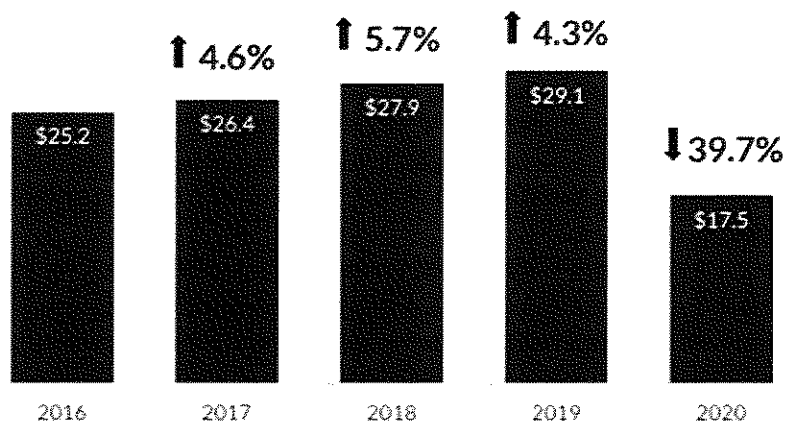
- Coker added that the timing is right, Sabbatini needs to apply and receive a grant to cover the process. Sabbatini is on board and will make it happen.

Sabbatini congratulated Machen on being one of the finalists at the award ceremony for Virginia's Hospitality & Tourism Awards.

- Coker reported the number of dollars spent in both counties was not available for 2020. Martian directed inquires to Vatc.org/Research/Virginia-Tourism-Economic-Impact. Data found is below but was not available per county break out.

Virginia visitor spending and annual growth

Amounts in \$billions and year-on-year percentage growth



Source: Longwoods International, Tourism Economics

- Coker continued that there is a lot of money out there for recovery, ESVA TC needs to go after it. An added challenge for Northampton Co is staffing and housing issues. Many businesses are not able to be open full time. The need is to obtain grants but delay spending those funds until Northampton has resolved housing and staffing issues.
- Martin stated Virginia Recreation, Travel & Lodging Association is working on statewide workforce issues. It may be difficult to get more people but having workshops for employers to help with retention of their employees may be the answer.
- Holloway commented that workshops may not work at this point. Employers do not have that time. Businesses are doing all they can, with limited workforce, to just stay open and serve the public.
- Shotwell stated that it is the same on Chincoteague. Everyone is exhausted and the shoulder season has just started. Visitors are still coming and sometimes there is no place for the tourist to eat.
- Holloway stated the summit needs to address these challenging times employers are having with workforce.

- Machen stated, speaking from experience, working several jobs on the Shore from hotel to restaurant environments. Each segment of the business needs different support.
- Elizabeth Lankford has the same issues with workforce at her business, Blue Crab Bay Co. From the manufacturing perspective everything that is touched in the manufacturing side of business has doubled in price.
- Sabbatine stated that the ANPDC had a workshop on these very issues, hard issues to solve, we are waiting on the follow up to those meetings. During the last economic workforce downturn, it took 6-8 years to recover.

5. Matters by Commissioners

- MacGarvey shared that this weekend is the CBES bike tour which is sold out. Exmore will be hosting the biker's lunch.
- Elizabeth Lankford announce that Deborah Christie celebration of life will be on Sunday at the Island House from 2-5.
- Shotwell reported that the Oyster Festival was very successful. It was the first in person festival in 2 years. Downtown merchants will be closing the streets for trick or treating on October 30. Chincoteague Center will be hosting Resilience Workshops on October 30. The second workshop will be held in December or January. A follow up workshop in February or March. The focus of the workshops will be on all types of resilience man made and natural. The Christmas parade will be December 4. Santa will be seating in the Love chairs with a mailbox for children to place their letters in. There will be no sitting on Santa's lap. The Chincoteague travel guide will go to the printer by the middle of November. September Welcome Center visitation was up 6%. New businesses: Pony Adventure Park is now open and Key West cottages will be open in 2022. Shotwell commented on the ad for the Virginia Tourism Travel Guide, her suggestion was to add more pictures if possible.
- Holloway shared that on November 1st Mainstreet Connect will hold their second happy hour reception in appreciation for wait staff. A transformational strategic planning session with different focus groups from the town of Cape Charles will be conducted by national Main Street specialist. Cape Charles Festive Fridays is scheduled to happen this holiday season. The 19th Annual Artisan Guild holiday tour is set for Thanksgiving weekend. ESVA Chamber of Commerce held an eight-business ribbon cutting. It was suggested that the Southern Welcome Center be the location for the first new Love Work sign for the Shore. The second Love Work sign will be developed when the ESVA Chamber of Commerce is turned to an official Welcome Center. There was discussion that the EDA grant money can be used to upgrade the Chamber building. Cape Charles train car upgrades could also be included in the EDA grant. Martian suggested to request one million dollars. Coker suggested to put together a package that covers a number of big-ticket items. EDA likes a regional approach to string together proposals for the region.
- Tarr inquired if the debate tonight will be video. Sabbatini stated that it will be recorded. It will be at Chesapeake Bay KOA at 7 pm tonight.

6. Adjournment

- At 1:21 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tarr, and the meeting was adjourned.

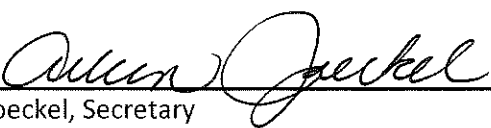
These minutes have been approved by



John Coker, Chairman

11/17/2021

Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

11/17/21

Date