

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 15, 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-
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

Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center

Commissioner in Absence

Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council

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

- Cherron Davis, from the New Church Welcome Center commented that the WC is busy with lots of people on the move. Chincoteague has a Blitz promotion that is hosted at the New Church WC along with the video display WanderLove, which includes rack cards. Debbie Holland has retired after 36 years of service and is replaced by Lindsay Fuller, Ray's Shanty's daughter.

3. Consent Agenda

- Coker asked for the missing P&L FYtD and Budget Performance reports. Quick Books program has issues that will be repair next week with reports to follow, Sabbatini replied to Coker.
- At 12:09 p.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

4. Commission Updates

• **Welcome Center Update**

Betz stated that everything is running smoothly. The Welcome Center purchased a fogger to disinfect the inside of the WC. The visitor numbers have blown the 2020 numbers away, but the WC still hasn't surpassed the 2019 numbers to date. There continues to be many visitors to the WC that have never been to ESVA before. Betz has also been working with Southern Lady Magazine which will be doing an editorial piece on Chincoteague. The magazine has a year-long series called, Waterfront Wonders. Chincoteague Island has been selected for the September

2022 issue. The magazine photographer will be arriving on the island next week Tuesday and staying through Friday. Betz will be working with the photographer showing off fun things for ladies to do when visiting Chincoteague Island. A pony tour is also scheduled.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported Instagram has been doing extremely well. The Boat Docking video had gone viral and reached over a million plays on personal accounts. Life on the ESVA revolves around water that is what needs to be portrayed and increased on social media. Facebook has had a decrease in reach, paid ads for WanderLove have come to an end. The budget is being looked at to see where post can be boosted to continue growth on Facebook. All other outreach is a slow and steady climb.

- Coker inquired about promoting oyster roast that happen during the Fall and Winter months.

Machen responded that ESVATC has established a plan for promoting the events. The scheduled events have been identified and are posted on the VisitESVA website event page. As specific oyster events get closer to date event posts will be created and pushed out.

- **Drive 2.0**

Machen announced that the beginning stages of the Drive 2.0 has started. The first step is to get 30 responses from community stakeholders on the survey. The survey takes 1 ½ hours to fill out. Virginia Beach had to drop out of the Drive 2.0 grant process because Virginia Beach could not get the 30 surveys completed by stakeholders. If the first step, which is the survey, is not completed ESVATC will have to drop out of the grant process.

- Spuck suggested to go through the survey and create a template of answers so that the stakeholders, when taking the survey, don't have to be so innovative in thinking through questions that may stump them. Betz will also sit down with anyone and walk through the whole survey so that it can be completed promptly.

- **VA Found**

Betz reported that VA Found program will be featured on PBS television travel and culinary series. Cape Charles and Kiptopeke will air on WHRO September 17th. Chincoteague and Tangier will air September 24. The Eastern Shore Post has featured a story on the upcoming program on the front page of this week's paper. E-Blast are going out regularly to remind folks on the Shore about the upcoming series. Marlene Cree from Blue Heron Realty has a drawing of an At Altitude print 12" x 18" for people that share the post on the lower Shore episode. Betz is looking for a give away from the upper Shore to boost the Chincoteague post.

- **Tourism Summit**

Robert reported on the Tourism Summit accruing Monday February 28, 2022. Next month mid-October ESVATC will be sending out RSVP invitations. Get the word out reminding people that the Summit is happening. A band and a great line-up of speakers have been scheduled.

- **FY2022 Budget**

Sabbatini followed up on budget items that were changed and needed to be voted on.

- Increase in Visitor Guide Budget Line to \$47,000
- Increase in Professional Development To \$5,018.81

- At 12:25 p.m. Coke called to have the FY22 Budget approved. Shotwell made the first motion to approve the FY22 Budget, seconded by Tarr and passed unanimously. Sabbatini continued that the VA Found is a big wow factor for the Shore and encourage everyone to push it out. Sabbatini thanked Shotwell and Holloway for all their help in showcasing Cape Charles and Chincoteague area. Betz's used her skills for driving this home with Dave Parker Productions. Machen did a great job putting the 15 second ad together for the program.

- **Updates to By Laws**

Sabbatini reported that during the July meeting the updates to By Laws have been reported on. The completed By Laws are ready for Commissioners to sign and be added to binders. The ESVA Chamber of Commerce and ESVA Tourism Commission officers have a quarterly meeting which will meet next week. Updates on that meeting will be giving to the Commission on that meeting.

5. Matters by Commissioners

- MacGarvey shared that this Friday night at 7:30 p.m. Shakespeare in the Park production will take place in Exmore. The next day, the Third Annual Artisan Festival will take place. Vendors will be coming from as far away as Baltimore. On the 16th of October, the 5th Annual Car Show will take place in the Exmore Town Park. Another Bakery Café is opening, and the Skate & Bike Park has received legal approval and most likely will be opening the 1st or 2nd Quarter of 2022.
- Shotwell shared that Chincoteague is very busy. This week Ocean City will host Bike Week (Motorcycles). Last Saturday was a Plein Air event. The Police Department Poker Run was Saturday and included an auction. October 9th will be the Chincoteague Chamber Oyster Festival only 40 tickets are left. The Chill Chowder Festival was to be next weekend, but it was canceled because of lack of interest. The Farmer's Market is still well attended this fall. A new business opens in September, Iron Pony Adventure. This is an outside adventure theme park with 30 plus aerial obstacles on 2 full levels. Shotwell is anticipating a good September and October season on Chincoteague. The word from people that rent out their second homes is that they are now booked well into November. Spring rentals are also being booked early.
- Tarr shared that Chincoteague is still busy. Motel parking lots are full in the middle of the week in September a good sign. A new campground is opening in 2023, Key West cottages will be opening next summer.
- Coker commented that the challenge for Cape Charles is housing. People are coming but there are not enough places for them to stay. Rental housing is a big share of the market for the incoming visitors to Cape Charles. Northampton County Economic Development is working to see what can be done to improve the issues on housing.
- Spuck shared that Onancock has had a robust shoulder season in the Spring and now the Fall. Onancock has the same staffing problems everyone has; business owners are tired. No new events to announce for Onancock. There will be a new campaign this fall called, "You'll fall for Onancock", this is meant to create interest in Onancock. Stay tuned for details. Onancock is starting to have strategic conversations about Airbnb's in town. Planning Commission and Council are looking hard at protecting the neighborhood feel that Onancock has. Onancock may be limiting STR (Short Term Rentals) where Cape Charles and Chincoteague need this type of housing. Work on Christmas is beginning for the Town. A driving holiday tour is planned, Santa arriving by boat, kayaking reindeers, Noel Night, and a parade is schedule. A robust Christmas for Onancock is in the works.

6. Adjournment

- At 12:47 p.m. Tarr made a motion to adjourn, seconded by MacGarvey, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:



John Coker, Chairman

11/10/2021

Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

11/10/2021

Date