

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2022, at 1 PM
19056 Parkway Melba, 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
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C
Clairice 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

None

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

Commissioners Absent

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

1. Call to Order

- At 1:01 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- No Guest

3. Consent Agenda

- At 1:02 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Shotwell and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer announced in April VTC will be holding an online seminar for DMO's to learn about a new social media platform called Web Stories. Content will be put into a mini web page which will continue to stay up live endlessly. Messer and Machen have been discussing agritourism and expanding the reach on the Shore.
 - Coker added that he has been on the BOC for 4 years. The discussion of agritourism has not been able to get off the ground. Coker is looking forward to Messer help. Messer stated that agritourism and conservation go hand in hand and tourist like to experience these ventures. Messer has worked with Lavender Farms and Winery's in her previous position.
 - Sabbatini added there will be an agritourism workshop put on by the Virginia Cooperative Extension and will be held at the ES Community College, Work Force Development

building on April 13th. The Chamber of Commerce will be assisting in putting on the first workshop.

5. Building

- Coker announced the purchase of the building has finally been agreed upon. It will be a 50/50 split of ownership for the ESVA Chamber of Commerce and ESVA Tourism Commission. Coker will write the commitment details and get it to the Commissioners for their approval. Coker believes this is a fair deal and the TC will have a home for a long time. If the EDA money comes through this will be a home run for the Chamber and the TC. If BOC cannot make a commitment an independent party will come in to help the two parties come to an agreement.

6. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz stated visitation numbers at the Welcome Center are better than 2019. There is discussion of extending the hours at the WC starting Memorial Day through Labor Day. The Welcome Center would be open from 9 am to 6pm. A paid employee from 9am-3pm, another paid employee from 3 pm-9 pm. Next month four new replacement light boxes will be installed. The end of March Betz will be attending the VTC Welcome Center Summit.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported all platforms are doing very well. There has been a pickup in January and February which has been encouraging to see. Travel planning post have begun with events now beginning. St. Patrick Day parade in Onancock and the Garden Tour are being promoted. Machen has been working on MLP grants promoting activities on the water. Machen has been wrapping up several projects in our grant which include an app development to tourism and Virginia Space Loop rack card. Death by Chocolate had been promoted heavily and the content has boosted our photo library for the future.

- Coker asked Machen if she has talked to the Rail to Trail group. They want to put together some impactful videos. Machen has had a conversation with the Rail to Trail group. Coker added that Congress has approve 2.5M for the Cape Charles Rail to Trail. This is a great start to the trail system on the Shore.
- Holloway asked Coker to elaborate on what this funding for the trail looks like.
- Coker explained the Rail to Trail plan was started about 2 years ago by VDOT creating a plan for the whole Eastern Shore. A very detailed plan was created for downtown Cape Charles to the Food Lion on HWY 13. The thought was that a VDOT grant would support this portion of the trail. ANPDC decided to delay the project 1 year. Three months after that decision by the ANPDC the program was killed by VDOT. The plan was to have the trail head located at Rayfield Pharmacy with the other trail head located at the Food Lion shopping center. The detailed VDOT plan was given to Elaine Luria team which was a completely engineered and ready to go. It is hoped that this is a done deal and funding will be found for this portion of the trail. Coker was impressed with Elaine Luria coming to the Shore looking for projects, the Rail to Trail and 91.1 funding being the projected she has sponsored.

- **Tourism Summit Recap**

Sabbatini stated that everyone has heard nothing but positive comments on the summit. The summit was a true reflection of the BOC and the support they give and the professionalism of the tourism staff and hard work everyone has put forward for the whole program. The summit was a grand slam for a lot of folks who attended.

- Coker stated it was the excitement that was conveyed to the attendees. Part of the energy was that the summit had not been held for several years because of Covid.

- Holloway commented that the tone was set when you walked into the Community College the WC staff was so professionally and welcoming to everyone.
- Coker stated the only bad news is that it must be better next year, which is going to be hard to top.

Sabbatini stated that we are already planning for next year. The plan is to have more networking and move the oysters to the afternoon networking session. Pulling in Chatham and the breweries for the end of the day to go along with the oysters. That should produce some opportunities for people to connect with others. Machen has broken the summit videos into sections so that our partners can view any portion of the day's topics.

- Betz commented that some of our partners will be using the mainline speaker's presentation as a train tool for their staff.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties Update**

Sabbatini reported everyone is very happy with funding that is coming to their towns for marketing. The plan has been to have everyone in Accomack County submit their plan by the end of March. Sabbatini will format the plans for presentation to Accomack County Board in April. Sabbatini is beginning work with Northampton County towns so that he can go in front of the Northampton County Board also. The hope is to have funding released so that the marketing plans can begin to do the work for our towns.

- **VisitESVA App**

Sabbatini reported that Machen has been working on the VisitESVA app which is a download for phones. The app was pulled up onto the big screen so that the Commission could experience how the app is used. The hope is to have the app live for this season.

- Coker concern is to always update information so that it is accurate, and businesses do not appear that are no longer in existence.
- Shotwell asked what the advantage is to have an app over a website.
- Holloway stated that websites do not transfer over to a phone application very well. Apps are built for phones.

- **VTC Grants (Submitted)**

Sabbatini reported that all grants eligible to ESVA Tourism Commission have been submitted, with Messer help. The DMO and MLP grants have a focus of off-season travel.

- Messer added that there were 288 grant applications for the three different grants that were being offered. The total request for all the grants were over \$3.6M. Which exceeds the total that is available?

- **EDA Grant**

Sabbatini reported that nothing formally has been relied to the TC on the EDA grant. The only comments have been that the application looks very strong.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Holloway shared that this year the National Main Street Conference will be held in Richmond, VA. May 16th – 18th. April 2nd Cape Charles Main Street is sponsoring a job fair. To make the event festive a food truck will be at the site. Twenty-five employers will be attending between 12-4 pm. The following weekend is the big sidewalk sale in Cape Charles April 9th, Easter Egg Hunt April 16th, Blessing of the Fleet Friday April 22nd, Love Run April 23rd, Historic Garden Week April 30th and Low Country Boil April 30th. Eight new businesses are coming to Cape Charles. AJ's, by the old fire house will be opening as a steak house. Tim's Place has changed hands it has a new name, Salt and Sand restaurant the people that owned Exmore Diner have now located to this spot. Next door the convenience store has changed hands and a new name, Just Peachy. Four new businesses will be opening on Strawberry Street, Edible Picasso, Live Localish, featuring new


artisans and Love & Canna Co., Popcorn Co. opening on Mason Ave, Asbury Collective a yoga studio. Beach Market to open mid-April with a mini-Putt Putt Golf opening later in the season on the same side of the street as Beach Market. Custom Carts is moving beside Beach Market.

- Shotwell shared this weekend will be, Search for Shamrock, Easter Decoy Show is on Easter weekend. Seafood Festival is May 7th ticket sales are 100% over what they were in 2019 with a \$10 increase in price. A customer experience class will be held at the Community Center May 19th along with digital marketing strategy class. April 2nd there will be a job fair on the Island and another job fair at the Community College April 5th. Visitation on the Island has been good, ahead of 2021 but not ahead of 2019.
- MacGarvey shared that a new event facility has opened at the old bank building. The Skate Park should be open by tourist season. The town has donated to the Skate Park owner the caboose which will be turned into a coffee shop/ welcome store. The restaurants in Exmore are doing extremely well.
- Coker announced he will not be at the next meeting. He will be in the Galapagos Islands on vacation. Tarr will be heading the April meeting.

7. Adjournment

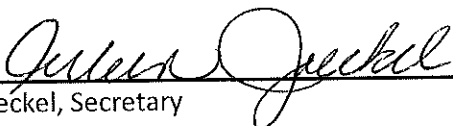
- 2:13 p.m. MacGarvey made a motion to adjourn, second by Holloway, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

 _____ Date 5/13/2022

John Coker, Chairman

Date

 _____ Date 5/18/2022

Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

Date