

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 20, 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

Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C
Clairice 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

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

Commissioners Absent

John Coker, Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair

1. Call to Order

- At 1:00 p.m. Tarr called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Cherron Davis was pleased that Betz attended the WC Seminar. Davis stated that she has worked for the New Church Welcome Center for 20 years, this past Easter weekend was the busiest on record.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 1:01 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Spuck and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer announced that she and Betz met with the Town of Parksley. VTC will be holding a free virtual orientation on May 10, 11 and 12. An Agritourism seminar was attended by Machen. Grant notifications have been sent out for the spring rounds.

5. Building

- Tarr announced that things are moving well on the joint purchase of the Chamber of Commerce building between the ESVA Tourism Commission and ESVA Chamber of Commerce. A few outstanding issues remain to be resolved.

6. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported the WC visitation numbers are 35% higher than in 2021. Two volunteers will be coming back with a new third volunteer starting in May. Four new light boxes have been ordered. The new light boxes are for Cape Charles, Wachapreague, Onancock and Saxis displays. The order is on backorder with an end of May arrival delivery date.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported that things are going well. Machen received a notice from Facebook to verify ESVA TC identity because the platform is reaching so many people. ESVA website is doing much better compared to last year. The January and February numbers were good with March numbers climbing rapidly. Machen is completing the items from the last two grants to be submitted to VTC for reimbursement. ESVA TC has received two more grants. MLP grant: On a Wing and a Beach and another DMO grant: Stories of the Shore. The Agritourism workshop was a good event for networking and talking to small farms on how to begin promoting their farm products.

- Sabbatini added that there were twenty-five attendees. ESVA TC partnered with Virginia Cooperative Extension to put on the event at the Eastern Shore Community College. It was a worthwhile program collaborating with the farmers and bulking up the industry that is the backbone of the Eastern Shore. The agritourism program will be something that we can build upon sharing marketing and advertising tools was appreciated. VTC also attended the workshop and did a phenomenal job-sharing information.

- **EDA Grant & VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported the EDA grant was not awarded to us. None of the ten applicants in the regional group that we applied together with received grant monies. The reason given, there were so many applications. ESVA TC and our partners on the Shore have a templet from what was created for the EDA grant that will make it easier to put together other grants that become available. There are four other grant opportunities that have potential for ESVA TC.

- Spuck commented Elaine Luria has a Community Building Grant that she administers each year. ESVA TC should reach out to Luria's people and see if we can collaborate with them next year.
- Holloway shared that Elaine Luria's team did say that the ARPA funding that is offered to the counties can now be used for infrastructure projects. Holloway stated that we can market all day long but if there is no place to go to the bathroom when people are visiting that leads to an unpleasant experience.

Sabbatini added that even though towns have submitted ARPA plans, the town plans can be changed to include infrastructure work.

- Messer verified that changes to the plans are acceptable.
- Spuck asked where ESVA TC is in pulling together the APRA fund plans for towns and DMO;s

Sabbatini answered most plans have been submitted. The big plans that are not in yet are Cape Charles and Onancock.

- Tarr requested Cape Charles and Onancock to submit their proposals so that monies can be released.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Shotwell reported the Easter Decoy Show attendance was the best year since 2014. Exhibitors at the show did very well. The Seafood Festival preparation is in full swing only forty-two tickets left

to sell. Shotwell also attend the WC Seminar with Christy and Cherron. A lot of good useable information was received. Chincoteague was awarded a DMO grant to do extensive marketing in the Hampton Roads and Richmond area. March visitation numbers are up 181% over last year. Spring has been remarkably busy, and the belief is that it will be a busy summer. Chincoteague is still trying to hire a full-time position. Summer help has been lined up for Chincoteague tourism office. A new business has opened in Chincoteague, Ridge Road Pit Stop, a convenience grocery store which will also be making deli sandwiches.

- Holloway reported on the job fair held in Cape Charles. The event theme: Food Truck Rodeo. It was a good event a lot of employers. More job seekers would have been better. The networking for the employers turned out well. Next year there will be transportation for the high school students to get to Cape Charles. Cape Charles has been busy this spring. Five new businesses will be opening in Cape Charles. Main Street is looking for an executive assistant. Someone with marketing skills and help in the office. The position is part-time. Cape Charles is in discussions on what to do with the town hall building. An assessment has been done on the build. The consultants' recommendations will be given at the next town council meeting.
- Spuck reported that Onancock also received a DMO grant. Main Street and Town of Onancock will be sharing the funds. Town of Onancock will be using their share of the funds to market to boating clubs. The town purchased a building in the center of downtown Onancock. The plan is to create a welcome center and install public bathrooms. The Lilliston building sold to a developer. There are some businesses talking about coming to Onancock. A town wide sale will be May 7th.

7. Adjournment

- 1:48 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, second by Spuck, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by

John Coker, Chairman

5/18/2022

Date

Aileen Joeckel

Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

5/18/2022

Date

