

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 18, 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
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

Commissioners Absent

Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee

Chamber of Commerce- Observer-Absent

Ace Seybolt

Ex-officio Non-voting Member -Absent

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

- At 1:12 p.m. Coker called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Meredith Lusk, Moonrise Jewelry and Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street were in attendance to observe the BOC meeting.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 1:13 p.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer was absent but sent reports for the BOC.

5. Building

- Coker stated that the partnership of the ESVA Chamber of Commerce and ESVA Tourism Commission on the building ownership is progressing and the deal has been agreed to. The plan is to have the agreement papers done by the end of June. One of the first priorities is to redo the rest rooms of the building.

6. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Emily Machen, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Staff-Absent

Christy Betz, Destination Development Dir

Guest Present

Meredith Lusk, Moonrise Jewelry
Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street

Sabbatini reported that Betz is on vacation. Sabbatini gave the WC update and reported the WC is doing great the staff is fantastic Sally, who manages the WC, is second to none. There are no concerns the visitation numbers keep rising which is a good thing. Google reviews from visitors at the Southern Welcome Center are always extremely positive. That is attributed to the staff at the WC and Betz leadership.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported it has been a good month with social media and the website is doing exceptionally well with views. Things have slacked off marketing wise with Facebook promotions that were a part of the MLP grant. The promotions will begin again in September. There has been incredibly positive response to the content that has been pushed out on stories about the Eastern Shore Machen stated.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported that he will be presenting, to the Accomack County Board of Supervisors, the town proposed spending plan for the VTC APRA funding. Sabbatini had conversations with Mike Mason, Accomack County Administrator, which relayed to Sabbatini that everything looks good in the proposals that are being submitted tonight. Sabbatini announced that Belle Haven has also joined the list of towns with proposals and Mike Mason has included that information for the Supervisors. Sabbatini thanked the Accomack County Supervisors for their patience. The process of reaching out to all the incorporated towns took a little longer but the results have been overwhelming appreciated by our small communities on the Eastern Shore.

- Tarr asked a question for a supervisor, from another district, why some towns received different amounts of funding. Sabbatini responded that the amount and spending plan came in at those levels because the monies could only be spent on new marketing initiatives in each town. The towns decided what their spending needs were.
- Coker thanked Sabbatini for going to the towns and bringing this project awareness to them. So many towns do not know the Tourism Commission exists and the assistance that they can receive from the Tourism Commission.

Sabbatini also announce that the Northampton County proposal is being finished so that it too can be presented to the NHC Supervisors in the next couple of weeks.

- **App Update**

Sabbatini referred to Machen to discuss the ESVA Tourism App. Machen announced that the final stretch of the app to completion is happening. The design of the app is completed the next step is publishing and licensing the app. The hope is that the final phase will not be much longer.

- **Space Loop rack card**

Machen reported that the Space Loop rack card is near completion just adjusting borders.

Sabbatini pulled up the rack card for all to view.

- Coker asked how the rack card design and content came to be.

Machen announced that Shirley Deeds designed and put content together on the rack card. Staci Martin and Machen worked on the content and pulling it all together. The original idea for a Space Loop rack card was formulated by Staci Martin. The location of the different NASA sites Staci provided. Machen reached out to Wallops for information on and content and created QR code that links to visitESVA.com website.

- Sabbatini suggested to also have a QR code for launch dates at Wallops.

Machen added that the Space Loop is a statewide initiative which is starting at Wallops.

- **Travel Taste and Tour**

Machen reported that the Eastern Shore will be featured in an editorial and full-page picture in Travel Taste and Tour magazine. The magazine is sold nationally in Barnes & Noble on the East

Coast, Books a Million and a store chain in Canada. A great price was negotiated for a summer article with a winter feature added at no charge, Sabbatini added.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- MacGarvey shared that the Juneteenth Festival will be in Exmore on Saturday June 18th. It will be a full day starting in the Exmore town park followed by a parade. MacGarvey reported that the local businesses in Exmore are small but have never been busier, some of the new businesses are already expanding.
- Shotwell shared that the Seafood Festival was a success even with the light rain that was experienced. The heavy rain and wind did not arrive until the event was over. It appears that April visitations has been good on Chincoteague Island. Customer training workshop will begin tomorrow. Annual awards will be on Tuesday April 24th. Chincoteague has hired a third full time person today. Businesses are opening with some new businesses starting. The Real Eel food truck is new. There does not appear to be an effect on visitation to Chincoteague with the high gas prices yet.
- Holloway reported that when the new budget for FY 2023 passes new public bathrooms have been approved. For this year there will be portable bathroom stops placed around Cape Charles and communicate with businesses to let them know where the portable bathrooms are located. The new Cape Charles map has arrived. The first printing of 30K maps were to last 2 years they only lasted 1 year. The Love Run was an enormous success up 50% in participation. Bay Haven Inn along with eight other businesses are celebrating 10-years in business. Hotel Cape Charles is hosting the celebration. Main Street hired an executive assistant position.

7. Adjournment

- 1:43 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, second by MacGarvey, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

Billy Joe Tarr 6/15/2022
John Coker, Chairman Billy Joe Tarr Date

Aileen Joeckel 6/15/22
Aileen Joeckel, Secretary Date