

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
June 15, 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
Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Christy Betz, Destination Development Dir
Emily Machen, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Commissioners – Absent

John Coker, Northampton County Supervisor, Chair

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street

Chamber of Commerce- Observer

Ace Seybolt

Ex-officio Non-voting Member -Absent

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comments

- Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street in attendance to observe the BOC meeting.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 1:00 p.m. Spuck made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Shotwell and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer absent, Messer reports are on google docs for Commission to review.

5. Building

- Tarr stated the building partnership of ESVA Chamber of Commerce and ESVA Tourism Commission is continuing to move forward.

6. Commission Updates

• **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported the Welcome Center is fully staffed and running well. Four new lightboxes have been installed and functioning. All lightboxes have been replaced with new photos. Quail Cove has partnered with the WC to serve peanuts to visitors. Quail Cove has a rack space and video clip

on the WC TV monitor. Betz shared the Southern Lady magazine which has a nine-page spread on Chincoteague Island. Southern Lady has a print circulation of 180K subscribers, 200K online. The visitation numbers from April to May are up 22%. The hours at the Welcome Center have shifted to be open longer. Visitors on the weekend days have almost reached five hundred.

- Tarr stated that last week Chincoteague Island was dead. Last year people came Mother's Day and never left. Children were not in school last year schoolwork was done online. The island never slowed down in 2021.
- Holloway stated 2020 and 2021 was an anomaly. Visitors could travel and do their work from any place with good internet access. The hope is for the numbers in 2022 to be closer to the 2019 numbers.

Betz added last week she attended the Southeast Tourism Society (STS) Marketing College this was the second year Betz has attended. The knowledge that Betz received was amazing. Many new processes she learnt can be implemented to improving marketing the Eastern Shore. Next year will be Betz last year attending STS Marketing College. Betz hope is that Machen will begin the series of classes once Betz has finished.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported overall the Tourism Commission platforms are performing very well including an uptick on visitESVA website traffic. Facebook numbers have reduced. In March grant funds were used to boost Facebook post. Machen has been busy attending several events on the Shore which Machen has promoted. Machen did a workshop on, Google Analytic 4, which is recommended for updates on websites. Google Analytic will be replaced next year. If google backup for websites is not done, you will not have analytics tracking data.

- Holloway asked if this information can be shared with our partners. Machen and Betz will put an eblast together to inform tourism partners.
- Shotwell asked once the eblast is created if it could be shared with Chincoteague.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported the TC needs to be aware with gasoline current cost being high how that will affect tourism on the Shore. Sabbatini ran through a short example of how the cost of gasoline effects everyones buying power. Using minimum wage as an example: \$11 current minimum wage, \$2 goes to Uncle Sam right off the top bring take home pay to \$9 an hour. \$9 x 40 hours a week equals \$360 week pay. Department of Energy states on average Americans use 40 gals of gas a week, at \$5 a gallon equals \$200 a week is spent on gas. The \$360 folks are making a week is now down to \$160 a week. Divide \$160 by 40 hours a week brings the wage earner hourly rate to \$4 an hour. TC needs to see and understand those numbers and adjust our marketing. What needs to be conveyed to our visitors, through marketing the Eastern Shore, is once you arrive to your destination you can walk, bike, stay and not be motoring around. Sabbatini continued, VTC ARPA funds need to stretch those marketing dollars into next year when promoting the Eastern Shore will be even more needed. Sabbatini made a presentation to the Northampton County Board of Supervisors for ARPA funding spending plans for marketing towns in NHC yesterday evening. No questions were asked of Sabbatini by the Supervisors.

- Holloway shared that the presentation, made by Sabbatini, was well received by the Board of Supervisors, but no decision was made at the meeting to Holloways knowledge.
- Tar stated that the Accomack County Board of Supervisors understands there will be a lot of help requested from smaller towns to implement plans.
- Shotwell asked when and how will the funds be disbursed? What will the procedure be for releasing the funding to the towns?

- Sabbatini replied that each of the counties administration offices will create procedures for the towns to follow. The county reimbursement procedures have not been completed. This is all new for the small administrative offices and their staff to develop.
- Holloway commented that smaller towns may not have the money to spend and wait to be reimbursed
- Spuck shared that Accomack County Administrator has been great to work with from Spuck perspective on assisting with funding request in past programs.
- Sabbatini replied that he will call Accomack County to see where they are with their plan on disbursement.

- **Budget**

Sabbatini presented the first draft of the 22-23 ESVA Tourism Commission budget. Sabbatini requested an increase in funding from the Accomack County for marketing efforts, and benefits for staff. Funding will now match that of Northampton County. Visitor guide advertising is budgeted for \$58,400. Sabbatini is concerned the cost of all goods are going up especially for paper.

- Shotwell stated that she spoke with her printer and pricing has gone up 150%. Shipping a case of guides comes in at \$33 per case.
- Joeckel stated that TC re-boxes the case box of 150 guides into flat rate boxes of 100 guides to a box with a ship cost of \$8.88 per box.

Sabbatini brought up a bold idea, which has not been discussed with the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber does a yearly publication called Essentials. Sabbatini asked the question should ESVA TC look at a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce in publishing a guide that can be used by both establishments? Is there a way we can join forces and combined what we are doing?

- Spuck commented the two publications are going to two different audiences.
- Holloway suggested a subcommittee to talk about it. It does not seem possible looking at it today with different audiences that we go after.
- Seybolt suggested to secure paper requirements today for both publications.
- Holloway asked what are the printing and distribution cost?
- Betz stated we had 16K visitor guides left over from the 2021- 2022 printing. We inserted those remaining guides into the Richmond Times Dispatch. TC does not let the visitor guides go to waste. The fact that we widen our distribution at the end of the year is a selling tool that our partners like.

Sabbatini stated travel is trending regionally. VTC forecast travel trend is that long travel trips may not be as big of a focus with high gas prices. Sabbatini continued the review of the budget with a high light on the deferred maintenance fund for the building with the joint ownership that is being negotiating.

6. Matters by Commissioners

- Spuck shared Chamber of Commerce Le Tour De Shore Bike Ride will be held in Onancock this weekend. Onancock is pleased to be hosting the event with 350 riders coming to town.
- MacGarvey shared Juneteenth Festival will be held Saturday June 18th in Exmore. A parade down Main Street will be at noon. Screening and free Covid boosters at the town park takes place at 10:30 am. Music and educational opportunities will be until 4 pm. Ice cream is now served in two locations in Exmore, Liv's and the donut shop.
- Holloway shared Cape Charles and Onancock just received Main Street America accreditation. Cape Charles Distillery will host the party for the twenty-seven winners from the town of Cape Charles in the Best of Virginia contest that was put on by Virginia Living Magazine.

- Shotwell shared that visitation is up 20% year to date. The new businesses on the Island are, Reel Eel Food Truck, it is owned by the folks that own AJ's. Ebb Tide Cottage on Willow St. is a gift shop. Auntie Ann's Pretzels opened on the island. Salty Pelican gift shop is new and is owned by the Brant gift shop. July 20th will be Misty's birthday party held in the yard of the Chamber office. The Pony Swim and Carnival are up coming in July. Oyster Festival will be held October 8th. Inlet View property is coming along. There has not been a name announced for that property. Tall Pines is now called, Sun Outdoors Chesapeake Bay. The properties are run under Blue Water Development Jack Burbage. Next Ataries Rocket launch will be mid-October.

7. Adjournment

- 2:09 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



Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary



Date