

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
October 19, 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 County Supervisor, Chair  
Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair  
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council  
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C  
Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee  
Clarice 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

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street  
Bill Stramm, Cape Charles Main Street  
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street  
Becca Meyers, Advance Travel & Tourism  
Joseph Dabbs, Sr Director Advance Travel & Tour

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

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

2. Presentation by: Advance Travel and Tourism

- Sabbatini introduced Becca Meyers and Joseph Dabbs from Advance Travel and Tourism to the BOC meeting. Advance Travel and Tourism (ATT) is a division of Advance Local and is one of the top 10 publishers in the US. The company is privately held and is a leader in digital marketing. ATT collects their own data and has accurate targeting technology to know where travelers are from and how long they visit in person at specific locations. Campaigns are designed to be specific to client's needs. The basis of all travel planning falls into four steps. Dream, Plan, Book, Share. Data search can be set to a date range to see who and where people are coming from to a specific vicinity. Year over year can be searched to see if any new trends are developing. Locals are excluded from the search. The data is sourced from cell phones entering a specific area with the origination points being the zip code that the phone is attached to. Becca states we can have access to this information anytime. Experian persona (type of visitor) couple, single, age range, household income, homeowner or not, and children ages is the data that is gathered from cell phones. Complete demographics can be put together to know how the ads are working and probability of visits and frequency.
  - Holloway asked where the content comes from for the ads that ATT places. Machen stated the content comes from ESVATC or VTC and is paired with our content calendar. ATT builds the story so that the featured ad will resonate with the audience they are promoting too. Holloway commented that some of the content didn't sound like us.

When working with a third-party Machen needs to keep an eye on what is created so that the essence of the story is always about ESVA and not ATT vision of us.

- Karen Zamorski asked if ESVATC will be able to pull the analytics from a campaign featuring Cape Charles businesses. If that is possible Cape Charles Main Street would share those analytic at their monthly meetings so that the data creates a closer bond with local businesses to Cape Charles Main Street and the TC. Tracking results, from content that is being pushed out, may show a correlation to business traffic.
- Holloway thanked Christy for bringing ATT to the BOC attention.

Sabbatini stated that ATT is a compliment to the work that Machen produces. ATT also has verified, as we already know, where the bulk of our travelers are coming from, Virginia Beach and Richmond. ATT data also extends to other areas that are stopping on the Shore showing strong travel patterns that are emerging. These are very powerful tools and data ATT is bringing to ESVATC. Targeting these new areas with well placed ads to the right customer base will help us grow.

- Coker stated we need to measure the results of this data. One tool of measurement is the meals tax and TOT tax revenue.

### 3. Public Comments

- Bob Stramm shared that Cape Charles is having an event November 14 from 6 pm – 8 pm. Art and Soul in a Bowl. This is a free event serving soup, bread, and libations. Everyone is invited there is no charge.

### 4. Consent Agenda

- At 1:46 p.m. Tarr made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Holloway and passed unanimously.

### 5. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer reported the VTC economic impact study for the Eastern Shore 2020-2021 was outstanding. Northampton County had the fastest recovering locality for the whole state.
  - Coker commented that recovery on the Shore has been knocked out of the park for several reasons. 2019 was our best year and that was pre pandemic. Going to the figures for 2020 and 2021 TC surpassed 2019 numbers. The Tourism Commission has blown the past away. ESVATC is a great team no one accomplished this by themselves. We worked very hard, and we were there when someone needed help. The Eastern Shore must maintain where we are and come up with new ideas to grow. Everyone here has done an outstanding job individually and as a team.

### 6. Building

- Coker stated that the purchase of the building is a go. ESVA Tourism Commission and the ESVA Chamber of Commerce will be equal partners in the purchase of the building. ESVA Tourism will pay half of the purchase price of the building and a \$1,000 each month for 5 years until the building is paid off. The Tourism Commission group must stay together for 5 years until the building is paid off. If there is to be a different management agreement the details would be worked out at that time. The hope is that the terms of the ownership agreement would be done by the end of November no later than the end of the year.

### 7. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported the Welcome Center had 9K visitors in the month of September. At this moment Betz is attending the Mid Atlantic Public Relations Alliance (MATPRA) tradeshow. This is a marketplace trade show where DMO connect with travel writers. Betz has spoken with Better House Keeping and several AAA organizations. The travel writers are all familiar with Cape Charles but not Onancock. The plan is to have a good group of travel writers coming to the Shore in the next 6 months.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported September was a good month. There was a little bit of a drop on the website which was expected. A lot of content creation was done over the month of September. This includes capturing the local Choice winners with a little short story about their business which is the content for, "Local Hood" stories. Machen has received the B-Roll videos from VTC which was developed for a pitch to the Today Show. The content is very high quality which will come in handy many times.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini stated the 2023 Tourism Summit is around the corner. Summit date February 27, 2023, 10 am – 3 pm. The theme: Virginia's Natural Coast turning challenges into opportunities. Messer has assisted with confirming the staff from VTC that will be attending the summit and available to give presentations. A possible keynote speaker, that Christy interacted with at the Marketing College, is Steve Chandler. Steve has two decades of experience in strategic planning and brand development for local, regional, and national brands. His experience emphasis is connected to the hospitality industry and place marketing where Steve has worked with over 90 communities in 26 states. Steve believes in 360-degree branding that is not limited to graphic branding and place adventures. Branding is most determined by the locality delivery of value to its region. Steve has lots of energy his website is Chandlerthinks.com.

- Coker added we need to figure out what we are not doing right on the Eastern Shore and fix it. A lot of positive things have happened on the Shore. The Tourism Commission needs to look deep to know what we need to provide to our community to reach the next level of success. That is a goal. Coker stated the BOC should plan on staying through the closing networking section of the summit. The extended 1-2 hour social with oysters and wine will be a great time to network and get ideas.

Sabbatini added the Chamber is focusing on needs for both counties. An example is Accomack County Comprehensive Plan does not have a section on tourism. The thought is to have the Tourism Commission, Town of Onancock, and Chincoteague help to develop this section for Accomack County. Abandon builds in Accomack County is another issue. Sabbatini suggested that the Chamber and Accomack County working those issues would be addressing some of the areas that need fixing.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported that the ARPA funding has been approved for Northampton County. Instructions have been sent out to all towns with approved plans on how reimbursement will work. Sabbatini spoke with Mike Mason, from Accomack County, which has not had the funding released to them yet.

- **New Church Welcome Center**

Sabbatini stated that Cherron Davis asked to have a FAM tour for the 2 Welcome Centers happen again on the Shore. The plan would be for ARPA funding to be used to pay for it. To receive as much exposure as possible will help the Shore reach our benchmark and go beyond.

- Holloway asked to have the FAM tour in September.

## 8. Matters by Commissioners

- Holloway stated growth for the Shore means to address the workforce issues. The Eastern Shore will not be able to handle the everyday needs of promoting the Shore if we don't have a workforce to provide a good customer service experience. Cape Charles is hoping to address the housing needs of Cape Charles for workforce. One housing complex will be ready by next year the other the following season. Tourism needs to get on board to help our towns with housing. We cannot sustain the growth that we are experiencing without affordable housing for a workforce. Now that the lower Shore is going to have housing can that model help the upper Shore so that we can see growth for our communities. The next issue is where are these people going to come from. We don't have a pool of people to pull from as other communities are experiencing this also.
  - Shotwell added it is frustrating for tourist that come when they can't find anywhere to eat because nothing is open. Businesses can only be open if they have staff to work. Festive Friday planning is in full swing and lots of fall activities are planned.
- MacGarvey stated there were two successful events in September. The Exmore Antique Auto Show was a great success. It was supported by Northampton County which assisted in the marketing of the event. There was also a fall festival down Main Street that was jammed packed. New Ravena celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Investors and clients came from all over to attend the event. These visitors raved about the Eastern Shore.
  - Coker stated he had the same experience when he attended the VIMS dedication. People were from all over who have never been to the Shore before, and they raved about the experience they had on the Shore.
- Shotwell stated the Oyster Festival had a very pretty day. It was not predicated to be that with the hurricane that was passing through. The new Chincoteague website has launched. The ARPA funding help pay for it. All holiday festivities are set. Tree lighting will be Thanksgiving weekend. Christmas parade on December third. Antares will launch on November 6<sup>th</sup> and other Antares launch in March and then it will be on hold for 2 years. The cores and engines for the Antares will be built in the US now rather than overseas.
- Spuck shared, CBES bike race is this weekend with hundreds of cyclists on the Shore. Onancock 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday has ended for the season. The town of Onancock has purchased the Chandler building which will be renovated to become a welcome center with rest rooms. There will be dozens of events for Christmas, tree lighting, home tour Dec. 10th, parade, free movies, fire pits and smores.
- Tarr shared the Governor Youngkin is coming to Chincoteague because his wife told him too. The first lady of the state of Virginia fell in love with the ponies. Chincoteague will be receiving the Good Spirit award which will be held at the Chincoteague Fire House. Tarr attended a meeting on a study being done on a natural gas pipeline into Accomack County. The pipeline would have a major impact on local businesses with natural gas being a much cheaper fuel source. Nature Gas will make Accomack County chicken plants able to compete with other chicken plants in other states.
  - Shotwell is hoping to put a bug in the governor's ear that Virginia doesn't have a state horse or pony, North Caroline does. The Chincoteague pony needs to fill that need. Tarr added that before the ponies brought in big dollars at the auction a pony was sent to the governor every year.

## 9. Adjournment

- 2:33 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, second by Spuck, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:



11/16/2023

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John Coker, Chairman

Date



11/16/23

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Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

Date