

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

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
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

Commissioners Absent

Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

1. Call to Order

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

2. Public Comments

- Bill Stramm stated the Cape Charles event, Heart and Soul in a Bowl was successful. There were about seventy people that attended.

4. Consent Agenda

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

5. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer reported November is Virginia Oyster month. Rocket Lab is launching the electron rocket on December 7th. This will be the first Rocket Lab launch on the Shore. Four businesses received Microbusiness Marketing Leverage grant: Drizzles, Lemon Tree, Live Local ish, Onancock Main Street.

6. Building

- Coker stated the contract is still being worked on with the help of Seybolt. Once the contract comes back from the attorney it will be reviewed word by word by Coker, Seybolt, Tarr, Annis, and Sabbatini. The joint ownership of the Chamber of Commerce building owned 50/50 by the ESVA Chamber of Commerce and ESVA Tourism Commission will be a public record.

7. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported the Welcome Center is running smoothly. September and October were great months. October had almost 7K visitors. The Welcome Center is fully staffed with paid employees and volunteers.

- Coker asked how the sales of the visitor guide ads were going.

- **Travel Guide**

Betz replied that the sales for the visitor guide as of today are just under \$70k.

- Sabbatini remarked that the budgeted travel guide sales were conservative not knowing what was ahead of us. Betz has hit the ad sales out of the park. Sabbatini remarked that this travel guide will surpass last years. Coker added his gratitude to Betz for an amazing job.

Betz will create three different covers and solicit responses from travelers at the Welcome Center as to the most eye-catching. Shore History will revamp two pages in the travel guide with new pictures and stories. Karyn Belknap will help with the art and culture section by revising the content. Machen has lots of new pictures that will be added.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported everything is going well with marketing. Social media channels are running strong. There has been the expected dip in website traffic with the fall season. This October is higher than last year 2021. Year over year has seen an increase. Machen is working on the SEO to be user friendly. More pages connect to other pages and more content per page.

- Sabbatini put the web traffic into perspective. In October 2021 the page views on the website were 1805 views. October 2022 page views 3632, that is a huge improvement. A lot of the work that Machen does is to drive folks to the website.
- Holloway asked if those items stats can be shown in a graph.

- **Food and Travel Magazine**

Machen gave an overview of the opportunity with Food and Travel Magazine which is a national publication. It is an editorial with a full-page ad. The placement will be the last two pages of the magazine. Included in the package is the print magazine, digital package, thirty second video dedicated to their web page, and social media presence. Chincoteague also has three pages in the same edition of the winter publication.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini stated the 2023 Tourism Summit is coming together. A few new things have been added. Jeff Holland and Paige Addison will give an update on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Shelia Sheppard from Paloma Healing will give an update on health and wellness.

- Betz had just gotten back from the VA1 Summit with ideas for a keynote speaker. Steve Chandler works with DMO's on branding. Steve is very dynamic and very affordable. He can adjust his presentation to suit branding personal businesses. Another speaker that is impressive, Jon Schallert who also spoke to a group in Cape Charles in 2017. Jon is familiar with the Eastern Shore. Jon is out of Colorado his talks centers around finding the wow factor in your business. Creating your niche turning a small-town business into a multimillion-dollar business. Simple solutions and strategies. Jon was entertaining and filled with great information. Betz had a long conversation with Jon this morning. There is no wiggle room in the speaker fee of 10K. If ESVATC could receive extra sponsorships from VTC, Chincoteague, Cape Charles and reach out to some banks maybe Jon Schallert could be affordable for the summit.
- Holloway stated Jon Schallert is one of the best motivational speakers she has ever been associated with. Holloway has done conference planning for years. You will never forget

what you learn from Jon. Jon is a mover and shaker and will leave you motivated and inspired to move on. If ESVATC markets Jon Schallert for additional sponsorships, we should secure Jon as the keynote speaker.

- Shotwell asked if MLP grant money can pay for this.
- Laura Messer does not believe VTC can add additional monies for sponsorship. It could be possible next year.
- Betz stated that if we do consider having Jon Schallert the agenda has to be adjusted so that we get our money's worth out of his presentation. The contract for Jon is 50% down to hold the date. Jon would help with marketing his presentation. Betz asked if Jon could stay the next day for a workshop. Jon said it would be another 10K for the next day. Another option is Steffanie Stucky, the great granddaughter of the founder of Stucky's. Steffanie was a speaker at the VA1 Summit. The Stuckey company was sold when Steffanie was a child. The business was run into the ground by bad management. A few years ago, Steffanie was practicing law when she heard the Stuckey brand and thirteen locations were for sale which included the Mapsville, Va store. It is a success store that fits our theme of turning obstacles into opportunities. There was talk amongst the BOC that this might not be the year for Jon Schallert.
- Coker spoke stating that he disagrees with the thought that this may not be the year for the high expense of bringing in Jon Schallert. A lot of extra money has come to both counties because of Covid and other funding. The reason that money has become available is so that we ramp it up and think big. 2023 is a good time to spend the money because you won't see the results until the following year. If we are ever going to do something big next year is the time to do it. That is what ARPA funding is for to help our businesses figure out how to support more tourism. Coker supports having Jon Schallert as the keynote speaker but if the feeling is that it is too soon for ESVATC to pull this off successfully it is okay to pass in 2023 and wait another year.
- Spuck stated that going into partnership with the Chamber on purchasing the building is going to be an unforeseen expense this coming year and adding an additional expense of a huge speaker fee could be too much of a burden.
- Coker disagreed the building purchase will lower the ESVATC expenses.
- Sabbatini agreed this year needs to follow last year and hit the summit out of the park by inspiring our partners.
- Holloway agreed but added to push on negotiating a better price.
- Shotwell agreed if ARPA money could be used Chincoteague would chip in funds.
- Betz added that his expenses are not covered. That is an additional expense for ESVATC. Betz will send Jon Schallert website out to the BOC.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported that the ARPA marketing funding for the Accomack County plan has been approved by VTC. With both counties spending plans approved all the towns can bring their marketing initiatives and submit expenses for reimbursements.

Sabbatini had the opportunity to speak with Cape Charles Main Street. It was a great meeting with an overview of what is happening with the Tourism Commission. Letting Cape Charles Main Street group know the resources and services ESVATC can provide to assist their businesses.

- Jay Abella stated anytime ESVATC wants to attend or refer some other group to address Cape Charles Main Street they are welcomed.
- Holloway stated it was a wonderful presentation done by Sabbatini and Laura from VTC.
- Holloway brought up the lack of workforce on the Shore. For businesses to continue to grow and knock it out of the park it is not possible if we do not have a workforce. This

issue needs to be addressed and is it possible to have a small task force to assist in producing solutions. Can this topic be added to the ESVATC agenda? Is the J Visas Waiver being addressed to help with workforce needs? These are questions we need to work on.

- Shotwell stated that some people in Chincoteague are working to get the J Visa back and building housing for them. Chincoteague has nowhere affordable for people to live.
- Holloway fears that it is irresponsible for businesses not to work towards improving the workforce needs. It will reflect on bad experiences for our visitors. Soon our thriving businesses could start to tank.
- Coker agrees that this is a huge constrained for growth.
- Seybolt added this is a difficult situation. Seybolt personally just pulled the plug on a project in Exmore to rehab the old Pebbles building. Rents need to go up and construction cost need to go down and that was at 3% interest rate. The interest rate now is at 8%. There is a lot of money out there to build housing if they could figure out how to make money on it. Exmore and Onancock have been very flexible on zoning to try to be accommodating with this issue.
- Holloway stated we need to get the right people in place to solve this issue, there are no easy fixes.
- Shotwell stated Workforce Development does meet to discuss these issues, but they only meet quarterly.
- Seybolt stated the realtors had their annual meeting with a speaker from the Economics for Virginia Association of Realtors. The speaker broke down Accomack and Northampton Counties stats. Chincoteague and Cape Charles home sales have driven up the price of homes in both counties. Based on these findings only one-third of the people in Accomack Co and one-third of the people in Northampton Co can afford to purchase a home. That is much worse than anyone thought.
- Coker stated ESVATC cannot solve this as a group. We do have to have housing before we have people. I suggest that we do put this on the agenda so that we look at it and push it out to other groups like ANPDC for them to have it on their agendas to work at getting a strategy together. Housing is a limiting factor for any growth on the Eastern Shore. Coker will address these issues with ANPDC to make sure that they are addressing these issues.
- Seybolt suggested to get involved with the development of the Comprehensive Plan for Accomack Co. Relaxing the density for housing like trailer parks is an issue that is being investigated.
- Coker stated building multifamily housing around communities that already have infrastructure is a positive way to address this type of growth. Northampton County is looking into this with two multifamily developments of fifty units. Childcare and transportation are also issues that need to be addressed.

- **Mileage for Commissioners**

Sabbatini reminded the BOC the FY23 budget allows for mileage reimbursement for BOC travel from their home to the Chamber of Commerce build for BOC meetings that are attended in person. We will back date all trips to July 2022 meeting. What is needed is a mileage print off, from google maps, with your home address to the Chamber and back again to your home giving round trip mileage. Checks will be written every quarter.

8. Matters by Commissioners

- Spuck shared Onancock is preparing for upcoming Christmas events starting December weekend 9, 10, 11, and 12. There is a new program in place to help low-income residents pay water bills.

- Holloway shared Cape Charles is starting the holiday season with Festive Fridays beginning November 25th and concluding December 16th. Mason Ave will be lite up professionally added much needed light for the Festive Friday events. Mason Ave will be closed to car traffic during Festive Fridays. Lighted Gulf Cart Parade and Grand Illumination will be again this holiday season. Cookie Trail the second week of December. Cape Charles Main Street is talking about the reprinting of the Discovery Map. Cape Charles has gone through 40k maps this past year. After the Chamber building partnership has been completed Holloway would like to start work on discussions for a LOVE Works sign out in front of the Chamber of Commerce building. AAA did a photo shoot of the Bay Haven Inn last Thursday. In the AAA February issue Bay Haven Inn will be featured. Holloway is hoping other places on the Shore will also be in the issue.
- Shotwell shared Chincoteague is also getting ready for Christmas. Tree lighting is the Saturday after Thanksgiving which then kicks off holiday season on Chincoteague. Christmas parade December 3rd. Chincoteague travel guide is at the printers. Holiday tour is back on December 3rd
- Coker announced there will be no December meeting.

9. Adjournment

- 2:07 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, second by Spuck, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by


1/18/2023

 John Coker, Chairman Date


1/18/2023

 Aileen Joeckel, Secretary Date