

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
September 21, 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

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
Matt Spuck, Accomack County Appointee
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street
Bill Stramm, Cape Charles Main Street
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center

Chamber of Commerce- Observer

Ace Seybolt

Ex-officio Non-voting Member

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

- At 1:02 p.m. Tarr called meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Jay Abella, member of Cape Charles Main Street and Investment Partners Asset Management firm addressed ESVATC on the economic outlook for the coming year. A recession is looming with inflation that is being experienced these factors could mean a downturn economically for tourism on the Eastern Shore.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 1:09 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Shotwell and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura Messer reported the VTC economic impact study figures for the Eastern Shore are very good. Grant application for the Microbusiness Marketing grants have closed with 113 applicants. Funding is available for 150 businesses. All participants could receive funding if applications are acceptable.

5. Building

- John Coker was absent; no report given on the progress of the contract between the ESVA Chamber and ESVA Tourism regarding joint ownership of the Chamber building.

6. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Betz reported the Welcome Center is fully staffed with paid staff and volunteers. The hours have gone back to regular time 9 am – 5 pm Sunday through Saturday. All is running smoothly at the Welcome Center.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported digital marketing is doing well across all platforms. Facebook has outperformed August numbers. Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine, September issue, has an article featuring Birding Biking and Artisans on the Eastern Shore. Advance Travel and Tourism will be focusing on luxury travel, craft spirits and seasonal highlights found on the Eastern Shore. Advance Travel and Tourism will give a presentation at the October BOC meeting. The Media B-Roll that VTC created to lure the Today Show to Cape Charles was not successful. ESVATC now has access to that B- Roll content to be utilize in the future when promoting Cape Charles. Filming was done at Lambert Shellfish Co. during a bus tour which experienced oyster tasting and the whole oyster operation. Machen also has been filming the Local Choice winners for social media. Machen has submitted an application for the DRIVE Outdoor grant program.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini stated the 2023 Tourism Summit planning has begun. Summit date February 27, 2023, 10 am – 3 pm. The theme: Virginia’s Natural Coast turning challenges into opportunities. Save the date announcement will be going out once it is confirmed that VTC officials will be able to attend. An addition to the day events will be a section on health and wellness. Taking care of yourself as you serve others is very important.

- Messer stated she would coordinate having Chris Canfield, Steve Galyean and Staci Martin attending the summit. Having a table set up by VTC with a help desk for attendees to address any needs they may have with grants or using the tools of the VTC website.
- Holloway suggested a different main speaker for the summit. Rita Suiter was great but having a different person would be fresh and exciting. Rita returning in 2024 would work.
- Betz mentioned that Eric Terry talk was more for a larger city tourism experience. Eric’s speech may have missed the mark for our audience.

Sabbatini continued at the close of the summit there would be a 3pm-5pm networking socializing session with oysters and wine.

- **VTC ARPA Money to Counties**

Sabbatini reported Chincoteague and Cape Charles had to adjust the ARPA grant moneys in each of their spending plans. The changes have been made everything looks good going forward.

- **VA Coastal Magazine**

Sabbatini reported Coastal Virginia Magazine - Best of the Eastern Shore nomination process is completed. If any BOC would like to nominate a business, they have until this Friday September 23 to do so. Using TC list of local choice contestants, as a resource, the TC nominated all the businesses on that list as nominees to the Co Va Magazine contest. The May/June issue will list the Eastern Shore winners.

- Holloway suggested to continue to investigate Chesapeake Bay Magazine for opportunities to work with the Eastern Shore to promote stories.

7. Matters by Commissioners

- Shotwell shared; tourism on the island has been great. 2022 numbers are better than 2019 numbers but slightly down from 2021. The island is still full of travelers. Chincoteague's visitor guide ad sales are wrapping up. The Fall Roundup of Assateague Ponies will be October 1st. Oyster Festival October 8th. Christmas Parade is scheduled to take place.
- Holloway shared; tourism in Cape Charles has been trending like Chincoteague's. 2022 is running the same as 2019 and 2020 tourism number. 2021 numbers are an anomaly which will take a while to beat. September numbers were flat, October number are up. Cape Charles is having a locals' campaign. The restaurants were full of visitors all summer. Residents tried not to dine out and add pressure to the short staffing that was experienced by business owners. The locals are looking forward to enjoying dinning out in Cape Charles now that the heavy travel season has pasted. Festive Friday's planning has begun. November 25, December 2, December 9, and December 16 will be the weekends full of festivities activities. The Friday before Christmas, December 23, there are no plans for activities. Holloway suggested that the TC do a rack card like the trail rack cards promoting all Oyster Roast on the Shore.

8. Adjournment

- 1:55 p.m. Holloway made a motion to adjourn, second by Shotwell, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:

Billy Joe Tarr 10/19/2022
Billy Joe Tarr, Vice Chairman Date

Ailéen Joeckel 10/19/2022
Ailéen Joeckel, Secretary Date