

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 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
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council-Z
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague C of C-Z

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Emily Machen, Marketing Director
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant
Sally Williams, Southern Gateway Welcome Ct

Commissioners – Absent

John Coker, Northampton County Supervisor, Chair
Clairice MacGarvey, Northampton County Appointee

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street- Z

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 shared Cape Charles Main Street continues to work on advertisers for the 2023 – 2025 map.

4. Consent Agenda

- At 1:03 p.m. Spuck made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Shotwell and passed unanimously.

5. VTC Updates

- Laura will be attending the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce annual meeting tomorrow. The VTC grant cycle will be closing February 28th at 5 PM. Laura is here to help if anyone is applying for MLP grant, Special Event and Festival grant, and DMO grant.
 - Sabbatini asked if the special event and festival grant is a two-day event. Laura stated that it is. The purpose is to drive overnight visitation.
 - Spuck asked if the event could have the first day of festival be a town business networking followed by the concert the next day. Laura will investigate the specifics if the event is growing into a 2-day event after the first couple of years only being a one-day event.
 - Sabbatini stated that both the Chamber and Tourism Commission would like to be involved in the festival growth of ESVA Chamber Fest.

6. Building

- Ace Seybolt stated that the building closing is ready to happen. Waiting on Supervisor Coker to be available for signing and closing.

7. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Update**

Sally Williams reported this January is up over last January by 78%. Things are picking up at the Welcome Center. February has dropped off but still 50% better than last year. The welcome center has eight paid staff and nineteen volunteers with another volunteer joining the team.

- Sabbatini added that Williams will be attending the Visitor Center Seminar March 20th - 22nd. There are some projects that Williams will be overseeing to polish up the inside of the welcome center. Williams has been helping with the Tourism Summit planning.

- **Digital Marketing Analytics**

Machen reported it has been a good month with an uptick from last month. The MLP grant and DMO grant will be wrapping up in February. Marketing initiatives that have been planned for off season promotions have been completed.

- **Travel Guide**

Sabbatini reported the travel guide proof has come back. The guide looks phenomenal Betz did a great job getting industry partners ads sold. Machen took over and produced a great product representing the Eastern Shore. We will have the travel guide available for the summit.

- Tarr asked how many travel guides were printed. Sabbatini responded 135K.

- **Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini reported summit planning is well on its way. The only thing left to do is a supply run for water, snacks, and soft drinks. There will be a split schedule for the summit. The Grand Hall is at capacity with 126 people attending. Having the attendees split during the keynote presentation will give a more intimate experience during Jon Schallert presentation. Sabbatini suggested a change in the lineup of the speakers. A discussion on space tourism and Rocket Lab was an idea. An alternative would be a presentation on workforce development with A-NPDC help. Sabbatini believes workforce development would be an added plus this year. All of BOC agreed workforce development is much needed at this time. Jon Schallert has done an interview with Sabbatini on WESR. It will air this Wednesday and next Wednesday. The summit doesn't need more people to attend the thought is to keep the momentum and excitement going. There is a wait list for the summit that has been started when we receive a cancellation the wait list will be used.

- Holloway asked what time should the BOC be at the Community College. Sabbatini responded check in is at 9 am if BOC comes in at 8:45 am that would be plenty of time.
- Messer asked for a list of attendees for the summit.

- **Director of Destination and Development Job Posting**

Sabbatini stated that Betz accepted another job. Betz position has been posted. Even before posting Sabbatini received some interest in the position. The candidates so far are very good. The timeline for the job posting is to run until next Friday February 24th. After the summit we will begin the interviewing process.

- Messer shared that the DDD posting is also on the VTC website.

- **Audit Update**

Sabbatini stated Audit FY 2023 has been completed everything looks very good. Sabbatini thanked Joeckel for her communications with the auditor and all document preparations needed. Record keeping and books all looked good. Tourism Commission is waiting for the final report. The audit was done by Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates.

- **Miscellaneous**

Sabbatini attended both the Accomack Co. and Northampton County budget request meetings. The feeling is that the request was reasonable hopeful funding will be approved.

8. Matters by Commissioners

- Holloway asked if the BOC would consider changing the meeting time from 1 pm to 12:30 pm. The change of meeting time at the Chamber would help Holloway get back in time to check in guest at Bay Haven Inn.
 - Tarr asked Holloway to make a motion for the time change.
- At 1:35 pm. Holloway made the first motion to approve meeting time change of ESVA Tourism Commission from 1 pm to 12:30 pm. seconded by Spuck and passed unanimously. Holloway continued Cape Charles has been busy with local specials at restaurants and special things going on around town. The booking pace at the Inn is 30% up compared to last year.
- Shotwell shared Chincoteague visitation was up 95% over last year. Shotwell can contribute the increase to the advertisement in the Richmond, Northern Virginia, Hampton Roads area. 13 News Now ads during the months of August and September reached 3M people which equals 94% of the Hampton Roads area. Chincoteague will now be marketing heavily for Death by Chocolate and Search for Shamrocks. Annual general membership meeting is tomorrow. Sabbatini and Messer are both on the agenda to speak. Chincoteague Chamber and Visitor Center has a new employee who will begin the first part of March. The excitement over the new Chincoteague pony becoming the state pony has led to the approval of a new Virginia is for Lover's logo; Virginia is for Pony Lovers.
- Spuck shared the LOVE gift card program was very successful. How the program worked; if you spent \$100 on a gift card with local merchants you received a value of \$125 to spend. St Patty's Day parade is well on the way. It's looking like it will be as big or bigger than last year. Bookings and restaurant sales are up in the 25% range. Dog park is officially open. On Saturday morning you cannot get a parking spot close by. Main Street has a mural project on the way. The locations have been identified now artist are being selected. The mural project will begin soon. Onancock has retained a company to do its town plan. It's not a strategic plan it is a plan for lighting, parking and signage. The grant for the Lilliston building is moving forward nicely. The renovations will be for the Lilliston building and the Police Department. There is push back on a welcome center. The town of Onancock will be applying for the DMO grant.
- Tarr stated what the Chincoteague ponies do for the fire company is amazing. The Chincoteague pony has been around for 97 years and now it's the state pony. There are a lot of benefits that come when the governor visits with his wife. Tarr added the next event is the Tourism Summit on February 27th.
- Messer added that the VTC orientation is March 7-9. It is a virtual program you can register now. It is good for any new employees.

9. Adjournment

- At 1:35 p.m. Spuck made a motion to adjourn, second by Holloway, and the meeting was adjourned.

These minutes have been approved by:



John Coker, Chairman

3/15/2023

Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

3/15/2023

Date

