ESVA Chamber of Commerce + ESVA Tourism...  

...A Step Forward?

Submitted by Andrew Barbour

Andrew Barbour was elected Supervisor for District 1 in Northampton County in 2004 and served on the Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission from 2004 to 2008. Before moving to the Eastern Shore, he served as programming director of AOL’s Travel Channel and as an editorial director at Fodor’s Travel Publications.

The growth of tourism over the past 15 years has been one of the Eastern Shore’s economic success stories. A great deal of credit must go to a revitalized Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission (ESVATC), which left an unproductive marriage with the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce in 2005 and went on to develop a dynamic regional tourism strategy. The tremendous gains in tourism since then make the recent decision by Accomack and Northampton Counties to hand the ESVATC back to the Chamber almost unfathomable.

In coming to their decision, county leaders must have completely overlooked the dismal results of the Commission’s first marriage with the Chamber. When Supervisor Laura Belle Gordy of Accomack spearheaded the 2005 effort to separate the Commission from the Chamber, it was clear that the joint organizations were doing little, if anything, to promote tourism. They had no strategy document whatsoever. Their sole marketing efforts hinged on an annual trip to a travel expo in Harrisburg, PA, and the publication of a tourism directory. In fact, so little attention was paid to tourism that the Chamber was sitting on a slush fund of approximately $60,000 in unspent county funds.

Stand-Alone Tourism Commission a State-Wide Success

By removing the Tourism Commission from the Chamber and hiring a dedicated director, Gordy freed the Commission to focus single-mindedly on tourism. Within 3 years, the Eastern Shore was the fastest-growing tourism region in Virginia in 2016 — the third time in 4 years it had claimed the title.

Despite its success, the Commission — like almost every regional initiative on the Shore — has faced steady political headwinds. While tourism professionals from Chincoteague to Cape Charles see the value of a regional approach, local politicians understandably put their own constituents first. To be successful in its mission, the revamped Commission believed that it was important to insulate itself from local politics as much as possible.

To that end, the Commission took 2 steps: It removed the requirement that Supervisors from each county sit on its Board, in order to make way for Commissioners with true tourism expertise. Second, the Commission persuaded the State Legislature to allow Northampton, and...
Choice

Politics or Tourism? An Unfortunate Choice

In retrospect, the Commissioners at the time – myself included – were naïve. These measures have proved woefully insufficient to protect the Commission from political meddling. A series of missteps in 2018 by the ESVATC leadership and Board, combined with a growing perception that the Commission had lost its momentum, gave cover for 2 Accomack Supervisors to take out their knives. Instead of shaking up the board, which would have been understandable and maybe even necessary, Accomack threatened to kill the bi-county Commission entirely. In a compromise hammered out with Northampton County, the Commission was ultimately shunted back under the wing of the Chamber of Commerce. We are back to where we started.

At first glance, a return to the Chamber might not seem a bad idea. The current head of the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, Robie Marsh, appears to be a diligent and competent leader. But it is unwise to erect organizational structures around specific personnel. Times change, people move on. More importantly, Marsh is tasked with dual responsibilities as head of the Chamber and the Commission. Even if he wanted to, he cannot devote 100% of his attention to tourism.

Not only does Marsh face a difficult juggling act time-wise, but he must also handle inherent conflicts in the business models of the 2 organizations. The Chamber’s role is to promote the interests of its paid members, whereas the Commission’s job is to grow tourism for all businesses. It’s no coincidence that accusations of favoritism and bias tend to dog Chambers of Commerce that double as tourism bureaus. When a reporter comes from the New York Times to tour the Eastern Shore, for example, what does Marsh do? Does he steer them to tourism operators who are paid members of the Chamber or does he offer the exposure to a rival who is not in the Chamber?

The makeup of the revamped Board also raises concerns about how the Commission will be run. While the previous Commission placed a premium on finding Board members with tourism expertise, the new 7-person Board reserves positions for 3 elected politicians. Interestingly, an appointee of the Richmond-based VTC will also serve on the new Board, purportedly as our liaison to the state tourism board. There’s a certain irony in this. For the past decade, the ESVATC has enjoyed a hand-in-glove relationship with the VTC, and the VTC has touted the Shore’s tourism strategy and approach as a model for other regions to emulate. With a representative now on the Board, perhaps the VTC can persuade Accomack and Northampton of the wisdom of returning the Commission to its previous structure, installing dynamic new leadership that is independent of the Chamber, and appointing a hands-on Board whose expertise lies in tourism, not politics.

ShoreLine Comment: We recognize the intense negotiations that occurred between the counties to salvage a regional tourism entity after Accomack threatened to pull funding. We share Barbour’s concerns about whether moving tourism back to the Chamber can be successful. While officially this is a 6-month trial only, it is hard to understand how it could be changed again at the end of 6 months. We wish Marsh well on this difficult new addition to his responsibilities. We hope everyone remembers the dangers of comingling the two positions.
Cape Charles has been interested in the Virginia Main Street Program for several years. It had an initial association with this program several years ago, which led to the creation of the Cape Charles Business Association. Fast forward to 2017, when the town rethought the value of engaging with the program. Virginia Main Street is a preservation-based economic and community development program that follows the National Main Street Center’s Main Street Approach™ and is managed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). As a community with a “compact, pedestrian-oriented commercial setting,” but not yet ready to take on the full scope of the Main Street designation, Cape Charles applied again to become a Community Affiliate. The application was accepted, and Cape Charles officially became a Community Affiliate in the fall of 2017.

An Affiliate designation allows the community to employ the Main Street Approach™ in the development of programs and partnerships to achieve successful downtown revitalization. As an Affiliate member, Cape Charles receives training by downtown development experts, learns best practices, and has the opportunity to network with peers. Affiliate members are also eligible for DHCD grants, through which funding was received last year to develop a new Cape Charles brand identity.

The Organization Takes Shape

Cape Charles Main Street, Inc. (CCMS), was created in April 2018, and as part of this process, it obtained its tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3), defined its mission, and designated the Main Street commercial area. CCMS directs core volunteer committees that coincide with the Main Street Four Points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization.

The mission of CCMS is to “create a vibrant and attractive downtown that preserves historical character, encourages economic development and enhances the quality of life.” The official Main Street commercial area stretches from the Cape Charles Brewing Company down Mason Avenue to the Northampton Hotel, encompasses one block of Peach and Strawberry Streets, and includes the Harbor District.

In June, 2018, CCMS was selected to be the first town to receive a Virginia Downtown designation in a pilot program launched through Virginia Main Street. This distinction affords CCMS the tools and free resources needed to become a designated Virginia Main Street Community.

Following a Rev Up event in February 2018, committees began their work in earnest and now boast many accomplishments. Administratively, much of the “behind the scenes” infrastructure was put in place. This includes the development of bylaws, organizational communication and fundraising strategies, and a Volunteer Handbook. A Treasurer was appointed, and accounting procedures were established. In October, a new brand and tagline, “Cape Charles Virginia’s Cape,” was launched and will provide a strategic blueprint to be used and shared consistently in marketing the town.

CCMS was also instrumental in planning and executing a ribbon-cutting parade in July, presided over by Governor Northam, to commemorate the launch of 14 new businesses in town. The governor was escorted by dozens of golf carts and cheering pedestrians up Mason Avenue, starting at the LOVE sign and ending at the Cape Charles Brewery.

Planning for Future Business Expansion

Initial plans were developed and approved to enhance streetscaping along Mason Avenue, including the Phase 1 design of Strawberry Street Plaza and the design of 9 new signature banners. Community meetings were held, and recommendations were made for improvements to parking in the commercial district.

An “outward” facing Facebook page was developed for posting news and photos of events and happenings around town. And a presence was established on Instagram, with 2 sites that now boast a total of 1,370 followers. These social media channels supplement the current “Cape Charles by the Bay” website, which is slated for redesign in 2019.

To establish baseline data that support strategies for strengthening existing businesses and recruiting new ones, an analysis of economic and market statistics was performed. A review of initial findings and implications were embedded into the 2019 strategic plan.

This year promises to be even bigger, with many of the plans developed in 2018 put into action. The Phase 1 plans for Strawberry Street Plaza, which include the installation of benches, trash receptacles, and other infrastructure items, will be executed. CCMS is currently working on fundraising and sponsorship with a completion goal of May 1. It will work with the community and stakeholders to upgrade signage for parking and navigation guidance into and through the commercial district. Plans for the improvement of streetscaping will be implemented.

See Cape Charles Main Street, cont’d on p. 5
A multi-billion-dollar ecotourism industry that is thriving worldwide also adds to the health of our local economy. It is the genesis for the new non-profit organization, Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife, Inc.

According to a Brandon Withrow article from January 2019 (www.thedailybeast.com), “Determined birders are ornithological junkies, compelled to travel long distances by their love of spotting a rare species. In fact, they are part of a growing multi-billion-dollar ecotourism industry. And birding, as it turns out, is not only the perfect excuse for travel, but also part of a practical global conservation effort to help both birds and humans thrive.”

The Outdoor Industry Association (outdoorindustry.org), a leading trade association for the outdoor industry, issued an Outdoor Recreation Economy report in 2017 that showed an $887 billion annual contribution to the U.S. economy. The report was based on data by Southwick Associates, a market research, statistics, and economics firm that specializes in outdoor recreation markets.

The 2017 report cites some surprising facts: Consumers spend $887 billion annually on outdoor pursuits. The industry provides 7.6 million jobs, $65.3 billion in federal tax revenue, and $59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue. The South Atlantic region (from Virginia south to Florida, west to the Mississippi River), accounts for over $179 billion in annual spending, over 1½ million jobs, and state and local tax revenues of $10.6 billion.

More than 20 million Americans take birding-specific trips annually. They spend over $12 billion on equipment and gear for wildlife-watching, and expend almost $18 billion on their trips. Locally, the Eastern Shore of Virginia Birding Festival, currently on hiatus, was an important annual ecotourism event, bringing hundreds of birders from Virginia, Maryland, and surrounding states to enjoy various activities in Accomack and Northampton counties.

**Birding Eastern Shore!**

From the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on Assateague Island, to the Eastern Shore of Virginia Wildlife Refuge at the southern end of the Delmarva Peninsula, birders can observe species that differ depending on the season. Although the Shore has year-round avian residents, there are also species that visit solely during the spring and/or fall migrations, and even those who stay only in the wintertime.

Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife, Inc., a new non-profit organization, was created in order to own, develop, market, and operate the *Birding Eastern Shore!* website (www.birdingeasternshore.org), as well as promotions and events. The *Birding Eastern Shore!* site is an effort to promote the niche birding and nature tourism market by providing high-quality expertise related to birds and other natural elements, coupled with information to help visiting birders find lodging, food, and other activities compatible with their nature explorations. Resources for educators, children, and adults will also be provided in order to cultivate an expanded interest in birds and nature of the Eastern Shore.

**Bird Like a Local**

The welcome page of the new *Birding Eastern Shore!* website (www.birdingeasternshore.org) promises to share vital information regarding the best birding locations on the Shore, as well as providing links to birding guide services and other tips for successful birding forays. Locations in both Northampton and Accomack Counties are clearly shown, with links to other information specific to each area.

The site is the brainchild of several Shore residents, one of whom recently gave a presentation at the Lemon Tree Gallery in Cape Charles. Franktown resident Roberta Kellam, who has been a birder for decades, described the benefits of using the new website during a regular meeting of Friends of Kiptopeke State Park, a non-profit group “that supports the Park in programming, operations, and sustainable use” (www.facebook.com/FriendsOfKiptopekeStatePark).

In addition to introducing the website, Kellam gave an overview of the types of birds that can be spotted during the year on the Shore. Using close-up photographs, she pointed out some of the details birders observe to identify

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Birding, cont’d from p. 4

species that are sometimes hard to differentiate. She also cautioned the audience that although a bird identification guide is essential for birding enthusiasts to take with them into the field, characteristics such as flight pattern and preferred habitat can help to verify species as well.

Kellam listed a few of her favorite viewing areas. In Northampton County, the Southern Landfill area just north of Oyster on Seaside Road was recommended as “a mecca for waterfowl.” Kiptopeke State Park offers several birding-centric activities; in Accomack, Queen Sound Landing, on the causeway that connects Chincoteague Island with the mainland, offers birders parking opportunities and a variety of species to observe.

Kellam recommended that all birders, experienced or fledgling, use the website www.eBird.org, which is a product of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Registered users can submit lists of the birds they have spotted on a given day, access resources for bird identification, and find out what species other birders in an area have seen. Data submitted to the site allow Cornell Lab scientists “to develop analyses of continental bird abundances, range boundaries, habitats, and trends” (www.eBird.org/science).

Kellam referred to the organization that updates and monitors the eBird site as “the Birding Police,” but it offers much more than a strict protocol for recording bird sightings. There are also rules for birding competitions, life list records, and U.S. areas targeted throughout the year as prime birding spots, with specifics available regarding counts and time-sensitive location information.

The Big Year

2017 was Kellam’s “Big Year,” a birding term that refers to a determined effort to find and register the most species in a calendar year. Using the eBird website, and beginning early on January 1, Kellam set out to count the most bird species in Northampton County. She had fierce competition, however, and though she led the field for most of the year, in the end, her rival – and her girlfriend – each recorded more species than Kellam did during 2017. She did, however, count 195 different species.

Birding Eastern Shore! will officially launch the website with a reception at the Lemon Tree Gallery on Sunday, March 24, at 4:00 PM, followed by a 5:00 PM showing of the comedy film The Big Year, which stars Jack Black, Steve Martin, and Owen Wilson, at the Palace Theater in Cape Charles. The film describes 3 contest participants as they crisscross the U.S. and try to best other competitors, and each other, in counting the most bird species during a calendar year.

The public is invited to both events; more information will be available on the Facebook page Birding Eastern Shore; the Twitter account is @BirdingESVA; Instagram users can follow @birdingesva.

CBES Receives Contribution from Onancock Business & Civic Association

Onancock Business & Civic Association (OBCA) Treasurer Matt Spuck hands CBES Executive Director Donna Bozza a check for $7,375, CBES portion of the proceeds from the 2018 Onancock Christmas Homes Tour. CBES partnered with OBCA to promote the event and the town through its 2018 Between the Waters Bike Tour. According to the organizers, last December’s Christmas Homes Tour had a record-breaking 600 attendees.

Cape Charles Main Street, cont’d from p. 3

including new seating, sidewalk beautification, and the installation of 9 new banners that promote aspects of the good life in Cape Charles. The group also is eyeing a train car with hopes that it will be feasible to refurbish it as a Welcome/Information Center located in the Strawberry Street Plaza.

New maps of the commercial district, for distribution at the Visitors Center and throughout town, will be created. During the peak season, weekend pop-up stores will be recruited. The current website will be replaced with a new site that features the “Cape Charles Virginia’s Cape” brand. As with the current site, the new site will provide information of interest to locals and visitors including a calendar of events. Inventories of commercial buildings and businesses will be completed in 2019, a New Business Owner’s Orientation Kit will be developed, and data obtained from the 2018 analysis will be maintained and expanded. Whew!

So, stay tuned to the exciting changes that are happening in town. Cape Charles Main Street welcomes you!

Ed. Note: With the removal of reverse-angle parking (just passed by the Cape Charles Town Council), visitors and residents should be more comfortable parking on Mason Avenue, even if it means losing a couple of spots.
## Keeping Track

### Aquifers, Recharge, & the Long, Long Look Ahead

Over 2 billion people on the planet rely on groundwater from underground aquifers. Rainwater seeps through rocks and earth layers to fill the aquifers. Some of us are drinking water that was first stored in an aquifer when dinosaurs roamed the earth.

A team of international scientists recently published a paper in *Nature Climate Change*, in which modeling was used to determine how devastating climate change could be to aquifer recharge. Comprehensive modeling demonstrated that the recharge to 44% of the world’s aquifers will be affected by climate-related changes to rainfall.

Mark Cuthbert is a groundwater specialist at Cardiff University in Wales, and was lead author on the paper. He described the combination of climate change-induced drought and population growth “as an environmental time bomb”– since the impact of aquifer recharge deficits occurring now will only reach crisis levels in the future.

Both Northampton and Accomack county citizens rely on our sole source aquifer, the Yorktown-Eastover. The data now indicate that we are moving to an aquifer recharge deficit. This study highlights how critical it is that we understand the growing impact of climate change and sea level rise on our water supply.

1 https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0386-4.epdf

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### CBES Membership 2019

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Volunteer for our community-building opportunities:  
Bike Tour | Community Unity Day | Hospitality  
Oyster Roast | Clean the Bay Day | Fundraising  
*ShoreLine* reporter | Administrative  
Candidate Forums | Where needed

PO Box 882, Eastville, VA 23347 • Join online: www.cbes.org

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### A Reminder

Please don’t forget to renew your CBES membership! If you are unsure of your membership status, you may contact us at info@cbes.org, or call 757-678-7157. Also, a gift membership to CBES is a lovely way to welcome new residents to the area.
Celebrating 30 Years of ShoreLine 2008

- Virginia adopts its first regulatory program for clam and oyster farming.
- Southport Investors LLC, new owners of the STIP in Cape Charles, announces that over 2 dozen companies have expressed interest in the Industrial Park and have registered for Free Trade Zone and Enterprise Zone benefits.
- USDA’s Economic Research Service announces that under new regional classifications (Urban, Non-metro, etc.), Northampton County appears to be the only mainland coastal jurisdiction still identified as Rural.
- Accomack County Planning Commission presents the first Draft Comprehensive Plan. Supervisors delay scheduling public hearings. Months later, hearings are held, and the Plan is adopted.
- The Arlington Archaeological Site (1674) is placed on the Virginia Landmarks Registry and the National Register of Historic Places.
- At the Shore-wide Economic Development Forum, state officials advise county leaders that the Shore will not benefit from state outreach efforts without a local, trained workforce and a local government committed to “lifetime skills training programs.”
- Northampton Middle School closes: fewer students plus higher costs of repairs and maintenance are cited as reasons.
- Eastern Shore Boys and Girls Clubs win national awards for Education and Career Exploration, Health and Futures Programs, and a Staples Award for Diversity.
- Webster LLC announces redevelopment of the former KMC industrial site in Cheriton. Plans for multiple businesses include a vegetable packing plant as well as a regional water and sewage treatment facility.
- USDA’s Economic Research Service encourages rural communities to pursue a “sustainable planning” course for the well-being of current residents, not for potential residential growth.
- The State Court of Appeals upholds denial of a permit to Captain’s Cove Utility Co. to dump 900,000 gallons/day of treated effluent into Swan’s Gut/Chincoteague Bay.
- The Cape Charles Planning Commission recommends approval of a 6½-acre downtown project, Cape Harbor by Landmark Holdings (Nimrod Tavi); development to include 425 apartments, 120-room hotel, and a 2-level, 1,000-space below-grade parking garage on the harbor.
- Accomack County considers extending the Bay Act to its seaside to improve tidal water quality.

CBES Welcomes New Bike Tour Coordinator

By Donna Bozza

The CBES 27th Between the Waters Bike Tour, scheduled for October 26, will have a new coordinator at the helm. Alissa Yoder is taking over for long-time CBES Board Member Sally Richardson, who ran the event with distinction for 3 years and is assisting with the event’s transition.

Having recently moved to Onancock with her husband Matthew and their 2 children, Yoder joins her in-laws, who along with her husband, are no strangers to the Eastern Shore. When Matthew was a boy, his family fell in love with the area while vacationing here.

“We have a mutual appreciation for the down-to-earth people here, and want to raise our children in an environment where the people are friendly. Time doesn’t seem to go so fast,” said Yoder. She and Matthew are putting down roots on the Shore, building a home near Jamesville.

Yoder is originally from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, though the couple moved here from the rural community of Somerville, Maine. There she was the Town Clerk and Administrative Assistant, wearing many hats and handling a variety of tasks. As Registrar of Voters, she managed elections and was responsible for Vital Records, Animal Welfare, record keeping, and town notifications.

Keen organizational skills along with experience juggling diverse responsibilities are major reasons why the CBES Board felt Yoder would make a capable Bike Tour Coordinator.

“I hope to bring a thoughtful approach to the event that will encourage everyone to come back every year, feel challenged, and be welcomed no matter what their skill level,” she said. “I want people to see and appreciate the Eastern Shore as the unique place it is, because that’s what drew me here as well.”

The Between the Waters Bike Tour is the major annual fundraiser for CBES. Would you like to join Yoder and our friendly volunteers to make this year’s event successful? Not only is it fun, but you are supporting “Pedal to Protect Virginia’s Eastern Shore.”

Contact Yoder at biketour@cbes.org to find out how you can help. A variety of volunteer opportunities exists, from pre-event activities to helping on the day of the ride.
Community Calendar

Note: Please verify times and places prior to traveling to meetings.

Accomack County
757-787-5700
www.co.accomack.va.us

1st Wed Board of Zoning Appeals
10 AM, Accomac

2nd Wed Planning Commission (PC)
7 PM, Accomac

3rd Tues School Board
6:30 PM, Accomac

3rd Wed Board of Supervisors (BOS)
5 PM, Accomac

4th Tues PC Work Session
7 PM, Accomac

4th Thur Wetlands Board
10 AM, Accomac

CBES and Other Activities
1st Wed VIMS Public Seminar
7:30 PM, Wachapreague

3rd Tues ES Ground Water Committee
10 AM, Accomac

3rd Tues CBES Board Meeting
7:00 PM, Eastville

Northampton County
757-678-0440
www.co.northampton.va.us

1st Tues Board of Zoning Appeals
10 AM, Eastville

1st Tues Planning Commission (PC)
7 PM, Eastville

2nd Tues Board of Supervisors (BOS)
6 PM, Eastville

3rd Wed Wetlands Board
Meets as needed, Eastville

3rd Wed PC Work Session
5 PM, Eastville

4th Tues BOS Work Session
5 PM, Eastville

4th Tues School Board
6 PM, Machipongo

Note
We draw your attention to the several articles in this month’s issue submitted by our readers. The ShoreLine Editorial Board encourages submissions of articles of special or general interest for consideration by the Board for publication. Fund-raising appeals, political or other partisan advocacy cannot be considered. Letters to the Editor are also encouraged to be sent in for consideration for inclusion by the Edit Board. Please send to info@cbes.org.

For membership and other CBES information: www.cbes.org