Essex County Tourism Action Minutes
April 25, 2024

1. Welcome
Lisa Andrews opened the 2nd meeting of the Essex County Tourism Plan by thanking all who were present and those who had participated in the first meeting. Lisa then shared a little information about the EDA and its mission and vision statements, reflecting on the EDA’s association with tourism.

Lisa introduced Laura Messer who briefly provided her background in EDA with James City County and her current role with the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Laura then went over the day’s agenda.

2. Icebreaker
- What location perfectly shows Essex County in a photo?
  Attendees were asked to tell of a location that describes, or tell a story, about Essex County.
- Describe Essex County in one word (or phrase).
  Attendees were then asked to describe, in one word or phrase, Essex County.

3. Mission Exercise
Laura expressed the purpose of the mission statement. She then handed out slips of paper with words on it. Attendees were asked to pick up to three words. Each attendee shared their words. Laura tallied the words to find commonality.

Laura shared the mission statements of four other localities

Mission Statement: Statement of purpose; fundamental reason for an organization’s/tourism effort existence

Urbanna Tourism Action Plan Mission Statement
The Urbanna Tourism Action Plan strives to position and promote the Town as a welcoming, waterfront destination.

Colonial Beach Tourism Action Plan Mission Statement
The Colonial Beach Tourism Action Plan will share Colonial Beach as a beautiful waterfront community and as an anchor of the Northern Neck National Heritage Area.
Gloucester County Tourism Action Plan Mission Statement
The Gloucester Tourism Action Plan will promote Gloucester as a scenic destination with distinct cultural experiences.

Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Action Plan Mission Statement
The Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission will invite and inspire visitors to experience the natural beauty, culture, and heritage on Virginia’s natural coast.

Below are draft statements for Essex County based on the most commonly picked words and dialogue that followed.
4. **Vision Exercise**

Laura expressed the purpose of the vision statement. She then handed out slips of paper with words on it. Attendees were asked to pick up to three words. Each attendee shared their words. Laura tallied the words to find commonality.

**Vision Statement:** A word picture of the future that the organization/tourism effort intends ultimately to become or to influence

**Urbanna Tourism Action Plan Vision Statement**
We envision Urbanna for all seasons through diversifying business opportunities, enhancing visitor experience, and celebrating our unique culture and history.

**Colonial Beach Tourism Action Plan Vision Statement**
Enhance Colonial Beach into an iconic waterfront destination in the historic Northern Neck by expanding tourism experiences that inspire visitors to engage and explore year-round.

**Gloucester County Tourism Action Plan Vision Statement**
Celebrate and enhance Gloucester’s blend of recreation and heritage by engaging community and regional partners to expand tourism.

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Action Plan Vision Statement**
Enhance the visitor’s welcoming experience by diversifying and expanding opportunities year-round while balancing economics and the environment.

Below is a draft vision statement for Essex County based off the most commonly picked words and dialogue that followed
Both the mission and vision would be tweaked for the EDA’s review. As a break was nearing, Laura placed 9 red dots and one blue dot at each attendee’s seat. The blue dot is the “top priority” item, the red dot was just a priority.

5. Break – 15 minutes

*During break attendees placed their dots on the displayed goals charts*

6. Goals Exercise

*Enclosed are pictures of the goals charts showing the placement of dots and where it was determined as a short-term (S), on-going (O) or long-term (L)*

- Prioritize draft goals
- Separate into short-term and long-term goals
Increase partnerships between businesses

1. Work more collaboratively with the Middle Peninsula Public Access Authority (Essex Comp Plan) (Tape Comp Plan)

2. Work regionally to connect with existing resources for entrepreneurs

3. Increase funding initiatives
   - eligibility for grants, support from businesses, virtual marketing, partnerships
   - efforts for tourism, development through partnerships and collaborations
   - explore resources such as partnerships, funding and mechanisms to promote and showcase the main attractions in the county (Essex Comp Plan)

4. Increase public-private partnerships

5. Build relationships with surrounding localities to enhance regional efforts

6. Increase collaborative efforts between County/Town governments

7. Better communicate with tourism stakeholders
Work on beautification of Essex County

Addition of public restrooms to Downtown Tappahannock (TDRP)

Expand available public transportation

Review tourism wayfinding and signage as appropriate

Improved launch facilities associated with the Blueways trails (MPCEDS)

Improvements to public facilities at local museums (MPCEDS)

Expand Tourism Infrastructure

Redevelopment and revitalization projects (TDRP)

Create and enhance public access to water (kayak launch, etc.) (Essex Comp Plan) (MPCEDS) (TDRP)

Access improvements at Hoshing Creek
Route 17 Bridge
Redevelopment and revitalization of the Strickland Woll property
Development of a County Marina
Work closely with the Middle Peninsula Public Access Authority and other agencies to explore opportunities to provide greater public access to the river and creeks (Essex Comp Plan)
Host familiarization tours

Improve Tourism Marketing

Positive press campaign
- Press release strategy
- "Best of" campaign
- Encourage visitor reviews (Yelp, TripAdvisor, etc.)
- Press and influencer trips

Form a collaborative committee of tourism stakeholders to engage in facilitating joint co-branded marketing efforts

Build upon existing co-branded marketing campaign for Essex County and Tappahannock (TDRP) (Tapp Comp Plan)
- Identify and engage potential marketing partners as appropriate
- Create messaging
- Highlight strengths of region
- Develop visitor profiles

Maximize the ~42 miles of river shoreline and broader 317 miles of shoreline County-wide and brand Essex/Tappahannock as a waterfront destination (Essex Comp Plan)

Develop new marketing materials

Expand use of Historic Downtown Tappahannock app

Expand use of Essex County GIS opportunities
7. Discussion and wrap-up

Laura thanked all for participating. Lisa thanked all for participating and indicated that the EDA would be reviewing the draft report in June.

Laura is to send a draft report to the EDA by May 31, 2024.

If you have any additional thoughts after the meeting, feel free to email Laura at lmesser@virginia.org.

In attendance were:

Lisa Andrews (EDA), Wright Andrews (Planning Commission and Essex County Museum), Bill Croxton (EDA), Tim Smith (EDA), Sara Gallagher (Essex County staff), Rob Akers (Essex County Board of Supervisors, Chairman), Nate Parker (Rappahannock Roundstern), Skip Weiss (EDA), Tim Manley (Essex County Museum), Jamie Segar (EDA), Tyler Wind (Wind Vineyards), Bud Smith (Essex County Board of Supervisors, Member)