

**MINUTES  
ESSEX COUNTY  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
January 4, 2024**

A meeting of the Economic Development Authority of Essex County was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of January 2024, with the following present:

Present:

Lisa S. Andrews, Chair  
William A. Croxton, Vice-Chairman  
Tim Smith – Treasurer  
David Holt  
Jamie Segar - Remote  
Ronnie Sidney - remote

Also present:

Kay Carlton – Town of Tappahannock Council  
Chris Rhodes – Rappahannock Times  
Tommy Blackwell – Commissioner of Revenue  
Dick Blackwell – Public  
Laura Messer – Virginia Tourism Corporation

Absent:

Skip Weiss

RE: CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lisa Andrews called the meeting to order. A quorum was met.

RE: APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Andrews asked for the approval of the minutes from the December 5, 2023 meeting as presented. Mr. Holt made the motion to approve. Motion was seconded. Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

RE: TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr. Smith stated that the checking account balance was \$15,857.63. There were no checks written for the month. The 12-month CD was \$15,530.06. Interest to date this fiscal year is \$530.06. The total fund balance is \$31,387.69. Motion to approve the report was made and seconded.  
Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

RE: ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Nominees for EDA officers were:  
Lisa Andrews – Chair

Bill Croxton – Vice-Chair  
Tim Smith – Treasurer  
David Holt – Secretary

Ms. Andrews opened the floor for additional nominees and there were none.

Motion to elect Ms. Andrews as Chair was made and seconded. Ms. Andrews was elected with 6 ayes and 0 nays.

Motion to elect Mr. Croxton as Vice-Chair was made and seconded. Mr. Croxton was elected with 6 ayes and 0 nays.

Motion to elect Mr. Smith as Treasurer was made and seconded. Mr. Smith was elected with 6 ayes and 0 nays.

Motion to elect Mr. Holt as Secretary was made and seconded. Mr. Holt was elected with 6 ayes and 0 nays.

RE: GUEST SPEAKER – LAURA MESSER – DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT MANAGER – VIRGINIA TOURIST CORPORATION (VTC)

Mr. Croxton introduced Ms. Messer.

Ms. Messer is an alumna of George Mason University (Bachelor's) and Arizona State University (Master's). She has been with VTC for two years and prior to that worked with other localities. She was with James City County for 14 years.

Ms. Messer is in the Partnership Marketing division of VTC, which works with grants, destination development and business/industry initiatives. Their primary goal is to assist communities in maximizing their tourism potential, which means different things in different parts of the state. To achieve that goal there are three resources they can provide/assist – Strategic Tourism Planning, Tourism/Business Development and Cooperative Partnership Marketing Opportunities.

Partnership Marketing staff – Destination Development Managers - are spread throughout the state. Ms. Messer is responsible for the Middle Peninsula, Northern Neck and Eastern Shore.

Ms. Messer discussed that the VTC also collects data on tourism economic impact for all localities at the city/county level. Town specific data is not available.

Ms. Messer then led us through her presentation, which accompanies these minutes.

Some items of note:

- The state had 42.2 million overnight visitors that resulted in \$30.3 billion
- Essex has 256 jobs directly related to tourism
- Visitors to Essex spent \$35.7 million
- 49.7% of visitors spent at least one night in Essex, 50.3% were one day
- Average of nights stayed was 1.4 days
- Most visitors from Richmond Metro, Washington/NoVa and Hampton Roads

- Businesses can get free listings at Virginia.org, which has 13 million visitors a year
- Free online orientation course on how VTC to connect with VTC for support
- Marketing Leverage Program – a reimbursable grant program for eligible parties
  - Travel industry
  - Small businesses
  - Private sector attractions
  - Accommodations
  - Events

Ms. Messer described grant opportunities VTC offers, including a set of grants that businesses and EDAs can apply for starting Feb. 8 and ending March 14, 2024. The grant information can be obtained at [vtc.org/grants/](http://vtc.org/grants/).

Ms. Messer also indicated that she can be available to assist the EDA with tourism strategic planning and related items such as SWOT analysis, short/long term goals and mission statements.

### Old Business

#### Tourism Initiatives:

Ms. Andrews initiated a process for an increased focus on tourism in Essex. There will be two strategic planning committees formed. The first is the Tourism Strategic Planning committee. Messrs. Smith, Segar and Croxton and Ms. Andrews will comprise the committee. The first meeting is planned for 9:00 am on Friday January 12, 2024 at the Essex County Historical Museum. Ms. Laura Messer is expected to facilitate two strategic planning sessions with the Committee that will include interested parties from the public and private sectors.

The other committee is the broader Strategic Planning Committee. Messrs. Smith, Holt and Weiss and Ms. Andrews will comprise this committee.

Facade Grant Applications: None pending.

#### Historic Downtown Tappahannock:

Laura Messer will be presenting at the Essex Business Forum in June.

Mr. Sidney reported that Winterfest was a great success and the location in downtown worked out very well.

Mr. Sidney also reported that work has started on Central Park.

EDA Website: No report this month

#### Board of Supervisors:

At its December meeting the Board rejected the Mount Clement project. Also, Ms. April Rounds has been appointed County Administrator.

Chamber of Commerce:

Mr. Croxton reported that the Chamber met in December at 1710 Tavern and attendance was quite good.

Zoning:

Mr. Smith reported on Zoning and indicated that the PUD and Comprehensive Land Use Plan are still the primary efforts of the department at this time. Mr. Smith presented several demographic maps, available on the county website, which will be data used in the planning process. It was suggested that the EDA and the Planning Commission may want to coordinate on the plan and there should be a preliminary plan available mid-year for consideration.

New Business

It was requested that the EDA consider handling the finances for the “Clean Essex” program this year. The parameters of the program preclude the county engaging in the financial process. The EDA has assisted this program previously. There is a remuneration to the EDA for this service based on the amount of funds disbursed to the nonprofits participating. Motion was made for the EDA to assist the Clean Essex program by receiving and issuing funds as required in the program. The motion was seconded and was approved – ayes 6, nays 0.

RE: NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Thursday, February 1, 2024 at 9:00AM.

RE: ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made to adjourn and seconded. All Ayes

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Secretary, David Holt