

**ESSEX COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
March 28, 2024**

The EDA sponsored a meeting on March 28,2024 at the Hampton Inn. The meeting’s purpose was to begin the creation of an Essex County Tourism Action Plan. Participants included business owners ranging from the hospitality industry to retail establishments, interested members of the community, and representatives of local nonprofits.

The meeting convened at 1:00 pm and concluded at 5:00 pm.

Representing the EDA were:

Lisa Andrews - Chair
Bill Croxton
Tim Smith
Skip Weiss
David Holt
Jamie Segar

Ms. Andrews informed the participants that the EDA secretary would be providing minutes of the meeting as required by statute. Ms. Andrews then introduced Ms. Laura Messer of the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) who served as facilitator for the meeting.

Ms. Messer then led the group on a review of tourism in Essex and resources available from the VTC.

Ms. Messer then led a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis process where the group identified items in each category.

Each category had specific questions which participants were asked to answer:

Strengths

- What does Essex County do well in terms of tourism?
- What sets Essex County apart?
- What are the tangible tourism assets? (natural and built)

Weaknesses

- What is Essex County missing? (attractions and services)
- What do nearby localities have that Essex County does not have?
- What are limitations?

Opportunities

- Shat could be improved?

What needs to be developed? (future needs)
How can Essex County grow tourism?

Threats

What issues are there?

What concerns exist?

What could hinder progress?

The answers were compiled, tallied, discussed and compared with information from prior SWOT analyses on flip charts. These flip charts and the data provided from a couple of follow-up questions (Favorite restaurant?; Hidden gem in Essex?), will be reviewed over the next month and a follow-up meeting is scheduled for April 25, 2024 at the Hampton Inn (1:00pm-5:00pm) where Ms. Messer will present the VTC findings. Attendees will be asked to help prioritize short-term actions, initiatives to complete within two years, and goal to accomplish within five years. The meeting will enable the EDA to develop a draft action plan and present it to the Essex County Board of Supervisors..

David Holt - Secretary