



# Accomack-Northampton Economic Development Committee

DRAFT Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, December 9, 2020 2:00 PM  
Virtual Zoom Meeting

## **Members Present**

Robie Marsh, ESVA Chamber of Commerce  
Joseph Betit, Entrepreneur  
Dr. Mark Reiter, Virginia Tech  
Sara Baldwin, Entrepreneur  
Ava Gabrielle-Wise, New Road Community  
Chris Bott, Town of Chincoteague  
Karyn Belknap, Ten Good Sheep  
Phillip Hickman, Dublin Farms  
Dr. Richard Snyder, VIMS  
Evelyn Shotwell, Chincoteague Chamber of  
Commerce  
Dr. Patrick Tompkins, ESCC  
Charles Kolakowski, Northampton County  
Elaine Meil, A-NPDC  
Terry Malarkey, Shore U  
Kerry Kobe, theGIG

## **Members Absent**

Elizabeth Lankford, Blue Crab Bay Co.  
Ira von Ashby-Hope, Accomack EDA  
Hon. Lynwood Lewis, VA General  
Assembly  
Hon. Rob Bloxom, VA General Assembly

Mike Mason, Accomack County  
Michael Hitch, NASA  
Peter J. Bale, Wallops Island Regional Alliance  
Andy Mason, Mason-Davis Realtors  
Jacqueline Chatmon, Citizen  
David Zamorsky, Northampton County

## **Others present**

Shannon Alexander, A-NPDC  
Clara Vaughn, A-NPDC  
J. Estefan Abogabir, A-NPDC  
Caroline Bott, ESRCDC  
Bill Payne, Citizen  
Pat Coady, Citizen  
Mike Tolbert, Town of Chincoteague  
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street  
Kristine Marcy, University of the Eastern Shore  
of Virginia Foundation  
David Bowles, VISA/ODU  
Donna Smith, ESAAA/CAA  
Karen Downing, Many N. Smith  
Mike Tolbert, Town of Chincoteague  
Eyre Baldwin, Pearl Market

1. **Call to Order** – Chairman Marsh called the Economic Development Committee meeting to order at 2:05 PM.
2. **Public Participation** – Marsh provided members of the public the opportunity to comment. None offered to comment.
3. **June Draft Meeting Minutes** – The draft meeting minutes of the June 10, 2020 meeting were presented.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Malarkey, seconded by Meil, and carried unanimously. No discussion followed.

4. **Organizational Business**

- a. **Attendance Record** – The attendance record for the previous year was presented. No discussion followed.
- b. **Member Update**– Chairman Marsh noted that in January the nominating subcommittee, composed of Betit, Kolakowski, and himself, would meet to discuss nominations for the vacant Chincoteague and Accomack private sector seats on the Committee. Alexander noted that during the January meeting of the A-NPDC, Commissioners would designate a representative for both counties. New member, Vice Mayor Bott, appointed by the Town of Chincoteague Council was welcomed.

5. **Staff Update**

1. **Broadband Update** - Alexander presented updated Eastern Shore of Virginia Broadband Authority (ESVBA) figures, with a comparison to the December 2019 figures. She reported 60 miles of Broadband lines have been built of the planned 204 miles, representing significant progress. Malarkey requested a regular report on what percentage of homes eligible for Broadband connection have been connected. Meil presented that [minutes of the ESVBA](#) include an analysis of the number of residents connected. She also presented that the ESVBA has adopted new commercial pricing for small businesses and encouraged members to review new pricing for cost-effectiveness. She also reported ESVBA will host a public meeting on rates Feb. 25, 2021. The meeting will be held via conference call from 2-3 PM.

Reiter inquired if any Committee members were aware of when Spectrum plans to initiate their network across the Eastern Shore. Meil provided this is likely in spring 2021, and Marsh affirmed this is likely to happen in the first quarter of 2021.

2. **Economic Resilience Items** –

- i. **CAWG/HMP/State Resilience Plan Update** - Alexander briefed the committee on upcoming meetings and projects. The Climate Adaptation Working Group

will host a meeting January 12 at 1PM with a focus on identifying projects for the state resilience database. The next meeting of the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan Steering Committee, which is open to the public, is January 19 at 2 PM.

ii. ***Federal Response to COVID-19*** - Alexander shared data from

<https://www.usaspending.gov/disaster/covid-19>.

iii. ***Economic Response & Recovery Efforts***

- Alexander introduced the A-NPDC's new Regional Disaster Economic Recovery Coordinator J. Estefan Abogabir, who presented a summary of the updated [Financial Assistance Resources for the Eastern Shore of Virginia](#). Wise noted that the Commonwealth's Rebuild VA program has exhausted all funds and was closed at the time of the Committee meeting. Abogabir indicated that the resource document would be amended and updated on the website the following week.
- Shotwell presented on Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce efforts over the last several months. She pointed out resources on the COVID 19 Updates and the Economic Development pages at <https://www.chincoteaguechamber.com/>. She reported the Chincoteague Chamber has distributed 6 press releases related to economic recovery and visitor attraction. Blogs and itineraries are also being incorporated into outreach efforts. The Chamber plans to focus on revitalizing its business resources, economic development and COVID-19 recovery webpage in the near future. Visitors to the Town of Chincoteague increased in September, October and November, she reported. The Chamber is currently drafting its 2021 Visitors Guide.
- Marsh presented on Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce efforts over the last several months. He shared recent weekly publications and resources available at <https://www.esvachamber.org/covid19-resources>. He noted the Chamber was able to hold three of its regular events, including the annual Le Tour De Shore Bike Ride and golf tournament.

iv. ***Economic Development-Related A-NPDC Projects*** - Alexander presented projects the A-NPDC is managing related to initiatives in the *Eastern Shore of Virginia Regional Economic Development Plan*, as listed below. If any committee members wish to receive updates on the projects, she requested they contact her by email or inquire directly during Committee meetings:

- [USDA Wachapreague Hotel Market Study](#)
- [VDOT Eastern Shore Rail to Trail Feasibility Study](#)
- DHCD CDBG Downtown Revitalization, Parksley – bandshell and alleyway bids due December 10
- VHDA Chincoteague Historic Fire House Redevelopment – Community Impact Market Analysis
- Virginia Port Authority Waterway Maintenance Fund dredging and beneficial use projects

- Ecotourism-related efforts including the [VirginiaWaterTrails.org](http://VirginiaWaterTrails.org) website, [Explore Our Seaside partner](#), [Virginia Ecotour Guide Course](#) facilitation and management, business resiliency training events, inventorying Virginia Water Trails access points and prioritizing those in need of signage, and more

v. ***Member and Partner Updates***

- The GIG - Kobe and Betit presented data and findings from their report to GO Virginia/DHCD and shared changes to programs they have pursued in order to meet operational changes from recent pandemic regulations and changing demands from clients during this time.

Kobe updated that The GIG held its grand opening before closing between March-May 2020 due to COVID-19. She reported that, in response to COVID-19, grant managers distributed surveys and conducted interviews of current members of The GIG regarding the need for co-working space and unique challenges to include in reporting. The approximately 50-page report to DHCD includes the following findings:

- a. The largest percentage of users of The GIG came to the co-working space due to the need for high-speed Internet.
- b. The GIG has 7-8 monthly, full-time members currently, which utilizes almost all available space. The survey identified a need for additional space at the facility.
- c. The need for privacy and private offices has increased with increasing remote work in response to COVID-19.
- d. The number of remote-work startups is increasing.
- e. There is a need for more safe spaces to gather, including dining options, in close proximity to The GIG.
- f. Parents are interested in using The GIG during school hours.
- g. Respondents reported a need for interaction with others.

Betit presented that The GIG provides a model for similar co-working spaces in other rural regions of Virginia, especially as many other GO Virginia projects were forced to shut down due to COVID-19.

- Eastern Shore Community College Workforce Development - Dr. Tompkins presented that he and partners are working on an alternative activity based on the cancelled May workforce summit. He also presented programs currently underway at ESCC, as listed below. He noted that over 40 programs have been requested at the campus, however, this is not possible due to the College's capacity and insufficient number of students to fill all simultaneously. Administration is looking at prioritizing these requests in response, he reported.

A. Workforce education funding streams

- a. [REV - Re-employing Virginia](#) - Tompkins reported funding was provided and required to be spent within about four weeks. He

noted a demand in the labor market for education and training, but that criteria, abbreviated timelines attached to funding opportunities, and potential learners' lack of awareness of or clarity on the programs present barriers in utilizing funding for workforce training.

- b. GEER (formerly G3)
- c. [Virginia Ready](#)

- B. [Dental Assistant Program](#) - Tompkins reported the Community College hosted its first program recently.
- C. Medical Scribe Program - Tompkins reported the Community College hosted its first program recently.
- D. RSVP Grant to provide integrated education and training through GED, a healthcare fundamentals class, and a nurse aide program
- E. ESL - Tompkins reported this program was over-subscribed for fall.
- F. [CDL](#) - Tompkins reported demand remains strong.
- G. [UMS](#) – ESCC is working with partners at Wallops and associated organizations to develop a program in unmanned systems
- H. WIND – ESCC is partnering with Hampton Roads community colleges and the Hampton Roads Workforce Council to identify and meet education needs for offshore wind
- I. Chamber survey – Tompkins reported that the ESVA Chamber of Commerce's survey of employers provided useful information on programs and skills needed for the Shore, such as hospitality and customer service
- J. Tourism summit – ESCC is partnering with the chamber and A-NPDC to identify specific education needs for this sector
- K. Trades – ESCC is seeks to start or expand programs in welding, automotive, and EMS
- L. ESCC serves as testing center for EMS

IT programs are forthcoming, Tompkins said. ESCC is exploring potential partnerships with Broadwater Academy and Northampton County Public Schools for its welding program, similar to the existing partnership between the College and Accomack County Public Schools for automotive certifications.

- [Virginia Institute of Marine Science](#) - Dr. Snyder reported that VIMS has been closed to the public due to COVID-19, halting its normal summer internship and other annual programs. The institution's ecological restoration reports on seagrass restoration and Bay scallops have been published in internationally recognized journals. Snyder offered to provide copies of these reports to Committee members by request and may be reached at [rsnyder@vims.edu](mailto:rsnyder@vims.edu).

Rebuilding of the VIMS Eastern Shore Laboratory is beginning and

construction is due to be completed by May 2022, Snyder updated. Only two buildings on campus will remain, with four buildings to be replaced and two additional buildings to be constructed. The project should improve VIMS's ability to attract researchers, students and others to its Eastern Shore laboratory.

- Southeast Crescent Regional Commission - Gabrielle-Wise presented progress with Congress, the incoming Biden transition team, and other supporters for the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission. She provided an update on her prior discussion of Federal Regional Commissions, which play a significant role in economic development. Research has shown that counties located within the Appalachian Regional Commission have a faster rate of economic growth than counties directly outside of the Commission, she noted. Support can be acknowledged and more can be learned at <https://scrcc.org/>. There was also an article over the summer featuring Wise and Meil, which can be found [here](#) and an NPR feature with audio, which can be found [here](#).

Due to time constraints, additional updates were not presented. Alexander planned to contact Members prior to the next Committee Meeting to gather brief, written updates from those who wish to provide them to be included in the meeting packet.

### 3. **Regional Economic Development Plan**

#### *i. Overview of Updates to Regional Action Plans*

1. Alexander presented that advances continue on most priority projects, as formally adopted by the Committee in December 2019, though progress has changed shape in some cases due to the unanticipated impacts of COVID-19. No major updates were presented for the Aerospace & Defense Subcommittee plan.

Eyre Baldwin provided a brief update on Pearl Market since its opening in Northampton County this year, as it relates to several goals in the [Agribusiness and Food Processing Regional Action Plan](#). He reported that, by next spring, the market is likely to have five full-time vendors, with additional pop-up vendors. The goal next year is to be open at least three days a week. Visitors are roughly one-third Hampton Roads residents, 12-15 percent highway travelers, and the remainder local, he said. In the summer, 40 percent are visitors to Northampton County. 535 people attend the most recent Saturday market Baldwin noted. The market has worked out configuration of vendors as it relates to heating, refrigeration, and other needs involved in the sale of food and value-added items. He invited Committee members to visit for an educational session or to contact him to learn more. Alexander planned to contact him to arrange a visit for interested Committee members.

Belknap inquired if a retail component is planned, which Baldwin confirmed, adding that pop-ups and innovative products will remain a large component of the business model.

**ii. Update on the Economic Development Plan Industry Sector 2020 Priorities**

1. Alexander presented the 2020 Priorities, as formally adopted by the Committee in December 2019. Marsh noted it may be beneficial to carry the same goals over to 2021, in light of unanticipated delays in progress due to COVID-19. There was a consensus among Members to carry the 2020 Priorities forward for 2021, with the addition of “*Project C. Pursuing [Future Farmers of America](#) programs for the Eastern Shore*” to the Agribusiness & Food Processing industry sector priority list.

**iii. Economic Development Plan Strategic Update** - Alexander presented that during CY2021 a contractor will be engaged to strategically update the Regional Economic Development Plan. A Request for Proposals for updating the Plan is to be published in January. She requested a Proposal Review Subcommittee be established to review and score all received proposals in February. Members Gabrielle-Wise and Betit volunteered to serve. Vice Chair Baldwin volunteered to serve if none of the Members not present wish to serve. Alexander planned to distribute an email to all Committee members to see if any who were not present at the Meeting would like to serve on the review subcommittee. She planned to send an update in early 2021.

6. **Next Meeting** – The next Economic Development Committee meeting will be Wednesday, June 9, 2021 at 2:00 PM. The Committee will be engaged prior to that time during meetings to update the Economic Development Plan. A reminder will be sent ahead of the meeting.
7. **Adjourn** – Chairman Marsh adjourned the meeting at 4:11 PM.