

NORTHERN NECK TOURISM COMMISSION

Northern Neck Tourism Plan

DRAFT APPROVED BY NORTHERN NECK TOURISM COMMISSION 12/17/10

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Acknowledgments

The following Tourism Strategic Plan was facilitated by Sandra Tanner from the Virginia Tourism Corporation and is the result of in-depth discussions and consideration by the following representatives, business owners, organization leaders, and stakeholders the Northern Neck Tourism Commission, all of which demonstrated a passion for positive impact on the Northern Neck's economy and quality of life through tourism:

Lisette Raymond	ilraymon@verizon.net
George Beckett	gbeckett@nnht.com
Gene Edmonds	captaingene@verizon.net
Sue/Ivan Hertzler	runninn@oonl.com
Linda Morris	fmorris@nnwifi.com
Camille Bennett	cbennett@christchurch1735.org
Chip Jones	charles.jones@bankatunion.com
Karen Hart	karen@mbwm.org
Katrina Lawrimore	director@rfmuseum.org
Catherine Petrie	catherine@heritagepark.com
Susan Cockrell	susancockrell@kilmarnockva.com
David Mower	dmower@northernneck.com
Edie Jett	info@lancasterva.com
Natalie Fallon	info@northernneckgourmet.com
Steve Madey	smadey@thehaguewinery.com
Lucy Lawliss	lucy_lawliss@nps.gov
Kathryn Murray	kam129@aol.com
Steve Walker	s716william@earthlink.net
Annette Bareford	Annette.Bareford@dcr.virginia.gov
Dick Saxer	rpsecdev@kaballero.com
Thomas Wolf	thomasw966@aol.com
Rusty Bragg	rbragg@rappahannock.edu
Jason Perry	jperry@rappahannock.edu
Paul Reber	
Jerry Davis	
Lisa Hull	

Sandra Tanner, Tourism Development Specialist with the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) facilitated the strategic planning process and drafted this document with the assistance and input of the previously listed stakeholders. Sandra will continue to assist our community as we move forward with the implementation of this plan.

Special recognition to Jerry Davis, Lisa Hull, and the Members of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission for their support and encouragement to develop this strategic plan.

Background

Past Tourism Efforts

Over a decade ago, the counties of the Northern Neck formed a non-profit organization to promote tourism. In 2009, inadequate funding and the need for greater public oversight forced the dissolution of the non-profit. Continued community and public interest in tourism as a vehicle for regional economic development resulted in the formation of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission (NNTC) under the auspices of the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Region Partnership, a public-private partnership established by the Northern Neck Planning District Commission. Industries associated with increased tourism are compatible with the Partnership's goal of fostering sustainable, environmentally-low impact economic growth across several sectors of the Northern Neck economy.

The NNTC consists of 12 members, appointed by the counties, with a Chair and Vice-Chair, and strives to be representative of the counties and stakeholders in the tourism industry. The Commission members include: three county administrators, one national monument superintendent, one town employee, one county supervisor, one retired citizen, one winery owner, three private museum/house museum directors, and one tour business owner. The Chairman of the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Region Partnership and the Executive Director of the Northern Neck Planning District Commission are present at all the meetings of the NNTC.

The localities of both the Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Region Partnership and Northern Neck Tourism Commission are comprised of the four counties and six towns of the Northern Neck:

- Lancaster County
- Northumberland County
- Richmond County
- Westmoreland County
- Town of Colonial Beach
- Town of Irvington
- Town of Kilmarnock
- Town of Montross
- Town of Warsaw
- Town of White Stone

To inform the Northern Neck community and prospective tourists that the organization was in operation, in 2010, the NNTC revitalized its website, retaining its long-established domain of northernneck.org, and published 107,994 copies of The Official Guide of Virginia's Northern Neck. The marketing efforts of the NNTC in 2010 have been focused on the promotion of the website and wide distribution of the visitor's guide through Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC)

Welcome Centers, local convention and visitors bureaus throughout the Commonwealth, through local organizations and upon request.

Concurrent with the establishment of the new tourism effort was the passage of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, which includes the Northern Neck Heritage Area Study Bill legislation and directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the suitability and feasibility of establishing a Northern Neck National Heritage Area. In 2010, National Park Service representatives have been working with the NNTC in holding public meetings to determine if the Northern Neck meets the criteria to attain the designation of a National Heritage Area.

With the confluence of the National Heritage Area Study and the reconfigured NNTC, the need emerged for a current strategic plan to guide the efforts of the NNTC. In examining the necessity of a strategic tourism plan, the NNTC researched the communities' current revenues associated with tourism and the economic impact. The analysis included the industries directly benefiting from tourism - retail and accommodations. It is noted that tourists spend money at a range of local services from restaurants and gas stations to boutiques, hotels, and bed and breakfasts. Increasing tourist activity does not just benefit the local businesses, but it also helps boost a local jurisdiction's revenue stream through a lodging tax, meals tax, and the county's standard portion of the state sales tax. Below, in Table 1, are the Northern Neck's localities' tax rates as they relate to tourism income as of 2010.

Northern Neck Tax Rates (Table 1)

Locality	Lodging	Meals	Sales
Lancaster County	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Town of Kilmarnock	8.0%	5.0%	
Town of White Stone	0.0%	0.0%	
Town of Irvington	2.0%	0.0%	
Northumberland County	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Richmond County	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Town of Warsaw	2.0%	4.0%	
Westmoreland County	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Town of Colonial Beach	4.0%	4.0%	
Town of Montross	0.0%	0.0%	

The Town of Warsaw's revenue from the lodging tax in 2009 was \$10,799 and the meals tax generated was \$236,159. In 2009, the lodging tax generated \$103,379 in the Town of Kilmarnock; the meals tax generated \$548,520 in revenue in the same year. The lodging tax generated in Colonial Beach for 2009 totaled \$37,047; the meals tax generated \$250,000. The

Town of Irvington's meals tax generated \$54,089 in 2009. These are significant revenue streams for these towns.

Wirt Confroy and Steven Burkarth with Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) met with the Northern Neck Tourism Commission to discuss VTC services and to introduce VTC services in early 2009. On November 10, 2009, Sandra Tanner met with Lisa Hull, Northern Neck PDC, to discuss VTC services such as Tourism Assessment Planning and Agritourism workshops. The Agritourism workshop was scheduled for March 2010. On January 22, 2010, Sandra Tanner, met with the Northern Neck Tourism Commission Board of Directors for a mini planning session to "Rev it Up"; at the conclusion of the 2-hour session the Board decided to move forward with a bigger Tourism Assessment Planning session.

Development of this Plan

On January 22, 2010, by request of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission and the Northern Neck PDC, Sandra Tanner met with the board, for a mini-planning session to help with marketing the Northern Neck Region. As a result of that discussion, the Northern Neck Tourism Commission formally requested assistance from the Virginia Tourism Corporation with developing its first tourism strategic plan. Strategic planning sessions were held on May 13 and 20, 2010, at the Northern Neck Electric Coop and Rappahannock Community College, Warsaw Virginia, with community and tourism stakeholders attending. The content of the following plan was determined through facilitated discussion with input from the previously listed stakeholders during the planning sessions. Discussions were lively and informative throughout the planning sessions. Attendees were pleased with the information gathered and were happy to be invited to be part of the process by the Board of Directors of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission.

Situational Analysis

As an important aspect of the planning process, the stakeholders group conducted a Situational Analysis of tourism to help determine the goals and objectives of this plan. The process included the identification of tourism assets existing in the community and targeted customers who could enjoy those assets. The process then included the traditional examination of the community's infrastructure analysis, Business gaps that support tourism, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Tourism Mission & Vision

In order to convey clearly and concisely the direction of the tourism plan and its goals and objectives, the following Mission and Vision Statements were drafted by plan participants.

Mission Statement

The Tourism Mission Statement for Northern Neck Tourism Commission is: to facilitate and promote tourism by capitalizing on our natural, historical, cultural, recreational resources, and increasing lodging and dining opportunities in a way that enhances the local community and visitor experiences.

Vision Statement

The Tourism Vision Statement for Northern Neck Tourism Commission is: The Northern Neck of Virginia is a nationally recognized tourist destination.

Planning & Visioning

Tourism Goals, Objectives, Measures, Targets, & Initiatives/Tasks

Following are the identified tourism strategic plan goals, objectives, and related implementation measures, targets, and initiatives/tasks, as identified by the stakeholders group. Utilization of the identified measures and targets, and completion of the listed initiatives and tasks, will result in significant progress toward each tourism goal and objective.

The overall goal of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission is to develop strategies and opportunities for increased economic impact through regional tourism development. Below is a list of strategies to meet that goal:

Goal 1

Create Tourism-Friendly Culture in Northern Neck to enhance the visitor experience to the region

Objective 1.1 Educate Businesses and local Community their role in Tourism

Measure 1.1 Education-Tourism Benefits

Target 1.1 April 2011/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 1.1

1. Create 10-slide PowerPoint for presentation to business organizations, chambers, rotary, etc.
2. Develop Speakers Bureau to educate local businesses on their role in regional tourism and economic benefits of tourism
3. Develop campaign to educate local citizens on the tourism assets in the area could include local Tourism days at attractions, etc.

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Objective 1.2 Workforce Development

Measure 1.2 educated workforce for tourism development

Target 1.2 Spring/ September 2011

Initiatives & Tasks 1.2

1. Sponsor VTC Hospitality Training Sessions and work toward "Train the Trainer" program.
2. Work with Local Community College, Tech Center and school systems to develop Hospitality training certification program

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Objective 1.3 Education-Local leaders

Measure 1.3 Education of Local leaders-Economic Benefit

Target 1.3 2011/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 1.3

1. Commission will regularly communicate with local boards/councils
2. Commission will develop a tracking system to better validate Tourism economic benefits

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Goal 2

To Improve, Enhance, and Promote Quality of Life

Objective 2.1 Develop a plan to increase tourism and economic benefit for the Northern Neck without losing our small town charm, open spaces, and values

Measure 2.1 Enhance Current Tourism assets and develop new product

Target 2.1 January 2011/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 2.1

1. The Northern Neck Tourism Commission will support and advocate local tourism efforts throughout the Northern Neck.
2. Commission will set up subcommittees from members and local resources to aid in product development
3. Hold community meetings to gain support for enhancement of quality of life through tourism development-speakers bureau can help with this

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Objective 2.2 Address Infrastructure needs to enhance tourism

Measure 2.2 Develop tourism infrastructure plan

Target 2.2 2011/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 2.2

1. Work with local community litter control and organizations for beautification and cleaning up the area.
2. Work with localities and state to address signage issues
3. Work to overcome ADA compliance issues
4. Work with localities and state resources to develop water access points and bike plan for region
5. Support continued efforts to improve the physical and technological infrastructure of the Northern Neck, including roads, ferries, public transit and broadband.

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Goal 3

Create Financial Support for Tourism Initiatives

Objective 3.1 **Secure Dedicated funding source for Northern Neck Tourism Commission and Tourism Development for the area**

Measure 3.1 **Sustainability of Commission and Northern Neck Tourism growth and development**

Target 3.1 **2010/Ongoing**

Initiatives & Tasks 3.1

- 1) Commission will develop a plan and a membership package to increase membership and member benefits
- 2) Explore Grant Opportunities and funding from other sources
- 3) Leverage marketing and development funds regionally
- 4) Explore fundraising ideas-Example: Sale of Northern Neck Merchandise
- 5) Angel Investors

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Goal 4

Improve Marketing Efforts

Objective 4.1 **Develop a realistic marketing plan**

Measure 4.1 **Completion and implementation of a marketing plan**

Target 4.1 **January 2011/Ongoing**

Initiatives & Tasks 4.1

1. Develop an comprehensive Marketing Plan
2. Work with Marketing firm to develop a Brand for the Northern Neck Region
3. Develop PR Campaign to get message to community and leaders-better utilize Social Media/Marketing
4. Develop funding/advertising opportunities and incentives for development/printing of brochures/websites

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Goal 5

The Commission will create a cohesive strategy/effort for marketing the Northern Neck as a tourism destination

Objective 5.1 Education of Northern Neck Tourism Commission Contributors

Measure 5.1 Better Communication between Contributors/Commission

Target 5.1 2010/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 5.1

Commission will develop a better communication strategy to benefit the contributors

1. Develop Newsletter, Social Media and other communication efforts to keep members apprised of tourism happenings, benefits, partnering and grant opportunities.
2. The Commission will plan to hold more meetings with Contributors to help them maximize their tourism potential
3. The Commission will work with local, regional, and state resources to sponsor workshops to help contributors maximize their tourism potential as part of their contributorship benefit package

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Objective 5.2 Create a Central Management Entity for Northern Neck Tourism

Measure 5.2 Cohesive Managed Tourism Effort

Target 5.2 2011/Ongoing

Initiatives & Tasks 5.2

1. Tourism Commission will work with local PDC to make it a central marketing clearing house for resources, information
2. Commission will explore and investigate funding options to hire a full time Tourism coordinator/staff to help move tourism efforts forward
3. The Commission will continue efforts to establish the Northern Neck PDC/Tourism Commission as the Management Entity for the proposed National Heritage Area

Responsible: Northern Neck Tourism Commission

Conclusion

Representatives of the Northern Neck area recognize the significance of tourism through its economic impact and related contributions to the quality of life for the citizens in the city, towns, and county. The significant steps taken by those representatives and milestones met prior to the development of this first tourism strategic plan serve as evidence of that recognition. This plan is intended to build upon those accomplishments and to help create a sustainable tourism program.

Local government support and stakeholder participation is required for this plan to be implemented and successful. The Board of Directors of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission will take a leadership role in overseeing implementation. However, future assistance and input from various members of the Northern Neck Tourism Commission, tourism organizations, businesses, civic groups, and other interested citizens, will also be extremely vital.

The targets and measures of this plan were determined during the planning process and will serve as references for evaluation. To encourage progress toward the established targets, this plan should be reviewed by the NN Tourism Commission on a monthly basis (from the date of formal adoption of this plan). Upon each review, any adjustments that need to be made to this plan can be discussed. Once a majority of the targets have been met, a new or updated plan will be developed.

Using this plan as guidance, the Northern Neck Tourism Commission, and the towns within, are expected to make significant progress toward the development and promotion of tourism. It is imperative that the plan be referenced consistently as any new tourism related discussions occur and as all related decisions are made. While new ideas and recommendations should be considered in the future, officials should reference this plan and determine if implementing any new ideas and recommendations is feasible and in accordance with this plan. This document will also serve as a reference piece for tourism entrepreneurs and businesses that are considering locating within the city or county, and should be available for distribution at local economic development offices and other appropriate distribution sites.

