



TALBOT COUNTY GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

215 Bay Street, Suite #5 | EASTON, MARYLAND 21601 | (P) 410-770-8058 (F) 410-770-8059

Talbot County Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes from December 6, 2018

Members Present: Chairman Al Silverstein, Vice Chairwoman Jackie Wilson, Ron Engle, Peter Dunbar, Cassandra Vanhooser, Reza Jafari, Micah Risher, Ted Bautz, Jean Weisman, Scott Beatty, Andrea Lev, Walter Chase

Members Absent: Margaret Enloe, Terenda Thomas, Shannon Dill, Tim Jones, Craig Wanner, Gerald O'Mara, Andy Hollis,

Department of Economic Development Staff Present: Sam Shoge, Kathy Megahan

Attendees: Dana Newman, Scott Warner, Nancy LaJoice, Susie Hayward, Kelly Simonsen, Hugh Grunden

Call to Order: Al Silverstein called the meeting to order with a quorum at 8:04 a.m.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the November 1, 2018 meeting were presented. Mr. Jafari moved the minutes be accepted as written. Mr. Bautz seconded the motion, which passed by a unanimous vote.

Guest Speaker Series, Talbot County Free Library: Hugh Grunden, President and CEO, Easton Utilities

Mr. Grunden opened his presentation with a brief overview of Easton Utilities. They are Maryland's first municipally owned public utility, founded in 1914. They are made up of seven business units: Electric, Natural Gas, Water, Wastewater, Cable Television, Internet, and IT Professional Services.

Mr. Grunden stated the three major areas that customers look for are reliability, price, and customer service. Underlying these are Easton Utilities people, their infrastructure, and their involvement in the community.

Good people are the first key factor. Attracting high quality, high performing people to this area can be challenging, he stated. People are a resource that is hard to replace. Mr. Grunden stated, in the development of their employees they focus on three words, integrity, commitment, and excellence. He feels it is important to develop leaders from within. They do this through programs they offer their employees such as leadership development for managers and



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supervisors, an emerging leaders program, mentoring program, ambassador program, and internship program. Next, he discussed infrastructure. They are a facilities-based business therefore they spend a lot of capital on infrastructure. This is where customers look for reliability. Each department has reliability metrics. Thirdly is community involvement and how they fit into the community and what does Easton Utilities provide the community and how do they enhance the quality of life in the community. He pointed out a long list of organization they participate with. Mr. Grunden said every year they do a proforma to compare their cost against other providers with an annual customer savings of about \$7,500,000 in discretionary dollars.

He went on to talk about the Electric Department, of which they are one of five municipal electric utilities in the state of Maryland. They have 2 power plants, approximately 54 sq. miles electric service territory, and have over 10,000 customers. They are Maryland's only municipal gas utility and serve over 4,000 customers. They have a state of the art ENR Wastewater treatment Facility and 6 major pumping stations. Easton Velocity provides internet, cable TV, and digital voice, with 3,000 miles of fiber optics, over 200 digital channels and the lowest rates in the region. They offer an IT Professional Services business that offers customized software solutions both locally and nationally.

Finally, Mr. Grunden discussed three challenges, first is getting high-speed wireless internet to more customers. Most people now get all their content via the internet. The second challenge is to continue to bring clean energy to the community. Utilities are required to get a certain amount of energy from green sources so Easton Utilities developed Easton Sustainability Campus to continue moving toward resource conservation and protecting the environment. The third challenge is to expand high-speed broadband to all areas in the county.

Director's Report: Cassandra Vanhooser

Ms. Vanhooser distributed the tourism numbers for 2017. She stated these numbers are the most recent and best metric to judge how the county is performing in the tourism industry. These numbers are part of a state wide impact study that we participate in. The numbers show tourism revenue down in the county by about 1.6 percent as of 2017. Some of this is due to Harbortowne Resort being closed for renovations. Total industry sales for Talbot County were \$206 million, which was down about 3 percent. The report showed there are approximately 1,981 jobs in the county directly related to tourism.

Chairman's Report: Al Silverstein

Mr. Silverstein thanked the members for the opportunity to chair the committee this past year. He reported Jackie Wilson will be the new chair for 2019.



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County Council Report: No report

Department of Commerce Report: Nancy LaJoice

Ms. LaJoice reported Qlarant, a non-profit located in Easton was awarded one of the “Top Workplaces” by The Baltimore Sun for the second year in a row. She also reported Dart Containers is hiring 125 new employees and partnering with Bay Runner Shuttle, who is launching a pilot program to provide employees with transportation to Dart.

Member Updates:

Peter Dunbar – Town of Oxford has received \$75,000.00 to help stabilize the MEWS

Dana Newman – asked members to take note of the artwork around the room from a Plein Air group and is available for sale with 25% of the sale going to the library. The library has received a five thousand dollar grant from “Choose Civility Initiative.” The book sale at the St. Michaels Library will begin Saturday, December 8 at 9:00 a.m.

Reza Jafari – The Work Force Development Task Force has had its second meeting and they will meet again in January. This is a partnership between the Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Economic Development. Mr. Jafari stated two areas the Task Force is focusing on are training of the work force and transportation.

Ted Bautz – Mr. Bautz reported on an uptick in interest in Talbot County and Easton from the business relocation standpoint.

Adjournment: With business concluded Mr. Engle moved to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Mr. Jafari. The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 a.m.

Next meeting will be Thursday, February 7 (no January meeting) at 8:00 a.m. at 100 W. Dover Street (TCFL)