

Economic Development Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 3, 2020
Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairperson, Jackie Wilson called the meeting to order at approximately 8 a.m.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Shannon Dill, Ron Engle, Andy Hollis, Reza Jafari, Tina Jones, Sandi Pepe, Micah Risher, Donna Saathoff, Cassandra Vanhooser, Jean Weisman, Jackie Wilson

Board Members Absent: Walter Chase, Chuck Callahan, Margaret Enloe, Al Silverstein, Terenda Thomas, Craig Wanner

Staff Present: Pam Keeton and Candace Harris.

Guests: Kimberly Kratovil, Melissa Kelly, Merry Mears, Susie Hayward, Nancy LaJoice

III. Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the July 2, 2020, meeting were presented. Tina Jones moved the minutes be accepted as written. Jean Weisman seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

IV. County Council Report: Andy Hollis filled in for Chuck Callahan who received an urgent call from a client and unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Hollis reported that the second round of Talbot CARES Small Business Grants opened, the airport tree removal will begin shortly, and Kristin Greenaway will be briefing the County Council about the economic impact of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum during the Council's next meeting on September 8. The meeting will be fully virtual. Jackie Wilson asked if the Council reversed the prohibition on serving at bars, and Mr. Hollis confirmed that it did.

V. Chairman's Report: Jackie Wilson gave a brief summary of the results of the Talbot CARES Small Business Grant Program and thanked the staff for the work they put into administering the program. She stated that she believes it is making a positive impact in the community.

VI. Director's Report

Ms. Vanhooser reported on the results of round one of the Talbot CARES Small Business Grant program. A total of 108 applications were received, 90 were approved, four were withdrawn, eight did not qualify, and six are under review. A total of \$849,957 has been awarded to date. She stated that the grants went to a variety of business types, though

there were many in the hospitality and services industries. She also gave a breakdown of the applications by town: Easton, 69; St. Michaels, 19; Oxford, 7; Trappe, 4. A total of nine came from unincorporated portions of the county, including Cordova, Royal Oak, Sherwood, and Tilghman Island.

Ms. Vanhooser also expressed her sincere thanks to the EDC members on the grants task force, including Jackie Wilson, Ron Engle, Sandi Pepe, Jean Weisman, and Walter Chase. Ms. Vanhooser thanked her staff for all their hard work on the grant applications. She also mentioned that Rich Loeffler from the Small Business Development Center has been a great partner in the program, and that a new consultant, Greg Bartoo, has joined the local office.

Ms. Vanhooser briefed the Commission on two major events this month: the USDA Grant award ceremony with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and the unveiling of outdoor exhibits at the Frederick Douglas Park on the Tuckahoe and launch of International Underground Railroad Month on September 1.

Ms. Vanhooser also covered upcoming initiatives, including round two of the Talbot CARES Small Business Grant, activities in marketing and communications, and work surrounding COVID-19.

Ms. Vanhooser then briefed the Commission on the Economic Recovery Project being led by the Mid-Shore Regional Council with a grant from the Economic Development Administration. This is a two-year project that she believes will enhance the county's business retention strategy.

Pam Keeton, Content Marketing and Events Coordinator for the Department of Economic Development and Tourism then briefed the Commission on information and social media activities, especially around COVID-19.

Mr. Jafari thanked the staff for their work and asked for more information about the Recovery Project. Ms. Vanhooser responded that the department's role is to help develop products that will enhance the region's resiliency during emergencies and to gather data. She asked Scott Warner of the Mid-Shore Regional Council to provide additional information.

Mr. Warner explained that the Project is being carried out in partnership with a number of other mid-, lower- and upper-shore groups. The \$400,000 grant will allow the group to develop a resiliency plan and tools for businesses to help them recover from COVID-19.

Mr. Jafari asked how the project will be communicated to the community. Mr. Warner explained that it must be completed within 24 months, and the tools will be rolled out as they develop.

VII. Maryland Department of Commerce: Nancy LaJoice reported that 70 Talbot

County businesses received \$10,000 grants from the department, and additional applications are being processed. She has been providing daily updates since the pandemic began, has pared them down to three a week, and hopes to phase out her reports by the end of the year. Finally, Ms. LaJoice stated that not many applications were received for the Maryland Nonprofit Recovery Initiative (NORI) grant for 501(c)6 organizations, which closed September 1.

VIII. Town Reports

Ron Engle from the Town of Easton gave a short update on efforts to increase business in the Town – namely, closing or partially closing streets to allow businesses to expand. The Easton Economic Development Corporation held a focus session with approximately 70 people and the Town is exploring options to make the Town more pedestrian friendly.

Sandi Pepe of Oxford reported the most businesses are open, residential real estate sales are up, and the town received a grant to study sea level rise.

IX. Comments from Board Members: Micah Risher reported that the airport won a \$1.6 million grant to improve the runways. The first phase will be removal of trees. He also thanked Sen. Van Hollin for writing a letter to the Federal Aviation Administration in support of the grant.

X. Other Comments: Ms. Kratovil and Ms. Kelly expressed pride over the joint work of the counties to win grants and address the needs of businesses during this difficult time.

XI. Adjournment: Jackie Wilson adjourned the meeting. The next meeting will be held on October 1, 2020, at 8 a.m.