

Joint Meeting
Talbot County Economic Development Commission
Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 6, 2021
8 a.m.
Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Reza Jafari called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

Roll Call

EDC Members Present: Ted Bautz, Chuck Callahan, Cliff Coppersmith, Shannon Dill, Ron Engle, Margaret Enloe, Reza Jafari, Amy Kreiner, Dana Newman, Sandi Pepe, Terenda Thomas, Cassandra Vanhooser, Debbie Walsworth, Jean Weisman, and Jackie Wilson
Jackie Wilson

Members Absent: Walter Chase, Micah Risher, Donna Saathoff, Clay Stamp, and Craig Wanner

Tourism Board Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Angela Eade, Ron Engle, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Michael Hoffmann, Amy Kreiner, Laura Price, Mark Salter, and Jeff Schneider

Members Absent: Kelley Cox, Harold Klinger, and Kimberly Weller

Staff: Pam Keeton

Guests: Abby Green, Susie Hayward, Melissa Kelly, Nancy LaJoice, Cristy Morrell, Tracy Ward, and Scott Warner

II. Welcome from the EDC Chairman.

III. Director's Report: Cassandra Vanhooser reported on the successful Business Appreciation Summit. Dr. Connie Reimers-Hild, the featured speaker, was a hit. She reported that a new grant for businesses that do not collect sales and use tax will be available from the Maryland Department of Commerce soon. She also announced the death of Tourism Board member Kelley Cox and asked for a moment of silence.

III. Presentation – Talbot County Tourism Board Members: Board Chairman Judy Bixler kicked-off the presentation by announcing that May 2-8 is National Travel and Tourism Week. She explained that tourists are defined as visitors coming from more than 50 miles. In 2019, tourism in Talbot County generated \$222.9 million in sales and \$54.25 million in tax receipts. If not for tourism, Maryland residents would have to pay \$1,175 more in taxes. Tourism also provided jobs for 150,000 people in Maryland and 2,775 in Talbot County.

Jessica Bellis presented information about how the Avalon Foundation is contributing to the economy by creating shared experiences for residents as well as visitors. Fifty-percent of attendees to Avalon events come from 216 area codes, and 50% from outside. She used Plein Air Easton Arts Festival and Competition as an example of “place making” in tourism. The festival draws people from across the U.S. because it connects place, art, and culture. Bellis also talked about the county’s agricultural art collection which was developed in partnership with Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism and the Talbot County Extension Office and will be on display for the first time during Plein Air.

Mark Salter briefed the groups about the growth of the culinary industry during his time in Talbot County and reported that staffing has been a huge challenge for the culinary and hospitality industries. He added that the grants and loans provided by the county, state, and federal government have kept businesses alive.

Michael Hoffmann further addressed the shortage of workers in the hospitality industry. He told the group about a monetary incentive program at the Inn at Perry Cabin for employees refer new employees; both get a bonus if the new employee stays for at least 90 days. Hoffmann noted that despite the pandemic, accommodations taxes collections are comparable to 2019.

Laura Price, who is the county’s liaison to the Maryland Association of Counties, addressed the rise in unemployment tax rates and encouraged everyone to write to elected officials as well as candidates to stop that from happening.

- V. Questions and Answers:** Many ideas to bring both workers and tourists to Talbot County were discussed, including making people aware of the opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industries, investing in marketing, partnerships with colleges and universities, creating more affordable housing, and improving pay and working conditions for hospitality workers.

The proposed reduction of the advertising budget in St. Michaels was also discussed. Several members cautioned against cutting marketing budgets, especially during the COVID-19 economic recovery.

- VI. Next EDC meeting:** June 3 at 8 a.m.
- VII. Next Tourism Board meeting:** September 8 at 8:30 a.m.
- VIII. Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 9:18 a.m.