

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 4, 2021

8 a.m.

Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Reza Jafari called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

Roll Call

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Chuck Callahan, Dr. Clifford Coppersmith, Shannon Dill, Ron Engle, Margaret Enloe-North, Reza Jafari, Jimmy Jaramillo, Ken Kozel, Amy Kreiner, Clay Stamp, Cassandra Vanhooser, Jackie Wilson

Members Absent: Walter Chase, Jeff Rhodes, Micah Risher, Donna Saathoff, Terenda Thomas, Craig Wanner, Debbie Walsworth

Staff Present: Krista Boothby

Guests: Abby Graves, Susie Hayward, Melissa Kelly, Kimberly Kratovil, Nancy LaJoice, Cristy Morrell, Dana Newman, Tracy Ward, Scott Warner

II. Guest Speaker

The November meeting did not feature a guest speaker.

III. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the October 7, 2021, meeting were presented. Ted Bautz made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Ken Kozel seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

IV. County Council Report

Councilman Chuck Callahan reported that the County is working to find solutions regarding the Trappe development project. He noted the public hearing with MDE took place last week and that there are legal hurdles to work through. Council has begun work on FY 2023 budget, working with School Board on present issues, COVID-19 pandemic numbers are falling within the County, and the Marlboro clinic is now open and providing COVID-19 vaccinations.

County Manager Clay Stamp reported that work on the new sewer connection at the Talbot County Community Center is progressing. He also noted that the County is working to build transparency via its web portal and a total compensation study will be conducted to help with employee retention. In recent months, the County has had to replace 40% of the County's management-level workforce. A review of the County's permit process is in progress, and County EMS team is undergoing training using an ultrasound diagnostic system. Mr. Stamp gave a shout

out to the Emergency Management department for their communications and messaging during the recent flooding episode and noted that Ms. Vanhooser had reached out to businesses. American Rescue Act funds will be available after a targeted survey is conducted as the County wants to be purposeful about how the money is spent.

V. **Chairman's Report**

Mr. Jafari began by discussing the future of the Economic Development Commission meetings. He said that the executive committee had discussed the issue with Ms. Vanhooser, who had recommended quarterly meetings beginning in January 2022. This would allow the Commission to focus more fully on business issues. Featured speakers would appear at other events, potentially a speakers series, planned at a different time. Mr. Jafari asked for show of hands to accept the new schedule, which was unanimous. The chairman also encouraged Commission members to attend the Economic Development and Tourism sponsored Coffee and Conservation event on Nov. 12 at 8:30 a.m.

VI. **Director's Report**

Business Sentiment Survey: Ms. Vanhooser presented the results of the Business Sentiment Survey that was conducted as part of the Eastern Shore Economic Recovery Project in June 2022. In addition to the summary of the results, she highlighted answers of particular importance to Talbot County. She compared the rankings of barriers to expanding business with barriers to starting a business in Talbot County, noting that those who answered the survey indicated that it is much harder to get started in business after the pandemic.

She also noted that 87% of the respondents said that COVID-19 has either somewhat negatively or very negatively impacted the area's Quality of Life, which is a cause for concern. Of the total respondents, 42.29% were from Talbot County, which Ms. Vanhooser said made her proud. But the second survey is being launched December 1, and she says the department will make every effort to increase those numbers. The Recovery Project team members are hoping for a much more robust response to the December 2021 and June 2022 surveys.

Proposed Accommodations Tax Increase: Ms. Vanhooser continued her PowerPoint presentation by explaining the Tourism Board's recommendation that the County Council pursue a 2% increase in the public accommodations tax. She explained the tax, how it is collected, and the proposed changes. At 4%, Talbot County currently has the lowest rate in the state. The Tourism Board recommended raising the rate to 6%, with 1% going to the municipalities where it is collected and 1% going to the County's general fund to fund the tourism and economic development activities. Mr. Bautz said that he believes the low rate offers a competitive advantage to Talbot County businesses and is not in favor of an increase. Ms. Vanhooser noted that the current collections do not cover what is spent by the department, which is among the reasons the Tourism Board is advocating for an increase.

Talbot County Online Sales and Telework Grant: The department received 19 applications for the state-fund Online Sales and Telework Grant. The applications are being evaluated, and they money must be distributed by Dec. 1.

Maryland Economic Development Association (MEDA) Virtual Rural Economic Development Summit Recap: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the virtual conference was a success, and that she was particularly proud of the two Talbot County panelists. Derick Daly of Jack Construction moderated a panel on accessing capital, and Ruby Vanags of Ruby's Cakes presented as part of a panel that discussed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the workplace. Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism will receive a \$5,000 grant for their participation to use for a project yet to be named.

Election of Officers for 2022: November is the time we typically discuss new officers. Mr. Jafari is currently serving as chairman, and Margaret Enloe-North is serving as the vice-chairperson. Jackie Wilson serves on the executive committee in her role as immediate past chairperson.

Ms. Vanhooser said that she had ask Mr. Jafari if he would be willing to service a second year as the EDC chairman and that he had agreed. She noted that she and Mr. Jafari work well together and that the two past chairmen had served two terms. Ms. Enloe-North agreed that this would be an agreeable solution. Anyone else who wishes to be considered should contact Ms. Vanhooser and submit their name.

Meeting Schedule for 2022: The Commission voted on and agreed to quarterly meetings beginning in January of 2022. Ms. Vanhooser said members should hold two hours for the less frequent meetings as she anticipates that the group may have more to discuss. She also said that there will be ample opportunity for members to be involved as she and her staff will be conducting the required outreach for the Eastern Shore Recovery Project. It is also time to refresh the department's strategic plan.

Volunteers for Business Appreciation Summit: As hard as it is to imagine, the Business Appreciate Summit is right around the corner. Ms. Vanhooser anticipates a date in late April or early May, and she requested volunteers to help with sponsorships and planning. Please respond to the email that she sends.

Coffee and Conservation at Waterfowl Festival, Nov. 12 at 8:30 a.m.: The department will again hold a breakfast event at the 50th Waterfowl Festival on Friday morning of the festival. Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio will be the featured speaker, and other cabinet secretaries may be in attendance. Ms. Vanhooser said that she hoped all members were planning to attend and bring colleagues.

VII. Town Reports: Representatives from each of the towns and industry sectors reported on news and upcoming events.

Ken Kozel report that UM Shore Regional Health opened a new freestanding facility in Cambridge on October 28. It is a unique model that is one building open 24-7-365 with observation beds and hospital-based care on the first floor and wellness, diagnostics, testing, and specialists on second floor. Their next step is to make sure models are working as expected and begin approval process for new hospital to break ground in 2023 at a \$350-400 million investment. The new hospital will be built near the Easton Airport. Mental health out- and in-patient services are up and running, thanks to collaborations with partners. Mr. Kozel gave a shout out to Dr. Clifford Coppersmith and Chesapeake College.

Dr. Coppersmith reported that new enrollment at Chesapeake College is going strong for spring and that there is a waitlist for nursing program. Current enrollment is down, but that is a nationwide trend with challenges coming from the adult population as they deal with pandemic-related issues such as childcare, work conditions, wages, and other challenges. There is significant student funding available for assistance.

IX. Maryland Department of Commerce

Commerce Rep Nancy LaJoice reported that Choptank Transport was sold to the Hub Group, a \$5 billion dollar company with 6,000 employees nationwide. As part of the deal, there is an incentive to keep leadership intact for at least five years. Choptank Transport is actively hiring 50 people, with plans to grow to 200 employees at their Easton location. This is in addition to 300 employees at Choptank Transport's Preston location. The Department of Commerce has two incentives, one for a tax credit for investors and one for technology businesses. The Department of Commerce is seeking 15 companies to attend the next technology conference to represent Maryland.

X. Upcoming Meetings

- December 2, 2021 – Economic Development Commission Meeting

XI. Adjournment

Dr. Coppersmith made the motion to adjourn which was seconded by Ms. Kreiner. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.