

Economic Development Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 16, 2022

8 a.m.

Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

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

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Shannon Dill, Ron Engle, Margaret Enloe-North, Reza Jafari, Amy Kreiner, Clay Stamp, Cassandra Vanhooser, and Terenda Thomas

Members Absent: Walter Chase, Jimmy Jaramillo, Ken Kozel, Micah Risher, Debbie Walsworth, Craig Wanner, Jackie Wilson

Staff Present: Krista Boothby, Sandy Dubay (moderator), Pam Keeton

Guests: Al Bond, Kody Cario, Dina Daly, Dr. Ron Forsythe, Kristen Greenaway, John Horner, Nancy LaJoice, Liza Ledford, Meredith Mears, Ken Miller, Dana Newman, Brian Schmidt, Jan Soderberg, Mike Thielke, Drew Van Dopp, Scott Warner.

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the March 3, 2022, meeting were presented. Dr. Coppersmith made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Mr. Bautz seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

III. Welcome

Mr. Jafari welcomed guests and gave brief overview of the Rural Economic Development Fund and then asked Ms. Vanhooser to lay out the ground rules for the presentation.

IV. Director's Report

Ms. Vanhooser added her welcome to EDC members and guests. She then gave an overview of the Rural Economic Development Fund, noting that each applicant had been invited to present their project to the Commission at this meeting.

In February, Gov. Larry Hogan announced that he would include \$50 million in his budget for economic development in Maryland's rural counties. The Maryland Department of Commerce has been tapped to manage this Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund, which will be administered locally by Maryland's five regional councils.

The Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism worked with the Mid-Shore Regional Council to secure a portion of this funding for Talbot County. The goal is to invest in projects and programs of significant economic development impact in our communities. A total of \$3,233,333 was allocated for Talbot County projects.

Seeking a fair and equitable process, Talbot County accepted applications from public entities and nonprofit organizations. Ms. Vanhooser laid out the plan to deploy these funds.

- 1) Jurisdiction, agency, or organization was required to submit a summary of project in writing by June 10.
- 2) Members of the Economic Development Commission were asked to volunteer to serve on a committee to rank all eligible projects. Members who volunteered to serve on the committee include: Reza Jafari, Ted Bautz, Cliff Coppersmith, Shannon Dill, Margaret Enloe-North, Amy Kreiner, Terenda Thomas, Cassandra Vanhooser, Jackie Wilson, and Debbie Walsworth.
- 3) At the Economic Development Commission meeting on June 16, each jurisdiction, agency, or organization has 3-4 minutes to pitch its proposal. Those going longer than 4 minutes will be silenced by a moderator.
- 4) Completed applications for all eligible projects must be submitted no later than July 7.
- 5) Members of the EDC committee will rank all proposals. If a member of the committee has a conflict of interest, they will recuse themselves from the ranking process for that project. The lowest score will be dropped for each project.
- 6) The final list of projects will be presented to the County Council at July 26 meeting for approval before submission to the Mid-Shore Regional Council on August 12.

V. Rural Economic Development Fund Project Presentations

Scott Warner, executive director of the Mid-Shore Regional Council, explained how the MSRC plans to evaluate the applications after they are submitted by the three counties.

The order of the presentations were assigned randomly. 0

**Chesapeake College – Future Work Workforce Training
Presenter: Dr. Cliff Coppersmith, President, Chesapeake College
Amount Requested: \$250,000**

Dr. Coppersmith reported that Chesapeake College is requesting \$250,000 to expand the College's marine trades program, create a Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, build an Advanced Manufacturing Technology program, and create a \$75,000 endowed scholarship for students exclusively in trades programs.

**Maryland Broadband Cooperative – Mid-Shore Optical Broadband Network Upgrade
Presenter: Drew Van Dopp, President & CEO, Maryland Broadband Cooperative
Amount Requested: \$240,000**

The Maryland Broadband Cooperative plans to upgrade the backhaul network equipment to meet increasing demand for broadband. The strategy is to deploy 100-Gigabit capable optical equipment ubiquitously across our statewide network. In the Mid-Shore, they have plans to upgrade and future proof our Points-of-Presence (POP) in Cambridge, Denton, and Wye Mills. These grant funds would help them keep pace with the growing needs of the Mid-Shore. Costs for upgrading equipment, facilities, and service capacity in the three identified Mid-Shore POPs is approximately \$240,000 per location. Mr. Van Dopp requested \$240,000 for the Wye Mills POP in Talbot County.

**Town of Trappe – ENR Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade
Presenter: Brian Schmidt, member, Trappe Town Council
Amount Requested: \$14,385,000**

The Town of Trappe is in the process of upgrading its Biolac wastewater treatment facility to a Wave Oxidation Plant with Sludge Removal and Mechanical Dewatering.

Waterfowl Festival – Armory Building Improvements

Presenter: Ken Miller, President, Festival Board of Directors

Amount Requested: \$3 million to \$3.5 million

The condition of the Waterfowl property has deteriorated. Improvements include a) remediation of potentially harmful interior environment concerns; b) roof membrane replacement; c) complete window, brick, and concrete restoration work; d) lighting and electrical component replacements and upgrades; e) new HVAC and humidity control systems; f) installation of needed fire control suppression and life safety systems. Preliminary cost estimates for this work range from \$3 million to \$3.5 million.

Building African American Minds – Workforce Training Program

Presenter: Dina Daly, Executive Director, Building African American Minds

Amount Requested: \$150,000

Building African American Minds seeks funding to develop a workforce training program that will serve middle school students as well as young people 18 years of age and older who are seeking employment. As a result of this program, the students and young adults will gain the skills needed to be successful in the workplace.

Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism – Strategic Plan

Presenter: Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Economic Development and Tourism

Amount Requested: \$125,000

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism seeks funding to develop a strategic plan for Talbot County, a plan that leverages past successes and takes the community to the next level as a destination both for businesses and visitors. An achievable, strategic economic development and redevelopment plan that leverages the strengths and distinct character of Talbot County will chart the course for the coming years.

The department created its last Economic Development Strategic Plan in 2018. A five-year planning cycle is now coming to an end, and the time is coming to revisit a pro-active approach to defining our local economy's path forward. In addition, Talbot County's business community has endured a "once-in-a-lifetime" pandemic and attention to positioning and repositioning strategies as a result should occur.

The next cycle of strategic planning will focus on the firm establishment and expansion of our county's competitive identity, focusing on Talbot County's abundant quality of life, business-friendly atmosphere, and wealth of workforce opportunities.

Deep research and consideration on data and trends that are now available in the post-COVID economy should be factored into a detailed strategic plan that succinctly provides collective direction for all those entrusted in moving the associated action plans forward. Analysis of

county economic progression – past, current and future – will be incorporated into planning to fully identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the local economy.

Qlarant – Talbot Technology Incubator Program

Presenter: Dr. Ron Forsythe, CEO, Qlarant

Amount Requested: \$275,000

This program provides an ecosystem of support that can improve the success rates of small businesses, which in turn translates into jobs, diversification of the local economy, and tax base expansion. The program will attract, retain, and develop technology organizations to Talbot County by providing a full suite of business services, funding, and a platform for the exchange of ideas within the community.

Qlarant will lead a consortium of Talbot County businesses and organizations that would provide services to incoming organizations, and include an investment committee to identify qualified applicants, potential investment funding, partnerships between regional businesses, local colleges and corporate sponsors. Qlarant offers up to 11,000 sq. ft. of space in Easton providing ‘landing spot’ access to/from D.C., New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Qlarant’s technology division offers ‘boots on the ground’ counsel.

A member of Qlarant’s senior executive team with proven experience in this field will implement and manage the Technology Incubator Program. They seek to leverage expertise in Talbot County including Cyber Security, AI, Data Analytics, Logistics, and Agritech to attract and develop new businesses. This program will help coordinate professional service advisors, marketing, and investment resources across the community.

Town of Easton – Port Street Improvement Project

Presenter: Kody Cario, Engineering Project Manager, Easton Public Works

Amount Requested: \$1,000,000

The Town of Easton is requesting \$1 million to upgrade the existing electric and broadband infrastructure serving Easton Point as the first step in creating an 11-acre park, waterfront promenade, transient boat slips, a new marine, restaurants, retail shopping, mixed income housing, and variety of other amenities at Easton Point.

Matching Funds for Feasibility Study for Chesapeake Bay Passenger Ferry Project

Presenter: Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Economic Development and Tourism

Amount Requested: \$25,000

Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County is leading a regional initiative to determine the feasibility for a passenger ferry that would travel between multiple destinations on the Chesapeake Bay. Multiple counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland including Calvert, Dorchester, Queen Anne’s, and Somerset have signed on in support of this project.

This exciting project may someday provide an alternative way to experience the Chesapeake Bay region, connect travelers with destinations by water, and support destination community economics and workforce development efforts.

Visit Annapolis and Anne Arundel County is seeking funds from the EDA Planning and Local Technical Assistance Programs (EDA-PHI-TA-PRO-2021-2006851). Funding for this project will support a feasibility study for a tourism-based passenger ferry service for the Chesapeake Bay, leading to potential consideration of implementation funding.

A feasibility study will give the Chesapeake region the framework it needs to understand the capital investment and operational considerations for such a project, including key routes and shore-side infrastructure, available vessel technologies, scheduling, labor, and ridership associated with a passenger ferry service. Each participating county has pledged \$25,000 to match the funds from the EDA.

Avalon Foundation – Stoltz Pavilion

Presenter: Al Bond, President & CEO, Avalon Foundation

Amount Requested: \$1.2 million

The Avalon Foundation seeks grant funding to make its highly successful Stoltz Pavilion permanent, adding significant tourism infrastructure capacity to Maryland's Eastern Shore. The project was originally launched to provide outdoor performance and gathering space during pandemic restrictions. With less than a year of operations it produced 90 ticketed events with an average of 97% of seats sold, earning the MD Department of Commerce: Maximizing Opportunities Award.

The Stoltz Pavilion venue will have a seating capacity of approximately 250 and will operate April–October, which compliments the season for the Foundation's other venues. By adding the outdoor venue to the mix the Foundation will be able to sustain its live music programming as a major tourism driver year round.

To transition from temporary to permanent use the site will require infrastructure upgrades, including permanent fencing, geothermal radiant heat/cooling, structures for concessions, restrooms, green room, storage & mechanicals. In addition, it will require dedicated furnishings, audio/visual & lighting systems. The estimated cost of these improvements is \$1.5 million.

Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center, Inc. – Ag Biotech Manufacturing Project

Presenter: Mike Thielke, Executive Director, F3 Tech

Amount Requested: \$500,000

The proposed project establishes an ag biotech manufacturing center in Talbot County. Ag biotech is the merging of agriculture and biotechnology, commercializing innovative solutions based upon biology rather than chemistry.

ESEC proposes leasing and equipping a small pilot-scale ag biotech manufacturing facility that would position Talbot County as having the resources to expedite advancement from lab-stage technology development to pilot-scale manufacturing and then onto large-scale manufacturing through a network of future facilities in a campus environment of manufacturing capabilities, which doesn't currently exist elsewhere in the Mid-Atlantic.

Through ESEC's collaboration with Johns Hopkins University and Thermo Fisher, this funding would jump start a longer-range effort to remove structural facilities and financial

barriers to entrepreneurial growth which limits the creation of new high-skill jobs; providing intermediate, growth-stage facilities, equipment, funding, and advisory resources and reducing the financial burdens for entrepreneurs and providing more equitable access to success.

Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism - Feasibility Study for New Talbot County Visitors Center

Presenter: Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Economic Development and Tourism

Amount Requested: \$25,000

The current Talbot County Visitors Center is located in the historic firehouse in downtown Easton. This space is ideal for Easton visitors, but fails to maximize the opportunity to serve the wide range of visitors who visit other parts of the county.

The Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism in partnership with the Tourism Board has begun to envision a larger, more functional Visitors Center. This facility would offer visitor services including bathroom facilities and a digital experience that showcases all that Talbot County has to offer, as well as storage space and office space for the staff and volunteers who will be needed to operate an expanded facility.

Talbot County's location at the epicenter of the newly designated Chesapeake Country All-American Road gives an urgency to this request. U.S. Route 50 forms the spine of this internationally significant byway as it passes through Talbot County. Co-locating on the property alongside the Talbot County Community Center or the Easton Airport seems to make sense from a practical standpoint.

A feasibility study will help the Talbot County Council understand the capital investment and operational considerations required for such a project.

Oxford Community Center – Full Live Stream Capabilities

Presenter: Liza Ledford, Executive Director, OCC

Amount Requested: \$13,000

The Oxford Community Center is a prime space to serve workforces on many kinds. With existing high speed internet, new surround sound audio system, breakout rooms, outdoors platforms, screens and a commercial kitchen, the OCC is staged and ready to become a high-service business hub. But, it is missing reliable hybrid technology and live streaming A/V.

Businesses from sole proprietors to industry conferences, hybrid options for participants is a must. The need to provide online access is standard due to the pivot all businesses made during the Covid-19 years and the need to provide these services to our regional business community is paramount to OCC's mission to be a viable resource to the region.

The Center serves indie, start-up, small and medium sized businesses and with this new upgrade, the Center can be a catalyst for growth for all of them. OCC can be a development space that launches new business allowing the technology they need to reach larger audiences. Before they can afford their own conference room with tech, they can use OCC's built in system for growth.

With the addition of the new technology, OCC can also be an educational space. With the higher demands for this technical knowledge, the new workforce seeking this expertise can learn at the OCC. Other colleges and affiliates can use the OCC to teach. OCC can be the resource for so many with this new capability.

Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum – New Welcome Center

Presenter: Kristen Greenaway, President & CEO, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum
Amount Requested: \$500,000

CBMM requested \$500,000 to support the completion of Phase II of its Master Plan. Developed in 2017 and recently re-envisioned, CBMM's Master Plan is a 5- to 7-year plan to enhance the visitor experience, further fulfill its mission, and contribute to Maryland's economic and community well-being.

The requested funds will support the completion of Phase II. Phase I, the renovation and expansion of the existing Library and Collections facility is nearing completion. Phase II, the construction of a 12,000 sq. ft. Welcome Center, will house a museum store and two new exhibition spaces. Phase II addresses the needs identified in a community assessment: providing better wayfinding, access, and visibility. It will also increase the museum's ability to share the history and culture of the entire Chesapeake Bay Region.

Talbot County Free Library – Building Digital Literacy and Employment Skills

Presenter: Dana Newman, Director, Talbot County Free Library
Amount Requested: \$40,200

The Talbot County Free Library (TCFL) is building on a series of initiatives, funded by grants -- begun at the outbreak of the pandemic -- that provide our rural community with improved access to, and training on, and use of, the internet and other digital library resources.

TCFL has worked to provide improved access to the internet by building out wireless connectivity to the exterior of our two branches, increasing the number of circulating Wi-Fi hotspots, and creating a Wi-Fi Community Connection at a public park in Trappe. TCFL has also worked on marketing and training the public on using a wide variety of e-resources and training opportunities available from all public libraries on the Eastern Shore.

The library also offers workforce development assistance by giving patrons access to and help with job searches, resume writing, career exploration, and skills building; dedicated meeting and learning spaces; diverse digital learning resources such as test prep; and one-on-one digital training.

This funding would allow TCFL to expand its workforce development services by offering classes on digital literacy such as computer, email and Internet basics, Microsoft Word and Excel, common apps, and library e-Resources and classes on employment related skills such as resume writing, interview skills, and job searching. The library would also like to build its capacity to offer classes by adding 25 laptops to create a mobile lab and by purchasing books on related subjects such as computer skills, career assistance, and exam study guides to create special branch collections.

Classic Motor Museum of Saint Michaels – Apprenticeship Program
Presenter: Jan Soderberg, Board Member, Classic Motor Museum
Amount Requested: \$315,000

The Automotive Technician Apprenticeship Program is a scalable, ongoing, education program with job opportunities for apprentices upon completion. The Program is a multi-employer and multi-participant program, requiring oversight and management of both.

Currently, there are five (5) independent automotive shops registered with the Maryland Department of Labor under the Museum's Program to provide on-the-job training. There is also online related instruction provided by Penn Foster's Automotive Technician Program, a DOL recognized education provider.

As the sponsor of the program, the museum is responsible for the overall education of the apprentices, and the ongoing operation of the Program. As such, the Program can be as having two (2) components: the oversight and management of the delivery and receipt of the on-the-job training and related classroom instruction; and 2) the on-going marketing and recruitment of apprentices and independent automotive shops.

Easton Utilities – Business Park High Speed Internet Project
Presenter: John Horner, Sr. Vice President of Operations and Chief Operating Officer, Easton Utilities
Amount Requested: \$318,682

The current infrastructure supplying internet in Talbot Commerce Park (TCP), Easton Tech Center (ETC), and Mistletoe Hall Commerce-Business Park (MHP) utilizes a system designed and built in 2001. Upgrading this system to 100% fiber connectivity for these 60 parcels provides Gigabit speeds and reliability to retain existing businesses, and more importantly, attract new businesses considering investment in Talbot County.

There are 20 existing businesses in TCP and ETC, with several warehouses under construction and a handful of parcels under contract. Industry sectors already include warehousing, geospatial solutions, automotive services, glass manufacturing, financial services, construction, and insurance services, among others. These business parks are currently targeting national and international clients for cold storage, extensions of the airport industry, HVAC, agricultural processing, clean energy, and even bitcoin mining. Onsite broadband capabilities are always discussed early in the negotiation.

Talbot County Parks and Recreation - Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Predevelopment Engineering for Phase II of Park Master Plan
Presenter: Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Economic Development and Tourism
Amount Requested: \$750,000

The master plan for the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe devised a layering of park development efforts over time. The phased development approach allows for Talbot County to carry out the project for successive improvements and provide visitors with a growing program of activities available on the site with each visit.

Specifically, this project focuses on a trifecta of visitor experiences while further incorporating measures to protect the natural resources, which includes the conservation space, interpretive space, and memorial space at The Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe.

Funds are necessary to support the planning and implementation of further archaeological investigations at the park, proposed overlooks to be planned along the Tuckahoe shoreline, expanded trail networks with improved visitor access. Waterfront access will lead visitors down to the river for possible launching of kayaks or canoes and potential park arrivals by water. Providing a visitor experience at the water is an important part of the park experience for visitors to experience the authenticity of Frederick Douglass's early childhood on the Tuckahoe.

Additional interpretive panels and other site elements as outlined in the Interpretive Plan of the Master Plan will need to be planned and implemented. Facilities that allow for longer visits need to be planned and constructed. The existing structure on site will be repurposed as event space and indoor space for interpretive exhibits. Restrooms will be planned for and provided. An accessible route be created from the parking area to the existing building on site. A small paved plaza area will need to be created adjacent to the existing building to allow groups to gather before touring the site.

Talbot County Public Works - Goldsborough Neck Road Culvert Project

Presenter: Clay B. Stamp, Talbot County Manager

Amount Requested: \$1,000,000

Talbot County is working to widen and improve Goldsborough Neck Road to support local businesses moving the Town of Easton's Industrial Park located on Goldsborough Neck Road. The culvert improvements will extend the existing pipes to allow Goldsborough Neck Road to be widened with 39 feet of pavement.

By widening Goldsborough Neck Road and this culvert, existing businesses in the Towns of Easton and St. Michaels will have an alternative route that supports heavy-duty tractor trailers, buses and farm equipment. In addition to the existing businesses, the proposed road improvements will support new businesses moving to the Industrial Park developed on land owned by the Town of Easton.

Talbot County has hired Davis, Bowen and Friedel, Inc. to complete the designs of widening Goldsborough Neck Road and Airport Road along with completing the required environmental permits. Due to current permit review timeframes, this project is anticipated to start in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024 with a completion date in SFY 2025. The overall road improvements have been estimated to cost about \$4.0 million for Goldsborough Neck Road and up to \$6.0 million for Airport Road. The estimated cost of the culvert widening is estimated to be \$1.0 million and this estimate is included in the \$4.0 million budget for Goldsborough Neck Road.

Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism - Minority Business Program

Presenter: Cassandra Vanhooser, Director, Economic Development and Tourism

Amount Requested: \$100,000

The department seeks funding for a training program to assist small, minority, woman, and veteran entrepreneurs with education, mentorship, and access to capital. The goal is to help these businesses maximize opportunity, create jobs, and grow the local and state economy.

This program would be patterned after the very successful Inclusive Ventures Program developed by Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation and replicated in Charles County. Both Johns Hopkins Carey School of Business and Morgan State University run similar programs.

After all presentations were completed, Mr. Jafari thanked the presenters for attending the meeting and presenting such a range of exciting projects. He then reminded members about upcoming meetings and, as the meeting was running long, suspended all other business.

VI. Upcoming Meetings

- a. June 23, 2022 – Community Economic Review Meeting, St. Michaels, 8 a.m.
- b. Sept. 1, 2022 – Economic Development Commission Meeting, 8 a.m.
- c. Dec. 1, 2022 – Economic Development Commission Meeting, 8 a.m.

VII. Adjournment

Mr. Bautz made the motion to adjourn; Amy Kreiner seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

NOTE: Some organizations amended the amount of their request for the Rural Economic Development Fund on their official application which were due on July 7, 2022, after the presentations were made.