

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 1, 2023

8 a.m.

Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Ken Kozel called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Al Bond, Shannon Potter Dill, Ron Engle, Reza Jafari, Jimmy Jaramillo, Chris Kleppinger, Ken Kozel, Clay Stamp, Rob Straebel, Terenda Thomas, Cassandra Vanhooser, and Jackie Wilson

Members Absent: Chuck Callahan, Walter Chase, Clifford Coppersmith, Amy Kreiner, Micah Risher, Donna Saathoff, Debbie Walsworth

Guests: Holly DeKarske, Margaret Enloe, Sarah Kilmon, Kimberly Kratovil, Dana Newman, Ryan Snow, and Scott Warner

II. Introduction of New EDC Member

Al Bond, president and CEO of the Avalon Foundation, has been appointed by the County Council to serve as the arts representative on the Economic Development Commission.

The Avalon Foundation is the largest arts organization on the Eastern Shore, and Al has led this organization for 15 years. The Foundation has an annual budget of approximately \$2.2 million and reaches about 170,000 people across its programming, which total more than 300 event days annually.

The Avalon Foundation operates the Avalon Theatre, Stoltz Listening Room, Todd Performing Arts Center, Plein Air Easton, Easton Farmers Market, Summer Concerts in the Street Series, Easton Independence Day Celebration, Talbot Multicultural Festival, and MCTV, Talbot County's cable access station. The organization is also responsible for eight weeks of theatre, dance, fine art, and film summer camps, plus an extensive after-school program in conjunction with Talbot County Public Schools and Avalon Children's Theatre.

III. Approval of Minutes

Reza Jafari made a motion to accept the minutes from the March 2, 2023, meeting as written. Mr. Engle seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

IV. Welcome and Introduction of Guest Speaker

Mr. Kozel introduced Keith Adkins, deputy director of Delmarva Community Services and Delmarva Community Transit, who joined the EDC to discuss public transportation in Talbot County. Transportation is an important issue to employers on the Eastern Shore, and many people are simply unaware of the service offered by DCT.

Over the past 47 years, Delmarva Community Services has grown from a staff of three with a \$75,000 budget located in the basement of a church in Cambridge to a staff of more than 300, an operating budget of \$20 million, and a 30-acre campus. The non-profit now serves an area that covers the entire Delmarva Peninsula, including Talbot County.

Mr. Adkins knows transportation as he has owned his own trucking company, and he served as Dorchester County Manager before joining DCS.

V. County Council Update

Mr. Stamp gave the County Council update on behalf of Council President Callahan. He thanked everyone for their time and commitment. Mr. Stamp noted an overarching feeling of "vibrancy" in the county, which is emulated by the leaders who make up the Economic Development commission.

The Council is working well on a number of very important issues and projects and has just completed a 5-month process to develop the FY24 budget. The budget prioritized education and public safety as well as a number of significant projects that support the important work of economic development and tourism. Significant efforts were made to maintain well-proven conservative budgeting practices.

The budget includes significant capital projects such as the new health department to be co-located with Shore Regional Health services at the Achievement Park site, the build-out of the new Sheriff's Department, and the 9-1-1 center on Mary's Court. Mr. Stamp also noted the new gymnasium at the Community Center, the extension of the sewer systems, the resurfacing of roads, and other important investments.

Finally, the budget maintains a healthy fund balance in the face of various challenges such as cost surrounding a highly competitive workforce, uncertainty related to costs and availability of commodities, and inflationary pressures.

Mr. Stamp announced that the County Council has filled a new communication manager position, for which they hired Sarah Kilmon. Sarah will be rolling out a number of strategic communication initiatives, such as a new web presence, social media engagement, and frequent press releases that help describe issues, all of which will enhance the County's public engagement and add transparency.

VI. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

Ms. Vanhooser wished the EDC a happy summer, echoing Mr. Kozel's greeting.

Business Appreciation Summit: Ms. Vanhooser noted that the Business Appreciation Summit on May 3 was a huge success. She promised not to rehash the entire event, noting that many EDC members. The videos, photos, and stories featuring the Community Impact Award winners can be found at TalbotWorks.org.

The speaker, Mark Perna, turned out to be a real firecracker, and Ms. Vanhooser has gotten many calls, texts, and emails praising the event. She is hopeful that we will be able to muster the resources to bring him back to help develop "career trees" for the Eastern Shore as I know several people have reached out to him directly. One email she received congratulated the EDC on bringing in a national thought leader for this event. There's not a Mark Perna standing on every corner, but she tries every year to select a speaker that brings value to the business community.

Joint EDC/Tourism Board Meeting: Ms. Vanhooser thanked those who attended the joint meeting on May 10. She noted that the two groups meet periodically so that members of the EDC can get a snapshot of the health of the tourism industry. From all indications in the news, travel will remain strong this year, though consumers appear to be tightening their belts when it comes to buying other goods. We watch our tax revenue numbers closely and adjust our promotional efforts to keep Talbot County front of mind for travelers.

Let's Talk Business Speaker Series: The speaker series concluded in April just before Easter with Tim Frump, Vice President of Risk Management and Soy Merchandising at Perdue AgriBusiness. Tim was a last-minute substitution for grain consultant Dick Willey.

The series also featured economist Dan North and our own Ken Kozel, who gave an overview of the proposed regional medical center. We had 30 to 40 people attend each session. I will be meeting with Dana Newman at the library soon to determine if we will offer the speaker series again next winter. This initiative is not labor intensive, though there is a resource cost, and it connected businesses and the general public with great information. But we'll do a cost-benefit analysis and make a determination later in the year, given the many projects we're working on.

Maryland's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Program: Those who have been on the commission for some time will remember that the County Council adopted C-PACE legislation in 2017 to allow businesses to borrow money to pay for energy upgrades to their business and make the payments with their property tax bill.

Talbot County has been notified that we need to update our legislation to include additional language pertaining to water efficiency, environmental remediation, and resiliency, and I am working with Clay Stamp and his team to be able to bring this to Council. We are planning a work session later this summer to bring Council up to speed

on the program, talk about why the legislation was adopted, and discuss the requested changes. I will keep you posted when we firm up that dates.

Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the EDC Executive Board asked for reports from the Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund projects. Ms. Vanhooser reported on her four projects.

- **Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Predevelopment Engineering, Interpretative, and Design:** The County Council appointed an advisory committee for the park, which meets monthly. LSG Landscape Architecture is leading the group of architects, engineers, interpretive planners, and naturalists who are working on this project.
- **Feasibility Study for Visitors Center:** The RFP has been approved and was advertised on Friday, June 30 at 10 a.m.
- **Minority Business Program:** Debbie Walsworth has agreed to chair this committee. Ms. Walsworth and Ms. Vanhooser meet with Councilwoman Keasha Haythe to begin planning this program. Ms. Haythe ran a similar program for the Anne Arundel County Economic Development.
- **Economic Development Strategic Plan:** RFP has been drafted. A fall release is planned.

Eastern Shore Business Sentiment Survey: The survey conducted bi-annually by BEACON opened on June 1 and will stay open through the first week of July. Ms. Vanhooser asked board members to take the survey and share it with others.

VII. Town Reports

Town representatives reported on activity from their jurisdictions.

IX. Upcoming Meetings

September 7 – EDC meeting, 8 a.m. via Zoom

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Bautz made the motion to adjourn; Mr. Jafari seconded the motion.