

**Talbot County Tourism Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**September 13, 2023**  
Via Zoom

**I. Welcome and Call to Order**

Chairwoman Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

**Members Present:** Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Keasha Haythe, Amy Kreiner, Mark Salter, Cassandra Vanhooser

**Members Absent:** Maureen Curry, Angela Eade, Mary Kellogg, Harold Klinger, Jeff Schneider

**Staff Present:** Krista Boothby

**Guests Present:** Holly DeKarske, Deena Kilmon, Joan McNamara, Martha Sparks

**II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – May 10, 2023**

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the May 10, 2023, meeting. Mr. Fleming made a motion to approve the minutes with Ms. Greenaway seconding the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**III. Special Guest – Martha Sparks, Talbot County Finance Officer**

Ms. Sparks gave an update on accommodations tax collections — compliance, remittance, and recording — for Talbot County. She asked for the Tourism Board's support regarding the new compliance measures and purchase of Granicus software. Accommodations tax collections appear to be down for fiscal year 2023, especially when it comes to short-term-rentals.

**IV. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser**

**Chesapeake Country All-American Road:** Talbot County hosted the public unveiling of the Chesapeake Country All-American Road logo and interpretive plan on October 12 at the Avalon Theatre. This project is a partnership between the nine counties and three heritage areas on the Eastern Shore. Ms. Vanhooser said that she is very pleased with the product the group has developed with their consultant, Interpretation by Design, and those attending the public meeting seemed to love it too. Ms. Vanhooser noted that she has been working on the scenic byway project

since 2013, when she took the job as tourism director for Talbot County. It was then Michener's Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway, which was a state byway only. Since then, Talbot County has become part of a national scenic byway, and the partners have begun the process of knitting the Eastern Shore into a seamless experience for travelers.

**Move to 215 Bay Street:** The department has moved to 215 Bay Street, which has been a little like trying to put 20 pounds of flour in a five-pound sack. The group survived and is beginning to look at the airport to see how we can enhance the terminal and improve the visitor experience.

**Visitors Center Feasibility Study:** A committee made up of Board members and staff has conducted the interviews with the consultants that bid on our Feasibility Study project, and we expect to be able to award that bid at one of the Council meetings in October. The bid cannot be awarded until October to let the capital enabling legislation take effect.

**Talbot County Bike Maps:** The department is in the process of redeveloping our bike maps and we're headed toward a digital solution. Talbot Thrive, the local group that is advocating for better multimodal transportation alternatives, are helping develop the routes. Ms. Vanhooser anticipates a spring launch.

**Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Visit:** Tom Barkin, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, came through Talbot County on his way to the MACo conference in August. We had a roundtable discussion with him on the state of the tourism industry, which he specifically requested. It was a good opportunity for the tourism industry to be heard in the context of economic development and with our region's central bank. Ms. Vanhooser thanked everyone who attended the event.

## **V. Manager's Report – Krista Boothby**

**MATPRA:** Ms. Boothby attended the Mid-Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Alliance (MATPRA) Annual Media Marketplace in Montgomery County, Maryland on July 31 to August 2, and connected with 42 selected journalists.

### **Journalist Visits:**

- Talbot County hosted MATPRA Media Marketplace Post FAM Tour for three bloggers and an editor on August 3<sup>-4</sup> as part of shared media visit titled "Across the Bay" with Queen Anne's, Caroline and Wicomico counties.
- Both hosted and assisted in partnership with Maryland Tourism Office and Capital Region USA, including:
- July 8, hosted a Photojournalist and photo book publisher and received 30 images for our use.
- On August 16, welcomed two Joker Tours representatives, a tour company out of Germany. Ms. Boothby them at the CRUSA Marketplace October 2022.

- On August 20, journalist and photographer from the high-end French magazine Le Club Yonder visited Talbot County.

**Staff Departure:** Ms. Boothby reported that she will be leaving her position with Talbot County on September 22, 2023. She expressed that she has enjoyed learning more about this destination and marketing it to journalists, visitors, and tourism businesses. She stated that she especially enjoyed getting to know and work with the board, and she thanked them for their service to the community.

## **VI. Town Reports**

Town representatives reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

## **VII. Comments from Board Members**

Board members shared insights on happenings in their businesses, nonprofits, or industries.

## **VIII. Comments from the Public**

There were no comments from the public.

## **IX. Upcoming Meetings**

- Tourism Board Meeting, October 11
- Tourism Board Meeting, November 8
- Maryland Travel and Tourism Summit, November 8-10
- Coffee and Conservation at the Waterfowl Festival, November 10
- Tourism Board Meeting, December 13

## **X. Adjournment**

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Bellis made the motion to adjourn; Ms. Greenaway seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:29 a.m.