

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
January 10, 2024
Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairwoman Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Harold Klinger, Mark Salter

Members Absent: Maureen Curry, Keasha Haythe, Amy Kreiner, Jeff Schneider

Guests: Holly DeKarske

Staff: Cassandra Vanhooser, Kristen Goller

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 8, 2023

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the November 8, 2023, meeting. Ms. Bellis made a motion to approve the minutes with corrections, and Ms. Greenaway seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously. Ms. Bixler also thanked Mr. Fleming and Mr. Salter for hosting the December meeting / holiday gathering at the Robert Morris Inn on December 6. Her thanks were echoed by those who attended and enjoyed the excellent food and beverages.

III. Introduction of Kristen Goller

Ms. Vanhooser introduced and welcomed Talbot County's new tourism manager, Kristen Goller. Ms. Goller said she is delighted to have joined the Talbot County team and looks forward to working with the Tourism Board. Ms. Vanhooser will include Ms. Goller's complete bio with the minutes.

IV. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

Ms. Vanhooser wished the Tourism Board a very happy 2024 and noted that it will be a busy year for everyone.

Talbot County Travel Guide: Ms. Vanhooser said that she and Ms. Goller have an important decision to make about the future of the department's travel guide. During the pandemic, the department produced an "evergreen guide" with content

that doesn't go out of date. There also aren't any listings. We have used that guide for three years, and we are currently completely out of that publication.

We use these guides to fulfill requests that come in via phone and that are generated by our advertising campaigns. We also distribute several thousand at the state's visitors centers. Poore House does the fulfillment for the guides that we send out each year, and we also pay Bob Ehlers from St. Michaels to deliver brochures to all of the lodging properties in the county.

These are the number of guides we mailed out from Poore House.

FY 2021 – 10,290

FY 2022 – 8,131

FY 2023 – 9,634

When we last put this project out to bid, Chesapeake Bay Media won the bid. Technically, we have a contract with them to publish our next guide. But their business model has changed, and the price of paper is such that it may be cost prohibitive to produce. They have agreed to release us from our obligation.

We are still gathering information about how to proceed, but I want to get your input on our guide and your thoughts on its production. Many board members agreed that visitors still want paper brochures and guides for planning or directing their visits, though Ms. Eade noted that the young brides she serves do not ask for paper. The staff will proceed with pricing for a new guide and report back.

Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund Projects: Ms. Vanhooser gave an update on the projects that the team will finish up this year. They are: 1) Pre-development Engineering, Design, and Interpretation for the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe; 2) the Feasibility Study for the Visitors Center; 3) a minority business training program that is titled Talbot Works Business Academy; and 4) an Economic Development and Tourism strategic plan.

- The Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe project is well underway, but it is a much larger endeavor than anticipated. It will take every bit of a year to finish this project, but we are moving. We also are working on establishing a pollinator meadow, and we have funding for an audio driving tour for the Frederick Douglass story.
- We have begun work on our Feasibility Study for a Visitors Center. That bid was awarded to Becker Morgan Group who is partnering with BEACON at Salisbury University. I have answered a list of questions that I submitted to them on January 1, and I received more questions this morning. They will be interviewing the Tourism Board, likely as a group. I would also like for them to see the new Welcome Center at the Maritime Museum and possibly delve into the publicly available details about that project. So, please be on the lookout for more information about this process.

- The Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism is launching the first cohort of its new Talbot Works Business Academy on February 6, 2024. This free online business training program is designed to help small businesses succeed and grow. Applications are due Monday, January 15, and we are planning an information session this week. If you know anyone who would be interested in participating in this program, please send them my way. All of the information can be found at TalbotWorks.org.
- Finally, we are working on the RFP for our Strategic Plan. Ms. Vanhooser wants tourism to be a robust part of the plan, and she believes there is adequate funding to make it happen. The board will be an important part of this project.

Accommodations Tax Numbers: Ms. Vanhooser reported that she has just received the numbers from the Finance Office for July, August, and September. She hasn't had the time to analyze these numbers yet.

Tourism Day: This annual event is February 9 at Rams Head Live in Annapolis. The legislative season kicks off today, January 10, the second Wednesday in January. Ms. Vanhooser and Ms. Goller will report on Tourism Day at the next meeting.

V. Town Reports

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

VI. Comments from Board Members

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

VII. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

VIII. Upcoming Meetings

- Tourism Board Meeting, February 14
- Tourism Board Meeting, March 13
- Tourism Board Meeting, April 10
- Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit, May 2

- Tourism Board Meeting, May 8
- National Travel and Tourism Week, May 19-25

IX. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Greenaway made the motion to adjourn; Mr. Fleming seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:21 a.m.

DRAFT