

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
February 14, 2024
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, Harold Klinger, Amy Kreiner, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider

Members Absent: Maureen Curry, Angela Eade, Keasha Haythe

Guests: Holly DeKarske

Staff: Cassandra Vanhooser, Kristen Goller

II. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

The meeting did not have a quorum. Ms. Bixler asked Ms. Vanhooser to begin her report as others were logging in. Ms. Vanhooser wished the Tourism Board a happy Valentines Day before proceeding with her report.

Onboarding for Kristen Goller: Ms. Vanhooser noted that much of the previous month was consumed with onboarding Ms. Goller. Ms. Vanhooser stressed that we are lucky to have Ms. Goller on the team and that board members are going to love working with her.

Talbot County Travel Guide: Last month, Ms. Vanhooser and Ms. Goller reported on our need for a new Talbot County Travel Guide. Ms. Vanhooser consulted County Manager Clay B. Stamp and he has asked that we go out to bid for the project as is dictated by our procurement procedure. Ms. Vanhooser has drafted the RFP, and it will go out as soon as possible. In the meantime, the team will work on content for the 2024 guide, and Ms. Vanhooser will keep you posted on progress.

Visitors Center Feasibility Study: Ms. Vanhooser spoke to John Hickman from BEACON last week, and he reports that his team is working on the data analysis for the study. The team is discussing a meeting where we'll get public input for this study. It's important that the Tourism Board attend.

Tourism Day: Ms. Goller and Ms. Vanhooser both attended Tourism Day in Annapolis on Friday, Feb. 9. Ms. Vanhooser noted that it was good to see Deena Kilmon from Discover Easton there too. She also said that she was fortunate to be

asked to represent both the Maryland Tourism Development Board and the Maryland Association of Destination Marketing Organizations. She will share the one-page advocacy sheet that we created for Tourism Day with the board. She also reminded the group that every day is Tourism Day for those who work in the industry.

Taste of the Eastern Shore: Ms. Vanhooser and Ms. Goller attended the Taste of the Eastern Shore on Feb. 8, also in Annapolis. Talbot County was well represented, and Ms. Vanhooser said that she appreciates those who were able to attend or send representatives. The Talbot Watermen shucked oysters, and Ms. Kilmon was there with a terrific ice sculpture promoting the Fire and Ice Festival.

Talbot Works Business Academy: The department kicked off an eight-week training program with a class of 15 business owners on Tuesday, Feb. 6. The first cohort includes several tourism-related businesses, which Ms. Vanhooser feels is good news. She asked board members to consider volunteering to judge the capstone projects on March 26 from 6-9 p.m. She will send recruiting details next week.

Talbot Day: Last year, the Talbot County Council created a proclamation for Talbot Day to unify the county. This year, we are building on this idea and planning a modest Talbot Day celebration on April 25. Councilman Dave Stepp has asked that the department engage the businesses and ask them to offer Talbot Day specials at restaurants and stores. Stand by for more details as they become available.

Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit: Last, but certainly not least, Ms. Vanhooser asked board members to mark their calendars for the summit on May 2.

III. Manager's Report – Kristen Goller

Meet & Greet Meetings: Ms. Goller, introduced through Ms. Vanhooser, has begun meeting with local stakeholders and towns throughout the county to broaden her network and understanding of the area. So far, Ms. Vanhooser has coordinated meetings for her to meet representatives of the Mid-Shore Regional Council, Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, Talbot Arts, Easton Economic Development Corporation, and the St. Michaels Business Association. Additional meetings are in the works. Ms. Goller would also welcome the opportunity to meet with each board member. She will reach out individually to coordinate.

Online & Print Collateral Review: In addition to reaching out to community stakeholders, Ms. Goller is undertaking an in-depth review of the tourism division's online presence and print collateral. This is traditionally completed annually, so the timing fell in line, and it has assisted in getting her up to speed at the same time.

Media Exposure: The department recently hosted Mr. Van Delden, who is an international group tour organizer and journalist from the Netherlands. Mr. Van

Delden, coordinated through CRUSA, which is a collective among Maryland, Virginia and DC to market internationally, came to the United States in late January. He traveled across the Eastern Shore to Talbot County, where he overnighed at the Tidewater Inn and explored Downtown Easton, St. Michaels, and Tilghman Island. This weekend, a journalist writing for NBCnews.com will visit Talbot County to cover the Frederick Douglass birthday celebration. She has also been encouraged to explore the Fire & Ice Festival as well as other areas of the county. The department is working with a journalist writing for Northern Virginia Magazine, who will visit later this month.

Regional Partnerships: Ms. Goller attended a full-day strategic planning workshop for the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area and will stay in tune with the organization's progress in developing this plan. The Chesapeake Country All-American Road Alliance, of which Talbot County participates, has also continued meetings to determine priorities and next steps now that the interpretive plan for the All-American Road has been completed.

Along with the eight other Eastern Shore Counties, Talbot County continued its partnership to market to the group tour industry by sending a representative to the American Bus Association Marketplace. A preliminary report has been received by the representative and the group has a follow-up meeting scheduled for later this week to discuss further.

M.D.M.O. and Legislative Update: Through our participation in the Maryland Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (M.D.M.O.) we are working with a lobbyist to monitor this year's legislative session. One is Senate Bill 0014, Cross-Filed HB1281 Economic Development – Tourism Zones – Designation of Benefits. This bill authorizes the mayor or governing body of a municipal corporation to designate an area as a tourism zone under certain circumstances. This designation can coexist with others including Arts & Entertainment and Main Streets, and it allows for exemption from the admissions and amusement tax or other property tax credits. This bill is viewed favorably by M.D.M.O. as it encourages tourism-related businesses.

IV. Town Reports

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

V. Comments from Board Members

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

VI. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

VII. Upcoming Meetings

- 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

VIII. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Bellis made the motion to adjourn with multiple people seconding the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:14 a.m.