

**Talbot County Tourism Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**March 13, 2024**  
Via Zoom

**I. Welcome and Call to Order**

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

**Members Present:** Judy Bixler, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Harold Klinger, Jeff Schneider

**Members Absent:** Jessica Bellis, Tad duPont, Maureen Curry, Angela Eade, Keasha Haythe, Amy Kreiner, Mark Salter

**Guests:** Holly DeKarske

**Staff:** Cassandra Vanhooser, Kristen Goller

**II. Guests – John Hickman, BEACON at Salisbury University, and Ronald Morgan, Becker Morgan**

Mr. Hickman’s team has done some preliminary research and has identified 43 visitors centers on the Delmarva Peninsula. He will be conducting interviews with those in the towns that function as Visitors Centers and will continue work on gathering numbers for his report.

Mr. Morgan is reviewing two sites for a potential visitors center – the Easton Airport and the Talbot County Community Center, both owned by Talbot County government.

**III. Director’s Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser**

The meeting did not have a quorum, and Ms. Bixler asked Ms. Vanhooser to begin her report as others were logging in. Ms. Vanhooser noted that the Visitors Center is just one of the four projects she is managing that were funded by the Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund. Those include the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe, a departmental strategic plan, and the Talbot Works Business Academy Entrepreneurship Training Program.

**Talbot Works Business Academy:** The first cohort of this 8-week entrepreneurship training program is ending on March 26. There are 15 participants in the first cohort. Ms. Vanhooser asked those with business and

finance experience (everyone!) to volunteer to serve as judges. She will reach out directly.

**Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe:** The design team is working with representatives of the Critical Areas Commission and MDE's tidal and non-tidal wetlands programs to create a design that will meet with their approval.

**Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan:** This has taken a back seat to the other projects, but Ms. Vanhooser is working to draft an RFP for this process. Tourism will be represented in the plan and on the advisory team. Volunteers will be needed.

**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.

#### **IV. Manager's Report – Kristen Goller**

**Meet & Greet Meetings:** Ms. Goller has continued to meet with stakeholders around the county. Since the last board meeting, she has met with Easton Airport, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, Tidewater Inn and Simoneink, publicist for Blue Point Hospitality.

**Online & Print Collateral Review:** An in-depth review of the department's printed and online presence has continued. We are updating inventories for our printed pieces and scheduling timelines for re-printing. Revisions have been completed for our Fish & Hunt Maryland guide. A final draft is nearing completion for a Talbot County map, which we have partnered with the chamber to publish.

Focus is now shifting to one of our most popular pieces, which is the Talbot County Restaurant Guide. We plan to re-print it prior to summer. Work has continued to move forward on our new Talbot County Travel Guide. We are finalizing an RFP for the printing and advertising sales with the County Attorney. In the meantime, we've been working on content development and photography.

As far as our online presence is concerned, we are continuing work, which will enhance the functionality and content of the site. All business listings are being reviewed for accuracy, as is content.

**Media Exposure:** A journalist, Donna Owens, published a piece for NBCNews.com that was shared on a variety of other digital platforms. In it, Frederick Douglass and

the Town of Easton were highlighted. According to the State's Office of Tourism, within 24 hours of being published, it had garnered a combined reach of 23.5 million. The article is linked [here](#).

A journalist writing for Northern Virginia Magazine had a successful visit in late February. Her piece is expected to be published in May, and in addition to providing a general overview of the area, she'll include the Inn at Perry Cabin, who hosted her. She also dined at Bas Rouge and will cover the recent James Beard nomination of Harley Peet. This lead came to us through our participation in the Mid-Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Alliance (MATPRA), which is a regional tourism partnership among locations within the Mid-Atlantic.

We are also assisting Victor and Fyllis Hockman, who reached out to a few of you. They are hoping to visit in May or June. They reside in DC and are writing a piece for Beacon, which is a 50+ newspaper.

Andrea Poe is writing a piece for the Eastern Shore, which is scheduled to print in the Washingtonian in May as well.

**MDMO and Legislative Update:** We are continuing to work with MDMO and the group's lobbyists to monitor this year's session. SB0014 Economic Development Tourism Zones – Designation of Benefits, which we mentioned at our last meeting, continues to gain favor. We're monitoring a new bill, HB1515 Sales and Use Tax – Rate Reduction and Services, which will alter the definitions to impose the tax on certain services and labors. While MDMO has not taken a stance on this bill, it is being strongly opposed by the Maryland Tourism Coalition as well as the Maryland Chamber of Commerce. Outside of legislation, our lobbyists are also monitoring regulatory changes that could impact the rockfish charter fishing industry, as well as waterfowl hunting.

## **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, April 10
- Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit, May 2
- Tourism Board Meeting, May 8
- National Travel and Tourism Week, May 19-25

### **IX. Adjournment**

The meeting ended at 9:21 a.m.