

# **Economic Development Commission**

## **Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, March 7, 2023

8 a.m.

Chesapeake College

### **I. Welcome and Call to Order**

Chairperson Debbie Walsworth called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. and, in her first act as chairperson, welcomed the group.

**Members Present:** Ted Bautz, Chuck Callahan (via Zoom), Dr. Cliff Coppersmith, Shannon Potter Dill, Reza Jafari, Ken Kozel, Amy Kreiner, Chris Kleppinger, David Montgomery, Clay Stamp (via Zoom), Cassandra Vanhooser, Deborah Walsworth, Jackie Wilson

**Members Absent:** Al Bond, Walter Chase, Jimmy Jaramillo, Micah Risher, Donna Saathoff, Rob Straebel, Terenda Thomas

**Guests:** Alyssa Hastings (via Zoom), Kimberly Kratovil, Nancy LaJoice, Jessica Mumbulo, Dana Newman (via Zoom), Daniel Schneckeburger, Ryan Snow, Scott Warner, Tyler Young

**Staff:** Kristen Goller

### **II. Approval of Agenda and Meeting Minutes**

Ms. Walsworth noted that the minutes were sent prior to the meeting and asked if anyone had comments or corrections. Mr. Jafari made a motion to accept the minutes as written; Mr. Kozel seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **III. Introduction of New Board Member**

Ms. Walsworth welcomed Mr. David Montgomery, a Harvard-trained economist who worked in the Congressional Budget Office, served as the deputy assistant secretary of energy, and is now in his first term on the Easton Town Council. (See attached bio.) Mr. Montgomery notes that he looks forward to serving on the Talbot County Economic Development Commission. "We're facing some big challenges, both in terms of keeping businesses here and healthy, and also in managing growth so that we don't turn into something unrecognizable," he said.

### **IV. Chesapeake College and the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board**

The meeting was held at Chesapeake College and hosted by EDC Vice Chairman Cliff Coppersmith. He welcomed EDC members to the college and thanked them for their support over the years. Enrollment is up at Chesapeake College, with 40% of the students classified as dual enrollment.

Dr. Coppersmith explained the renewed emphasis on the skilled trades and discussed the challenges and opportunities this presents. He specifically noted the nursing program that is a partnership with UM Shore Regional Health and the marine trades program that has been expanded with Talbot County's assistance with funding through the Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund. Despite their success, Chesapeake College and other community colleges had their budgets cut during the 2024 legislative session. Dr. Coppersmith offered a tour to anyone who wished to see the skilled trades programs in action.

Dan Schneckenburger, director of the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board, discussed his work serving the same five counties as the college. He noted that the Workforce Investment Board is embedded with the community and is one of only four in the entire country located at a college. He discussed the state's emphasis on the adult registered apprenticeship program and highlighted other ways local businesses can take advantage of the federal and state resources he shepherds.

#### **V. Chuck Callahan, President, Talbot County Council – Reported by Clay Stamp**

Mr. Stamp presented the county report as Mr. Callahan was called away during the meeting. He took a moment to acknowledge the importance of Chesapeake College, especially their work engaging students in the trades. He said Talbot County is working with Chesapeake College leaders to try to get some of their funding restored.

The Talbot County team is excited about working on the plans for the new regional medical center and about expanding broadband. Mr. Stamp recognized John Horner and Easton Utilities for their work on broadband, and Cassandra Vanhooser and Mark Cohoon on the county's side. Mr. Stamp also noted that Talbot County has opened a new gymnasium at the community center, with indoor pickleball courts. The County Council is preparing their 2025 budget, which is always a changing time. However, "Spring is coming, and optimism is high," Mr. Stamp said.

#### **VI. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser**

**Welcome to the New Chairman:** Ms. Vanhooser welcomed Ms. Walsworth as chairman of the Economic Development Commission and noted that she is really looking forward to working together. Ms. Walsworth is a CPA, and she owns BSC Group in Easton. She has deep knowledge of this community and great insight into the things that make it special.

Ms. Vanhooser thanked Mr. Kozel for his service as chairman in 2023. "He was faithful in his duties and a joy to work with," she said. Ms. Vanhooser noted that it is a real time commitment to serve in a leadership role, and she expressed her heartfelt thanks to all who serve.

**Welcome to New Staff:** Ms. Vanhooser also welcomed a new colleague, Kristen Goller, who is serving as Tourism Manager. "Kristen is a marvelous addition to our department and to Talbot County Government," Ms. Vanhooser said. Ms. Goller has many years of experience in county government in Wicomico County where she most recently served as tourism manager. Ms. Goller told the group she is delighted to be working at Talbot County and that she and her husband plan to relocate to Easton later in the year.

**DHCD OSB Broadband Grant:** In December 2023, Ms. Vanhooser and Mr. Snow, along with John Horner and Ted Book from Easton Utilities, applied for a \$1.1 million grant from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development's Office of Statewide Broadband to finish funding for the unserved residents of Talbot County. DHCD OSB offered a block grant to every county for difficult-to-serve properties. These were properties with long driveways or some sort of barrier to reaching the side of the house. Ms. Vanhooser said that the team had an interview with the deputy director early in January and submitted formal answers to his questions. She has her fingers crossed that the Governor of the State of Maryland will make an announcement soon, and our names will be on the list. You can follow the progress of Connect Talbot at Easton Velocity dot com.

**Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund Projects:** The department continues to monitor our 14 Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund projects. Four of our partners have finished their projects:

- 1) The sludge has been removed from the Trappe Wastewater Treatment Facility.
- 2) The Oxford Community Center now has state-of-the-art AV equipment installed. If you're looking for a great place to host a meeting that needs advanced media capabilities, that's a great choice.
- 3) The Talbot County Free Library has purchased the equipment for its digital literacy program.
- 4) The New Welcome Center at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum opened in December.

That leaves 10 more projects that need to be finished before the end of this calendar year. Ms. Vanhooser chose one of her projects to feature. The Talbot County Department of Economic Development and Tourism launched Cohort #1 of our Talbot Works Business Academy.

The department began taking applications in December and received 21 applicants. Two dropped out immediately for unknown reasons, two were from other counties, which left us 17 candidates. Mr. Jafari, Ms. Walsworth, Ms. Vanhooser, and consultant Will Holmes interviewed all 17 candidates and picked 15 for the first cohort. The other two were referred to the Small Business Development Center for additional resources and have been invited to reapply in July when we prepare for Cohort #2.

Ms. Vanhooser said that these business owners are all eager to learn and ready to succeed and grow. Will Holmes is giving them the tools to make that happen. "YOU helped give them the tools to make that happen," she said. During the final class on March 26, each member of the cohort must present a capstone project, where they layout their numbers and identify their plans for growth. She needs 15 judges to join us on March 26 to give them feedback on their projects. If you are interested, let her know this week. The cohort will graduate at the Talbot County Council meeting on April 9, and we're working on a little celebration with the group.

**Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation:** On February 21, we co-hosted an informational session for the Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation at the Talbot County Free Library to promote their new workforce development programs available with the Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation. The Service

Corps and Maryland Year are first in the nation programs and they may be a pathway for young people and adults who are need additional skills and need to make a living wage. We were delighted to host Secretary Paul Montiero, who gave much of the presentation, and who, as it turns out, was a history major and is a real fan of Frederick Douglass.

**Upcoming events:** Ms. Vanhooser asked the group to mark their calendars for several upcoming events.

1) The department is again partnering with BAAM, Talbot Mentors, and ChesMRC to host a Career Expo on April 20. This event was moderately successful last year, but consistency and intensity create long-term success. We are meeting about that after our meeting this morning.

2) These same partners will be working with us on a Business Resource Fair for the September time frame. Will Holmes, the consultant for our Business Academy, will offer his Money Maryland class free of charge, the SBDC will again offer a business class in Spanish, and we'll have our resource partners exhibiting. Stand by for more on this.

3) The Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit is scheduled for May 2. We've invited the Secretary of Commerce to be our speaker, though he has not yet committed, but we have chosen our winners. It should be another exciting event.

## **VII. Town Reports**

Town representatives reported on news from their jurisdictions.

## **VIII. Comments from Board Members and Guests**

No comments from board members or guests.

## **IX. Final Remarks and Announcement of Upcoming Meetings**

Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit – May 2, 2024

Talbot County EDC Meeting – June 6, 2024

Talbot County EDC Meeting – September 5, 2024

Talbot County EDC Meeting – December 5, 2024

## **X. Adjournment**

Mr. Bautz made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Jafari seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.