

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
November 8, 2023
Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairwoman Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Maureen Curry, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Harold Klinger, Amy Kreiner, Jeff Schneider, Cassandra Vanhooser

Members Absent: Keasha Haythe, Mark Salter

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – October 11, 2023

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the October 11, 2023, meeting, noting that there was an error in the section that referred to the Chesapeake National Recreation Area. Ms. Bellis made a motion to approve the minutes with corrections, and Mr. Schneider seconding the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

Coffee and Conservation: Ms. Vanhooser reminded the board that the department is hosting its annual business networking breakfast at the Waterfowl Festival on Friday morning at 8:30 a.m. The event will be held in the Art at the Pavilion tent across the street from the Waterfowl Festival Building. Karina Stonesifer, DNR's new Director of Wildlife and Heritage Service, will represent the governor's office.

Staffing: Talbot County has made an offer to an individual who has accepted the job of Economic Development and Tourism Manager. Ms. Vanhooser did not announce her name as she is still wrapping up her job in another county, but on January 2, the department will welcome a new colleague.

Feasibility Study: The County Council has awarded the bid for the Feasibility Study for the Visitors Center to Becker Morgan Group in Salisbury. We'll be getting started on that project by the end of the month, and there will be plenty of opportunities to engage with us during this process.

Strategic Plan: Ms. Vanhooser also noted that the department received funding from the Maryland Rural Economic Development Fund for a strategic plan for economic development and tourism. She noted that she would like to have at least

one person from this board to serve on the steering committee. Ms. Vanhooser will send out an email requesting volunteers. This is a great opportunity for the Board to be involved.

Accommodations Tax Numbers: Ms. Vanhooser asked Mr. Klinger to discuss accommodations tax numbers with the board. Mr. Klinger is an accountant, and he typically reviews the numbers with Ms. Vanhooser when they are released. He noted that there has been a drop in accommodations tax collections across the board, but that the most dramatic drop was in short-term rentals.

Ms. Eade represents short-term rentals on the board, and she believes there are a number of factors affecting the industry right now. Competition has increased, and consumers appear to be tightening their belts. She has seen a drop of bookings in her business, as well, and she noted that she had no bookings for Waterfowl Festival.

The board is concerned about the numbers. Mr. Klinger and Ms. Vanhooser will follow up with Martha Sparks, the director of finance for Talbot County.

December Meeting: Ms. Vanhooser said that the next meeting is scheduled for December 13, but that many of the board members would be away at that time. She noted that Ms. Fleming has volunteered to host the board for some holiday cheer. Ms. Greenaway made a motion to cancel the December board meeting and to gather instead at the Robert Morris Inn for a holiday party. Mr. Schneider seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The board will have its holiday gathering on December 6 at 5:30 p.m.

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

- Maryland Travel and Tourism Summit, November 8-10

- Coffee and Conservation at the Waterfowl Festival, November 10
- Tourism Board Holiday Gathering, December 6 at 5:30 p.m.

VIII. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Schneider made the motion to adjourn; Ms. Bellis seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 a.m.