

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
May 8, 2024
Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Vice chairwoman Jessica Bellis called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. as Ms. Bixler was running the ferry and attended the meeting via phone.

Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Tad duPont, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Amy Kreiner, and Jeff Schneider

Members Absent: Maureen Curry, Keasha Haythe, Harold Klinger, Mark Salter

Guests: Holly DeKarske, Sammie Moon

Staff: Cassandra Vanhooser, Kristen Goller

II. Approval of Minutes – April 10, 2024

Ms. Bellis presented the minutes from the April 10, 2024, meeting. Ms. Greenaway made a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Fleming seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

Business Appreciation Summit: Ms. Vanhooser echoed Ms. Bellis's comments about the excellence of the Business Appreciation Summit that was held on May 2. The group congratulated Ms. Greenaway on receiving one of the five Community Impact Awards. Ms. Vanhooser said she thought it was one of the best events yet, and she thanked those who attended. She noted that there was a lightheartedness about this particular year that has been missing for some time. She noted that it's an immense amount of work, but the Summit is "our love letter to Talbot County."

Upcoming Events: Looking ahead to the rest of 2024, Ms. Vanhooser reviewed upcoming events.

- On **May 24**, Talbot County Economic Development and Tourism will partner with the Talbot Historical Society to commemorate the Talbot Resolves, which marks the 250th anniversary of Talbot County's declaration of support for the patriots beginning the American Revolution. Ms. Goller will add additional details.

- The department is partnering with the Talbot Family Network and the Talbot County Free Library to host a lunchtime program called, “Let’s Talk Numbers,” featuring the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative and the Delmarva Index. Ms. Vanhooser noted that anyone interested in data should consider attending on **June 18**.
- **September 10** is the launch of our second Talbot Works Business Academy. The application portal opens June 1. If board members know anyone who is interested in participating in this free program, please refer them to Ms. Vanhooser or invite them to apply.
- On **September 14**, Talbot County is partnering with the Small Business Administration, the SBDC, and Will Holmes to host a Money Maryland event at the BAAM Athletic Center. This will serve as the department’s annual Business Resource Fair.
- During the Waterfowl Festival, the department will again partner with The Arc Central Chesapeake Region and Waterfowl Chesapeake to host a breakfast event for businesses. The event will be held on **November 8**.

Accommodations Tax: Harold Klinger was away and unable to attend the meeting, but he has asked Ms. Vanhooser to begin preparing a plan to pursue an accommodations tax increase. If you wish to serve on this committee, please express your interest now.

Rural Economic Development Fund Projects: Ms. Vanhooser still has four projects to complete, including a strategic plan. Though the board is on hiatus for the summer, they will be asked to participate in this process.

September Board Meeting: Our next board meeting will be held on **September 11**, an unfortunate day in our national history. Ms. Vanhooser asked everyone to mark their calendars now for this important meeting.

New Board Members: Ms. Vanhooser has spoken to several people who are interested in serving. She will ask members to vote via email over the summer on her recommendations.

IV. Manager’s Report – Kristen Goller

Trappe Boundary Amendment for Stories of the Chesapeake: The Maryland Heritage Areas Authority has approved the boundary amendment to add Trappe to the heritage area. Ms. Goller and Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area Executive Director Gail Owing are now working with the town as they are required to update their comprehensive plan. This update is expected to be approved by late summer.

Talbot Day: Ms. Goller thanked those who attended Talbot Day on April 25. A nice crowd could be seen outside of the courthouse for the celebration, and she and Ms. Vanhooser expect the county will make this an annual event.

National Travel and Tourism Week: This annual celebration is scheduled for May 19-25, 2024. In the same week, the department is also working with the Talbot County Historical Society and Sons of the American Revolution on a small event that will take place on May 24 to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the Talbot Resolves. The county is viewing this as the launch of its Maryland 250 celebration, which is a statewide and nationwide initiative running now through 2026. A committee will be formed in the coming months to work on this effort further.

Online and Print Collateral Review: An in-depth review of the department's printed and online presence has continued. Since the board last met, Ms. Goller and the team have finalized the Talbot County hotel guide, restaurant guide, and county map. Ms. Goller showed the hotel and restaurant guides.

The department has continued to review its online presence, as well. Ms. Goller and Ms. Harris have updated the county's online restaurant listings to ensure they align with the printed restaurant guide. Ms. Goller is working with the TourTalbot.org webmaster to make sure the site's SEO and load times remain strong. The department also is continuing to work through the process to add TilghmanIsland.com, which was purchased last year.

Media Visits: Victor Block and Fyllis Hockman, who are writing for *Beacon*, which is a DC-based publication geared towards those 50+ as well as national syndicates, arrive this Friday, May 10. Among other items on their itinerary, they'll be riding on the ferry, touring the maritime museum, and riding on the Patriot Cruise. Ms. Goller thanked Ms. Bixler and Ms. Greenaway's team for helping to arrange those details.

Andrea Poe's piece for the Eastern Shore has been released in the May issue of the *Washingtonian*, and Erica Moody's piece has been published in *Northern Virginia Magazine* from her February visit. We provided images to assist Blue Point Hospitality's PR firm secure an article on *USA 10 Best* entitled, "A Perfect Weekend in Easton, Maryland: Where to Eat, Drink, and Stay." Link: <https://10best.usatoday.com/interests/explore/easton-maryland-trip-planner/>

Ms. Goller and Ms. Vanhooser are now working with the State's tourism office and Capital Region USA (CRUSA) to host three German journalists later this month. The focus of the tour is, "Culinary delights and luxury overnights," and it includes journalists who are writing for travel and lifestyle platforms based in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Bid for Travel Guide: The printing and advertising sales for the travel guide have been awarded to APG Chesapeake through a formal bid process. Advertising sales have commenced, and we're working on copy and ad design. The goal is to have the printed guide in hand by early summer.

V. Town Reports

Town representatives reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions. The spring, summer, and fall feature many events for residents and visitors to attend.

VI. Comments from Board Members

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

VII. Comments from the Public

Ms. DeKarske reported on activities in the town of Easton. Ms. Moon reported on activities at the Waterfowl Festival building.

VIII. Upcoming Meetings

- National Travel and Tourism Week, May 19-25
- Tourism Board Meeting, September 11
- Tourism Board Meeting, November 13

IX. Adjournment

Mr. Schneider made the motion to adjourn. Ms. Kreiner seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15 a.m.

Have a great summer!