

# **Economic Development Commission**

## **Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, June 5, 2025

8 a.m.

Talbot County Free Library

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

Past Chairman Reza Jafari called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Members and guests introduced themselves.

**Members Present:** Ted Bautz, Al Bond, Chuck Callahan, Shannon Potter Dill, John Horner, Reza Jafari, Chris Kleppinger, Ken Kozel, Amy Kreiner, David Montgomery, Clay Stamp, Cassandra Vanhooser,

**Members Absent:** Walter Chase, Dr. Cliff Coppersmith, Micah Risher, Terenda Thomas, Debbie Walsworth, Jackie Wilson

**Guests:** Holly DeKarske, Helga Einhorn, Kurt Fuchs, Cristy Morrell, Jessica Mumbulo, Dana Newman, Phil Starkey, Scott Warner

**Staff:** Kristen Goller, Brennan Tarleton, Bryce Yelton

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

Mr. Jafari noted that the minutes were sent by email in advance of the meeting. Mr. Stamp made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Bautz seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **III. Guest Speaker – Brennan Tarleton, Planning Officer, Talbot County Planning and Zoning**

Mr. Tarleton delivered a presentation on the Comprehensive Plan update. The county is required to complete this plan by 2026; the last was adopted in 2016. Nearly 500 survey responses have been received, and public listening sessions are scheduled throughout the summer. Key areas of focus include land use, housing, infrastructure, resiliency, and broadband expansion. He emphasized coordination with Talbot County's Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan to ensure alignment. Community members can follow progress on the Engage Talbot website.

### **IV. County Council Report – Chuck Callahan**

Council President Callahan reported that the County has finalized its FY25 budget with no new fees. He highlighted sewer expansion projects in Bozman-Neavitt and broadband deployment reaching Tilghman Point. The Chapel School is nearly complete, and a new EMS station has been approved for Chapel. He noted that Easton Airport will re-bid its next phase of improvements.

Talbot County has maintained its AAA bond rating from Fitch and AA1 from Moody's. Investor confidence was evident in the 17 bidders for a recent \$25 million school bond

issuance. He also reported that construction of the new Shore Regional Medical Center is on track, with roadwork completed and vertical construction beginning soon.

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

Ms. Vanhooser shared updates on Economic Development and Tourism priorities.

**Talbot Works Business Academy:** Cohort #3 graduated 38 small businesses, each receiving ARPA-funded grants.

**Business Appreciation Summit:** This year's event drew record attendance. Tom Barkin, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, served as keynote speaker. Six Community Impact Awards were presented.

**Economic Development and Tourism Strategic Plan:** Open houses, focus groups, and interviews are in progress; a draft will be available in fall 2025.

**State Engagements:** The department hosted the Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Kevin Atticks, with emphasis on seafood and aquaculture. Tours included Wittman Wharf Seafood, Ferry Cove Shellfish, and Chesapeake Landing.

**Key Projects:** The Welcome Center feasibility study is nearing completion. Both economic development and tourism websites are being redesigned with federal EDA funding; and plans for Frederick Douglass Park are advancing.

**Economic Climate:** She reported that tariffs and supply chain disruptions continue to impact local businesses, particularly in construction materials and electrical equipment

## **VI. Town Reports**

Town representatives reported on news from their jurisdiction.

Mr. Montgomery and Ms. DeKarske reported new council leadership in Easton, ongoing comprehensive plan revisions, and major developments including Elliot Road Apartments, Easton Crossing, Gannon Range, and Dutchman's Lane. Traffic congestion on Matthewstown Road and Route 50 was identified as a significant concern. Easton also welcomed several new businesses: Molly's Place, Starbucks, Scottie's Place, and redevelopment at Dover Station

Mr. Starkey reported that the Town of Queen Anne is exploring acquisition of the former River's Edge Garage property, destroyed by fire, for use as a kayak launch and trailhead along the Tuckahoe River.

No representatives were present from Oxford, St. Michaels, and Trappe.

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

Board members and guests contributed to a robust discussion about events and issues around Talbot County. Highlights include:

- Mr. Bond reported a strong fiscal year and previewed the upcoming Plein Air Easton festival.

- Dr. Dill announced the Talbot County Fair, scheduled for July 11–12, and introduced the USDA Agricultural Census dashboard. EDC members congratulated Dr. Dill on the recent completion of her Ph.D.
- Mr. Kozel reported a positive FY25 margin for the hospital system. He confirmed the new Shore Regional Medical Center is scheduled to open in summer 2028. Workforce development efforts with Chesapeake College are ongoing, and emergency department throughput improvements are underway

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

- Solid Foundations, Limitless Futures: Building a Sustainable Future Conference – June 28, 2025
- Next EDC Meetings: September 4, 2025, and December 4, 2025

#### **IX. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 a.m. following board and guest updates.