

Talbot County Tourism Board

Meeting Minutes

May 13, 2026

Avalon Theatre

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Vice-Chairman Jessica Bellis called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. and welcomed members and guests to the Avalon.

Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Maureen Curry, Harold Klinger, Patricia McGlannan, Mark Salter, and Jeff Schneider

Members Absent: Chris Agharabi, Jennifer Brown, Keasha Haythe, Amy Kreiner, Kristen Greenaway, Eric Levinson, Katrina Whittington

Guests: Sammy Adams-Mercer

Staff: Cassandra Vanhooser, Kristen Goller

II. Talbot County Council Report – Keasha Haythe

Ms. Haythe was unable to attend, so there was not a report from council.

III. Director's Report – Cassandra Vanhooser

Ms. Vanhooser reminded members that the annual Business Appreciation Summit is tomorrow (May 14, 2026). The fourth cohort of the Talbot Business Academy wrapped successfully, with graduates recognized at a recent council meeting.

Using remaining grant funds from the Mid-Shore Regional Council, the department partnered with the Talbot County Public School system to host Mark Perna. As a nationally recognized workforce and education speaker, Mr. Perna is a thought leader at the unique intersection of education, employment, and economic development. Mr. Perna spoke at Easton and St. Michaels Middle High Schools, delivering his message to staff, students, and the community. The event was well received, and a big step in opening the door for further integration with the school system for workforce development.

Ms. Vanhooser distributed the most recent lodging tax report provided by the county's finance office, which provide data through calendar year 2025. A discussion of the number ensued. During this discussion, it was noted that renovations at the Oxford Inn are underway. The Days Inn has closed to the public and is now operating as a homeless shelter. The Tidewater Inn is for sale.

IV. Approval of Minutes – Feb. 11, 2026

Ms. Bellis noted that minutes were emailed out in advance. Mr. Klinger motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Bixler seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

V. Manager's Report – Kristen Goller

Online Content Strategy: Ms. Goller noted that work continues on the TourTalbot.org website, as recommendations are implemented from the recent AI audit. The TalbotWorks.org website is in the final phase of development. New Federal legislation regarding online ADA requirements for government entities has been delayed to 2028, but the county is taking a proactive approach to implement.

This spring and summer, in part through grant funding from the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, a refresh the department's image library is underway.

Print Collateral

Shifting over to print collateral, APG Media is readying to launch advertising sales, which will commence in June/July. The printed guide will be in hand prior to 2027.

Media Visits:

The department continues to field media inquiries and track media mentions. A compilation of coverage received, some of which was secured by the public relations efforts of local partners such as Bluepoint Hospitality, Inn at Perry Cabin, etc. includes: Baltimore Business Journal, Baltimore Magazine, Secret DC, USA Today 10Best, Baltimore Banner, Chesapeake Bay Magazine, Northern Virginia Magazine, MSN.com, USA Today, Mainline Today, Travel + Leisure, Washingtonian, and Southern Living.

A new piece is in the works for Military Officers Magazine, focused on the War of 1812. Later this summer, a journalist is covering the Log Canoe Races. The State's Office of Tourism Development public relations team is visiting for a FAM tour in early June. The Mid-Atlantic Tourism PR Alliance Marketplace is scheduled for Sept. 2026. As the host location is in Delaware, Talbot County will have the opportunity to host a few media representatives for a FAM tour prior to the marketplace.

Projects and Events:

Welcome Center

Funded through a grant by the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, Becker Morgan has developed renderings to enhance the visitor display at Easton Airport. Conversations with the airport management team are ongoing to determine the scale that these renovations should/could follow.

Chesapeake Country All-American Road, ABA Partnership, and Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area

The alliance members are utilizing grant funds to create promotional videos for the highways. Filming will take place next week across the shore. Conservation by Design, who developed the original interpretive plan for the byway was awarded the RFP to develop byway hubs. Each county will receive a hub, and Talbot County's will be installed at the Talbot County Community Center.

Recent and Upcoming Events:

The Maryland Department of Transportation held a public meeting focused on the proposed Frederick Douglass Rail Trail project on April 20. The meeting was well attended, drawing feedback from both those in favor and against the project. Following the meeting, the Talbot County Council voted on April 28 not to include the proposed trail from its annual list of recommended priorities submitted to the Maryland Department of Transportation.

At the same council meeting on April 28, the Talbot County Council unanimously approved the Talbot County Economic Development strategic plan.

Talbot County has been awarded the bid to host the Maryland Motorcoach Group Travel Leader Showcase on Sept. 28-29, 2026. Ms. Goller will be reaching out to community partners with additional details.

MDMO and Legislative Update:

Ms. Vanhooser and Ms. Goller are continuing to monitor the legislative climate both at the county level and through their role in the Maryland Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (MDMO). Ms. Goller serves on the Maryland Tourism Development Board strategic planning development committee, and as a board member, Ms. Vanhooser just participated in a two-day planning retreat.

VI. Town Reports

Town representatives reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

VIII. Comments from the Public

Ms. Adams-Mercer provided a planning update on the 2025 Waterfowl Festival.

IX. Upcoming Meetings

- Sept. 9, Nov. 11 and December Holiday Gathering

X. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:53 a.m., motioned by Mr. Schneider and seconded by Ms. Bixler.