



Economic & Tourism Development Commission

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July 12, 2023

Commission Members Present: Aaron Bramble, Charlie Athey, Richard Story, Sandy Scott, Paula Reeder, Judy Gifford, and David Bowman

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director; Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager; Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development; and Shelley Heller, County Administrator

Attending via Teams: Katie Wright, Economic Development Manager, and Nancy LaJoice, Maryland Department of Commerce

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Bramble called the meeting to order.

Mr. Bramble welcomed Ms. Gifford and Mr. Bowman to the Commission. He also welcomed Mason Cole who is attending as part of a Fellowship through Woodberry Forest School in Virginia to explore local government.

At 3:01 p.m., at the request of Mr. Bramble, a motion was made by Mr. Story, seconded by Ms. Reeder, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes from the June 14, 2023, meeting.

With several new ETDC members and staff and having to elect a new chair at the first of the year, Mr. Bramble, Mr. Story, and Ms. Williams felt it would be helpful to review the Bylaws of the Commission, the 2022 Strategic Plan for Economic and Tourism Development, and how to effectively navigate the County website.

Mr. Bramble reviewed the Bylaws of the Commission. Ms. Gifford inquired whether the number of members on the Commission increased when the Economic Development Commission and Tourism Development Advisory Board merged. Mr. Bramble advised that the previous board and commission were a maximum of seven and after the merger a maximum of nine was set. Ms. Williams shared that to date, the County Commissioners have elected to keep the number at seven however, the flexibility exists.

Mr. Story reviewed the 2022 Strategic Plan. He pointed out the importance of remembering the five goals listed in the Strategic Plan as they move forward in their roles as members of an advisory committee to the Commissioners.

Ms. Gifford expressed her desire to see an economic impact study prior to supporting or opposing a project. Ms. Williams shared that economic impact studies are costly. The Maryland Office of Tourism

does an economic impact study annually which is funded by the state and a contribution from each of the twenty-five destination marketing organizations to make it possible.

Ms. Williams reviewed how to navigate through the Kent County website. She pointed out where to find the posted agenda, minutes, archived files, video of the meetings, and meeting schedule for the EDTC. Ms. Williams reviewed the Economic and Tourism Development page where the EDTC goals are listed and where links to the Strategic Plan can be found along with other resources.

Ms. Williams advised that everything under the Visitor's Tab is the responsibility of the Economic and Tourism Development department with the technical assistance of Information Technology (IT). She further advised that Ms. Osborn updates the Family Resources Directory under the Resident's Tab, and the department maintains all the pages under the Business Tab. She urged the EDTC to review the website and provide comment on any issues, errors or areas that were not user friendly. The IT Department is currently looking at updates to the website and that Ms. Wright would be involved in the update, relying on her expertise in advertising.

Ms. Williams advised that Ms. Boulden and Ms. Wright have been busy closing out FY2023 and working on their marketing plans for FY2024. Economic Development will focus more on Real Estate Brokers and parcels of land that are zoned for development. Ms. Williams advised that there is a list of properties on the County website with the permission of the owners, along with contact information for potential developers, site selectors, and the Commerce Business Attraction team.

Ms. Williams advised that a press release announcing the approval of the Worton Industrial Area and the Town of Betterton Enterprise Zone (EZ) will be coming out on July 14, 2023. The EZ designation provides access to property and income tax credits for businesses. The property tax credit is the most used credit. The property owner must invest a minimum of \$25,000 on improvement. The base is set as of the date of application. The credit is applied only to the increase in the assessed value of the improvements. The County is only forgoing taxes on the newly assessed value at 80% for the first five years and then decreases over the next five years to 70%, 60%, 50%, 40% and then 30%. Ms. Williams and Nancy LaJoyce, Senior Business Development Representative, Maryland Department of Commerce will be meeting with businesses in the Worton/Betterton area. The income tax credit is \$1,000 per new net job in Maryland and is claimed on the income tax return. There are other criteria that also must be met to claim these credits. The Enterprise Zones are the most effective tool in our Economic Development toolbox for Kent County.

Ms. Williams advised that a request was received from the Grand Army of the Republic Post #25/Sumner Hall for support of their application to the Maryland Historical Trust for a grant through the African American Heritage Preservation Program. A motion was made by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Reeder, and passed unanimously to send a letter of support.

Ms. Williams advised that she is working with Sarah King, Executive Director to invite the Senate President, William Ferguson, to meet with the business community in Kent County to discuss the 2023 legislative session and how it will impact businesses. The Blueprint (required funding for public school systems) and changes to the Family Medical Leave Act are of concern. Ms. Williams advised that a letter has been drafted to be sent once Ms. King has the details worked out. At her request, a motion was made

by Mr. Bowman and seconded by Ms. Reeder and passed unanimously to approve sending the letter of support in extending an invitation to Senator Ferguson to visit Kent County.

Ms. Williams advised that the department is planning for the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) conference booth in August. This year's theme is Chesapeake Bay All the Way, and we are considering a Capt. John Smith themed booth with his exploration of the Chesapeake Bay.

Ms. Williams requested ideas from the EDTC on what they would want for FY2025 in a grant program through the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) and the County Commissioners. She advised that for the past four years, USRC has budgeted for an ag grant. The Commission and staff can set the parameters of the grant with approval of the USRC and County Commissioners. She advised that Cecil County mentioned technology-based businesses. Mr. Bramble suggested tourism, stating that depending on how it was written, could cover several industries such as marine-tourism, ag-tourism, restaurants, producers, etc. Ms. Reeder advised that transportation could also be included in a tourism-based grant. Mr. Bramble requested that the matter remain on their agenda for unfinished business at the August meeting.

Ms. Williams advised that we received a couple of press releases from Dan Divilio, Public Relations/Communications Specialist, Kent County Public Schools (KCPS) and that they were shared with the EDTC and on social media. Mr. Divilio advised that they were continuing with their review of the Middle School Feasibility Study and have narrowed down a location to two options: at the Chestertown Campus or a new building at the Worton Campus. KCPS announced new administrators for the Kent County Middle School (KCMS). Mr. Mark Buckel is the new principal and Kelly Melvin is the new assistant principal.

Ms. Kate Goodall-Gray requested the EDTC discuss the matter of the new Kent County Middle School (KCMS) and take a position on what would be best for the county, taking into consideration the number one priority being the students' education and secondarily the economic impact of the location. Mr. Divilio advised that the results of the feasibility study can be found on the public schools' project webpage. The recordings of the two public hearings can also be found on that webpage. The Board of Education has the final say on what and where and the State has the final say on funding for this project.

Ms. Heller advised that Delegation 36 will be meeting with the Commissioners in late July/early August to discuss school funding and other legislative issues.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Mr. Story, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:07 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, August 9, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director