



**Recordings of the Economic and Tourism Development Commission (ETDC) meetings can be found on the Meeting Archive Tab.**

**March 13, 2024**

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

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director; Katie Wright, Economic Development Manager; Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager; Economic and Tourism Development; John Price, County Commissioner; and Shelley Heller, County Administrator.

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Story called the meeting to order. Mr. Story requested a motion to approve the minutes from the February 14, 2024, meeting. On a motion by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Scott, the February 14, 2024, minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Owen Bailey, Director of Land Use and Policy, Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) shared the progress of the Eastern Shore Trail Network which is an initiative that began two years ago to create more trails on the Eastern Shore. Small rural governments do not have the resources or staff for the planning and implementation of trails. ESLC organized a steering committee comprised of members from each county and sought the assistance of the National Park Service, and their River's, Trails, and Conservation assistance program. They have been promoting an Eastern Shore Regional Trails initiative to connect the Towns, parks, and historic places with an interconnected trail network. The Trails initiative provides mental and physical health benefits, and they provide a connection with National parks, playgrounds, and schools. Economically, trails cost approximately \$1M to build, and can yield an annual return of approximately \$800,000. Income is generated by tourists that travel to visit the trails, new businesses such as bike shops, hotels, and restaurants. Trails tend to attract new businesses organically. Trails create more value in a community through better access and more livable communities. According to the 2022 Kent County Land Preservation Parks and Recreation Plan, people are looking for more trails, longer trails and trails that connect to places. In the coming months, the steering committee plans to create an Eastern Shore Trail Coalition to help local governments find resources such as grants and technical assistance. The committee has also created a map of all the Eastern Shore trails and planned trails. On April 27, 2024, Celebrate Trails Day, ESLC will be holding events to show the benefits of trails, one of which is scheduled to take place in Chestertown on the Rail Trail.

Ms. Debbie Bowden, Principal, Envistra, LLC, a consulting firm that was hired by the Upper Shore Work Inforcement Board (USWIB) to administer the Incumbent Worker Training grant. Grant funds are available to Kent, Queen Anne's, and Dorchester County businesses to aid in training for employees that are already established. Funding for this grant is through the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund, administered through the Upper Shore Regional Council. Ms. Bowden advised that this grant was designed to assist smaller companies (under fifty employees) and includes accounting firms, hair salons, restaurants, and landscaping businesses for training such as TIPS and pesticide certifications. Funding

must be dispersed by November 30, 2024. Ms. Williams advised that the grant information has been in the Economic Development monthly newsletter as well as on the County website and Economic Development social media platforms. Ms. Bowden advised that she has already had three businesses express interest in the funding. At an average of \$5,000 per business, Kent County would be able to assist approximately thirteen businesses. This is a reimbursement grant, whereby the business would pay for the training and receive reimbursement from the grant.

Ms. Wright shared the February Economic Development newsletter that highlighted the Incumbent Worker Training program and mentioned other sub-content pieces and reshared where the information is found on the County website. The Micro Ag Grant applications closed on February 15, 2024. Thirteen applications were received. The judging panel has met and will be individually scoring the applications. The panel will reconvene the first week of April to review and discuss the applications. The winners will be announced by the end of April. We have been actively collecting applications for entrepreneurs interested in pitching their ideas for the Upper Shore STRT1UP Roadshow. There are currently seven entrepreneurs signed up and the deadline is March 15, 2024. Ms. Williams advised that the STRT1UP bus will be on-hand for the entrepreneurs to video their pitch for a chance to win \$4,000 for first place and \$1,500 for a runner-up. The competition will take place on April 9, 2024, at 2:30 p.m. at Washington College.

Ms. Boulden shared an advertisement using photographs recently purchased from JP Henry, a local cell phone photographer. Ms. Boulden spent three days with Conner Sebreny of CPAS Studios located in Annapolis. Mr. Sebreny is putting together a travel series on Kent County. They visited the Museums of Kent in addition to many businesses throughout the county. The documentary may feature the following businesses/locations that were visited: Hebe Fountain at Fountain Park, Memorial Park, Evergrain Bread Company, the Schooner Sultana, Echo Hill Outdoor School, the historical boats docked adjacent to the Sultana, Chestertown Marina, Modern Stone Age Kitchen, Houston's Dockside Emporium, Jerry Moe's, Play It Again Sams, Bespoke Chocolate, Kent County Visitor's Center in Chestertown, Chestertown Art project pieces, St. Paul's Church, Battle of Caulk's Field marker, Kent Museum, Knock's Folly, Turner's Creek, Bordley Historical Center, Sumner Hall, Piney Grove, Eastern Neck Island National Wildlife Refuge, Haven Harbour Marina, Haven Harbour South, Waterman's Museum, Manor House and cottages at Haven Harbour, Osprey Marina and Inn, the Village Shops on Main Street in Rock Hall, Fresh Start Food and Garden, Java Rock, Rock City Café, Tolchester Marina, Blue Bird Tavern, Phat Daddy's, African American Schoolhouse in Worton, Molly's, Crow Vineyard, St. Dennis Church in Galena, Twinny's, The Jefas Mexican Grill, Cross Street Food and Garden, Massey Air Museum, Cypress Branch State Park, Robvanary Park and La Cascada Restaurant in Millington. Ms. Boulden advised that Mr. Sebreny enjoyed his stay so much that he stayed an additional day to shoot additional footage in Chestertown and was invited as a guest to Crow Vineyard for dinner with guest Chef Robbie Jester. The video will be shared upon completion.

Ms. Williams met with Lara Wilson, Executive Director for University of Maryland Shore Medical Center, who shared a list of the services currently provided in Chestertown. She further advised that the University of Maryland, Shore Regional Health, will be meeting with the County Commissioners to share an update on the new facility on Route 50.

Ms. Williams shared a rack card which was part of Rebuilding Together's initiative to survey the condition of housing within the community to guide their work in the community. The survey was

sponsored by the Kent County Health Department, Chestertown Rotary Club, and the Upper Shore Regional Council. Rebuilding Together is partnering with Washington College GIS. Postcards have been mailed to residents encouraging completion of the survey.

Mr. Story shared that he and Ms. Reeder attended the statewide Economic Development Day in Annapolis with Ms. Williams on February 15, 2024. Ms. Reeder advised that the Day was sponsored by the Maryland Economic Development Association (MEDA) to provide an opportunity to network with other Economic Development professionals from around the State. Keynote speakers gave details on the Governor's legislative agenda, noting that housing and workforce development items are among the top concerns. It was reported that for every \$1 spent in Economic Development yields a return of \$9.17 across the State.

Ms. Williams presented the Economic and Tourism Development (ETD) Strategic Plan Score Card for 2022-2023. The scorecard is a means of assessing performance or achievement in meeting the goals set out in the Strategic Plan. An ETD Strategic Plan is not a requirement. There was an Economic Development Plan in 2013 and 2017. In 2022, the current ETD Plan was adopted by Resolution by the County Commissioner. The Plan identifies five main goals that contain strategies on how to achieve the goals and objectives to measure progress.

Ms. Reeder urged everyone to send letters of support of legislation proposed in HB0365 and SB 0110 that would increase the allocation that the State gives to the County to fund the Kent County Middle School construction. Commissioner Price advised that we currently receive 50% for school construction and the proposed legislation would increase that funding.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Bowman, seconded by Mr. Athey, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:39 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, April 10, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD  
Director