



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

**April 10, 2024**

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

Commission Members Absent: David Bowman

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director; Katie Wright, Economic Development Manager; Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager; and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist; Economic and Tourism Development.

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Story called the meeting to order. Mr. Story requested a motion to approve the minutes from the March 13, 2024, meeting. On a motion by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Scott, the March 13, 2024, minutes were unanimously approved.

Nina Fleegle, Executive Director, Main Street Chestertown, provided an update on the Visitor's Center and Main Street Chestertown. Main Street Chestertown is a staff of two with a full-time Assistant Executive Director, Kelly Reed. She shared current and upcoming projects and provided the 2024 Chestertown brochures. Tourism is an area that they would like to take a more active role in. Main Street Chestertown has moved their offices from the Chestertown Town Hall to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Visitor's Center and will now be managing the operations of the Visitor's Center. This move allowed not only for more space, but also serves as a "store-front" for the Main Street organization. Main Street Chestertown would like to expand the operations of the Visitor's Center programmatically by offering limited Chestertown branded merchandise. They have partnered with Washington College, giving them increased downtown visibility. They would like to open the center up to the public more, offering meeting and event space. Main Street Chestertown is a free-standing organization under an independent Board of Directors. They receive funding from the Town of Chestertown and receive an operating grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development. Other funding sources include miscellaneous grants and direct fundraising through events, annual appeals, and corporate sponsorships as well as donated parking meter fees.

Main Street Chestertown has partnered with Design Collectives to work on a Downtown Chestertown Master Plan. They are working on Phase I that will run through the Summer. As part of Phase I, they will be conducting stakeholder interviews, and holding public Town Hall meetings. At the end of Phase I, they will have plans. Phase II will be prioritizing the plans with public input and looking for funding. Phase III will be the implementation. Main Street Chestertown will serve as the umbrella agency with concepts handed off to other agencies that are more qualified for the specific tasks. They are hopeful that this Plan would be attractive to outside agencies that would want to fill some of the vacant store fronts. Ms. Fleegle advised that Phase I should be completed by early Fall and Phase II within

approximately six months to a year afterwards. Phase III completion will be determined by what comes out of Phase I and II and how readily funding is available. Phase I's cost is approximately \$100,000 with funding coming from various sources. Ms. Fleegle advised that they work closely on the Plan with the Town of Chestertown, Chestertown Planning & Zoning, and possibly Housing and Community Development. Ms. Fleegle was clear that this Plan will not be the vision of Main Street Chestertown, but rather the Town of Chestertown's vision of what Chestertown should be.

Ms. Williams advised that Secretary Atticks visited Kent and Queen Annes Counties on March 28, 2024. Ms. Boulden and Ms. Wright hosted the Secretary, visiting Wildly Native, Modern Stone Age Kitchen and ended the day with a "gather and grow" roundtable at Washington College's Center for Environment & Society at Semans-Griswold Environmental Hall. Ms. Williams advised that she has received very positive feedback from the tour and roundtable.

The AI Conference was held at Chesapeake College on April 5, 2024 with approximately 200 people in attendance. Ms. Williams advised that Artificial Intelligence (AI) I will not be perfect and can create about 90% of the work and the user will still need to refine the other 10% to suit their specific needs. Ms. Reeder added that it won't necessarily be the developers of AI that will lead the future, but rather those that can implement it effectively in their workplace. She complemented the Economic and Tourism Development office on the fact that they are already utilizing AI to assist with workload.

Ms. Williams shared that the Upper Shore STRTIUP Roadshow was held on April 10, 2024, at Washington College with approximately 50 attendees. There were eight entrepreneurs that pitched their ideas/business and competed. Beyond Words Tutoring from Queen Anne's County received \$1,500 as the runner-up and The Naked Embrace from Cecil County was the grand prize winner, receiving \$4,000. There were also panel discussions to share information such as Where are They Now and Bootstrapping Your Business. Ms. Williams shared that the planning team will be meeting to debrief and discuss future events.

Ms. Boulden and Ms. Wright have been working with Main Street Rock Hall on Social Media workshops for Rock Hall businesses. They will be working with PPR Strategies to facilitate the workshops. Seven Micro Ag grant winners have been selected and notifications will be going out early next week. The Kent County Visitor's Guide is currently being updated and will be sent to the printer soon.

Ms. Williams and Ms. Wright attended a regional partner's meeting on March 20, 2024. This meeting includes representation from the four counties served by Nancy LaJoice, Maryland Department of Commerce. The purpose of the meeting is to share updates and resources. Ms. Boulden shared that the Chesapeake Heritage Area All American Roads recently received a national award for their scenic byways.

Ms. Boulden attended a workshop on April 9, 2024, on marketing the Chesapeake Bay loop which is a targeted focus for the Office of Tourism Development. Ms. Boulden presented the Upper Bay Best Bets partnership with Harford, Cecil, and Kent Counties and how they have been able to collaborate to be at more events as a group.

Ms. Gifford expressed an interest in obtaining more detailed information regarding the Micro Ag grants and the process.

Mr. Athey proposed a survey of local businesses, conducted by the ETDC Commission Members, to assess how the businesses feel about Economic Development in Kent County. Ms. Williams advised that a Business Retention Survey could be set up in HubSpot to track all data. She recommended that Mr. Athey meet with her and Ms. Wright to come up with a series of questions that could be presented to the ETDC at a later meeting. It was suggested to survey the major employers first and then move on to the medium and small businesses. Mr. Story expressed his desire to work with Mr. Athey on this project.

Ms. Gifford provided a copy of “The Local Economy Revolution Has Arrived!” book to the ETDC members and staff, encouraging them to read the book and expressed her desire to discuss it at a future meeting.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Reeder, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:08 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners’ Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD  
Director