



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

September 12, 2023

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

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director; Katie Wright, Economic Development Manager, and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development; Shelley Heller, County Administrator; John Price, County Commissioner

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Bramble called the meeting to order. Mr. Bramble requested a motion to approve the minutes from the August 9, 2023, meeting. On a motion by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Ms. Gifford, the August 9, 2023, minutes were unanimously approved.

Nina Fleegle, Executive Director, Main Street Chestertown presented an overview of the Maryland Façade Improvement Grant Program. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development funds this program and these funds are separate from the State Revitalization funds. The Façade Improvement funds are used to enhance the appearance of the outside of a building or other exterior projects. Each Main Street organization has the authority to create their own rules and regulations around the funding. Chestertown Main Street has a six-member committee, which is comprised of local architects, designers, engineers, etc. The first round of façade funding for this year took place in March and the second is currently underway.

Commercial property owners and commercial property tenants within the historic district are eligible to apply for façade funding. Each applicant may apply for up to a \$20,000 grant, requiring a 50% match. Funding is considered for businesses, retail, commercial, restaurants and public use buildings. All applications are subject to approval by the Chestertown Historic District Commission as well as the Maryland Historical Trust, the entire Town of Chestertown is a National Historical Landmark. The committee looks for projects that will enhance or improve the building, make it more sustainable, or bring it back to its historical roots. Twenty-five projects have been funded to date for a total of \$280,000 and \$3.4 million in private investments.

Ms. Fleegle advised that Main Street Chestertown is working on a downtown master plan and in Phase I have hired a consultant to develop the master plan. The plan will put together a priority list of projects and identify funding sources and what organization should lead the projects. Phase II of the project will determine the costs of the projects and Phase III will be implementation of the projects.

Ms. Wright advised that there are currently eight properties that are utilizing the Commerce Zone Tax Credit and seventeen properties utilizing the Enterprise Zone Property Tax Credit (twelve in Chestertown and five in Rock Hall). There are nine businesses utilizing the Enterprise Zone Income Tax

Credit. Ms. Wright gave a brief overview of where to find information regarding the tax credits on the County website under the business tab.

The department developed a rack card for hotDesks and is working with the other three locations to distribute the cards. She advised that hotDesks is a network of four business incubators/coworking office spaces throughout Maryland's Eastern Shore, Cambridge, Chestertown, Denton, and Salisbury. hotDesks membership provides access to the shared workspace and the statewide startup and entrepreneur ecosystem. Ms. Wright also reviewed where to find the information on the County's website.

Ms. Wright reviewed the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) business mentoring services. She advised that these services are free to anyone who owns or wants to start a business in Cecil, Kent, or Queen Anne's Counties. The mentoring services are for start-ups, entrepreneurs, and existing businesses wanting to grow or improve a component of their business such as marketing, cash flow, or to develop a business plan. An application for these services can be accessed on the County webpage under Request a Business Mentor tab which Ms. Wright reviewed. She shared that the website is a work-in-progress. There are approximately twelve to fourteen mentors, and we are always looking for additional mentors.

Ms. Williams thanked the Commission Members for the brainstorming session about the USRC Ag Grant Program and thanked Mr. Bramble for his notes and Ms. Reeder for emailing thoughts prior, as well as everyone's input during the meeting. She advised that it is ultimately up to the USRC whether there will be any changes to the program. The Field to Farm dinner held in Queen Anne's County was funded by the USRC. This funding was allocated in 2020 for a small business marketing grant program. Kent County completed the grant program and distributed funding in 2020 and provided technical assistance to fourteen small businesses.

Ms. Williams shared that the USRC Agricultural Grant Program FY2023 is wrapping up between now and October 31, 2023, and that an extension was given due to supply chain and contractor delays. FY2024 applications will open January 2, 2024, and close on January 31, 2024, the same schedule as last year. Ms. Williams reviewed the USRC webpage and the Ag Grant link to the County page. Kent County received \$41,000 for the FY2024 Grant Program, \$33,000 in FY2021, \$39,000 in FY2022, and \$52,000 in FY2023.

Ms. Williams advised that WCTR offers the Maryland Farming and Ag Report, 60 second daily updates in the noon hour provided by MD News Network, it provides local and national news and can be found on the web at <https://www.mdnewsnetwork.net/latest-newscasts>.

Ms. Williams advised that she and Ms. Boulden attended the logo reveal for the Chesapeake Country All American Road on September 12, 2023. The nine shore counties will begin using the new logo.

Ms. Williams thanked Ms. Reeder for reviewing the Kent County one page advertisement card and sending a list of recommendations for consideration when it is reprinted. This is the type of feedback we need to continue to improve our communication internally and externally. In follow-up to a comment that was made at the August meeting about the website being difficult to navigate, members

were urged at the July meeting and again today to reach out to the office with any difficulties you encounter trying to navigate the website.

Ms. Osborn advised that Ms. Boulden attended a Passenger Ferry Feasibility study meeting which was held on August 25, 2023, with Queen Anne's County and Visit Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, Ronnie Fithian for the Town of Rock Hall and Tom Mogle for the Town of Betterton were there to answer questions from the consultants. The consultants also visited St. Michaels, Tilghman Island, Kent Narrows, Chesapeake City, and other locations around the Chesapeake Bay as potential ferry destinations.

Ms. Boulden met with MPT to discuss the marketing plan for FY2024 and completed ads for Chesapeake Bay Weddings, Armed Forces Directory, MATPRA Newsletter, Tidewater Trader Hunt issue, and Destination Maryland. Ms. Boulden and Ms. Williams attended grant training held by Marci Ross, Maryland Office of Tourism Development detailing new guidelines and updates.

Ms. Osborn read an email from Willaim Mackey, Director of Planning, Housing and Zoning regarding the Kent County Comprehensive Rezoning and Update.

Ms. Williams advised that she has had a couple of preliminary meetings with the Maryland Chamber of Commerce regarding legislative priorities. Ms. Williams currently serves on the Workforce and Education, and the Business Regulations Committees and will share the legislative priorities once identified.

Ms. Reeder currently sits on the Bay Area Association of Realtors (BAAR) and the Maryland Realtors Association and advised that they have not solidified their legislative priorities. She advised that the BAAR is interested in and encouraging local governments on the Eastern Shore to include licensed members of the Real Estate Boards on their Planning Commissions and Board of Appeals due to the amount of information they have access to and are valuable active participants.

Ms. Reeder advised that the regional board will be lobbying for:

- accessory dwelling units (ADU) on any single-family property that would not require additional sewer allocation or septic system if the total square footage or number of bedrooms existing on the property would be less than what is permitted for a single-family home of the same size;
- ADU's be permitted by right to execute leases for up to six months or more and to allow shorter-term leases if the owner lives in the primary unit on the property;
- the minimum lot size be eliminated; and
- explore the use of sponsored zoning text amendments.

Ms. Reeder advised that at the county level, BAAR supports:

- the elimination of the 10% rule to observe personal property rights and to create an atmosphere that would enable property owners to utilize their properties for more purposes than what the 10% rule allows;
- Queen Anne's County is looking to create a task force to come up with ways and market-based mechanisms to increase moderately priced housing starts; and

- enabling condo projects that are approved to make use of shared well and septic systems for the project.

On a State level, they will be paying close attention to:

- proposals that have a significant fiscal impact and any affect they may have on taxes and fees assessed to real property and property owners (due to a recent poll by the Maryland Realtors that revealed 29% of those polled were seriously considering moving out of state);
- the Pathways report with regards to regulating emissions standards for multi-family and commercial structures as well as any proposed alternatives to the gas tax. (One alternative discussed is a vehicle miles-traveled tax);
- housing supply is a major concern and are working on a package proposal with the biggest challenge being overcoming local government opposition;
- working towards improving financial illiteracy education; and
- condo and HOA reforms to make disclosures and resale package contents more consistent.

Ms. Williams shared that we know that there will be an economic impact to moving the Kent County Middle School out of Chestertown. There are 60 Staff (full and part time), 25 walkers, and 40 car riders (some should be bus riders). Staff and parents could potentially be redirected from Chestertown. The Commissioners discussed the new middle school at their August 8, 2023, meeting, the consensus preferred it remain in Chestertown for the same reason. However, it comes down to what is best for the students and costs associated with each option. Commissioner Price advised that if the project moves forward as a stand-alone school in Worton, it should have its own kitchen and not be a shared kitchen with the high school. He added that there are pros and cons to both sides, his preference would be to keep the school in Chestertown. Mr. Athey shared that in a study done years ago through Kent Forward, to determine where most of the businesses were in Kent County by size, most businesses are in and around Chestertown. He felt that from an economic development perspective and trying to attract new employees to Chestertown, it would make sense to put the new school in Chestertown. Ms. Reeder shared that there is a designated growth area along the 301 corridor.

Mrs. Heller advised that the school board was hopeful to move forward in the design phase of the project in FY2024, however, it was not funded by the County Commissioners. She shared that the best-case scenario would be FY2025 and that the design phase will take approximately a year to complete.

Mr. Bramble shared that he felt the Commission should be involved in this process and should make a recommendation but did not feel it was the right time. He felt that the Commission needed more information and to discuss the matter further.

Ms. Osborn advised that there is a Turner's Creek Park Free Play Day scheduled for September 16, 2023, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. In conjunction with the event, Ms. Wright worked with Stephanie Gosman to create a Turner's Creek brochure including input from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Kent Museum.

Commissioner Price, on behalf of the County Commissioners, expressed their appreciation to the members of the Commission for their service to the ETDC and their commitment to the citizens of Kent County.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Story, seconded by Mr. Athey₂ and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:50 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, October 11, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director