

Kent County Economic Development Advisory Board

Minutes of September 5, 2007

Chairman Stuart “Mickey” Elsberg called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Members present were: Mickey Elsberg, Tom Beckett, Jim Gillespie, Jeff Grafton, Carrie Anderson, C. Breck Debnam, and Kent County Economic Development Director Jack Steinmetz, who acted as recording secretary.

Members absent were: Jay Yerkes

Guests present were: Mr. John Mason, DBED area representative
Mr. Dick Barker, Chestertown commercial real estate specialist

The minutes of the August 1, 2007 meeting were reviewed. Chairman Elsberg provided several suggested corrections, which were all agreed upon by the Board. It was moved by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Mr. Beckett, that the minutes be approved as corrected. Approved.

Guest Speaker:

The Town of Rock Hall Mayor Jay Jacobs was originally scheduled to speak, however he asked to be moved to the October meeting.

Chairman’s Report:

Chairman Elsberg reported that the final Task Force document was being prepared for presentation to the County Board of Commissioner (BOC), the Chamber of Commerce (CoC), and the County Council of Governments (COG). Task Force Chairman Airlee Johnston is coordinating the time and date for a presentation of the report. The report will ask that the BOC decide if they want to take over the implementation of the Task Force’s recommendations as a sub-department of Planning and Zoning or to have a public/private “authority” established to carry on the task.

Individual Board Member Reports:

Mr. Beckett, SCORE

Mr. Beckett reported that Mr. Jim O’Harrah has assumed the office of President of SCORE, and that at least 3 workshops are planned for November, January, and March, with a joint Kent County/Queen Anne’s County sponsorship envisioned. Mr. Beckett and Mr. Dick Barker will co-chair that effort. SCORE has offered to assist the Junior Achievement (JA) program in providing some of the 16 instructors needed for this year. Of note, \$260 per class is required and JA is seeking assistance in that regard.

Mr. Breck Debnam, Agriculture

Mr. Debnam provided a very informative report on Kent County’s farm/crop situation. He stated that crops are off approximately 30% to 50% in some areas of the County, with parts of the Golts and Massey areas better off. Additionally, some farmers who were irrigating had more success, although the aquifer conditions in much of the County do not allow for maximum usage. Mr. Debnam felt that there would be a definite trickle-down effect from the farmers to the local merchants, as farmers whose crops were damaged would probably be more conservative in their

spending. He noted that although Kent County was declared a disaster area, in order to obtain Federal benefits a farmer had to be turned down by 2 banks, and with the value of Kent County farm land, it was difficult for any farmer to be turned down for lack of collateral. He estimated that about 38% of the farmers had some level of crop insurance, which would offer some relief.

Mr. Gillespie, Commercial Building

Mr. Gillespie discussed the continued concern he and several other local businesses have for the need for a by-pass bridge over the Chester River. A memo sent to Director Steinmetz by the State Highway Administration was reviewed, and the upcoming September 25th joint Kent/Queen Anne's Counties "task force" meeting was discussed. Director Steinmetz will be part of that meeting and will report back to the Board. Director Steinmetz took the opportunity to remind the Board that Gillespie & Son will be celebrating its 85th Anniversary on September 15, 2007, and the Board offered their congratulations to the Gillespie family for their continued high level of product and service to the area and for their dedication to the community. Mr. Gillespie noted that his son, who works for the company part-time during his college school year, represents the 5th generation of Gillespie family members in the business.

Mr. Grafton, Education

Mr. Grafton reported that all teaching positions are filled and that approximately 2,200 students make up the new school body, with approximately 800 students in the high school. Unfortunately, this number continues a 10-year downward trend in enrollment, with a loss of approximately 75-100 students this year over last. The Board was concerned about the implications this continued decline represents and Mr. Grafton discussed a number of ways he hopes to go about determining the real cause for the continued declines. A cost of approximately \$10,000 per student was also discussed (base on a budget of approximately \$23 million and approximately 2,200 students). He reported on the Board of Education's agreement to deed over 26 acres of property to the County for use in the Community Center/ County Park campus. He also noted the need to redo the high school parking lot and sewer systems.

Ms. Anderson, Retail

Ms Anderson reported on local businesses gearing up for the holiday season. She had attended the Rock Hall Business Association and would be attending the Chestertown Downtown Association meetings to keep abreast of local initiatives. A discussion followed concerning the need to have a closer association between the City of Chestertown and Washington College. Director Steinmetz reported that he is working directly with both groups to try and bring Washington College items (such as sweat shirts, memorabilia, etc.) into local merchant window to attract students and their parents, and create more of a welcoming perception to the student/parent population. In addition, Board member Grafton suggested that we consider establishing an additional seat on the EDAB, who is non-voting member/representative of Washington College. All Board members were in favor of the idea and Director Steinmetz agreed to review the concept with the County Board of Commissioners.

Director's Report:

Director Steinmetz reported on the upcoming Chester River Health Center Board of Trustees information meeting on Monday, September 10th, and strongly suggested that all EDAB members attend the meeting to gather more information on this important issue.

Director Steinmetz reported that he would be joining the principals of Needham Mushroom Farms in attending the Kent County Planning Commission meeting tomorrow. The Needham project is up for a final site plan approval.

Director Steinmetz updated the Board on the latest Drayton Manor proposal to supply a water/sewer line from the site to the Worton W/S Plant. The Board continues to strongly support the Drayton project.

Director Steinmetz reported on the approval by MARBIDCO of an assistance/performance “grant” to continue with the review of the potential for a vineyard management company in the Kent/Cecil/Queen Anne’s County corridor. Meetings and plans continue to develop and much interest has been generated among not only the other two counties, but also Talbot County.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, Mr. Beckett moved for adjournment, and Mr. Debnam seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:12 p.m.