

## **Economic Development Advisory Board Kent County, Maryland**

**May 6, 2015**

Board Members Present: Dan MacLeod, Robert Jacob, Robert Ampula, Cindy Genter, Kate Gray, Zoe Schneider and Jim Luff

Board Members Absent: Billie Dodge

Also in Attendance: Commissioner William Short, Ernest Crofoot, County Administrator, Scott Boone, Director, Information Technology, Doris Mason, Executive Director, Upper Shore Regional Council, Loretta Lodge, Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce, Amy Moredock, Director, Planning, Housing, and Zoning

At 4:02 p.m. the meeting convened.

Mr. Luff called the meeting to order. On motion by Ms. Genter and seconded by Ms. Gray the Board unanimously approved the minutes from the April 1, 2015, meeting.

Mr. Luff thanked Ms. Schneider for serving on the Board sharing that this is her last meeting. Ms. Schneider is graduating from Washington College in the next few weeks. Ms. Schneider shared that she received a second job offer today and will be taking a tour of Europe before starting employment either in Baltimore or Chicago, as it stands today.

Mr. Luff shared that Ms. Dodge has been in contact and is currently out of town for work and will out of town during the June meeting as well. Ms. Dodge is looking forward to attending her first meeting on July 1, 2015.

Mr. Luff shared he heard a rumor that Chestertown had been approved as an Arts and Entertainment District, and is expected to be announced next week. Mr. Luff will share information as it becomes available.

Doris Mason, Executive Director, Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) gave an overview of a recent visit to the Economic Development Administration, US Department of Commerce, and how our region; Kent, Queen Anne's, and Cecil Counties could qualify as an Economically Distressed District (EDD). Qualifying as an EDD would give our region access to federal investment/federal funding to drive economic growth and innovation. Ms. Mason shared that some considerations to qualify could be aging population, youth migration, home foreclosure rates, percentage of school age children receiving free and reduced meals, and drug addiction rates and how they affect employment and employer recruitment. The USRC will be creating a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), enlisting the support of County Economic Development Directors, Planners, and Information Technology Directors, Advisory Board members, etc. Ms. Mason answered questions from board members.

Mr. Boone shared that Kinniards Point concerns with loss of internet service has been addressed. A template agreement is being developed to offer providers access to County towers and property to allow additional broadband internet access to citizens. Comcast is currently riding around the County and exploring the possibilities of expanding service in Kent County.

Mr. Crofoot shared that this will most likely be his last meeting as he has given his resignation effective June 30, 2015. A recommendation has been forwarded to the Commissioners to create an Economic Development Coordinator position.

Ms. Moredock shared that Tents and Events has received final site plan approval and should begin construction soon. The Southern States project in Massey is going through project review and is awaiting State Highway Administration input. A proposal has been presented to demolish Patsy Whitely's real estate building and to replace it with upgraded storage facilities with a small retail component (an expansion of the A Storage Depot located on an adjacent parcel behind the Whitely property). The Technical Advisory Committee will be reviewing a 28-lot major subdivision in Langford Creek. The developer is proposing some innovative techniques, i.e. a Critical Area Forest Banking Program, which Kent County does not have and very few counties in the state have. Ms. Moredock briefly explained the practice and shared it is currently being reviewed by state agencies. A community wastewater treatment facility is being proposed with septic tanks on each lot with a lagoon located on the property to be utilized for spray irrigation on three agricultural fields located in the center of the property. The Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan would require amendment to accommodate this community system. Ms. Moredock answered a few questions from the board members and discussed regulations that apply to this project.

Ms. Williams opened the discussion about the FY2016 budget recommendation to the County Commissioners sharing that the solution should be sustainable and develop first a structure to carry Kent County forward, five to ten years from now, and not allow ourselves to create a position to fit a person. Ms. Ampula shared an observation that the marine industry was omitted from the Journal Communications publication. Ms. Williams shared that through her research she agrees and there are additional business sectors, i.e. education, healthcare, manufacturing, and small businesses, that drive the economy in Kent County and the figures that are currently being shared do not present the entire picture.

Mr. Luff shared that Keasha Haythe, Director, Economic Development, Dorchester County, is the new president of Maryland Economic Development Association (MEDA).

Mr. Luff shared that he felt the Board did not get much direction from the Commissioners. Commissioner Short shared he would advocate for a Coordinator position, and Ms. Williams to assume that position. In addition Mr. Short suggests that Mr. Boone, and Bernadette Bowman, Director, Tourism Development be involved in the equation, building a team to move the County forward. Mr. Crofoot expanded on the team concept and shared the importance of Ms. Moredock in the process. Ms. Moredock discussed the need to address perceptions about the planning process.

Ms. Genther shared the need to build functional teams to pull together resources and strengths to develop a marketing plan to attract that aspiring business person to bring their company, idea, or concept to Kent County. Mr. Genther shared that branding is the next step in the process of enticing growth in the County.

Mr. Jacobs asked how the Board actually advises Economic Development efforts. Mr. Luff shared that quarterly reports would be made to the County Commissioners. Mr. Crofoot shared that the Board takes a position on issues when needed. Mr. Luff shared the example of the zoning text amendment that was recently adopted and the Board voted to speak in favor of the amendment at the public hearing. Commissioner Short shared that he would like to see potential businesses come before the Board during the process of determining if Kent County is the right fit for their business and allow the Board to give them feedback

Ms. Williams shared that there were no real performance measures or action plans to ensure we are meeting goals in the previous economic development plan. In addition we are missing a vision and philosophy, i.e. three different tag lines on the Economic Development website. Kent County needs one vision and philosophy to build the strategic plan for the County.

Mr. Ampula shared a missing component in County Government is the function to communicate information about the County. Mr. Crofoot agrees and believes that should be a function of Economic Development.

Mr. Ampula feels very strongly that part of our role is to communicate to the citizens of the County, i.e. Why are farms important? Farmers are only 3% of the population, however over 80% of the land is in agriculture. How many people realize the importance of farming, Dixon Valve, LaMotte Chemical, etc. to Kent County? Mr. Luff stated that a means to communicate the information may be to identify the taxes derived from the industries in Kent County.

Ms. Gray shared that it appears the synergies that are necessary within the county departments are working. There has to be a person who owns it and someone who determines what department needs to be involved. Ms. Genther suggested that everyone agrees that a Coordinator position be created and the Board move forward with a recommendation. Ms. Mason shared a definition. Mr. Ampula made a motion to support Mr. Crofoot's recommendation to the Commissioners to create an Economic Development Coordinator position; the motion was seconded by Ms. Genther and carried unanimously. Mr. Crofoot shared that also as a part of that recommendation, the Revolving Loan Fund be re-instated and take advantage of matching funds, up to \$200,000.00, offered by the Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center. On motion by Mr. Ampula and seconded by Ms. Genther the Board unanimously approved the recommendation.

Ms. Genther shared that there was a recent article in the paper about the Young Professional Network. Mr. Luff shared that there are over 180 members. Commissioner Short spoke to some members and invited them to get involved with the Economic Development Advisory Board.

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Mr. Luff presented the idea of increasing the number of board members from seven to nine. After a brief discussion the Board agreed to discuss at the June 3, 2015, meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Genter and seconded by Ms. Gray and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:49 p.m. The Board agreed to meet again on Wednesday, June 3, 2015, at 4:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams  
Deputy Clerk