

Economic Development Commission

The County Commissioners of Kent County

400 High Street

Chestertown, MD 21620

August 3, 2016

Board Members Present: Dan MacLeod, Cindy Genther, Kate Gray, Aaron Bramble, and Jim Luff

Board Members Absent: Bob Jacob, Bob Ampula, and Shreyas Suresh

Also in Attendance: Amy Moredock, Director, Planning, Zoning, and Housing; Lois Haggerty, TEDCO; Tom Rider, DLLR; Shelley Heller, County Administrator

At 3:05 p.m. the meeting convened. Mr. Luff called the meeting to order. Mr. Luff requested a motion to approve the minutes from the July 6, 2016 meeting. On motion by Ms. Gray and seconded by Ms. Genther, the Commission unanimously approved the minutes from the July 6, 2016 meeting.

Ms. Williams demonstrated the ZOHO Customer Relationship Management software that the Economic Development partners are utilizing. The summer high school intern entered data from business cards and internet searches. Information that has been populated includes; number of employees, contact information for each business, as well as partners such as the Maryland Department of Commerce; addresses, phone numbers, and emails. There is a note section to share important information as well as a task tracking feature. The goal is continuity of efforts currently being invested in economic development for Kent County and sharing information to operate more efficiently, and to provide the best possible customer service to our business community.

Ms. Williams shared that as a result of the discussion at the July EDC meeting, she is working on a tax chart for the State, the County and the Towns. There is a meeting scheduled with Ms. Williams, Ms. Heller, Pat Merritt, Chief Finance Office, and Amy Smith, Supervisor, Kent County Assessment Office to discuss real property tax, personal property tax, and utility tax rates and what the County has the authority to do, with real property tax incentives and/or abatements.

Ms. Moredock shared information on renewable energy recent activity, stating that the Land Use Ordinance contains solar and wind energy systems provisions. Small scales systems are permitted in most zoning districts, defined as on-site production and consumption with an allowance to sell excess energy back to the meter and allow for aggregation as defined by the State of Maryland. The controversy has occurred with utility scale projects. Utility scale wind energy systems are not permitted in the county. Utility scale solar energy systems are permitted by either site plan review or special exception in the County. On commercially zoned land, utility scale solar is permitted as a special exception which carries both Planning Commission and Board of Appeals review. On employment center and industrial zoned land, utility scale solar is permitted as a primary use and structure and is subject to site plan review by the Planning

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Commission. There is no limitation of size in these zoning districts. Ms. Moredock shared updates on the two proposed solar projects in Massey.

The Mills Branch Solar project by Apex Clean Energy, Inc. is being proposed in an agricultural zoning district. Utility scale solar systems are permitted in the Agricultural Zoning District and the Resource Conservation District; however, they are limited to five acres and they must be incidental to the operation of the farm. The Mills Branch project is not compliant with Ordinance provisions. The County and Keep Kent Scenic have intervened in this case before the Public Service Commission, namely opposing the PSC's stance on preemption of local zoning.

Mr. Luff shared that the issue creates a conundrum, utilizing commercial land for solar does not produce the highest and best use for economic growth. Ms. Moredock shared that the Renewable Energy Task Force struggled with that issue during the drafting of the 2011 proposed renewable energy system zoning text amendments.

Mr. Luff led a brain storming session on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Kent County in preparation for an update of the Economic Development Plan. Ms. Williams will compile the information shared in the draft Economic Development Plan 2016 working document.

There was a discussion on workforce development and how to incorporate students in development training with the local businesses. Mr. Luff asked about resume preparation and mock interview experience for students. Mr. MacLeod shared that curriculum and instruction time requirements restrict what can be done to enforce essential skills.

Janet Christensen-Lewis shared that utility scale solar is not a county decision, the Public Service Commission can issue a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) and the project can be located on any land regardless of zoning. Ms. Lewis shared that our region is currently congested with solar projects and these large projects will restrict property owners from being able to take advantage of renewable energy for personal production and consumption. The proposed Mills Branch project and other large scale projects actually eliminate four jobs in the agricultural industry.

Mr. Rider shared some insight on workforce development. DLLR is partnering with other agencies to assist in the endeavor of building a workforce, in the region, that is attractive to employers.

A motion was made by Ms. Gray, seconded by Mr. MacLeod, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:10 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, September 7, 2016, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

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Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams

Coordinator