



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

February 14, 2024

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

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

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Story called the meeting to order and welcomed new Board Member, Judy Crow. Mr. Story requested a motion to approve the minutes from the January 10, 2024, meeting. On a motion by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Mr. Athey, the January 10, 2024, minutes were unanimously approved.

Gale Drenning, Acting President and Jeanette Jeffrey, Executive Director, HomePorts provided an update and overview of HomePorts. Ms. Jeffrey advised that HomePorts is a non-profit organization, established in 2007 to serve the 55+ community in Kent County. HomePorts is a paid membership organization that offers free rides throughout the county to its members as well as invitations to all their monthly social and educational events. The focus of HomePorts is to reduce isolation and loneliness among older adults. More information on HomePorts can be found at <https://homeports.org/> or on their Facebook and Instagram pages. Their office is located on the second floor of Chestertown Town Hall. Their signature event is the Health and Wellness Expo at the YMCA. They have a membership of 30 and approximately 30 volunteers, 10 of which are very active.

Ms. Genter presented the 2023 Real Estate Review, indicating that the real estate market in Kent County has stayed relatively the same as it was in 2022 with a similar number of houses sold at similar prices. Ms. Genter advised that the market is unchanged due to low inventory. New construction activity is up overall, and new home sales are up, especially in Chestertown with home sales being around \$250,000. These new home sales will generate an estimated \$236,284 in additional tax revenues for the County. In the regional home sales comparison, Kent County came in at 16% compared to Queen Anne's County at 19%. The Eastern Shore's median home price grew more than any other region in the mid-Atlantic area at 7.6%. In closing, Ms. Genter advised that she is optimistic for Kent County's growth.

Ms. Williams advised there was a work session with County Commissioners a few weeks ago to discuss the Village of Kennedyville. The Commissioners do not have a desire to purchase additional land for development. Their focus is to complete the buildout of phase two. Kent County Public Works is working on the costs for the infrastructure that must be done to complete phase two. The cost estimates to do the larger project was approximately \$5M which was not desirable for a developer. Now, with only thirty-four lots to complete, the County is reaching back out to some of the developers that showed interest.

Ms. Wright shared the Micro-Ag Grants will be closing on February 15, 2024, and we have received 10 applications. The judging panel has been formed and will be reviewing the applications over the next couple of weeks. There will be an AI conference sponsored by the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board held on April 5, 2024, at Chesapeake College at 8:00 a.m. The focus of the conference is to learn how AI is impacting government, business, and the academic world, registration is required. Kent, Cecil and Queen Anne's Counties, Washington College, StartUp Maryland, TEDCO, and the Upper Shore Regional Council are planning the Upper Shore STRTIUP Roadshow that will be held at Washington College on April 9, 2024. Entrepreneurs in Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties are invited to pitch their ideas for a chance to video their pitch and win prize money.

Ms. Boulden shared the grant application for EDA funds through the Maryland Office of Tourism was approved at \$112,320. The funds will be used for television and streaming radio marketing. Funds must be spent in FY24 and FY25. She attended the AAA Travel Showcase in Pittsburgh, sharing a booth with Cecil and Harford counties as part of the Upper Bay Best Bets (UBBB) partnership. There were 164 raffle submissions that were added to the tourism newsletter list. She attended the Great American Outdoor Show at the Maryland Office of Tourism/Department of Natural Resources Booth in Harrisburg. Many Kent County businesses were represented at the show. She attended Tourism Day in Annapolis sponsored by the Maryland Tourism Coalition.

Ms. Crow inquired about the American Bus Association (ABA) bus tours that have been booked to bring motor coaches to Crow Winery. Ms. Boulden met with the ABA representative a few months ago. The ABA representative attended the national conference in Nashville and provided the office with an eighteen-page document of leads on various groups and what they are interested in.

Ms. Williams shared that FY25 departmental budgets are to be completed by March 25, 2024. Budget presentations from each department to the County Commissioners will take place on April 2, 2024, and budget workshops with the County Commissioners follow. An almost final budget is then presented at a public hearing and voted on by the Commissioners at a later date. Members of the ETDC are welcome to attend the process at any point. The Nominating Committee Policy and Procedures were updated and shared with Commission members.

Ms. Williams, Mr. Story, and Ms. Reeder will be attending the Economic Development Day in Annapolis. According to the Economic Development Awareness Report completed by BEACON at Salisbury University, Economic Development generates \$9.17 in county and state revenue for every dollar invested.

Mr. Divilio gave an update on the Superintendent search. Mr. Divilio advised that the public input survey opened today. This survey will assist the Maryland Board of Education prepare marketing materials for the search and will help them in screening applicants. Surveys are for anyone in the community to complete and have been provided in English and Spanish online, on social media and in print format. The survey closes on February 25, 2024. The superintendent search will be nationwide.

Ms. Gifford questioned progress on the 2022 Strategic Plan and suggested quarterly reporting on the Plan's objectives. Ms. Williams advised a score card has been started and we will make that a priority for a future meeting.

Aaron Bramble, advised that he was appointed to serve on the Rock Hall Economic Development Committee and will be attending the ETDC meetings as a liaison to the Town.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Reeder, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:39 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, March 13, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director