

Kent County Economic Development Advisory Board

Minutes of December 5, 2007

Chairman Stuart “Mickey” Elsberg called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m., having allowed additional time due to inclement weather.

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

Members absent were: Jay Yerkes, Tom Beckett, and C. Breck Debnam

Guests present were:

1. Chester River Association: Marcy Ramsey, Chester River Board Member and Vida Morely, Chester River Membership Committee Member
2. Mr. John Mason, DBED area representative

The minutes of the November 7, 2007 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Gillespie asked to change the second sentence of his presentation to read, “*Radcliff Park will no longer be including residential units within that area.*” Mr. Grafton asked to change the first sentence of his presentation to read, “*Mr. Grafton reported that some Kent County recent college graduates accept positions outside of the county in order to gain employment immediately.*” It was moved by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Mr. Gillespie, to approve the minutes as corrected. Approved.

Guest Speakers:

The Board heard a presentation on The Chester River Association (CRA) by Ms. Marcy Ramsey and Ms. Vida Morely. The CRA representatives used a power point presentation to outline the work being done by CRA to help monitor, clean, and protect the 60-mile long Chester River and its entire watershed area. A thorough discussion on nitrogen and phosphate levels and point source pollution concerns was undertaken. The representatives outlined their plans for presentation of their story and membership efforts to the community and Board members provided suggestions for potential speaking engagements. Currently there are approximately 1,300 members. Chairman Elsberg thanked the representatives for an excellent update on CRA’s activities.

John Mason reported that he had met with Mr. Gillespie, at Gillespie & Son, Inc., to learn more of their operation and outline potential DBED programs for the company.

Chairman’s Report:

Chairman Elsberg presented the final report of the Workforce Housing Task Force to the Board members, and updated the Board on activities relating to the Calvert Heights housing complex.

Individual Board Member Reports:

Mr. Gillespie, Commercial Building

Mr. Gillespie reported that there was no new commercial building this month, but led off discussion on the National Guard Armory project. Director Steinmetz reported on the December 4th Board of Commissioners meeting regarding the Armory and updated the Board on that issue.

Mr. Grafton, Education

Mr. Grafton reported that the 82-student reduction in total enrollment, which was experienced in the 2007 school year, is projected to occur again in 2008. In reviewing the registrations of local private schools, there was no noticeable student increase in those institutions which account for the continuing 10-year decline in enrollment. He noted that the Junior Achievement program continues to work well in the school, and that the Board of Education is still considering alternative uses for the current Board of Education Building on Washington Avenue in Chestertown.

Ms. Anderson, Retail

Ms. Anderson reported that although the area merchants were decorated for the Christmas holiday season, sales were still not as strong as they were at this time last year. She did see that several businesses in Rock Hall had utilized suggestions made by Retail Consultant Casey Wilson. Director Steinmetz then outlined for the Board, his work in the eventual changing of existing Maryland Sales Tax law, which Governor O'Malley signed into law during the recent Special Legislative Session. This change was initiated after Director Steinmetz followed up on a comment by local merchant, Richie Bramble, regarding the prohibition against a merchant paying the sales tax on behalf of a buyer. This resulted in legislation (HB 1413) being introduced by Delegate Michael Smigiel in the close of last year's legislative session, which unfortunately was bogged down in the House Rules Committee. However, the bill was reintroduced in the 2007 Special Session as HB 9, and was also included as an amendment in both SB 2 and HB 5. The latter two bills were then joined in conference and ultimately signed by the Governor. The new law, allowing a merchant to pay and advertise to pay sales tax on behalf of a buyer, takes effect January 2008. This change began with the Economic Develop Office and now positively affects merchants throughout the State.

Director's Report:

Director Steinmetz reported on the Revolving Loan Fund, and noted an upcoming request. He discussed the delays in bringing a Washington College representative onto the EDAB. He reminded everyone of the December 19th EDAB Appreciation Luncheon at 11:30 in Galena, and lastly reviewed some of the issues regarding Federal legislation and the H2B Guest Worker program.

Adjournment:

There being no further business, Ms. Anderson moved for adjournment, and Mr. Gillespie seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 p.m.