

# Kent County Economic Development Advisory Board

## Minutes of July 11, 2007

The meeting was called to order by Director Steinmetz at approximately 7:03pm.

Members present were: Chairman Mickey Elsberg, Ms. Carrie Anderson, Thomas Beckett, Jay Yerkes, and Kent County Economic Development Director Jack Steinmetz, who acted as recording secretary.

Members absent were: C. Breck Debnam, James Gillespie, and Jeff Grafton.

Also in attendance was Ms. Cindy Genter, Executive Director, Kent County Chamber of Commerce

There were no members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

### New Member Introduction:

Director Steinmetz welcomed Ms. Carrie Anderson as the newest EDAB member. Ms. Anderson provided the Board with a summary of her background and expressed appreciation at becoming an active member of the Board.

### Approval of Minutes:

The minutes of the June 6, 2007 Regular EDAB meeting and the June 6, 2007 Closed Session meeting were reviewed. It was moved by Mr. Yerkes, and seconded by Mr. Beckett, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

### Guest Speaker:

Ms. Cindy Genter, newly appointed Executive Director, Kent County Chamber of Commerce, introduced herself to the Board and outlined her vision for the Chamber. She outlined her plan to increase the actual value of Chamber membership and how she would go about informing existing and potential members of this value. She spoke of the importance of keeping downtown Chestertown viable, as it is the gateway to all of Kent County. She discussed the successes Rock Hall has had in keeping store vacancy to a minimum, and how she hopes to pass that information on to Galena, Millington, and Betterton.

The Board was enthusiastic about her energy and plans for strengthening the County's business community. The Board welcomed her into her new position and asked that she continue to work closely with the Economic Development Office in our mutually beneficial efforts.

### Chairman's Report:

Chairman Elsberg reported on the success of the establishment of a Junior Achievement (JA) program in Kent County Public Schools. He explained the two-year history of effort put into bringing this formerly high school-only program into the entire K-12 system. He mentioned the critical support of both former Superintendent Ward and current Superintendent Pack in helping to bring the program to life. During the recently completed school year, an initial program was established in two classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders, with the upcoming school year's program being expanded into eight classes. In addition, Chairman Elsberg had worked with Principal Ed Silver to bring a Job Shadow program into the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Finance Academy.

Board member Thomas Beckett asked that the record indicate that this important program would not have been possible without the continued efforts of Chairman Elsberg, and the rest of the Board agreed.

Chairman Elsberg reported on a joint resolution passed by the Boards of Commissioners of Kent, Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Talbot, and Queen Anne's Counties. The resolution was entitled, *Eastern Shore 2010: A Regional Vision*. It dealt with the recognition of the impact of future development on the former lifestyle of the Eastern Shore, and certified the joint agreement in which the subject Counties would cooperate on managing growth, increasing preservation programs, implement economic development plans, and develop regional transportation initiatives by 2010.

Individual Board Member Reports:

The Board has begun a new process designed to make the individual Board members more active in the information gathering, opportunity and challenges recognition, and idea exchange. Each member will now be responsible for presenting a short review of technical or business areas they represent or are interested in, or in general areas of concern to them countywide.

Tom Beckett: SCORE and United Way:

Mr. Beckett reported that the Economic Development Office had included a \$1,500 grant in its 07/08 budget for use by SCORE in sponsoring 3 business workshops. He further reported that SCORE has about 25 to 40 full analytical sessions per year with potential or existing business owners, and that each of the approximately 15 to 20 active counselors handle 2 or 3 cases each on an ongoing basis. He noted that in recent years SCORE has helped three companies detect internal fraud, which the company's management was not aware of. Outside of fraud, SCORE typically finds the greatest problems are related to a lack of capital.

Mr. Beckett reported that he represented Kent County Economic Development at a recent meeting with U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski, in which jobs, health care, and "third bridge" issues were discussed.

Mr. Beckett reported on recent strategic direction being considered by the United Way. As a Board member of U/W, he was instrumental in redirecting U/W efforts. In the past U/W was a reactive organization, distributing funds to agencies based on the agency's requests. However the U/W was concerned that they did not completely understand the needs of others who may not have come forward with requests. Therefore the U/W is working with Salisbury University Graduate Business School to prepare and undertake a survey and study of regional needs. He will keep us updated on the progress of that effort.

Jay Yerkes: Residential Building and Chamber of Commerce:

Mr. Yerkes reported that locally new residential construction was very slow. However, the slowness in the new construction market has created a very strong demand for renovation services. Those firms that are able to offer quality and timely renovation work are experiencing good growth and strong backlogs. Apparently regional marketing projections expect some relief by next summer.

Mr. Yerkes reported that he is the Chairman of the Legislative Committee for the Kent County Chamber of Commerce, and that he is working to obtain more input from members on the effect of new legislation on their businesses. He reported that he is working to have legislation proposed to increase the amount of green construction credits the State of Maryland provides. Currently there are very few credits given as incentives for builders or home owners to use more green construction even though the technology is available to positively affect the environment.

Ms. Carrie Anderson: Retail Businesses:

Ms. Anderson reported that she has been touring the County's five municipalities and reviewing the status of retail store fronts. She reported on the problems being experienced in Galena, with the loss

of the Amish stores and the bakery. She has been watching the vacancies in the Kent Plaza and Washington Crossing malls. Discussion entailed regarding the problems which occur when landlords do not maintain their properties or when landlords raise rents to levels that force existing tenants to abandon the property.

Economic Development Director's Report:

Vineyards: Mr. Steinmetz reported that he is working with John Dillman, Executive Director of the Upper Shore Regional Council, to obtain a grant or study authorization from MARBIDCO to determine the feasibility of establishing a vineyard management company to cover Kent, Cecil, and Queen Anne's Counties.

Washington College Survey: Mr. Steinmetz reported that the Washington College student survey regarding downtown Chestertown shopping is completed and, was reviewed with Dr. Michael Harvey. Although the number of survey respondents was much smaller than he would have preferred, Mr. Steinmetz will share the findings with the Downtown Chestertown Association in order to formulate a strategy.

Downtown Chestertown Association: Mr. Steinmetz happily reported that there is positive move afoot to rekindle the DCA as a viable business group. A new association leader has been elected and there appears to be a great deal of enthusiasm in the group.

At approximately 8:52p.m., there being no further business before the board, a motion was made by Mr. Beckett, supported by Ms. Anderson, to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously.