

Economic Development Advisory Board
Kent County, Maryland

April 1, 2015

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

Board Members Absent: Zoe Schneider

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, Kent County Chamber of Commerce, and Richard Story, Senior Vice President, Director of Community Relations and Government Affairs, Business Development Liaison

At 4:00 p.m. the meeting convened.

Mr. Luff called the meeting to order. On motion by Mr. Ampula and seconded by Ms. Gray the Board unanimously approved the minutes from the March 4, 2015, meeting.

Joe Holt, Chief of Staff, Washington College presented the Strategic Plan for mapping the future for Washington College. Mr. Holt shared the goal of increased student enrollment from 1,395 to 1,751 by 2019. Washington College will be applying to become a Regional Institution Strategic Enterprise (RISE) Zone. The purpose of the RISE zone program is to access institutional assets that have a strong and demonstrated history of commitment to economic development and revitalization in the communities in which they are located. Mr. Holt shared Washington College's vision by the year 2020, which included, increased enrollment, increased staff with strengthened STEM disciplines and business and communications, an endowment of over \$300 million, a new residence hall, renovated residence halls, a waterfront campus to advance the environmental science and studies that supports the rowing and sailing programs, and two new academic buildings. Washington College has a new admissions visitors' center that greets potential students and parents, that is state of the art, and the last thing on the tour is the career center. Mr. Holt stated that students once needed a high school diploma to get a job, now students need a bachelor's degree to get a job and tomorrow students will need two to three internships/externships to get a job. Mr. Ampula asked what is being done to encourage students to return to the area after graduation. Mr. Holt shared that a greater emphasis on internships will introduce students to local businesses. Doris Mason shared that many GIS students are currently working in the region. Mr. Beckett asked if there were an incubator, would Washington College have an appetite to be a partner. Mr. Holt said he believed they would and presently capital is the obstacle.

Dick Goodall, CEO and Bob Grace, President, Dixon Valve & Coupling Company shared Dixon's needs, current state, actions being taken, and what help is needed. Mr. Grace stated that the first impression of economic development in the community is alluring. The goal

is to make the community a place where people want to move, work, and raise their family. Mr. Grace stated that the County, from an Economic Development standpoint, can assist Dixon by making sure we have the resources and a school system to attract and retain people. Dixon will be 100 years old next year, and has been in Chestertown for 40 years, and has more than 1,600 employees including 387 international. Chestertown, Kent County, is the corporate headquarters and Dixon is committed to the community. Dixon spends about one million dollars annually on goods and services in Kent County. Dixon's meetings and visitors support hotels, restaurants, etc. Mr. Grace shared that Dixon provides leadership training and an apprenticeship program for employees. Kent Forward was formed to assist Kent County Public Schools to improve the school system and supporting Kent Forward is paramount. Assuring the product the school system is putting out is employable and ready for the workforce. Mr. Grace shared the plans for a new building in Chestertown, a high tech facility, which will require higher skilled personnel. A regional vocational technical school was discussed as was the part of the high-school. Ms. Genter shared that Kent County High School has appointed a new Career & Technology, Coordinator, Mark Buckle and suggested Dixon partner with the High School. Mr. Grace shared that Dixon would entertain any discussions to get people trained. Mr. Goodall shared some history on Economic Development in the region. Mr. Goodall shared that hiring Economic Development directors is not the answer in his opinion. Kent County has to put dollars and support behind our school system, to draw entrepreneurs into opening shops in the towns. Mr. Goodall stated that Maryland is ranked in the 40's within the 52 states to do business and encouraged us to reach out to the new Governor and DBED Secretary and share how Maryland taxes and regulations hurt the State in recruiting businesses.

Mr. Crofoot introduced Mr. Story and Mr. Story shared his background with Kent County and experience in Economic Development, which included creating an incubator. MEDA's Council of Past Presidents could assist the County in developing a strategic plan. Mr. Story stated that even if the County went with a regional approach, there still has to be a point person. Someone who answers the phone and is responsive to requests, how that is structured is less important. Mr. Crofoot shared the past two year discussions about Economic Development and the decision to run the activity through the Commissioners' Office to track the activity. Mr. Crofoot shared that our office has attempted to attend as many meetings as possible, but there are many others we should be attending. It requires a position to represent the County. Mr. Crofoot has put a place holder in the FY2016 budget pending the recommendation of the Board and Commissioners' direction.

Mr. Luff reviewed the history on Kent County's Economic Development structures through the years. Options were discussed on proposed structures and Mr. Luff recommended for consideration of establishing a free standing department with a director/coordinator/manager, staff, and an office.

Mr. Ampula agreed that the Economic Development function needs to be re-established and suggested consideration of hiring a consultant to establish a plan as to what an Economic Development Office should look like and understand the needs of businesses and Kent County. Ms. Genter shared that a day to day type coordinator position is needed and also agrees with a contract position to develop a plan that includes implementation strategies. Mr. Ampula

originally thought an outside person would be best, however after tonight's conversations believes an inside person would serve the County best. Mr. Story stated that whoever handles Economic Development has to appear to be a Department Head and attend all County meetings, so they are not a stranger. The person has to also carry the Commissioners' clout.

Commissioner Short requested that everyone be patient, the Commissioners have had discussions and the three Commissioners should be at the table during these conversations. Ms. Gray stated that the Board had to start somewhere and we are not under the impression any decisions are being made. Mr. Luff asked Commissioner Short if a meeting with the Commissioners would be appropriate. Commissioner Short stated that the Board should meet with the Commissioners later this month. Ms. Williams will advise the Board on a date and time available to meet with the Commissioners.

Ms. Gray spoke on the component of Tourism and as it relates to Economic Development and especially in Kent County with Tourism being such a huge component there is a linkage, and Tourism is a huge part of our Economic Development. Mr. Crofoot shared that the workload was too much for one person. Mr. Story expressed his belief that Tourism and Economic Development should stand on its own.

Ms. Mason offered that at the core of any hearty Economic Development strategy that business retention site visits and expansion efforts must exist regardless of how they are accomplished. Mr. Story shared the strategy of Business appreciation week that has been successful in other counties. Economic Development Offices set up and coordinate business visits by Commissioners, department heads, police, and inspectors. It builds good will, is good visibility, and is good for information gathering.

Mr. Luff presented an interest form for a candidate for the Board to replace Mr. Beckett. Mr. Beckett stated he feels the Board is strong and wants to step out and make room for others. On motion by Mr. Beckett and seconded by Mr. MacLeod, the Board unanimously agreed to recommend the appointment of Billie Dodge. Ms. Williams will prepare a recommendation request for the Commissioners.

Mr. Ampula asked about the interest of the Board and Commissioners in re-establishing the revolving loan fund (RLF). Mr. Ampula shared that Mike Thielke, Executive Director, Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center is prepared to offer Kent County a dollar for dollar match, up to \$200,000.00 for the program. Mr. Luff shared his experience with RLFs in Queen Anne's County and the success of the program. The Board, Commissioner Short, and Mr. Crofoot all thought the County should consider the option of re-establishing the RLF during the budget discussion for FY2016. Mr. Story again suggested utilizing the MEDA's Council of Past Presidents as counsel to the Economic Development function in Kent County.

Mr. Luff shared that in Queen Anne's County the lodging association agreed to an increase in the room tax, provided those funds are designated for Economic Development. Mr. Story shared that most counties are currently at 7%. Mr. Story stressed the importance of having some ability to partner with the upfront costs of a business investing in the community. If not,

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you are not going to be at the table when the important deals are being discussed. You have to have some ability to talk incentives that will make sense for the business and the community.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m., and the board agreed to meet again on Wednesday, May 6, 2015, at 4:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams
Deputy Clerk