



Audio recordings of the Economic and Tourism Development Commission meetings can be found on the Recordings Tab.

March 8, 2023

Commission Members Present: Aaron Bramble, Charlie Athey, Paula Reeder, and Tracey Williams

Commission Members Absent: Rob Thompson, Dick Story, and Sandy Scott

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director, Dawson Hunter, Housing and Transportation Coordinator, Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager, Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development; Cindy Genter, Real Estate Agent and Broker; Dan Schneckenburger, Director, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board (WIB); Commissioner Price; and Carla Gerber, Deputy Director, Planning, Housing, and Zoning

At 3:05 p.m. Jamie Williams called the meeting to order.

Ms. Gerber shared that the Planning Commission met last week and gave preliminary approval of the site plan submitted by Gillespie Precast, LLC to expand the concrete and ceramics manufacturing and contractor's yard and to construct an equipment storage building. The Commission gave preliminary approval for a second project submitted by Gillespie Precast LLC to expand the finished-product concrete storage yard, construct a storage building, and build a new entrance off MD 291. Preliminary approval was given for a project submitted by Camp Fairlee to construct two new cottages to house employees, and a 12-foot-wide driveway.

Other items on the agenda included residential projects, variances to build or renovate houses, and ten landowners that brought forth land preservation applications with the intention of establishing Land Preservation Districts with the hope that they become perpetual easements through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation. The Technical Advisory Council met on March 7, 2023. Residential building is picking up. There were 3-4 oversized accessory structures. K & L Health Services came in with their site plan to operate at a location in Worton. The Planning Commission has completed its review of recommendations prepared by the Comprehensive Rezoning Update Task Force and is finalizing its presentation for the County Commissioners.

At 3:09 p.m. Mr. Bramble requested a motion to approve minutes from the February 8, 2023, meeting. On a motion by Ms. Reeder and seconded by Tracey Williams, the February 8, 2023, minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Schneckenburger provided handouts and shared the role of the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board (WIB) as a Title One provider. They work with the five counties of Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Caroline, and Dorchester. They offer career counseling and enroll applicants in workforce training and provide funding for the training. As a result of COVID,

approximately 80% of the applicants find the WIB virtually. A website was created in 2020 for people to reach the program: wib@chesapeake.edu. An intake specialist reviews the application and determines what program the applicant would qualify under for funding.

Labor funds are provided under three segments- adult, dislocated workers, and youth. Funding is provided through the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). Requirements are very low income and multiple barriers exist. As a result of COVID, in 2021 the General Assembly decided to redirect a portion of the State American Rescue Plan Funding and give it to the Workforce Investment Boards across the State of Maryland which almost tripled the Upper Shore WIB's budget to train the community. New funding has new guidelines relating to whether you have tested positive for COVID, do you know anyone that has tested positive, did you lose your job due to COVID, etc.

Statistically from the start of FY2022 to date, there have been twenty-four county residents approved for scholarships totaling approximately \$70,000. These numbers include six of the County's Public Works employees that needed commercial driving qualification at a minimum of a Class B licensing. While roughly half of the \$70,000 provided thus far has been for Commercial Drivers License qualifications, health care has come in second with Certified Nursing Assistant training.

Chesapeake College's Job Fair is to take place on May 11, 2023, with seventy-eight businesses and a waiting list of twenty more. Target is high school seniors with summer tourism season right around the corner and many hospitality jobs available.

Ms. Genter shared a 2022 Real Estate Update. The last six months of 2022 saw a decline in the inventory of homes for sale with the largest decrease due to a lack of affordable inventory. The average sold price and the median sold price both increased. People are using cash, a reflection that the typical buyer in Kent County is older. Ms. Genter advised that Delaware's tax base is increasing and that the transfer tax is higher in Delaware compared to Maryland. Maryland compares favorably with Pennsylvania and is better than New Jersey's tax base.

Homeowners with an interest rate below 4% are not selling unless they must. Buyers are being cautious not to buy too high due to the higher interest rate. Kent County sales by location by zip code in County, reflected a decrease in units sold, total dollars sold, and average selling prices, except for Millington. There are currently fourteen commercial properties for sale in Kent County. New construction activity is selling quickly.

Observations and Opportunities for this Commission: 1) Low inventory of existing homes for sale reduced 2022 sales volume and dollar amount – housing demand continues to exceed supply in Kent County; 2) New homes in the Village at Chestertown are selling well – adopt and enforce land use regulations that maintain long term availability of developable land around existing towns and villages; 3) Increasing home sale prices particularly for starter homes and higher interest rates, limit affordable homes for workforce – identify and incentivize

construction of affordable single and multifamily housing units to increase the inventory of affordable rental units; and 4) commercial and ag buyers are younger owners and investors – adopt and implement land use policies and regulations that ensure land use flexibility, particularly in commercial, industrial and employment center zones; and adopt land use policies that enable and encourage diversification of agricultural pursuits and make it easier for young farmers and special boutique farmers to afford and acquire farmland locally.

A brief discussion regarding the 10% rule in the Agriculture Districts was held. Previous discussions considered a waiver that could be applied if the property was divided by a roadway or waterway. Concerns were shared that this rule will give special exceptions to one property owner over another property owner. The request was made that when the issue comes before the County Commissioners, it be scheduled for an evening meeting to allow property owners the opportunity to attend to share their comments.

Jamie Williams shared that she is currently involved in preparing the FY2024 departmental budget request for the County Commissioners. Upper Shore Regional Council Agricultural Grants applications have closed, and the review committee will be meeting soon. She advised that the Worton/Betterton Enterprise Zone application is due by April 15, 2023.

Ms. Boulden shared that we are working with Delmarva Craft to create commercial spots for television commercials including WBAL, WJZ, and WMAR. Ads have been submitted for What's Up Annapolis, Armed Forces Directory, Food Network, Travel, Taste and Tour, and several others. Ms. Boulden advised that she is enrolled in a four-week course on National Scenic Byways. All FY2023 tourism marketing, both state and county, funding has been successfully allocated.

Mr. Hunter shared that the County received a funding request for seasonal shuttle services from Rick Carter, Delmarva Craft from May 26 to October 9, 2023. Additional funding will be sought from the Upper Shore Regional Council to offset the costs of marketing and launching the shuttle. A motion by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Mr. Athey and carried unanimously to make the formal request for Mr. Carter's budget allocation.

Jamie Williams revisited Initiating a Focused Corporate Relocation Recruiting Campaign and advised that attraction is very costly and resource-heavy. The current focus leans more toward retention and expansion of current businesses. However, several ads are placed in executive attraction magazines such as Business Xpansion Journal, Expansion Solutions, and Site Selection, and every effort is made to advertise in a magazine that will provide editorial where more information can be provided to promote Kent County, publications that are taken to trade shows and offer a digital component. A lot of thought goes into where the funding is spent to keep Kent County visible regionally.

Jamie Williams opened the floor for discussion on business attraction efforts. There was a brief discussion, and it was decided to keep this matter on the agenda to continue the discussion.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Mr. Athey, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:48 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, April 12, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD, Director