



Economic & Tourism Development Commission

November 13, 2024

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

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director, Katie Abbott, Economic Development Manager, Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager, and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development.

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Story called the meeting to order. Mr. Story requested a motion to approve the minutes of the October 9, 2024, meeting. On a motion by Mr. Athey seconded by Ms. Crow, the October 9, 2024, minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Story reported that the Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) initiative is a work in progress and that Ms. Williams and Ms. Abbott are working to aggregate and organize the feedback from recent visits for reporting. The amount of feedback was abundant.

John Hickman, Director, Business Economic and Community Outreach Network (BEACON) at Salisbury University, gave a presentation on the Business Sentiment Survey results from the July 2024 survey that was conducted by BEACON. The overall trends from the survey showed an increase in optimism, strong concern for conditions in the short term, improved view of standard of living expectations in the next five years, and 68% of respondents believed that conditions in their county will improve over the next year. The top barrier for starting a business has consistently been labor force, until the July survey which moved to financing. The top barrier for expanding a business was labor force until June 2022 when the top barrier was labor force and inflation. Inflation continued as the top barrier through December 2023 when financing moved to the top. The Next survey is scheduled to take place in January 2025, and all are encouraged to share complete the survey.

Erin Silva, GISP, Project Manager, Eastern Shore Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Cooperative gave a presentation on the Delmarva Index. The Eastern Shore GIS Cooperative is an outreach entity of Salisbury University and a collaborative effort between the Mid-Shore Regional Council, the Tri-County Council of the Lower Eastern Shore, the Upper Shore Regional Council and Salisbury University. Their mission is to develop advanced data-driven decision-making tools. Data from ESRI, BLS, and the Census Bureau are used to compare communities to each other as well as the state and nation. Ms. Silva advised that the Eastern Shore Economic Resiliency Toolkit was launched in 2020 bringing together local economic and workforce development professionals to create data visualization tools. The Delmarva Index is comprised of dashboards utilizing maps, charts, graphs, etc. to compare data.

Ms. Williams gave an update on the short-term rental registration and tax collection process. The first quarter of FY2025 the County saw an increase in tax revenue of approximately \$30,000. She further advised that 72% of the properties identified as short-term rentals have registered.

Ms. Williams shared that the Bayways & Gateways Destination Assessment Program is looking at potential destinations on the water that could be potential for tourism. The locations identified for Kent County are Betterton, Chestertown and Rock Hall. Three teams have been established and will go through a series of exercises to assess the amenities of each location. Each team will identify what they currently offer and what they would need to improve their location. The National Park Service provides technical assistance and funding for this program was provided through an EDA grant, Visit Annapolis and several county contributions.

Ms. Williams shared that Ms. Boulden finished filming with Outdoors Delmarva that will result in two segments. Ms. Boulden also attended the Maryland Travel and Tourism Summit.

Ms. Williams advised that a groundbreaking for the new Emergency Services Facility will be held on November 19, 2024, and the groundbreaking for the Millington Senior Village will be held on December 3, 2024.

The Maryland Business Roundtable Next Generation Scholars (NGS) will be touring the County Office Building, meeting with the County Commissioners and Department heads as well as visiting downtown Chestertown. Ms. Williams shared that the NGS is looking for volunteers for their mock interviews with students on December 13, 2024.

The Ag Breakfast meeting with the Kent County Extension Office will be held on December 11, 2024, and the Maryland Department of Planning has a Brownfields Conference scheduled for November 15, 2024.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Gifford, seconded by Ms. Crow, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:12 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director