



Recordings of the Economic and Tourism Development Commission (ETDC) meetings can be found on the Meeting Archive Tab.

December 13, 2023

Commission Members Present: Aaron Bramble, Judy Gifford, Richard Story, Sandy Scott, and Charlie Athey

Commission Members Absent: David Bowman and Paula Reeder

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director, Katie Wright, Economic Development Manager, and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development

At 3:01 p.m. Mr. Bramble called the meeting to order. Mr. Bramble requested a motion to approve the minutes from the November 15, 2023, meeting. On a motion by Ms. Gifford, seconded by Mr. Story, the November 15, 2023, minutes were unanimously approved.

Ms. Osborn gave an update on the short-term rental efforts and advised that she and Ms. Williams met with members of the Finance Office and the County Administrator and have finalized draft legislation for the County Attorney's review, finalized draft MOUs with the Towns, and finalized the draft Statement of Work and Scoring Matrix for the County's procurement process. She further advised that we would secure updated pricing proposals to include the best pricing for multi-year contracts and will define any annual increase increment by percentage moving forward. The next steps will be to choose the software vendor which is anticipated by mid to late January and full implementation and on-line tax collection by July 1, 2024.

Ms. Osborn shared a presentation from the Rural Maryland Council Summit on the Idea Friendly Method. This method was designed to assist small towns in being more open to new ideas. Ms. Osborn provided the commission members with handouts on the explanation of the Idea Friendly Method as well as an action guide, prompting the members to come up with new ideas for the January meeting.

Ms. Boulden shared that Upper Bay Best Bets (Harford, Cecil, and Kent Counties) will attend the Pittsburgh Travel Show, January 19 – 21, 2024. Ms. Boulden and Ms. Wright created an on-line raffle form to capture leads for the Tourism Newsletter. The raffle will include a gift certificate for a restaurant and a one-night stay in each county. We are working with Shore Studios to update our video and photo libraries on events and Towns. The most recent project was for Downrigging Weekend in Chestertown, and the next event will be the Dogwood Festival and the Town of Galena.

The County hosted the Next Generation Scholars for a career day on November 28, 2024. Thirty students and two chaperones toured Creafil Fibers, visited several departments at the County Government Center and had a brief question and answer session with the County Commissioners. Then they visited

Modern Stone Age Kitchen, the Visitor's Center, Chestertown Town Hall and ended their day at Hodson Hall, Washington College for lunch.

Ms. Williams shared that Ms. Wright met with the Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) and the mentors last month regarding the Business Mentor Program details. The initial drive will be for additional mentor recruitment while on-boarding the individuals that have already requested a mentor. Ms. Williams and Ms. Wright attended the USRC full council meeting at the MACo conference and Ms. Wright gave an update on the Business Mentoring Program.

A meeting was held with the three counties and the USRC to finalize the 2024 Ag Grant Program. Ms. Williams advised that the program will run from January 15 through February 15, 2024, rather than January 1 through January 31, 2024. The outreach plan for the Ag Grant Program will include the monthly Economic Development Newsletter(s), social media, and email. Ms. Gifford offered to distribute flyers at the upcoming Farmer's Market.

The USRC has allocated \$3,000 for each county, for a Tech Grant program. Grant details will be outlined by Bill Sorenson, Economic Development Director, Cecil County. This program will focus on cyber security software or hardware to protect small businesses. Given the limited grant funding, only one to three awards will be possible.

Ms. Wright completed the updates to the Kent County Brief Economic Facts and submitted them to the Department of Commerce, copies will be distributed once published. The annual Enterprise Zone report was also completed and submitted.

Ms. Williams provided a handout from the Maryland Small Business Development Center showing 5-year statistics from 2018 to 2023 on the Business Mentoring Program. Ms. Williams noted that numbers went up during COVID. She spoke to Zane Carter, former SCORE mentor and shared that when they were active, they had approximately twenty mentors and various configurations of fifteen, two-member mentor teams that served two to four clients each year on average. Some engagements were only for two or three months, while others continued for years. It is estimated that they served forty-five total clients each year to include ten to fifteen new clients each year. In their last years, SCORE lost several mentors due to moving away, retirement, and/or health.

Ms. Williams shared that the Department of Commerce has a finance tracker tool on their website. Some Queen Anne's County businesses had to be removed, that have a Chestertown address, to obtain accurate numbers. The Maryland Department of Commerce from 2016 to 2022, through various programs; grants, tax credits and loans, invested \$6.3 million into the Kent County business community.

Through Project Restore, a Department of Housing and Community Development program, properties that were vacant for a minimum of six months, in a Tier I county, a business could qualify for grants for property assistance and/or business operations. In FY2022 and FY2023 There were seventeen applicants with nine approvals that received a total of \$701,955 in Kent County. The Project Restore program is anticipated to open again in early January, operating under new guidelines. Place-based organizations such as Main Streets, Chambers of Commerce, or Economic Development organizations will apply to be a fund manager and then would be responsible to distribute it within the community.

The Department of Housing and Community Development released their Neighborhood Revitalization Programs Awards and Kent County received the following:

Town of Galena – Facade Improvement Program	\$ 50,000
Kent Attainable Housing – Prospect Street Community Revitalization	\$150,000
Main Street Chestertown – Historic Chestertown	\$ 50,000
Main Street Rock Hall – Rehabilitation Project	\$ 50,000
Town of Millington – Commercial Façade Improvement Program	\$ 25,000
Washington College – 800 High Street Property	\$500,000

Gross Domestic Product numbers for goods and services in Kent County are down, putting us 24th in the State of Maryland.

2019	\$962,000 (all rounded #s)
2020	\$913,000
2021	\$931,000
2022	\$896,000

Ms. Williams will be reviewing the report more closely and meeting with Heather Tinelli, Economic and Tourism Development Director, Queen Anne’s County, to better understand the numbers and what they mean to our counties. Mr. Bramble advised that the ETDC recommendation be tabled for discussion until the next meeting.

Dr. Karen Couch, Superintendent, Dan Davilio, Public Relations/Communications Specialist, and Gina Jachimowicz, Director of Teaching and Learning, Kent County Public Schools were in attendance to give an overview of demographics, challenges they face as a school system, how they are trying to navigate through them, and to provide information where Kent County Public Schools fared with regards to the testing at the end of 2022. Dr. Couch advised that there are new innovations in place for this year and that they are constantly checking data to ensure they are making progress.

Chronic absenteeism, which was suspended during the pandemic, has been integrated back into the School Report Card, resulting in almost every secondary school in the State of Maryland dropping one star rating. Kent County High School dropped one star rating, as did the comparable schools in neighboring counties. Currently Kent County High School is rated as a three-star school along with Queen Anne’s County High School, Kent Island High School, and all high schools in Cecil and Talbot counties. 8% of Maryland schools saw an increase in star ratings, to include Galena Elementary moving from a three to four-star rating. Kent County Middle School dropped from a three to a two-star rating.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Athey, seconded by Ms. Gifford, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:08 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners’ Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director