

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 7, 2021

8 a.m.

Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Reza Jafari called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

Roll Call

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Chuck Callahan, Walter Chase, Clifford Coppersmith, Shannon Dill, Ronald Engle, Margaret Enloe-North, Reza Jafari, Jimmy Jaramillo, Amy Kreiner, Micah Risher, Clay Stamp, Terenda Thomas, Cassandra Vanhooser, Deborah Walsworth, Jackie Wilson

Members Absent: Donna Saathoff and Craig Wanner

Staff Present: Krista Boothby and Pam Keeton

Guests: Helga Einhorn, Abby Graves, Susie Hayward, Michael Hiner, Melissa Kelly, Kimberly Kratovil, Nancy LaJoice, Cristy Morrell, Dana Newman, Tracy Ward, Scott Warner

II. Guest Speaker: Michael Hiner, President and Co-Owner, Willow Construction

Mr. Hiner gave an overview of Willow Construction and its leadership. He discussed the company's major projects in Talbot County and other areas. The company employs more than 40 people and engages more than 300 subcontractors, making Willow Construction a large economic engine in Talbot County.

III. Approval of Minutes: Minutes from the August 5, 2021, meeting were presented. Cliff Coppersmith made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Jimmy Jaramillo seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

IV. County Council Report: Chuck Callahan noted that the County held its quarterly meeting with Town leaders on Tuesday, Oct. 5. He listed a number of major projects including a new Fire and EMS Training Facility at Mistletoe Hall Commerce-Business Park, the launch of Easton Utilities' broadband installation to approximately 3,500 homes, and planning for the first phases of Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe and a master plan Bill Burton Fishing Pier State Park on the Choptank River outside Trappe. He then turned the floor over to County Manager Clay Stamp.

Mr. Stamp stated that the pandemic is still causing anxiety in people, and it will take patience to get through it. He then outlined the focus for Talbot County planning, which includes "people, processes, and projects." Major County initiatives include:

- A compensation study to evaluate pay ranges for County employees. Ensuring that Talbot County is properly compensation employees is critical to keeping the county staffed with skilled employees.
- Planning and Zoning and Permits and Inspections are undergoing an internal strategic planning process. The outcome should be an improved permitting process.
- Building projects include a new Sheriff's Office and an EMS Station near Cordova.

V. **Chairman's Report:** Mr. Jafari introduced three new members — Ken Kozel, Jimmy Jaramillo, and Jeff Rhodes.

VI. **Director's Report**

Talbot County Online Sales and Telework Grant: The department is currently taking applications for the state-fund Online Sales and Telework Grant. Ms. Vanhooser asked members to share the information with businesses that have expanded their online sales as the result of the pandemic and to encourage them to apply. The application form can be found at TalbotWorks.org website. The deadline for applications is October 22.

American Rescue Plan Act: The County is still working on its plan for the American Rescue Plan Act, also known as ARPA. Ms. Vanhooser has recommended that some of that money go toward small business relief. That money doesn't have to be entailed until 2024. The department is getting calls about the Easton grant, and staff are directing them to the Town of Easton for information.

SBDC Office Hours: The October 2021 newsletter contained a story noting that the Small Business Development Center is now holding office hours once a week at the County Office Building at 215 Bay Street. Ms. Vanhooser explained that it has long been a goal of the department to find office space for the SBDC consultants. Talbot County refers many businesses to them for help with business plans and financing advice. Providing office space in Talbot County as others do just makes it easier for our businesses to get the help they need. Talbot County also helps fund the SBDC with a \$6,000 appropriation in the County budget.

Chamber of Commerce Economic Symposium: Ms. Vanhooser congratulated the Chamber on successfully hosting their annual Economic Symposium and noted that the department was proud to again be a sponsor. The program featured economic analysis by Anirban Basu of the Sage Policy Group and Luke Tilley from Wilmington Trust. Members who missed the insightful analysis, can watch the recording that is linked on the Chamber website.

Mid-Shore Regional Council Tour of Sea Watch International: On September 9, the Mid-Shore Regional Council hosted its annual tour of businesses in Caroline, Dorchester, and Talbot counties. The Talbot County business that was featured was Sea Watch International, the largest vertically integrated clam producer in the world which is headquartered in Easton. The Easton plant produces the company's value-added products that are largely used in food service and restaurants. IMs. Vanhooser as you might imagine, the restrictions on restaurants really hurt their business here, and like every industry, they are need workers.

Maryland Economic Development Association Virtual Rural Economic Development Session Sponsored by PNC Bank, Oct. 28 from 9 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Talbot County is a co-sponsor with the five mid- and lower shore counties. The topic is Small Business Fuels Eastern Shore Recovery, and two of Talbot County's own will be featured speakers. Derick Daly will moderate a panel on obtaining financing, and Ruby Varagas of Ruby's Cakes will share her immigrant's journey from housekeeper to business owner.

Coffee and Conservation at Waterfowl Festival, Nov. 12 at 8:30 a.m.: The department will again hold a breakfast event at the 50th Waterfowl Festival on Friday morning of the festival.

Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe: The park advisory committee presented the completed master plan to the Talbot County Council in a work session on Tuesday, Sept. 14. Ms. Vanhooser, who served as the project manager with Parks & Recreation Director Preston Peper, said that she had planned to show the video of the proposed Visitor Center at the park, but in the interest of time she would just share a link. She asked that EDC members become familiar with the project and be prepared to advocate for this transformative project. The County Council is considering a resolution that will allow the formation of a 501(c)3 to begin fundraising and continue the work of the park.

VII. Town Reports: Representatives from each of the towns and industry sectors reported on news and upcoming events.

IX. Maryland Department of Commerce: Ms. Nancy LaJoice reported that Choptank Transport is hiring people for its new facility in Easton and that Project Restore closes Oct. 8.

X. Upcoming Meetings:

- November 4, 2021- Economic Development Commission Meeting
- November 12, 2021 – 8 a.m. at Coffee and Conservation at Waterfowl Festival
- December 2, 2021 – Economic Development Commission Meeting

XI. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:10 a.m.