

**Talbot County Tourism Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, January 12, 2022**  
**8:30 a.m.**

**I. Call to Order**

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m. The meeting was held via Zoom videoconference.

**Board Members Present:** Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Angela Eade, Ron Engle, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Amy Kreiner, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, Cassandra Vanhooser, Kim Weller

**Board Members Absent:** Michael Hoffman, Harold Klinger

**Staff Members Present:** Krista Boothby, Pam Keeton

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the December 8, 2021 meeting. Mr. Fleming made a motion to approve the minutes with Mr. Schneider seconding the motion. Minutes were approved.

**III. Director's Report – Cassandra Vanhooser**

**Update on Chesapeake Country All-American Road:** The Eastern Shore counties are working together to create a Master Plan for the scenic byway, which stretches from Chesapeake City to Crisfield. We participated in the interview process and have hired Conservation by Design to create the plan. This is partially funded by a grant from the Maryland Heritage Area Association, county contributions, and in-kind donations of time and resources.

**Update on Frederick Douglass Mural Project:** An Easton Boy Scout has approached the department about working with us to help finish the mural project. This includes the procurement and placement of benches, developing and interpretive panel, installing slats in the fence, adding landscaping, and getting signage installed on the Easton Rail Trail. This will fulfill the Scout's requirements for his Eagle Scout project. The approval process is underway.

**Restaurant Week Promotion:** Ms. Vanhooser asked the Tourism Board to make a decision about holding a Restaurant Week in 2022. She reminded the Board that they had voted in 2019 to discontinue the promotion. Members had agreed at that time that the

idea of a Restaurant Week had grown stale and that we could use our resources in a better way. The idea generated a great deal of discussion. Kim Weller said that St. Michaels plans to hold their own event again this year titled, “A Taste of St. Michaels.” Others noted that with labor shortages and uncertainty about the continuing pandemic they could not support having a Restaurant Week. Mr. Fleming made a motion that the department NOT undertake a Restaurant Week promotion in 2022; Mr. Schneider seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Workforce Issues:** Ms. Vanhooser said that she had added workforce issues as a topic of discussion because it again tops the list of things businesses are concerned about in the December 2021 Eastern Shore Business Sentiment Survey. Also, other DMOs around the state are trying ideas to make the industry more appealing and sexy. She posed the question: is there anything we should be doing to help the situation? Board members said that they believe that this is an ongoing problem of a national and international scale driven by both demographic and economic shifts that we cannot control. The consensus: it must work itself out. Ms. Vanhooser asked Board members to bring any ideas to her directly or to the group if they find something that Talbot County should try.

#### **IV. Manager’s Report – Krista Boothby**

**Future of the Talbot County Visitors Center: What does it look like and how to we pay for what we need?** Ms. Boothby gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Talbot County Visitors Center’s past and present, as well as what other Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) across the nation are doing to bring their centers into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- Ms. Bixler said visitor centers are a good way to engage visitors and visibility is important. Chesapeake Country All-American Road is getting national attention and we should leverage that.
- Mr. Schneider expressed that he believes a visitors center for Talbot County is very important and that the current facility is antiquated. To best serve everyone in the county, a visitors center should be located on Route 50.
- Ms. Vanhooser noted that documents related to the donation of the land for the Talbot County Community Center indicate that the original plan included a regional visitors center. She believes Community Center location has real possibilities and a new center could be built on the property. She asked the board to come together and agree on what the future is for a visitor center.
- Mr. Engle stated that the Royal Farms property may be available and has a large parking area.
- Ms. Kreiner asked if there might be an opportunity to co-locate with the Chamber of Commerce and the two entities could partner to share resources.
- Ms. Price asked what surrounding counties are doing with the idea of possibly sharing a facility at Chesapeake College. Ms. Vanhooser detailed that Dorchester, Denton, and Queen Anne counties all have very good facilities. The newest is

Denton. The Town of Chestertown operates the Kent County Visitors Center, and that the Chamber is located there, but does not run it.

- Ms. Bellis explained that she associates visitor centers with clean, up-to-date facilities, especially restrooms. She feels we are not sufficiently taking advantage of traffic passing through to Ocean City and believes the Community Center is the ideal place and that the board needs a plan in order to take advantage of any funding streams.
- Ms. Vanhooser also added that the hospital has plans to build behind the community center and that area will become a high traffic area.
- Ms. Greenaway asked for clarification on whether or not there is money in the budget. Ms. Vanhooser explained that the Visitors Center she asked for a new to be added to the Capital Budget last year, but it was not. She will resubmit for FY2023.
- Ms. Bixler asked for a committee to be convened and meeting on the calendar. Committee volunteers: Jeff Schneider, Amy Kreiner, Kristen Greenaway, Ian Fleming, Kim Weller, Ron Engle, Judy Bixler, and Cassandra Vanhooser.

**V. Town Reports:** Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

**VI. Next Meeting:** The next Tourism Board meeting will be held via Zoom on February 9, 2022.

**VII. Adjournment:** Ms. Bellis moved that the meeting be adjourned. Kristen Greenaway seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:30 a.m.