

**Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
October 12, 2022**

I. Welcome, Call to Order

Chairwoman Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

Members Present: Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Michael Hoffmann, Mary Kellogg, Harold Klinger, Amy Kreiner, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, Cassandra Vanhooser

Members Absent: Ron Engle

Staff Absent: Krista Boothby

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – September 14, 2022

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the Sept. 14, 2022, meeting. Harold Klinger made a motion to approve the minutes with Michael Hoffmann and Mary Kellogg simultaneously seconding the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Election of Vice Chairman

At the September meeting, Ms. Bixler announced that the board needed to elect a new vice chairman as Kim Weller has resigned her position in St. Michaels. She previously held the position of vice chairman.

Jessica Bellis expressed interest after the last meeting. Ms. Bixler opened the floor for additional nominations. Michael Hoffmann nominated Jessica Bellis to fill the role of vice chairman. Mary Kellogg seconded the nomination. Ms. Bellis was elected unanimously.

IV. Director's Reports

Ms. Vanhooser wished board members a happy autumn, noting the chill in the air was a welcome change. She then became her report by sharing highlights from the October 11 County Council meeting. Councilman Corey Pack dubbed it the GOOD NEWS meeting as four things of major importance occurred.

Ms. Vanhooser began by congratulating Jessica Bellis and the Avalon Foundation for the proclamation celebrating their 100th anniversary. Other notable announcements from the meeting included:

- 1) Talbot County presented a check for \$1.75 million to Easton Utilities, fulfilling a promise the Council made to bring broadband to every household in Talbot County. Easton Utilities has three crews working throughout the county right now laying fiber to the home even as we speak. This is transformative for Talbot County on many levels, and it is about to become a reality.
- 2) Ken Kozel, president and CEO of Shore Regional Health, announced that UMMS will file a Certificate of Need for a new hospital on Jan. 6, taking a giant leap forward on a project that has been discussed for many years. This is a \$500 million project on 200 acres by the Community Center, and it will fundamentally change the complexion of Easton and Route 50.
- 3) The County Council also approved the purchase of 30,000 sq. ft. of space at Achievement Park (a.k.a. the former Cadmus building) for a new health department. Both the hospital and the health department moves leave open redevelopment opportunities for prime real estate in the core of downtown Easton.
- 4) Finally, the Council approved the purchase of an acre of land on Goldsborough Neck for the expansion of that road to serve Mistletoe Hall Commerce-Business Park, Easton Technology Center, and the new hospital.

Ms. Vanhooser noted that change is coming, and the tourism industry, at the very least, needs to understand the changes. Better yet, we need to prepare for fundamental changes to our tourism product. The department will receive funding soon for a strategic plan for economic development, and Ms. Vanhooser is determined that it should include tourism, and we are receiving funding for a feasibility study for a visitors center. Ms. Vanhooser told board members they are going to need to be engaged in all of these things.

On the heels of such an amazing County Council meeting, Ms. Vanhooser also named this Tourism Board meeting the GOOD NEWS MEETING. First, she presented the accommodations tax numbers for FY22, which showed record collections (she att, then numbers I have from the state of Maryland Office of Tourism).

Ms. Vanhooser noted that Ms. Boothby was in DC working with our partners from Capital Region USA to pitch Talbot County to international travelers. Ms. Vanhooser attended the Monday session and shared key takeaways from the presentations.

- 1) Western Europe is rebounding in terms of in-bound travel to the US, and it is the key point where growth is happening. They have the time, the means, and the desire to travel.
- 2) Some 26% of all visitors to the U.S. come from the UK, Germany, India, and France.
- 3) The UK, Germany, and France are countries we have targeted for years in partnership with CRUSA and the State of Maryland.
- 4) The Mid-Atlantic region anchored by Washington, DC is one of their top choices.
- 5) Analysts believe that before the end of 2023 we will see full recovery and will surpass 2019 numbers.
- 6) There are some storm clouds on the horizon. Inflation, consumer confidence, the strong US dollar, war, recession, visa waivers . . . but for now, it is full speed ahead for international travel.

Talbot County is trying to find a path in this market. Ms. Vanhooser said we know international visitors come here, but we have such limited resources, we have never had the time to devote to this market. At the very least, we will continue to partner with CRUSA in marketing Talbot County to the world.

Mr. Hoffmann and Mr. Fleming both said they host international visitors at their lodging establishments and these guests spend significantly more money than domestic visitors. However, the numbers are so small that it may not justify the allocation of additional resources.

Ms. Vanhooser noted that Ms. Boothby also attended the Maryland Motorcoach Association Travel Showcase on September 27 where she met with group tour operators from around the country and Canada.

V. Town Reports

Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

VI. Comments from Board Members

- Board members reported on news and events taking place with their organizations.

VII. Upcoming Meetings

- Tourism Board Meeting, Nov. 9, 2022
- Coffee and Conservation at the Waterfowl Festival, Nov. 11, 2022
- Maryland Travel & Tourism Summit: November 14-16, 2022
- Tourism Board Meeting, Dec. 14, 2022

VIII. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Bellis made the motion to adjourn; Ms. Kellogg seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:30 a.m.