

Economic Development Commission

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 2, 2023

8 a.m.

Via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Ken Kozel called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

Members Present: Ted Bautz, Clifford Coppersmith, Reza Jafari, Jimmy Jaramillo, Chris Kleppinger, Ken Kozel, Amy Kreiner, Micah Risher, Clay Stamp, Rob Straebel, Cassandra Vanhooser, Jackie Wilson, and Debbie Walsworth

Members Absent: Chuck Callahan, Walter Chase, Shannon Potter Dill, Ron Engle, Donna Saathoff, Terenda Thomas

Staff Present: Krista Boothby

Guests: Dina Daly, Holly DeKarske, Deena Kilmon, Kimberly Kratovil, Nancy LaJoice, Cristy Morrell, Dana Newman, Daniel Schneckenburger, Kelly Simonsen, and Scott Warner

- **Introduction of New EDC Member**

Mr. Kozel welcomed Chris Kleppinger, who was appointed by the County Council to fill the seat vacated by Craig Wanner. Mr. Kleppinger is a licensed master electrician who has owned and operated Kleppinger Electric Company in Easton for more than 20 years. He brings a wealth of experience in the skilled trades and entrepreneurship, areas of renewed interest and investment for the County Council and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

- **Introduction of EDC Members**

EDC board members introduced themselves to their newest member.

- **Recommendation for Arts Representative**

At the December Board meeting, Margaret Enloe-North resigned her position representing the arts to pursue other career opportunities. Ms. Vanhooser noted that the County Council appoints all EDC members, but our bylaws allow the Commission to make recommendations for new members. Ms. Vanhooser asked the EDC to consider recommending Al Bond, president and CEO of the Avalon Foundation, to serve the remainder of Ms. Enloe-North's term. Mr. Kozel asked for

other recommendations, but no other names were submitted. Mr. Jafari seconded Ms. Vanhooser's motion to recommend Mr. Bond for appointment to the EDC. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Approval of Minutes

Dr. Coppersmith made a motion to accept the minutes from the December 1, 2022, meeting as written. Mr. Bautz seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

III. Welcome and Introduction of Guest Speaker

Mr. Kozel introduced Dan Schneckenburger, the executive director of the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board and congratulated him on his one-year work anniversary.

Mr. Schneckenburger has a great deal of experience in workforce development in both Florida and Maryland. He is a former elected official in Cecil County, and he also served 10 years on the board of directors of the Susquehanna Workforce Network, a WIB that serves Harford and Cecil counties.

The USWIB's primary mission is to qualify and enroll Upper Shore residents in workforce training that results in a credential or skills gain, or an easier path to obtain a job. Mr. Schneckenburger discussed current employment trends on the Eastern Shore, highlighted the top three focus industries for the WIB, and chronicled the many programs employers can access for helping fund workforce training.

IV. County Council Update

Mr. Callahan was away visiting family and asked County Manager Clay Stamp to make comments on his behalf. Mr. Stamp reported that the process of preparing the County's budget has begun. The new Health Department is under development at the former Cadmus Building, and the Sheriff's Office will move to the Talbot Commerce Park in Easton.

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism is beginning a feasibility study regarding the future of the Talbot County Visitor Center. Construction will start on the current Visitors Center this spring, and the department will vacate that building. The County will hold a Work Session with the Town of Easton to discuss Easton Point.

Ms. Vanhooser responded to Mr. Jafari's question regarding a proposed public accommodations tax increase proposal stating that the Tourism Board is crafting its proposal and working to build consensus.

V. Director's Report – Cassandra M. Vanhooser

Ms. Vanhooser wished the EDC a happy second day of March and noted that one-sixth of 2023 has already passed. It has been a busy year already.

Business Resource Fair, January 21 – Ms. Vanhooser asked Dina Daly from Building African American Minds to report on the event they partnered to present. Ms. Daly reported that more than 100 people attended the event, including 12 resource partners and 54 business owners or prospective business owners who signed in. Everyone who attended has received a follow-up email. Ms. Daly said the event grew out of a conversation Ms. Vanhooser had with her husband, Derick, where he said he did not know about the resources that were highlighted. She was encouraged by the turnout, and the group of partners who sponsored the fair are planning other business-related events, including a job fair and a resource fair for the Spanish-speaking population.

SBDC Update – The Business Resource Fair also yielded a number of new clients for the Small Business Development Center. Ms. Vanhooser presented the SBDC's fiscal year report for 2022 (attached) and said that she refers many people for business consulting services. She meets monthly with consultants Rich Loeffler and Greg Bartoo, and she shares office space with Mr. Bartoo who has office hours at 215 Bay Street on Tuesday afternoons.

Three-Part Let's Talk Business Speaker Series – Ms. Vanhooser asked Dana Newman of the Talbot County Free Library to report on this new initiative. Ms. Newman said that about 40 people attended the first talk by Dan North, economist for Allianz Trade North America. Mr. Kozel will speak on Monday, March 6, and Dick Willey, former president of Perdue Agribusiness, will speak on April 3. Ms. Newman noted that Talbot County has an engaged population that wants to know more about business topics, which is why she wanted to help sponsor the event.

Rural Economic Development Fund – Talbot County has received the money for the 14 approved projects. The nine non-county recipients have signed agreements, and three have asked for advances of up to 25% of their project. Mr. Warner's team is gathering monthly reports for all projects, which started in February 2023.

Connect Talbot – Easton Utilities briefed the County Council at a Work Session about the Talbot Connect Project on Tuesday, February 28. Ms. Vanhooser asked Marketing and Communications Manager Kelly Simonson to update the EDC on the project. Ms. Simonson said that Easton Utilities is making service available to 20-40 residents per week, and they are signing up 10-20 per week. An interactive map showing the project's progress can be found at EastonVelocity.com/ConnectTalbot. Ms. Vanhooser noted that broadband access is an economic development priority and that she has been part of the County team working on this issue since 2015.

December 2022 Business Sentiment Survey – BEACON released the results of the Eastern Shore Business Sentiment Survey in January. As you might expect, workforce issues ranked atop the list of barriers to starting or expanding a business. Financing has emerged as a concern, and inflation is a lingering issue. There is a bright spot, Ms.

Vanhooser noted, with respondents expressing a positive outlook for the future. The business leaders who answered the survey overwhelmingly believe they will still be in business five years from now, with nearly 35% believing they will expand. More than 25% of the people who took the survey were from Talbot County. Complete survey results can be found at DelmarvaIndex.org.

Relaunch of TourTalbot.org – After many months, the Department of Economic Development and Tourism has released a new design for the TourTalbot.org website. Ms. Vanhooser congratulated her colleague Krista Boothby who was the project manager. Ms. Vanhooser said that she dreamed about this design for 10 years since coming to Talbot County and is very proud of the work her team has done to make it a reality.

Frederick Douglass Birthplace Website – The Department of Economic Development and Tourism is about to release a new Frederick Douglass website, as well. The site is being reviewed by a Douglass researcher, but should launch by the end of the month. Ms. Vanhooser has written much of the content.

Frederick Douglass Mural – The Department of Economic Development and Tourism also worked with Douglass descendants to create the tourism deliverables for the Operation Frederick Douglass on The Hill Mural in Easton. A flag-raising ceremony and ribbon cutting was held on February 18 to celebrate the completion of the project, which included the installation of benches and an interpretive panel, the creation of a mural brochure, fence repairs, and landscaping. Ms. Vanhooser was the writer on this project, which was also an Eagle Scout project for Easton High School Student Brian Warner.

Chesapeake Country All-American Road – Talbot County will host a public meeting for the Mid-Shore Region to discuss the interpretive plan under development for this internationally significant scenic byway on March 15 at the Talbot County Community Center.

Talbot County Business Appreciation Summit – Ms. Vanhooser asked that EDC members and friends MARK THEIR CALENDAR for the department's signature event to be held on Wednesday, May 3. The awards breakfast will be held at the Tidewater Inn Gold Ballroom, with an afternoon keynote address open to the entire Mid-Shore. See Mr. Kozel, Ms. Walsworth, Mr. Jafari, or Ms. Wilson for details on sponsorships. Watch for additional details in the next few days.

VI. Town Reports

Town representatives reported the top priorities for their jurisdiction for 2023.

VII. Comments from Board Members and Guests

Kimberly Kratovil reported that Senators Cardin and Van Hollen will visit a number of Eastern Shore organizations that received funding from Congressionally Directed Spending on March 17, 2023.

VIII. Maryland Department of Commerce – Nancy LaJoice

Ms. LaJoice used Zoom’s chat feature to congratulate Ms. Daly and Ms. Vanhooser on a successful Business Resource Fair, which she attended. She also invited EDC members and guests to attend a webinar with Gov. Wes Moore on March 15 at 9 a.m. where he will share his vision for the State of Maryland and programs that will aid in the region’s economic health and prosperity.

XI. Upcoming Meetings

Mr. Kozel asked if the EDC Board would like to continue meeting via Zoom or go back to in-person meetings. The consensus was to continue meeting by Zoom videoconferencing. Ms. Vanhooser noted that there are many opportunities in the coming months for EDC members to attend events in person.

The EDC has been invited to a joint meeting with the Talbot County Tourism Board on May 10 at 8:30 a.m.. Mr. Jafari made a motion for the EDC Board to attend the Tourism Board meeting. Mr. Bautz seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

March 6 – Let’s Talk Business Speaker Series Featuring Ken Kozel
April 3 – Let’s Talk Business Speaker Series Featuring Dick Willey
April 23-25 – 2023 MEDA Annual Conference
May 3 – Business Appreciation Summit
May 10 – Joint EDC/Tourism Board Meeting
May 7-13 – National Travel and Tourism Week
June 1 – EDC Meeting

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Kozel made the motion to adjourn; Mr. Coppersmith seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m. on the dot.