

Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
April 12, 2023
Via Zoom

I. Welcome, Call to Order

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

Members Present Jessica Bellis, Judy Bixler, Tad duPont, Angela Eade, Ron Engle, Ian Fleming, Kristen Greenaway, Keasha Haythe, Mary Kellogg, Harold Klinger, Mark Salter, Jeff Schneider, Cassandra Vanhooser

Members Absent: Amy Kreiner

Staff Absent: Krista Boothby (excused)

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 8, 2023

Ms. Bixler presented the minutes from the March 8, 2023, meeting. Ms. Vanhooser noted that Mr. duPont has requested a correction to one of his comments. Mr. duPont made the motion to approve the minutes as corrected with Ms. Kellogg seconding the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

III. Guest Speakers – Brennan Tarleton, Talbot County Planning Officer, and Duane Gottschalk, Talbot County Alcoholic Beverages Inspector/Code Compliance Officer

Mr. Tarleton and Mr. Gottschalk gave an overview of Talbot County's compliance procedures for short-term rentals. Mr. Gottschalk uses a software called Host Compliance to find those in the county who are renting illegally. He reaches out to offenders who are identified through this process and helps them become compliant with the Talbot County Code.

- There is a 24-hour hotline for complaints.
- Mr. Gottschalk stated that his office has had only eight complaints in 2023.
- Talbot County does not monitor short-term rentals inside of the towns, which have their own rules for short-term rentals.

- Short-term rentals are defined as any rental that is less than 14 weeks.
- The compliance officer has no jurisdiction over collecting the accommodations tax.
- Mr. duPont suggested that the County and Towns join forces, with one division for licensing and monitoring short-term rentals. Ms. Vanhooser noted that this is a County Council decision.

IV. Chairman's Report – Judy Bixler

Ms. Bixler reported that she is participating in Chesapeake Storytellers, and she gave an overview of the program. She also noted that Sandy Pepe who is starting Tumble Home Yacht Tours in Oxford is also taking the class.

The Tourism Board typically takes a hiatus in June, July, and August. The Board agreed to the amended schedule though no vote was taken.

Ms. Bixler also noted that Bluepoint Hospitality has invited the Tourism Board to tour its Easton properties. Mr. Schneider made a motion that the Board accept this invitation; Ms. Bellis seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Ms. Vanhooser will reach out to Matt Mason to schedule the tour.

V. Director's Report

Civil War Trails, Inc.: Ms. Vanhooser serves as the Eastern Region representative on the Civil War Trails Inc. Board of Directors. This six-state organization interprets Civil War stories, and surprisingly, even after the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the maps and brochures are among the most requested from the State of Maryland. Talbot County has four Civil War Trails panels within its borders—Oxford, Trappe, Unionville, and the most recently installed, at Covey's Landing in Cordova that interprets the birthplace of Frederick Douglass.

Ms. Vanhooser is leaving today to travel with other state representatives to the annual meeting in New Bern, North Carolina. The hottest issue is the use of QR codes on interpretive panels. A few years ago, QR codes were passe. But with COVID and the advancements in smart phone technology, they have made a comeback. The State Office of Tourism says that people who enter their website via a QR code spend significantly more time on site than those who enter in other ways. Stand by for more on this issue.

Visitors Center Feasibility Study: Ms. Vanhooser distributed the draft document to the board and asked that anyone with comments submit them no later than COB on Friday. Ms. Greenaway stated that the documents seemed to assume there would be a new visitors center. Ms. Vanhooser noted that Phase I of the study is an actual needs assessment. Ms. Greenaway agreed to provide edits.

Fate of the Visitors Center at 11 S. Harrison Street. Ms. Vanhooser reported that she, Ms. Boothby, Ms. Bixler, and Ms. Bellis met with representatives from the Town of Easton and have negotiated the department's exit from the Town-owned building. The Talbot County Visitors Center will be relocated to the Easton Airport Terminal, though that center will be unmanned for the time being. Easton Economic Development Corporation will take over operation of the downtown Visitor Center on July 1, 2023.

Stories of the Chesapeake Boundary Amendment for Trappe: The Rural Life Museum of Trappe has asked Ms. Vanhooser for assistance with reopening their facility. When the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area was founded in 2005, Trappe declined to be a part of the organization, which required that they amend their comprehensive plan. The museum cannot qualify for grants through the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority unless the town become an official part of the heritage area.

Museum volunteers asked Ms. Vanhooser and Gail Owings, executive director of the organization, to seek a boundary amendment from the Town of Trappe. Ms. Vanhooser has presented to the Planning Commission in March, which voted 5-0 to recommend the amendment to the Town Council. Ms. Vanhooser present to full Council on April 5 to request an amendment. They voted 4-0 to approve, with one member absent.

Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area Five-Year Plan: The Heritage Area is working on a five-year plan with consultants, and the group is planning to apply for National Heritage Area status in the future. The group will undertake a feasibility study for that project. Ms. Vanhooser is president of this organization.

Douglass Audio Driving Tour: Ms. Vanhooser has submitted a grant for a Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant through the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area to develop a Frederick Douglass audio-driving tour. The County Council voted to support the grant and will issue a letter of support.

Bike Maps: The Talbot County Bike Trails Map is more than 10 years old, but remains the most popular piece of collateral the department prints. Ms. Vanhooser is working with Talbot Thrive, a local advocacy group for multimodal transportation, to redevelop this map and make it more modern and user-friendly. This comes at the request of Talbot Thrive.

Job Fair, May 11: The Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board is hosting a Job Fair at Chesapeake College on May 11. Hospitality is one of the targeted industries. If you need workers, please plan to attend.

VI. Manager's Report

Ms. Boothby was called away unexpectedly with a family emergency, and Ms. Vanhooser gave her report.

National Travel and Tourism Week: NTTW is the second week of May, and Ms. Boothby is coordinating the department's efforts for this event. The County Council will issue a proclamation on May 9, and there will be a joint meeting of the Tourism Board and EDC.

Travel Writers: The department has helped host a number of travel writers. We get more writers in the spring than any other time of year.

VII. Town Reports and Board Member Comments

Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions. Other Board members shared insights on happenings in their businesses, nonprofits, or industries.

VIII. Comments from the Public

No representatives from the public were present.

IX. Upcoming Meetings

- Joint Tourism Board and Economic Development Commission Meeting, May 10
- National Travel and Tourism Week, May 7-13
- Tourism Board Meeting, September 13

X. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Greenaway made the motion to adjourn; Mr. Schneider seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:33 a.m.