



Economic & Tourism Development Commission

Recordings of the Economic and Tourism Development Commission (ETDC) meetings can be found on the Meeting Archive Tab.

June 12, 2024

Commission Members Present: Richard Story, Paula Reeder, Sandy Scott, Judy Crow, David Bowman, and Judy Gifford.

Commission Member Absent: Charlie Athey.

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director, Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager; and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development; and Shelley Heller, County Administrator

At 3:00 p.m. Mr. Story called the meeting to order. Mr. Story requested a motion to approve the minutes from the May 8, 2024, meeting. On a motion by Ms. Reeder, seconded by Ms. Scott, the May 8, 2024, minutes were unanimously approved.

Mr. Story advised that Ms. Crow is working on a Certificate of Recognition for Robbie Jester. Ms. Reeder recommended criteria for recipients of recognition be established if we plan to do this going forward.

Mr. Story distributed a sample business retention and expansion (BRE) survey developed by the committee. The survey will be utilized when visiting businesses in Kent County. The ETDC members and staff will visit a minimum of two businesses each during Economic Development Week in October. The visits will include large, medium, and small businesses across various business sectors. The ETDC members were asked to review the form and provide feedback to Ms. Williams before the next meeting. Ms. Reeder suggested that the ETDC plan for what they will do with the information received. Ms. LaJoice advised that the questions on the questionnaire were specifically chosen to extract information to get to know the businesses, how to support them, what their needs are, what their challenges are, and future programs that can be tailored to their needs. She further advised that some information received may not be of value immediately, it may be useful in the future i.e. to qualify a business for a new program.

Ms. Williams advised that the Business Sentiment Survey through the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) will be available and distributed in July.

A discussion on the book, The Local Economy Revolution was held. Overall, comments reflected that information in the book validates what we are already doing. Ms. Gifford stated she is concerned that we don't recognize the unintended consequences. Everyone agreed that collaboration is important. Ms. Gifford stated we need a strategy on who is going to do the long-term work. Ms. Gifford stressed the importance of reaching other groups in the community and assessing what their needs are such as the

Hispanic population and the youth population and getting out to the broader community and not just the business community.

Ms. Williams shared the Kent County Lodging Association met. Ms. Crow shared the concern that short-term rentals may be taking business away from existing businesses that are licensed to provide lodging. Ms. Williams advised that suggestions were made to mimic other areas such as New York City where you must live in the building and/or institute a one- or two-week minimum stay. The Lodging Association will be putting together a small working group comprised of several members to discuss. Ms. Williams expressed the need to coordinate efforts across the County and municipalities because just instituting changes within the County may not have the effects that they are looking for. Ms. Scott advised that as a business owner, she must have a license through the County and the Town and that expectations for short-term rentals should be the same. She advised that it might be beneficial for short-term rentals to be required to complete a registration to hold them as accountable as any other business in the county.

Ms. Williams shared the County's updated code is effective July 1, 2024. New software will require short-term rental owners to create an account and file monthly reports as well as allow them to pay the short-term rental taxes due online. July taxes are due on August 21, 2024. The software will allow the County to gather data and run reports for their use as well as the municipalities. Ms. Crow expressed the need to have local businesses working together and supporting each other. Ms. Williams advised that the Lodging Association needs to be more active. Ms. Heller suggested a notice on the account registration page of the new software to invite short-term rental owners to join the Lodging Association.

Ms. Williams provided a handout on the outcome of the guest speaker survey and advised that it would take two years to get through the speakers if we followed the request from the last meeting to have a guest speaker every other month. After some discussion, it was decided to revert to the old format and host one or two guest speakers at each meeting with staff reports.

A discussion was held on increasing the ETDC Members from seven to nine. Reasons shared for increasing the number of members were not utilizing talent in the County, more ideas, diving deeper into Tourism, more representation, diversity, etc. The matter was tabled until the next meeting.

Ms. Reeder advised that the legislature passed several bills this year related to supporting affordable housing with grant programs. Ms. Williams advised that the Housing and Transportation Coordinator position was not approved in the budget again this year. She further advised that the Grants Manager position was funded and will reside in the Planning, Housing, and Zoning department. Ms. Reeder shared that she felt the lack of funding for this position was a failure of the County to recognize a key criterion for the future well-being of the County. Ms. Heller advised that the Department of Planning, Housing, and Zoning has representation on Housing Committees Statewide. She also added that there are several non-profit organizations within the County and that the County does rely on their expertise. Kent County has a community action agency, Maryland Rural Development Corporation, with a dedicated representative housed in Kent County.

The ETDC agreed to reschedule the August Meeting to August 7, 2024, due to the dates of the MACo Summer Conference.

Mr. Story shared that Barbara's on The Bay in Betterton has been sold.

Ms. Williams advised that Kent Cultural Alliance is on the July agenda and that she would reach out to the other identified speakers to check their availability. In addition, other items to discuss include the size of the ETDC and incentives.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Scott, seconded by Ms. Reeder, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 4:35 p.m. The Commission agreed to meet again on Wednesday, July 10, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director