

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MINUTES**

October 12, 2011

PRESENT: Joyce Bowsbey, Dr. Robert Gell, Harland Graef, Commissioner Robert Hodge (Ex-Officio), Laura Mayse (Chamber), Grove Miller, Jeanne Minner (Town of Elkton), Mike Ratchford (Chair), Dr. Carl Roberts.
Staff: Debbie Graham, Sandy Turner.

ABSENT: John Dillman, Mayor James Eberhardt (Perryville), Norman Gaither, Paula Gilley, Raymond Hamm, Mayor Frank Hill (Chesapeake City), Dr. Ken Lewis, Mayor Robert McKnight (North East), Mayor Tom Mumey (Rising Sun), Dr. Stephen Pannill, Rupert Rossetti, Gary Stewart, Donna Tapley, Linda Tipton, Mayor Wayne Tome (Port Deposit).

GUESTS: Jim Buckland (Artesian), Cheryl Mattix (Cecil Whig), Linda McLeod (Columbia Bank), Stephanie Palko (Cecil Guardian), Alan Sexton (SWN), Linda Siegel (SWN), Mie Mie Joe Strickler (MDS Consultants), Scott Sturgill (Harford Bank), Doug Zeisel (TEDCO).

Call to Order & Welcome

Chairman Ratchford called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

The September 2011 EDC minutes were approved as e-mailed.

Update on Economic Development Department Activities

Mr. Clough, Acting Director, submitted a written report prior to the meeting, which Chairman Ratchford expounded on (a copy in the file for reference). In reference to the EDC report, Mr. Graef questioned the elimination of Enterprise Zone tax credits. Commissioner Hodge advised that the County's per capita income level exceeded the minimum to qualify. When the County renewed the last time, it was over the limits, but they allowed it anyway.

Ms. Richart-Young, Agricultural Coordinator, also submitted a written report prior to the meeting, which Mr. Miller expounded on (a copy in the file for reference).

Sandy Turner, Tourism Coordinator, reported the following:

1. The Tourism Committee has been working on a Strategic Plan that they hope to have completed by the next EDC meeting, at which time copies will be made available.
2. Tourism is working on a partnership relating to the War of 1812 with Harford County. There is a website www.upperbay1812.com that shows the sites and events that will be scheduled.
3. Tourism recently attended a travel writers' conference to try to entice travel writers' to come to Cecil County.
4. Fair Hill International is this week.

5. Tourism has met several times with the Chesapeake House Welcome Center. That building is to be razed and rebuilt. The State is currently receiving proposals for reconstruction and running the center. HMS Host is currently running the center, and if they get the new contract, tourism will help them to make the visitor center part of that building to be the look and feel it needs to be. It will be rebuilt by 2014. Marriott has the franchise for the food concessions and HMS Host has the visitor center.

Cecil County Workforce and Business Initiatives

Alan Sexton and Linda Siegel gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Susquehanna Workforce Network (SWN), a copy in the file for reference. Highlights of SWN are:

1. SWN targets the business community. They will provide 1500-2000 services to businesses this year.
2. SWN has three workforce centers, one in Cecil and two in Harford. They expect to service 25,000-30,000 customers this year.
3. SWN provides services to youth. They contract with youth service providers to work with youth who have dropped out of school and/or are basic skills deficient. The program is to reconnect the youth to an educational system to get their GED and then assist to get them jobs or continue their education through a post-secondary education certificate type program.
4. SWN is a Cecil County United Way agency. With the funds from United Way, SWN provides services to the general youth population by holding youth workshops that cover career planning, workplace readiness, job search assistance, life skills and background checks/security clearance. SWN holds several job fairs for youth each year, as well as several job fairs each year for the general public. Last week they held a job fair that had 49 employers in attendance, all of which were looking to hire people. At the last entry level job fair, SWN had to turn away employers because they can only accommodate 15 employers at this type of fair. However, the entry level job fairs are run three times a year.
5. SWN received \$50,000 from the Video Lottery Terminal Community Impact Grant funds. This grant will target unemployed people that reside in the census tracts west of Rt. 272. Those census tracts have the highest number of unemployed people.
6. SWN provides a program titled Score Logix, which is an assessment of your re-employability score and your job security score. This assessment allows people to identify, based on their occupation, education, age, gender, industry, and location requirements, what the availability is for employment in the region they have chosen. This is a free service offered to residents of Cecil and Harford County, and can be accessed on SWN's website.
7. SWN provides reimbursement to an employer for the costs associated with on-the-job training for a new employee. The employee has to have been out of work for 19 weeks continuously.
8. SWN received almost \$1 million through a BRAC/National Emergency Grant. The program offers training to veterans, unemployed workers, and dislocated workers. It also offers training for the family members that have transitioned with their spouses from Virginia and New Jersey. This program also gives support filling out Federal job applications.
9. SWN is involved in Maryland Energy Sector Partnership grants (called green grants), which will wrap up in January 2013. Most awards to date have been for incumbent workers. These grants are 100% reimbursable for training costs.

10. SWN has also received a grant from the Harford County Economic Development Office, which will target Harford County job fairs, customized business support, etc. Harford County Social Services approached SWN about expanding a program that they currently operate to provide intense case management services for customers with multiple barriers.
11. SWN operates early intervention workshops every other week. The workshops are targeted to people receiving unemployment. It is mandatory that they attend.

Chairman's Report

1. **Tolls** - Chairman Ratchford advised the MdTA drafted a toll plan that addresses the local concerns on the Hatem Bridge. Commissioner Hodge stated that the new toll structure is very beneficial to the average commuter that has a two-axle vehicle. However, commercial vehicles have lost a discount program where they were able to purchase coupon books at a significant discount. The coupon books have been eliminated and commercial three-axle vehicles will have to use EZ Pass. Maryland Portable Concrete has advised that the toll will add \$2 a yard for concrete. A five-axle vehicle will pay \$48, which inevitably will be added to delivery costs to consumers. Ms. Bowlsbey stated that it was suggested that the Chamber of Commerce do a survey of its members to see how much the increase in tolls will impact individual businesses.
2. **Termination of Wastewater Deal w/ Artesian** - Chairman Ratchford thinks the termination of the wastewater deal with Artesian is a step backward when it comes to infrastructure in the County. Commissioner Hodge agreed. The County can have all the water they want, but without wastewater, it doesn't do the County any good. Businesses want and need both water and wastewater. Dr. Gell asked if the County will have to subsidize the existing water/wastewater system in the northern part of the County and also replace the system? Commissioner Hodge stated that some years the taxpayers subsidize the system and some years they don't, depending on when the rates are raised. There will be some heavy capital investment on some of the facilities. If there isn't a large base of customers, then current customers pay a significantly higher rate, or it is subsidized by taxpayers.
3. **Future of Economic Development** - Chairman Ratchford advised that he sent an e-mail to the Commissioners suggesting the process of choosing a new director for the office be open and transparent. There have been approximately 40 applicants for the position. Half of those look to be very qualified. The deadline for applying was extended two weeks and the position has been advertised extensively. Chairman Ratchford understands that there will be a screening process from the private sector and the EDC, and then a recommendation will be made to the Commissioners.
4. **Economic Development Plan** - Chairman Ratchford stated that he would like to have a Comprehensive Economic Development Plan done with a professional. He would like to continue a dialogue with the Commissioners on that and make sure the resources for it are put in the next fiscal year's budget.
5. **Maryland General Assembly** - Maryland General Assembly will be in Special Session next week. The intent is to address re-districting.
6. **Entrepreneur Program** - Chairman Ratchford advised that he has been contacted by Angela Corrieri about establishing an entrepreneur program in the County that would encourage people into entrepreneurial activities. More to follow at a later time.

7. **Elkton's Proposed Increase in Water Rates** - Chairman Ratchford stated that Elkton is proposing increases in water rates. Out of town businesses pay higher rates than those inside town limits. He asked the EDC if this is something they should weigh in on since it will have an impact on out-of-town businesses. Discussion ensued. It was decided that the EDC should contact the town to get more information from the town requesting their rationale for the difference in rates.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 a.m. Next meeting to be held on November 2, 2011 at 8:00 a.m. in the Perryville Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah J. Graham
Administrative Assistant