

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
MINUTES**

December 7, 2011

PRESENT: Joyce Bowlsbey, John Dillman, Paula Gilley, Raymond Hamm, Dr. Ken Lewis, Laura Mayse (Chamber), Grove Miller, Dr. Stephen Pannill, Mike Ratchford (Chair), Rupert Rossetti.  
Staff: Roy Clough, Debbie Graham, Sandy Turner, Joanne Richart-Young.

ABSENT: Mayor James Eberhardt (Perryville), Norman Gaither, Dr. Robert Gell, Harland Graef, Mayor Frank Hill (Chesapeake City), Commissioner Robert Hodge (Ex-Officio), Mayor Robert McKnight (North East), Jeanne Minner (Town of Elkton), Mayor Tom Mumey (Rising Sun), Dr. Carl Roberts, Gary Stewart, Donna Tapley, Linda Tipton, Mayor Wayne Tome (Port Deposit).

GUESTS: Jim Buckland (Artesian), Deb Carter (Buttonwood Beach and Tourism Committee), Tammy Edwards (DBED), Bruce England (SWN), Michael Garrity (SBDC), Tom Kenny (insurance agent), Kathy Kunda (BEPAC), Cheryl Mattix (Cecil Whig), Linda McLeod (Columbia Bank), Commissioner Tari Moore, Stephanie Palko (Cecil Guardian), Alan Sexton (SWN), Mie Mie Joe Strickler (MJS Consulting), Scott Sturgill (Harford Bank), Silvia Zsoldos (Success Programs, Inc.).

**Call to Order & Welcome**

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

**Approval of Minutes**

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

**Chairman's Report**

Chairman Ratchford reported on the following:

1. Some EDC members were up for re-appointment. All but Gary Stewart, Carl Roberts, and Joyce Bowlsbey were re-appointed. New appointments are Andrew Jodlbauer, Michael Travers, and Bill Kilby. The EDC is an open forum and Chairman Ratchford encouraged the members whose terms expired to continue to participate.
2. Search for EDC Director – the interview committee had good representation from retail, tourism, and small business. The committee made recommendations to the Commissioners who will interview the candidates in the near future. The goal is to get a new director on board in January. None of the candidates are Cecil County residents.
3. The Chamber will be sponsoring Cecil Night in Annapolis on January 12<sup>th</sup>. A bus will be provided for \$35 and will leave from Big Elk Mall that afternoon. It is a great time to see and meet the delegation. Ron Wineholt will hold a seminar at 3:45 p.m. on pending legislation that will impact small businesses. The Chamber is looking for sponsorships for the event.

**Update on Economic Development Department Activities**

Mr. Clough, Acting Director, reported the following:

1. Weeks Robinson Properties have aggressively promoted the TradeCenter@95 since they bought it. There has been a great deal of interest since September, including three well known national firms, one that would employ approximately 150 to 200. The building has been empty since 2007.
2. General Services Administration has leased an additional 76,800 sf at the North East Commerce Center, for a total of 153,600. GSA employs 40 at the site. Combined with the space leased by Herrs Foods, the building is 90% occupied.
3. If natural gas can be provided to the North East Commerce Center, an ag-related prospect is interested in leasing the remaining available space in that building and would employ 20-25. Chesapeake Utilities advised that they would be able to provide the gas needed by the third quarter of 2012. Chesapeake Utilities will be making a presentation at the January EDC meeting.
4. Cecil's October unemployment rate was 8.2%, which is the lowest unemployment rate for the county in the past three years.

Ms. Richart-Young reported the following on ag:

1. Warwick Mushroom has an additional 83,000 sf facility that will open by the first of January with an additional 40 jobs. The company is making improvements to Worsell Manor Road. They will hold an open house after the second building is operational. Currently, they ship out 100,000 pounds of mushrooms per week and expect to ship 200,000 pounds per week after the new building is up and running.
2. IESC poultry houses in Warwick are being rebuilt at an investment of over \$1 million per house and are scheduled to open the first quarter of 2012.
3. Galvinell Meat Company, the only USDA butcher in Cecil and Harford Counties, is in the final stage of expanding. They are also researching organic processing.
4. Cecil County products will be served at Cecil Night in Annapolis.
5. Working on grants for the Chesapeake Country National Scenic Byway to install interpretive panels along the Byway.

### **Fair Hill International**

Rupert Rossetti reported that 10,000 to 11,000 people attended FHI this year, which is a little up from last year. Many of those are competitors from all over the country, which is good for the local economy. 15,000 were in attendance when the Pan American games were held.

### **Tourism Strategic Plan**

Ms. Maruchi-Turner reported that she has been working with a company on a series of videos that will be displayed on the County's website, with no cost to the County. There are seven videos that pertain to economic development, tourism, welcome, education, agricultural, quality of life, and real estate & relocation.

Ms. Maruchi-Turner advised that the tourism committee normally meets every January to plan for the coming year. This year they worked on their Strategic Plan instead since the last Strategic Plan was done in 2004. The Plan is divided into categories consisting of introduction, marketing, tourism products, partnerships, statistics, the tourism office, strengths and weaknesses, short term goals and long term goals. The short term goals were broken into separate categories, including marketing, funding, recreational advancement, partnership, advocacy and education, and a primary goal of making tourism a priority for the Commissioners. To do that they felt tourism should be made its own department. This has been talked about for a number of years by the committee and they felt that this may be the time.

She made a presentation to the Commissioners a couple of meetings ago to request the Commissioners make tourism its own department. Ms. Maruchi-Turner read her presentation that was given to the Commissioners, a copy in the file for reference. The operating budget should stay the same since no additional staff or equipment will be needed.

Chairman Ratchford asked how the Commissioners would know if a separate tourism department were successful? Ms. Turner stated the Commissioners would have a closer relationship with tourism if it were a separate department and it would be evident if tourism is more successful. Statistics would be available that would indicate tourism industry numbers. Chairman Ratchford asked what other counties do? Ms. Maruchi-Turner stated there is no norm in Maryland. Many of the larger destinations that have multiple large tourism businesses have their own non-profit tourism office. Some operate completely on hotel taxes. Some are part of county government. One is part of a civic center department. Five are part of the economic development department, and eight are their own department.

Deb Carter stated that the return on investment would be an easy thing to measure. Depending on the budget that the department would be given, it would be easy to determine the businesses that would come into the county or succeed in the county. There are many ancillary incomes from the tourism industry. When it is joined under economic development, it is difficult to separate those things. Ms. Carter thinks it is appalling that the tourism coordinator cannot go directly to the Commissioners and speak to them about a project.

Dr. Lewis asked if tourism received a reaction from the Commissioners on some of the short term objectives, particularly related to marketing or funding. Ms. Maruchi-Turner stated they are focusing right now on the department's issues. The one bit of feedback they received was not being able to do a tourism Facebook page. Due to the meeting with the Commissioners, tourism has permission to have a Facebook page that is separate from the County's. The other things will be addressed as they move forward but right now they are focused on the top priority of making it a separate department.

Mr. Hamm thinks that tourism deserves an opportunity to become a separate department, however he cautioned that making tourism its own department, the tourism committee may become subject to political appointments.

Mr. Miller asked why tourism was not on the job description for a new director. Ms. Maruchi-Turner stated that she doesn't think it was intentional, it's just that tourism is an afterthought. There are no tourism representatives on the EDC. Mr. Rosetti stated that when the job description was put together, they were thinking economic development, not tourism. Mr. Miller stated that the County put the job description together, not the OED. He cautioned that if it is a separate department, the County will have more control over tourism and over the hiring and firing of the tourism director.

Mr. Dillman stated that at the state level, tourism is under economic development. He asked if there is synergy at the state level. Ms. Turner stated that she believes there are challenges, but there is absolute synergy. Tourism, Film, and the Arts is a division of DBED.

Ms. Bowsbey reminded tourism that Cecil County's form of government will change in 2012 and the County Executive will appoint department heads.

Mr. Clough stated that Al Wein recommends that the issue wait until budget time. Per Vicky Rinkerman, the Commissioners' agenda is so full, there will probably be no action taken on this until after the middle of January.

## **Discussion**

1. Ms. Gilley stated that she received an e-mail from a Maryland senator who was concerned about Plan Maryland. There will be a hearing on December 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. in Annapolis, with a rally at 9:30 a.m. that day at Lawyer's Mall. They are trying to get as many people from Cecil County as possible to attend. Ms. Bowsbey is concerned that this information didn't come from the Cecil County delegation. Ms. Mattix stated that when Senator Pipkin was asked at the legislative meeting with the Commissioners on Tuesday afternoon, he talked about it a little bit. He stated it is not a hearing, but a briefing. Only six people will be able to speak for it and six people against it. But, you could have a voice and press coverage if you rally in Lawyer's Mall. There will be open mics and media in attendance.
2. Dr. Pannill stated that out of last year's legislative session, there was a call to look at higher education in northeastern Maryland. That work was just concluded. The group is calling for a significant expansion of the Heat Center location. Towson University has proposed a building on the campus of Harford Community College since 80% of students from HCC to on to Towson. The funding source and building design has been identified.
3. Ms. Kunda reported the following:
  - a. Anirban Basu will be the guest speaker at a Chamber event at Cecil College this Friday from 8-10 p.m. Some of his presentation will be on how economic development is directly impacted by public policies.
  - b. A Bohemia Manor STEM Academy student is being sponsored by the Columbia Bank and will be introduced and sitting with Mr. Basu because he is doing a research project on educational impact on economic development.
  - c. BEPAC had the University of Delaware regional architect speak last month. In January, the Dean of the Health Department will be the speaker.
  - d. Army Alliance doesn't think BRAC is over. The Defense Department budget is being cut and there will be more bases closing.
  - e. Dr. Devine will have a community forum on the impacts of education on economic development on December 14<sup>th</sup>. See BEPAC website.

Mr. Buckland stated that 3400 contractors have moved to date and another 8,000 – 10,000 are yet to move.

4. Mr. Rossetti advised that the Watershed Implementation Plan was submitted to the state in November. They hope to have someone speak knowledgably each month about septic systems, stormwater management, wastewater treatment, etc. since the committee will continue to meet through the first half of 2012 to look at reducing the cost and how to do what was a very broad assessment The final deadline is July.

## **Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m. Next meeting to be held on January 4, 2012 at 8:00 a.m. in the Perryville Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah J. Graham  
Administrative Assistant