

**Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 9, 2020
8:30 a.m.**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81101841522?pwd=TGhySHI5T2RWbE5iVjA0VVJCaGww
UT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81101841522?pwd=TGhySHI5T2RWbE5iVjA0VVJCaGwwUT09)

Meeting ID: 811 0184 1522
Password: 624719

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Board Members Present: Judy Bixler, Kelley Cox, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Laura Price, Mark Salter, Ben Simons, Kim Weller, Cassandra Vanhooser

Board Members Absent: Harold Klinger, Jeff Schneider, Al Silverstein

Recording Secretary: Candace Harris

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the June meeting were presented and passed by unanimous vote.

III. Old Business

Presentation: Cassandra gave a presentation on the 2019 numbers. The economic impact for 2019 is very positive, with numbers up in every category. Visitor numbers were up 16.3% since 2015. In 2019, visitors spent \$223 million in Talbot County. Tourism employment is up; Talbot County has almost 2,000 people directly employed by tourism businesses. The 2019 numbers for day trippers was 60% and 40% stayed overnight. This is great news for 2019, but it will be a very different picture for 2020.

Talbot CARES Grant Program: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the team has worked diligently to get the applications complete and moved through the process. It has been very surprising how many applications that were turned in incomplete. The Department of Economic Development and Tourism has received 108 grant applications in the first round and eight applications that did not qualify, four withdrew for various reasons, and six are still under review. A total of 90 applications have been approved for payment. The Talbot County Council has reinvested almost \$850,000 into the businesses of Talbot County. These are federal tax dollars that have been given to the county to offset the cost

of the COVID-19 pandemic. Half of the \$6.4 million was given for the public health initiative, with the County Council deciding how to distribute the remainder of the money. They elected to give \$1.2 million to fund a grant program to help Talbot County businesses; the other \$1.2 million was given to help with individual assistance. The individual assistance is for people who are having difficulty paying their rent and other expenses because of COVID-19.

More than half of the businesses that have received grant were tourism-related businesses. Service businesses including hair and nail salons, massage therapists, and acupuncturists are also among the most impacted by COVID-19 closures. One of the things that we have done is make a stronger connection with the Small Business Development Center. Business consultants Rich Loeffler and Greg Bartoo will be working directly with businesses, offering free and confidential services.

USDA Grant: Ms. Vanhooser was on the team from Talbot County that partnered with Easton Utilities to win a \$13.1 million USDA grant. The Connect Talbot broadband project will help the unserved areas of Talbot County get broadband. This project should benefit both economic development and tourism as businesses and visitors expect to be connected in today's world.

Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe: Talbot County partnered with the Maryland Office of Tourism Development to launch International Underground Railroad Month from the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe. Outdoor exhibits that tell the Frederick Douglass story were installed the same day at the park. The media coverage we received for this event was incredible and is worth almost \$100,000.

Market and Communications: Ms. Vanhooser stated that we are maintaining and we have never stopped our basic digital campaign. We have pulled back on discretionary advertising spending. She is having weekly calls with her digital marketing team and the DMOs to keep tabs on the trends and digital media. The private sector calls are now happening the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month instead of weekly.

IV. New Business

Eastern Shore Recovery Project: The Mid-Shore Regional Council received a \$400,000 grant from the EDA to develop those platforms that will assist businesses and governments in making decisions during future crisis situations. This is a two-year project. We will be surveying our businesses to gather data for this project. This will bring funds into the Economic Development office to hire someone to help engage the businesses to gather the data that we need.

V. Town Reports

Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:56 am. The next meeting will be held on October 14 at 8:30 a.m.