

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

January 4, 2023

PRESENT

Dr. Mary Bolt (Cecil College), JoAnn Dawson (Fairwinds), Danny DeMarinis (Mitre Corp), Joe DiNunzio (Artesian Water), Sandra Edwards (OED Mgr.), Maureen O'Shea Fitzgerald (OED Agribusiness Coordinator), Dr. Jenni Hammer for Dr. Jeffrey Lawson (CCPS), Woody Jackson (Citizen), Ed Jones (Northrop Grumman), Kimberly Justus (SWN), Sharon Kurfuerst (Christiana Care/Union), Sandy Maruchi-Turner (Tourism Manager), Robert Palsgrove (Citizen), Michael Ratchford (W.L. Gore & Assoc.), Bill Sorenson (OED Director), Richard Starr (OED Coordinator)

ABSENT

Jeff Emmons (Delmarva Power), Vince Fiorelli (Chesapeake Utilities), Bob Meffley (CC Council), Morgan Miller (CCPL), Dr. Carl Roberts (BDC), Mike Travers (Cecil Dancenter)

GUESTS

Brandon Brice (Cecil College), Debbie Brown (CC Chamber of Commerce), Scott Flanigan (CC DPW), Andrew Griffin (MD Chamber of Commerce), John Ness (WCHC), Brigitte Peters (Commerce), Rupert Rossetti (FH), Toni Sprenkle (BDC), Andrea Vuncannon (APGFCU), Maura Van Syckle (SBDC), Karen Zuccardi (TEDCO)

Call to Order & Welcome – Mike Ratchford

- Meeting called to order at 8:01 a.m.
- December 7, 2022, meeting minutes approved

Chairman's Report – Mike Ratchford

- Maryland General Assembly reconvenes next week – like to hear from Maryland Chamber of Commerce re bills for this session
- New administration coming in; number of new legislators
- Acknowledge Debbie Brown – stepping down as Executive Director of the Chamber
 - Leadership has energized Chamber, made more of a force
 - Appreciate efforts for County and business community over last several years

An Update on Maryland Chamber of Commerce's Priorities for the Upcoming Legislative Session was presented by Andrew Griffin, VP, Government Affairs, MD Chamber of Commerce

- General Assembly back next week – number of new legislators
 - Will offer host of challenges and opportunities
 - Relationship between new governor and General Assembly
 - Policy to be driven by Moore administration
- Legislative Priorities:
 - Working on Pay/Leave Program
 - State passed last year – putting together technical correction bill
 - Clean up a lot of issues, definitions, etc. in bill
 - Not addressing #1 issue – employers do not retain say in when employee can/cannot take leave; employees can take up to 12 weeks whenever wanted
 - No economic hardship allowed
 - Workforce Development Initiatives
 - Large/Small businesses struggling with talent recruitment & talent retention

- Child Care – has not rebound since Covid shutdown.
 - Cost & availability issues
 - Incentivize private industry to help with childcare (capital investment)
- Broadband (BB)
 - State and federal matching money to roll out BB – both rural and urban
 - Still some areas too costly to run BB - looking at sales tax exemption on commercial telecommunication equipment for companies going into more difficult areas to run BB (possible tax credit over 10 yrs.)
- Other Issues:
 - Middle Housing: Affordable housing; workforce housing
 - Trying to address State's affordable housing price issue
 - Difficult for middle income to purchase homes in MD
 - Cannabis – legalization of recreational use
 - Tons of issues for employers for workforce/customer safety
 - Set up necessary regulators structure for Cannabis use
 - Watching other jurisdictions for guidance
 - D.C. ban employer testing – removing employer right to test (only employer outlet)
 - Intoxication experts – come to work place and identify employees under influence
 - Need other avenues
 - Federal employees must abide by Federal law – can be tested and lose job
 - Huge talent recruitment for State's largest employers – will shrink workforce talent pool
 - Minimum Wage – Moore team
 - Expect fast track legislation; \$15/hr. minimum wage in Jan 2024
 - Do not want to raise above \$15/hr.
 - Do not want to eliminate tip/wage worker exemption
 - Attaching annual increase in minimum wage to increase CPI
 - Many employers already paying above \$15/hr. to get applications
 - Chamber will oppose minimum wage accelerated schedule for many reasons
- Moore Administration:
 - No announcements in House re committee assignments
 - Senate revamped some committees; Senate leadership appointments good for business community
 - Late in making cabinet announcements
- Taxes:
 - Budget healthy; probably won't discuss; administration will spend through surplus – very concerning re possible recession; need to fund blueprint for future
- Public Safety:
 - Moore to focus attention on Baltimore; new State's Attorney General

Director's Report – Update on Economic Development – Bill Sorenson, Director OED

- 2022 – Full of new businesses & jobs (Bainbridge, Great Wolf, North Grumman)
- Implementing Salesforce – software to track business growth, job creation, capex, challenges
 - Will share info at Cecil County's State of the Economy
- Upper Shore Ag Grants open
 - MACo Dinner – Ag grant program recognized
- Workforce Training interest – Cecil County training options/programs, State training options/programs
 - Contact OED for details/contacts
- Solicitations/RFPs down slightly in 2022
 - Concerns of softness in marketplace; Working on couple RFPs at present

- Seven Enterprise Zone (EZ) properties were certified

Education Update – Dr. Jenni Hammer for Dr. Jeffrey Lawson

- Working on plan for blueprint
 - 5 pillars of plan – due to State in March
 - College/Career Readiness Pillar – partnering with Cecil College and SWN
- Budget season

Cecil College Update – Dr. Mary Bolt

- Provide workforce training and workforce certifications
- Introduce Brandon Brice, new Vice President, College Advancement and Community Relations

Workforce Update – Kim Justus

- Have funding available to help with cost of workforce development – contact Alan Sexton

Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO) Update – Karen Zuccardi

- Federal grant opportunity for rural communities -- if interested, TEDCO happy to help

Cecil County Chamber Update – Debbie Brown

- Been a blast to have experienced Chamber and Cecil County business community for past 5 years
- Will train replacement, Megan McCray, over next 3 weeks
- Will be making introductions starting Monday
- Jan 23 – State of the Economy Breakfast, Schaefers, 8:30am
- Business Card Exchange, Chamber Orientation, Community Care Round Table happening

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 am.

Next EDC Meeting will be VIRTUAL on February 1, 2023, at 8:00 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terri Springel
Administrative Assistant