

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

January 8, 2025

PRESENT

Ariel Balog (Ag Industry Coordinator), Dr. Mary Bolt (Cecil College), JoAnn Dawson (Fairwinds), Danny DeMarinis (NEMD URP), Joe DiNunzio (Artesian Water), Sandra Edwards (OED Director), Vince Fiorelli (Chesapeake Utilities), Ed Jones (Northrop Grumman), Dr. Jeffrey Lawson (CCPS), Sandy Maruchi-Turner (Tourism Mgr.), Robert Palsgrove (Citizen), Michael Ratchford (W.L. Gore & Assoc.), Rachel Wright (interim for CCPL)

ABSENT

Kristina Brown (Delmarva Power), Amy DiPietro (MRA), Woody Jackson (Citizen), Kimberly Justus (SWN), Carl Roberts (BDC), Mike Travers (Cecil Dancenter)

GUESTS

Hannah Allen (MD Chamber of Commerce), Randy Baynes (Pepco), Stacey Brown (SWN), Alicia Calhoun (Elkton Alliance), Scott Flanigan (CCDPW), Anne Marie Hamilton (CC Arts Council), Rebecca Hamilton (CC Council), Laura Hannan (FHNC), Megan McRay (CC Chamber of Commerce), John Ness (WCHC), Kim Ray (Tourism), Dan Schneckeburger (CC Director of Admin.), Dr. Arsalan Sheikh (Christiana Care Union), Toni Sprenkle (BDC), Clyde Van Dyke (CC P&R), Maura Van Syckle (SBDC), Karen Zuccardi (TEDCO)

Call to Order & Welcome – Mike Ratchford

- Meeting called to order at 8:01 am
- December 2024 Meeting minutes approved

Chairman's Report – Mike Ratchford

- Significant progress on North East River dredging
- Economic Development Strategic Plan – approved by Council; asked for additional information

Director's Report – Sandra Edwards

- Funding approved for Economic Development Strategic Plan, working on RFP
 - Hope to share draft with EDC members and Council
- Request to Fill both vacant OED positions submitted to HR
- Ongoing one-on-one meetings with EDC members; received great feedback
 - Fielding interest in serving on Strategic Plan Steering Committee
- Partnering with County Chamber of Commerce:
 - Small Business Month Appreciation (May)
 - Cecil County Collective Meetings (get towns more engaged)
- Tourism:
 - Planning spring marketing
 - Part of Planning Committee for marketing grant promoting MD Horse Park System (part of MD Horse Industry Board)
 - Attending MD Tourism Development Board and MD Heritage Areas Authority meetings

- Winter Lights Cecil Nights – 5th year underway! Runs January-February, Check website for activities
- Chesapeake BayWay project planning, meeting, and workshop

A Legislative Preview was presented by Hannah Allen, Director of Government Affairs, MD Chamber of Commerce

- Today is opening day of 90-day legislature
- 2025 Legislative Priorities - Revenue:
 - **TAXES:**
 - State expecting ~ \$3B deficit for FY2026
 - Focus of legislature on raising additional revenue to balance State budget
 - MD showing slow growth and slow labor growth; private sector jobs lost
 - Not seen ton of growth in sales tax – one of State's largest general fund revenue sources
 - Estimated revenues will only cover 80% of State's current spending by 2030
 - Expect to see combined reporting on corporations, higher taxes on pass-through entities, expanding sales tax on services
 - Talk of personal income tax changes – increasing millionaires tax brackets
 - Adjustments/changes to blueprint to relieve State and local Board of Ed funding issues
 - Governor must introduce budget by Jan. 15th
 - **TRANSPORTATION FUNDING:**
 - Gap in Transportation Trust Fund
 - Reasons: Push for electric vehicle sales & drop in gas tax
 - Anticipate discussions on toll increases, vehicle miles traveled fees, retail delivery fees, expanding sales tax on services for transportation and related services
 - **CLIMATE FUNDING:**
 - MD has most ambitious climate goals in country
 - MDE report in 2023 – need to raise over \$1B/year to meet goals in report
 - May see legislative ideas introduced
 - MD - Can't raise taxes for transportation, education, and climate – cost of living and **doing business already high**
 - **ENERGY:**
 - Piedmont Reliability Transmission Line Project
 - Push to electrify puts strain on grid – grid needs updates, more capacity needed especially to attract data center development in MD
 - Data center development good for local tax revenue
 - **DATA PRIVACY/ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:**
 - In 2024 passed Data Privacy law; law goes into effect Oct. 2025
 - Expect tweaks to legislation; align more with bills in other states
 - **CHILDCARE:**
 - Increasing availability remains priority (opening new facilities, expanding access to existing facilities)
 - Creates big workforce issue
- Session focus will be budget and revenue; hope to see considerations that grow economy and make people/businesses want to invest time & money in MD

Others:

Cecil College – Dr. Mary Bolt

- Spring Enrollment Open – Please register
- Milburn Stone Theater – upcoming Cecil County Public School art exhibit

Elkton Alliance – Alicia Calhoun

- Winter Lights Cecil Nights – lighting up town of Elkton
- 1st Friday – Soup Event
- Business Update:
 - Old Howard House/Minihane's – new temporary roof begun
 - Bing's Bakery – coming to Main Street, Feb. 1 opening
 - PNC building sold – renovations underway
 - Japanese restaurant on Main Street closing/closed

Cecil County Chamber of Commerce – Megan McRay

- Jan. 9 – Cecil Day in Annapolis – Grayson Wiggins/MD State Chamber; Great day program planned
- Recommend attending Day and Night sessions
- Cecil Night in Annapolis – Gallery featuring artists from Cecil College
- Jan. 30 – State of the County Breakfast - new Streight administration

CCPL – Rachel Wright, Interim Director

- Board of Library Trustees in final stages of selecting new Executive Director; hoping for announcement early February
- Jan. 29 – 6:30pm @ Elkton Library – Architects on hand for Elkton Library design renovations
- Jan. 20 – Feb. 4: Journey Back Holocaust Stories Virtual Exhibit at Elkton & North East branches
- February – Frederick Douglass Advocate for Equality Exhibit – North East branch

REMINDER:

**February EDC Meeting will be IN PERSON at Cecil College, TC208, North East, 8:00am.
Presentation from MD Chamber of Commerce on Competitiveness of Red Book.**

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terri Springel
Administrative Assistant