

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

February 2, 2022

PRESENT

Dr. Mary Bolt (Cecil College), JoAnn Dawson (Fairwinds), Danny DeMarinis (Mitre Corp), Joe DiNunzio (Artesian Water), Sandra Edwards (Acting Dir., OED), Bruce England (SWN), Vince Fiorelli (Chesapeake Utilities), Maureen O'Shea Fitzgerald (Agribusiness Coordinator), Woody Jackson (Citizen), Dr. Jeffrey Lawson (CCPS), Sandy Maruchi-Turner (Tourism Manager), Morgan Miller (CCPL), Steve Overbay (Acting Dir. of Admin), Michael Ratchford (W.L. Gore & Assoc.), Dr. Carl Roberts (BDC), Richard Starr (OED Coordinator)

ABSENT

Sharon Kurfuerst (Christiana Care/Union), Bob Meffley (CC Council), Robert Palsgrove (Citizen), Mike Travers (Cecil Dancenter)

GUESTS

Debbie Brown (CC Chamber of Commerce), Michele Burch (Realtor), Bus Info Ctr (CCPL), Bill Coutz (CC Council), Donna Culberson (CC Council), Scott Flanigan (CC Director, DPW), Andrew Griffin (MD Dept. of Commerce), Laura Hannan (FHNC), Rowan Levy, Lauren Levy (CC Health Dept.), John Ness (WCHC), Sharon Pelham (APGFCU), Brigitte Peters (Commerce), Jack Schammel (TEDCO), Dan Schneckenburger, Jeff Sellers (SB Realty), Maura Van Syckle (SBDC)

Call to Order & Welcome – Mike Ratchford

- Meeting called to order at 8:00 a.m.
- January 5, 2022, meeting minutes approved

Chairman's Report – Mike Ratchford

- Chamber hosted very successful Cecil 2022
- Acknowledge Laura Hannon, Executive Director, Fair Hill Nature Center, with us today

A COVID Update was presented by Lauren Levy, JD, MPH, Cecil County Health Officer

- Headed in a good direction -- Numbers trending down
- Community concerned couple weeks ago – Hospital Covid Positive numbers up; Hospital operating over 100% capacity; Numbers down to 88%; Case Rate still high per 100,000 population, Positivity Rate 19.95%, high but going down
- Expanded testing in response to increased demand (off-site clinics, testing clinical health department) – will scale back for now with numbers going down
- Offering at-home PCR tests – have distributed through libraries, various community-based organizations, Senior Center (for homebound clients or individuals with access difficulties)
- In discussions with third party vendor to offer testing as another community resource
- Seeing drop in vaccinations/drop in interest
 - If any teams interested in boosters/vaccination series, please reach out to us
- Seeing more availability and lowered pricing of testing kits
- CCHD still trying to address needs of high vulnerability populations

- Omicron seems to cause less severe illness but still seeing fatalities in higher risk, those with comorbidities, and unvaccinated populations
- Not sure what future holds – another wave/variant?
 - Will combined natural and vaccination immunity be sufficient protection?
 - Know we will be better prepared if it occurs (mass testing sites, mass boosters)
- Current Vaccination Status:
 - 12+ population - 64.3% vaccinated
 - 18+ population - 48.3% have received boosters
 - 65+ population - 64.2% have received boosters
 - Outreach efforts ongoing for 65+ population due to mortality rate/more significant morbidity
- Cecil County's strength of partnerships between agencies has made navigating pandemic successful

A Maryland Chamber of Commerce Legislative Update was presented by Andrew Griffin, Vice President, Government Affairs, MD Chamber of Commerce

- Recent developments:
 - Introduction Dates – Cut offs General Assembly imposes rules of the Chamber
 - House introduction date pushed back a week – Gives extra week to introduce bills (possible additional 500 bills being introduced)
 - For General Assembly:
 - Redistricting taken up so much time
 - Covid and restrictions hampering regular business
 - Committee Work and Bill Hearings taking place
- Top Issues to Pay Attention to:
 - Paid Family Leave – would establish new State-run paid leave mandate for employers of all sizes
 - 12 weeks (24 weeks in certain circumstances) Paid Leave
 - 50/50 Cost Share Employers and Employees - Up to 1% of Employee's Average Weekly Wages
 - Employees cannot OPT out – will mean additional payroll deduction
 - Employee must have worked total of 680 hours in previous year to qualify
 - Employer has no say in when leave taken, verifying leave, or reporting fraudulent use of leave
 - Narrow Exemption written in bill – difficult for employers to qualify
 - Family definition broader than FMLA definition
 - Additional Issues: Bill's Language, Layers on Unionized Labor forces, Layers on existing collective bargaining agreements
 - Businesses need to be aware bill could pass this year, if not soon – Employers need to engage on this issue
 - Taxes:
 - Between budget surplus and being tax year, do not look for tax increases
 - Seeing more perennial issues bad for businesses – don't look for them to pass
 - Focus on small and targeted tax relief: economic development and Covid recovery
 - Possible targeted relief for certain industries/outlets without long-term revenue impact
 - HB299 – Changing definition of who qualifies as an employer throughout Labor and Employment Code

- Particularly connecting employer-employee relationship between general contractors and employees of subcontractors
- Governor's Package – seeing extension of More Jobs for Marylanders Act

Acting Director's Report – Economic Development Update - Sandra Edwards

- Bainbridge Phase I transferred to MRP Industrial
- February 18 - Upper Shore Micro Ag Grant application deadline
- Winter Lights Cecil Nights campaign/events continuing through end of February
 - Cecilton held local art exhibits/photography event last night
- Great Wolf Lodge moving along; update meetings now every other month
- Chesapeake Overlook – next phase moving forward; great possible prospect for one site
- FY2023 OED Budget submitted – will update on budget hearings
- GBC and EAGB merging – hope to learn more details soon
- March 5 – 2nd Annual Rooted in Our Community – Virtual Event
 - Topics to be horses, economy, indoor farming, farming for craft beverages, effects of pandemic on farming and climate resiliency on farming
 - Jeff Newman, MD 5 Star, will be joining
- Economic Impact Analysis Study for Cecil County events (MD 5 Star, Calvert Park, Cecil County Dragway, Plumpton Zoo) kicked off; deliverable expected end of March
 - Identified 10 points of interest to gather mobile phone data (4 named, 4 larger wedding venues, 2 marinas not included in study)
- Will be completing series of videos telling story of Cecil County like DataStory project

Administration Update – Steve Overbay

- Thank OED team for keeping momentum going - tremendous team
- Cecil employees countywide doing tremendous job making sure interest of County and business community looked after
- MACo identifying bills of concern at County level – Administration and Council following
 - Will continue to bring issues in front of EDC – great sounding board; opportunity to discuss legislation and its impact on bottom line of companies
- Thank you to Chamber for hosting State of the County address – opportunity to provide updates over last year, how we've weathered pandemic, and optimism going forward
- MD 5 Star planning underway
 - Pleased with press received last year; attendance exceeded expectations
 - Year 1 - Wonderful showcase/learning experience for County; make Year 2 even better
 - More happening with broadband than past 20 years – 18 applications, Totaling ~\$10M
- Thank Bruce and SWN team - working hard with Bainbridge re: prospect activity and providing detailed, specific, tailored data
- Have infrastructure, location, and workforce to allow us to grow next 5–10-year window
- Budget – wonderful year; exceeded revenue expectations
- Special guests today: Dan Schneckenburger, Councilman Coutz
- Thank you to Joe DiNunzio for working with us on failing wells issue
- Important aspects to employers/employees choosing Cecil: quality of life, libraries, parks and rec, workforce

Good of the Cause:

Council Update – Bill Coutz

- Coming into budget season
- Working on economic development - If opportunities go to other counties, then not doing our job
- Please let administration know to take these things into account with budget

Chamber Update - Debbie Brown

- Appreciate Carl's help on legislative issues affecting Cecil businesses/county
- Government Relations Committee every Thursday morning (virtual)
- March 15 - Bowling Alley Tournament "Shamrock Games" (in person)

CCPS Update – Dr. Jeff Lawson

- Monitoring Covid cases/positivity rates; monitoring staff/student attendance – 90% at present
- Mask mandate still a factor

College Update – Dr. Mary Bolt

- Have scholarship money – if interested in attending, contact Cecil College Foundation
- Continuing with 6 ft. social distancing and masking

CCPL Update – Morgan Miller

- Seeing decline from public for test kits
- Over 1,000 visitors/day requiring employment or technology help
- Five branches open for 40 hours real challenge – staff shortages (budget), branch illnesses, and vacancies (working to fill)
- Meeting with State Legislative Panel for libraries - Advocating for increase to State per capita formula for funding libraries
- Working with Maryland statewide broadband office – Partner with libraries to advance broadband throughout U.S.
- Working with Town of Port Deposit and nonprofit community to bring greater broadband and technology to that area

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 am.

Next EDC Meeting will be VIRTUAL on March 2, 2022, at 8:00 am. Details to follow.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terri Springel
Administrative Assistant