

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**February 7, 2024**

### **PRESENT**

Dr. Mary Bolt (Cecil College), Kristina Brown (Delmarva Power), JoAnn Dawson (Fairwinds), Danny DeMarinis (NEMD URP), Joe DiNunzio (Artesian Water), Amy DiPietro (MRA), Sandra Edwards (OED Mgr.), Vince Fiorelli (Chesapeake Utilities), Ed Jones (Northrop Grumman), Dr. Jeffrey Lawson (CCPS), Sandy Maruchi-Turner (Tourism Manager), Robert Palsgrove (Citizen), Michael Ratchford (W.L. Gore & Assoc.), Kim Ray (Tourism), Dr. Carl Roberts (BDC), Mike Travers (Cecil Dancer)

### **ABSENT**

Ariel Balog (Ag-Industry Coordinator), Rebecca Hamilton (Council), Woody Jackson (Citizen), Kimberly Justus (SWN), Amy Marston (Christiana Care-Union), Morgan Miller (CCPL), Bill Sorenson (OED Director)

### **GUESTS**

Matt Adams (Comcast), Randy Baynes (BGE), David Black (CCG GIS), Michele Burch (Exit Realty), Scott Flanigan (DPW), Bryan Lightner (Charlestown), John Ness (WCHC), Brigitte Peters (MD Commerce), Alan Sexton (SWN), Kim Swyka (Peoples Bank), Maura Van Syckle (SBDC), Karen Zuccardi (TEDCO)

### **Call to Order & Welcome – Mike Ratchford**

- Meeting called to order at 8:00 am
- Meeting minutes approved for January 2024

### **Chairman's Report – Mike Ratchford**

- Chamber hosted State of the Economy breakfast – great turnout; good to hear from County Executive re improved bond rating

### **Director's Report – Sandra Edwards for Bill Sorenson**

- March 2 – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Rooted in Our Community event @ Cecil College, TC208, 9:00am-1:30pm
  - Focus will be on climate change
  - Serving continental breakfast, lunch, and treats; will be a drone demonstration at end of session
  - Students from Cecil County School of Technology will be conducting a panel
- Rt. 40 Revitalization Grant – currently have 4 applications; please spread word about grant
- Feb. 15 - Micro Ag Grant application deadline; 11 applications thus far but expect more; grants up to \$10,000, total of \$84,000 grant funding this year
- Apr. 28 – May 4 - National Small Business Week
  - Ideas/suggestions on how to celebrate are welcome
  - Will have business visits, possibly host workshop
- March 20 – Hart Print Ribbon Cutting; small new manufacturer in Free State Business Park, Elkton
  - 20 new jobs anticipated to start up to 50
  - Custom printing on labels for aluminum cans
- Richard Starr has left OED and relocated to Massachusetts
- Winter Lights/Cecil Nights – few more weeks left; check website for events
- County Council accepted EDA grant, the Network to Freedom
  - Tourism to manage grant on 3 sites designated; have until end of 2025 to complete project
- Tourism working on updating Visitor Guide

***An update on utilities (gas) was presented by Randy Baynes, Sr. Economic Development Specialist, BGE***

- Primary contact for Cecil and all Central Maryland counties
- Limited in Cecil County
- BGE is gas utility, not electric utility in Cecil
- Increased activity with Great Wolf Lodge, Bainbridge, across Rt. 40 corridor
- Have incentive called SEED (Smart Energy Economic Development)
  - Have ability to influence cost of projects located in enterprise zone; looking to increase to opportunity zones
- Work with developers, county economic development offices, State of MD Dept. of Commerce
- Enlarging gas footprint dependent on future projects
- Cooperative understanding with other utility companies

***An update on utilities (natural gas) was presented by Vince Fiorelli, Chesapeake Utilities***

- History: Began as Dover Gas & Light in 1859; incorporated in State of Delaware 1947; Eastern Shore Natural Gas incorporated in Delaware 1955 (now oversee transportation of natural gas from neighboring states and Delaware); 1959 Eastern Shore Natural Gas extended pipeline from Parkesburg, PA to Salisbury MD; Sharp Energy, a subsidiary, formed in 1981
  - In Delmarva Peninsula have natural gas and propane
  - Acquired Central Florida Gas Company in 1985; common stock began trading on Nasdaq same year
  - 1993 – Chesapeake Utilities Corp began trading on New York Stock Exchange
  - Purchased Florida Public Utilities in 2009 – distribute natural gas, propane, and electricity throughout State of Florida
  - Large footprint in Florida and up and down East Coast
  - 2013 – First natural gas customer in Cecil County; currently serving about 7,000 customers in Cecil
  - 2013 – Purchased operating assets from Eastern Shore Gas to serve Worcester Co., MD
  - 2016 – Opened 8 Flags Energy – combined heat & power plant on Amelia Island, FL
  - 2019 – Completed Eastern Shore natural gas expansion – largest single transmission expansion in company’s history
- In Cecil County:
  - Rt. 40 pipeline – extends 9 mi. from Nottingham Rd, Elkton by YMCA and Thiokol to Belvidere Rd, Perryville
  - Large projects underway: Belvidere Road Main Extension, approx. 9500 ft. of main extension, to coincide with Belvidere Rd. I-95 Interchange
  - Principio Parkway East, 4500 ft., to fee 2 new distribution facilities; hoping to get Restoration Hardware as customer
  - Rt. 40, North East – Chipotle & Starbucks, North East Library
  - Elkton – Thiokol new construction; main extension added for Southfields Phase I and future projects, Sheetz
  - Town of Elkton – Replaced all old Allied pipeline, 22,000 ft. or 4.3 mi. replaced, 289 services replaced, completed 10/2023, just under \$2.5M
  - Southern Cecil – 15,000 ft natural gas main extension from Warsaw Manor Rd (Sun Med Growers, mushroom farm) to west side of Cecilton Elementary (hoping to convert school)

***A Broadband Update was presented by David Black, GIS Manager for Cecil County***

- History of Cecil County’s Broadband (BB) Grants to date:
  - Grant Award Amount: \$16,932,823

- County Matching Funds: \$2,184,636
- ISP Matching Funds: \$5,823,319
- Number of addresses: 2,577
- Cost per connection: \$9,678
- County % of funding: 8.76%
  - Total # of addresses in Cecil County: 47,902
  - Addresses lacking broadband prior to 2019: 2,688
  - % of addresses lacking broadband: 5.31%
  - Addresses completely connect since then: 1,187
  - Addresses underway (funding, construction, etc.): 1,390
  - % of addresses lacking broadband: 0.23%
- Final 100-150 addresses (no funding secured) to be most difficult due to remote locations, unusual circumstances, etc.
- Some wireless solutions used 4-5 yrs. ago no longer up to task
- FCC definition of BB (25 Mbps down/3 Mbps up) no longer matches State and BEAD definitions (100 Mbps symmetrical)
- Some address may cycle back to “unserved” given changing criteria
- Maps (handout attached) designate locations in Cecil County of:
  - Verizon Remote Central Offices
  - Verizon “Bainbridge” Fiber Feeder Route (35.3 mi.)
  - Verizon “North East” Fiber Feeder Route (17.57 mi.)
  - Verizon “Elkton” Fiber Feeder Route (28.56 mi.)
  - Verizon “Chesapeake City” Fiber Feeder Route (12.33 mi.)
- If resident or business in underserve area, contact David Black

***Cecil College Update – Dr. Mary Bolt***

- Yesterday was Student Advocacy Day in Annapolis
- MD community colleges working hard to get word out to delegation, State, governor regarding budget cuts
- Budget threatens to cut \$22M from 16 MD community colleges; Cecil College’s budget stands to lose \$1M in State funding

***Brigitte Peters – Maryland Dept. of Commerce***

- Working to get word out on programs:
- More Jobs for MD – enroll businesses
- Funding Project Restore – applications coming out in March on DHCD website, Grants for Businesses

***Others:***

***Joe DiNunzio – Artesian water***

- Want to acknowledge Sandy Turner for her nice presentation on Tourism efforts at County work session

***Adjournment***

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 am.

**Next EDC Meeting is March 6, 2024, and is scheduled to be IN PERSON.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Terri Springel  
Administrative Assistant