



**Queen
Anne's
County**
MARYLAND

Travel And Tourism Advisory Committee

Business Meeting Minutes for February 14, 2023

I. Call to Order and Determination of Quorum:

The meeting began at 8:06am and the following Active Committee Members were present and represented a quorum:

Eric Hoffman
Dolores Jones
Gail Owings
Michelle Brink-Pringle
Jody Schulz
Katherine Bonner

Not Present:

Brian Truitt
Derek Janes
John Anderes

Staff Present:

Heather Tinelli, Director, Economic & Tourism Development
April Plummer, Marketing & Destination Development Specialist
Lisa Gallow, Office Coordinator (Zoom)

Supporting Members Present:

Gigi Windley, Executive Director, Kent Narrows Dev. Foundation
Lee Bridgman, University of MD Extension-QAC
Ashley Genova, Godfrey's Farm
Curtis Blouch, QAC Recreation Program Coordinator

II. Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

There were two corrections to the December meeting minutes regarding Ms. Brink-Pringle attending the meeting and Ms. Bonner not being present. With those corrections, on a motion made by Gail Owings and seconded by Ms. Bonner, the December meeting minutes, and the February meeting agenda were approved by a unanimous vote of all members present.

Economic & Tourism Development

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County Commissioners:

James J. Moran, At Large
Jack N. Wilson, Jr., District 1
Patrick McLaughlin, District 2
Philip L. Dumenil, District 3
Christopher M. Corchiarino, District 4

- III. Department of Economic and Tourism Development Update:** Heather Tinelli, Director of Economic & Tourism Development, provided an update for the committee:
- A.** Tourism staff is currently working on the Stevensville Arts & Entertainment redesignation application. The A&E District is required to re-apply each 10 years. The A&E District is also in the initial stages of working with the Planning Dept. to obtain a Sustainable Communities Application for a study focusing on parking issues and funds for planning in the Stevensville A&E District.
 - B.** The department has been meeting with Parks & Recreation Staff to discuss ongoing projects, events and how they can continue to support, promote, and combine efforts. They have established a shared calendar that is utilized to help awareness with department planned and locally planned events.
 - C.** The Ferry Feasibility Project has received quite a bit of press which is exciting. Ms. Tinelli, along with representatives from other counties, will be meeting to discuss RFP applications.
 - D.** The Chesapeake National Recreation Area public comment time has been extended to mid-March. Senator Van Hollen's office will be conducting a question-and-answer session and Ms. Tinelli said she can share that information. It is important for us to follow and understand how this would affect Queen Anne's County, local watermen, property owners and the Eastern Shore.
 - E.** Ms. Tinelli attended the Taste of Maryland event in Annapolis where legislators are invited to join county tourism representatives to talk and collaborate.
 - F.** The Bay Bridge Boat Show is returning on April 14th-16th. Ms. Plummer has been working with the owners regarding sponsorship and marketing options for the event.
 - G.** The Concours d'Elegance Car Show, which typically takes place in St. Michael's, will be in Queen Anne's County at the Kent Island Yacht Club this year in October.
 - H.** MD Tourism is hoping to receive an increase in the overall tourism operating budget for FY24 marketing. The MD DMO's are actively advocating for the increase which will enable our marketing efforts to expand into new areas and offer new opportunities.
 - I.** The department continues to work on the FY24 budget submissions.
 - J.** Ms. Tinelli announced the plans for a remodel of the Visitor Center parking lot that will include new walkways, landscaping and a new drainage system. The Visitor Center will be closed to the public, but staff will be allowed to work from the building. The department is working on finding a temporary option for the Visitor Center while the construction project is

IV. Old Business

A. Committee Vacancies

There are 5 seats on the Travel & Tourism Advisory Board that will be expiring on March 31st, 2023. The members are:

- i. Kathryn Bonner
- ii. Michelle Brink-Pringle
- iii. Dolores Jones
- iv. Jody Schulz

v. Brian Truitt

Ms. Bonner, Ms. Brink-Pringle, and Ms. Jones have stated they would like to renew their terms. Mr. Schulz stated he will not be renewing his term. Ms. Tinelli has not received notice of Mr. Truitt's intentions and will be contacting him this week. An advertisement listing the committee openings will also be shared this week.

V. New Business

A. FY 23 QAC Tourism Marketing Plan- April Plummer, QAC Marketing & Destination Development Specialist, shared a presentation focused on Tourism Marketing Plan for the remainder of FY 2023.

- I. **Mission-** A valued partner and respected resource for employers, entrepreneurs, business owners, stakeholders, and visitors. We inspire Queen Anne's County residents, visitors, and businesses to experience the beauty, culture, and amenities an Eastern Shore lifestyle promises
- II. **Vision-** A valued resource, connector and catalyst, the Department strengthens Queen Anne's economic and community vitality, showcases the county's culture and character; and supports sustainable growth opportunities for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- III. **Goals For FY23-**
 - a. Increase Visitation for new and returning visitors
 - i. Focus on people discovering QAC and engaging with past visitors
 - 1) Dollars Tracked
 - 2) Foot Traffic
 - 3) Hotel Tax
 - b. Increase brand awareness for Visit Queen Anne's County
 - ii. Increasing tourism attention to our area
 - 1) Web visits
 - 2) Visitors Guide
 - 3) Newsletter conversions
 - 4) QR scans
 - 5) Social Media growth
 - 6) Ad impressions
 - 7) Event attendees
 - 8) Events
 - c. Increase hotel occupancy & overnight visits
 - iii. Group travel leader to visit TTAC and speak to hotel decision makers
 - iv. Create itineraries encouraging multi-day trips
 - v. Focusing on event traffic and encouraging QAC stays

TTAC members engaged in a conversation regarding what details are included in the tourism tax totals. Ms. Tinelli is going to follow up with information that explains the break down and how the tourism tax figure

is calculated. Ms. Plummer shared present and past Hotel Tax Reports for the members to view and discuss. Mr. Schulz and Mr. Hoffman introduced a discussion regarding the manner in which local homes listed for rent on VRBO and Airbnb do not submit hotel taxes and their concern for the lack of regulations to enforce the issue. Members requested that Ms. Tinelli provide them with a breakdown of hotel tax regarding Airbnb's and hotels in the county. The group discussed the proposed increase to the hotel tax and the direct implications it will have on local hotels. On a motion made by Mr. Schulz and seconded by Mr. Hoffman and with the exception to Ms. Owings who abstained from taking part in the vote, all other members present agreed to send a letter to the County Commissioners showing non-support for the proposed hotel tax increase.

- d. Strengthen partnerships with local businesses and organizations
 - iv. Visiting businesses regularly and supporting them with their tourism efforts.
 - v. Added spotlight to newsletters, provide data for their reporting, meet with businesses regularly.
 - vi. Co-op marketing with businesses

Eric Hoffmann stated that he would like QAC Tourism to attend travel related trade shows. Ms. Plummer stated that the department is looking into both attending smaller regional shows as well as cutting costs of the larger shows by partnering with other Eastern Shore counties to attend as a group.

- e. Develop lead strategy
 - vii. Increase lead generation
 - viii. Nurturing workflow throughout strategies

IV. Target Audiences- Audience Demographics

- a. Age
 - 1) 24-64
- b. Interests
 - 1) Leisure
 - 2) Recreation
 - 3) Outdoor/Trails
 - 4) Water interest
 - 5) Boating
 - 6) Fishing
 - 7) Hunting
 - 8) History
 - 9) Restaurants
 - 10) Weddings
- c. Geographic Targets
 - 1) New York
 - 2) New Jersey
 - 3) Pennsylvania
 - 4) Virginia

5) Maryland

Ms. Plummer shared examples of magazine and digital ads that Tourism has recently created and discussed the geographic details that determined the region in which they were utilized. Ms. Plummer explained the manner in which details are retrieved from digital ads and how reports show if a click followed with a visit to QAC. In addition, reports will show if exposure to the ads led them to a specific local hotel Mr. Hoffman asked if the QR codes that have been utilized in the Visitor Guide and in marketing could be sent to him for him to include on the Holiday Inn website. Ms. Plummer will follow up with that request.

After a discussion regarding the proposed increase to the MD State Tourism Budget, the members are requesting a letter of support from the committee be sent to the state. On a motion made by Mr. Hoffman and seconded by Gail Owings, the request for the support letter for increased MD Tourism Funds was approved by unanimous decision by all members present.

VI. Member Reports/Announcements-

A. Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area- Gail Owings, Exec Director, provided an update for the committee members.

- i. There will be a Chesapeake All American Road Interpretative Plan meeting as well as public meetings during the week of March 14 – 16, 2023. Locations of the meetings will be shared as details become available. The Chesapeake All American road starts in Chesapeake City, runs down Rt. 213 through Centreville, continues Rt. 18 to Kent Island, through Stevensville, heads back to Rt. 213 passed the Wye Grist Mill and then winds its way through the Eastern Shore all the way to Crisfield. It is one of only 60 All American Roads in the United States and is one of the most prestigious designations in the Scenic Byway System.
- ii. The Heritage Area is undertaking a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study to determine if we have the resources, themes, and historical character to tell a national story. There are only 50 National Heritage Area in the United States.
- iii. The Heritage Area is completing a 5-year Strategic Plan which will include public meetings and surveys for local businesses and residents.

B. Kent Narrows Development Foundation- Gigi Windley, Executive Director, provided an update for committee members.

- i. KNDF has acquired grant funds to create a more detailed heritage map of the Kent Narrows trails and pathways.
- ii. KNDF continues to track legislation and bills that may affect the region. Ms. Windley suggested local restaurants follow the

proposed the Maryland Fair Scheduling Act which would see retail shops and restaurants with more than 10 locations across the state pay time and a half for employees who are asked to work overtime within an 11-hour window of their original shift, as well as pay workers for being on standby for hours that the businesses did not dole out to the workers.

- iii. Ms. Windley, as well as Gail Owings, attended the Power 2Go Symposium Electronic Vehicle Conference at the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center on February 13th. Discussion topics were *The Opportunities to Electrify Transportation in Maryland Rural Communities*, *Fueling an EV Future* and *Making Maryland's Heritage, Cultural & Recreation Destinations EV Friendly*.

C. QAC Parks & Recreation- Curtis Blouch shared that they have book a Baseball Tournament for the region and that he will continue to keep the TTAC members and QAC Tourism office aware of additional larger events and sports tournaments as they are scheduled.

VII. Next Meeting- The next meeting date is scheduled for Tuesday, March 14, 2023.

VIII. Adjournment- The December Travel & Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting was adjourned at 9:37am.