



Economic & Tourism Development Commission

April 8, 2026

Commission Members Present: Creigh Rahenkamp, Judy Crow, Bob Jacob, Cathy Bramble, Benjamin Tilghman and David Bowman.

Commission Members Absent: Joanne Rich.

Also in Attendance: Jamie Williams, Director, and Katie Abbott, Economic Development Manager, Shalyn Boulden, Tourism Manager, and Rose Osborn, Administrative Specialist, Economic and Tourism Development and Shelley Heller, County Administrator.

At 3:00 p.m., Ms. Williams called the meeting to order.

Ms. Williams requested a motion to approve the minutes of the March 11, 2026, meeting. On a motion by Mr. Tilghman, seconded by Mr. Rahenkamp, the minutes of the March 11, 2026, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mr. Rahenkamp reported that the housing subcommittee has no new updates at this time, and they will meet again once the Planning, Housing, and Zoning Department completes the Housing Study.

Ms. Crow shared that the tourism subcommittee met at the end of March. They are focusing on ideas to continue moving tourism forward by collaborating with all the tourism-related businesses in the County. She mentioned a software platform for businesses to stay informed about each other, and the possibility of a County-wide coupon book. The full committee is scheduled to meet on April 30, 2026.

Mr. Bowman shared that his and Mr. Jacob's terms expire in May, and they are both eligible for reappointment. They are both willing to serve another term. The nominating subcommittee met on April 1, 2026, and recommended the reappointment of Mr. Bowman and Mr. Jacob. A motion was made by Ms. Bramble, seconded by Mr. Tilghman, and passed unanimously to approve and forward the Commission's recommendation to the County Commissioners for consideration.

Janice Palmer, Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC), gave a brief overview of the USRC. She shared about the 2026 STRT1UP Roadshow pitch competition that will take place on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, and invited the ETDC members to attend. This year finalists were required to meet with a mentor, which proved to be a positive experience, resulting in many applicants scheduling additional meetings. Ms. Palmer shared that USRC's major priority is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). She shared that the contract is ready to be signed.

Ms. Williams shared that the office is working on the 2026 Visitor's Guide, which will be a tri-fold design with QR codes to access the Visitor's page(s) on the County Website. Additionally, there will be a rack card highlighting the County's Annual Events.

The public hearing was held on April 7, 2026, in the Commissioners' Hearing Room on the joint application with the Town of Chestertown and the County for the Redesignation of the Chestertown Enterprise Zone. Following the hearing, the Commissioners signed the resolution. Ms. Williams shared that there are 5 census tracts in Kent County, and three have been designated as Enterprise Zones: Chestertown, Rock Hall, and Worton/Betterton. Businesses within the Enterprise Zone can apply for property tax credits on the increased assessed value of their property and income tax credits.

The Ag Grant applications have been scored, and award letters will go out next week. Out of 10 applicants, there were 7 awards totaling \$52,400. Ms. Abbott will provide the ETDC members with a list of applicants and awards.

The commission members began discussion on updating the 2022 ETD Strategic Plan, focusing on pages 3 and 4 of the data. Ms. Williams provided handouts that she prepared with updated data from Lightcast (economic modeling software). Ms. Williams shared that, in hopes of receiving the budget request for consultant fees, she has been working with Ms. McNamara, Director of Grants and Contracts, and Ms. Osborn to draft the Request for Proposal (RFP). The plan is to have the approved updated 2027 ETD Strategic Plan completed by January 2027. Mr. Rahenkamp asked how Agriculture is structured in the data, and Mr. Tilghman asked about the economic impact data for free amenities, such as Kent Cultural Alliance, Sassafras Natural Resource Area, Sumner Hall, etc. Ms. Williams shared that the Lightcast data includes all businesses and/or organizations with employees, including self-employed individuals, who file a Schedule C, E, F, etc. Ms. Williams will share the Ag Census and the resource-based economic impact data/study with the ETDC members again. Ms. Williams urged the ETDC members to review the current goals in the 2022 ETD Strategic Plan to assess whether they are the right goals and to consider how the goals will be measured. She further requested that the members give some thought to who should be included to provide input for the update.

Nancy LaJoice, USRC, will be at the May 13, 2027, meeting to discuss the CTE Liaison Project and to give a recap of the STRT1UP Pitch Competition. Susan O'Neil, Executive Director, and Jenn Cooper, Consultant, USRC, will be at the June 10, 2027, meeting to discuss the CEDS and the USRC Business Mentoring Program.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Rahenkamp, seconded by Ms. Bramble, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 3:54 p.m. The Commission will meet again on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Hearing Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie L. Williams, CEcD
Director