



Minutes
Tourism Board Meeting
December 11, 2018

Present: Lynda Blades, Anthony Casey, Jeannette Delude, Phil Liske, Don Mulrine, John Phillips, Cathy Schwab

Guests: Debi Sewell, Tara Hill-Coursey

Staff: Ceres Bainbridge

Ms. Delude called the meeting to order at 8:05 AM. Two potential board members were in attendance so the board made introductions to Ms. Sewell and Ms. Hill-Coursey.

Sweet treats and coffee were set up for the pre-holiday meeting with new members.

Ms. Bainbridge reviewed the financial update. All bills are paid up to date. Tourism funds are low at this time of year, but after January 1, she will file a marketing reimbursement request for approximately \$12,000. This is higher than in the past because of our having placed more 100 percent reimbursable ads using the State Office of Tourism's template. This enabled us to expand our reach into social media and radio and different publications. We also will receive \$1000 reimbursement from the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area grant we received in 2017 and is ready to be closed out.

Ms. Bainbridge also reported that the commissioners are requiring Tourism to be audited every three years instead of a financial review as in the past. She had asked that we be allowed to do a compilation instead of a review at the recommendation of Lisa Durham as ASG because our budget is now so much smaller that it is not necessary. She explained that Ms. Durham had said that a compilation would cost about \$2000, a review \$3500, and an audit \$6500 minimum. However, Margaret Roe and Sara Visintainer reported back that the commissioners would continue to require a review and an additional audit every three years. The board was concerned about their request notably that CEDC had never been asked to submit to an audit before and some wondered if all outside agencies were required to do so. Therefore, they requested that Ms. Bainbridge ask Ms. Durham to write a note to the commissioners explaining her recommendation, which she will do.

Mr. Phillips asked about Marina Dowdall's leaving the area. Audrey Clemens, the current bookkeeper, is interested in taking on more of Marina's accounting responsibilities. The board is comfortable with this transition. Marina will train Ms. Clemens before she leaves.

Ms. Bainbridge represented Caroline County Tourism at Maryland's Tourism Summit at the Chesapeake Hyatt Resort in Cambridge. The meeting is hosted by the Maryland Tourism Coalition, the political arm of tourism interests and businesses across the State. There are breakout sessions with experts in the travel industry, social media, and other relevant topics. Attendance is strongly encouraged by the Maryland Office of Tourism and the fee is 100 percent reimbursable.

Ms. Bainbridge reviewed mini-grants for the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area. The heritage area has \$10,000 from the Maryland Heritage Area Authority that they must distribute to their own entities. This year, there were fewer requests than expected, so the heritage area review board was able fully fund some of the projects.

The Tourism Office sponsored Created in Caroline Open Studio Tour the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving. The weather really worked against the event, but most of the 15 artists felt it was worth the

effort even if the second day was slow. Word of mouth says that some artists did better than others, including one who made \$700.

Next year, we hope to promote the event earlier, perhaps with artist previews beginning September. We would like to get artists to commit to the event sooner for that reason. We also want to expand the offerings of our many talented artisans in the county. Ms. Bainbridge and Ms. Dowdall from the Arts Council have developed a questionnaire to send to artists to collect their feedback. We hope to expand the event and make it an eagerly anticipated annual holiday event that supports our artist community. Lively, extended conversation regarding this event and publicizing it took place.

Ms. Bainbridge reported that State law has changed so that non-profit groups receiving State money must be able to be reimbursed for the "incidentals" that help that organization meet its mission. The State Office of Tourism is working with the Attorney General to figure out what that means, but it could be a huge boost for all of the non-profit tourism offices in the state. Producing brochures and visitor guides is currently non-reimbursable, and that could change. She will report back as soon as the DMOs are informed.

Ms. Bainbridge and the other entities managing the Tubman Byway met to discuss a grant opportunity offered by National Park Service to utilize technology in unique ways. They will meet with virtual reality creators for a demonstration next week. The grants are offered every year if we don't have a project proposal ready for 2019.

Ms. Bainbridge explained that the State Office of Tourism is changing its marketing grant schedule to the Fiscal year. As a result, we will receive our entire marketing grant for 2019 in January and it must be spent by June. This means that she will have \$20,000 to market the county in six months. She will try to get as much bang for that by using the State templates and making larger buys, while keeping our operating budget within its limits.

Ms. Bainbridge will be leading a group of spouses from Winter MACo, which will be held in Cambridge in January. They will be going to Adkins Arboretum, the Culinary Center, Turnbridge Point, the Artsway, and Blades Orchard. It's entitled, Sip and Savor Caroline County. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate.

The Tourism Office is slowly deteriorating from general neglect. There are cracks in the doors and the A/C units are losing parts. It is not clear how much the county is willing to invest in the structure while trying to sell it. People love to visit the steamboat wharf and museum and it's a shame. She will ask if someone could come and make some repairs.

Lynda Blades informed the board that Chesapeake Harvest is looking for a Caroline County location. She is going to find out more and get back to us. It may include a tourism aspect and retail site. This would be a part of the agricultural tour that is in the pipeline for 2019. Ms. Bainbridge briefly discussed its similarities to the artisan studio tour, having some farms always open and have some additional farms opening on one day a year for an event. The ag tour is just coming together now.

John Phillips reported on the executive meeting with the Chamber of Commerce. They want to have a meeting with Tourism and Parks and Recreation to see about partnering over Paddlefest. Ms. Delude is concerned about the scale of the event and if it would overwhelm Tourism. Mr. Phillips feels that P&R can handle the event if we take on marketing and promoting it. While Tourism wants to support the Chamber and will help with Paddlefest, but the missions of Tourism and the Chamber are very different.

There was discussion that Tuesdays might be better for board meetings, but no decision was made.

Anthony Casey made a motion to adjourn. John Phillips seconded it. Meeting was adjourned with unanimous vote at 9:35.