



**MARYLAND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
MINUTES**

February 23, 2023 | 10:30 a.m.

Maritime Conference Center – 692 Maritime Blvd, Linthicum Heights, Maryland 21090

Meetings are in person only

MEMBERS PRESENT

Judy Bixler, Oxford Bellevue Ferry
Ashley Chenault, Charles County Tourism
Ben Seidel, Real Hospitality Group
Casey Jenkins, Darker Than Blue
Juan Carlos Linares, Federal Realty
Melonie Johnson, MGM National Harbor
James Mathias, University of Eastern Shore

Chris Riehl, Rent-A-Tour
Al Spence, A.S. Midway Tours
Sandy Turner, Cecil County Tourism
Cassandra Vanhooser, Talbot County
Economic Development and Tourism
Shelonda Stokes, Downtown Partnership

MEMBERS ABSENT

Aldolph Ebersberger, Private Industry
Cara Joyce, Urban Pirates
Heather Shaffer Braue, CFG Bank Arena

Rick Howarth, Levy Restaurant Group
The Honorable Katie Fry-Hester, Senator

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO THE MARYLAND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Mary Presley, Maryland Motor Coach
Association
Ruth Toomey, Maryland Tourism Coalition

Rosanne DeSousa, Maryland Tourism
Education Foundation

DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION (DMO)

Abigail Vitaliano, Baltimore County

Kelly Groff, Montgomery County

COMMERCE STAFF

Secretary Kevin Anderson
Assistant Secretary Tom Riford
Liz Fitzsimmons
Brian Lawrence
Cynthia Miller

Marci Ross
Rianna Wan
Theresa Donnely
Greg Bird
Julia Bouie

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / WELCOME GUESTS

- a. The meeting was called to order by Chair Judy Bixler at 10:30 a.m. Chair Bixler asked members to introduce themselves then welcomed and introduced Commerce Secretary Kevin Anderson.

Secretary Anderson extended greetings from Governor Moore and expressed his excitement about his new role at Commerce. He assured everyone that the Governor's goal is to keep Maryland front and center leveraging all assets to keep Maryland competitive. Secretary Anderson thanked the Maryland Tourism Development Board for their service and shared his thoughts on how important tourism is and having the private sector provide insights directly from the industry frontline provides the framework for the work to be done. Recalling how much he enjoyed meeting everyone at Maryland Tourism Day, Secretary Anderson thanked the Maryland Tourism Coalition for organizing an amazing event. He pointed out that tourism delivers revenue to our state and there is much that is good in the state, examples include:

- Over the weekend CIAA Basketball tournament kicked off in the first showing of the renovated CFG Bank Arena and will run in Baltimore through 2025. (<https://theciaa.com/tournaments/?id=346>)
- [Kite](#), a global biopharmaceutical company, is adding 100 new jobs and expanding its cell therapy manufacturing operations in Frederick County.
- \$50 million allocated through the Rural Maryland Economic Development Fund will help fund 114 economic development projects throughout the State.
(<https://commerce.maryland.gov/media/governor-hogan-announces-114-economic-development-projects-for-rural-communities>)
- [Repurpose Aggregates](#) in Harford County is responding to rising demand by focusing on sustainability and renewable solutions.
- Great Wolf Lodge in Perryville, Maryland, will open on August 1, 2023. It is the 20th lodge to join the Great Wolf Lodge water park resort family.
(<https://www.greatwolf.com/maryland>)

Secretary Anderson engaged the Board in discussions about the deluge of funding requests coming into the new Governor's office. Ben Seidel noted that the Maryland Office of Tourism funding is much smaller than other States. Members of the Board stressed that more funding is needed to remain competitive. Jim Mathias expressed that the eyes of the industry are present in the room bringing collective experience for the Board to incorporate for a brighter future for the tourism industry. Attention was called to the fact that the Legislative branch can now add **or** cut budgets and we need to be very aware of that in everything we do. The group was encouraged to reach out to Legislators in support of tourism.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

- b. **Approval of Minutes from October 27, 2023**

Chair Judy Bixler asked for any questions or comments regarding the minutes from October and a motion to approve. There were no questions or comments. Al Spence moved to approve the minutes. Cassandra VanHooser second. No opposition. Minutes approved and accepted.

III. UPDATE FROM BOARD CHAIR JUDY BIXLER

c. Chair Judy Bixler also spoke about the excitement and excellent participation at Tourism Day and echoed the sentiment that the Maryland Office of Tourism funding is much smaller than other States and that additional funding is needed to remain competitive. She applauded the collaborative document “Maryland’s Tourism Industry - A Sound Investment” designed by Kristen Pironis, Executive Director, Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County for Tourism Day. This document includes statistics on “Why invest in tourism, economic impact, Maryland tourism funding vs. competing states, visitor spending and a call to action and can be viewed at https://www.visitmaryland.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/MTDB_MDMO_MTC.pdf.

IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

d. Liz Fitzsimmons, Executive Director, turned the meeting over to Assistant Secretary Riford Report who extended a heartfelt thank you to all those serving on the Maryland Tourism Development Board and assured Secretary Anderson that he is in a room filled with friends. Assistant Secretary Riford also stated that with the new Governor in office, there will be upcoming changes with people moving around in different capacities. In summary, the Maryland Marketing Partnership continues to work diligently to attract businesses and award funding throughout the State for various projects.

Introducing a new elevated definition of tourism: “*Tourism is an economic ecosystem that delivers opportunity and quality of life for Marylanders, which is derived from visitor spending*” Liz Fitzsimmons discussed the reasoning around the elevation of the term. On the EDA award side, she provided updates which include:

- Twenty-nine applications have been received
- Sixteen projects have been approved totaling \$2.9 million.

Maryland’s Big Five data-driven and heart lead differentiators were highlighted:

- The Most Powerful Underground Railroad Storytelling Destination in the World
- Trail System Second to None
- The Great Chesapeake Bay
- Scenic Byways
- Fish and Hunt Maryland

Regarding Advertising and Content, Brian Lawrence introduced our new Office of Tourism Writer/Content Developer, Theresa L. Donnelly. Mr. Lawrence also provided updates in two areas, New Co-op Opportunities for DMOs and Spring/Summer 2023 Advertising Campaign. Last spring's campaign ROI was \$15 to \$1.

On research, Rianna Wan provided findings from the Maryland State FY 2023 - Three Months Sales and Use Tax Collection Report and the Lodging Monitor. The first quarter of FY23 (July 2022 to September 2022)'s total tourism sales and use tax is 435.8 million. Compared to the first quarter of FY22 (July to September 2021), 28.5 percent increase. Compared to the first quarter of FY19 (July 2018 to September 2018), 26.4 percent increase.

For Tourism Development, Marci Ross summarized ongoing projects including Chesapeake Bay Storyteller tour guide training begins on March 1 Civil War Trails: Install eight new Western Region Gateway Markers at Welcome Centers and Visitor Centers; T Welcome Centers - Fill supervisor and travel counselor vacancies; complete Youghiogeny Overlook graphic installation. Fulfillment - Transition internally and externally to CY23 publications.

Reporting on Strategic Partnerships & Public Relations, Cynthia Miller shared updates on initiatives including September - International Underground Railroad Month (IUGRR): Celebrating 5th Anniversary of IUGRR and 25th Anniversary of U.S. Park Service Network to Freedom. Governor's Proclamation Event - Baltimore, August 24 or 29, 2023. OTD has a social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Youtube and Instagram@visitmaryland. A request was made to ask your social media teams to tag our posts. Everyone's attention was drawn to the new DMM travel guide featuring day and night time covers for the first time (<https://www.visitmaryland.org/brochure>).

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Judy Bixler requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion to adjourn- Al Spence. Seconded by Cassandra Vanhooser. The business meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.