



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

April 27, 2023 | 10:30 a.m.  
Canopy by Hilton Washington D.C.  
940 Rose Avenue  
North Bethesda, MD 20852  
\*Meetings are in person only\*

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Judy Bixler, Oxford Bellevue Ferry  
Ashley Chenault, Explore Charles County  
Rick Howarth, Levy Restaurant Group  
Juan Carlos Linares, Federal Realty  
Investment Trust  
Melonie Johnson, MGM National Harbor  
James Mathias, University of Eastern Shore

Sandy Turner, Cecil County Tourism  
Cassandra Vanhooser, Talbot County  
Department of Economic Development and  
Tourism  
Shelonda Stokes, Downtown Partnership

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Aldolph Ebersberger, Insurance  
Casey Jenkins, Darker Than Blue  
Cara Joyce, Urban Pirates  
Chris Rheil, Rent-A-Tour

Heather Shaffer Braue, CFG Bank Arena  
Ben Seidel, Real Hospitality Group  
The Honorable Katie Fry-Hester, Senator

**COMMERCE STAFF**

Tom Riford  
Liz Fitzsimmons  
Brian Lawrence  
Cynthia Miller  
Marci Ross  
Rianna Wan  
Greg Bird  
Rich Gilbert

**I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / WELCOME GUESTS/APPROVAL OF  
MINUTES**

- a. With a Board quorum present the meeting Chair Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. Members were asked to introduce themselves.

b. A motion was made to approve the minutes from the 2-23-23 meeting. There was a request for a correction to page two (2), “Secretary Moore to Secretary Anderson”. The correction was acknowledged and will be made. Another motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes with the correction. Motion passed

### **III. UPDATE FROM BOARD CHAIR JUDY BIXLER**

c. Chair Bixler thanked Board member Juan Carlos Linares for hosting today’s meeting. Mr. Linares welcomed everyone to this neighborhood of great restaurants and gathering places here in Montgomery County and introduced his Pike and Rose staff. Pike and Rose is appreciative of this opportunity to host and is looking forward to establishing tourism partnership opportunities to help everyone.

### **IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

d. Liz Fitzsimmons, Executive Director, turned the meeting over to Assistant Secretary Tom Riford. Secretary Riford shared that there is a lot going on in the Department of Commerce; there hasn’t been a pause in activities. The Legislative session just ended and there are issues that impact us. The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) is holding a special board session to move grants and projects forward with the influx of an extra \$40 million of grant funding. MSAC is on track to do 2,500 grants this year. If you are on any arts related Board or organization be sure to apply for arts grant funding at <https://msac.org/programs/grants-organizations>.

e. On the Advertising and Content side, Brian Lawrence presented results of two OTD campaigns. First, the Be Open Q1 Campaign which is a 5-week campaign running from mid-January thru mid-February composed of digital banner ads, travel platforms Expedia and Kayak, Spotify, social media platforms. FY23 Q1 campaign generated \$2.9M in hotel revenue delivering a \$31:1 ROI. Top platform performance came from Expedia driving nearly 90% of total revenue at a 85:1 ROI on the strength of Hotels.com. Last year’s ROI was \$11:1. Second, the Spring/Summer Campaign which is our largest campaign ran from mid-April thru early-August consisting of broadcast TV, connected TV, digital banner ads, pre-roll video, digital billboards, Spotify, radio, social media platforms with a \$2.9 million spend. Last year’s ROI was \$15:1. With the approval of the Governor's administration and assistance from Marriner Communications, the agency of record for the Maryland Office of Tourism, the assets from the “Be Open” are transitioning to “Your Welcome” for the State campaign. Liz Fitzsimmons remarked the ROIs are great numbers achieved as a result of deals and discounts and new systems put in place by the office to drive traffic.

f. Reporting for Strategic Partnerships & Public Relations, Cynthia Miller shared updates on initiatives including U.S. Travel, “Travel and Tourism Week” (May 7 - 13) with the theme of Travel Forward. There will be a Governor's Proclamation Event, May 8, 10:00 a.m at the Annapolis City Dock. Speakers to include Chris Riehl as emcee. Information on upcoming tourism week events is included in your Board packets, should you need further information, please feel free to contact [cynthiad.miller@maryland.gov](mailto:cynthiad.miller@maryland.gov).

**g.** Rich Gilbert, Travel and Trade Manager provided updates on IPW 2023, Maryland & Capital Region USA to be held May 20-24, 2023 in San Antonio, Texas and the Global Travel Exchange 2023, Maryland & Capital Region USA, a smaller, regional IPW September 17-20, 2023 in Annapolis, Maryland. Board members will be invited to participate in the Annapolis evening events. If interested in attending, please contact Liz or [rich.gilbert@maryland.gov](mailto:rich.gilbert@maryland.gov).

**h.** Rianna Wan, provided findings from the Maryland State Tourism Taxes - FY23 Six Months (December 2022). For the first six months of FY23 (July 2022 to December 2022) tourism tax collections totalled \$848 million. The Maryland Department of Commerce Office of Tourism Development has released the results of a new study on the Chesapeake Bay as a major factor in visitor travel. For the complete report visit <https://industry.visitmaryland.org/industry-research-studies>.

**i.** The Chesapeake Bay Storyteller graduation of the class of 2023 was proudly announced by Liz Fitzsimmons, Executive Director. Sixteen businesses/organizations participated in the training; for more info on Chesapeake Bay Storytellers please visit <https://www.visitmaryland.org/chesapeake-bay-storytellers>. Board Chair, Judy Bixler, a graduate of this eight week training praised the program facilitation and encouraged people to take the training.

**j.** **EDA Update:** Twenty-nine applications have been received and the majority have been approved. The awards cover workforce development, improved programming, additional accessibility, diversity and marketing. Recipients are very appreciative of the funding received.

**k.** At Destination Capitol Hill, several OTD staff participated in very serious discussions with Chief of Staffs and legislative officials about marketing and elevation of the State. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which is a Federal tax credit available to employers for hiring and employing individuals from certain targeted groups who have faced significant barriers to employment. More information available at <https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/work-opportunity-tax-credit>. This credit has very daunting paperwork. An offer to program officials was made to facilitate connections to assist with piloting these types of programs.

**I. MARYLAND ALCOHOL PROMOTION FUND:**

This program is only available to governmental programs and not for profits. According to the legislation, the intent is to:

- Foster the creation and expansion of state breweries, distilleries and wineries and attract new visitors to state breweries, distilleries and wineries;
- Encourage and create incentives for special events to promote state breweries, distilleries and wineries;
- Educate the public about alcohol manufacturing in the state - especially its history; conduct research on, develop incentives for, and promote the growth of state agricultural products used in state manufactured beer, wine and spirits;

- Support the expansion of minority ownership and participation in the operation of state breweries, distilleries and wineries.

For more information, visit

<https://commerce.maryland.gov/fund/maryland-alcohol-manufacturing-promotion-fund>.

The question was asked as to how information on these types of initiatives are promoted? Liz Fitsimmons responded that these programs are promoted by our trade associations, DMO's and through press releases.

**m. MARYLAND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

- New Board Members begin July 1, 2023
- Retiring board members June 30, 2023

**n. REPORTS FROM THE INDUSTRY:**

- The Baltimore Orioles have teamed up with Levy, the market leader in creating unforgettable hospitality experiences at sports and entertainment venues- Rick Howarth, Vice President of Hospitality and Strategy, Levy Restaurants
- Pike & Rose has completed 60% of its build out. Choice Hotels headquarters will be joining the community soon with others following - Juan Carlos Regional General Manager, Bethesda Row and Pike & Rose,
- Upcoming Designation of Southern Maryland National Heritage Area will feature Governor Moore as keynote speaker - Ashley Chenault, Chief of Tourism, Explore Charles County, Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism
- Talbot County has the only blue catfish processor on the Eastern Shore. Discussions are underway to acquire more USDA-certified processors - Cassandra Van Hooser, Talbot County Director of Economic Development and Tourism.
- Ongoing and various developments happening in Ocean City with Tom Perlozzo - Director of Tourism & Business Development - Jim Mathias, Director Government Relations University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- With safety a top concern for Baltimore City, additional coordinated efforts in the form of a 24/7 strategic operations center. Shelonda Stokes, President of the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore (DPOB).
- Poolesville Grape Crushing Economic Development Facility opening- no date yet- Kelly Groff, President & CEO at Visit Montgomery

**o. Next Meeting Dates:**

- Update Call (Virtual) Thursday, May 18, 2023
- Marketing Plan Showcase - June 15, 2023

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Judy Bixler requested a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion to adjourn passed.