



**MARYLAND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD (MTDB)  
QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES**

**October 20, 2023 | 10:00 a.m.- 12:00 pm**

**Great Wolf Lodge - Baltimore/Perryville**

**1240 Chesapeake Overlook Parkway**

**Perryville, Maryland 21903**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Melonie Johnson, MGM National Harbor  
Ben Seidel, Real Hospitality Group  
Al Spence, A.S. Midway Tours  
Chris Riehl, Rent-A-Tour  
James Mathias, University of Maryland  
Eastern Shore  
Juan Carlos Linares, Federal Realty  
Investment Trust  
Dave Ferraro, Friends of Patapsco Valley  
State Park

Gerardo Martinez, Wild Kid Acres  
The Honorable Melissa R. Wells,  
Maryland State Delegate  
Levern McElveen,  
Levern McElveen & Associates  
Rick Howarth, Levy Restaurants  
Robert Arthur, The Ivy Hotel  
Sandy Turner, Cecil County Tourism  
Shelonda Stokes, Downtown Partnership  
Tonya Fitzpatrick, Esq., World Footprints

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

The Honorable Wayne Hartman,  
Maryland State Delegate  
Cassandra Vanhooser, Talbot County  
Department of Economic Development and  
Tourism

Heather Shaffer Braue, CFG Bank Arena  
Group  
The Honorable Kate Frye-Hester,  
Maryland State Senate

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Amy Rohrer, Maryland Lodging Association  
Ruth Toomey, Maryland Tourism Coalition  
Ross Peddicord, Maryland Horse Industry Board

**DESTINATION MARYLAND ORGANIZATIONS (DMO)**

April Plummer, Queen Anne's County  
Economic Tourism & Development  
Trish McClean, Visit Baltimore  
Shalyn Bolden, Kent County Economic

and Tourism Development  
Holly Gilpin, Dorchester County Tourism

Dan Spedden, Visit Hagerstown and  
Washington County Convention and Visitors

Bureau  
Eric Rebbert, Visit Harford (Interim  
Director)

### **COMMERCE MARYLAND OFFICE OF TOURISM (OTD) STAFF**

Liz Fitzsimmons, Managing Director  
Brian Lawrence, Advertising & Content  
Assistant Director  
Cynthia Miller, Director, Strategic  
Partnerships and Public Relations

Marci Ross, Senior Assistant Director for  
Tourism Development  
Greg Bird, Web Development / Electronic  
Communications  
Julia Bouie, Administration

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- a. Having a Board quorum present, Johnson called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. Fitzsimmons facilitated the introduction of the new Board members who spoke briefly about their respective affiliations and areas of work. Johnson informed everyone that she and Ben Seidel have agreed to co-chair the Maryland and Tourism Development Board for one year until the nomination process is completed. Seidel reminded all that the past chair termed out. The path forward is uncharted territory. Current thinking is that a nomination committee and process will be outlined according to our bylaws and elections would take place in November 2024 at the annual meeting. Because the bylaws are broad, no change is needed to move forward. A vote to approve the one year co-chairmanship of Johnson and Seidel was called and unanimously approved. Fitzsimmons thanked the new co-chairs for their contributions, willingness to serve and is excited about the possibilities, setting new goals and accomplishments.

### **II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- b. Johnson called for a motion to approve the minutes of 6/15/23. The minutes were unanimously approved.

### **III. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- c. Fitzsimmons presented the Maryland Tourism and Development Board mission/vision statements, Board composition and noted that this meeting attendance was outstanding and encouraged members to continue a strong showing. Rich Gilbert, Travel & Tourism Manager spoke briefly about the Capital Region USA (CRUSA) Global Travel Exchange (GTE) held in Annapolis. Board members were invited to attend this annual marketplace designed to connect the region's travel suppliers, overseas buyers, and receptive operators face-to-face. Fitzsimmons also thanked Gunther and A.S. Midway Tours for providing the beautifully Maryland wrapped bus promoting the great State of Maryland.

### Maryland Legislative Updates Senate

Senator Griffith's departure has generated several key changes to the leadership of the Senate:

- Senator Pam Beidle will succeed Senator Griffith as chair of the Finance Committee led by Senator Antonio Hayes.
- Senator Clarence Lam will take over as Vice Chair of Executive Nominations.
- Senator Joanne Benson will become the new Senate majority whip.
- Senator Michael Jackson will take over as Vice Chair of the Senate Democratic Caucus.
- Senator Shelly Hettelman will move up to become the Chair of the Senate Rules Committee.
- Senator C. Anthony Muse will become the new Vice Chair of the Senate Rules Committee.

#### **d. Research**

Fitzsimmons presented FY2023 Direct Tourism Taxes and MTDB Grant Awards /Tax numbers indicating \$600 million in revenue providing \$60 million in promotional dollars. Ben Seidel applauded the effort made to obtain accurate and as thorough as possible information. Fitzsimmons asked that when Board members are having conversations with their elected officials, mention not only the role of the State tourism office, but also mention the role of the county tourism offices as well. Fitzsimmons will facilitate a plan for the Board to identify, messaging including ROI, promotion, representation, and marketing plan legislative needs. Fitzsimmons also presented statistics on:

- Fall and Holiday Travel Season Outlook Remains Strong As Leisure Travelers Are Motivated to Spend More Time With Family and Friends
- Visitor Spending and Annual Growth

More information on domestic and international spending will be forthcoming. There was also discussion around future tourism workforce training. James Mathias spoke of the succession of the workforce and the efforts underway under his direction at UMES as did others. Information on the Office of Tourism visual assets will be sent to the Board.

#### **e. Advertising & Content**

Brian Lawrence, Advertising & Content Assistant Director, presented on:

- 2023 "Welcome Home for the Holidays", a five week digital advertising campaign reaching millions of potential customers, encourages overnight hotel stays for the holidays and corresponding deals & discounts at hotels; as well as retail, restaurants and attractions.

- “Maryland Minute” Radio Spot Takeover”for DMOs to promote their own county-centric events and attractions runs from September through October on Hearst radio stations across the state promoted by the Maryland Office of Tourism

Several Maryland Office of Tourism spots were shown promoting various Maryland projects and locations with voiceover by Governor Wes Moore. The Maryland Office of Tourism met with the Governor’s Communications team to coordinate a new campaign. Governor Moore and staff have been very enthusiastic, gracious and responsive to our requests.

#### **f. Tourism Development**

2024 - Maryland’s Year of Civil Rights:

- Governor Moore’s announcement planned for 10/25
- OTD is collaborating with MD Commission of African American History and Culture, state agencies, DMOs, Heritage Areas, private sector businesses, etc.
- OTD will be market-ready in early June to showcase the statewide travel opportunities in time for 7/2/24 60th Anniversary of 1964 Civil Rights Act

FY24 Grants:

- Grant agreements and other application documents are being distributed
- Transitional year for co-op creative away from “Open” and to “You’re Welcome”

Included in the Board packet are the new “Follow Pathways to Freedom” guide and information on free promotional “Deals and Discount” opportunities.

- Self entry portal: <https://tinyurl.com/4tccpf9t>
- VisitMaryland.org’s Deals & Discounts Page- <https://www.visitmaryland.org/article/deals> - Offer any deal anytime and upload it. Be creative!

#### **g. Strategic Partnerships and PR**

- Main Street/Retail Association - partnerships/holidays/Deals & Discounts
- Tourism Connect/PRSA - partnerships with DMOs
- Chesapeake Bay Gateways Conference - best practices/successes
- October Maryland Horse Month
- Department of Agriculture - joint social media campaign about apple farms
- Maryland Public Television Destination Maryland

#### **h. Industry Reports**

##### Maryland Tourism Development Board Report

##### Executive Directors Council Report

- Maryland Wineries, Breweries and Distilleries - Jim Bauckman
- Maryland Association of Destination Marketing Organizations - Kelly Groff
- Maryland Horse Industry Board - Ross Peddicord
- Maryland Hotel and Lodging Association - Amy Rohrer
- Maryland Tourism Coalition - Ruth Toomey

##### **Dates of Note**

- January 10, 2024 - Legislative Session Begins
- January 17, 2024 - Governor Presents State Budget
- February 9, 2024 - Tourism Day at Ram's Head Tavern
- April 8, 2024 - Legislative Session Ends

The Board is required to meet four times a year. A poll will be conducted to assess dates and times that work best for members. There was discussion about moving up the date for the marketing plan meeting. The Board would like input to the plan before it's finalized in addition to a call before the legislative session starts.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

A big thank you to Cecil County Tourism and Great Wolf Lodge for hosting. Johnson requested a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion to adjourn passed. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm. Many in attendance joined the Great Wolf Lodge team for a tour of the property.