

Outreach programs planned for minority businesses in Charles County

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Charles business owners got an update on how the county plans to introduce recommendations of a disparity study released in October.

Kelly Robertson-Slagle, the new economic development director for Charles County, spoke during the department's quarterly business roundtable on Feb. 3.

Robertson-Slagle said the department would organize monthly training events to “demystify” the process of enrolling in both the Small Business and Minority Business Enterprise programs.

“One of the things I have seen over the years is that the program can be overwhelming and cumbersome,” she said.

Simplifying the program could encourage more small and minority business owners to engage, Robertson-Slagle continued.

The economic development department is developing a proactive community outreach plan to better reach out to business owners including training seminars, outreach on social media and other programs.

The department also hopes to enhance the county's race-neutral small local business set-aside program by increasing the number of firms participating from 201 to 250 by the end of the year.

Improving outreach was one of the recommendations of a disparity study performed by Atlanta-based law and public policy consulting firm Griffin & Strong. The study found a significant underutilization of minority and women-owned business enterprises in contract work across several business categories in Charles County.

Griffin & Strong also provided several recommendations for mending underutilization of minority and women-owned businesses such as limiting the use of on-call contractors and setting annual aspirational goals in addition to increasing community outreach.

A summary of the plan as well as a link to the full text can be found on meetcharlescounty.com/.

A full implementation plan based on recommendations made by the study will be unveiled at a later date.

Taylor Yewell, chief of development, briefed business owners on a tax credit that would create an "incentive to revive and revitalize properties in the county."

The Commercial Real Property Improvement and Rehabilitation Tax Credit was approved by county commissioners in December and took effect on Jan. 29. The tax credit applies to commercial properties based on an improved assessed value of between \$100,000 and \$3 million.

The increase in value would be determined by the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation. The credit is scheduled to phase-out over five years.

Yewell said an application for business owners who wish to apply would be available soon.

The credit would only apply to county taxes, but Yewell said the towns of Indian Head and La Plata are interested in applying their own versions of the tax credit in their own tax codes.

Business owners also received an update on the ongoing process to rezone areas around the Maryland Airport for business use.

The comprehensive plan amendment to return some 500 acres of land around the airport to business use was approved in October. The next step is a zoning text amendment, which Yewell said could take between a year and 18 months, and "probably longer."

However, Yewell cautioned that much of the land within those 500 acres was unusable.

"Much of the land is undevelopable due to steep slopes and protected areas," Yewell said during the meeting, adding that he didn't expect to see "dense development" in the area.

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