



Baltimore Convention and Tourism Redevelopment
and Operating Authority Task Force
December 15, 2025
Virtual
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Minutes

Task Force members present:

Chuck Tildon	Tarcher Group - Chair
Harry Coker Jr.	Secretary of Commerce
Senator Antonio Hayes	District 40, Baltimore City
Delegate Stephanie Smith	District 45, Baltimore City
Justin Williams	Deputy Mayor, City of Baltimore
Tracy Lingo	Unite Here, Local 7 Baltimore
Edward Brown	AFSCME Local 44
Ruth Toomey	Maryland Tourism Coalition
Matthew (Mac) Campbell	Baltimore Convention Center
Eric Dodson	Co-owner of Cuples Tea House
Otis Rolley	Baltimore Development Corporation
Tom Sadowski	Maryland Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO)
Mark Anthony Thomas	Greater Baltimore Committee
Bill Cole	Maryland Stadium Authority
Leland Shelton	MCB Real Estate
Kireem Swinton	Visit Baltimore
Holly Arnold	Maryland Transit Administration
Onahlea Shimunek	PM Hotel Group
Shelonda Stokes	Downtown Partnership of Baltimore
Shamiah Kerney	City of Baltimore
Alex Smith	Atlas Restaurant Group
Ben Seidel	Real Hospitality Group

Guests:

Bethanie DeRose	Hunden Partners
Kalvin Kerwin	Hunden Partners
Gabriel Auteri	Just Economy
Cassie Clemente	Just Economy

Alan Cason	McGuireWoods
Denise Gilmore	AFSCME
Kristen Pironis	Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County
Lisa Jones	Harris Jones & Malone
Al Hutchinson	AVH Enterprise
Jennifer LaHatte	Department of Commerce
Hannah Fuchs	Department of Commerce

I. Call to Order

Chuck Tildon called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.

He thanked all of the subcommittee members, the consultants from Hunden Partners and Just Economy, and Lisa Jones from Harris Jones & Malone for their time, insight and work putting together this report, as well as for helping navigate the political environment. And he thanked the staff of the Commerce Department for staffing the task force.

II. Presentation of the Report

Chuck walked through the presentation which serves as a summary of the report and started by pointing out the objective for this meeting, which is voting on advancing the task force's report to the Mayor of Baltimore, the Governor and the General Assembly for their consideration to form a joint authority and subsequent recommendations.

Chuck then provided a brief overview of the task force's history of developing its recommendations. In 2024, the task force's main recommendation was to create a unified joint authority, whereby the city retains ownership with state bonds for the improvements (state lien). Concerning operational funding, the task force recommended establishing a dedicated revenue stream. In August 2025, the task force began its work with the newly formed governance and finance subcommittees. Between August and December 2025, the subcommittees met over six times and briefed several stakeholders about its work.

Bethanie DeRose provided an overview of the key topics of the report. On the governance side, the task force reviewed different governance models and confirmed that the joint authority remains the best model for Maryland. The task force, together with its consultants Hunden Partners and Just Economy, then analysed governance frameworks from comparable cities and evaluated reporting and staffing implications for a consolidated structure. The task force also discussed a refined board composition and appointment processes, as well as anticipated staffing transitions.

Bethanie walked through the recommendations of the report in regards to the governance structure of the joint authority. The recommended board seat structure includes seven fiduciary

voting members based on skills and professional backgrounds as well as six to seven ex-officio non-voting members designated by organizational representation. Tracy Lingo asked where within this board structure the community would be represented. Bethanie explained that the “At large” seat could be dedicated to a community representative. The ex-officio board member categories “public/private partnership” and “regional representative” would also serve as possible community representation.

Bethanie continued to explain the task force’s ideas around transition and employee protection. As part of that, she highlighted the importance of an employee transition plan and for all employees to be made whole, meaning that all current city employees must be kept whole in pay, benefits and tenure. Furthermore, existing union representation and collective bargaining agreements should remain in place to mirror current structure under the new authority, as conditions permit. She briefly touched on the board and authority structure again before outlining the benefits of an operational integration. Adopting a full authority model unifying Visit Baltimore and the Baltimore Convention Center under one CEO reporting to the board will provide improved alignment by consolidating marketing, sales, and operations to enhance accountability, efficiency, and collaboration.

Regarding the funding recommendations, Bethanie provided a brief recap of the funding recommendations. The task force identified in 2024 three priority funding streams for further study, including a city prepared food tax, naming rights, and incremental hotel occupancy tax and tourism improvement district revenues. The reconvened task force expanded its review to broader funding mechanisms, including incremental financing districts and potential regional tax structures. There was a lot of discussion about the type and mechanisms of funding and financing structures amongst task force members. The task force assessed operating and capital needs, including an estimated \$52M annual operating budget and approximately \$1B in modernization costs. The task force also reviewed current revenues supporting Visit Baltimore and the Convention Center, along with the city and state subsidies that close the convention center’s operating deficit. The task force evaluated multiple geographic funding scenarios and confirmed that convention center impacts extend well beyond Baltimore City. A range of revenue categories were analyzed, along with projected incremental revenues that could result from a renovated and modernized convention center.

Bethanie presented two scenarios based on the geographic reach of taxes levied. The first scenario would be a 3% tax on a selected list of items taxed in the Baltimore Metropolitan Council Region, collecting \$15.3B between 2030 and 2059. The second scenario would narrow the geographic reach to Baltimore City only and would result in a tax collection of \$3B in the same timeframe. The third option would be a so-called Regional Tourism Financing Zone, raising \$4.9B over 30 years.

Bethanie summarized the funding recommendations, saying the task force urges to establish a regional financing framework. After looking at several options of what could define this region, the task force recommends a 15-mile radius. However, this can of course be changed. The core

revenue package would consist of leveraging the incremental hotel occupancy tax, incremental parking and sales tax from the same financing zone. In terms of a finance strategy, the task force recommends a finance modernization through tax-exempt municipal bonds secured by pledged incremental revenues, with required capital maintenance included in the bond structure. On the governance side, Baltimore City, the state, the issuing entity, and the joint authority would enter into a formal agreement outlining funding responsibilities, ownership, and bond payment terms. Finally, Bethanie suggested that a detailed economic impact analysis is needed to refine revenue projections to support future legislation.

Presentation provided upon request.

II. Vote on the Report

Delegate Smith suggested having three separate votes; on the governance part of the report, the finance part and the full report advancing for submission to the Governor's Office, the Mayor of Baltimore and the General Assembly. The task force agreed to it.

Chuck asked for a motion to approve the governance part of the report, which was moved and seconded. Chuck asked for a discussion on the motion. Senator Hayes pointed out that this report will be considered in his committee, of which he is the vice chair, and he would therefore be abstaining from the governance vote. He also wanted to clarify the appointment and confirmation process of the proposed board. Bethanie ensured that based on the structure proposed in the report all appointments would have to go through a confirmation process. Senator Hayes noted that he fears that the board would not be as diverse as it should be and that this is something to actively keep in mind.

Tracy Lingo highlighted several concerns about the report. She feels more comfortable with the funding proposal but has issues concerning the governance part, including certain language that was used in the report. She generally agrees with establishing a joint authority but she would like to hear how employees' union status can be maintained, especially if the convention center is a private entity. Regarding bonding, she feels uncomfortable that public money is being raised for a private entity as well as public debt being raised to support this private entity. Bethanie responded saying that the word 'private' needs some explanation. The authority would not be a public entity and would not be a body of the city or the state. It's the flexibility that is beneficial in this case. Operations would not be privatised, instead, the convention center would self-operate. The intention is to change the superstructure to allow for better efficiency. This works well with other convention centers she is working with too. On Tracy's concerns about bonding, the authority would not be allowed to issue debt or raise funds on their own. Onahlea Shimunek said she is particularly pleased with the board composition.

Chuck asked everyone who is in favor of the governance part of the report to raise their hand (14 members), everyone who is voting against it (4 members) and everyone who wants to abstain (4 members). The governance part of the report was approved.

Chuck asked for a motion to approve the funding recommendations of the report. The motion was moved and seconded. Chuck asked for a discussion on the motion. Ruth expressed concerns about the funding model. While she agrees that if the convention center is doing well, the region is doing well too, all parties such as the DMOs, hotels, and any other tourism entities should have been more involved in this discussion. Tourism is not seen as the economic engine that it is. She also noted that she has concerns about taxing i-gaming. Shamiah Kerney echoed Ruth's point, saying that there should have been conversations with the entities that would be impacted by the taxes proposed. Chuck pointed out that he and the consultants have started socializing the ideas introduced in the report with stakeholders in the tourism industry but those conversations were not detailed since this would have been premature. The convention center would take the lead on this in the coming year.

Mark Anthony Thomas agreed that a high level of engagement needs to be a priority in 2026, and that he knows there are people who are interested in helping the task force with their mission. Mac Campbell wanted to highlight that the convention center is not and will never be a cash cow but that it should align with the industry standards across the country.

Chuck asked everyone who is in favor of the funding part of the report to raise their hand (19 members), everyone who is voting against it (1 member) and everyone who wants to abstain (2 members).

Finally, Chuck asked for a motion to approve the full report to be submitted to the Mayor of Baltimore, the Governor, and the General Assembly. The motion was moved and seconded. Chuck asked for a discussion but no comments were made. He asked everyone to raise their hand if they approve (17 members), if they oppose (2 members: Tracy Lingo, Ed Brown), and if they abstain (3 members). The motion carried. Tracy made a brief comment saying that there needs to be more discussion about keeping union members whole and how this would work.

III. Good of the Order

Chuck thanked everyone for their hard work and that everyone can be proud of the work they have done.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12 p.m.