



COMMERCE SUBCABINET
Leading Economic Development

The mission of the Subcabinet is to advise the Governor on proposals to enhance the State's business climate; gather information the Subcabinet considers necessary to promote the goals of the Subcabinet; collaborate to facilitate and expedite critical economic development projects in the State; and provide other assistance that may be required to further the goals of the Subcabinet and enhance the State's business climate.

Members

Agriculture (AG)	Secretary Kevin Atticks, (Steve Connelly)
Commerce	Secretary Kevin Anderson, Chair, (Jerel Registre)
Environment (MDE)	Secretary Serena McIlwain, (Scott Goldman)
Governor's Office of Small, Minority, and Women's Affairs (GOSBA)	Secretary Y. Maria Martinez, (Eduardo Hayden)
Higher Education Commission (MHEC)	Secretary Sanjay Rai
Housing & Community Development (DHCD)	Secretary Jake Day, (Rosa Cruz)
Labor	Secretary Portia Wu, (Ashley Sharp)
Natural Resources (DNR)	Secretary Josh Kurtz, DNR (David Goshorn, Julia Solomon)
Planning (MDP)	Secretary Rebecca Flora, (Joe Griffiths)
State (SoS)	Secretary Susan Lee, (Cathy Bauer, Alexandria Liu)
State Department of Assessments & Taxation (SDAT)	Director Dan Phillips
Transportation (MDOT)	Secretary Paul Wiedefeld, (David Zaidain)

November 25, 2024
401 E. Pratt Street, 17th Floor Conference Room, Baltimore
1:00 – 3:00pm
Minutes

Subcabinet:

Kevin Anderson, Secretary, Department of Commerce, Chair
Kevin Atticks, Secretary, Department of Agriculture - Virtual
Rebecca Flora, Secretary, Department of Planning - Virtual
Joshua Kurtz, Secretary, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) - Virtual
Susan Lee, Secretary of State (SoS) - Virtual
Y. Maria Martinez, Secretary, GOSBA - Virtual
Serena McIlwain, Secretary Department of Environment, (MDE) - Virtual
Sanjay Rai, Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission - Virtual
Portia Wu, Secretary, Labor
Secretary Jake Day, DHCD - Virtual

Guests:

Ricardo Benn, Commerce
Delaine Brady, OSFM
Rosa Cruz, DHCD
Luis Cardona, The Governor's Office of Business Advancement
John Gilstrap, Commerce
Jayson Knott, Commerce
Jennifer LaHatte, Commerce - Virtual
Alexandria Liu – SoS

Michael Lore – SoS
Ashley Sharp – Labor
Timothy McGowan, Commerce
Jason Mowbray, OSFM – Virtual
Martin Proulx, MDA
Robert Iman, OSFM - Virtual
Jerel Registre, Commerce
Julie Woepke, Commerce

I. Meeting called to Order

Secretary Anderson called the meeting to order at 1:01pm.

II. Review and Approval of October 21, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the October 21, 2024, meeting were approved.

III. Chair’s Update

Secretary Anderson provided updates on recent developments at Commerce. He explained that the Maryland Aerospace and Technology Commission was recently established and held its first meeting on October 23. Senator Alonzo Washington introduced the legislation that established the commission, highlighting that the current administration has allies committed to promoting innovation in the fields of space exploration and commercial aerospace, including integrating space, aeronautics, and aviation industries into Maryland’s economy. Secretary Anderson thanked the Secretaries for their input and comments. He also gave some brief updates on the Maryland Economic Council’s report, and the expected effects of their recommendations.

Secretary Anderson continued by describing several relevant conferences he recently attended, including the 15th annual technology showcase at Fort Detrick, the Maryland Tourism and Travel Summit, and the MEDICA Conference in Dusseldorf, Germany. The MEDICA Conference was particularly notable as Secretary Anderson had the opportunity to speak with some of Germany’s top medical technology and healthcare firms. His trip to Germany confirmed that the United States remains the most sought-after market, despite recent economic and political turmoil. He also shared that the Governor spoke at the 2024 AfroTech conference in Houston and recently visited Washington County. Additionally, Secretary Anderson briefly discussed how the Department would position itself following the election, as this was the first time the Subcabinet had met since the election results. He affirmed that the Department would continue to stay on message, grow Maryland’s economy, and respond to changes in federal policy in a timely and effective manner.

The Secretary concluded his Chair’s Report by introducing three new Commerce employees: Ricardo Benn, Deputy Secretary of Innovation and Growth; John Gilstrap, Assistant Secretary of Innovation and Growth; and Luis Cardona, Director of the Governor’s Office of Business Advancement. Secretary Anderson invited each of them to introduce themselves and share their professional backgrounds.

IV. State Fire Marshal Discussion

Acting State Fire Marshal Jason Mowbray gave a presentation on the Office of the State Fire Marshal’s (OSFM) plan approval process. For many projects, especially architectural ones, the OSFM must approve the plans for fire protection and safety purposes. Although the number of OSFM plans increased in 2024, the number of plans reviewed decreased from 1,484 in 2022 to 1,205 in 2024. Efficiency problems have arisen from vacancies and compensation issues. The OSFM currently has only one fire protection engineer per region and is responsible for multiple counties, so when a vacancy occurs, a backlog of plans requiring approval quickly accumulates.

Secretary Anderson invited Marshal Mowbray to address this issue after receiving various complaints from business owners and leaders. If architectural plans are not approved, construction cannot begin, leading to substantial losses for businesses. Representatives from Hitachi raised this concern regarding the expansion of their factory in Washington County. While no plans have been submitted yet, it is best for the OSFM to address this issue given the scale of the project. Marshal Mowbray proposed a plan of action to improve OSFM efficiency, which includes enhanced analysis, the establishment of an automated management system, building engineering workstations, and introducing overtime pay.

Secretary Anderson welcomed the Subcabinet to ask Marshal Mowbray questions and engage in an open discussion. Secretary Flora asked whether Marshal Mowbray has a breakdown of the types of projects the OSFM reviews. The Marshal did not have the information but explained that once the automated management system is established, retrieving that data would be much easier. Secretary Flora also inquired about how solar panels affect the approval of design plans and whether regulations restrict their use in some instances. The Marshal confirmed that solar panels are inspected since roofs need to be accessible to firemen in case of an emergency. While such regulations can limit the space available for solar panels, the reduction is minimal. Secretary Day asked whether Maryland could implement a “Fast Track” program for permitting approval, like the one used in Pennsylvania. Marshal Mowbray explained that certain counties have similar initiatives, but this does not currently apply to the OSFM. However, he stated that he would be open to a similar program if it could be applied without compromising safety. Secretary Day added that merely signaling that efficiency is being addressed would be attractive to companies considering whether to relocate to Maryland, making such a plan appealing.

Secretary Anderson pressed Marshal Mowbray for more details on the proposed management system. The Marshal explained that a portal would be created where clients can create accounts and submit their plans digitally. Currently, all plans reviewed by the OSFM are paper copies submitted through the mail, which contributes to delays and inefficiency. Ashley Sharp of Labor emphasized that staffing needs to be increased even if the other improvements are implemented. She also recommended exploring the use of AI, which could be helpful in analyzing some architectural layouts, especially for more common plans. Mrs. Woepke asked Marshal Mowbray who to contact for inquiries regarding the OSFM. The Marshal advised contacting the regional office based on the client’s location. Presentation on file.

V. Strategic Plan

Mr. Jerel Registre provided a brief update on the strategic plan. While the plan is nearly complete, the Governor’s office is still working on its messaging to ensure it is detailed enough for rollout. Additionally, it is essential that the plan is marketed correctly so no county feels left behind, as this economic plan will boost certain industries concentrated in specific areas. Secretary Anderson added that the plan needs to be articulated clearly, given budgetary challenges, to ensure the legislature and the public view it as a prudent use of funds.

VI. Good of the Order

Secretary Anderson invited the Secretaries to provide updates on their departments. Secretary Wu shared the completion of National Apprenticeship Week and highlighted some accomplishments. Secretary Lee described a meeting with NATO representatives; Secretary Kurtz explained his advocacy for legislation to promote the seafood industry; Secretary Flora gave an update on her work regarding sustainable development, and Secretary Martinez shared her involvement with the Black Caucus and the Governor's Minority Summit. Secretary Anderson thanked everyone for their participation and wished them a Happy Thanksgiving.

VII. Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.

