



September 20, 2024
60 West Street, Suite 100, Annapolis
9:00 - 11:00am
Minutes

Members in Attendance:

Will Castleberry, Chair	Netflix
Matthew Bjonerud	Cerebro Capital
Loren Douglass	MKD Partners International – Virtual
Reza Jafari	e-Development International
Mary Kane	Maryland Chamber of Commerce
Jerrold Moton	Goldman Edwards – Virtual
Alec Ross	Bologna Business School – Virtual
Dana Stebbins	The Cornelius Group
Vernon Thompson	Strategic Path Forward
Christy Wyskiel	Johns Hopkins University – Virtual

Ex-Officio Members:

Secretary Kevin Anderson	Department of Commerce
Secretary Portia Wu	Department of Labor
Natalie Evans Harris	Chief Data Officer

Guests:

Leah Woody	Office of the Lt. Governor – Virtual
Meryam Bouadjemi	Office of the Governor – Virtual
Ben Seigel	Office of the Comptroller – Virtual
Andy Schaufele	Office of the Comptroller – Virtual
Lester Davis	Carefirst BlueCross BlueShield – Virtual
Heather Gramm	Department of Commerce – Virtual
Jayson Knott	Department of Commerce
Jennifer LaHatte	Department of Commerce – Virtual
Tim McGowan	Department of Commerce
Julie Woepke	Department of Commerce
Larry Twele	Eastport Partners
Chris Moyer	Bluefin Strategies

I. Meeting called to Order

Chair Castleberry called meeting to order at 9:03am.

II. Minutes of the June 25, 2024 Meeting

Upon a motion duly made and second, the minutes of the June 25, 2024 meeting were approved.

III. Chair's Report

Chair Castleberry thanked the Council members for their cooperation in completing the report, which is required by Executive Order. He reported the final report is currently under review by the Governor's Office.

The Executive Order approved in January 2024 extended the sunset of the Council to January, 2027. Because the Council fulfilled its primary duty, Chair Castleberry opened a discussion on how the Council should proceed in the coming months. Council Member Dana Stebbins stated that the extension indicates that Governor Moore seeks to utilize the Council in the future. Additionally, Council Member Reza Jafari added that the provisions of the Executive Order go beyond the report and thus the Council should remain vigilant. Furthermore, Council Member Vernon Thompson suggested that we wait for Governor Moore's feedback and circle back based on that information. The Council agreed with this suggestion.

IV. Review of the MEC Report

The Chair admitted that the report is not gentle, however, it is honest and bold, which is needed should the State aim to change its economic strategy. Furthermore, Chair Castleberry informed the Council that he changed the tax credit section, making it more clear and less demanding. Chair Castleberry asked the Council for input on the cover letter. Council Member Stebbins said she wants the letter to frame the discussion but leave the specific recommendations for the actual report. The Council agreed, acknowledging the importance of reading the whole report instead of a summary. Additionally, Council Member Mathew Bjonerud recommended taking out a specific line that alluded to controversy, which stated "nothing in this report should be read as an indictment of the Department of Commerce". The Council agreed that there was no reason to cover for a controversy that has not happened. Finally, Council Member Loren Douglass insisted that the Council should not come off as apologetic for its recommendations. The Council worked diligently to create the report and should be proud of the product. Additionally, the Council agreed any meaningful change will come with resistance.

Mr. Jafari highlighted the excellent timing of the report, given that October is Economic Development Month. Ms. Mary Kane added that the report signals the ambitions of Governor Moore, which will create a positive perception of Maryland. Secretary Anderson suggested that Secretary Wu investigate other programs the MEC can look into, in case the Governor seeks recommendations for Council interaction and advice in 2025 and beyond.

V. Department of Commerce Update

Chair Castleberry invited Secretary Anderson to give an update on the Department of Commerce. Secretary Anderson gave a presentation which included the administration's recent wins, the business attraction and retention pipeline by industry and region, outreach initiatives, and various economic indicators which highlight Maryland's strengths and weaknesses. Also, Secretary Wu presented on slide on the labor outlook in Maryland, particularly the labor participation rate among different demographics. There was a brief discussion on why Maryland had the largest drop in labor participation in the country.

While Secretary Anderson was giving the presentation, the Council was allowed to ask questions. A graph showcasing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate by counties between 2017-2022 was of particular interest. Council Member Alec Ross questioned the validity of the data, citing other figures that indicated that Baltimore City did not grow as much as the graph indicated. Due to the confusion, Secretary Anderson tasked his economic team to analyze the data and provide a summary of it following the meeting. Other discussions revolved around the Department of Commerce's open prospects. Mr. Jason Knott explained that Maryland could not compete in certain projects due to geographic and economic constraints. For example, available land and energy costs make certain types of manufacturing infeasible in Maryland. Presentation on file.

There was an open discussion based on Secretary Anderson's presentation.

Secretary Anderson concluded by stating the importance of the Council in supporting the Department's business development activities, serving as advisors and ways to work together for economic growth.

VI. Strategic Plan Update

Secretary Anderson gave a brief update on the MEDC's strategic plan and its next phases. The update included an explanation of the identified subsectors, the legislative concepts required to support the subsectors, and engagement with other partners. Presentation on file.

VII. Good of the Order

Chair Castleberry reported no meeting for the remainder of the year. Council member Mary Kane reported that the Chamber will be undertaking a study of the topic of childcare assets, needs, and the impact to the workforce.

VIII. Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and second, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00am.