



December 12, 2024
Rita Rossi Colwell Center, 701 E. Pratt St, Baltimore
Room 2036, MD 21202, USA
3:00 – 5:00pm
DRAFT Minutes

Commissioners in attendance:

Dana Stebbins, Chair	The Cornelius Group, Inc.
Paxton Baker	PKB Enterprises - Virtual
Ken Banks	Banks Contracting
Dr. Nia Banks	Beaux Arts Plastic Surgery, Art of Balance Spa
Sherri Blount	Fitch Even Tabin & Flannery
Nakeia Drummond	The Women Entrepreneur Leadership Lab - Virtual
J. Russell Fugett, PMP	Equity Through Action
Seth Goldman	Eat the Change - Virtual
Arnold Jablon	Attorney – Virtual
Israel “Izzy” Klein	Klein/Johnson Group – Virtual
Qili Li	Worldshine Group – Virtual
Gwen McCall Winston	F&L Construction & Solid Waste, LLC
Ginger Noble	Business Operations & Tax Preparation
Eben Smith	Three E Consulting Group, LLC – Virtual
Darius Stanton	The Stanton Group, Inc.
Kevin White	Global Vision 2020, Inc.
Miguel Wilson	Miguel Wilson Collection, Inc. - Virtual
Scott Zakheim	Landmark Ventures

Ex-Officio Members:

Kevin Anderson	Secretary, Maryland Department of Commerce
Troy LeMaile-Stovall	Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO)
Tom Sadowski	Maryland Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO) – Virtual
Ashely Sharp for Portia Wu	Department of Labor

Commerce Staff:

Ricardo Benn	Deputy Secretary, Commerce
Luis Cardona	Director of the Governors Office of Business Advancement
John Gilstrap	Assistant Secretary, Commerce - Virtual
Jerel Registre	Chief of Staff, Commerce
Stephen Rice	Deputy Secretary, Commerce
Julie Woepke	MEDC Executive Director, Commerce
Jennifer LaHatte	Managing Director, Commerce
Tim McGowan	Council and Commission Program Specialist, Commerce

I. Call to Order

Chair Stebbins called the meeting to order at 3:03pm.

II. Review and approval of September 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, minutes of September 17, 2024 were approved.

III. Chair's Report

Chair Dana Stebbins thanked the Commission for submitting the strategic plan on time, which was only possible because the Commission met more frequently than the quarterly mandated schedule outlined in the legislation. This effort ensured the thorough and timely completion of the plan, something other boards have struggled with in the past. Additionally, she wished everyone a Happy Holiday, regardless of religious affiliation.

IV. Secretary's Report

Secretary Anderson began his report by acknowledging the outcomes of the presidential election. He urged the Commission and the Moore administration to continue working in a nonpartisan way. He noted that Maryland is home to 140,000 federal workers and that many projects rely on federal funding. Given Maryland's close relationship with the federal government, it is paramount that the Department of Commerce remains vigilant and flexible. While Secretary Anderson hopes that the State can maintain a positive relationship with the federal government, Maryland will not compromise its positions and will continue fighting for all Marylanders.

Secretary Anderson also noted that the 2025 General Assembly session is just a few weeks away. He was unable to share anything about the administration's budget or legislative proposals, but some priorities include fiscal discipline to drive growth and investment, increased economic competitiveness, and a focus on "work, wages, and wealth" regardless of what happens in Washington, D.C. These priorities are in response to Maryland's \$2.7 billion budget deficit and stagnating Gross Domestic Product (GDP). To counter these challenges, the administration needs to make strategic investments that will create an economy capable of keeping up with Maryland's ambitions.

Secretary Anderson continued by explaining various organizational changes within the Department of Commerce. The newly created Governor's Office of Business Advancement will help attract large-scale, high-value businesses to Maryland and provide concierge-level support. Secretary Anderson invited Luis Cardona, the director of this office, to introduce himself. Additionally, Commerce's business development operations will be split into two units, each headed by a deputy secretary. The Innovation and Growth unit will oversee the Office of International Investment & Trade, the Office of Military and Federal Affairs, and the Office of Strategic Industries. This unit will work to develop and implement strategies to foster innovation and entrepreneurship within the state. Secretary Anderson welcomed Deputy Secretary Ricardo Benn and Assistant Secretary John Gilstrap to introduce themselves. The Business Attraction and Special Projects Unit will oversee regional representatives, as well as the Finance and Business Attraction teams. This unit will play a pivotal role in developing and executing initiatives to attract businesses to Maryland, promote the retention and expansion of existing companies, and manage special projects that drive economic growth. Secretary Anderson invited Deputy Secretary Stephen Rice to introduce himself. Lastly, Commerce now has a new Director of Rural Economic Strategy, Carl Anderton, who will connect with rural communities, economic developers, and the governor's office.

Commissioner Goldman expressed his support for the Governor's endorsement of lifting the ban on beer and wine sales in grocery stores, stating it would make Maryland more competitive in the industry. He asked Secretary Anderson if Commerce had any involvement in the Governor's position on this issue. Secretary Anderson reiterated that the Department follows the Governor's lead and facilitates his vision rather than implementing its own.

To conclude his report, Secretary Anderson explained the "Soft Landing Exchange Program," an important complement to the Department's established Maryland Global Gateway Program. While Global Gateway has been bringing international startups to "soft land" in Maryland incubators and accelerators for a few years, this new program will do the same for Maryland companies looking to explore international markets. These companies will be able to soft land at incubators and accelerators in Australia, France, Ireland, the UK, the Netherlands, and Japan, with plans to add more international partners in the future.

The Secretary added that the Governor was scheduled to address the Maryland Association of Counties that day and that he would make announcements related to economic development activities and industry sector focus areas. He stated any information would be shared with the Commission.

V. Meet the Commissioners

Chair Stebbins invited Commissioner Blount to share some background information on her personal life and professional career. Commissioner Blount was an attorney for over 30 years, with expertise in intellectual property. After completing law school, she initially practiced labor law for three years, which was not her original intention but provided her with valuable experience. She later became an Attorney Advisor at the Federal Trade Commission, where she gained her expertise in intellectual property and antitrust law. After that, she continued her law career representing the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for a decade. In 2016, she transitioned into the cannabis business, anticipating a wave of legalization across the country. Commissioner Blount successfully set up several dispensaries before the market became oversaturated. Chair Stebbins and Secretary Anderson personally thanked her for her service and invaluable perspective.

VI. Strategic Plan Update

Secretary Anderson explained that the Strategic Plan is complete but still needs to be socialized before its official rollout. To ensure its successful adoption and implementation, the plan will need to be discussed with various economic partners and the legislature. The Commission can assist by promoting the plan to the appropriate channels and organizations. Chair Stebbins added that communication will be vital so that different Commissioners do not reach out to the same organizations. Secretary Anderson mentioned that a condensed version of the plan, along with talking points, will be provided to the Commission. Mr. Registre added that the Governor is incorporating many of the plan's recommendations into his talking points, signaling that the plan will be rolled out soon. Commissioner Nia Banks asked what in the plan would be prioritized if not everything can be implemented, due to budgetary restrictions. Secretary Anderson replied that the priorities will be up to Governor Moore and that the Commission and the Department of Commerce will have to follow his lead. Commissioners requested a fact sheet on the Plan and talking points once distributed.

VII. Consent Agenda

The MEDC is statutorily required to review the annual reports of the Maryland Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO), the Maryland Agriculture and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO), and the Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO). Chair Stebbins' motion to accept the MEDCO, TEDCO, and MARBDICO reports was approved by the Commission.

VIII. Good of the Order

Secretary Anderson announced that Mrs. Woepke would be retiring after 22 years of service for the State of Maryland. He shared some of her accomplishments and thanked her for her service. The Commission acknowledged her with a standing ovation.

Chair Stebbins informed everyone of the social hour to be held at Phillips Seafood after the meeting.

V. Adjournment

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 3:55pm.