



Minutes

Date: July 17, 2025

Time: 3:00 pm

Members Present

Teira E. Farley

Conan Owen

Keith Groomes

Madi Alvis

Staff Present

Matt Johnson

Absent

Marlena Reid-Joyner

Juandiego Wade

Jamaala Hamilton

Meeting was called to order by Keith Groomes at 3:04 p.m.

Introductions were made for the new committee member, Conan Owen. Mr. Owen shared that he is a University of Virginia Darden graduate and the owner of Charlottesville's Sir Speedy franchise. Mr. Owen also shared that he is an active supporter of Sin Barreras, a local 501(c)(3) non-profit working to empower immigrants and their families, with a focus on Hispanic communities in Central Virginia.

The meeting minutes for **April 17, 2025** were reviewed and approved pending a change to correct the spelling of Teira E. Farley's name.

Commented [MA1]: I noticed that the minutes we approved had the date of the meeting as April 24, but I believe that it was on the 17th?

Mr. Groomes began by providing an update on the GO Start-Up program. He shared that the June session of GO Start-up, which was intended to be the first course provided virtually, did not receive enough applicants. Instead, applicants were transferred to the September in-person course, which will begin Wednesday, September 3 at 5:00 p.m. Mr. Groomes stated his intention to revamp the virtual GO Start-Up program and offer it again in the future.

Mr. Groomes then shared a summary of his experience at the Economic Mobility Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. He identified several key lessons learned from this event including the importance of building connected services— not just between local businesses, but within all facets of the local community.

Mr. Groomes continued by sharing that the City of Charlottesville, on behalf of Beacon Kitchen, was awarded a \$50,000 grant through the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) Fund. BEACON Kitchen will use this grant to purchase equipment and supplies for food packaging that will be available for use in the shared-use commercial kitchen space. Mr. Owen added

that, in his experience, packaging is often a barrier to growth for small businesses size restraints when ordering packaging materials. Ms. Farley shared that the Community Investment Collaborative (CIC) is in the process of creating a micro-grant pilot program with Beacon Kitchen to provide businesses with the funding they need to begin production at there.

Mr. Groomes shared that the Chamber of Commerce Minority Business Alliance (MBA) Gala is scheduled for Friday, October 10, 2025.

Mr. Groomes concluded updates from the Office of Economic Development (OED) by sharing his experience at the Piedmont Ascent Conference and Piedmont Pitch event. He reported receiving great feedback concerning the topics of discussion from participants in the Piedmont Ascent Conference; of particular note was the discussion on leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a small business owner. Mr. Groomes described a strong turnout for the third annual Piedmont Pitch Competition. Six finalists presented their pitches, of which two were chosen to receive grants: Wild Space received the second-place grant of \$5,000, and Sunflower Contracting was awarded the first-place prize of \$10,000.

Madi Alvis shared several Procurement updates, including a recent change to the Virginia Public Procurement Act Section 2.2-4310 that adds “military family-owned” businesses to the list of those which discrimination is prohibited against. Ms. Alvis added that while this does not change any functions of the Minority Business Commission, it may necessitate some changes in language in City’s associated codes and contracts. Ms. Alvis is working with her manager, Vernice Groomes, and the City Attorney to determine what changes may be required.

Ms. Alvis also shared that Procurement had successfully navigated the end of fiscal year 2025. She indicated that the Commission should expect updated SWaM spend report data for the entirety of fiscal year 2025 during the October Commission meeting.

During the discussion period, Mr. Owen brought up an issue that another local business, Mel’s Café, had been experiencing with the City’s code inspectors from Neighborhood Development Services (NDS). Mr. Johnson explained that while neither the Minority Business Commission nor OED has authority over NDS, they are always working on ways to communicate code requirements to the community more effectively. Mr. Groomes and Mr. Johnson indicated that OED would continue to explore potential communication improvements.

Mr. Owen also inquired whether the City had any data on the growth of minority-owned businesses within the City. Mr. Johnson shared that while this is not data that OED currently has, it may be available from the Commissioner of Revenue’s Office. Mr. Johnson will investigate the availability of this data further.

The meeting was adjourned by Mr. Groomes at 3:52 p.m.