

Business Revitalization Task Force

6th Meeting Minutes

Meeting was held virtually via Zoom and physical location at 250 South Hotel Street, Room 435,
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

July 17, 2025

2:00 p.m. – 3:24 p.m.

PRESENT:

State Government:

James Kunane Tokioka, Dean I. Hazama, Seth Colby, David J. Rodriguez, Sandra
Fujiyama

Small Business Regulatory Review Borad:

Tessa Gomes

County Government:

Amy Asselbaye, Michelle Agbiga (on behalf of Dennis Lin),

Construction Industry:

Roseann Freitas

Agriculture Industry:

Brian Miyamoto, Alec Sou

Visitors Industry:

Sue Kanoho

Food Industry:

Jimmy Chan, Lauren Zirbel

Retail Industry:

Tina Yamaki, Monty Pereira

High Technology Industry:

Patrick Sullivan

Visitor Industry:

Sue Kanoho

Regional and Ethnic Chambers of Commerce:

Constancio Paranal, Wendy Laros

Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i:

Sherry Menor- McNamara

Staff Members:

Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT),
Research and Economic Analysis Division (READ): Joeseeph Roos, Mustafa
Shirzad, Oscar Carvallo Valencia

CALL TO ORDER:

Time lapse: 2:03 p.m. – 2:05 p.m.

DBEDT Director James Tokioka opened the meeting and announced that Seth Colby will be DBEDT's new Research and Economic Analysis Division Administrator. Dennis Ling called the meeting to order. 20 members were present.

SUMMARY:

Agenda Item 1: Approval of the June 05, 2025, meeting minutes.

Time lapse: 2:05 p.m. – 2:07 p.m.

Dennis Ling called for a motion to approve the June 05, 2025, meetings minutes. Seth Colby proposed a motion to approve the minutes and Brian Miyamoto seconded. No objection vote was raised and the motion passed.

Agenda Item 2: Discussion and action of the Hawai'i's General Economic Competitiveness and Business Climate report by DBEDT Research and Economic Analysis Division

Time lapse: 2:07 p.m. – 2:10 p.m.

Joseph Roos (READ, Branch Manager) discussed the structure and content of their upcoming report to the legislature on Hawaii's economic competitiveness. He presented an outline that comprised of the *Hawai'i's General Economic Competitiveness and Business Climate* report by DBEDT, READ, and ranked recommendations pulled from permitted interaction group reports.

Agenda Item 3: Discussion and action of task force priorities to include in final report.

Time lapse: 2:10 p.m. – 2:14 p.m. & 3:00 p.m. – 3:19 p.m.

The task force discussed how to approach the top 10 permitted interaction group (PIG) recommendations for the next meeting. Seth Colby suggested voting on the top recommendations individually after group discussion. He also proposed discussing and potentially rewording each recommendation in a Word document before voting. Patrick Sullivan emphasizes the need to focus on growing the economy, not just improving the current system. Wendy Laros suggested more information regarding the other agenda items. The group debated whether to focus solely on the top 10 or consider additional items. Lauren Zirbel suggested accepting the top 10 and dedicating the next meeting to elaborating on them. Roseann Freitas reminds the group that a key issue related to building permits was not included in the top 10 but was included in the previous meeting by taskforce members. The task force considers including building permit item along with the top 10 for further discussion and voting.

Agenda Item 4: Discussion and action of the draft *Hawai'i Business Competitiveness Act* proposal by Seth Colby, Ph.D.

Time lapse: 2:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Seth then presented a draft "Hawaii Business Competitive Act" proposing to improve Hawaii's business rankings over 10 years, aiming to move from 50th to 10th place. He suggested creating a small business competitiveness office to track progress and report to the legislature with recommendations. The office would consult with various stakeholders and submit annual progress reports. Seth explained his choice of the CNBC America's Top Business Ranking as the metric, citing its comprehensiveness and lack of ideological bias. He explained that based on CNBC's business ranking methodology, there are 128 metrics across 5 key areas.

Members discussed this goal, with Alec Sou suggesting a more modest target, while Patrick discussed maintaining high aspirations to drive change and innovation. Constancio Paranal acknowledged the boldness of the vision and its intent to support local businesses and create a more resilient environment for communities.

The group also discussed challenges in improving Hawaii's business rankings, with Constancio expressing concerns about chasing a moving target and factors beyond state control. Seth responded that while some metrics are difficult to change, many are actionable, emphasizing that improving rankings is achievable with political will. Patrick added that current conditions are driving young people away, and the state needs to adapt to changing global trends to create opportunities. The discussion highlighted the need for support from political leaders and other agencies to effectively implement changes and improve Hawaii's business environment.

Wendy Laros expressed concern about the perspective of small business owners in the revitalization efforts. She emphasized that many small business owners are risk-averse and focused on day-to-day operations and employee care. DBEDT director James Tokioka acknowledged these concerns and explained that the proposed initiatives aim to

improve Hawaii's business reputation without necessarily creating new bureaucratic departments. Tessa Gomes shared her experience of how government support during the pandemic has improved confidence in state and city efforts to help small businesses. The group agreed on the need for serious, measurable goals and realistic timelines for any new initiatives.

The group further discussed Seth's proposal to use CNBC's business competitiveness rankings as a metric for economic improvement in Hawaii. Alec asked about correlating ranking improvements to economic growth, which Seth suggested as a potential research project. Amy Asselbaye expressed hesitation about adopting the CNBC rankings without fully understanding the 128 metrics involved, suggesting instead reviewing and selecting relevant metrics that align with the task force's priorities. Patrick supported moving forward with the proposal, viewing it as a starting point for progress. Dennis Ling called for a motion to accept Seth Colby's proposal titled "Business Competitive Act." Patrick Sullivan put forth a motion to accept Seth Colby's proposal titled a Business Competitive Act as a draft with the details to be worked out later. Wendy Laros seconded the motion, and the motion passed with all members voting in favor.

Agenda Item 5: Discussion of potential agenda items for next meeting including related action suggestions

Time lapse: (during the meeting)

Throughout the meeting, Taskforce members engaged in discussion and deliberation on key actions regarding the final report to the legislature. Members agreed to review the Top 10 recommendations and come prepared to discuss and vote on each item at the next meeting. In addition, Seth and the DBEDT/READ team will revise the Hawai'i Business Competitiveness Act to align the Top 10 recommendations with the CNBC business ranking metrics and will prepare a cohesive presentation for review and finalization at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Schedule for next meeting

Time lapse: 3:19 p.m. – 3:24 p.m.

Members agreed to select a date for the next meeting based on a Doodle poll during the week of August 25th to 29th.

NEXT SETPS

1. Seth and DBEDT/READ team to align the top 10 recommendations with the CNBC business ranking metrics and prepare a coherent presentation for the next meeting.
2. DBEDT/READ to send out a Doodle poll for scheduling the next meeting during the week of August 25th to 29th.
3. Task force members to review the top 10 recommendations and be prepared to discuss and vote on each one at the next meeting.
4. Seth and DBEDT/READ team to prepare a draft report summarizing the task force's findings and recommendations, with PIG reports included in the appendix.

AJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 3:24 p.m.