

VIRTUAL COOPERATIVE FORECASTING GROUP

June 25, 2025
10:02 A.M. to 10:56 A.M.

MINUTES

Mr. Steve Cohoon, Queen Anne's County, called the meeting to order at 10:02 A.M.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Cohoon asked for approval of the minutes from the April, 2025 meeting of the CFG. Ms. Kathleen Comber, Carroll County, moved to approve the minutes with, with Mr. Jeff Bronow of Howard County seconding the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

2. INTRODUCTION TO POPULATION ESTIMATES DASHBOARD

Mr. Cohoon introduced Mr. Matt Hancock, BMC, who presented a new interactive dashboard that showcases annual population estimates and demographic components of change for the jurisdictions within the Baltimore region. This was the first demonstration of the dashboard to the Cooperative Forecasting Group.

Mr. Hancock explained that the dashboard replaces the static presentation slides used in prior meetings and is intended to improve usability, transparency, and access to year-over-year data. The dashboard is hosted on Tableau Public and provides a user-navigable format, allowing viewers to explore five tabs displaying twenty years of demographic trends for the region. These include total population, births, deaths, natural increase, domestic migration, and international migration.

The home screen provides introductory text explaining the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program, as well as embedded links to BMC's Cooperative Forecasting resources and the underlying U.S. Census data sources. Users may select jurisdictions from a dropdown menu and interact with the displayed charts. Mr. Hancock demonstrated how selecting a year highlights all related component figures for that year, with precise data displayed upon hover.

Mr. Hancock noted that the dashboard breaks down estimates into two distinct time series—2010 through 2020 and 2020 through 2024—reflecting a methodological shift following the 2020 Census. He explained that while both series are presented in the same visual space for ease of use, they should not be compared directly due to differences in data sourcing and estimation methodology.

The dashboard's interactivity also enables quick navigation between jurisdictions. Mr. Hancock noted that a comparative view—allowing multiple jurisdictions to be viewed side-by-side—is under development and expected in a future update. Mr. Hancock added that the dashboard would be updated annually following the release of the Census Bureau's Vintage population estimates, and BMC would notify CFG members once new data had been published.

3. PRESENTATION ON UPDATED EMPLOYMENT ESTIMATE RATIOS

Mr. Cohoon invited Mr. Hancock to lead a discussion on the employment estimation methods to be used in the upcoming forecast cycle. Mr. Hancock began by addressing a key technical consideration: the historical use of employment ratios to reconcile differences between the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data and total employment counts that include self-employment, military, rail, and other categories not fully captured in QCEW reporting.

He explained that in prior forecast rounds, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) provided sub-county employment data used to create adjustment ratios for each jurisdiction. These ratios helped local jurisdictions estimate total employment more accurately by accounting for the known limitations of QCEW's scope. However, BEA discontinued its sub-county employment series in November 2023, leaving a potential gap in the methodology used to calibrate forecast baselines.

In response to this discontinuation, Mr. Hancock shared that BMC is currently evaluating alternative sources to fill this gap. He mentioned that S&P Global and other proprietary data vendors offer replacement options, but noted that these sources are often costly and lack transparency in their methodology. He cautioned that reliance on black-box data models may compromise consistency and replicability, especially across jurisdictions. Mr. Jeff Bronow, Howard County, agreed and emphasized the importance of having access to reproducible and methodologically sound sources to justify employment baselines. Members discussed alternatives for military employment estimates, which are not covered by QCEW and are increasingly difficult to obtain from military installations directly. Mr. Greg Goodwin shared that the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) now uses BEA military estimates (including active duty, reserve, and National Guard) and offered to present MWCOC's methodology at a future meeting.

Mr. Hancock confirmed that, for now, BMC would continue using the final BEA data available for 2023, but anticipates transitioning to American Community Survey (ACS) based ratios once reliable five-year files are released (likely December 2025). He cautioned that ACS data often overstates total employment and that careful adjustments will be needed.

Ms. Kathleen Comber, Carroll County, recalled that in previous years, BMC staff had provided specific employment-to-QCEW ratios for each jurisdiction, which helped her team adjust for self-employment. She asked whether similar guidance would be provided for this round. Mr.

Hancock responded that he would review documentation and tools developed by former BMC staff member and, if needed, replicate the ratio framework using available sources. He committed to working directly with jurisdictions to ensure they receive updated ratios or comparable adjustment guidance in advance of the next forecasting deadline.

Mr. Hancock concluded by stating that BMC will continue to evaluate non-proprietary data sources and engage with partners to maintain a consistent and transparent approach. Any updates regarding alternative data availability or methodology changes will be shared at upcoming CFG meetings and through follow-up communications.

[PowerPoint: Updated Employment Ratios for Forecasting]

4. MEMBER DISCUSSION – NEEDS FOR FORECASTS

Mr. Hancock provided an update on the status of the 2024 Master Establishment File (MEF). He explained that the dataset, derived from QCEW data for all four quarters of 2024, was currently being prepared and would be released to jurisdictions as soon as the Q4 data were finalized and processed.

He noted that the format would mirror the structure used in prior years, particularly those shared by former BMC staff to minimize disruption and ease the comparison of historical and current values. The file will contain jurisdiction-level and TAZ-level employment data, consistent with previous deliverables.

Mr. Hancock confirmed that confidentiality agreements were already on file for all jurisdictions, allowing the final dataset to be shared through BMC's secure shared folder. He committed to notifying the group when the file is posted and providing written guidance for its use. He also explained that a review period would follow, during which jurisdictions could flag any irregularities—particularly concerning the geographic distribution of large employers.

Mr. Bronow, Howard County, sought clarification on the QCEW time period included in the release. Mr. Hancock confirmed that the file will incorporate all four quarters of 2024 and is intended to support interim forecast refinement in 2025, even as 2020 remains the official base year. Mr. Bronow noted that while jurisdictions may use the file for internal adjustments to 2025 estimates, the dataset would be most valuable once 2025 becomes the new base year in future rounds.

Mr. Cohoon asked whether jurisdictions would again be expected to review and verify the accuracy of major employer distributions within the file, particularly in areas with multiple sites or split TAZs. Mr. Hancock confirmed that BMC would perform initial quality checks but would still rely on jurisdictions to flag any discrepancies, especially for employers with complex location patterns. He committed to providing annotations in the file and inviting comments ahead of the next meeting.

Ms. Comber requested a visual timeline of the forecast update schedule, including expected deadlines for draft submission and review. Mr. Hancock noted that the timeline had been presented previously but agreed to circulate the graphic again via email. He added that the current schedule anticipates finalized local forecasts by the end of calendar year 2025, likely in November or December.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no New Business introduced. The next meeting of the CFG will be Wednesday, August 26, 2025. The meeting adjourned at 10:56A.M.

ATTENDANCE

Members

Krishna Akundi, Maryland Department of Planning
Rebecca Baird, Harford County Department of Planning and Zoning - GIS
Austin Broderick, Baltimore County
Jeff Bronow, Howard County
Steve Cohoon, Queen Anne's County Department of Public Works
Kathleen Comber, Carroll County Department of Planning
Greg Goodwin, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Olusola Omisakin, Maryland Department of Planning
James Wilkerson, Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning

Staff and Guests

Todd Lang, BMC
Matthew Hancock, BMC
Rahman Moklesur, BMC
Brian Ryder, BMC