



CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING AGENDA
Wednesday February 5, 2025, 6:00pm
In Person

10306 Eaton Place, Training Room 115AB, Fairfax, VA 22030

Commissioners Present:

Chair Mitchell Cho
Vice- Chair Jeff Hermann
Secretary Patrick Soleymani
Treasurer Dawn McGruder
Commissioner Beth Young
Commissioner Kathleen Paley
Commissioner Designee Kristin Feenstra

Others Present:

Chris Bruno, CEO/Director, Economic Development Department
Marie Spittell, Acting Business Investment Manager, Economic Development Department
Matthew Easley, Assistant Director of Operations and Finance, Economic Development Department
Tara Borwey, Assistant Director of Programs, Economic Development Department
Brittany Jones, PR & Marketing Manager, Economic Development Department
Jordan Locke, Economic Development Associate, Economic Development Department
Eddie Hill, Director, Mason Enterprise Center
Rachel Delora, Vice President of Brand Management, DCI Consulting
Ben Wills, account director, DCI Consulting

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| 1. Call to Order | Chair Cho |
| a. Meeting called to order at 6:05pm. | |
| 2. Adoption of January Meeting Minutes [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Commissioner Young seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 3. Adoption of February Meeting Agenda [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Vice- Chair Hermann seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 4. PR and Marketing Presentation on DCI Marketing and Communications Strategy (20 mins w/ Q&A) | |
| a. In collaboration with DCI Consulting, PR and Marketing Manager Jones developed a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy focused on increasing awareness of Fairfax City as a prime destination for business investment and growth. Rachel Delora, Vice President of Brand Management at DCI, and Ben Wills, an account director, led the presentation. | |
| b. Emphasized the importance of collaboration and suggests that the city could benefit from partnering with George Mason University. The importance of understanding what the university is doing and complementing it with the city's own initiatives was emphasized | |
| c. Discussed the distinction between general city marketing and economic development marketing was discussed. While city marketing targets a broad range of audiences (residents, stakeholders), economic development marketing focuses on a niche audience, such as businesses considering relocating. The advice was to market the city as a whole, rather than focusing too much on specific organizations, as the perception of the location is more important than the economic development organization itself. | |

- d. Shared suggestions for measuring the success of marketing campaigns, including tracking metrics such as website traffic, time spent on the site, video views, and engagement with content. The effectiveness of existing content, like the “Faces of Fairfax” YouTube videos, was questioned due to low views, suggesting that social media efforts could be tied to specific goals and supported by targeted advertising.
- e. Discussed the potential overlap between tourism marketing and economic development was discussed. While the two audiences differ slightly, both can benefit from similar messaging. The idea was to align tourism campaigns with economic development to create a cohesive message. Both sectors can use public relations, social media, and storytelling to drive engagement, with a consistent Fairfax City brand across both initiatives. It was acknowledged that the city’s “small town charm” and proximity to Washington, D.C., are key selling points but might not be enough to differentiate Fairfax from other nearby cities.
- f. Recommends to focus on specific industries that have been identified as a priority by the economic development team, ensuring that the marketing efforts align with those target industries. It was also noted that site selectors, who help companies decide where to locate, typically focus on different types of projects (e.g., office versus industrial). Understanding the target industries and tailoring marketing efforts toward these sectors would be key to attracting the right kinds of businesses.

5. Operations Update (10 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Easley

a. Treasurer’s Report

Treasurer McGruder

- i. The budget report showed that as of the end of January, 58% of the year had passed, and 40% of the budget had been spent. The spending on programs is on track, with 58% of the program budget spent. Public relations and tourism, however, are behind, with only 19% spent, indicating available funds for these priorities.

b. MOA Execution and Transfer of \$5,000,000 to REOF

- i. The EDA's \$5 million transfer to the Real Estate Opportunity Fund has been executed and the check has been cashed. The next steps are pending. An offer has been made on a property, and the team is awaiting a response from the property owner.

c. New Job Description/Post for Business Investment

- i. The job description for the Senior Assistant Director role is live until February 16, and interviews are set to begin in late February.

6. Mason Enterprise Center-Fairfax (15 mins w/ Q&A)

Center Director Hill

a. General Update on Operations and Financials

- i. Kaiden AI, a company that has been part of the incubator for over a year, recently raised a \$1 million funding round. This success comes despite the company having pivoted its target market just six months ago. The funding was secured with the help of a mentor within the incubator network, highlighting the value of the mentorship and resources available through the program.
- ii. New companies joining the incubator include Goodness Grub and Sahara Sewa, with Sahara Sewa expanding into larger office spaces. Techno Gems, a software company, has entered the co-working space with plans to transition into a dedicated office space in the near future. Mid Ready, a Canadian company, is seeking its first U.S. pilot project in healthcare, which will be key to securing investor funding for the company.
- iii. Despite current occupancy being at 56%, promising conversations are taking place, leading to new leases and indicating potential growth in the near future. Two companies, Pediatric Therapy and Vellorum, have exited the incubator, taking a total of three office spaces with them.
- iv. Center Director Hill, who previously managed five sites, now manages four. When asked about managing both the Arlington MEC and the Fairfax MEC, he provided the following breakdown:
 - 1. **Arlington:** Three offices and 12 companies, nine of which are co-working.
 - 2. **Springfield:** Requires minimal attention.
 - 3. **Herndon:** Serves only members under contract, with ongoing efforts to promote uptake of services and resources.
 - 4. **Fairfax:** Eddie spends 96% of his time managing the Fairfax location.

b. Faculty Research Commercialization Program

- i. The proposal aims to provide office space and support to faculty members applying for SBIR (Small Business Innovation Research) grants. The program is designed to help faculty members who need an office address to register for the SBIR award application process. In exchange, they would have access to office space for six months (at no charge), with the expectation that once their grant is funded, they will lease office space for 18 months.
- ii. Program Details:
 1. During the initial six months, faculty will have access to office space and the incubator's resources, including networking opportunities and events. If their SBIR grant application is successful, they will enter into an 18-month lease agreement for office space at the incubator at the standard rental rates. In case of an unsuccessful SBIR application, faculty members may leave the program by providing a grant rejection letter as proof.
 2. The program aims to provide a "glide path" for faculty to experience the incubator's space and engage in networking while pursuing their research and grant applications. This initiative could attract faculty members from other local universities, particularly those in Northern Virginia, over time. The incubator gains minimal financial risk, as there are currently vacant office spaces available. Over time, the program is expected to attract more faculty members from universities in the area, thereby increasing the incubator's presence and visibility.
 3. Concerns regarding the Grant Acceptance Rate and outcomes were raised. Low acceptance rate for SBIR grants may limit the number of faculty members who continue beyond the initial six months. Faculty members might choose other available office spaces or programs, and the uptake may be slow in the early stages.
 4. The program is still in its early stages, and the initial outreach has been primarily to George Mason University. The incubator plans to promote the program on its website and at networking events to raise awareness among faculty and department heads.

7. Business Investment Update on John Cabot Fellows (10 mins w/ Q&A)

Acting BI Manager Spittell

- a. The program involves a partnership with John Cabot University in Rome, where three students were selected to help market Fairfax City in Italy. This initiative started from a connection with an older Virginia resident tech entrepreneur who became an executive in residence at John Cabot University. Three fellows were chosen for the inaugural FCED-JCU International Business Fellowship. They will help strategize how FCED can effectively market to companies prime for an expansion into the U.S.
 - i. Nina: Junior majoring in communications, with a minor in entrepreneurship. She owns a flower shop in Rome.
 - ii. Samuel: Sophomore majoring in psychology and marketing. He is a tri-national citizen (South African, American, and Italian).
 - iii. Mario: Junior majoring in economics and finance, with a minor in mathematics and computer science. He is Italian.
- b. Explained the overall structure of the program with details on each key phase. In the first month, fellows will receive an introduction to the business environment, comparing U.S. and Italian economic development. In March, there will be more focus on customer discovery and developing marketing strategies for attracting Italian businesses to Fairfax City. In April, Fellows will create an outreach plan and prepare for participation in Select USA, a U.S. government FDI conference. In the final month, Fellows will receive on-the-ground learning with cultural activities, city tours, and business meetings, culminating in a presentation of their findings.
- c. The main goal is to extend Fairfax City's brand internationally and identify Italian businesses that could be brought to Fairfax City. The program aims to establish a strong pipeline between Italy and the U.S., leveraging Italy's interest in Northern Virginia as a target area for business development. There is no

reciprocal visit planned for U.S. students, as the program is focused on bringing Italian students to the U.S. to help market Fairfax City.

8. Programs Update (10 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Borwey

a. Fairfax City Restaurant Week

- i. Discussed the 8th iteration of Winter Restaurant Week in Fairfax City, with 32 restaurants participating. The success of Joy Riot's efforts to refresh the program and maintain business engagement was acknowledged. There have been some adjustments to the price structure to ensure it meets restaurants' price points and caters to their target customers.
- ii. The proclamation for Winter Restaurant Week will be held on February 11th at 7 p.m., with an invitation extended to all commissioners and committee members. The website will soon be updated with a list of participating restaurants and their menus.
- iii. Photo shoots for the program have been completed, with Mayor Reed participating in the event. The speaker encouraged people dining during Restaurant Week to share their experiences on social media, using the hashtag #FairfaxCityRestaurantWeek to help promote the event.
- iv. The program will feature "Let's Work Together" pricing, allowing for more flexible menu options at participating restaurants. The term "set price" will be used instead of "prix fixe" to encourage inclusivity, providing a variety of dining options without requiring multiple courses. Menus will reflect creative adaptations by the restaurants, and efforts are being made to offer customized pricing to meet different customer needs.

b. Culinary Careers Collaborative

- i. The Culinary Careers Collaborative, a partnership with the Town of Vienna Economic Development Division, successfully completed a beverage art course at Dolce Vita restaurant, certifying three students through ServeSafe. Despite challenges, including weather and illness, the program continued and is now preparing for a culinary course at GMU in June. Four local businesses are ready to accept applications for these students.

c. Business Marketing Grant

- i. The Business Marketing Grant, approved in December, will be launching on February 7th, with applications accepted until February 21st. A selection committee will review applications and approve up to five businesses, awarding grants of up to \$5,000 each.

d. Ribbon Cuttings Review CY2024

- i. Shared a recap of the ribbon cuttings held in 2024. A total of 23 ribbon cuttings took place, including notable events such as the expansion of Brook's Bridal and the opening of Andy's Pizza. The Mayor's role in making these events special for business owners and how these events foster connections that may lead to further business attraction was highlighted.
- ii. Announced an upcoming ribbon cutting that will dedicate proceeds for the day to two victims of the DC plane crash. The business owner, Amir, will match the proceeds for the day. The event will take place at 10 a.m. at Fair City Mall, and attendees were encouraged to participate in this somber but meaningful event.

9. New Business

All

- a. Commissioners welcome Kristin Feenstra to the Economic Development Authority and congratulates her on her appointment.
- b. Chair Cho discusses the impact of federal changes and what that means for city businesses. Treasurer McGruder briefly mentioned monitoring the impact on their business, particularly the trend of individuals who have been let go or fired considering starting their own businesses. These individuals have sought assistance in launching their startups.
- c. Commissioner Young shared that they recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of their company.
- d. Shared details regarding a webinar hosted by the center on government contracting that attracted over 1,000 attendees, with many individuals seeking information on the future of their businesses. It was acknowledged that while there are no concrete answers about the current business environment, it was

helpful for business leaders to engage in conversations and share insights. The webinar series would continue, and the speaker promised to share relevant information as it became available.

10. Public Comment (5 mins)

Public

- a. Bill Pitchford- SmarterGrowth
 - i. Shares a date for a seminar on the changing face of retail and its impact on the city of Fairfax. The seminar is scheduled for May 21st at 7 p.m. in a large Economic Development Authority conference room. It was emphasized that everyone is welcome to attend.
 - ii. Shares continued focus to encourage property owners to consolidate properties, particularly within the small area plan. Special focus is placed on the area between Armstrong and Sager in Old Town, which includes properties such as Ox Block A, Christopher property, and Davies property. The potential for development in this area was noted.
- b. Jennifer Rose- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce
 - i. Acknowledged the support from the Economic Development Department and Commissioners for providing grants, allowing participation in the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Institute for Organization Management. Director Rose shared their experience from the program and mentioned the implementation of new strategies to improve chamber operations and attract more members.
 - ii. The chamber's mission statement was announced to have been simplified. The new statement clearly defines the mission as providing leadership and resources to the business community, removing previous complexity.
- c. Doug Church- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce
 - i. Acknowledged the growth of Assistant Director Borwey in ribbon cuttings and expressed his appreciation for her dedication and commitment.

11. Adjourn

Chair Cho

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:36pm.

Next Meeting: March 5, 2025

6 pm, 10300 Eaton Pl. Fairfax, Virginia 22030

Subject to Change. Please Check gofairfaxcity.com for more information.