



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

9990 Fairfax Blvd Ste 350, 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 Kristin Feenstra

Others Present:

Chris Bruno, CEO/Director, Economic Development Department
Marie Spittell, Acting Business Investment Manager, Economic Development Department
Matthew Easley, Assistant Director, Economic Development Department
Tara Borwey, Programs Manager, Economic Development Department
Jordan Locke, Economic Development Associate, Economic Development Department
Eddie Hill, Director, Mason Enterprise Center

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| 1. Call to Order | Chair Cho |
| a. Meeting called to order at 6:03pm. | |
| 2. Approval for Remote Participation [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Treasurer McGruder seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 3. Adoption of February Meeting Minutes [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Chair Cho motions. | |
| b. Secretary Soleymani seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 4. Adoption of March Meeting Agenda [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Chair Cho motions. | |
| b. Secretary Soleymani seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 5. Closed Session w/ Legal Counsel [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |

b. Commissioner Young seconds.

c. Passes unanimously.

6. Reconvene Regular Meeting **[VOTE]**

Commissioners

a. Secretary Soleymani motions.

b. Commissioner Young seconds.

c. Passes unanimously.

7. Host Acknowledgement- Highlight Technologies (5 mins)

a. Aarish Gokaldas, CEO of Highlight Technologies, provided a brief overview of the company and welcomed the Economic Development Authority to their space. Highlight Technologies has been 100% employee-owned since 2022, after transitioning from a woman-owned small business. With over 200 employees across 32 states, the company primarily supports the federal government and is currently navigating challenges in that sector. Despite these challenges, they remain optimistic about overcoming them. The company expressed its commitment to supporting the Fairfax community and is open to utilizing its location for future events.

8. Introduction and Readoption of the Remote Participation Policy **[VOTE]**

Commissioners

a. Commissioner Paley motions.

b. Commissioner Young seconds.

c. Passes unanimously.

9. Introduction and Readoption of the All-Virtual Meeting Policy **[VOTE]**

Commissioners

a. Secretary Soleymani motions.

b. Commissioner Paley seconds.

c. Passes unanimously.

10. Consideration of \$57,198 to Pathway Homes Organization **[VOTE]**

Commissioners

a. Pathway Homes is relocating to a 19,000 sq. ft. building in Old Town Fairfax, creating 40 jobs and 15 affordable housing units for individuals with disabilities over 55. The Fairfax City Council approved the project and special use permit. The EDA recommends a \$57,198 grant to support the relocation, funded through the Economic Opportunity Fund.

i. Secretary Soleymani motions.

ii. Commissioner Young seconds.

iii. Passes unanimously.

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

Center Director Hill

- a. The Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) is experiencing growth with an increase in interest and new companies joining, including SCH Consulting, OP3 FT, Take Bridge Financial Solutions, and Ellery. This has led to an increase in occupancy from 56% to 64%.
- b. Center Director Hill shared the idea of an advisory board, which is meant to be established by the end of April. Commissioners and Economic Development staff provided feedback on the composition and structure of the board.

12. Operations And Finance Update (15 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Easley

- a. FY26 Budget Update
 - i. The City Manager presented the proposed FY26 budget to the City Council, marking the start of a multistep process that will conclude on May 6, 2025. As part of this process, Economic Development staff will work with the City Finance Department and Economic Program Managers to formalize a proposal based on the approved budget. This proposal will be presented to the FCED Commissioners for approval in June.
 - ii. The Economic Development program budget for FY26 remains the same as FY25, which is positive. However, two employee requests—a full-time position and a Director of Real Estate—were not included in the budget. These may be revisited during final city council discussions.
 - iii. The city is also considering raising the transient occupancy tax, but this would require a charter amendment and is unlikely to occur this fiscal year. Additionally, proposed tax changes, including increases to real estate assessments and the meals tax, may prompt feedback from the business community. Economic Development staff will continue monitoring these updates and keep the community informed.

13. Programs Update (15 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Borwey

- a. Culinary Careers Collaborative
 - i. The pilot program will conclude in June, after which a work group will evaluate its effectiveness and plan for future iterations. The goal is to continue supporting the restaurant community.

b. Business Marketing Grant

- i. The grant program received a strong response, with 24 total applications, 23 of which were from businesses within the city. The program aims to support local businesses by offering them funds for marketing services. Five businesses have been selected, but announcements will be made after contracts are finalized.

c. Fairfax City Restaurant Week

- i. The 2025 Winter Restaurant Week, held from February 24 to March 2 with an extension through March 9, was the largest to date with 33 participating restaurants. This year, restaurants could create their own pricing and menus, moving away from the traditional three-course setup. A new “Let’s Work Together” option expanded participation, and the event was promoted using Shop Mason influencers to target students. The event generated high sales for several restaurants, including Draper's. Commissioners were encouraged to support the event by dining at participating establishments and sharing experiences on social media using @gofairfaxcity and @fairfaxcityrestaurantweek.

d. Small Business Month

- i. The program, running from April 26th to May 31st, will feature weekend events and support local nonprofits. A retail fair will culminate the event. The program is a collaboration with the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce and the Old Town Fairfax Business Association.

14. New Business

All

a. Attendance Policy

- i. Chair Cho introduces the idea of an attendance policy for the Economic Development Authority. Currently, there is no set number of allowable absences, but a proposed limit of two absences for virtual meetings is being considered. This conversation is taking place as many other boards and commissions are addressing attendance issues. It was suggested to have a policy in place for the next fiscal year.

b. Impact of Federal Government Cuts

- i. There are ongoing challenges due to federal government budget cuts, particularly in Fairfax County. About 80,000 federal employees and 200,000 contractors are based in the region, and a

significant portion of these individuals may be affected by layoffs. This has a broader economic impact on the community, with some potential consequences already being felt. Director Bruno mentioned that Fairfax City has approximately 4,000 potentially impacted individuals, and they are conducting two studies to understand the financial effects. One study is being done through the Northern Virginia Economic Development Authority to assess the reduction in spending power, and another with Fairfax County Economic Development Authority to look at specific impacts on Fairfax City.

c. Farewell to Commissioner Young

- i. Commissioner Young was recognized for her leadership and contributions, especially for her work in the Women's Entrepreneur Luncheon. c

15. Public Comment (5 mins)

Public

a. Jennifer Rose- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. Shared positive feedback from restaurants, especially Bill Hamrock and Kelly's, which had a great turnout. Despite uncertain times, people are still eager to dine out, providing optimism for local businesses.
- ii. Highlighted the need for better outreach to inform businesses about Chamber resources. The Chamber's new member marketplace is gaining traction, with 302 out of 360 members activated.
- iii. Announced the Economic Development Summit on April 4, 2025, the guest speaker Secretary of Commerce Karen Merrick on March 27th, and the Nonprofit Expo on March 20th.

b. Bill Pitchford- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. Discussed tax concerns from local businesses, particularly restaurants, and the importance of open communication with the government. Affordable housing efforts, such as the Pathways project, were praised.
- ii. Fairfax Forward, the new 501c3 organization was introduced, with Jennifer Rose leading its development and seeking guidance on grants.

16. Adjourn

Chair Cho

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:25pm.

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