



CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING AGENDA
Wednesday April 2, 2025, 6:00pm
In Person

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

Commissioners Present:

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

Others Present:

Tara Borwey, Assistant Director of Programs, Economic Development Department
Brittany Jones, PR and Marketing Manager, Economic Development Department
Stephanie Gerson, Tourism Specialist, Economic Development Department
Jordan Locke, Economic Development Associate, Economic Development Department
Eddie Hill, Center Director, Mason Enterprise Center

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1. Call to Order *Chair Cho*
 - a. Meeting called to order at 6:07pm.
 2. Adoption of March Meeting Minutes **[VOTE]** *Commissioners*
 - a. Secretary Soleymani motions.
 - b. Vice-Chair Hermann seconds.
 - c. Passes unanimously.
 3. Adoption of April Meeting Agenda **[VOTE]** *Commissioners*
 - a. Secretary Soleymani motions.
 - b. Treasurer McGruder seconds.
 - c. Passes unanimously.
 4. Business Marketing Grant Check Presentation (10 mins) *Assistant Director Borwey*
 - a. Staff provided an overview of the Business Marketing Grant, created to support local businesses in improving their marketing and visibility. A total of 23 applications were received, and the selection process was competitive. The event recognized the first group of grant recipients:
 - i. Break Law, a boutique law firm, will expand digital marketing and client outreach.
 - ii. Great Clips, a locally owned salon, is investing in targeted ads and social media.
 - iii. Mackenzie's Tunes and Tonics, a restaurant and bar, is focused on music and event promotion.
 - iv. Piano Inspired, a music education company, is enhancing online presence and branding.
 - v. Virtual Savvy Assistants is using the grant to improve its website and online ads.
 - b. Jennifer Rose and the CSCC were recognized for their support, with Jennifer noted for encouraging several applicants to apply.
 - c. A group photo with the ceremonial check was taken. The event closed with gratitude to attendees and encouragement for future rounds of the grant, with plans to announce the awardees publicly online.
 5. Introduction of an Amendment to Section 7 of the EDA Bylaws Regarding Commissioner Attendance *Chair Cho*
(proposed in paragraph 11)
 - a. The proposed revision would limit commissioners to no more than two absences per fiscal year and includes provisions allowing for remote participation. It was noted that the amendment aims to support flexibility through virtual options while upholding expectations for active participation.

- b. Discussion followed regarding how the proposed policy differs from current practice. Several commissioners noted their understanding that an attendance policy already existed. Clarification was provided that no formal policy is currently in place.
 - c. Questions were raised about the meaning of the phrase “required to evaluate future membership.” It was explained that the intent is not to enforce automatic removal after two absences but to allow for a case-by-case review, enabling conversations with commissioners based on individual circumstances.
6. Mason Enterprise Center-Fairfax (15 mins w/ Q&A) *Center Director Hill*
- a. General Update on Operations and Financials
 - i. The Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) provided an update on increased activity and interest in its offerings. It was noted that several new inquiries have come in from individuals and businesses previously unaffiliated with the center. This uptick is believed to be partly due to the launch of the new MEC website, which went live in January. Although technical adjustments delayed formal promotion, the site is now contributing to broader awareness of the center’s programs and co-working opportunities.
 - ii. Occupancy and member activity continue to rise. In March, three new leases were signed, effective April 1. This brings the total to seven new companies since January, with three existing companies expanding their footprint. The April occupancy rate currently stands at 68%, with continued leasing conversations underway. Multiple site visits and meetings with prospective tenants are scheduled, including soft landing discussions for companies exploring longer-term engagement.
 - iii. Despite recent challenges in the broader economic environment, particularly in government contracting, MEC has only seen minimal impact. One government contractor exited due to a lost contract, and another scaled back from a dedicated desk. However, most companies remain stable, and some are continuing to grow, including one government contractor expanding in April. It was emphasized that while uncertainty remains, no widespread distress has been observed among current tenants.
 - b. Programs and Events
 - i. MEC hosted a March series focused on business exit planning, which saw strong engagement and consistent attendance. Attendees included mentors and consultants who are now better equipped to support other business owners in this area. Additional events in March included a “Leading in Uncertain Times” session and a spring networking lunch. April and May event planning is in progress, with a brief pause expected in July before activities resume in the fall.
 - ii. Center engagement remains strong, particularly midweek, with regular use of the conference room and shared spaces.
 - c. Marketing and SEO
 - i. There was discussion around search engine visibility. It was noted that MEC’s website does not appear prominently in search results for terms such as “co-working Fairfax.” While some success is being seen organically, leadership acknowledged the importance of search engine optimization (SEO). Final refinements to the website are underway, and SEO efforts will follow. Paid advertising options such as Google Ads are also being evaluated but will be pursued cautiously based on budget and expected return.
 - d. Integration with Arlington Campus and Other Sites
 - i. MEC clarified that while there is no formal MEC location within George Mason’s new Arlington campus building, clients do have access to meeting spaces there, and staff facilitate connections to university resources as appropriate. Although earlier plans envisioned a larger MEC footprint in Arlington, the current allocation is limited. Fairfax remains the primary focus of operations, with approximately 95% of staff time dedicated to that site. Herndon and Springfield require minimal attention due to their self-sufficient models and site management.
 - e. Patriot Pitch Competition Engagement
 - i. The center is exploring future involvement with George Mason University’s Patriot Pitch competition. While a request from a team this year could not be accommodated due to timing,

there is interest in formally supporting future cohorts. Options include providing subsidized space or mentorship opportunities for student ventures, particularly those that continue pursuing their ideas beyond the competition. Staff expressed enthusiasm for engaging students and aligning MEC resources with entrepreneurial activity on campus.

- ii. Discussion included the logistics of award presentations and protocols regarding judges' roles in presenting checks at the competition. MEC staff emphasized the value of visibility at such events and will work with partners to ensure appropriate representation moving forward.

7. Finance and Operations Update (15 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Borwey

a. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Treasurer McGruder

- i. The City Manager has requested a budget reduction of over 19%—nearly \$250,000—which could significantly impact core EDA programming. Potentially affected areas include initiatives funding, Culinary Careers Collaborative, Women's Empowerment events and grants, LIFT and FIG programs, tourism branding, ribbon cuttings, mural installations, marketing and PR support, economic opportunity funding, staff travel, and professional development.
- ii. These programs play a vital role in supporting the Fairfax City business community. While the outlook is challenging, discussions with city leadership continue. Several council members were attending a public budget town hall that evening to gather feedback, with hopes that a balanced solution may preserve key programs.

b. Upcoming Staff Travel

Acting Executive Director on behalf of Assistant Director Easley

- i. Assistant Director Easley recently attended the Virginia Association of Government Procurement (VAGP) conference in Portsmouth, Virginia. The conference provided an opportunity for procurement professionals from across the state to share insights and strategies. Attendance at the event supports the maintenance of the Virginia Contracting Associate Certification, allowing the EDA to independently procure goods and services up to \$100,000. Mr. Easley will also participate in the University of Virginia's LEAD program in Charlottesville from April 5–11. This leadership development initiative is covered by the city's HR budget and does not impact the EDA budget.

c. Chief Economic Development Officer Meeting – COG *Acting Executive Director on behalf of Director Bruno*

- i. Director Bruno will attend the Washington Council of Governments meeting for chief economic development officers in the region. The meeting will take place in late April, and a summary of key takeaways will be shared at the May EDA meeting.

8. Fairfax City Restaurant Week Media Coverage Recap (15 mins w/ Q&A)

PR & Marketing Manager Jones

- a. A recap of Winter 2025 Fairfax City Restaurant Week, which ran from February 24–March 2 and was extended through March 9, was presented. Media placements included features in *Washingtonian*, *DC News Now* (also picked up by *Yahoo! Life*), *Northern Virginia Magazine*, *Virginia Tourism*, *Fairfax Now*, *Fairfax Connection*, and *Patch*. Through a strong relationship with Patch editor Michael O'Connell, 13 unique articles were published highlighting participating restaurants—many of which had not previously been featured. The overall estimated media reach exceeded 10 million impressions.
- b. Live broadcast coverage also increased this year. Fairfax City Restaurant Week was featured on four local news segments, including appearances on Fox 5, ABC7, and WUSA 9. Notably, all four segments included City representatives or partners, which is uncommon for unpaid features. Coverage also included a food delivery appearance on *Elliott in the Morning*, reaching an audience of over 21,000 listeners in the D.C. and Richmond areas.
- c. The importance of these opportunities for local business visibility and described ongoing efforts to support business owners in participating in future media coverage was emphasized. While some businesses are hesitant to appear on camera due to time constraints or discomfort, PR support and mock interviews are available to help them prepare. A recent example highlighted the successful coaching of a local restaurateur who was then featured on-air with colleagues.
- d. Restaurant Week content has also been leveraged across Instagram and other social channels to increase reach. Coordination with Joy Riot has ensured timely sharing of news coverage and video clips, helping

build momentum and visibility across platforms. Engagement with hotel and tourism partners continues to support overnight stays and dining traffic.

- e. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the campaign's success and recognized the value of having in-house PR expertise to coordinate messaging and maximize consultant relationships. Jones's leadership was credited for elevating the City's media presence and strengthening business participation.

9. Tourism Update (15 mins w/ Q&A)

Tourism Specialist Gerson

a. Tourism Strategic Plan Presentation

- i. FCED re-engaged Street Sense, a third-party consultant, to update the 2023 FCED Workplan by incorporating tourism as a ninth pillar and conducting an analysis of its economic impact on Fairfax City. Over the past few months, FCED staff has worked closely with Street Sense to evaluate tourism's role in Fairfax City and explore how FCED can take the lead in future tourism initiatives.
- ii. The Streetsense study revealed that tourism in Fairfax City generates \$249 million annually, accounting for 6.8% of the city's economy. There is potential to increase this figure to 13%, bringing it in line with other cities of similar size. The primary reasons people visit Fairfax City include seeing family and friends, attending George Mason University events, and visiting the Eagle Bank Arena. Old Town Fairfax also draws significant weekend traffic, with 8,000-10,000 visitors on regular weekends, and as many as 25,000 during large events like the Fall Festival.
- iii. A major finding of the study was the lack of a centralized platform for information on events and activities. This makes it difficult for visitors to find things to do in the city. Additionally, there are jurisdictional barriers preventing Fairfax City from benefiting from the county's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT), which other neighboring areas have access to, as well as promotional support from Visit Fairfax, the county's destination marketing organization (DMO).
- iv. To address these challenges, Streetsense proposed several recommendations for enhancing tourism in Fairfax City. A new brand identity and a visitor-focused website were suggested, featuring a citywide events calendar and promoting local attractions, hospitality, and businesses. Streetsense also highlighted the potential for stronger collaboration with George Mason University and the Eagle Bank Arena to raise awareness of Fairfax City businesses. Ideas included offering shuttle services between Old Town and the Arena to encourage visitors to explore the area for longer periods.
- v. A civic pride campaign could also help encourage residents and visitors to promote local businesses, potentially through an "Experience Fairfax City" campaign or awards recognizing outstanding businesses. Additionally, the possibility of transferring visitor center operations from the Fairfax Museum to the FCED was discussed, as it could streamline and enhance tourism efforts.
- vi. One significant recommendation was to consider a 1% increase in the city's TOT to fund local tourism initiatives. This increase could generate \$192,000 annually, helping to support Visit Fairfax's regional and global efforts to promote the area. Streetsense also suggested advocating for improvements to accessibility in the city, including better connections between Old Town and George Mason University, and exploring ways to add gateway signage or promotional banners along Main Street.
- vii. Further, the introduction of temporary retail activation in vacant spaces or public areas in Old Town was proposed, featuring local artisans or George Mason University-related merchandise to encourage visitors to spend more time in the area.
- viii. There are some challenges ahead, notably with implementing the suggested tax increase. While the 1% increase in TOT could help fund the proposed tourism initiatives, it would need to be carefully considered and balanced against the city's budget constraints. Tax increases typically face resistance, though it was pointed out that the tax burden would fall primarily on visitors rather than residents. Additionally, Fairfax City currently lacks significant digital visibility compared to other regions. Despite hosting major events like Restaurant Week, there is no

centralized online platform where potential visitors can learn about activities in the city.

Enhancing this digital presence is a priority.

b. Mural Update

- i. The mural will be located on the second floor of the Ellicott Building, which houses Senbury and Marlo Tattoo. The project is scheduled to take place between May 3rd and May 10th, with the artist's availability being a key factor in this timing, as May offers a busy calendar with events like the GMU graduation, the Asian Festival, the Patriot Ride, Memorial Day weekend, and the Rock the Block event. These events present a challenge regarding the potential for crowds around the artist while she works. However, it's expected that the public's interest in seeing murals being installed will contribute positively to the project's atmosphere.
- ii. The artwork will not feature a color rendering yet, but the approved design (Option 1) is shown in black and white in the report. The final product will be colorful, though, in line with the artist's typical style. The property owners of the building, which include three individuals, are supportive of the mural, and there has been positive cooperation. The city is also handling logistics such as sidewalk closures and permit processing. The process has gone smoothly so far, and there is excitement around the connection between the location and the tattoo parlor.
- iii. As the project approaches, there's interest in documenting the process, with potential plans for creating content for platforms like TikTok to showcase how the mural comes together. Brittany, working with Stephanie, is exploring this possibility.

10. NOVA Economic Development Alliance Update(5 mins w/ Q&A)

Assistant Director Borwey

a. RSA Conference

- i. Brittany will represent both SCED and NEDA at the RSA Cybersecurity Conference in San Francisco, taking place the week of April 28th. At this event, she will promote Virginia as a hub for cybersecurity businesses. While she will be attending as a representative of NEDA, she will also advocate for Fairfax City's interests, engaging in discussions with other regional representatives to steer conversations toward Fairfax City as a potential business location for cybersecurity companies. The conference offers a great opportunity to network with industry professionals and promote the region's business development potential.
- ii.

b. NOVA EDA Brand Launch

- i. NEDA recently launched a new brand and website (NovaEDA.org), which is still in its first phase. Brittany, as chair of the Marketing and Communications Committee, played a significant role in the development of this brand. The new branding has been trademarked with the USPTO, marking an important step for the organization. The website will continue to evolve with a second phase of development underway. NEDA is also working on creating promotional materials such as brochures, retractable banners, and merchandise for upcoming events, particularly the Select USA conference in May. This initiative involves coordinating with various jurisdictions to gather feedback and ensure that all materials align with NEDA's objectives.

c. Leadership Team/Appointment/Employees

- i. The Nova EDA has recently formed a new executive committee, with the following leadership appointments:
 1. Chris Bruno as Treasurer
 2. Patrick Small from the City of Manassas as Chair
 3. Christina Wynn from Prince William County as Vice Chair
 4. Ryan from Arlington County as Secretary
- ii. In addition to the leadership appointments, NEDA is considering the need for additional operational staff as the organization grows. Currently, NEDA relies on volunteers from the member jurisdictions, but there may be future hires to support the increasing demand for NEDA's initiatives.

d. Annual Contribution

- i. NEDA is funded by its member jurisdictions, with contributions based on population. Fairfax City's projected contribution for FY 26 is \$10,000. This contribution helps fund NEDA's operations and initiatives, such as attending the Select USA conference. Despite this relatively small contribution, NEDA's regional collaboration ensures that Fairfax City can access high-value opportunities like Select USA, which would otherwise be too costly to participate in independently. The collective efforts of NEDA's members allow for a more significant regional presence at key events, with costs shared across the participating jurisdictions.

11. New Business

All

a. Fairfax City Factbook

- i. The Fairfax City Factbook has been updated and is now available for review. This resource offers an annual update on the city's data, providing valuable insights into the city's development and future direction. It's a fascinating read for anyone interested in understanding the key trends shaping Fairfax City. The Factbook is available on the same city website, making it easily accessible to the public.

b. Development Projects Update

- i. There has been a significant amount of development activity in Fairfax City, with a particular focus on townhome construction. This is expected to translate into increased revenue for city businesses. Some of the key development projects include the Lota La project, Metro Church, the IOA Campus by George Mason University, and the AT&T property just outside the city, which will be converted into hundreds of townhomes. Additionally, there are even potential developments in the parking lot area, indicating a broader trend toward residential expansion in the city. These projects should be closely monitored as they are likely to have a significant impact on the local economy and community.

c.

12. Public Comment (5 mins)

Public

a. Bill Pitchford- SmarterGrowth

- i. The next public seminar on May 21st will focus on the changing face of retail and its impact on the city, particularly in areas like Old Town, Northfax, Fairfax Circle, and Kent Washington. The seminar will feature a moderated panel and discuss how retail development can offset the rising property taxes expected in the FY 2026 budget.
- ii. There was an emphasis on the need for property owners to consolidate development, especially in smaller areas, to prevent fragmented growth and encourage more cohesive economic activity.
- iii. The speaker highlighted the success and publicity of this year's Restaurant Week, suggesting that tourism is an important area for economic development, and mentioned that the city's tourism plan would play a role in furthering this growth.

b. Jennifer Rose- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. Shared invitation to attend a breakfast event on Friday morning, organized by Fed Writers (FWI), a corporate investor in the chamber. The event will feature development updates and focus on the region's resilience. There are still seats available, and attendees can register through the speaker. Following the breakfast, the Fairfax Village Advisory Group will host the *Home for Life Expo* at the Sherwood Center, a resource fair focused on aging in place, which the chamber has supported for several years.
- ii. Expressed appreciation for a tourism presentation but noted that the chamber was not listed as an external partner, despite its potential contributions. They encouraged further collaboration to help advance the city's efforts, especially beyond Old Town Fairfax, and emphasized that the chamber is a valuable partner despite limited resources.

c. Doug Church- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. Discussed the chamber's efforts in preparing talking points for the upcoming public hearing on the proposed budget. They aim to support economic development initiatives, highlighting

concerns such as the potential meals tax increase and steep property tax hikes (up 150%) that businesses are facing.

- ii. Shared two significant businesses, *A Bite* and UPS, are leaving the area, which is a loss for the community. They expressed hope that economic development could help find new tenants for these spaces.
- iii. Emphasized the importance of balancing messages from the city and businesses, noting that sometimes the interests of businesses and the city may not align. They also offered to assist the Economic Development Office with communication or efforts that may help businesses.

13. Adjourn

Chair Cho

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:59pm.

*****Next Meeting: May 14, 2025*****

6 pm, 10300 Eaton Pl. Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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