



CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday May 14, 2024 6:00 pm

In Person at Economic Development Facility

10306 Eaton Pl, Training Space 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:

Catherine Read, Mayor, City of Fairfax
Chris Bruno, Executive 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, Programs Manager, Economic Development Department
Brittany Jones, PR and Marketing Manager, Economic Development Department
Jordan Locke, FCED Associate, Economic Development Department
Monika Blakely, Programs Associate, Economic Development Department
Tatjana Mara, Accounts Support Specialist, Economic Development Department
Silvia Pulino, Director, Frank J. Guarini School of Business
Jonathan Aberman, Visiting Executive Entrepreneur and Strategic Advisor, Frank J. Guarini School of Business
Nina Lange, FCED Fellow, John Cabot University
Mario Di Nicola, FCED Fellow, John Cabot University
Samuele Nusca-Dagon, FCED Fellow, John Cabot University

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| 1. Call to Order | Chair Cho |
| a. Meeting called to order at 6:00pm. | |
| 2. Adoption of May Meeting Agenda [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Vice Chair Hermann seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 3. Adoption of April Meeting Minutes [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Treasurer McGruder seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 4. Adoption of an Amendment to Section 7 of the EDA Bylaws Regarding Commissioner Attendance
(proposed in paragraph 11) [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Commissioner Feenstra seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 5. Consideration for Retroactive Approval regarding REOF \$5M return to City [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Soleymani motions. | |
| b. Vice Chair Hermann seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 6. Formation of Nominating Committee for FY26 EDA Officers (5 mins) | Commissioners |
| a. Vice Chair Hermann nominates himself. | |
| 7. JCU Fellows Presentation (35 mins w/ Q&A) | Acting Business Investment Manager Spittell |

- a. The Fairfax City Economic Development Office (FCEDO) presented the outcomes of a collaborative fellowship with students from John Cabot University (JCU) in Rome. The initiative emerged in response to increasing interest from Italian entities in Northern Virginia as a viable business destination. The fellowship aimed to develop a proactive and strategic approach to attracting Italian investment to Fairfax City.
- b. Background and Partnership Development
 - i. Recognizing Italy's interest in Northern Virginia, the city partnered with JCU to create a foundation for long-term economic engagement. The partnership was made possible in part through a connection with Jonathan Aberman, a regional economic development expert and executive-in-residence at JCU. He highlighted JCU's unique role as an American-accredited institution in Italy and praised its exceptional students for their global perspective.
 - ii. Dr. Silvia Pulino, a professor at JCU, emphasized the university's international values and educational philosophy, which align well with Fairfax City's ethos. She expressed gratitude for the partnership, noting its alignment with the university's mission to develop globally competent professionals.
- c. Student Research and Strategy Development
 - i. Three students, Nina, Samuel, and Mario, presented their comprehensive research and deliverables. Their work focused on foreign direct investment trends, marketing strategies, and building trust-based international relationships.
 - ii. Key recommendations included:
 - 1. Branding Initiatives: Positioning Fairfax City as a "walker's paradise" to appeal to business owners relocating with families; launching a Fairfax Italian Festival; incorporating global branding, such as using the Italian flag in promotional materials.
 - 2. Digital Tools: Proposing "FactFinder," an AI-driven web feature to streamline access to relevant information for foreign businesses.
 - 3. Outreach Tactics: Creating international materials like a "Fairfax Global Report" and an Italian-focused value proposition document.
 - 4. Connection Strategies: Establishing a sister city in Italy, engaging with Innovit (Italy's innovation hub), collaborating with Italian banks, founding an Italian cultural institute, and engaging with Italian business organizations such as Confindustria and the Italian Trade Agency.
 - iii. A brochure, developed in collaboration with Sweet Science (a D.C.-based marketing firm), was presented as a key deliverable. The brochure emphasizes Fairfax City's strengths in relationship-building, community integration, and tailored support for businesses. It aims to differentiate Fairfax City from larger, more saturated markets by highlighting its supportive ecosystem for small and medium enterprises. The brochure's tagline, "You don't have to be big to play big," reflects this message.
 - iv. The students attended the SelectUSA Investment Summit, where they engaged with international investors and U.S. economic development organizations. Mario provided insights from the event, emphasizing its importance in understanding how strategic investments drive growth. The summit validated many of the fellowship's proposals and helped solidify relationships with potential Italian investors.
- d. Questions and Commissioner Feedback
 - i. Commissioners praised the students' professionalism and the tangible outcomes of their work. Commissioner Paley commended the quality and scope of the research and asked about the students' process. The students described extensive interviews, literature reviews, and collaborative research with Fairfax City officials and international stakeholders.

- ii. Commissioners and FCED staff inquired about next steps and potential expansion. The students suggested:
 - 1. Direct outreach to identified Italian companies using the brochure.
 - 2. Pursuing practical implementation of proposals such as sister city partnerships.
 - 3. Supporting Italian startups through programs in collaboration with local institutions like George Mason University.
 - iii. The value of investing in such fellowships over traditional consulting, citing both the depth of engagement and deliverables was emphasized. It was noted that this was Fairfax's first return to the SelectUSA summit in seven years and attributed much of that participation to the fellowship team's efforts.
 - iv. Assistant Director Easley asked about future use of the brochure. Director Pulino confirmed it had already been distributed at the summit and would continue to be used in outreach efforts. Plans are underway to involve future JCU students in extending these connections from Italy.
- 8. JCU Proclamation (10 mins) Mayor Read
 - a. The Mayor presented Nina Lange, Mario Di Nicola, and Samuele Nusca-Dagon with a proclamation acknowledging the completion of the John Cabot University- Fairfax City Economic Development Fellowship.
- 9. Director's Update on Mason Korea Trip with Secretary Soleymani (15 mins w/ Q&A) Executive Director Bruno
 - a. Secretary Soleymani, from the Costello College of Business, and Executive Director Bruno visited the Mason Korea campus in Incheon and reported being impressed by its size, organization, and alignment with George Mason University's academic standards. During the visit, they held several productive meetings and showcased Fairfax City's economic assets, including In Startup Park, the Korean Data Agency, the Seoul FinTech Lab, and the Global Digital Innovation Network.
 - b. There was notable interest from Korean partners in the City of Fairfax's Economic Development Authority (EDA), particularly in its active support for entrepreneurship and small business outreach, both locally and internationally. The Mason Enterprise Center was highlighted as a potential soft-landing spot for international companies exploring U.S. expansion, and follow-up efforts are expected to increase workload for the city's business investment team.
 - c. The trip underscored the value of collaboration between the university and the city in attracting global talent and investment. South Korea's environment is particularly conducive to public-private partnerships, and several Korean entities have already expressed interest in continuing the dialogue, with potential support from provincial funding sources.
 - d. Students at Mason Korea follow the same academic curriculum as those in Fairfax and spend one year on the main campus, contributing to the local economy during their stay. The campus has grown significantly from 40 to over 1,000 students, the majority of whom are business majors, with additional programs in conflict analysis, government policy, and engineering. Secretary Soleymani clarified that Mason Korea is a fully accredited extension of George Mason University, not an independent Korean institution.
- 10. Finance and Operations Update (15 mins w/ Q&A) Assistant Director Easley
 - a. Treasurer's Report Treasurer McGruder
 - i. Treasurer McGruder reported that of the \$1.265 million allocated by the city, \$763,000 had been spent through April, leaving approximately \$500,000 unspent. While most programs are on track with their budgets only around \$200,000 is expected to remain by year-end and may be rolled over. The goal is to meet the 15% fund balance threshold, and the treasurer expressed confidence in achieving this.
 - b. Introduction of FY Audit Contracting with Cherry Bekaert
 - i. FCED Staff is moving forward with re-engaging the auditing firm Cherry Bekaert for a new three-year agreement starting at \$30,000, with \$2,000 increases in each of the next two years and

an option to extend for an additional three years on one-year terms. A solicitation for new banking services will also begin, with updates and approvals expected at the June meeting.

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

Assistant Director Borwey

a. Small Business Month

- i. As part of Small Business Month, the City is running a new month-long program in collaboration with the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce and the Old Town Fairfax Business Association, featuring 19 participating businesses. The program includes weekly charitable drives and culminates in a public event called *Fair on the Square* on May 31st, where 13 businesses will offer demonstrations and classes. Marketing has been managed by consultants Joy Riot, and the city launched a dedicated website, ShopFairfaxCity.com (FFXCity.com), to promote deals and events.

b. Shop Mason Influencer Recap

Associate Blakely

- i. The City also partnered with George Mason University's Shop Mason influencer program to promote local businesses and city programs to students via social media. Ten student influencers participated, sharing content such as reels, stories, and posts on events like Restaurant Week, the Chocolate Lovers Festival, and Small Business Month. Students were selected for their reach (minimum 1,000 followers), campus involvement, and diversity, and were compensated through a flex card system that also encourages local spending. The program is set to continue into the fall with additional events and promotions.

12. PR and Marketing Update (10 mins w/ Q&A)

PR & Marketing Manager Jones

a. RSA Conference

- i. The City's participation in the RSA Conference was made possible through its annual \$10,000 contribution to the Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance (NOVA EDA), which provides access to key economic development opportunities. A City staff member attended the conference in San Francisco as a representative of NOVA EDA, in coordination with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP). As the largest cybersecurity conference in the world, RSA presented a strategic opportunity to promote Northern Virginia's status as a premier tech hub, recently recognized as the #1 tech hub in North America by *Site Selection Magazine*.
- ii. The primary objective was to market Northern Virginia's highly skilled talent pool and business-friendly environment to potential investors and international companies. Six meetings were coordinated by VEDP, with a strong showing from international prospects, three of which were from Australia. One of the companies was already engaged with Fairfax County Public Schools, and VEDP is managing follow-up communications to determine potential location preferences. If prospects express interest in Northern Virginia, the City will be re-engaged to support next steps. Although many RSA participants indicated a preference for virtual operations, the targeted meetings held in San Francisco were productive and promising.

b. SelectUSA Conference

- i. The City participated in the SelectUSA Investment Summit, which concluded recently. PR and Marketing Manager Jones represented NOVA EDA and served in a leadership capacity as Chair of the Alliance's Marketing and Communications Committee. In this role, she oversaw the development of a new, professionally designed NOVA EDA booth in collaboration with a graphic design firm. This marked a significant upgrade from previous years, replacing minimal setup with a vibrant, eye-catching display that featured regional branding and collateral materials including brochures, tote bags, water bottles, and power banks.
- ii. The improved booth drew strong foot traffic and served as an effective conversation starter. Over 30 business meetings were scheduled through a consultant retained by NOVA EDA, who also provided on-site support and is handling all post-event follow-up. Early feedback from other NOVA EDA representatives suggests that many of the meetings were highly productive. The City

will be kept informed if any of the leads express interest in establishing operations in Fairfax or the broader Northern Virginia region. Additionally, the City's presence at the event helped elevate its brand among international business leaders, reinforcing the value of its involvement in regional economic development efforts.

13. New Business

All

14. Public Comment (5 mins)

Public

a. Bill Pitchford- SmarterGrowth

- i. The next public seminar on development is scheduled for May 21st, focusing on the changing retail landscape and its impact on Fairfax City. The seminar will be a moderated panel discussing future retail development in key areas such as Old Town, Northfax, Fairfax Circle, and Camp Washington. One panelist position remains open, and efforts are ongoing to recruit a retail development or real estate expert.
- ii. Expressed growing concern regarding the City Council's recent decision to eliminate several planned trails, including the Country Club Hills Connector, Pickett Connector, and George Snyder Trail. These trails are critical for multimodal access to activity centers and smaller area plans. Stakeholders are advocating for the council to reconsider, emphasizing the long-term negative effects on economic development.

b. Jennifer Rose- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. The 2025-2026 Community Guide and Membership Directory were recently published and distributed. This collaborative effort highlights things to see and do in Fairfax City and incorporates a broader regional perspective including Fairfax County.
- ii. Shared upcoming participation in the ETO American Chamber of Commerce gala, which includes a speaking engagement aimed at supporting the formation of local business chambers. Continued efforts emphasize collaboration between chambers and economic development authorities to support local businesses, especially during challenging economic times.
- iii. Ongoing engagement with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Greater Washington Board of Trade is focused on advocating for tariff exemptions for small businesses (defined as having 500 or fewer employees). Efforts include preparing communications and potential op-eds to influence federal policy and support the local business community.

c. Doug Church- Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. Economic development staff continue to foster international relationships, including mentoring a local entrepreneur originally from Zambia with connections in Greenland, Brazil, and Germany. These efforts aim to generate new ideas and business opportunities.
- ii. Appreciation was expressed for the professionalism and dedication of the economic development staff under strong leadership. The importance of economic development as a city priority was reiterated, with a commitment to innovation and adaptability to ensure business success. The meeting was adjourned with thanks to all participants.

15. Adjourn

Chair Cho

a. Meeting adjourned at 7:47pm.

*****Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 3, 2025 *****

6pm, 10300 Eaton Place Small Conference Room Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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