



CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
WORK SESSION AGENDA
Monday June 16, 2025, 9:00am
Virtual- Via Teams

<https://bit.ly/EDAWorkSession>

Commissioners Present:

Chair Mitchell Cho
Vice Chair Jeff Hermann
Treasurer Dawn McGruder

Others Present:

Chris Bruno, Executive Director, Economic Development Department
Matthew Easley, Assistant Director of Operations and Finance, Economic Development Department
Dominica Wambold, MEC Consultant, Economic Development Department
Jordan Locke, FCED Associate, Economic Development Department
Eddie Hill, Director, Mason Enterprise Center
Paula Sorrell, Associate Vice President, Mason Enterprise Center

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1. Call to Order Chair Cho
 - a. Meeting called to order at 9:13am.
 2. MEC Fairfax Advisory Board Assistant Director Easley/MEC Consultant Wambold
 - a. Chair Cho opened the discussion by affirming the value of the Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) as a city resource and its importance to the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Chair noted a personal connection to the center and expressed a commitment to supporting its continued success. MEC Consultant Wambold provided an overview of the charter's development, explaining that the proposed advisory board stems from operational and occupancy challenges that prompted collaborative evaluation by GMU, the City, and FCED over the past year. The board would operate under the existing 2021 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with the goal of improving coordination and accountability while respecting the roles defined by the MOU.
 - b. Purpose and Scope of the Advisory Board
 - i. MEC Consultant Wambold outlined a phased approach to implementation. Phase One is intended to establish the board and initiate a six-month stabilization period. Subsequent phases will focus on ongoing operations, performance monitoring, and adaptive governance. Assistant Director Easley elaborated on the draft charter's components, noting that while the purpose and scope are largely complete, elements related to decision-making processes and conflict resolution remain under development. He clarified that the advisory board would serve in a non-binding, recommendation-only capacity, and that any formal actions would require EDA authorization.
 - ii. Paula Sorrell, Associate Vice President of the MEC, expressed appreciation for the effort behind the draft but noted that it reads more like a legal document than a typical advisory board charter. She confirmed that the draft had been submitted to GMU legal counsel for further review.

- c. There was conversation regarding whether MEC tenants should participate in the advisory board and, if so, in what capacity. While concerns were raised regarding potential conflicts of interest and turnover, several members supported tenant involvement, particularly from those actively engaged in the center's operations. The general consensus favored including tenants in an advisory, non-voting capacity during Phase One.
- d. Commissioners affirmed the importance of including FCED staff on the board, noting their operational knowledge and full-time engagement. This representation was viewed as critical for ensuring informed and consistent input in board proceedings. In the interest of efficiency and expedited progress, commissioners supported a smaller "tiger team" for Phase One, consisting of one representative each from GMU, MEC, FCED staff, and the EDA Commission. Additional input from tenants and sponsored programs would be included in an advisory capacity. Commissioners agreed this structure would allow for quicker implementation and direct support to MEC leadership. The board discussed including external advisors or subject-matter experts on a case-by-case basis, particularly for technical or strategic issues. These individuals would not hold voting authority but could provide valuable insight.
- e. Commissioners emphasized the importance of clearly outlining the advisory board's role in defining KPIs. The board should not duplicate existing reporting mechanisms but instead focus on measuring the success of the Phase One action plan.
- f. Paula proposed a strategic review of how Mason Enterprise Network programs might be better integrated with MEC Fairfax. The Commission supported this idea, and Dominica agreed to compile a list of existing programs and assets for future consideration. Several commissioners raised the potential for rebranding the MEC to clarify its function to prospective users. "Mason Business Incubator" and "Fairfax Innovation Center" were among the suggestions. It was agreed that evaluating the center's name and branding could be incorporated into the advisory board's responsibilities.
- g. Commissioners discussed the need to distinguish between responsibilities specific to Phase One and those intended for subsequent phases. Members agreed that recommendations should focus on short-term goals, with a clear structure for transitioning into long-term governance. It was agreed that while the advisory board would oversee execution of the Phase One action plan, ultimate authority and accountability would remain with the EDA. The board may recommend changes if milestones are not met, but implementation decisions would remain with the governing bodies defined in the MOU.
- h. Before concluding, the group summarized key takeaways: establishing a four-member core team for Phase One, including tenant and program input in an advisory capacity, clarifying roles and expectations, and avoiding duplication of existing operations. MEC Consultant Wambold will revise the charter to reflect Phase One composition and clarify distinctions between phase-specific and standing provisions.

3. FY26 EDA Budget

Assistant Director Easley

- a. Staff reported that approximately \$66,000 in reductions were identified across the proposed FY25 budget. Commissioners recognized the difficulty of making these cuts and praised staff for thoughtful decision-making. The Chair expressed concern about reductions to the Executive Director's budget, noting the importance of maintaining flexibility and capacity for leadership functions.

- b. The reduction in funding for ribbon cuttings was discussed. Chair Cho emphasized the value of these events in building early relationships with new businesses. Assistant Director Easley clarified that savings were achieved through surplus inventory, including branded ribbon purchased in the current fiscal year. While the budget was reduced by \$1,000, the program remains operational. It was noted that event frequency may decline slightly in response to market conditions, and additional marketing support for these events is already integrated within existing contracts and departmental budgets.
- c. Commissioners questioned the \$61,000 allocation for a new tourism website. Several members expressed concern about the cost and asked whether the investment would deliver meaningful visibility for the city's primary tourism drivers. Director Bruno responded that the expenditure is in line with typical website development costs and explained that the site is part of a broader strategic branding effort. It was also noted that the website may be necessary for Fairfax to qualify as a Designated Marketing Organization (DMO), unlocking additional state and regional tourism funds. Commissioners requested more information on website goals and performance metrics, to be provided at a future meeting.
- d. Reviewing the \$24,000 allocation for Placer.ai, a location-based data analytics platform, Assistant Director Easley clarified that although FCED is currently funding the subscription, the platform is being administered through city procurement, and multiple departments are utilizing its services. A cost-sharing model is being developed to reduce FCED's portion of the expense. Commissioners supported the continued use of the tool but requested that future budgets reflect shared usage where possible.
- e. The proposed \$50,000 allocation for GMU partnerships, reduced by \$10,000 from the prior year, was discussed. Assistant Director Easley explained that the funding supports research studies, pitch competitions, and other collaborative initiatives with the Costello College of Business. The reduction would not significantly impact active projects and was based on a revised proposal from CIE. Commissioners asked for clarity on specific deliverables and expressed interest in maintaining strong connections to student engagement and entrepreneurial pipelines.
- f. Economic Development Initiatives and Opportunity Fund
 - i. Commissioners raised concerns regarding the near depletion of the Economic Development Initiatives Fund and the increasing reliance on the Economic Opportunity Fund (EOF). Assistant Director Easley confirmed that the prior fund was composed of pandemic-related allocations that have now been exhausted. Current programs, such as the façade improvement program and Lyft incentives, will need to draw from the EOF.
 - ii. There was agreement that a resolution should be introduced to authorize the use of EOF for FY25, but also a shared concern about longer-term sustainability. Commissioners debated whether to fully deplete the EOF to demonstrate program success or to preserve a portion of the fund to ensure flexibility in FY27 and beyond. Staff noted that pending business attraction deals may require near-term EOF support in the range of \$25,000 to \$50,000 each.
 - iii. Commissioners emphasized the need for clear communication with City Council regarding the status of the EOF and the risk of losing capacity to support business investment. Director Bruno

encouraged commissioners to consider drafting a memo to the Mayor and Council to advocate for future replenishment.

- iv. The Women's Entrepreneur Empowerment Luncheon will be maintained through a CFCC neighborhood and economic development grant, although with reduced involvement from FCED. However, the separate Women's Empowerment Grant has been discontinued. Staff noted that this decision allowed the marketing microgrant program to be retained.
- g. A new \$35,000 allocation for an external audit was added to the FY25 budget. To accommodate this requirement, adjustments were made in other areas. Staff also signaled the need for future discussions regarding personnel costs, as the share of the budget supporting staff has grown in comparison to direct program expenditures. While no immediate decisions were made, commissioners were advised that a more detailed conversation may be needed in the coming months.
- h. The Chair and commissioners expressed appreciation for the thorough and thoughtful approach taken by staff in developing the budget under tight constraints. Staff were commended for making difficult but necessary trade-offs. It was agreed that a follow-up memo to Council would be drafted to accompany the resolution authorizing the use of EOF funds.

4. Adjourn

Chair Cho

- a. Meeting adjourned at 10:35am.

*****Next Meeting: July 2, 2025*****

6 pm, 3565 Chain Bridge Rd, Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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