



CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING AGENDA
Wednesday October 1, 2025 6:00pm
In Person at Economic Development Offices

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

Commissioners Present:

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

Others Present:

Brooke Hardin, Interim Director, Economic Development Department
Matthew Easley, Interim CEO/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
Stephanie Gerson, Tourism Specialist, Economic Development Department
Monika Blakely, Programs Associate, Economic Development Department
Liz Keller, Business Investment 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 Hermann |
| a. Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m. | |
| 2. Adoption of October Meeting Agenda [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Cho motions. | |
| b. Treasurer McGruder seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 3. Adoption of September Meeting Minutes [VOTE] | Commissioners |
| a. Secretary Cho motions. | |
| b. Commissioner Feenstra seconds. | |
| c. Passes unanimously. | |
| 4. Welcome Commissioner Michelle Nguyen | Chair Hermann |
| a. Chair Hermann welcomed Commissioner Michelle to the Authority. Commissioners expressed their enthusiasm, noting that her appointment filled the Authority's final vacancy. | |

- b. Commissioner Michelle introduced herself, sharing that she is the owner of Yoga Commons, a small yoga studio in the city. She expressed her excitement about serving on the Authority, stating that she looks forward to learning and contributing over her four-year term. Commissioners welcomed her warmly.
5. A Resolution Recognizing the Economic Opportunity Fund as Committed for Unplanned and Strategic Program and/or Incentive Creation **[VOTE]**
 - a. Assistant Director Easley introduced a resolution to formally recognize and commit both the Economic Opportunity Fund and Real Estate Opportunity Fund as committed funds within the Authority's financial structure.
 - b. He explained that during the FY24 audit, the Authority was reported to have an unrestricted fund balance of approximately \$3.6 million. The proposed resolution ensures those funds are properly categorized as committed, clarifying that they are already allocated for strategic and programmatic use. This adjustment will allow future audits to accurately reflect these funds as restricted and committed, offering a clearer financial picture.
 - c. The motion to adopt the resolution passed unanimously.
6. Mason Enterprise Center- Fairfax (15 mins w/ Q&A) Center Director Hill
 - a. The MEC welcomed a new virtual soft landings company from India and continued to show strong traction in this program. Lumature, a second company founded by a former French lab tenant, joined the center and is planning to expand to office space within six months. A photography firm relocated from Springfield's Community Business Partnership after its closure, joining as a virtual member.
 - b. Director Hill reported that overall occupancy continues to improve, rising from 73% in July to 77% in October and expected to exceed 80% by November. Several existing companies have expanded from virtual memberships to dedicated desks or offices. He also highlighted referrals from the City's business development team, noting the positive collaboration with Marie and Brittany on prospective clients.
 - c. Hill concluded with a case study on *Vianna*, a virtual soft landings company from the UK. The company offers a real-time language translation app for healthcare settings and has demonstrated strong initiative by incorporating in Delaware, registering in Virginia, and obtaining a Fairfax City business license. Their actions have positioned them for deeper integration into Virginia's business ecosystem. Commissioners commended the company's commitment and noted the success as a model for future international soft-landing clients.
 - d. Assistant Director Easley added that other jurisdictions, including Arlington, had also courted Vianna, but the company chose Fairfax City underscoring the value of the city's entrepreneurial support ecosystem.

7. Business Investment Update (10 mins w/ Q&A)

Senior Assistant Director Spittell

a. Welcome to Liz Keller

- i. Assistant Director Spittell welcomed Liz Keller, newly hired as Business Investment Specialist, and Lena [Last Name], the department's Business Investment Intern. Marie noted the team's immediate impact in improving responsiveness, organization, and outreach. She emphasized that the department's focus remains on service quality and measurable results.
- ii. Business Specialist Keller introduced herself, noting her eight years of experience in USAID-funded international economic development projects and prior work with Virginia's Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs). Commissioners welcomed her and acknowledged the value of her project management and international trade expertise.

b. John Cabot Fellowship – Fall 2025 and Spring 2026

- i. Shared updates on the second iteration of the John Cabot University Fellowship Program. Three new fellows will participate remotely during the fall semester. The program will continue to build on prior research mapping potential international attraction opportunities, particularly in Italy and broader European markets. The fellows are guided by Professor Sylvia Polio, who will serve in a higher-level supervisory role, supported by a faculty mentor specializing in branding and marketing.
- ii. A new structure and syllabus are being implemented to streamline meetings and improve outcomes. In spring 2026, three additional fellows will travel to Fairfax for on-site collaboration. Although they will not attend SelectUSA due to academic conflicts, they will focus on developing country-specific engagement plans and partnerships with international business associations and chambers. Commissioners commended the ongoing progress of the program.

8. Finance and Operations Update (10 mins w/ Q&A)

Interim CEO / Assistant Director Easley

a. Adoption FY25 Rollover **[VOTE]**

- i. The Commissioners reviewed the FY25 rollover proposal initially presented at the September meeting. Approximately 19 percent of unspent funds will carry forward into FY26. The proposal aims to strengthen the Economic Opportunity Fund and align resources with planned initiatives. A motion was made and seconded to adopt the FY25 rollover proposal as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Audit Completion and Delivery

- i. Shared an update on the FY25 audit, noting the process was completed smoothly and ahead of schedule. The audit contained no material findings. One non-material item was identified related to a late submission of a Statement of Economic Interest form for a newly appointed commissioner. The management discussion and analysis (MD&A) was reviewed and approved by both the City's CFO and the auditors. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the clean audit results and commended staff for completing the process efficiently.

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

Assistant Director Borwey

a. ShopMason

- i. Programs Associate Blakely provided a brief presentation on the collaboration between the Economic Development Department and George Mason University's Shop Mason program. The initiative engages student influencers from varying majors and levels of campus involvement to promote Fairfax City's local businesses, programs, and events. For the current semester, nine student influencers are participating, seven of whom are new to the program. Each participant receives monthly promotional materials contingent on consistent engagement through social media activity. Businesses are encouraged to contribute items for inclusion in influencer campaign boxes to increase local exposure.
- ii. This semester's promotional campaigns will include Restaurant Week, Fall Festival, Rock the Block, Small Business Saturday, and Holiday Shopping, alongside ongoing coverage of ribbon cuttings and local business support initiatives.
- iii. Monica shared examples from a recent student photoshoot and noted the positive engagement the campaign continues to generate across social media platforms.

b. Local Shopping Initiative

- i. The program will extend beyond *Small Business Saturday*, evolving into a season-long campaign encouraging residents to shop locally throughout the holidays. Participating businesses will be promoted through the *Flex Card* marketing campaign, with an option to purchase additional visibility. The *Buy-One-Get-One 40% Off Flex Card* promotion will return, given its success in driving participation in previous years.
- ii. Assistant Director Borwey revealed the updated Flex Card logo, created in collaboration with the design team. The refreshed brand integrates the storefront imagery used in *Small Business Month* materials to establish cohesive, year-round recognition. She also shared the team's intent to identify

new opportunities to promote the Flex Card program beyond the holiday season, helping sustain momentum and visibility for participating small businesses.

c. FCRW

- i. Delivered a comprehensive report on Fairfax City Restaurant Week, noting strong participation and encouraging results from post-event surveys:
 1. 31 restaurants participated, with an average range of 27–32 participants each year.
 2. 50% of participating businesses reported seeing new customers, and 67% noted that their patron count more than doubled during the event period.
 3. 98% of surveyed patrons stated they would return to participating restaurants.
- ii. While the ten-day format remains popular with diners, some restaurants reported logistical challenges related to extended participation, such as food ordering and menu planning. Staff continue to refine the program’s structure and communication approach to ensure consistent participation and customer experience.
- iii. Commissioners discussed the possibility of using meals tax data to assess financial impact and suggested exploring percentage-based reporting from participating businesses in future iterations. Staff confirmed that meals tax data is typically available two months after the event due to reporting timelines, but will explore methods for earlier insights. Overall, commissioners and staff agreed that Restaurant Week remains a successful and high-impact program, contributing to measurable increases in restaurant visibility and overall meals tax growth.

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

PR and Marketing Manager Jones

a. Q1 FCED Press Recap

- i. Seven press releases were published during the quarter, covering topics including leadership transitions, George Mason partnerships, the reopening of FIG, Area 2 Farms’ relocation to Fairfax Circle, and Sweet Science’s arrival at the Mason Enterprise Center.
- ii. The campaign generated 182 unique media mentions and one television segment on *Fox 5 DC* featuring Area 2 Farms.
- iii. Both *Area 2 Farms* and *Sweet Science* received prominent coverage in *The Washington Business Journal*, *Patch*, *Fairfax Now*, and other regional outlets.

b. Upcoming Ad Partnerships

- i. Odyssey Radio (106.7 The Fan)

1. A three-month advertising campaign (October–December) includes 30-second and 15-second radio spots, as well as live sports updates. The ads emphasize Fairfax City’s community and business advantages with the tagline: “*Fairfax City, where innovation meets community and every business has home field advantage.*” Future iterations will feature Fairfax City business owners as spokespersons to serve as authentic brand ambassadors.
- ii. Washington Business Journal
 1. Two native articles will highlight Fairfax City businesses and programs, remaining online indefinitely with dashboard analytics tracking engagement. Each article will generate approximately 75,000 impressions and be featured on the homepage and daily newsletter, reaching 190,000 subscribers. The marketing team negotiated a reduced total cost of \$15,000, which includes one networking event ticket for staff participation.
- iii. DC News Now (TV and Digital)
 1. A six-month campaign (September–February) includes 15-second and 30-second TV and YouTube commercials at roughly 34,000 monthly impressions. The current ad repurposes video content from *Small Business Month* while new segments featuring local business owners are in development.
- iv. Emphasized that the department’s communications strategy aims to diversify messaging across radio, television, print, and digital outlets ensuring that potential investors, residents, and regional audiences hear directly from Fairfax City businesses. Plans to launch a lead generation webpage on *GoFairfaxCity.com/business* to track engagement and inquiries resulting from these campaigns were also discussed.
- v. Commissioners commended the marketing team’s progress, noting the strong visibility achieved across media outlets and the creative approach to integrating business voices into future campaigns.

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

Tourism Specialist Gerson

a. Z-Card Review

- i. Distributes copies of the updated Fairfax City Z-Card, a compact brochure designed to promote the city and its partners. One side of the Z-Card includes general information about the City of Fairfax, details about George Mason University and the Fairfax City Economic Development Authority (FCEDA), and multiple QR codes linking to *Restaurant Week*, the *Old Town Fairfax Business Association (OTFBA)*, *museums*, *historic sites*, and *city trails*. The reverse side features a map of

Fairfax City, which Dawn noted is particularly useful for distinguishing the city's boundaries from Fairfax County. She emphasized that the map is a key visual tool for visitors and hotel partners, helping them orient guests to attractions and local businesses.

- ii. Shared that Z-Cards have been distributed to all Fairfax City hotels and will also be available at upcoming tabling events. There are also plans to further refine the design to make the map feature more visible and to add new highlights, such as the Fairfax City Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Feenstra expressed appreciation for the tool, explaining that local hotels now include the Z-Cards in welcome bags for group check-ins and distribute them at front desks. Commissioners commended the collaboration between the Economic Development Office and the city's hotels to enhance visitor experience.

b. RFP for Tourism Brand and Marketing Strategy

- i. Reported that the Request for Proposals (RFP) for a new *Tourism Brand and Marketing Strategy* has been posted and is now live. The RFP seeks a firm to help develop a refreshed tourism brand and supporting campaign materials for Fairfax City. The deadline for proposal submissions is November 11, 2025. Tourism Specialist Gerson and Assistant Director Easley will review responses and develop a fair and transparent process for evaluation. She noted that several firms have already submitted questions, and a public Q&A document will be posted to ensure equal access to information for all respondents. Commissioners may be invited to participate in the review process.

c. LOVEworks sign update

- i. Noted that while fabrication had been delayed due to scheduling and resource availability, the project remains active. The current plan is to fabricate the structure through Public Works and apply individualized wraps designed by local artists to each letter. The installation site remains Old Town Hall, and collaboration continues with both the Old Town Fairfax Business Association and the Public Works Department.

d. Parking Wayfinding in Old Town

- i. Discussed recent involvement with the Parking Wayfinding Initiative in Old Town Fairfax in partnership with Tommy Shibuya of the Old Town Fairfax Business Association. The project aims to improve visitor navigation and alleviate the perception of limited parking availability. The team is reviewing existing signage, referencing recommendations from the 2018 Wayfinding Study, and

identifying key areas for new or improved signage. It was emphasized that this effort will enhance the visitor experience and support local businesses by improving access and visibility.

- ii. Commissioners discussed the ongoing parking challenges near the City Library. It was confirmed that outdated signage and visibility issues, such as a sign hidden by landscaping, had been identified as priority concerns in the current review.

e. 2024 Tourism Data from VTC

- i. The Virginia Tourism Corporation's Annual Tourism Data Report had been released and that city-specific data is being summarized into a one-page infographic in collaboration with one of Brittany's consultants. Once finalized, the report will be distributed to commissioners electronically.
- ii. Addressed preliminary discussions regarding potential EDA support for the City's Visitor Center. Tourism Specialist Gerson and Interim Director Hardin recently met with Assistant City Manager Melanie Zip and Interim Director of Historic Resources Megan Leaning to discuss operational challenges at the Visitor Center, which is a *Virginia-certified Welcome Center*. Currently, the center relies on volunteers, who are often unavailable or untrained in tourism engagement. Certification requirements stipulate that the center must remain open at least five days per week with staffed coverage, which is difficult under the current model. EDA staff are exploring whether the Authority could play a greater role in supporting or managing visitor engagement efforts to ensure compliance and enhance the visitor experience.

12. New Business

Commissioners

- a. Commissioner Feenstra revisited a previous discussion regarding the posting of grant opportunities, inquiring whether a centralized platform exists for state or local business grants.
- b. Assistant Director Spitell explained that while Fairfax City maintains a Grants and Resources page on its website and promotes EDA programs via newsletters and social media, there is no centralized statewide database for local grants. She noted that past experience shows posting grants on broader state platforms tends to attract out-of-area applicants, increasing administrative burden without clear local benefit. She emphasized that while staff may explore sharing state-level resources for businesses, EDA grants are best advertised through local networks to maintain manageable application volumes and ensure funds benefit Fairfax City businesses.
- c. Staff are coordinating with Gonah Shapiro, who is leading a regional initiative to improve business resource coordination among Northern Virginia jurisdictions.

- d. Highlighted several new openings and revitalization efforts across the city, including Shake Shack, The Fish, and new retail along Camp Washington. She also referenced the property management team at Regency Centers, which has expressed optimism regarding new leasing activity in that corridor. Commissioners discussed niche businesses such as Reef Escape, a specialty aquarium retailer, and Alley Bubble Tea, emphasizing the importance of promoting unique and local operators that contribute to the city's business diversity.
- e. George Mason University will host World Quantum Day in April 2026, which aligns with growing regional interest in quantum computing and advanced technology sectors. Staff will explore potential collaboration opportunities.

13. Public Comment (5 mins)

Public

a. Bill Pitchford - Smarter Growth

- i. Discussed the recent decision by the City of Alexandria to permanently close the 200 block of King Street to traffic following a successful 10-month pilot program. He expressed support for similar walkability initiatives in Old Town Fairfax, Camp Washington, and Northfax, citing positive impacts on local businesses and revenue.
- ii. He also reiterated Smarter Growth's support for the Willard-Sherwood Community Center, noting that such civic investments directly enhance community engagement and economic vitality.

b. Jennifer Rose – Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce

- i. The Women's Empowerment Luncheon, funded in part through an EDA grant, drew approximately 80 attendees with highly positive feedback and strong survey results.
- ii. Civic Connections, the Chamber's civic engagement series, continues to see strong participation with 32 enrolled in the current cohort. The next session, scheduled for October 8, will focus on community and economic development.
- iii. The program will conclude with a Community Engagement Expo on October 22 at the Sherwood Center, featuring information tables from city boards, commissions, and nonprofits.
- iv. The Chamber will also host the Valor Awards on October 24, recognizing outstanding public safety professionals.
- v. In early November, the Chamber will spotlight veteran-owned and military family-friendly businesses across its social media channels.

14. Adjourn

Chair Hermann

a. Meeting adjourned at 7:42pm.

*****Next Meeting: November 5, 2025*****

6 pm, 10306 Eaton Pl. Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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