CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING AGENDA
February 9, 2026, 7:00pm

In Person at City Hall, 10455 Armstrong st, Fairfax, VA 22030

Commissioners Present:
Chair Jeff Hermann
Treasurer Dawn McGruder
Secretary Michelle Cho
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
Marie Spittell, Senior Assistant Director for Business Investment
Tara Borwey, Assistant Director for Programs and Retail Strategy
Stephanie Gerson, Tourism Specialist, Economic Development Department
Meryam El Gazzah, Economic Development Associate, Economic Development Department

1. Call to Order — Chair Hermann
    a. Chair Hermann called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM
2. Adoption of the February Meeting Agenda **[VOTE]** Commissioners
    a. Secretary Cho Motions
    b. Motion Passes Unanimously
3. Adoption of the January Meeting Minutes **[VOTE]** Commissioners
    a. Secretary Cho Motions
    b. Motion Passes Unanimously
4. MEC Fairfax Update
   Center Director Eddie Hill

a. Hill from the Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) presented a February 2026 update on operations, occupancy, partnerships, and strategic planning.
b. Mason Enterprise Center is Fairfax City's business incubator, supporting early-stage and growth companies through office and lab space, sponsored programs, and connections to capital, talent, and global markets.
c. Occupancy and membership update:
    i. In January 2026, MEC added three new members, including Federal Astro, Point Solutions, and Robot Lab.

ii. Two companies exited due to relocation or business changes.
iii. Current availability stands at four offices and two labs, with multiple prospective tenants in discussion.
iv. Overall occupancy increased to approximately 88% by the end of January 2026.

d. Financial performance:
    i. MEC's financial position continues to improve as occupancy increases.
    ii. The Center is approaching a zero-burn rate, anticipated at approximately 95% occupancy.

e. Soft landings and international pipeline:
    i. MEC continues to expand its soft landings program, shifting from one-off companies to partnerships with organizations that bring multiple international firms to Virginia.
    ii. An agreement with a Taiwanese government-affiliated entity positions MEC as a potential U.S. landing site for Taiwanese companies.
    iii. Additional group-based international partners are in discussion, raising near-term space capacity concerns.

f. Marketing and visibility efforts:
    i. MEC implemented expanded marketing initiatives, including website enhancements, branded collateral, banners, newsletters, and content creation across multiple platforms.
    ii. Key outcomes in 2025 included increased awareness, higher occupancy, and new tenant and mentor referrals, including through partnerships such as 1 Million Cups Fairfax.
    iii. A new content strategy for 2026 will emphasize company success stories, soft landings, and the regional economic development ecosystem.

g. Sponsored programs and economic impact:
    i. Sponsored programs housed at MEC—including Mason SBDC, Virginia APEX Accelerator, and the Women's Business Center of Northern Virginia, continue to deliver the majority of the Center's economic impact.
    ii. These programs provide critical services including early-stage business support, government contracting assistance, international business development, and capital access.
    iii. Lease agreements for sponsored programs covering 18 offices are scheduled for renewal at the end of the fiscal year.

h. Strategic considerations and next steps:
    i. Staff and commissioners discussed the need for contingency planning due to high occupancy, including potential short-term expansion options within or adjacent to the existing campus.
    ii. Emphasis was placed on preserving space availability for soft landings companies.
    iii. Commissioners expressed interest in site tours of the Mason Enterprise Center.
    iv. Staff will continue internal discussions and return with potential space and expansion strategies.

5. Business Investment Update

Senior Assistant Director, Marie Spittell

a. Spittell provided an update on business investment initiatives, international engagement, and internship programs
b. VEDP International Team visit to NOVA, MEC:
    ii. Staff participated in a VDP International roadshow across Europe, including Vienna and Graz (Austria), Bratislava (Slovakia), and Ljubljana (Slovenia), to promote Fairfax City as a business destination.
    iii. Engagement included educational sessions for companies, introductions to service providers, and relationship-building with VDP and SelectUSA counterparts.
    iv. VDP Europe and Taiwan offices were actively involved, with outreach and lead management coordinated between VDP and Fairfax City staff.
    v. Staff emphasized the availability of free office space at the Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) for incoming businesses, with the official program launch imminent.

c. John Cabot Fellows internship program:
    i. Fairfax City is entering the third cohort of John Cabot Fellows interns, selected through a competitive process.
    ii. Interns are supporting the development of a landing page for international companies relocating to Fairfax City and assisting with LinkedIn campaigns targeting U.S. and European markets.
    iii. Intern engagement is guided by faculty advisors, currently Professor Alessandro Ferry, with input on messaging and content strategy.
    iv. Fellows will participate in site visits and presentations to Commissioners, enhancing transparency and reporting.
d. SelectUSA Central Europe Roadshow with VEDP/ Marketing and outreach highlights:
    i. Fairfax City Economic Development continues to layer MEC resources with additional programs, such as story maps and promotional content, to strengthen the City's investment narrative.
    ii. LinkedIn campaigns targeting key markets, including Silicon Valley and Europe, have been piloted successfully, with plans to expand further.
    iii. Staff is actively cultivating networks and relationships with international organizations, embassies, and commercial service providers to maximize outreach and resource access.
e. Strategic planning and next steps:
    a. Staff is leveraging international engagement, internships, and marketing tools to attract investment, support incoming businesses, and enhance the City's global visibility.
    b. Opportunities to implement creative initiatives suggested by interns, such as themed cultural or business events, are being explored to strengthen community and international ties.

6. Finance and Operations Update

Interim CEO and Assistant Director, Matthew Easley

a. Banking Transition:
    i. The EDA is concluding the RFP process for banking services, with interviews of the third and final finalist underway.

ii. Technology testing for the selected finalist will occur shortly, with a final committee decision expected by the end of next week.
iii. The Business Investment Division assisted in the interview process to support a smooth transition.

b. Treasurer's Report – FY Allocation:
   i. Overall allocation is slightly lower than the previous year.
   ii. At mid-year, 30% of funds have been spent, while 66% are obligated. Major commitments include:
      i. MBC funds
      ii. Old Town Fairfax Business Association (OTFBA) initiatives
      iii. Tourism and marketing-related projects

c. Tourism and marketing initiatives:
   i. Staff is actively working on a branding and marketing strategy to support tourism and placemaking efforts.
   ii. A tourism website is planned to aggregate city events and attractions; funding (~$70K) is allocated for vendor engagement and mural initiatives.
   iii. Timeline considerations:
      i. Website development may extend into the next fiscal year due to solicitation and implementation requirements.
      ii. Mural projects are expected to be underway soon and may be fully spent by year-end. Flexible funding strategies are being considered, including splitting costs across fiscal years depending on vendor selection and project timeline.

7. Programs and Retail Strategy Update
   Assistant Director of Programs Tara Bowery
   a. Mason Homecoming Crawl
      i. The City hosted the Mason Homecoming Crawl in conjunction with the Chocolate Lovers Festival, setting up a table at the Liquid Chocolate tent.
      ii. Participants received one festival ticket and a free T-shirt upon check-in.
      iii. Nearly 300 individuals signed up—the highest turnout to date—with 155 attending despite icy conditions.
      iv. Key partners included the Old Town Fairfax Business Association (OTFBA), Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, Student Involvement, and the City's marketing team.
      v. Ten local businesses participated, supporting the success of the event and fostering strong community partnerships.
   b. Fairfax City Restaurant Week – Winter Edition (Feb 27 – Mar 8):
      i. Currently, 24 restaurants are participating, with potential additions pending.
      ii. Proclamation will be recognized at the City Council meeting on Tuesday, Feb 24.
      iii. Marketing updates and menus are available on the City's Restaurant Week website.
      iv. Participation is slightly lower this year due to business expansions, scheduling conflicts, and a few holdouts, though new businesses, including Boba Tom Tom, joined.

c. Ribbon Cuttings & Business Openings:
    i. Bell Mode ribbon cutting is scheduled for Friday, Feb 13 at 1:00 PM.
    ii. Delays in business openings were not due to City processes; City staff support facilitated successful openings.
    iii. Positive outcomes reflect improvements in City-business consultation processes and highlight staff contributions to easing new business transitions.
d. Business Networking & Collaboration Initiatives:
    i. OTFBA's "Caffeinate & Collaborate" program fosters networking among local businesses in one centralized setting, increasing connectivity and efficiency.
    ii. City staff participate in initiatives to strengthen business engagement and share success stories with broader audiences.
e. Marketing & Advertising Programs:
    i. The City continues to leverage bus and bus shelter advertising for City messaging, including Small Business Month and Restaurant Week campaigns.
    ii. Social media and QR code campaigns direct users to City video content, increasing public awareness of events and programs.
    iii. Advertising opportunities are available on-demand, including interior bus ads, maximizing exposure for City initiatives.

8. Tourism and Placemaking Update
   Tourism Specialist Stephanie Gerson
    a. Tourism website and events page launch:
        i. Staff reported that Fairfax City's tourism webpage (gofairfaxcity.com/visit) has been enhanced with a newly launched events page.
        ii. The events page utilizes an AI-enabled platform (Vibe Map) that aggregates public and private events occurring within defined City boundaries, including selected Mason events.
        iii. The platform addresses the prior lack of a single location displaying all events occurring in Fairfax City.
    b. Events aggregation and functionality:
        i. The events page captures live entertainment, arts, cultural, and nighttime activities, demonstrating the breadth of activity occurring in Fairfax City.
        ii. Events are automatically pulled from multiple sources, including Eventbrite, reducing the need for manual entry by City staff or businesses.
        iii. Content is filtered to ensure events are Fairfax City–specific; staff have administrative control to remove or highlight events as needed.
        iv. The platform allows manual event submission through a link-based form that auto-populates event details and images.
    c. Sorting, tagging, and customization:
        i. Events can be sorted by category (e.g., music, arts) using tags.
        ii. Staff plans to create custom tags, including an "Old Town Fairfax" tag, to improve navigation and usability.

iii. Staff may feature select events at the top of the page for promotional purposes.

d. Marketing and promotion:
   i. The events page has begun to be promoted through City communication channels, including the Business Bulletin and event-specific campaigns.
   ii. During the Mason Homecoming game, City branding and QR-code ads directed users to a nightlife-focused landing page linking to the events page and local hotels.
   iii. Staff is coordinating with the Communications team to expand promotion of the events page.

e. Metrics and next steps:
   i. Staff plans to request engagement metrics from the vendor to track page views and user interaction.
   ii. The events page will continue to be refined as additional events are captured and tagged.
   iii. The initiative supports tourism visibility, placemaking goals, and perceptions of Fairfax City as an active destination.

9. New Business

Commissioner's

a. Local Business Recognition – Cameron's Chocolate:
   i. Brooke shared an anecdote highlighting the regional and national reach of Cameron's Chocolate, a Fairfax City–based small business.
   ii. While traveling in Orlando, Florida, the Commissioner observed Cameron's Chocolate products being sold at a hotel market operated by a major hospitality brand
   iii. Hotel staff indicated that the products were sourced through a program focused on featuring small business food and snack vendors across various locations.
   iv. It was noted that Cameron's Chocolate may also have previously operated a kiosk at airport locations, potentially contributing to its broader market presence.
   v. Commissioners expressed positive recognition of the business's growth and success beyond the local market.

10. Public Comment

a. Smart Growth America – Infrastructure and Community Facilities
   i. A representative from Smart Growth America expressed disappointment regarding the cancellation of the George Snyder Trail, noting its potential to enhance multimodal connectivity between the Northfax Campus, Washington Boulevard, and the Fairfax Circle Activity Centers.
   ii. Concern was also raised regarding uncertainty surrounding the Willard–Sherwood Community Center project, which has undergone extensive public and City Council review and has received broad community support.
   iii. The speaker emphasized the community center's importance as a generational investment with economic development implications, particularly for the Old Town Activity Center.

iv. Commissioners and City Council were urged to consider the long-term economic and community value of both projects when evaluating future funding decisions.

b. Business and Workforce Development – Robotics Lab:
   i. Comments were made regarding the recent opening of a robotics-related business in Fairfax City.
   ii. It was suggested that proximity to George Mason University's strong robotics and engineering programs may provide future workforce and talent pipeline opportunities, should the business expand.

c. Old Town Fairfax Business Association (OTFBA) Update:
   i. The Executive Director of OTFBA provided an update on business collaboration initiatives, highlighting the success of the "Caffeinate & Collaborate" networking program, which has strengthened relationships among Old Town businesses.
   ii. Recent coordinated efforts during the Chocolate Lovers Festival, including business-to-business collaboration and themed strolls, were cited as examples of improved cohesion within the business community.
   iii. OTFBA reported ongoing and upcoming partnerships with George Mason University to increase student foot traffic to Old Town, including a coffee crawl for new transfer students, a coaches' caravan event, and continued collaboration with Mason Athletics and Student Involvement staff.
   iv. Additional initiatives discussed included increased Mason branding within Old Town businesses, exploration of merchandising opportunities, and long-term efforts to position Old Town Fairfax as an extension of the George Mason campus experience.

d. Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce Update:
   i. The Chamber President reported continued organizational growth, including increased membership, improved retention rates, and strong momentum entering the new year.
   ii. Updates were provided on professional development accomplishments, upcoming Chamber programming, and plans for the annual Economic Development Summit.
   iii. The Chamber expressed interest in continued collaboration with George Mason University, City staff, and OTFBA to strengthen Fairfax City's identity as the home base for Mason-related activity.

11. Adoption of Closed Session under § 2.2-3711(A)(8) **[VOTE]** Commissioners
    a. Secretary Cho Motions
    b. Motion Passes Unanimously
12. Reconvene Regular Meeting **[VOTE]** Commissioners
    a. Secretary Cho Motions
    b. Motion Passes Unanimously
13. Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm

*****Next Meeting: March 4, 2026*****
6 pm, 10306 Eaton Place, Training Room 115 AB, Fairfax, Va, 22030
Subject to Change. Please Check gofairfaxcity.com for more information.