



**CITY OF FAIRFAX ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MEETING AGENDA
April 7, 2026, 6:00pm**

In Person at 10306 Eaton Place, Training Room 115AB

Commissioners Present:

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

Others Present:

Colleen Kardasz, Director & CEO, Fairfax City Economic Development
Matthew Easley, Assistant Director for Operations and Finance, Economic Development Department
Marie Spittell, Senior Assistant Director, Business Investment
Tara Borwey, Assistant Director for Programs and Retail Strategy
Brittany Jones, PR and Marketing Manager, Economic Development
Liz Keller, Business Investment Specialist, Economic Development Department
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 6:00 PM
2. Adoption of the April Meeting Agenda [VOTE] Commissioners
 - a. Secretary Cho Motions
 - b. Motion Passes Unanimously
3. Adoption of the March Meeting Minutes [VOTE] Commissioners
 - a. Secretary Cho Motions
 - b. Motion Passes Unanimously
4. Adoption of the Resolution appointing Colleen Kardasz President & CEO of the Fairfax City Economic Development Authority
 - a. Secretary Cho Motions
 - b. Motion Passes Unanimously [VOTE] Commissioners
5. MEC Fairfax Update
Executive Director, Eddie Hill
 - a. Executive Overview
 - i. The Mason Enterprise Center (MEC) continues to maintain stable operations, with a focus on business retention, targeted growth, and expanded community engagement amid ongoing economic uncertainty.
 - b. Occupancy and client base:

- i. MEC occupancy remains strong at approximately 88%, holding steady over the past several months.
 - ii. The Center currently supports around 110 companies, representing one of the highest sustained levels in recent years.
 - iii. While some companies have downsized or exited due to broader economic uncertainty, most tenants remain stable and committed, reflecting a strong core cohort.
 - iv. New and transitioning tenants include several early-stage companies adopting a more conservative growth approach in the current environment.
- c. Financial performance and stability:
 - i. MEC remains in a solid financial position, with no major changes or disruptions expected in the near term.
 - ii. Approximately 50–55% of tenant companies are established government contractors, providing a stable and reliable revenue base.
 - iii. This mix of companies helps insulate operations from broader market volatility.
- d. Business development and attraction efforts:
 - i. MEC continues active business attraction efforts, including hosting and pitching to an international company from Taiwan as part of a Northern Virginia site selection process.
 - ii. The Center is positioning Fairfax City as a competitive landing location for global companies.
 - iii. Sponsorship discussions are ongoing, though some decisions are delayed due to current economic conditions, with potential announcements anticipated later in the year.
- e. Community engagement and outreach:
 - i. MEC has increased its presence in the community through participation in regional events, including small business networking and accelerator programs.
 - ii. MEC has increased its presence in the community through participation in regional events, including small business networking and accelerator programs.
 - iii. Upcoming programs include “Entrepreneurship 101” in partnership with Fairfax County, aimed at building early-stage business pipelines.
- f. Mentorship and ecosystem development:
 - i. MEC continues to strengthen its mentorship network, targeting a core group of approximately 20–30 active mentors to address key business needs.
 - ii. Two new mentors were recently added, enhancing expertise in software, product development, and emerging technologies.
 - iii. A long-standing mentor and business coach, approaching 20 years of involvement, was recently recognized for exceptional contributions, including driving company referrals and fostering collaboration within the Center.
- g. Programming and events:

- i. MEC successfully relaunched in-person programming, hosting its first live event in 18 months with over 30 attendees, 75% of whom were new contacts. This indicates renewed interest and opportunity for pipeline growth.
 - ii. Upcoming events include sessions on practical AI tools, networking mixers, and expanded training opportunities aimed at attracting and supporting entrepreneurs.
 - h. Organizational outlook and next steps:
 - i. MEC will continue focusing on maintaining strong occupancy, expanding its mentorship network, and increasing outreach to attract new companies.
 - ii. While economic uncertainty persists, the Center remains well-positioned due to its stable tenant base and proactive engagement strategy.
- 6. Business Marketing Grant Check Presentation
 - Commissioners/Awardees
 - a. Program Overview:
 - i. The City's Business Marketing Grant Program remains highly competitive, with 35 applications received this cycle.
 - ii. Due to funding constraints, a limited number of grants were awarded, underscoring the strong demand for marketing support among local businesses.
 - iii. The program continues to prioritize use of Fairfax City-based marketing firms, incentivizing local collaboration and strengthening the business ecosystem.
 - iv. Staff expanded outreach by compiling a list of local marketing vendors to support applicants in identifying qualified partners.
 - b. Selection process:
 - ii. Applications were evaluated through a competitive scoring process, with support from external reviewers.
 - iii. The review process emphasized business need, growth potential, and alignment with program goals.
 - iv. A diverse cohort of five businesses was selected, representing a range of industries and stages of growth.
 - c. Awardee highlights
 - i. **Exurb Fitness**
 - i. A long-standing Fairfax City business focused on accessible fitness, offering classes and personal training.
 - ii. The grant will support continued growth and brand development, with potential for expansion beyond the city.
 - ii. **Ground Up Trade & Talent Solutions**
 - i. Workforce development business supporting apprenticeship pathways, particularly in skilled trades such as plumbing and HVAC.
 - ii. Addresses a critical workforce need and contributes to local talent development.
 - iii. **Lumiture**

- i. Early-stage company specializing in data, AI systems, and automation.
 - ii. Actively pursuing government contracts in a competitive sector and contributing to the innovation ecosystem.
 - iv. **Patriots Pub & Grill**
 - i. Established local restaurant and community hub, recently transitioned to fully woman-owned leadership.
 - ii. Strong partnership with the Chamber and active participant in community events.
 - v. **Jordan Design Build Group**
 - i. Boutique remodeling firm headquartered on Main Street, established in 2009.
 - ii. Focused on scaling operations and enhancing its client-facing space to support future growth.
 - d. Marketing partner collaboration
 - i. Several Fairfax City-based marketing firms are supporting awardees, including:
 - 1. Lumik, LLC (Old Town)
 - 2. NOVA Advertising (Old town)
 - 3. Volt Creative (MEC tenant)
 - 4. Vision Idea Design (Home based business)
 - ii. These partnerships reinforce the program’s goal of “businesses supporting businesses” within the local economy.
 - e. Closing:
 - i. Commissioners recognized awardees and partners for their participation and contributions.
 - ii. A group photo was taken to commemorate the awards and promote the program through City communications.
7. MOU and Task Order for GMU Center for Regional Analysis
- a. Secretary Cho Motions
 - b. Motion Passes Unanimously **[VOTE]** Commissioners
8. Business Investment Update
Senior Assistant Director Spittell
- a. Study background and purpose:
 - i. Staff is developing a new Business Investment Study in partnership with George Mason University’s Center for Regional Analysis (Dr. Terry Clower).
 - ii. The last comparable analysis was completed in 2009 and has not been updated since.
 - iii. The goal is to create a localized, actionable economic development strategy tailored specifically to Fairfax City’s scale, assets, and constraints.
 - iv. Unlike regional reports, this study focuses on identifying what works specifically for the city, not just broader Northern Virginia trends
 - b. Key Objectives of the study:

- i. Identify Fairfax City’s competitive industry clusters and advantages based on physical space, assets, and market conditions.
 - ii. Clarify the City’s role within the regional economy and avoid duplication with neighboring jurisdictions.
 - iii. Provide practical, implementable recommendations grounded in real market conditions.
 - iv. Strengthen alignment between economic development strategy, real estate realities, and institutional partnerships.
 - c. Scope concerns and timing:
 - i. Recent feedback from the consultant raised concerns that the scope may be shifting too broadly toward a regional analysis rather than a city-specific focus.
 - ii. Staff emphasized the importance of maintaining a tight, City-focused scope that reflects local constraints and opportunities.
 - iii. Given these concerns, staff is reviewing options before finalizing the contract.
 - d. Options under consideration:
 - i. Option 1: Meet with Dr. Clower to clarify scope language and return in May with a refined proposal at the same budget level.
 - ii. Option 2: If scope exceeds budget or data limitations are identified, issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to determine if other firms can deliver within budget.
 - iii. Option 3: Reassess and potentially re-scope the project entirely based on feasibility, budget alignment, and data availability.
 - e. Strategic context and use of study:
 - i. The study will supplement the City’s strategic plan by providing data-driven direction for business attraction and investment decisions.
 - ii. It will help identify:
 - 1. Target industry clusters (e.g., GovCon, AI, biotech, cybersecurity)
 - 2. Competitive positioning vs. neighboring jurisdictions
 - 3. Asset-based opportunities (office, flex space, etc.)
 - iii. The intent is to ensure the City markets itself to the right types of companies for its available space and cost structure.
 - f. Broader economic development application:
 - i. The study may also inform future business attraction efforts, including conferences, marketing messaging, and targeted outreach.
 - ii. Additional questions raised include how Fairfax City compares to regional competitors and how shifting office demand post-COVID affects strategy.
 - iii. A separate, longer-term real estate-focused assessment may be explored in the future but is not included in this scope.
9. Finance-Administrative Update (Procurement & External Engagements)
- Assistant Director, Matthew Easley
- a. Professional development and procurement engagement:
 - i. Easley participated in the Virginia Association of Government Procurement (VAGP) Spring Conference.

- ii. Attendance supported continued professional certification and best practice sharing among procurement professionals.
 - iii. Received a scholarship to attend and engaged in statewide procurement training and networking.
 - b. Key learnings and industry insights
 - i. The conference highlighted how global supply chain conditions can directly impact local government operations, including procurement of essential materials.
 - ii. Discussions reinforced the importance of diversified sourcing strategies and contract flexibility in local government purchasing.
 - iii. Staff noted increasing relevance of certification programs, including the Universal Public Procurement Certification Council credential, which is reimbursable.
 - c. Partnerships and outcomes:
 - i. Staff participated in coordination efforts supporting inter-jurisdictional collaboration, including school systems and local government partners.
 - ii. The engagement also included community support initiatives, including collection and donation of school supplies.
 - iii. The experience strengthened professional networks and procurement capacity within the City.
 - d. General update:
 - i. Staff continues to pursue training and external engagement opportunities to improve procurement efficiency and resilience.
 - ii. A follow-up update will be provided at a future meeting once additional coordination with university partners is complete.
10. Tourism and Placemaking Update:
- Stephanie Gerson, Tourism Specialist
- a. Budget reallocation overview:
 - i. Gerson presented a proposed budget reallocation within the Tourism Division with no change to the overall tourism budget.
 - ii. The proposal reallocates \$18,000 from the tourism website line item to the branding and marketing strategy line item to support the approved and ongoing branding contract.
 - iii. The adjustment reflects updated cost expectations identified during the RFP process, where branding and marketing scope exceeded initial estimates.
 - iv. The tourism website budget is reduced from approximately \$70,000 to \$52,000, while branding funding is increased from \$27,000 to \$42,000 to fully support the contracted scope.
 - b. Rationale and strategic alignment:
 - i. The Branding Selection Committee anticipated that additional resources would be required to meet project goals during the procurement process.
 - ii. Gerson and Economic Development staff identified website funds as the most appropriate source for reallocation given ongoing planning for future funding opportunities.

- iii. Staff noted the potential to pursue external grant funding to offset future website development costs.
- c. Grant funding opportunity (Virginia Tourism Corporation)
 - i. Staff identified a potential grant opportunity through the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC).
 - ii. The grant operates on a 2:1 match structure, requiring approximately \$60,000 in local investment to leverage up to \$30,000 in grant funding (up to a potential \$90,000 project scope).
 - iii. Eligible uses include website development, content creation, and broader tourism marketing initiatives.
 - iv. The application is broad in scope and intended to support destination marketing efforts; however, award is not guaranteed due to high competition statewide.
 - v. Letters of support were secured from required partners, including a hotel partner and City leadership, with internal review completed by City legal and administrative offices.
- d. Discussion and implementation considerations:
 - i. Commissioners discussed ensuring flexibility in funding strategies, including the potential to allocate additional resources across fiscal years if needed.
 - ii. Staff noted that contracting timelines could be structured to span fiscal years to accommodate budget constraints and project delivery.
 - iii. Discovery calls with potential website vendors are currently underway to identify cost-effective, locally based partners.
 - iv. In the absence of grant funding, staff indicated that scope adjustments may be required, particularly in content development and marketing support, with additional responsibility falling to staff.
 - v. Regardless of funding outcomes, the city will proceed with website development.
- e. Motion to adopt budget reallocation for tourism
 - i. Secretary Cho Secretary Cho Motions
 - ii. Motion Passes Unanimously **[VOTE]** Commissioners
- f. Motion and approval:
 - i. A motion was made and seconded to approve the budget reallocation of \$18,000 from the tourism website line item to the branding and marketing strategy line item.
 - ii. The motion specified no change to the overall tourism budget.
- g. Branding and marketing timeline update:
 - i. The tourism branding process remains underway, with an initial brand preview scheduled for review at an upcoming meeting.
 - ii. The final brand reveal is anticipated in early May, with presentation to Commissioners planned for the May 11 meeting.
 - iii. Staff noted coordination with design consultants and City project management to align rollout timing and cost efficiencies.
 - iv. The branding launch timeline may be adjusted based on project dependencies and event scheduling considerations.

- h. Tourism activation and 250th anniversary programming:
 - i. Staff confirmed ongoing efforts to support visibility and engagement for the upcoming 250th American anniversary celebrations.
 - ii. Businesses are participating through window signage, promotions, and themed offers tied to the celebration (e.g., \$250 packages and \$25 deals).
 - iii. Programming will be integrated into major City events, including the Fourth of July parade and related summer activities.
 - iv. Efforts are underway to encourage business participation and visual recognition of the celebration throughout the city.
- i. Additional placemaking ideas:
 - i. Commissioners discussed potential enhancements to placemaking installations, including interactive or selfie-friendly signage elements.
 - ii. Staff noted operational constraints due to active event usage of certain public spaces but will evaluate feasibility of movable or adaptable installations.
- j. Next steps:
 - i. Staff will continue progressing branding development, grant review, and website procurement
 - ii. Updates will be provided at the next meeting following brand preview and grant outcome timelines.

11. Public Comment

- a. Candidate for city council
 - i. Alexander M. introduced himself as a candidate who has filed to run for City Council in the upcoming election.
 - ii. He expressed appreciation for the work of the Economic Development Authority (EDA), noting the importance of economic development in helping offset rising costs, particularly related to the school system, and in mitigating pressure on property taxes that may otherwise drive residents out of the City.
 - iii. He referenced concerns about similar trends observed in Fairfax County.
- b. Immigrant and small business outreach inquiry
 - i. Alexander asked what the Fairfax EDA currently does to promote, support, and mentor new businesses, particularly within immigrant communities.
 - ii. Alexander noted his involvement as an advisor to a newly formed but growing Hispanic business association.
 - iii. He referenced a meeting with the Falls Church City Economic Development Office, which includes active outreach programs to immigrant entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors such as restaurants, landscaping, home services, and personal care businesses, and asked whether a similar model exists in Fairfax City.
- c. Staff response on small business and immigrant support
 - i. Staff noted that the EDA and Economic Development Department provide broad small business support programming through multiple initiatives.

- ii. It was stated that while programs are not always structured specifically by demographic category, many services effectively support immigrant and migrant-owned businesses through general outreach and programming.
- iii. Examples provided included Restaurant Week, which highlights diverse culinary businesses and encourages participation from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.
- iv. Staff also referenced Small Business Month programming, which highlights entrepreneurship and business formation, including immigrant and minority-owned businesses, particularly in connection with the 250th anniversary theme.
- v. The city's SWaM (Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned) procurement focus was cited as another mechanism supporting inclusive economic participation.
- vi. Staff noted ongoing efforts to expand accessibility, including translation services at public meetings and translation of City documents to improve accessibility for non-English-speaking residents.
- vii. Staff highlighted broader equity and inclusivity training and planning efforts across departments to improve outreach and engagement practices.
- viii. The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and partner organizations were noted as resources that include bilingual counseling support.
- ix. Staff expressed openness to further collaboration with community and nonprofit organizations to strengthen outreach to underrepresented and immigrant business communities.

12. Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm

*****Next Meeting: May 11, 2026, 6 pm*, 10306 Eaton Place, Training Room 115AB, Fairfax, Va, 22030**

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