



Front Royal Economic Development Authority Meeting “Business Development Board”

Monday, May 5th @ 12:00pm

Town Hall – East Conference Room

View meeting online LIVE at <https://www.frontroyalva.com/673/Town-Hall-Live>

New Business • Existing Business • Workforce • Infrastructure • Asset Development

1. Roll Call – *Hillary Wilfong*
2. *Approval of Minutes - *I move that FREDa approves the Regular Meeting minutes of April 7, 2025.*
3. Existing Business
 - a. Retail Strategies Update- *Lizi Lewis Director of Community Development and Tourism*
 - b. Parking Signage Update - *Lizi Lewis Director of Community Development and Tourism*
4. Open Discussion – *Rick Novak, Chairman*
5. Next Meeting – Monday, June 2, 2025 @ 12:00pm
6. Adjourn

**Action Item – requires board vote*



FRONT ROYAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (FREDA) MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 7th at 12:00pm

Town Hall Upstairs Conference Room

The following minutes are a summary of items on the agenda.

This meeting may be viewed in its entirety by accessing the video of the same date online via the Town's website at www.frontroyalva.com.

ROLL CALL PRESENT: Chairman Richard M. Novak
Director Thomas Eshelman
Director Robert Elliott
Director Frank Stankiewicz
Director David Gedney
Director Aiden Miller

ABSENT: Vice Chairman Nicholas Bass

SUPPORT STAFF PRESENT: Director of Community Development and Tourism Elizabeth Lewis
Executive Administrative Assistant Hillary Wilfong, Secretary

Approval of Minutes

Director Gedney motioned to approve the minutes from the regular meeting on March 3, 2025. The motion was seconded by Director Stankiewicz.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Yes:** Novak, Elliott, Stankiewicz, Gedney, Miller
- **No:** None
- **Absent:** Bass
- **Abstain:** Eshelman

Existing Business

Retail Strategies: Retail Recruitment Update

Ms. Lewis updated the Board on the engagement with Retail Strategies. She reported ongoing communication with the portfolio manager and indicated that Retail Strategies is finalizing a presentation featuring five potential development sites. Ms. Lewis stated that the Board's preferences for potential stores will be communicated to Retail Strategies. She will continue to follow up and provide the Board with a more detailed update at the next meeting.

Chairman Novak inquired about the status of the Big Lots store that had announced its closure but now appears to be reopening. Ms. Lewis confirmed this, stating that while many Big Lots locations closed, the Front Royal store is slated to reopen after rebranding. However, a specific timeframe for the reopening is currently unknown.

Parking Signage Update

Ms. Lewis informed the Board about discussions with Public Works and the Town's Sign Department regarding the addition of signage in the Downtown area to direct individuals to available parking. She noted that the Town is already addressing this, but emphasized the need for clearer markings and updated paint for existing parking spaces, as well as clear identification of privately-owned parking lots.

Chairman Novak followed up on the Parking Study. Ms. Lewis acknowledged that the study remains a priority but reported no new progress at this time. Director Eshelman raised the topic of the old County-owned building on West Jackson Street, noting its similar size to Winchester's first parking garage. He suggested initiating a discussion with the County about their plans for the site before it is potentially sold. Ms. Lewis agreed to contact the County regarding this matter.

NEW BUSINESS

Energy Services Update

Chairman Novak welcomed Carey Saffelle, Director of the Town's Energy Services Department, to discuss net metering, other energy solutions, and information regarding the Town's power supply.

Mr. Saffelle began by explaining net metering, defining it as a system where renewable energy generators, such as solar panels, connect to the public utility grid, allowing customers to offset their energy costs by transferring surplus power back to the grid. He stated that the Town currently does not have a formal net metering policy but anticipates having a draft policy ready for presentation to the Town Council by October of this year. Mr. Saffelle also emphasized the importance of adhering to proper protocols through Planning and Zoning and the County Offices to ensure structural soundness and permit completion for those considering solar panel installation. Mr. Saffelle briefly addressed the rate of power, explaining the Town's proactive efforts to encourage reduced electric use during peak times to potentially lower the overall cost of power purchased by the Town. He noted that current rates have increased by 88%. In response to a Board inquiry about the cause of these increases, Mr. Saffelle clarified that PJM Interconnection, a federal Regional Transmission Organization (RTO) regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, manages the bulk power transmission system and wholesale electricity markets in a 13-state region, including Virginia. While PJM sets the framework, the Town purchases its power through American Municipal Power Inc. (AMP), a nonprofit corporation that owns and operates electric facilities for its members. Mr. Saffelle announced that AMP would be presenting an update on the recent energy increases at the Town Council Work Session on Monday, April 14th, for both the Council and citizens.

Responding to Board questions about renewable energy, Mr. Saffelle stated that approximately 20-25% of the Town's energy comes from the local solar field. However, through its membership with AMP, the Town also benefits from other renewable energy sources, including hydro, wind, and additional solar power. He further explained that the Town has five substations that distribute power throughout Front Royal, with the Town utilizing roughly 50-70% of the energy distributed through these substations. The Board discussed the potential impact of data centers on the Town's infrastructure. Mr. Saffelle explained that data centers have specific power supply requirements and cannot be located just anywhere.

The Board also inquired about other energy sources the Town might be considering. Mr. Saffelle stated that the Town is continuously exploring various options, although most have not proven viable at this time. Regarding attracting new businesses, the Board asked about energy considerations. Mr. Saffelle indicated that the Town's infrastructure is well-suited for commercial businesses, while industrial businesses are beneficial for revenue. He advised against pursuing waste-burning facilities due to their high energy consumption. Lastly, in response to a question from Ms. Lewis about the Town's energy cost ranking within the state, Mr. Saffelle reported that Front Royal currently has the third-lowest energy costs in Virginia.

The Board expressed their gratitude to Mr. Saffelle for the informative presentation.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Chairman Novak welcomed Ms. Anna Walton, the Administrator and Work-Based Learning Coordinator at Blue Ridge Technical Center (BRTC). Ms. Walton provided an overview of BRTC's diverse career-focused programs, ranging from engineering and biomedical sciences to traditional trades such as welding, electrical work, and auto mechanics. She highlighted the program's success and the significant student interest, noting that many courses have waiting lists. Ms. Walton discussed the challenges associated with this popularity, including wait times and limited space, expressing a desire for BRTC's growth and the expansion of opportunities. Chairman Novak inquired about grant applications for new materials and additional space. Ms. Walton explained that they have applied for grants, and Director Miller, who has grant writing experience, offered his assistance. Ms. Walton concluded by announcing a hiring event for soon-to-be graduates on April 29th, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, in the auxiliary gym at Warren County High School, with approximately 45 to 50 area employers expected to participate.

Next Meeting

The next FREDA meeting is scheduled for **Monday, May 5, 2025, at 12:00 PM.**

Adjournment

Chairman Novak called for a motion to adjourn at 1:15 PM. Director Miller moved to adjourn, and Director Stankiewicz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.