



FRONT ROYAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (FREDA) MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 1 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 Aiden Miller
Director Robert Elliott
Director David Gedney

ABSENT: Director Thomas Eshleman

SUPPORT STAFF PRESENT: Community Development and Tourism Director, Lizi Lewis
Town Manager Joe Petty
Executive Administrative Assistant Hillary Wilfong, Secretary

Approval of Minutes

Director Miller moved to approve the minutes of the May 4, 2026, meeting. Director Gedney seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

- **Yes:** Novak, Miller, Elliott, Gedney
- **No:** None
- **Absent:** Eshleman
- **Abstain:** None

The motion carried.

Retail Strategies

Ms. Lizi Lewis provided the Retail Strategies quarterly update. She reported that attendance at the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) conference reached approximately 22,000 registrations, returning to pre-pandemic participation levels. Retail Strategies participated in numerous brand-specific meetings and continues outreach efforts to attract new retailers to Front Royal.

Ms. Lewis shared that one retailer is seeking a franchisee for a new fuel and convenience store concept; however, no local franchisee has been identified at this time.

Retail Strategies also discussed providing local businesses with data-driven reports, including customer demographics, trip insights, and spending patterns, to assist businesses in better understanding their customer base and enhancing their services.

Community partners continue to coordinate their priorities with prospective retail brands. While discussions remain active, no final agreements have been reached.

New Business

Mr. Petty informed the Board that the Town's Purchasing Manager will be presenting the Downtown Parking Study contract to Town Council for approval.

Existing Business/Workforce

Ms. Lewis reported that the Regional Job Fair was well attended by both employers and job seekers. She noted that several Warren County employers, including the school system and Valley Health, participated, along with employers from neighboring localities and various state and federal agencies.

Ms. Lewis expressed her appreciation for the diversity of employers represented and stated that she would like to see an even greater presence from Warren County businesses and organizations at next year's event.

Infrastructure

Ms. Lewis provided an update on the Shenandoah Rail Trail initiative. He explained that the Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Partnership continues to support the Commonwealth's acquisition of the former Norfolk Southern rail corridor to develop a multi-use recreational trail.

Mr. Petty noted that the estimated cost of converting the corridor into a rail trail is approximately \$164 million, compared to an estimated \$700 million for constructing a rail-with-trail alternative. He further advised that the Commonwealth Transportation Board intends to utilize \$35 million appropriated in the state budget toward acquisition of the corridor. Ownership of the property is necessary before the project can pursue federal funding opportunities for trail development.

Chairman Novak requested an update on the South Street Project. Mr. Petty reported that the project continues to move forward. He stated that VDOT is finalizing engineering drawings after working collaboratively with adjacent property owners to develop a left-turn lane into the easternmost entrance. The design also includes adjustments to the existing pedestrian crossing to improve safety and traffic flow. Mr. Petty noted that the Town and VDOT held regular meetings with property owners throughout the design process, resulting in a solution that will improve traffic operations while maintaining the existing character of the corridor. Once the final plans are complete, the project is expected to move into the bidding phase next year.

Asset Development

Ms. Lewis reported that Main Street America recently distributed an Economic Vitality Survey to approximately 77 organizations to better understand the programming and support needs of small businesses throughout the region.

She also reminded members that a joint meeting between the Warren County Board of Supervisors and the Front Royal Town Council is scheduled for Thursday to discuss tourism initiatives and economic development strategies.

Open Discussion

Laurel Ridge Small Business Development Center (SBDC)- Ms. Lewis discussed the increased activity of the Laurel Ridge Small Business Development Center (SBDC) within Warren County. Members discussed the possibility of providing a modest financial contribution to support the SBDC's expanded

services, noting that even a small contribution would demonstrate the Authority's support for local business development.

Ms. Lewis also highlighted a grant opportunity available through Shenandoah County's Economic Development Office for qualifying small businesses and discussed the potential value of similar investment opportunities for businesses in Front Royal.

Director Miller inquired about the status of the Small Business Blueprint and whether there had been any new updates. Ms. Lewis reported that the program is now live but that no feedback has been received to date. She stated that she will continue to monitor responses and provide updates.

Director Miller also asked whether the Board's Business Survey remained active. Ms. Lewis confirmed that the survey is still live; however, no additional responses have been received.

Next Meeting

The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for July 6, 2026, at 12:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Director Miller moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:41 p.m. Director Gedney seconded the motion. Motion carried.