FRONT ROYAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (FREDA) MEETING MINUTES
Monday, July 6, 2026 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 Thomas Eshelman
Director Robert Elliott

ABSENT: Director David Gedney

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 June 1, 2026, meeting. Director Elliott seconded the motion.
Roll Call Vote:

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

The motion carried.

Retail Strategies
Ms. Lewis presented the Retail Strategies quarterly update and provided Board members with a printed copy of the quarterly report, along with notes from the recent International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) meetings held in Las Vegas. She reported continued interest from several national retailers, including a national smoothie concept, sporting goods retailer, and hair salon franchise. Ms. Lewis noted that Retail Strategies has been working with the new ownership of Royal Plaza, which is being acquired by Rural King, to identify future leasing opportunities should space become available.

Ms. Lewis also shared updates on several prospective developments, including Planet Fitness, noting that while the business was not actively recruited by Retail Strategies, previous outreach had introduced Front Royal as a potential market. She further advised that two national hotel brands remain interested in locating within the community and continue to explore potential sites, particularly in or near the downtown area.

Board members discussed previously approved hotel projects along the corridor and received an update regarding the status of site plans and infrastructure improvements associated with those developments. Staff noted that one project remains inactive while another continues to progress through the development process. Members also discussed the potential tax and utility revenue associated with future hotel development.

Chairman Novak discussed reports that the KFC location on John Marshall Highway may be redeveloped into a Seven Brew Coffee location and briefly discussed the growing number of coffee businesses locating within the community. Additional discussion included the recently opened local coffee shop on John Marshall Highway.

Ongoing Business

New Business

Ms. Lewis highlighted the anticipated opening of Planet Fitness and noted the positive community response to the announcement.

Existing Business

Chairman Novak discussed the food truck area near Wendy's, including business licensing, operating hours, and customer activity. Ms. Lewis explained that each food truck operates as an individual business and obtains its own business license. Members also discussed the popularity of several vendors and the challenges businesses experienced during the recent period of extreme heat.

Infrastructure

Mr. Petty provided an update on the Downtown Parking Study, noting that a new transportation and parking study is underway through the Timmons Group and will build upon previous studies while evaluating additional transportation needs.

Members discussed transportation improvements associated with the Gateway Shopping Center and Rural King's acquisition of Royal Plaza. Mr. Petty advised that the Town, VDOT, and Rural King continue to work collaboratively on proposed entrance improvements to enhance traffic flow and safety. Discussion also included the concept of a future public-private partnership for additional infrastructure improvements, including improved connectivity across Happy Creek; however, staff noted the significant costs and maintenance responsibilities associated with such a project.

Asset Development

The Board discussed several vacant and underutilized commercial properties, including the former South Street car wash, the former Stokes property, and the former BB&T building at 14th Street and Shenandoah Avenue. Ms. Lewis advised that Retail Strategies and Town staff continue to monitor redevelopment opportunities and maintain communication with property owners and marketing representatives where possible.

Open Discussion

Ms. Lewis reported that Retail Strategies recently participated in a conference call with Patrick Barker, the newly appointed Warren County Economic Development Director, to discuss ongoing retail recruitment efforts and opportunities for collaboration. She advised that Retail Strategies will continue sharing available data and resources to support countywide economic development efforts.

The Board welcomed Mr. Barker to the community and discussed the importance of continued collaboration between the Front Royal Economic Development Authority and Warren County as economic development initiatives evolve. Mr. Petty noted that Mr. Barker is expected to attend a future meeting to introduce himself and discuss his vision for economic development partnerships.

Ms. Lewis also provided an update on the upcoming Virginia Little League State Tournament, noting that sixteen teams will participate, with visiting teams occupying hotels throughout Front Royal and neighboring communities. She stated that the tournament is expected to generate a positive economic impact for local hotels, restaurants, attractions, and businesses while providing an opportunity to position Front Royal as a future tournament destination.

Director Elliott noted that we are approximately halfway through its current contract with Retail Strategies and suggested it would be an appropriate time to begin discussing future deliverables and potential contract renewal. The Board agreed to continue the discussion at a future meeting.

Next Meeting

The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for August 3, 2026, at 12:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Director Eshleman moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:40 p.m. Director Miller seconded the motion. Motion carried.