

**MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY MEETING
CITY OF STAUNTON, VIRGINIA**

**Thursday, April 16, 2026 8:30 a.m.
Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor**

Members Present: Billy Vaughn, Chair
Terry Holmes, Vice-Chair
Billy Sowers
Don Bosserman
Isaac Grant
Kristina Arbogast

Members Absent: Suzie Dull

Others Present: Amanda DiMeo, Director of Economic Development
Jessica Blythe, Assistant Director of Economic Development
John Blair, City Attorney
Jeff Overholtzer, City Council Liaison
Jessie Moyers, CFO City of Staunton
Rodney Rhodes, Community Development Director
Samantha Johnson, Director of Tourism
Sheena Logan, Sales and Marketing Manager, Tourism

Mr. Vaughn called the meeting to order.

1) Consideration of Meeting Minutes from February 5, 2026.

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Sowers, and seconded by Mr. Bosserman to approve the minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

2) Treasurer's Financial Report

The report was attached to the packet and opportunity was given for questions. No significant changes were reported and only slightly more interest income was noted. On April 7, the remaining amount held in escrow was received. Thanks were extended to Mr. Blair for his work on this matter.

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Bosserman, and seconded by Mr. Holmes, to approve the financial report. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

3) Executive Director Report

Ms. DiMeo and Ms. Blythe updated the group on the items below:

Staunton Crossing Business Plan Update

Ms. Dimeo provided an update on the EDA's desire to move forward with an update to the Staunton Crossing Business Plan. Key discussion points included:

- The EDA shared its direction with City Council at the April 9 Council Work Session.
- Media coverage created some confusion regarding a potential data center at Staunton Crossing; members clarified this is not currently planned.
- Consultant Tim Davey is awaiting direction from the EDA regarding the scope of the business plan revision.

- Initial estimate: 90-day timeline and approximately \$25,000 for a straightforward revision; additional community/stakeholder engagement sessions would increase both cost and timeline.

Discussion:

- Members agreed that community involvement is important, particularly following public comments raised at the Council meeting.
- It was noted that data center information had been included in plans since at least 2019 but appeared to catch the public by surprise.
- Discussion included the need to educate the public about the \$300 million in unfunded capital needs and the role of Staunton Crossing tax revenue in addressing those needs.
- Members emphasized that the EDA, as the property owner, is responsible for developing and approving a plan before submitting it to City Council for consideration.
- Topics identified for further discussion: appropriate uses for Staunton Crossing; community concerns about data centers (electricity, power grid, solar); and types of development the EDA wishes to pursue.

No formal action taken; further discussion and scope development to follow.

Fiber Lease Agreement – Dark Fiber / MGW Networks

John Blair presented background on a fiber lease agreement between the EDA and MGW Networks:

- During the City's 'Big Dig,' dark fiber was laid on Beverley and Augusta Streets. Ownership was not fully transferred to the EDA, but a lifetime grant of rights was provided to the EDA to lease the fiber.
- MGW Networks has leased 8 of approximately 45 fiber strands. The lease was last approved by the EDA on March 2, 2023, with a one-year renewal term.
- MGW Networks failed to send the required 90-day notice of intent to renew and subsequently appeared at the Economic Development office requesting renewal.
- There has been no other interest in the dark fiber for over a decade; the annual lease amount is approximately \$6,000 (\$500/month).
- Barriers to broader use include the original intent for the city to serve as an internet service provider (ultimately not pursued), and subsequent state legislation preventing municipalities from operating as ISPs.

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Sowers, and seconded by Mr. Grant, to direct Mr. Blair to revise the lease agreement to a five-year renewal term and bring it back for consideration at the next meeting. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

Other updates:

- Shop & Dine Out campaign has launched with favorable weather and strong results.
- The Farmers' Market has relocated to the West End / JDR lot and is performing well. Opening day was reported as the second-highest revenue in 33 years. Nearby businesses (Stella Mia, Mi Rancho, Suzy Q Crafts) are seeing increased foot traffic.
- Economic Development Week is May 4–8
- EDA officer elections will be held at next month's meeting.

- May meeting will include a presentation by Superintendent Dr. Eric Irizarry on CTE space at Shelburne Middle School (to be held at EDA offices due to student testing).
- Legislation that would have required public hearings and 30-day notice for economic development incentives was defeated at the General Assembly.

SDDA

- Adam Greenbaum (former owner of The Visulite) has been named Executive Director of SDDA.
- SDDA has restarted its Economic Vitality Committee; regular meetings with the EDA to follow.

GoTech CTE Initiative (Jessica)

- GoVirginia initiative to bring CTE curriculum (GoTech) to middle schools was presented.
- The program is active in 70+ middle schools in Virginia and originated in Pennsylvania.
- Nine career pathways available; curriculum covers grades 6–8.
- Augusta County and Shenandoah County are spearheading regional participation; Staunton has been invited to join.
- A mobile workshop is being scheduled; EDA members are welcome to attend.

Tourism Update (Samantha)

- Tourism numbers rebounded after the January/February ice storm and are trending up; summer projections are strong.
- The Governor attended a Virginia Tourism event in Charlottesville to unveil a new statewide strategic plan; regional plans to follow.
- Jones Garden is expanding into the Newtown Bakery property (West End).
- Art Hive is curating a West End Arts Festival later this month, including new murals.
- Hotel 24 South commended: the Virginia Aviation Council (12-year returning conference, 100+ attendees) praised Staunton's hospitality and logistics.
- The Virginia Association for College Employees will be in town the following week.
- A VSDB student is interested in connecting visually/hearing impaired students with business mentors and employment opportunities.
- Steam Engine Train: Returning in June (two weekends, June 12 and the following weekend). Approximately 1,100 seats per run, three runs per day (Fri/Sat/Sun). Train will load and disembark at the downtown station. Police coordinating traffic management. Tickets expected to sell out.
- Elizabeth Abudakar purchased Sweet Addies and the Anne Hathaway's Cottage.

Community Development Update (Rodney)

- Comprehensive Plan is under steering committee review; available to the public May 4. City Council presentation scheduled for June 3 at a special meeting at the library.
- McIntosh Development proposal (267 homes on Middlebrook with Ritchie access) is returning to the Planning Commission; may proceed to City Council next month.
- Fisher Auto Parks is requesting rezoning of 855 Statler Boulevard from Industrial to General Business for former strip mall space (old Walmart shopping center area); public hearing before Planning Commission.

- New permitting software goes live May 5, enabling electronic permit applications, status tracking, and public project visibility online.
- City project dashboard (presented by Josh Knight Communications) will be available on the city website, showing status of infrastructure and paving projects.

4) Enterprise Zone Grants/Wharf Grants

Jessica Blythe presented the results of the first year of the Enterprise Zone local incentive grant program:

- 18 applications received — significantly more than in recent years.
- Total funding requested: over \$90,000. Available budget: \$20,000.
- Total private investment represented: over \$300,000.
- Most popular incentive: Facade Improvement Grant; followed by Marketing Support Grant and Technology Grant. No applications for Job Creation or Large Business Incentive.

Options Presented

Three funding options were presented:

- Option A: Fully fund three applicants (Jones Garden, Staunton Augusta Art Center, Mike & Mario's).
- Option C: Fund those three plus Art Hive, with slightly reduced awards across all four.
- Option D: Spread \$20,000 across all moderately-to-highly aligned applicants (not recommended by staff due to diluted impact).

Applicant Summaries (Options A & C)

Jones Garden (Facade Improvement Grant):

- Expanding into the former Newtown Bakery property on the West End.
- Plans include a cafe, prepared meals, market/grocery space, and plantings.
- Aligns with West End revitalization priority.

Staunton Augusta Art Center (Technology Grant):

- Funding for digital equipment (cameras, recorders, monitors).
- Will allow in-house production and expanded course offerings including photography.

Mike & Mario's (Facade Improvement Grant):

- Located on the West End near the old Tasty Freeze on Churchville Ave.
- Requesting funding for new entrance/egress door; owner has already made significant property investments.

Art Hive (Facade Improvement Grant – Option C only):

- Located on Spring Hill Road
- Application includes: ADA-accessible ramp, mural (West End Arts Festival), landscaping, lighting, and hardscaping.
- Strong alignment with public art, ADA accessibility, and beautification priorities.

Discussion

- Members discussed the importance of making meaningful awards rather than spreading funds too thin.

- Budget will increase from \$20,000 to \$50,000 starting July 1 (new fiscal year).
- Discussion of carrying over current-year funds or adjusting the application window to allow grantees more time to complete projects within the fiscal year. Staff to follow up with Finance.
- Reimbursement-based grants have a 12-month term; carryover and multi-year tracking concerns raised.

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Sowers, and seconded by Ms. Arbogast, to approve Option A: Full funding for Jones Garden, Staunton Augusta Art Center, and Mike & Mario's. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

Note: Staff will follow up with Finance regarding grant disbursement timing, fiscal year carryover, and whether the application window should be adjusted for future cycles.

Wharf Marketing Grant – Business Impact Program

Jessica Blythe provided an update on the Wharf Marketing Grant program, established to support businesses impacted by the tunnel construction project:

- Grant range: \$1,000–\$5,000. Total program budget: \$100,000. This is an upfront award (not reimbursement-based) to reduce barriers for impacted businesses.
- Two workshops have been completed: one led by SBDC (8 attendees) and one marketing workshop with Katie Campbell and Courtney Thompson from the Chamber (4 attendees). Attendance at one workshop and a one-on-one SBDC session are requirements for eligibility.

Applicant: Ciders from Mars

- Total proposed marketing investment: \$7,896.
- Plan includes: digital and traditional advertising, graphic design (\$1,000), print (\$300), radio ads, and content creation (video, photo library, storytelling around construction) during spring and summer.
- All requirements have been met.
- Recommended award: \$5,000 (maximum).

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Holmes, and seconded by Mr. Bosserman, to approve a \$5,000 Wharf Marketing Grant award to Ciders from Mars. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

Additional Note: Well Balanced Paw

- Well Balanced Paw is expanding from the Wharf to a new space on Central Avenue (near Pizza Luca), which will affect her eligibility for the Wharf Marketing Grant (requirement: must remain at the Wharf).
- She also applied for the Enterprise Zone grant but was not selected in the current funding round.
- Staff will follow up with Mr. Blair to discuss whether a program amendment should be brought to Council to address her situation, given the impact of tunnel construction on her business.

Tunnel Project Status

- Project completion targeted for Spring 2027.
- Phase 1 (Buyer Street weak spot): Nearing completion.
- Phase 2 (Johnson Street): Beginning late June/July.

- Phase 3 (New Street): To follow.
- The parking lot at the Wharf is not part of the current project scope; limited parking access will continue after construction until a future project addresses remaining weak spots.
- A daylighting feasibility study (led by Willow in Engineering) is expected to be presented to Council in June.
- Communications Manager Josh Knight is updating the project website regularly.

5) Other Business

There was no other business

6) Meeting Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:38 am.

APPROVED:

Chairperson

Secretary

DATE: May 7, 2026

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