

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

**Thursday, May 7, 2026 8:30 a.m.
City Manager's Conference Room, City Hall, Third Floor**

Members Present: Billy Vaughn, Chair
Terry Holmes, Vice-Chair
Billy Sowers
Isaac Grant
Suzie Dull

Members Absent: Don Bosserman
Kristina Arbogast

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
Samantha Johnson, Director of Tourism
Dr. Eric Irizarry, Superintendent, Staunton City Public Schools
Chase Hoover, Cottonwood Commercial

Mr. Vaughn called the meeting to order.

1) Election of Officers

According to *Section 9. Annual Meeting* of the amended and restated by-laws of Economic Development Authority as approved on July 23, 2015, the EDA shall elect its officers in May. As outlined in *Section 3. Officers*, the directors shall elect from their membership a chairman and a vice-chairman, and from their membership or not, as they desire, an executive director, a secretary and a treasurer, or a secretary-treasurer.

Nominations:

Mr. Holmes nominated **Mr. Vaughn for Chair**. Mr. Sowers seconded the nomination.

There were no other nominations. All members present were polled and indicated their agreement by saying "aye."

Mr. Sowers nominated **Mr. Holmes for Vice-Chair**. Mr. Vaughn seconded the nomination.

There were no other nominations. All members present were polled and indicated their agreement by saying "aye."

Mr. Holmes made a motion to appoint **Ms. Amanda DiMeo as Executive Director, Ms. Jessica Blythe as Secretary, and Ms. Jessie Moyers as Treasurer**. Mr. Sowers seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

2) Meeting Date Resolution 2026-2027

According to *Section 10. Regular Meetings* of the amended and restated by-laws of Economic Development Authority as approved on July 23, 2015, the EDA shall establish its regular meeting dates by resolution.

The resolution before the Board of Directors establishes the regular meeting date of the EDA as the first Thursday of each month.

Motion: Mr. Holmes moved to adopt the regular meeting Resolution as presented. Mr. Sowers seconded the motion. All members present were polled and indicated their agreement by saying "aye."

3) Consideration of Meeting Minutes from April 16, 2026.

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

4) Dr. Eric Irizarry, Superintendent, Staunton City Schools

Dr. Eric Irizarry, Superintendent of Staunton City Schools, presented:

School System Overview

- Six schools:
 - One pre-K center
 - Three elementary schools
 - One middle school
 - One high school
- More than 2,800 students enrolled, with continued enrollment growth
- 615 employees, making the school system one of the city's largest employers
- Annual operating budget of approximately \$55 million
- Per-pupil spending around \$15,000
- Graduation rate of 93%
- Academic ranking improved from 105th statewide in 2018 to 35th out of 131 divisions
- Sixteen languages spoken across the division
- Student demographics continue shifting, including a growing Latino population

Operations & Student Support

- All students receive free breakfast and lunch through a grant-supported nutrition program
- School leaders noted increased demand for mental health and counseling services
- Limited availability of outside community placement and mental health resources remains a challenge
- Transportation operations include:
 - 31 buses
 - Approximately 213,000 miles traveled annually
- Maintenance, transportation, and food service are largely handled in-house

Strategic Plan – "Empower 2030"

- Focus on preparing students for both college and workforce pathways
- Goal of connecting graduates directly with local employers offering long-term career opportunities

- Expansion of Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways tied to regional industry needs, including:
 - Manufacturing
 - Logistics
 - Bio-manufacturing
 - Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training
- New CDL pathway partnership established with Blue Ridge Community College
- Exploration of a "Teachers for Tomorrow" pipeline to develop a diverse local teaching workforce
- Recruitment and retention supports include subsidized childcare for employees

Enrollment Growth & Facility Capacity Concerns

- Current enrollment approximately 2,839 students
- Enrollment exceeded projections for the current school year
- Approximately 155 new students enrolled during the year
- Significant facility pressures identified:
 - McSwain Elementary School critically over capacity
 - Mobile classroom units may be needed
 - Bessie Weller Elementary School over functional capacity
 - Shelburne Middle School over functional capacity
 - Staunton High School projected to exceed capacity within three years
- New housing developments expected to increase enrollment pressures:
 - 175 approved sites near Bessie Weller
 - 298 approved sites near McSwain
- Possible proactive redistricting strategies under consideration

Workforce Development & Economic Partnerships

- Schools encouraged partnerships with local businesses through:
 - Volunteer support
 - Career connections
 - Financial support
- "Kindness Matters" fund helps students from lower-income households access field trips, AP testing, and school opportunities
- Discussion centered on aligning curriculum with regional workforce demands
- Opportunities discussed related to:
 - Bio-manufacturing growth
 - Manufacturing careers
 - Logistics and transportation industries
- Go Tech mobile lab recently hosted at the middle school
- Regional collaboration underway to pursue Go Virginia grant funding to expand workforce exposure opportunities
- Valley Vo-Tech reportedly receives more than 650 applicants annually but can only accept a portion
- Of approximately 400 graduates, only 27 signed with local businesses at a recent signing event, highlighting retention and workforce pipeline challenges

Housing & Employee Retention Challenges

- Housing affordability identified as a major barrier for:
 - Teachers

- First responders
- Nurses
- Discussion included possible collaboration with developers to help offset housing costs for hard-to-fill public service positions

Additional Discussion Topics

EDA members and school leadership also discussed:

- The importance of strong schools in attracting young families
- The aging workforce and shrinking youth population (“silver tsunami”)
- Long-term school capacity planning
- The value of the city-schools revenue sharing agreement
- Increased competition from neighboring school divisions and housing markets

5) Executive Director Report

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

- Received a Proclamation from City Council for Economic Development Week
- Business Appreciation Breakfast
- Continued collaboration with workforce and education partners
- Wharf Grant Updates. There are three for the EDA to consider. Mr. Grant recused himself from this discussion and all related votes:

1. Well Balanced Paw – \$5,000

Signage, way-finding (including parking information), social media advertising, and website updates to support business visibility during construction. The applicant is planning to eventually relocate to the old firehouse (behind Pizza Luca), though no firm date has been established due to structural issues with the new space.

Discussion addressed the two-year residency requirement and whether a claw-back provision should apply if the business relocates before that period. Mr. Blair outlined three options: deny the grant, full claw-back, or prorated claw-back. The board moved to approve the grant with a stipulation that relocation within the downtown special business district would not trigger a claw-back.

Motion: Mr. Holmes made a motion to approve, with Ms. Dull seconding the motion. Mr. Grant recused himself. The motion carried unanimously by the voting members present.

2. Atlas & Ember – \$5,000

A vintage bridal shop on the Middle Brook side of the Wharf requesting funds for directional signage on both Fire Street and Middle Brook, digital marketing through an industry-specific social media manager, and a professional photo/video content campaign. Applicant met all workshop and SBDC requirements.

Motion: Ms. Dull made a motion to approve, with Mr. Sowers seconding the motion. Mr. Grant recused himself. The motion carried unanimously by the voting members present.

3. Red Beard Brewing Company – \$5,000

Located just outside the formal construction impact zone but reported a 30% revenue decrease since construction began. Requested funds to contract with a local videographer to produce

short commercials for streaming and social media geo-targeted advertising. Staff confirmed the grant program allows businesses adjacent to the impact zone to apply with a narrative of impact.

Motion: Mr. Sowers made a motion to approve, with Mr. Holmes seconding the motion. Mr. Grant recused himself. The motion carried unanimously by the voting members present.

This makes \$20,000 awarded to date out of \$100,000 available. Three to four additional applications anticipated in the coming month.

- Amanda DiMeo introduced Chase Hoover from Cottonwood Commercial, the EDA's marketing partner for Staunton Crossing, to present a development inquiry.

A developer experienced in spec industrial warehouses (based on a successful project in Harrisonburg) expressed interest in developing a small cluster of buildings (approximately 3–5 acres) at Staunton Crossing, similar to what was built in Harrisonburg—roughly four buildings averaging 10,000 sq. ft. each, which leased or sold prior to construction completion.

Ms. DiMeo noted that the EDA currently has several active RFIs with VEDP for a larger adjacent parcel near the rail line. She suggested any industrial micro-development should be located outside the ring road so as not to conflict with those prospects. Board members expressed general support for generating visible activity at the site as a catalyst for further interest. DiMeo indicated she would work with Cottonwood and Timmons Group (the master plan consultant) to identify suitable parcel locations and bring a formal proposal back to the board.

6) Other Business

A. Potential License for Staging and Storage at Staunton Crossing

Amanda DiMeo presented a request from the City's Public Works Department to use a vacant EDA-owned storage building at Staunton Crossing as a lay-down space for water main repair materials.

Mr. Blair recommended approving a 30-day revocable license, allowing Public Works to make minor structural repairs as needed, with the understanding the license would terminate upon 30 days' notice (e.g., in advance of a property sale to a developer).

Motion: Mr. Sowers made a motion to approve, with Mr. Holmes seconding the motion. Mr. Grant recused himself. The motion carried unanimously by the voting members present.

B. Fiber Lease Agreement – Dark Fiber / MGW Networks

Mr. Blair provided background: The city installed fiber cable and conduit infrastructure downtown as part of its Big Dig project. Because state law prohibits cities from directly providing fiber to private businesses, the city leased the infrastructure to the EDA, which has authority to sublease to private entities. MGW has leased a portion of the EDA's fiber since 2011. The most recent three-year agreement expired in 2026.

Before the board was a proposed five-year non-defeasible use agreement with MGW at \$500/month, with two additional one-year renewal options. No other private provider had expressed interest, and there have been no issues with rent or infrastructure damage in MGW's 15 years of use.

Motion: A motion was made by Mr. Holmes, and seconded by Mr. Sowers, to approve the

revised lease agreement. The motion carried unanimously by the members present.

C. SAW Facts/Figures 2025 Attached

The PDC's updated Facts & Figures sheet for the Staunton/Augusta County region was included in the meeting packet. Discussion focused on how to make this data more visible to the public. Ideas raised included:

- Expanding EDA social media presence to Facebook and Instagram (in addition to LinkedIn)
- Co-messaging with the City Manager's office
- Connecting with the PDC, which produced the report, about broader distribution

Note: Staunton's population is approaching 26,000, with continued growth by cohort, particularly in younger age groups

A demographic presentation at the Chamber the prior day by a demographer was noted as highly relevant; slides were requested and will be shared with the board once received.

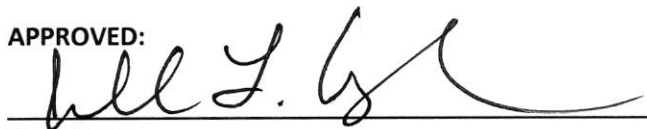
Discussion tied back to workforce pipeline themes from the Dr. Irizarry presentation: the need to attract and retain working-age residents, connect students to local industry, and support housing, childcare, and other infrastructure that keeps families in the community.

It was confirmed that the city signed onto the Go Virginia commercialization network grant through JMU. The grant was approved at the regional/state level.

7) Meeting Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:48 am.

APPROVED:



Chairperson

DATE: June 25, 2026



Secretary

DATE: June 25, 2026