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City of Fairfax City Council Meeting, Tuesday, May 27, 2025

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- Agenda: https://fairfax.granicus.com/AgendaViewer.php?view_id=13&clip_id=4210
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[00:00:19] Good evening. I would like to call the regular meeting of May 27th, 2025 to order. As we get started with tonight's meeting, I would like to ask for a moment of silence for four people whose lives were lost in the last two weeks.

[00:00:36] Joshua Pacheco's young life ended here in the city on the evening of May 16th. It was a shock to our community and to the people who know and love this family. Their grief is shared by many in our city, and we hold them in our thoughts. Congressman Jerry Connolly passed away in the early morning hours of May 21st, surrounded by his family, after a brief and valiant fight against esophageal cancer.

[00:01:00] He wasn't here to know that later that same day, a gunman would take the lives of Yaron Lashinsky and Sarah Milgram, two Israeli embassy staffers targeted outside the D.C. Capitol Jewish Museum following an event there.

[00:01:16] Each of these lives was precious to their families, friends, co-workers, and communities. and they will be missed and moored. I ask that we take a moment to contemplate those whose lives have been touched by these losses.

[00:01:44] For those who are able and so choose, please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. United States, to the Republic, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

[00:02:12] And now comes the time for proclamations. I would like to ask the Pride Festival Committee and the Metropolitan Community Church and anyone else who wants to support pride in our city to come down into the well.

[00:02:49] Lovely people. Whereas, within the recorded history of humanity, there have existed people around the world who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex, living in cultures and communities that have shunned, shamed, ostracized, and criminalized their very existence, a practice that continues in many places to this day.

[00:03:24] And whereas the contribution of those in the LGBTQ community have lifted our human experience through their art, innovation, discoveries, explorations, and in a variety of professions for centuries, while being denied the basic human rights of others in their local communities.

[00:03:44] And whereas the Stonewall Riots began in New York City on June 28, 1969, and are regarded is the catalyst for the gay liberation movement in the United States, bringing about a public display of pride and a celebration of people who refuse to cede their basic human rights to those who rigorously pursue a denial of those rights through dogma, antiquated beliefs, and discriminatory public policy.

[00:04:12] And whereas in October 2014, same-sex couples were allowed to marry in the Commonwealth of Virginia as a result of long-term efforts by many advocates and in advance of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on June 25, 2015, that ended marriage discrimination for everyone in the United States of America.

[00:04:32] And whereas in 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed 13 pieces of civil rights legislation known as the Virginia Values Act that protects the LGBTQ community from discrimination in public employment, housing, credit, and public accommodation.

[00:04:49] And whereas assaults on the rights of LGBTQ individuals continue in legislative bodies across the country and around the world, necessitating constant vigilance and a resolve to protect the basic civil rights, human rights, and safety of our friends, neighbors, and loved ones.

[00:05:09] And whereas the City of Fairfax wishes to recognize, celebrate, and uplift our LGBTQ residents and their allies with a celebration at Old Town Hall on June 7th in collaboration with our partners at George Mason University, now therefore I, Catherine S. Reed, Mayor of the City of Fairfax, on behalf of all residents of the City of Fairfax, to hereby proclaim June 2025 as LGBTQIA plus pride month in the city of Fairfax and urge all

[00:05:42] to acknowledge and celebrate our LGBTQI plus friends, family, neighbors, employees, educators, and visitors to our welcoming and inclusive community. And with that, Emma, Reverend Chatton.

[00:06:03] Yes. How delightful to see you here again. Thank you. Please share with us. I'm thrilled to live in a city that supports us. And the important thing that I want to say, if you want to know somebody in our community, know somebody in our community. Turn off the television. Turn off social media.

[00:06:20] Turn to a neighbor. Turn to a friend. Turn to me. I like lunch. Seriously. So turn to somebody you know. Get to know somebody in our community, and you will discover that we are good friends, We're good neighbors, and we are good citizens of Fairfax City.

[00:06:39] Thank you so much. All right, it's time for a group photo.

[00:07:17] We can move to the adoption of the agenda.

[00:07:48] Is there a motion to approve the agenda? Council Member Hardy-Chandler? I move to adopt the agenda as presented. Second. Okay, the motion has been made and seconded. A roll call vote. Council Member Amos? Aye. Council Member Hall?

[00:08:04] Aye. Council Member Hardy-Chandler? Aye. Council Member Peterson? Aye. Council Member McQuillan? Aye. Motion passed unanimously. We will go on to the initial general public comment. I have 16 speakers signed up by 5 o'clock today. I'm going to call the first one up, Mary McDaniel.

[00:08:27] I'm Mary McDaniel, member president of the city. My address is on file. I'm speaking tonight as a private citizen, not in my capacity as a member of this Fairfax City Electoral Board. I urge you to prove the construction of the Snyder Trail.

[00:08:46] I believe leaving the trails on either side of that segment unconnected will haunt us forever. I want you to think ahead five to ten years. If you leave trails unconnected in the city, do you think people in this region are going to look at that and say that that was a great idea?

[00:09:04] I think they're going to look at it and say that they hate having to work their way around obstacles and traffic to either get to the other side of a trail or get to the other side of the city. I want you to think about a previous decision that was made in that same area that we're talking about. Decades ago, the city council decided to reduce the number of athletic fields that were planned for Stafford Road Park from four to one.

[00:09:27] The city is now chronically short of athletic fields, and families have to travel further for their kids to participate in sports. That decision, I think, was short-sighted. It's hurt the city. But I have an example of a tough decision that turned out great, and that's building Old Town Hall.

[00:09:43] I remember the fierce resistance to removing the small stores and businesses that were previously on that site. But Old Town Square is now the beautiful centerpiece of our city. It is a gathering space all year round for all kinds of events. That decision has paid off tremendously in our sense of community and the vibrancy of downtown.

[00:10:04] Completing the Snyder Trail will fulfill decades of planning. We will never again have access to the unique financing which funds this project with non-city money. You all know the consequence of not completing the trail and having to repay \$3.7 million. Fiscally, giving up outside funding in favor of hitting taxpayer money to that amount seems nonsensical to me.

[00:10:30] And finally, I want you to consider this stark difference. The town of Vienna is considering converting a vacant office building that's adjacent to the Washington and Old Dominion Trail to a welcome center. It'll be a way station for their trail users and a place to publicize Vienna's offerings.

[00:10:46] They welcome their trail users. Canceling the Snyder Trail, leaving other trails in the city disconnected, tells trail users stay out of Fairfax City. And it tells our surrounding jurisdictions and city residents that city council cannot be counted on to follow through on promises made over the years and contracts signed.

[00:11:06] I believe Fairfax City is far better than that. I think it's time to be smart, welcoming, collaborative, and forward-thinking. Our next speaker is Philip Latassa. I speak tonight representing the

Friends of Acton Creek.

[00:11:26] We asked the City to hold the line to continue to seek an alternative route for the George Schneider Trail. At its April 22nd meeting, City Council voted unanimously to delay the bidding process for the George Schneider Trail to provide time to explore alternatives. The Council listened to community concerns about the trail's extensive environmental impact and high costs and acted upon those concerns.

[00:11:48] Yet we hear of a mystifying sudden reversal by VDOT that would close off any option but to build the trail as originally designed. How are we here again? It is time for heroes to step forward in response. As we have heard many times, the George Schneider Trail is already too expensive.

[00:12:05] Its perpetual maintenance will be out of taxpayers' pockets. The George Schneider Trail will permanently pave acres of woodland in the slender green buffer that protects Accutink Creek. The George Schneider Trail requires an exceptional level of alteration of the terrain for bridges and retaining walls.

[00:12:22] The George Schneider Trail is redundant in light of city plans for making Fairfax Boulevard safer for bicyclists and walkers. Arbitrary deadlines can be negotiated. Arbitrary demands for repayment can be waived when new information makes plans to proceed inadvisable. Under no circumstances should the city throw good money after bad by building the original design of the George Snyder Trail.

[00:12:44] Please be the heroes, the city, its citizens, and our forests need. Please hold the line to continue to seek an alternative route for the George Snyder Trail. Thank you. Our next speaker is Mariana Fournier. Good evening. I'm Mariana Fournier, and I have lived in the city for 45 years.

[00:13:14] This last week, I have read so many emails that I'm convinced of only one thing. We must not go forward with the original plan of the GST trail, which we are being pressured to do so.

[00:13:31] To be fair and honest to all our citizens, both pro and con, many questions need to be answered. Is the GST to be a recreational trail, or is it to be a mode of transportation? We can't have it both ways.

[00:13:48] What are the benefits of each and the drawbacks? What is the cost of this project realistically going to be? A while back, the council said it needed an additional million dollars to put it to bid. Now you add to that the cost for maintenance and increased security costs.

[00:14:09] What could we be facing in the future? What can VDOT offer us regarding the 3.7 amount of what we owe? Our full council must meet with VDOT and find out.

[00:14:30] I believe VDOT has said they would be happy to help us. They've even given us the option of reapplying down the road. I think that would be our best choice. It's our city and only our residents should be the ones to decide thank you very much our next speaker is Avril Garland thank you for letting me speak I'm from the town of Vienna and uh I'm also

[00:15:03] asking you to pause on the George Snyder Trail we've lost the the the number of trees that this would involve is absolutely sickening uh 500 to 600 trees it's just too many and I would definitely challenge the first speaker to come with me I can't remember your name and go from Arlington Boulevard right to 123 we can go on the sidewalk down Draper Road down Beach Drive through Draper Park we can go the whole way perfectly safe on either sidewalks or quiet

[00:15:37] streets this connectivity that people are saying is lacking it doesn't I have I am a commuter cyclist, and I cycle along the roads, and I'm looking forward to having the Blenheim Boulevard made more

safe and have more bike lanes. Bikes belong on the streets, and I hope that the council will stay to their decision on the 22nd of April. Thank you. Our next speaker, Steve Welke.

[00:16:07] Mayor and City Council, thanks again for the opportunity to speak. My name is Steve Welke. I live at 10130 Cardinal Road, and I'm going to start by admitting that I've not been as informed on city issues as I could have been over the years it may not be a good excuse but the 28 years I've lived here I have not had to be concerned that city council might approve an initiative that would result in the kind of destruction that has taken place on one side of the entrance of Mosby Woods I give the benefit of the doubt the council did not realize that what

[00:16:46] was written on paper would result in what is someone else termed from the last meeting as a strip mine. But now we know, and council is considering a repeat of the same thing on the other side. So here I am. Engaging in the GST issue has been very informative for me. I'm learning new things all the time. How long this issue has been in the works, how it morphed over time, some of how the city council process works, how different people in our city view this issue, et cetera. I imagine you will hear from other folks with much more detail about the ecological,

[00:17:22] safety, quality of life, and financial impacts of implementing the current approach. And I say all of this because my guess is that the vast majority of the citizens of Fairfax City know about as much as I do. My contribution is much more basic. For anyone in this room or watching who supports the current approach, I request that you go look at the entrance to Mosby Woods. One side is before, the other side is after. I'd like you to ask yourself if it makes any sense to knowingly allow a similar travesty at any cost. My ask is to make this issue the number

[00:18:02] one item on the work session agenda and to pursue a face-to-face meeting with VDOT that includes at least Mr. Peterson, who I understand was the primary author of the alternative approach that council unanimously approved. There has to be a path to compromise. Cowering to the VDOT ultimatum is not good for anyone. Finally, I know that this is hard work. I appreciate your efforts to dive in and to work on this issue on behalf of the citizens you represent, both now and for decades to come.

[00:18:37] Don't give in. Thank you. Our next speaker is Val Morgan. Good evening. Here we are again.

[00:19:09] We thought we got somewhere. But at the last meeting, I stayed a little longer and listened to the talks about sidewalks and streets, and when we got to the part about, I think it's in North Vax, fixing a street, adding to it, I guess, a street and some sidewalk, I was stunned to learn that that flat street with some sidewalk is going to cost more than the George Snyder Trail, but that's impossible.

[00:19:37] So if that's going to be \$21 million, and they're saying the George Snyder Trail with 11-foot retaining wall, other retaining walls, bridges, boardwalks, changing the topography to this. I just can't believe that that's going to be right. So if we actually have to pay back \$3.7 million, it might be better than whatever extra it's going to cost us at the other end,

[00:20:12] because there's no way that that's going to be \$20 million if a flat street is \$21 million. That doesn't make much sense. And besides, there's going to be sidewalks and there's going to be connections. I think we can do this on the streets.

[00:20:32] So it's just total folly to take out those gorgeous trees and kill whatever happens to disappear. So it would be great to cancel this thing. Thanks.

[00:20:49] Our next speaker is Nicole Lepetia. Good evening, council members.

[00:21:06] My name is Nicole, and I live in Cambridge Station, a neighborhood that will be directly and permanently affected by the proposed bike trail. This project, as currently designed, would result in the destruction of over 600 mature trees. The trees are not just part of our landscape.

[00:21:23] They are a living, breathing part of our ecosystem. They filter our air, protect against erosion, provide shade, and support local wildlife. Most importantly, they form a natural, peaceful buffer between our homes and the busy road of Fairfax Boulevard. Once they're gone, we can't bring them back in our lifetimes.

[00:21:41] I'm planning to raise a family here, and it honestly breaks my heart that my future kids may never experience what that forest gave us. It's something you can't replace with a few young trees and a ribbon-cutting ceremony. And for what? This trail will primarily serve a very small number of cyclists, while hundreds of families will bear the cost.

[00:21:59] Why are our neighborhoods expected to bend over backwards to give up safety, privacy, and green space for the convenience of a few? That's not equity. That's imbalance. And let's talk about safety. These kinds of trails become targets for loitering, trespassing, and even crime.

[00:22:15] They're rarely well-lit. They're hard for emergency services to access. When multi-use trails don't separate bikes and pedestrians, collisions happen, especially where children, pets, and seniors are present. And when that trail deteriorates, with cracks, debris, or flooding, who's going to maintain it?

[00:22:32] Because once it's built, the reality of upkeep often falls behind. But there's a better way. If the goal is bike access, the city could simply paint dedicated bike lanes on Stafford Drive a wide, paved road that connects the same areas without destroying a forest or putting families at risk.

[00:22:49] It's faster, cheaper, and actually safer for everyone. I am not anti-bike. I am pro-community, pro-safety, pro-common sense. I'm asking you, please pause this project, re-evaluate the route, involve the people who actually live here. Don't sacrifice an entire community's peace of mind, property values, and green space just to meet a deadline or avoid giving money back.

[00:23:11] You still have time to do the right thing. Please take it. Thank you. Our next speaker is Ellen Pence. My name is Ellen Pence. I live at 3211 Adams Court in Cambridge Station.

[00:23:37] I want to remind you to think about the year 2007, 2007, a long time ago, way before this GST plan. Parks and Recreation was in charge of the building of Stafford Park at that time, as it should have been.

[00:23:59] They had plans to build four ball fields in Stafford Park. The ground was to be completely raised all the way from the backs of what is now Freddy's and hooters to the creek bed, everything taken out. At that time, we citizens were opposed to such overbuilding and destruction of forest to build more fields. We had numerous meetings with city council and parks and recreation staff members over a period of about one and a half years.

[00:24:36] Parks and Rec ultimately changed the plans to one big field, sparing the small strip of urban forest from annihilation that we are fighting to save now.

[00:24:51] It's the same trees. The same trees are there that were there in 2007, plus a few more. That is the history behind this forest on the eastern portion. When did the Transportation Department take the

park and the urban forest away from Parks and Recreation?

[00:25:17] I don't know what year that happened, but somewhere in there, the Parks and Recreation was overwhelmed by transportation. Stafford Park is a small park, not a highway.

[00:25:33] It needs every tree. There is no way that it will ever be a commuter roadway for bicycles. Put back past where they belong or where they belong, which is on existing, well-lit, solid surfaces that are already maintained by the city.

[00:25:57] Thank you. Our next speaker is Francis Dietz.

[00:26:13] Good evening. When we did the trail walkthrough in late February or early March, we were walking through a thick forest. and it was probably difficult for people to comprehend what cutting down 600 trees would look like but fast forward a month or two and suddenly everyone knew what it would look like like a bomb went off that's what people were and still are appalled at the devastation wrought by the stream restoration project and now it seems that some folks just want to go ahead and basically

[00:26:50] take the rest of them down in the name of providing a bike path for which very viable alternatives exist. I live in Mosby Woods, which is ground zero for this project, and that term is apropos because that's what it looks like now, ground zero for a tornado or a hurricane. I just don't think that any reasonable person could view the devastation that has taken place east of Fairwoods Parkway and think that it is in any way a good idea to exacerbate it. I can't speak for my whole neighborhood, but I do talk to a lot of people, and there is widespread opposition to this project.

[00:27:25] I know your email boxes are full of comments. I'm very worried for our neighborhood and for our property values down the road. I'm sure before this spring, plenty of people thought, oh, who doesn't like a trail, right? I'm sure it will be fine. Then they saw what it would actually be like.

[00:27:42] And if you up there on the dais have not seen it, I would certainly hope you would take the time to see it before you make such a momentous decision. I know many people are talking about the \$3.7 million that is supposedly owed to VDOT. but we all know that these things are not set in stone. There's plenty of compromise to be had if one actually wants to find a compromise. I think what we need to do is take a step back, gather all the information, and try anew to find a way that makes the most sense for the most people. One of the things my Mosby Woods neighbors always say when they talk to me about this is,

[00:28:20] well, so much for being a tree city. I'm sorry, but they are already correct. Even though this project is not even off the ground, and it's a shame. Our next speaker is Susan Kyler. Hello,

[00:28:57] my name is Susan Hartley-Kyler. The staff report issued to guide your discussion of the George Snyder Trail during tonight's work session presents you with two options. Build the Through the Woods project or cancel it and repay \$3.7 million in already expended funds. However, the decision about the George Snyder Trail is not a binary either-or proposition because there is a feasible alternative that has been presented to this council. The sticking point for some of you may be the assertion that \$3.7 million must be repaid. However, the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority made a commitment to resolve disputes that may arise. Therefore,

[00:29:37] everything is negotiable, including the amount, if any, to be repaid and the VDOT June 30 deadline. I urge you to delay a vote on the GST until you have sufficient information on which to base the decision. Information such as how a recreational trail that was not going to be funded by the city morphed

into a transportation project that violated the city's own ordinances by routing the trail through a floodplain and a resource protection area where there are feasible alternatives from getting from A to B. A trail that consists of asphalt boardwalks, retaining

[00:30:13] walls, and is wide enough to accommodate city trucks for maintenance. Or how a project that VDOT, the NVTa and the Commonwealth Transportation Board, characterized as a recreational trail, was approved as eligible for I-66 concessionaire funds, funds that are clearly intended for transportation projects as NVTa, CTB, VDOT, and the city staff knew. And even though all other approved projects are for transit or transportation infrastructure improvements, even the Secretary of Transportation for Virginia, at public hearing on May 8th, noted that the VDOT is not in the

[00:30:50] habit of building recreational trails unless there is no other alternative for getting from point A to point B. Or why the city, NVTa, the CBT, and VDOT ignored the fact that the 2020 VDOT required public hearing, and 75 percent of public comments were against the Through the Woods GST. So there's plenty of blame to go around, and there is no reason why the city alone should be penalized for canceling a project so deeply flawed, particularly when there's an alternative. Again, I urge you to delay a vote until you, and not just staff, talk and negotiate with NVTa and CBT.

[00:31:29] Please do not allow yourselves to be rushed into a hasty vote based on insufficient information. Please also note that those who do want to vote now or even in early June are incomprehensibly, so they are willing to make a decision without sufficient information. Thank you. Our next speaker is Judy Frazier.

[00:31:52] Hi. Good evening, Mayor and City Council members. I wanted to talk just a moment about the RPA that's come up a couple times, And I have mentioned it before, but I just wanted to, you know, it's always said, well, it's a passive recreation use, so it's not an RPA issue.

[00:32:10] Well, it is. There is a gigantic manual that describes how you are to build in an RPA if you are to do so. This is put out by DCR. And first off, I want to say that the Chesapeake Bay Ordinance, as people listening may not know, is our ordinance.

[00:32:28] It's not a state. It's not a federal. It is up to you all to uphold the Chesapeake Bay Ordinance that is in our code. The buck stops here. The city's handling of its Chesapeake Bay Ordinance is under review right now. And how the city came to plot a seven-story building and 56 townhomes on top of a stream, on top of an RPA, is a big concern.

[00:32:54] So these are not light issues to build in an RPA. Even though it's up to us, the state is watching what we do. Now, the RPA manual does say that passive recreational uses are allowed. You must establish a review process to determine what activity qualifies.

[00:33:16] The local review must also verify that any proposed uses in the buffer do not conflict with the spirit or intent of the Chesapeake Bay Act. The locality should review the proposed facilities to determine whether or not an exemption is warranted.

[00:33:31] Because the term passive implies low impact and minimum disturbance to natural areas, the locality should not grant an exemption for a project that proposes excessive land disturbance, installation of large amounts of impervious surface, or the removal of a significant amount of buffer vegetation.

[00:33:52] If that sounds familiar, it's because that describes the George Snyder Trail as currently designed. If you decide to proceed with this project, you should probably proceed very carefully, and at

the very least, there should be a public hearing on whether to allow an RPA exemption for this unnecessary and unjustified project.

[00:34:12] The payback money threat is unfortunate. As other people have said, there are ways to negotiate this. Otherwise, it just becomes a blame game. There are a lot of people involved in this. They all need to be at the table. I don't know why VDOT is working more with the staff than with our elected leaders, because you all are the ones who are looking to do the right thing.

[00:34:34] So thank you. Our next speaker is Doug Cox.

[00:34:47] Thank you very much. Now I know how this stuff is. I think the first time I talked, I went way over. I'll try to keep it under. All right. I sent you all a brief from a ride I took yesterday, which took me all the way from Draper Park, well, I'm sorry, really Blenheim, all the way out to 66 Trail, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:35:08] George Snyder Trail is not necessary, guys. Not necessary. I keep hearing things like, well, we've got to patch into Wilcoxon. Yeah. So let me tell you a few roads. Draper, Cardinal, Fairfax Boulevard, Eaton Place.

[00:35:26] Those are all considered, once upon a time, bike-friendly roads. Not me. Look at Stafford. Go look at the George Snyder Trail placard. All those have blue lines. Bike-friendly. You want to go Wilcoxon to the George Snyder Trail, go up Draper.

[00:35:45] Even on the George Snyder Extension Trail, little legend, it indicates a little orange line that says, existing trail. Go up there, ride the George Snyder Trail, pops you out past Fairwoods Parkway to Crazy Crab, 0.3 miles.

[00:36:01] We're really arguing over this to stay off of Fairfax Boulevard for 0.3 miles. And on Fairfax Boulevard, it's a six-foot sidewalk, 46 inches off the road, way off, so safe, ridiculous.

[00:36:17] great sight lines. Ride your bike like nobody's tomorrow. I'm convinced whoever is planning these trails has never ridden a bike on a trail in their life. You know what the worst thing about riding a bike in a wooded trail is? Someone walking their dog. I'm one of those people, but I tell you what, you come off on that, you're worried about spooking the dog, you're coming up on a person. If you go down Fairfax Boulevard, 0.3 miles to Eaton Place, wide open sight line, you have a slight ridge, then you see Eaton, 0.3 miles. Go up to Eaton,

[00:36:54] There's a little bit of sidewalk that's needed to ride around the Best Western. And then guess what you're at? The service road to the Moose Lodge, you cross the Moose Lodge. Now I'm going to get to the destination. Ladies, do not take the I-66 bike trail. I cannot stress that enough.

[00:37:11] If you like going into tunnels on a trail that nobody can see you or hear you, that's your destination. And when you do this little access trail that goes to about three or four tunnels way down, like I said, you're hidden.

[00:37:28] You do pop up on Chainbridge Road once, so you can cross at the express lanes. So that's awesome. Then you dip back down, and then you're going down 66. You've got about a four-foot Jersey wall between you and that wall, which is the right lane of I-66.

[00:37:47] That's all that's protecting you. Probably a little less than that, actually. Don't do it. George Snyder Trail is not needed. They're on-street paths already available. Thank you. Our next speaker is Sophie McNeil.

[00:38:05] Hello, good evening. My name is Sophie McNeil. I live in Country Club Hills, and as many have already mentioned, the restoration is giving us a view into what the future destruction may look like if we go through with the full original George Snyder trail plan. As we have gone over in another work session back in April, you know, there is another option, which is just half of it,

[00:38:41] or we could go full cancel, and I do think that it would be really beneficial to allow extra time to investigate these other alternatives because of that large oak hickory forest that takes a really long time to form. I think that's one of the main concerns with the forestry aspect of it, but I would like to share a quote that many of us may be familiar with. It's, when the last tree has been cut down, the last fish is caught, the last river poisoned. Only then will we realize that one cannot

[00:39:17] eat money. And only after everything is gone will we realize that this path is not what is necessarily being advertised. You know, this pretty commuter trail. We saw these mock-ups photoshopped into the woods. Well, the one thing that might be different is that those photoshopped photos have canopy. The near 18% canopy loss that will occur with the combined George Snyder trail and restoration, that's where a lot of it comes from, will likely just be really not appealing to ride through. You know, it almost seems as if we're avoiding canceling the plan because of the

[00:39:55] fear of having to pay back that 3.7 million. And there's just too much destruction and so much community opposition. I really urge you all to just hold off on the vote like VDOT originally allowed until you know the end of this year and just explore other alternatives with the time that we have left it's really important that we just fully grasp what could happen if we built this

[00:40:20] trail or just vote to shut it down thank you very much our next speaker sofia meza uh good evening i'm sofia mes morales i live on 10302 cardinal road and i urge you to please cancel the george Snyder Trail. I've been a Fairfax resident for eight years now. Every day I wake up to the sound

[00:40:56] of birdsong, children laughing, dogs barking. I'll hear the occasional car drive by or sirens from the fire station on Fairfax Boulevard. But what I don't like to hear is heavy machinery, the sound of trees falling, and big trucks spewing fumes while blocking the neighborhood roads. For me, the best part of living in Mosby Woods are the woods, catching frogs by the creek, collecting rocks, going bird watching. I don't need a new break path to do that. I would hate to see Fairfax become dirty, desolate, and devoid of wildlife because of some new development that wouldn't

[00:41:32] serve any grand purpose, and takes up already limited space in Fairfax. There used to be herons living in the creek near me that have since fled or died from urban development. There are woodpeckers, cardinals, and owls living in the giant trees I see across the road from me, so where are these animals supposed to go please consider our already dying ecosystem in your development plants thank

[00:41:55] you our next speaker is katie johnson katie johnson 10132 spring lake terrace i'm going to read a march 10th memo from it's to fairfax the director of fairfax county department of transportation from the director of department public works and environmental services as well as jai cole the director of fairfax county park authority i'm going to read the conclusion based

[00:42:34] on 30 years of monitoring streams and water quality dpwes concludes that the development of hard surface trails should only be located in rpa as a measure of last resort from a right trails right place perspective hard surface trails designed to accommodate both transportation and recreational trail users

are best located outside of rpa because hard surface trails sups in rpa degrade the environment through extensive vegetation clearing and grading for trail construction and laid down areas for bridge installation cause direct impacts to wetlands

[00:43:13] and sensitive vegetative communities allow for invasive species encroachment exacerbate erosion alter floodplain function and contribute to light pollution from trail lighting hard surface trails sups and rpas are typically more expensive to construct due to regulatory requirements more extensive tree removal required mitigation of impacts to wetlands and stream channels and required special construction methods and infrastructure to compensate for floodplain soil and stream flows hard surface trails sups and rpas are more expensive to maintain

[00:43:48] due to erosion from drainage and flooding, deposition of debris, ponding issues which limit use days and can cause hazards due to ice formation and cold weather and pavement degradation from increased moisture.

[00:44:03] For these reasons, DP, WES, and FCPA conclude that hard surface trails, SUPs, should not be shown in RPAs on the countywide plan to include the active transportation and trail network program unless environmental assessments are completed beforehand and show de minimis impact to water quality and sensitive resources conversion of existing natural surface trails to hard surface trails and rpas should be avoided unless essential for completing a network connection that cannot be made otherwise due to the potential for and the introduction of invasive species

[00:44:41] efforts to reduce impacts to sensitive areas should be priority when designing or renovating trails along RPA. Let's learn from Fairfax County and not take 30 years to do so. Our last speaker for this general public comment section is Shelly Vance. Hi, I'm Shelly Vance. I live in Cambridge Station. It seems to me that there has been little examination of the long-term costs of installing the George Snyder Trail in its current proposed configuration through steep hillside woods in

[00:45:19] sections B and C, through wetlands in sections A and D, five million dollar bridges, and huge retaining walls to hold back the hillside. Everyone has been focused on the short-term \$3.7 million that may or may not be negotiable or waived. I'd like to question the long-term costs of installing this trail as currently designed. Has there been any comparison of the cost to construct the trail in its current design, as opposed to one that aligns the trail

[00:45:53] to a large degree with current infrastructure sidewalks and roads? Similarly, has there been any calculation to compare the cost to operate, maintain, and repair the trail in both scenarios? The cost of the trail in its through-the-woods configuration, apparently pegged at about \$21 million dollars doesn't end with its installation. There will be ongoing costs that far exceed what the city would be committed to if the trail is installed alongside current roadway infrastructure.

[00:46:27] Going ahead with the trail in its through the woods configuration with its expensive build, operation, maintenance, and repair is throwing good money after bad. I would like to make the case that \$3.7 million will quickly be recouped if the trail is installed using existing roads and sidewalks and from its lower maintenance and repair costs. The city needs to compare the long-term expense of constantly maintaining and repairing such an overbuilt and inaccessible

[00:47:01] trail to the cost of a trail that is combined in some design with the existing infrastructure. If the city has not compared the costs, then it owes it to citizens to get more information. No one is happy to

forego the money already spent on this trail, but it pales in comparison to the future costs that this council is consigning to city taxpayers.

[00:47:26] The council should take the long view. The city savings will pass the \$3.7 million mark as well as any cost the city must bear to install an existing infrastructure trail and begin to save money in the out years when compared to the maintenance and repair costs of the Through the Woods design.

[00:47:45] There are still many unanswered questions about this trail. At a minimum, the city council owes it to its citizens to get more information. Do not be pressured into a hasty vote based on insufficient information. You voted yourselves a December 31 deadline.

[00:48:01] Use it. Thank you. We can move on to the consent agenda. Is there a motion to approve the consent agenda, Councilmember Hardy-Chandler? I move adoption of a consent agenda, agenda item number 8A, introduction of an ordinance amending Chapter 90, taxation of the Code of the City of Fairfax, Virginia, to add thereto a new Article 14, creating City of Fairfax Commercial Poverty Assessed Clean Energy, CPACE, financing program.

[00:48:35] Agenda item number 8B, consideration of a grant supplemental appropriation resolution in the amount of \$1,047,794 for FY25, federal, state, and use of balance sheet funds for expenditures.

[00:48:51] I move to approve the consent agenda items 8A through B and the motion accompanying the consent agenda item as printed. Is there a second? Second. Okay. A motion's been made by Council Member Hardy-Chandler and seconded by Council Member Peterson.

[00:49:07] Are there any items Council would like pulled for additional discussion? Seeing none, a roll call vote. Council Member McQuillan? Aye. Council Member Bates? Aye. Council Member Peterson? Aye. Council Member Hardy-Chandler?

[00:49:24] Aye. Council Member Hall? Aye. Council Member Amos? Aye. Motion passed unanimously. We'll go on to the second general public comment. I had one person sign up by the time this meeting started. I'm going to call Cappy Russell forward. Madam Mayor, members of the city council.

[00:49:47] My name is Cappy Russell. I live in the Daniels Run Woods neighborhood. The clerk has my exact address. I come to you tonight to urge you to approve, finally, the construction of the George Snyder Trail as designed.

[00:50:03] I do so both as a proponent of the trail itself. I really could have used it as I was picking through the woods the last couple of months trying to get to CVS to pick up some prescriptions. I'm sure my kids would love it if there was an easy way for us to get to Freddy's for ice cream as well.

[00:50:20] But also as a vocal opponent of the wasteful spending, it would be to oppose the trail and incur this \$3 million debt to the state. Unlike some of my neighbors, I take VDOT's deadline very, very seriously. In the fall campaign, the fate of the trail was debated as a choice between the something a previous council had approved and the nothing that a vocal anti-development constituency was clamoring for.

[00:50:46] That's a fair debate. Reasonable people can disagree. But that, to me, is not the vote that the council is debating tonight. Tonight you're weighing a trail that VDOT will pay for against the city paying for the privilege of getting nothing. That's a choice between something and less than nothing.

[00:51:04] I can't imagine choosing to pay for nothing in my own personal finances. I doubt any of you would pay for nothing in your personal finances. So I can't support you choosing such a wasteful path for

our city's finances. I'm not naive about how politics goes.

[00:51:22] We've seen a very loud group of residents here tonight pushing against trail construction, as many have pushed against previous development opportunities in the past. But I'm here to tell you there are other residents in the city who are not trapped in a backward-looking desire that the city never change.

[00:51:38] We are excited and hopeful about the possibilities of a city going forward. We'd rather see you seize opportunities than watch us get left behind by neighboring communities who are more willing to take advantage of these opportunities and these amenities for residents.

[00:51:54] So if you want to reject an optimistic and inclusive vision for Fairfax City, I'm sure you have plenty of votes to do so. But please, please, please don't vote no in a situation which will cost the city \$3 million for no good reason. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

[00:52:13] Is there anybody else in the room that would like to speak? Okay, if you start a line over here by the window and come at one at a time, if you come forward to the podium, just state your name, street address, and comment.

[00:52:37] Good evening. My name's Tannehill with Downing, and I'm a national civil rights advocate litigator out of Washington, D.C. I need to provide a public notice to the council here. This is in accordance with the USCS rules of civil procedure, as well as also Rule 17 and Rule 20 of the United States Supreme Court.

[00:52:56] The Constitution of the United States, the overarching requirements that every state must follow. I don't think anybody is going to deny that. States cannot enact their own alternative legislation, substitute it for the guarantees of the Constitution of the United States. That would mean that the state laws are more powerful than the Constitution of the United States. Clause 1 of Amendment 5 to the United States Constitution says no person shall be held to answer for a capital or otherwise infamous crime unless on presentment or a grand jury.

[00:53:19] However, the state of Virginia has enacted its own alternative legislation that permits the prosecuting attorney or police officer to charge by information, not by indictment. That is unconstitutional. Now, an emolument violation is when you pay a public official to break the law. You can't do that. So the Constitution has actually two areas that enforces this.

[00:53:37] One is Article I, Section 9, where it says that no state shall create any law that shall impair the obligation of contracts. Police officers, prosecutors are all under a contract, a contract to perform. That's based upon the oath or affirmation that they took. So the contract parameters are defined within the Constitution of the United States.

[00:53:55] So when the state enacts a law that directs them to disobey the law of the Constitution of the United States, that would be a violation of Article 1, Section 10. Now, the 14th Amendment is the other place that you'll find the reinforcement of this issue, and that is where it says that no state shall create or enforce any law that shall abridge the privileges and medias of the United States citizens.

[00:54:13] The privileges and medias of the United States citizens are, at a minimum, those enumerated within the Bill of Rights, the First Ten Amendments. They cannot be impaired, and thus the state of Virginia here has enacted a law, and it's inferior constitution that is permitting public officials, law

enforcement, whom you pay to violate the Constitution of the United States. And as a result, there is an inordinate amount of people currently imprisoned in the state of Virginia illegally and unconstitutionally.

[00:54:39] I'm a litigating at the United States Supreme Court. We've already submitted this. We're about to argue it. I'm here today to let you guys know that if we continue to pay these public officials to break the law, that there can be criminal sanctions that would come from that. I don't want to go that path but but we need to be aware that when we pay people to disobey the law that is an emolument violation it is illegal it is unconstitutional so I'm asking you honorable individuals here to please take a look at clause 1 amendment 5 confirm what I'm saying and then let's direct our public officials to act in lawful constitutional manner consistent with the obligations that they have codified in the Constitution of the United States of America I have a notice here that I would like to put on the

[00:55:19] record we can also provide it to the county attorney I'm not sure if they're here. But thank you guys so much. God bless. I'm sorry to interrupt your meeting. Speaker can come forward. Good evening. Many of you will remember me from previous steps to the podium. My name is Jack Cull, another Cambridge Station, proud Cambridge Station resident. I'd like to just take a quick moment. Several members of the audience, I think, are under the impression that those of us who have concerns with the existing proposal for the George Snyder Trail

[00:55:56] are opposed to it and I think I can speak for many of my neighbors my colleagues we're not opposed to it all we're asking is that that thought be given to some of the proposals some of the compromises that we have put forward over many years that are much more financially sound and environmentally sound in fact just a couple weeks ago I was heartened to hear that the council voted six nothing to take a step back pause give consideration to other alternatives and i thought to myself dear

[00:56:32] god common sense has reared its ugly head now i understand that the city is and forgive my french hell-bent metal to the pedal to the metal to go forward with this so um what happened to the pause What happened to reviewing alternatives? As I said, we have put forward repeatedly proposals that will hopefully compromise proposals that are much more fiscally sound and environmentally sound.

[00:57:05] And if I may say, and I think I can speak for all of my Cambridge Station neighbors, we are stunned, and I would use stronger language, but I won't. We are just absolutely stunned at the destruction inherent in the stream restoration project.

[00:57:28] And I had a conversation with some of the construction men a couple weeks ago, and they said, yeah, we're going to be planting trees, and you see all those little things over there. those are going to be trees. Yeah, I said, okay, how long for the trees? Oh, maybe 20, 30 years.

[00:57:44] I'm thinking, okay, well, I'll be dead before any of those trees reach fruition. And to look at the George Snyder Trail as it's currently proposed, digging into the side of the hill, pavement everything my god i i mean any members of the council who haven't been down to take a look at the stream restoration project who haven't been down to see the destruction and some of you may remember when i was up here a couple of weeks ago a couple of months ago i made an

[00:58:19] allegory to a b52 strike in vietnam because i've seen pictures of that that stream restoration i i can i cannot even begin to think what the george snyder trail will look like give common sense a chance take a pause and step back thank you next speaker my name is sarah bird i live on 10232 shiloh street which is adjacent to cardinal road um i am a long-time fairfax resident i

[00:58:59] attended providence katherine johnson fairfax high school grew up here i played in the very same woods that are now decimated by the stream restoration project. I implore you to take a pause and reflect on how it affects the surrounding community. Another person who came up to speak talked about how the trails would be beneficial for children. I ask you what pavement provides

[00:59:28] that a beautiful forest and canopy cannot. Next speaker can come forward. Hi, my name is Sabrina DeWald, and I live at 3705 Hill Street. Good evening, Mayor and Council. We are about to enter June, which marks almost six months of this session of Council Mayor. It's a good time to check in and review some crucial things. This year's budget marked yet another raise in real estate taxes. During that budget meeting, the term financial stewardship was thrown around with no

[01:00:04] clear definition. But I look at it as our tax dollars are an investment and should make our everyday life in the city higher quality since we pay higher taxes. But this is not the case. More tax dollars to fund the city and its staff with additional raises for them. But those same staff do not seem to exhibit commitment to the city and its taxpayers who fund their salaries.

[01:00:25] Instead, they choose to focus on passerby drivers and not addressing safety concerns from the Q bus. It is a huge slap in the face to us taxpayers. The focus of city staff should be on appreciation from their city that gives them their salaries. By focusing on proving daily life for city taxpayers, not passerbyers who do not fund them.

[01:00:45] Traffic lights should work to allow residents, taxpayers out of their neighborhood and onto a main street at all hours of the day. But under the direction of Public Works and Dave Summers, this is not the case, even though it should be. For those of you who do not know, Dave Summers sits right behind me there on his phone, making no effort to converse with city residents and taxpayers.

[01:01:07] And also under them, the Q bus is allowed to drive in the middle of the street every day and not make proper right-hand turns, yet nothing is done. Additionally, the small planning committee consultants, who do not even know the city layout, claim we have three, four lanes throughout the city when we do not. They need to be removed and replaced with somebody who actually knows the city layout and the struggle of city taxpayers.

[01:01:28] The city itself needs to focus on being transparent on the cost of items, no matter if it was previously budgeted in previous years, because any dollar saved could be utilized for another improvement. But city parks and recs does not believe in attached transparency and prices. \$400,000 for playground equipment is outrageous.

[01:01:46] People need to realize that funding these public schools and students in these schools should be a priority versus a playground. Why not propose a choice for those parents? Have a choice between a playground or funding for your kid. Additionally, why is Park and Rec requesting a survey to be sent to another state to collect data?

[01:02:02] That makes zero sense. Seems to lack transparency and accountability. I know that in the budget, there is an efficiency study to be conducted, but there needs to be more than that. Member counsel can claim transparency, but there seems to be a lack of that when it comes to dollars. I urge you, council, mayor, and city staff, to take a look at yourselves, remember where those dollars come from, and remember that everything should be posted with a price and response to every resident and every feedback given.

[01:02:27] By not doing so, city staff is reaffirming their lack of appreciation for their salaries, as well as lack of a need to increase those salaries. Let's take time to remember who is behind the money and who should be prioritized every day. Thank you. Next speaker.

[01:02:52] Hi, good evening. My name is Beth Iannetta. I live in the Westmore community at 10916 Berry Street. And I just want to state up front that I support the Georgetown Trail project. After I spoke at the May 13th City Council meeting, I stayed to listen to the other testimony on the project to understand the opposing point of view.

[01:03:09] I decided to pull some additional information for your consideration as you discuss the project later tonight. At a January 2024 City Council workshop session, Councilman Bates shared some detailed calculations on pedestrian and bike trip generation and how it would correlate to reductions in admissions.

[01:03:25] And I hope I got that right. Clearly, you demonstrated that you are a science and data person, whereas I am not. It inspired me to download the pedestrian and bike trip counts for the I-66 trail near Route 123, which is the closest data point collection site to the west end of the proposed trail.

[01:03:43] In 2024, there were 25,000 total trips counted that year by peds and bikes, with a daily average of 63 trips on a weekday and 82 trips on a weekend. So far this year, there have been 8,500 trips counted between January through May.

[01:04:00] This is ramping up to the summer months, which have higher counts. Also, please note that the Georgetown Trail is not in place yet, as will our other projects at Random Hills down the line. So please feel free to use these data points to update your emission reduction calculations.

[01:04:20] I imagine those numbers will grow when the GSD connection is constructed. I've included excerpts from a PowerPoint presentation on the Park Authority's trail website, which shows impacts that dirt and gravel trails have on floodplains when there's a high volume of trail users traversing them.

[01:04:37] As you will see, the damage can be extensive. The last slide gives you insight in terms of maintenance costs between a dirt and gravel trail versus a paved trail in a floodplain. I hope you will consider this information as you continue your discussions on the George Niner Trail. I will conclude with a quote that I came across recently.

[01:04:57] It said, democracy is a process, not a position. It's important for voters to know whether a candidate will follow the democratic process and decision-making, i.e. listen to citizens and work openly with them, and not bypass it to adopt a predetermined position, such as from a party platform.

[01:05:17] This quote was taken from a September 24th interview of then-City Council candidate Tom Peterson. It is excellent advice, and I implore you to consider the pros and cons from both sides of the argument before you make a \$3.7 million decision that will impact all of us. Thank you.

[01:05:35] Next speaker. Hi, my name is Mary Ann Sebald, and I'm a longtime resident of Mosby Woods. I live on Shiloh Street. We moved into Mosby Woods in 1996, and then proceeded to raise both our children through all city schools and at Mosby Woods pool and in the Little League parks and so forth so we have a huge family investment huge financial investment in this city and eons

[01:06:11] and multitudes of fabulous memories when my son who now lives in the norfolk area who's you know grown up and left the nest came home at easter and saw the devastation in the front of the

neighborhood he was just gobsmacked he was like mom what the heck is going on that's the creek i used to play in. That's where I used to catch those giant crawdads that then I'd bring home, and then you put them in supposedly a cage, but leave the top off so that they'd escape and

[01:06:43] hopefully find their way back to a stream. It was devastating to him to see what part of his neighborhood had turned into. Many other residents have spoken with tremendous details and facts and statistics and so forth. I'm speaking from the heart of a mom who has absolutely enjoyed and have been of true privilege to raise my children in the city. But to have that same type of devastation go on on the other side of Plantation Parkway in the front of our neighborhood

[01:07:20] would be something that would probably have my husband and I truly consider leaving the city. For a city council to have as many people come up here and speak about not doing something and then you to not listen would truly be heartbreaking and would leave us in a position where we really felt like we had no more voice in the city.

[01:07:48] So why should we continue to live here after the investment we have made? Thank you very much. Good evening. My name is Faizah Alam, 10112 Radcliffe Manor Drive, Fairfax.

[01:08:06] I stand here as a teacher, as I've stood here many times before. City pays millions of dollars to have CPS to hire the teachers. And as a teacher for 20 years in the city at Katherine Johnson, prior to that linear middle school, I have taught seventh grade to how to protect the ecosystem, and that's 50% of the population of the school each year, about 600 kids.

[01:08:30] And the entire curriculum is about taking care of your ecosystem and playing a balanced role in the ecosystem, that we human beings are not the only species who live on this earth.

[01:08:47] There are other species who have the right to live, and those species really help us in our ecosystem and the food web. And we need to look, not be selfish about us humans all the time, is what we need.

[01:09:04] What we need, what I need, it's a me syndrome. We need to get over that me syndrome and just think of the bigger picture, not money, \$3.7 million, not I want a bike trail, I want to bike to this place A, B, or C. What are we going to leave behind for our children and grandchildren and their children? Are we leaving a place better than what our parents left it for us? And that's the question for each people of you sitting here and the dais. And if I was there, I should have thought the same. That am I going to leave? My

[01:09:43] son lives in Germany. When he comes, he loves those trails and runs around it. And people are protecting the green space. I lived in Vienna for 16 years and moved to Fairfax because of the tree city and my passion for the environment. And if the passion I pass on, one of my students just spoke, who I taught in seventh grade, I think I did a good job. I earned my pay. Thank you so much for paying to the FCPS.

[01:10:14] So jokes apart, I'm not trying to be here to be smart. I'm just truly trying to say, please think before you do 3.7 million in the long run of schemes after I am gone and each one of you are gone, it's going to be not even peanuts. The cost of this trail is going to be way more and the maintenance even above that 3.7 million.

[01:10:36] So we can look at the long run for generations to come. Who is going to benefit? Few bicycles and we can get that absolutely. i support that i hosted the bike to school a big event at my school i'm a big

supporter of that and we can achieve that very easily by you know enhancing our streets and doing a good job over there right thank you so much and i trust you guys is there anybody else in the room that would

[01:11:07] like to speak wonderful so thank you all um i will now recess the regular meeting to go into a work

[01:11:19] we will take a five-minute recess to go into the work session room and you're

[01:19:57] back come to our work session Ms. Shinneberry our first items a joint discussion with the economic development authority and updates by the economic development department on programs and tourism portfolio I'm going to recognize Chris Bruno the economic development director to provide the staff presentation very much and good evening mayor council and commissioners I am joined with the FCED team and we have been looking forward to this meeting for a long time. As many of you know, this was originally scheduled to be an update on our programs, or sorry, our tourism and public relations portfolio modifications. It has

[01:20:35] since grown into an update on all of our public facing portfolio functions. So we are looking forward to this conversation this evening. I am joined by most of the staff from Fairfax City Economic Development. You will get to see them and we will do brief introductions as they come up to provide an overview of their portfolio functions. I'm also joined by the Commissioners of the Economic Development Authority this evening, led by Commissioner Mitchell Cho. I think we have, in a different order, we have Vice Chair Jeff Herman, Treasurer Dawn McGruder, Secretary Patrick Salamani, and Commissioner Kristen Feenstra with us

[01:21:13] this evening. We do have one vacancy on the authority right now, and Commissioner Kathleen Paley was unable to join us this evening. So we will get started. Tonight's overview will largely follow this outline that you see on the screen in front of you. After each subject or each portfolio function, we'll pause for any corresponding comments that the commissioners may have.

[01:21:34] To go over the outline briefly, we will talk a little bit about the Economic Development Authority, and then we will transition into talking a little bit about Fairfax City Economic Development. We'll talk about what the agency is and how it's currently organized right now. And then we will talk a little bit about our actual strategic work plan, the process that we went through.

[01:21:54] some of you may have been here for portions of that. And then we will begin to go into our portfolio areas, which for tonight will be business investment, programs and tourism, public relations and marketing. And then we will pause and go back to special initiatives and partnerships. And then we'll have an open discussion after a special slide that highlights the partnerships with George Mason University. I do think probably the, I'm sorry, I gave you to sign too early. I do think the easiest thing to do is probably save the questions or group questions together for staff by portfolio function so that we don't have different people up and

[01:22:30] moving. So when we're done with this presentation, we probably can have all of the business investment or all of the strategic partnerships questions altogether. So a little bit about the Economic Development Authority. The EDA in Fairfax City has been active for at least 25 years and was predated by an industrial development authority. EDAs are permitted under Virginia law as a parallel level of government and separate municipal corporation apart from the city's municipal government. However,

unlike other governments, the EDA is governed by an economic development commission or board of directors in our case, and they are appointed by you,

[01:23:08] the mayor and city council of the jurisdiction. In theory, this is done to remove the economic development operations and decisions from the political process and provides a long-term planning capacity with four-year terms for each commissioners. They are staggered terms as well, so we do not all sort of reset at the beginning of every fiscal year. As you will see at later points in this discussion, the strategic work plan for all economic development is based off of the city council's adopted policies and procedures. So for example, the priorities that you have identified at the beginning of, or will identify at the beginning of each council term, the comprehensive plan has been adopted, the small area plans, just to name a few.

[01:23:48] It is the responsibility of the Economic Development Authority to ensure that all actions of the EDA comply with these plans when developing programs and initiatives, which you see coming from us all the time. So I did mention who all of our commissioners are.

[01:24:05] I did highlight that we have one vacancy. It is just worth pointing out that all of our commissioners are experts in their respective fields or entrepreneurs, small business owners, leaders at organizations that help move FCED forward. They all play a role. They're not just a random grouping of people.

[01:24:20] are people that we mostly have recommended to you for appointment on the authority to move the organization forward. I would pause here to see if Commissioners Cho and Herman have any comments that they'd like to make at this point. Hello, everybody.

[01:24:38] My name is Mitchell Cho. I'm the chair of the EDA, and first I wanted to say that the city is very lucky to have such a professional EDA staff, and I mean that sincerely. This team really cares about the city, and as Chris mentioned, they have some really great experts in their fields.

[01:25:01] I am actually the founder of a company called FedRiders. We're located right in the city, and if I could just indulge you for a second about my experience of working in the city. I started my company as a one-person company. I actually started in Arlington, and I found out there's this thing called the Procurement technical assistance program, the PTAB, which is now the Apex Accelerators.

[01:25:22] And they do all these procurement-related classes, right? I took every one of those classes, how to write a proposal, how to price a proposal. And I found out that it was in this place called the Mason Enterprise Center, the MEC, that offered short-term leases.

[01:25:38] It was a business incubator run by George Mason and by the city, right? So over the course of the past 15 years, I've grown from a one-person company to over 300 people today. We do about \$40 million in revenue, and I can't stress how much the city helped me achieve that through various grants, through direct assistance, through relationships building with Chris.

[01:26:02] You know, when we graduated from the MEC, I was actually looking at different office spaces in other districts, in Fairfax County, in Reston, actually, in Arlington, and Chris actually reached out to me and built that relationship with me, offered me some certain incentives, and so I stayed in the city ever since.

[01:26:19] So I can't stress how much that impacted my decision, and here I am today as the chair of the EDA. So I can't say enough great things about what we're doing. I'll speak loudly. Our microphone system.

[01:26:38] All right, we have already failed as an EDA to organize ourselves well. But so I guess what I'm just going to add to what Mitchell had said was while we all have our individual specialties and, you know, highlight different aspects of why we're commissioners, I'd say the one thing that brings us together is that we are all very much community-minded.

[01:26:57] We are here to build community in many different ways, whether that be through financial means, development means, the tourism, through hospitality, through you name it, that's the one thread that sort of brings us all together, is that we are here because we want our community to be as great as it possibly can be.

[01:27:17] And so I'd like to say that the mayor and council have done a great job in pulling us together. So thank you for pulling together such an awesome group. But, you know, it's our individuality, but it's also the thread that pulls us together that makes us, you know, a great group to work through. So thanks. I'll just leave with that.

[01:27:34] Okay, thank you. So, excuse me, what is Fairfax City Economic Development? So prior to the pandemic, the EDA existed in this sort of weird gray area and previously operated through the Economic Development Department, which at the time was the Economic Development Office, which was itself a unit of the city manager's office. This created an uncomfortable effect of occasionally the EDA and the EDO having goals that were not in perfect alignment or even at times adverse to one another. And when I say adverse to one another, I mean a friendly sort of opposite views perspective, but it was

[01:28:10] still important. This led on a couple of occasions to the EDA retaining its own legal counsel for transactions involving property acquisition and direct-to-business grant and investment programs. And what we saw was that the city council responded to this and saw that this was particularly effective in terms of managing the EDA and encouraged further EDA oversight of EDO programs at the time. In 2019, the staff provided an overview of the types of operations that economic development agencies typically follow. I know most or none of you were on council at the time,

[01:28:46] So to a very high level summarize that, if you think about the models on a spectrum of sort of how these organizations can be set up, you can have economic development efforts that live within a department of a city or county, and then on the far end of the other end of the spectrum, you can have departments or independent nonprofits that carry out the economic development agencies, economic development work within a city.

[01:29:10] We fall somewhere in between, and we kind of have been shifting more towards being right in between all four of those. For example, Arlington County has the embedded in the department model, the city of Alexandria has the sort of independent nonprofit model, and Fairfax County has the economic development authority model, which is still kind of in between all of those.

[01:29:34] We ended up shifting from primarily EDO with an advisory EDA to more of a hybrid model that we have today and this still has some challenges one example an obvious example in the elephant in the room example is that the director of economic development is both a city employee but also accountable to the economic development authority commissioners but for the most part this model has worked and led to successful programmatic oversight of economic development programs for the branding purposes

which we're going to see here and we'll get into in a little bit later. We've rebranded as Fairfax City Economic Development to limit consumer

[01:30:12] confusion with the business community. They are consumers and they're our clients that we work most directly with. At the end of the day, the businesses don't really care if we're working for the department or the authority. They just care that we're there working with them. So about Fairfax City Economic Development, the department, I'm not going to read this, although I'm happy to pause anywhere if you have any questions on any of this specifically. At their core, economic development agencies are marketing, investment, and partnership agencies. And FCED was formed to bring the operations of the department and the EDA under one brand, though there are still some important

[01:30:49] distinctions, which we've talked about in the past here as well. We are pretty consistent in stressing that we are a non-regulatory client-focused agency. And we believe that because we've done that, we've been able to really communicate to our clients and our business community that we provide a high level of economic development services. We do have additional safeguards for accountability that have been built in with support from city staff and commissioners. We have done a number of reporting on our programs. We have metrics management programs in place, and we have a number of financial controls led by our finance and operations division. All of those reports are on

[01:31:27] our website or either distributed to you all independently. I have to say that this This relationship has been working because there seems to be a lot of trust between the mayor and city council and the commissioners of the EDA, and that trust is what has allowed us to implement programs consistent with the goals of the mayor and city council in the past.

[01:31:46] I think from our perspective, it is that level of trust and ability to implement the goals of the mayor and city council, which make it really important for us to have a clear understanding of what those goals are at the beginning of each council term. So it's very helpful when there's clear communications from the mayor and council to the economic Development Authority about goals. I do think it's important that there are always small challenges and we're not looking to solve any challenges tonight. This is just sort of a report out of some of the things that are happening. But I do think that this conversation and this resulting discussion will help close any gaps that might exist between the EDA and the Mayor and City

[01:32:22] Council and to begin a process for the new council to better have an EDA Council dialogue. Very briefly, I know this looks kind of all over the place, but I want to highlight the overview of our staffing chart. The only things that I'm really going to mention here specifically are that we currently have a vacancy in the Senior Assistant Director for Business Investment position, which we are currently in the middle of a recruitment for, I hope. And then all of the yellow dots, which the authority has asked me to highlight, which are positions that historically have been funded by the Economic Development Authority, but have been able to be placed on

[01:33:00] this org chart with the help of the city since the EDA does not have the human resources program and infrastructure to handle that on its own. Did any of the commissioners? Yeah, I'll say something on that. So again, highlighting those yellow dotted positions, while some of them are temporary internships, others are just temporary positions, kind of the reason why those have been something the EDA is invested in is because our programs have been so successful that we need additional staff to keep those things going. So we made an investment in more staff to make these already

[01:33:36] very successful programs even better and to just take it to the next level. Programs such as the facade improvements grants that we provide, the lease incentives for tenants that, you know, make sure that our vacancy rates stay low, things like that. That's what the point of those positions are to do. It's to support and make sure that those programs that I know that the mayor and council both you know really enjoy and make you know know that we want to keep those going at a very high level so that's we're making that investment back to make sure that those programs continue so just highlight that if i could just say one thing the reason why that senior

[01:34:16] assistant director position is vacant is because that person moved on to be the director of the vienna eda right and the the true mark the mark of a true leader is that they grow other leaders And that's what Chris has done, actually, in multiple cases. Thank you.

[01:34:33] We've had a lot of people leave. Okay, so you've heard us mention on numerous occasions our strategic work plan. The 2022 work plan was the first economic development strategy that was ever developed by the city, and its focus was on maximizing impacts within the capacity that we could achieve within a five-year period.

[01:34:53] So it's not long-term, but it was sort of the first attempt at doing this. For this project, we retained the services of Street Sense, which is a nationally recognized, I'm oversimplifying, but strategic plan company. Street Sense helped develop the FCD plan and to grow it into the most effective agency it could be with our existing resources.

[01:35:14] The image here is the strategic work plan. I do not expect or want you to read it from this image. This is just an image. It is all over our website, and I believe we've sent it to you in the past, but we can make sure that you have updated copies of it as well. The plan, however, responded directly to a stakeholder group, which included members of industry, city leadership, the community, partners, and elected officials from the mayor and city council. And it resulted in nine portfolio functions that have guided our work since 2022.

[01:35:44] Honestly, it is due for a refresh at the end of the next fiscal year, which is a good thing. But it has led to an effective, impactful, and recognizable economic development effort here in Fairfax City. Anecdotally, it's also led to us being recognized as a role model for small city economic development agencies, and we have talked about how successful this plan has helped us be both domestically, but certainly around Northern Virginia as well. Important to note and highlighted here on the two bottom bullet points is that it was updated this year to include public relations

[01:36:18] and marketing and tourism. So now we're going to talk about some of our programmatic functions. Importantly, and this is actually really important, they're not divided by people or employee, but rather by the responsibility area itself.

[01:36:35] This is because with such a lean team, we feel, and StreetSense felt as well, that it was important that each employee is responsible for advancing some, if not multiple, goals of the strategic work plan, which is why our team requires that every program proposal be aligned with a deliverable.

[01:36:51] And when programs are proposed, these programs are proposed to the Economic Development Authority in such a way that this satisfies Goal 2.2 or something along those lines. So everything we do has to align to that chart that I know that you can't read here. We're going to start with

business investment, which is being led by Acting Business Investment Manager, Maurice Patel, and she will come up and walk you through those slides.

[01:37:16] Good evening. My name is Maurice Patel. I've been with FCED, Fairfax City Economic Development, for two years. And I was previously with Alexandria Economic Development.

[01:37:34] Before that, with International Economic Development Council. So all in, I have about 10 years of experience with local economic development. And in this role, I'm focused on our business retention and attraction efforts. And in this first slide, we'll talk a little bit about retention.

[01:37:50] So basically, what retention means is keeping our businesses here and happy. And why it's important to focus on them is because, according to some studies, 80% of job growth in a city happen with your existing businesses. It's also important to have a good, healthy business base because they are your best way to attract new businesses.

[01:38:13] If people see that businesses are here and thriving, they also want to locate here. And also keeping a pulse on our existing local businesses in times like these when they're experiencing some shifts with their work with the federal government is important. So a few things that we have done in terms of business retention is our lease incentive program, LIFT, and that is if businesses sign a lease in 20 priority office buildings, we give them a cash grant, X amount of dollars per square foot.

[01:38:48] At least two or three businesses have used this to expand their footprint in Fairfax City. I spoke with one the other day who needs to expand and weighing the options of leaving the city or staying in the city and lift, it sounds from our conversation, was going to be a deciding factor.

[01:39:08] And we also have used financial incentives to retain businesses, most notably Zeta. And they were in need of an office upgrade, and so they were weighing on whether to renovate their existing office or move to a new one outside the city. And the financial incentive we gave them encouraged them to stay, invest in the office space, which is a win for the city.

[01:39:31] It has some measurable ROI, such as square feet occupied employee headcount and their spend in the city. But it's also a marketing advantage to us. If you look at our surrounding jurisdiction, Fairfax County, they have X number of Fortune 500 companies.

[01:39:49] We don't have that here, but we do have a very large company that's a subsidiary of Lockheed Martin. And so that is something that we put in our presentations as we're talking about our business community and looking to attract new businesses here. And, you know, the business retention process, how it kind of works is first we have to reach out and establish a connection with the business.

[01:40:10] We have to get a meeting with them to learn their needs, to establish some level of trust where it's a beginning of a relationship and an open dialogue. If we see a need to develop certain programs or step in with an incentive, that is something that all is our intel kind of gathering that we roll up and look into overall how is the business community doing here.

[01:40:33] And all of this has to be done in a timely manner. So we have certain internal goals that we set in terms of how many businesses we want to meet with on a quarter or a certain period of time. And then if there is any follow-up, which typically there is, even if it's something small, but you want to be timely in the way that you can address that.

[01:40:54] And so that takes staff and resources in terms of how we achieve that. So I guess I'll pause there. Any comments, questions? Good evening, everybody.

[01:41:11] Mayor, members of the council, great to be with you. Patrick Soleimani, secretary to the authority here. I'll tell you, we're talking about resources. With the existing resources that the EDA has, I think they're doing a remarkable job.

[01:41:29] The FCD is more representative of a larger city than 26,000 and change with the work that's being done. Northern Virginia is a very crowded space. What sets this jurisdiction apart is really going to be that outreach and that partnership.

[01:41:47] That's the unique value proposition. The ability to establish those critical relationships with businesses both within the city limits but also outside to be able to leverage the largest university in the Commonwealth right here in your backyard.

[01:42:03] Whether it's the director on strategy, the business investment team on outreach and relationship building, and even to the interns who are supporting programs and events that cultivate all the relationships, I really do believe that the Economic Development Authority is making a significant difference and punching way above its weight.

[01:42:25] Yeah, and if I could just add, I mean, can't understate the importance of retaining Zeta, right? I mean, that wasn't just a big win for the FCD, but that was a big win for the city. We're talking about a subsidiary of Lockheed that does, you know, hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue.

[01:42:44] They occupy a complete building in Willowood, and, you know, we were able to retain them. So that's a huge win for the city. And I'll just, you know, we ended our last point on interns, and it's, we don't give our interns busy work by any means.

[01:42:59] We have interns that come back to a semester after semester because they get really valuable experience and they put out a really good, valuable work product. And so we're proud of that. So they are an essential part of the team. So the next thing I'll talk about is focusing a little bit more on our attraction work.

[01:43:23] As Commissioner Soleimani said, we have some very unique assets. We are in a competitive region, but it is all about self-promotion, and we do have things to sell. George Mason University, the Mason Enterprise Center, Small Business Development Center, and APEX.

[01:43:43] Commissioner Chair Mitchell Cho, he couldn't have laid it out better in terms of how it is all woven together. And when we do talk about our assets here, we do talk about how it's very intentional in the way that things are set up. all you know our economic development campus you have space at the MEC with their mentors you have the SBDC programs you have Apex it's all right there you know in our offices as well and the the chamber of commerce so it's very intentional and it's able people are able to get their hands on it and they feel like they're being taken care of in a place like this as opposed to maybe some

[01:44:21] of our other regional um not competitors neighbors um so we have um and another thing you know about fairfax city is that we have an interest in projects of all sizes um i you know there's no project too small for us here especially with our incubator we can take on a lot of businesses of different sizes and different periods of growth and we hope they do become you know the one to 300 person company

because they they do have room to grow and expand here um and uh you know one One thing that we can really do as our competitive advantage in the region is compete on the level of service.

[01:44:59] So if you do, again, if you're a business of any size, if you come to the economic development office and say, I'm interested in locating my business here, we can lay out, we've literally laid out the roadmap of what that looks like if a business wants to come to the city.

[01:45:14] And why do we want to attract new businesses? Well, they inject new ideas, new capital, and new employees, new jobs into the economy, They build our reputation as a business center. In terms of how we go about it, we're obviously a small organization with a small budget.

[01:45:30] But we've really been honing in on who our target market is. Because, you know, as a good marketing marketer will tell you, you can't be everything to everyone. Otherwise, you're nothing. And so we've been drilling down in terms of particular industries that we can support here in the city and businesses of certain sizes, kind of what that profile would look like of where they would, if they would choose Fairfax City.

[01:45:54] So we're not casting a wide net. So when we go out and we market ourselves, we are doing it in a very strategic way. Another thing that we do is develop relationships with partners that can do the work for us. So the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, they have a variety of different people that help do lead generation as well in certain industries and also in certain countries. And so we've been developing relationships with them, and they will bring us leads. So, you know, if someone comes to VEDP, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and says, I want to locate in Virginia, they'll kind of get an idea of what that business is, where they might

[01:46:33] locate, and then they hand them off to the jurisdiction. So we need to keep ourselves top of mind. And I'll just share an example. We were recently at the Select USA conference. It's a conference that happens every year in the DC area. It's about attracting foreign direct investment to the US. And so Virginia had a booth and we were there as part of Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance. And VEDP was getting these leads and saying, oh, you think, I think you'll be best in like Fairfax County, Fairfax City. And then they would walk them over to our booth. Well, Fairfax City is not at events like this. You can guess, you know, they're not coming to Fairfax

[01:47:10] city. So that was great for us to be at events like this. And I'll reference, that's us at SelectUSA on the bottom photo there. But that also brings up our engagement with partners like Italy. We went there with the Small Business Development Center. They organized a terrific tour. We made connections in the region. There's mutual interest in Italy engaging with Northern Virginia, and we've kind of planted the flag there first as Fairfax City, and have an ongoing

[01:47:44] relationship with them now, and they actually, this region in Italy, Freezie, Venezia, Giulia, and Virginia signed an MOU in October of last year for increased cooperation on a variety of areas, including economic development. And so how do we achieve our goal of business attraction?

[01:48:05] It's by getting there first, to be quite honest. We need to go where businesses are and be the first one to have their ear. I'll share an example from a, in a previous position, I went on a trip to England with VEDP. We were trying to get, you know, English businesses interested in Virginia, particularly where I was currently working in Alexandria.

[01:48:25] And we met with one business and we said, are you interested in coming to the U.S.? And they said, yes. And we're like, well, where would you consider? And they said, Maryland. And we said, well, why? and say, well, I talked with Marilyn first, and that's kind of where I'm interested in going. So there's, you know, it's, I think people kind of assume that businesses are doing some deep research in terms of where they might land, but really a lot of it comes down to having their ear first and kind of presenting yourself as the best option. And again, it all relates back to customer service and making sure that we can keep up the momentum, we can build our reputation by offering excellent customer service and doing it all in a timely manner.

[01:49:06] Programs and tourism. Okay. I also wanted to bring up a trip that I was personally on with Director Bruno, which was to Korea.

[01:49:22] As many of you may know, George Mason University has a campus in Inshin, Korea. We started there with 46 students. Now over 1,000 students have a significant presence there. Just like the partnership that we have here in Fairfax. We thought it would be very important to be able to showcase that partnership overseas. The travel there allowed us to visit four startups and incubators and accelerators that were there in Seoul and some of the surrounding neighborhoods there. It was really

[01:49:59] important to have a presence and to have discussions about potential soft landings for organizations in South Korea, here in Fairfax City. We actually bumped into our brothers from the county who were there trying to do some of the same things.

[01:50:18] Like I said, Northern Virginia is a pretty crowded environment and you have folks all over planting flags. Being able to attract business from overseas in those areas is crucial. Having an academic partner with a campus presence to be able to do that with, I think, is a sound strategy.

[01:50:41] Overseas, and this surprised me when I took my first of many trips to South Korea, the government is not just a proponent of innovation and entrepreneurship. It is the chief financier of innovation and entrepreneurship.

[01:50:58] And whether we agree with that system or not, the residents and the entrepreneurs there have this thought that in order for them to really be able to be successful in another nation, they need to see the support of the local government.

[01:51:16] So having the Fairfax County Economic Development there really allowed us to have a unique value proposition for these businesses to be able to show a partnership between government, quasi-government, academic and research institutions really spurred a lot of conversation and a lot of follow-up where we're now talking about some soft landings at the Mason Enterprise Center for a lot of Korean businesses.

[01:51:46] It also replicates the foundation of the partnership that was in Rome and hopefully partnerships in other areas of the world. And I'll end this part by saying the Northern Virginia Tech Corridor, and we're here in the beating heart of that corridor, is underestimated.

[01:52:08] We right now have productivity that is in many areas excelling and exceeding places like Silicon Valley in innovation entrepreneurship, like New York and many other areas.

[01:52:23] We don't want to just be known for government contracting. We need to be known for some of the other great things that we're doing and to attract innovators and entrepreneurs from other areas of the

world as part of this ecosystem. And I think these types of trips go a long way in doing that.

[01:52:40] So now we're going to switch gears to programs and tourism with someone you might know. Good evening, Mayor and Council.

[01:52:56] My name is Tara Borway, and I am Assistant Director for Programs with RefxV Economic Development. I hope that every single one of you have heard about the programs that we'll be talking about this evening. I am very grateful to our commissioners for being here this evening as well, and for the support that they continue to provide FCED on a regular basis.

[01:53:20] We've talked tonight a little bit already about our strategic work plan, and I have been here for three years. I've been able to see the transition that has occurred under the recommendations of this plan. We have shifted our programs to align more closely with traditional economic development practices and industry standards. As recommended in the work plan, we've also transitioned some initiatives to our trusted community partners, such as the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, and the Old Town Fairfax Business Association, who are well-positioned

[01:53:56] to lead them. These partnerships have expanded our reach and impact. They allow us to connect with businesses, increase capacity for our shared programs, and in the case of the OTFBA, they provide targeted support for businesses in Old Town. Strengthening these partnerships has been a key to laying a strong foundation for the program's portfolio and the continued growth of our partner organizations. Through these collaborations and with ED Oversight and funding, we offer events like Fairfax City Restaurant Week and Small Business Celebrations,

[01:54:32] which spotlight local businesses that give our city its unique character and help attract visitors. This is one of my favorite photos that we've got during Fairfax City Restaurant Week, and I would just speak to how appreciative our small businesses are when we visit them and specifically with Mayor Reed, of course.

[01:54:56] I got an email just today, and I haven't had a chance to share with you, but B2 Pilates just thanked us so much for coming by this past week. We stopped by to create some collateral and social media content for Small Business Month. These businesses just feel very supportive with that type of support and attention that we're able to give.

[01:55:21] A big part of our programming focuses on driving local spending and keeping local dollars local. Increasing awareness of these businesses, their products and services that make Fairfax City an exceptional place to live as well as visit. The programs listed here help us achieve those goals.

[01:55:40] For example, the Facade and Interior Improvement Grant has helped many businesses enhance their storefronts, 33 to be exact, I believe. And not only has that led to improving the aesthetics, and I'm sure all of you can easily think of how Main Street has changed over the course of the last several years.

[01:56:01] Many of those businesses took advantage of that grant. But most importantly, I think, is that these types of grants encourage further investment in the city. So with the FIG program, that was a 50% matching grant.

[01:56:17] Whatever we invested was doubled. And I just can't speak enough to how much more welcoming Main Street looks with some of these updated facades. And I can hope to see that continue

through the support of the EDA and the City Council.

[01:56:35] While we work diligently to amplify our message, programs have been a reliable source of networking and relationship building with a variety of stakeholders, as well as a key tool in garnering earned media opportunities in the region and increased awareness of our own brand through our programs fcd is able to build strong connections with local business owners connections that deepen our impact across the small business community these businesses are one of fairfax city's greatest strategic strengths they bring foot traffic into the city

[01:57:14] offer unique experiences and keep visitors coming back ribbon cuttings one of my favorite things they're a great example of how we foster these relationships they're not only meant to help welcome new businesses to the city but also serve as a draw encouraging others to explore and engage and even relocate their businesses here um you know this is uh just a few examples of the many ribbon cuttings we've done over the last few years um but as many of you know we create

[01:57:49] videos of these events for uh social media and for um to share on our youtube channel and the businesses can take advantage of that as a as a perk of the program but we have been um approached by a couple that specifically chose fairfax city as to relocate because of the ribbon cutting videos that they saw and their interest in starting business here uh which i think is incredible that we are, you know, a little department, but doing big things. Businesses that feel seen and valued

[01:58:25] in their first interaction with us is an example of the concierge level service that FCED has become known for. The sense of place our small businesses create enhances the residents' quality of life, and it's also what inspires people to spend their time and money in Fairfax City.

[01:58:42] And that connects programs to tourism. Because when you combine a strong business community with a distinct sense of place, you create a destination. I have a great respect for one of our new team members who has joined us to work on tourism.

[01:59:04] And I just really see how both of the things that we do are overlapping and complementary. And I really look forward to continuing to work with Stephanie, who you're here from, soon. Can you give my girl a mic?

[01:59:25] So for those of you that don't know me, when I'm not serving on the EDA, I moonlight as the general manager at the Residence Inn here in Fairfax City. And I took that role in 2022, just in time, to complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of the building.

[01:59:42] And when we finished it, I contacted the city and I said, hey, we're going to do a grand reopening, reimaging. And the support that I received from the EDA, specifically from Tara and Matt and Chris, was absolutely overwhelming.

[02:00:00] I have been opening and renovating hotels for 20 years, and I have never in my life experienced the kind of support that we received for that grand reopening. We had hundreds of clients come. We had George Mason artists. We had George Mason music students playing music.

[02:00:18] And the mayor showed up to our grand reopening. And I just want to express that there really isn't anything quite like it. You don't get that kind of level of service anywhere else. And the small town feel combined with the power of a company, it's overwhelming.

[02:00:35] So I just want to thank you guys for the support that you give to the EDA. I want to thank Chris for everything that they do. But please understand that these programs aren't easy to do. And having ribbon cuttings, although it seems, you know, like an average thing to do, it really isn't.

[02:00:52] And it means a lot. So anything we can do to try and support the EDA and having enough support staff to get that done for every business, no matter whether it's a big hotel or the Pilates studio, that should be important in every setting. So making sure that we have that staffing and support and the funding to do that.

[02:01:10] Like I know we have hired temporary staff here and there to do that. I know, I think Stephanie, who you'll hear from later, is a part-time employee. But anything we can do to fund those things is going to be much, much appreciated to continue the good work. Okay. Tourism. We're almost there.

[02:01:35] Hello, Mayor and Council. My name is Stephanie Gerson. I am the Tourism and Placemaking Specialist in FCD, and I've been in this position for about eight months. So just to give a little history lesson, a few years ago, FCD brought on a temporary staff member to focus on leveraging ARPA funding for placemaking and tourism-related initiatives.

[02:02:02] The success of that effort led City Council to request that FCD formally explore incorporating tourism into its ongoing portfolio, which is where I come in. So the past couple of months, myself, with the help of focus groups that included city council members, regional partners, city staff, and industry professionals, we were able to pull from past experiences and best practices to help guide our consultant, StreetSense, in integrating tourism into FCD's strategic work plan and lay out the next steps.

[02:02:36] the consultant also conducted a tourism study, which I have shared with all of you, providing tourism data that helps support our initiatives. I would like to look at the big picture. So in 2018, the Northern Virginia region accounted for \$11.2 billion in travel and tourism spending.

[02:03:00] That's approximately 44% of the state's overall travel and tourism spending. This is pre-COVID, but the numbers are almost back to that level. We are in Northern Virginia, so we are part of that number. The difference being, though, that this does not happen organically, but it is a testament to the power of tourism investment that jurisdictions in Northern Virginia dedicate to promotion and marketing of the region. These would be destination marketing organizations called DMOs. So that's visit Fairfax, visit Alexandria, all in Arlington, visit Loudoun County,

[02:03:38] among others. The money that they are provided allows them to promote themselves as standalone destinations. They create an identity for themselves through branding and marketing efforts, partnering with hotels and venues to attract large-scale events and meetings.

[02:03:59] These efforts are then multiplied when they collaborate through regional partnerships like Nova Tourism, Nova Sports Tourism, and Destination DC. This allows for global exposure, not just local exposure. So how are they able to do this?

[02:04:18] These jurisdictions are able to focus on marketing efforts through the TOT tax, the transient occupancy tax, which I'm sure you are all aware of. So Fairfax City and Fairfax County, I'm using the county as an example here, both have a TOT of 7%, which is of the total amount of the room charge.

[02:04:37] This is outside dollars coming into the city. Fairfax City allocates 4% to the city's general fund and 3% to the Northern Virginia Transportation District. Fairfax County, on the other hand, which is, this

is also common in a lot of other jurisdictions, 2% to the general fund and 2% to visit Fairfax and 3% to that Northern Virginia tourism district.

[02:05:00] So that 2% to visit Fairfax, that's the DMO, and that's what's funding not just marketing here locally, but marketing internationally, bringing big meetings here, bringing big events here. Anyone who comes to D.C. essentially also knows that Northern Virginia is here and Fairfax is here.

[02:05:23] they know Mount Vernon, they know Wolf Trap, they know that we're here, or they know that Northern Virginia is here. So data from the tourism study and from Placer AI shows that Fairfax City had roughly 120,000 in overnight visitors in 2023. Contributing, this contributed to 586,000 and TOT. If we were to increase the TOT by one percent it could generate approximately 192,000

[02:05:59] of outside money which then could be reinvested into promotion of events of promotion efforts that will not only directly benefit the hotels but also the restaurants retail and entertainment venues in the city through direct spending of the visitors. Seeing an opportunity the EDA has allocated \$100,000 to tourism efforts in the city. So tourism, it's not about having another website

[02:06:34] or another brand, but about storytelling. That's the way I like to think of it. It's about sharing what makes Perfect City unique and inviting people to come visit one of our museums, attend one of our events, host your own event, or eat at one of our restaurants. It's about having pride in your city and sharing it with the larger public, even internationally. Our neighbors may be the competition, but also part of the largest story of Northern Virginia, a story that we are currently being left out of because we do not pay a TOT tax to visit Fairfax. We do not have a DMO. We are not

[02:07:09] promoting tourism in the city. So our tourism work plan has laid out nine initiatives to focus on tourism. However, due to limited staffing and capacity, we have highlighted only a couple that we find most paramount. One would be exploring a DMO designation. Just for reference, 89% of all counties and cities in Virginia have a DMO. We are not one of them. Being a DMO, it does not require funding, but it does require a resolution by council. So that is something I'm just bringing to your awareness for right now. The other thing would be the creation of a tourism brand and

[02:07:48] website to promote Fairfax City and events. This is a place where everybody could go and see what's happening in the city, see what the museums are doing. Very visitor-facing, but also citizen-facing. The other thing would be looking into reassigning the visitor center, and then also exploring monetary partnership with Visit Fairfax. We do have a relationship with Visit Fairfax, and they are willing to, they currently do promote our events. Happily, They do that because they see that as a benefit for them.

[02:08:27] People who are coming here do not see boundaries. They don't know that they're in Fairfax City, and that could be a good thing, but it could also be a bad thing. So doing all this in tandem with continuing our efforts with partnering with GMU and Eagle Bank Arena, as well as our placemaking efforts.

[02:08:45] My one note is just by not participating in tourism-related efforts, we as a city in Northern Virginia are missing out on the exponential benefits of harnessing the outside dollars to fund internal projects and programs. It's outside money that we could be utilizing to then promote things of the city, which then has an exponential benefit. It brings more people in, which then funds more things. If you don't mind. So what I want people to understand is that when

[02:09:21] you go, I would encourage all of you to go home and Google visit the city of Fairfax and see what the top three um the top three pop-ups that you get on google are because the first one is our city website which doesn't really have a lot on it has the visitors museum but it's kind of just one link and then the second option is fxva which is the visit fairfax website and when you click there it does have some of our restaurants and some of our attractions but it doesn't have any of your hotels listed all five of the hotels that are in the city of fairfax do not have any representation there. If you go down to the third link, that's Virginia Tourism Corporation

[02:09:59] Commission, and that links you right back to the FXVA website. So from a digital perspective, the city of Fairfax at the moment doesn't exist, right, when it comes to tourism. So I know for a fact that Stephanie and Chris have done a really great job of trying to work on that for us and come up with a plan, but we really need to make an investment here because we are missing out on tremendous amount of dollars of people coming into the city but we're also missing out on grants and opportunities because Virginia as a whole tourism represents I think it's three billion

[02:10:33] dollars as an industry in Virginia as a state and then I think Fairfax County in and of itself Stephanie mentioned 11 million for northern Virginia Fairfax County is 3.6 million dollars of that and the Virginia Tourism Commission hands out millions in grants every year matching grants and we're missing an opportunity because we do not have a destination marketing organization at the moment and so what I would highly encourage us to do is look at either joining FXVA or creating our own DMO but to join FXVA that is two percent of your hotel revenues need to be

[02:11:07] dedicated to to FXVA that's the stipulation that typically they require so I'm not sure if you guys are aware but Fairfax County took a two percent increase that starts July 1st of this year for all of their hotel tax for their TOT tax. So what that means is the city right now will actually have a lower tax than the counties that surround us. So this might be an opportunity where we could look at what we're doing and say, hey, maybe we could take that same tax increase and go along with what everyone else in the marketplace is doing. And then we could use that to dedicate funds to a

[02:11:43] tourism program like FXVA. And that would allow us the capability to build bigger hotels. I know that that Ox Hill project is something that we're looking at there's a lot of opportunity to be had in tourism and we are leaving it all on the table and I it makes me so sad because this is the most wonderful place on earth and everyone should know it okay okay thank you we are going and I'm going to actually move this to have a quick overview of public relations and marketing hello I'm Brittany Jones the PR and marketing manager for Fairfax City Economic Development I started my role about

[02:12:21] year and a half ago. As part of the five-year strategic work plan, it was known that a PR and marketing lead was needed for the department. Since then, we have grown into a small but efficient team. I'd like to make a correction to this slide. We actually have one full-time staff, which is myself, and two part-time EDA-funded employees. This division leads brand and awareness campaigns, social media, PR, media outreach to position Fairfax City as an ideal location to start and grow a business as you can see at the bottom of this page there

[02:12:57] are three different um earned media efforts that were led by our division which is a direct result of our team's achievements and why we actually needed a unified team specifically for this office um just last june another another achievement from our department is that we launched a rebrand As you can

see throughout this presentation, we introduced a new logo, which includes our new sea foam green color to our color palette.

[02:13:31] We also have a new website. We have new emails. You can find us at fairfaxcityecondev.org now. And of course, the website is gofairfaxcity.com. And on all socials, we can be found at gofairfaxcity.com.

[02:13:49] This rebrand unifies both the EDA and FCED office to reflect our client-focused operations. That is now Fairfax City Economic Development Department. Our PR and marketing division is responsible for a number of things.

[02:14:10] As you can see in the top left corner, pick one, we maintain media relationships and act as spokespeople for FCED in live news segments like Fox 5 when we're talking about Fairfax City Restaurant Week. In the top right-hand corner, you'll see Chris Bruno, our director, acting as a thought leader on a panel for BizNow.

[02:14:32] BizNow is basically a business-focused brand that is, I think, nationally focused, but they have events all over the region. And he was able to act on the panel from representing Fairfax City along with a lot of other Fairfax County representatives.

[02:14:50] And we're also quoted in news articles. work one-on-one with the mayor, you know, our spokespeople within our divisions to give them talking points and revise their quotes for online articles. We also push out press releases as a tool to communicate FCD announcements both internally with you all and externally with the public, such as naming recipients of the Fairfax, the facade and interior and improvement grant, lease and incentives for Fairfax City programs, and sharing the news of major business retention and attraction efforts like Zeta Associates that Marie spoke of earlier.

[02:15:30] In the bottom left-hand corner, that is actually a print ad. We sometimes sponsor events, and we also have sponsored, you know, print ads in the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce is a directory.

[02:15:46] And in this one specifically, we were sponsoring the Regional Accelerate Investor Conference. It's kind of a conference for entrepreneurs to meet investors. And we were proud to have our ad in there with a QR code that links to our website.

[02:16:06] We also communicate to our target audiences in a variety of ways. We have a monthly e-newsletter that is sent out the first week of the month to over 2,100 subscribers. So if you are not a subscriber, please go to GoFairfaxCity.com, scroll down to the bottom of the page and subscribe.

[02:16:25] And social media, of course. Our division manages our departments, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and X accounts, communicating to the public of all FCED happenings. This also includes the monthly Faces of Fairfax City video series that we work closely with the City of Fairfax's Marketing Communications Office to help shoot.

[02:16:49] And we have an independent website, which I mentioned earlier. This content is specific to economic developments, resources, incentive guidelines, and applications, requests for ribbon cuttings, our reports, and a one-stop shop for all of our department's news.

[02:17:04] The PR and marketing department also supports all divisions within our team by developing marketing materials. In the bottom right-hand corner, you'll see our lovely step and repeat. We use this for, of course, photo ops, of course, but when we're having check presentations for our programs, when we are

at events, this step and repeat comes handy, along with, of course, branded merchandise, retractable banners.

[02:17:35] It's a way for people to recognize our office when we're out in the community. We also support with marketing collateral. We provide brochures, flyers. We need these, I guess, tangible items to bring with us to important meetings, I guess, content to appeal to both local, national, and international businesses and entrepreneurs, just to give them an overview, a handout for them to reflect on and be able to see a list of resources

[02:18:11] when they're trying to decide where they want to set up shop for their next business office, home. And lastly, we participate in regional marketing efforts with our partners. With Northern Virginia Economic Development Alliance, I am the chair of the Marketing and Communications Committee.

[02:18:28] We will talk a little bit about this in a strategic partnership slide, but just to give you a brief overview, NOVA EDA is a combination of nine different jurisdictions within Northern Virginia, and we are a partner. give a small contribution to the Alliance to be able to be in places like SelectUSA where we wouldn't be able to on our own. So being able to partner with the region, both Nova EDA and Greater Washington, to bring international businesses, national businesses to the region

[02:19:01] and using all of us to come together to attract businesses from all over the country. And I will pause for comments um the distinct and identifiable fed brand kind of separate from the city brand is really a signal to the business community that economic development is important to the city and in actuality right it's the top thing of the city council goals the first thing is economic

[02:19:35] development so um you know i think that the this team is doing a fantastic job of marketing the city's economic development programs i mean if you just look on youtube or any of those other things right you'll see it's loaded and and just with all the interviews they're doing on fox news and the radio and dc 101 i mean they they really have a great camera presence um and you know my business fed writers we actually are in the business of communications and i'm envious of what they're able to accomplish with such a little staff so um just wanted to say that um right it's

[02:20:09] They're all over the news, and they're all on top of the media, and it's really a fantastic thing to see. We have three left, I promise. All right, strategic partnerships and initiatives. So these strategic partnerships and initiatives are an important part of both the strategic work plan but also of our agency's core functions.

[02:20:33] Much of what we do relies in some way on a partnership for implementation. Without it, honestly, the agency would be extremely limited in what we are able to deliver on. And we deliver on a lot, I think, as you've seen. And we have a lot of partnerships to support these programs. I'm not going to read all of them.

[02:20:51] You can see this from here. But I do want to highlight just a couple. First, the Northern Virginia EDA, it provides us a seat at the regional table where we previously didn't have one. It's an organization that we are a founding member of that came into existence following the Amazon announcement several years ago.

[02:21:09] We are currently serving somewhat reluctantly as the treasurer of that organization, but it has given us the ability to really direct the regional economic development efforts in ways that were previously

not possible. I also want to mention the Old Town Fairfax Business Association, which the economic development team here spearheaded sort of the revitalization and reforming of a number of years ago.

[02:21:35] It's currently operating as like a bid light, business improvement district light. We have some really strong partners in the community, especially the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce. I'm not just saying that because I can feel them looking at me, but they are very active here, and they partner with our office frequently, and they are great partners.

[02:21:54] I also want to highlight Drapers. I do not know if you all know this, but that is actually property owned by the Economic Development Authority, and the EDA oversaw the redevelopment of that property for minimal taxpayer investment for what is now a business that is generating significant meals tax revenue for the city. And lastly, just to throw in a different type of example of partnerships, I'd mentioned Nova Labs.

[02:22:18] That was a makerspace that the Economic Development Authority voted on a number of years ago to support relocation from a neighboring jurisdiction into Fairfax City. So that has been a great addition to our city. We have consistently said that our partnerships with George Mason are our longest and strongest partnerships as a city. This certainly holds true for Fairfax City economic development as well. I am going to hand this part over to Commissioner Soleimani, who also works at George Mason University. Thank you. Yes, that is my day job. I have the pleasure of serving in the

[02:22:54] dean's office as a senior leader at the Costello College of Business. I think this is pretty much our last one, so I'll take us home. You know, I think it's really important to point out that the university, again, I said this a few minutes ago, it is in our backyard, right?

[02:23:12] And there has been sort of this moat or this little Berlin Wall or whatever you want to call it that has been there, and I commend the city council and the EDA and the mayor for really ensuring that we've taken down that wall.

[02:23:27] we continue to progress with the relationship of the city and the university. The Costello College of Business, there we pride ourselves on being able to open ourselves up to business and have business open itself up to us. The EDA and the city has been a prime example of that. We have four centers of excellence. They're here on the slide. I won't go through all of them for you, but they are windows from academia to industry.

[02:23:57] We have been able to partner specifically since 2023 with the mayor and the EDA to ensure that we are touching every single one of those centers with initiatives that include the citizens of Fairfax City and the businesses in Fairfax City and the students of George Mason University, over 40,000 of them that are able to now get involved with one of America's great cities. So kudos to all the stakeholders, both in this room and outside, for thinking

[02:24:31] outside the box, because this partnership didn't exist all but two years ago. And it requires a lot of trust, requires a lot of planning. We're thinking about what we're going to be doing next year and the partnership, how that's going to evolve. But it does require support, and it does require continued trust between all the parties, so thank you again.

[02:24:55] Okay, I'm going to really take us home, Patrick. I'm Dawn McGruder. I'm the treasurer of the EDA. I'm a CPA, so unsurprisingly, I serve as treasurer. I think what I would like to leave with you tonight is

we've talked about a lot of really big things. I mean, we've talked about Korea. We've talked about Rome. We've talked about George Mason. We've talked about Zeta.

[02:25:19] We've talked about Mitchell's, you know, an MEC startup that is now FedRiders. Everybody was nodding their head when they heard of FedRiders, right? Those are real success stories. But I think as a small business owner, we don't want to forget our everyday citizen business owners in this wonderful city.

[02:25:38] When I started my CPA practice 27 years ago, I could not wait to open my practice within the city. I was able to do that for 20 years ago I've been here. And many of my clients are business owners in the city. They're individuals in the city, nonprofits, and I absolutely love that work.

[02:25:58] And the Economic Development Authority, in connection with Central Fairfax Chamber, the Old Town Business Association, is making the city visible, is making you, the council and the mayor, visible to those individual struggling business owners that are part of this city and fellow citizens of this city.

[02:26:20] When they do ribbon cuttings, when they do lift grants, when they do any of that work, while we talk about big things, we don't want to forget those small business owners that are the ones that take a big risk in bedding into this city. So I thank you for your support of the Economic Development Authority.

[02:26:40] We need absolutely every position, intern, trainee, whatever it is that we can get because those are the people that are pounding the streets in front of those business owners and encourage their friends, people they network, their clients and customers to come here too. So thank you for your support of the Economic Development Authority.

[02:27:02] It is my, I'm so proud to serve here. Thank you. Thank you. And so I promise this was not an exhaustive list of what we do for that. There is actually a document called What We Do and it is posted on our website uh at gofairfaxcity.com i want to thank the staff for being here and all of the commissioners for being here as well um and i hope that you can see that we have a lot of really forward-thinking innovative programs and i hope that you also can trust that the commissioners and the staff are good stewards of public resources as well as we implement them so

[02:27:35] with that finally i think we can have the discussion topic portion council member amos just so everyone knows I'm playing timekeeper tonight as well so my apologies in advance so if we're all good to try to do this conversation by let's say 9:45 goes about 15 minutes is that that's cool my comments are very brief I appreciate everything that you all do I think having worked with a lot with the Fairfax County side of the EDA I think the more independent that you all are the better off we are because you have a lot of capabilities that we

[02:28:10] don't, and expertise that we don't. So the more we can do for our small businesses, the more resources we can provide to you where you can be self-sufficient, I think that should be our number one priority moving forward. Councilmember Hardy-Chandler. Well, I was looking forward to your report, and you did not disappoint. There was a lot of key points there, and I just really appreciate everything that you're doing for our city on a wide variety of ways. My introduction, my personal introduction to the EDA was through the partnership between the EDA and the Commission for Women and honoring the luncheon of women business owners. So certainly that

[02:28:49] collaborative spirit. You were talking a little bit about distinguishing us, yet recognizing we're part of a larger region. One of my questions, I guess, has to do with the destination, the destination story

that we're trying to tell. And I'm just curious if there is anything that is surfacing some themes in terms of the kind of destination we want to create as a city as a part of but distinguished from the county that surrounds us is there anything you want to share around that

[02:29:26] so in my short time so in my uh short time here i have explored you know what makes the city unique um and i know this is this might get old to hear but the old town is one um there's old town Alexandria, but that's its own thing. When I was exploring coffee shops in the area and I went to Duclue and I was like, where am I in Northern Virginia right now? There's an old town

[02:30:04] here. I had no idea. So old town is one of the things. Also, the love of art that this city has is also very unique, as well as the love of music. I would say those are things that we could really capitalize on. But then also we have the museums. We have three museums in the city that we could really promote to the citizens of the city itself, but also regionally and also

[02:30:39] internationally. I mean, I think the first week I was here, I went to a meeting with Office of historic resources where they were doing their little study and I was surprised at how so many people in the room did not think that people abroad would come to these museums and I'm telling you they will because it's part of the it's part of the history of America and I think that is extremely unique and something that has not been promoted and to be honest the county can't promote that

[02:31:13] because they're not in the county so that's up to us to promote those things there are the restaurants I mean international cuisine anything you could ask for that's another thing that I think is is pretty unique of this of the city I mean northern Virginia in general yes but our city is small and the amount of international cuisine you could find is is pretty impressive yeah those are just a couple of the things. Thank you. And as a follow-up to that, it sounds like a seed has

[02:31:45] been planted for the TOT and looking at that. So talk a little bit more about the example of increasing that 1% as compared to redistributing, I know how accents work, redistributing the 7% that we already have to focus on a DMO.

[02:32:14] So I do not have the answer for that at the moment. But I do know that it is, so the TOT is part of the city charter. So it's going to take a lot of work and a lot of collaboration between all of you and Chris to figure out what that's going to look like.

[02:32:35] because it's not just it's not just an easy task i think we would have to clarify the process and we'd have to work with both the budget team and the city attorney on that but it but we can if that's an interest of the council we can certainly develop some proposals and bring them back at a future work session you've certainly planted the seed and i guess just one follow-up to your comment when i came from out of state also and when you come to a new area particularly virginia where there are a lot of counties and things on the map when you're looking at the news it's you don't know where you are and one of the things that stood out to me when I came to the city was

[02:33:12] we were in the center of that that little donut hole right in Fairfax uh in Fairfax County and I could find where I was right so something about being in the center of that I think is pretty poignant for people who may not know the restaurants yet or may not know the museums yet there I am in the center there so I'm hoping that we can through your work really elevate that because I do think it's a very special destination and that concludes my comments thank you thank you councilmember Hall just to chime in I am very open to exploring the TOT tax I know we talked about that before and I

[02:33:52] think it's slated I think to be discussed at our June retreat to hopefully be active for July. So I really love the relationship that we have with George Mason. I do think, I know we've talked about this before a little bit, but I don't feel like we're still fully utilizing what we have right on the other side of our city, which is, like you said, 40,000 students. I think, and I don't own a restaurant here. It's not my jam. I was raised in a bagel bakery, and I don't want to go back to that, but we need to do things, I think, that bring

[02:34:29] in a slightly different demographic, that have maybe a different price point for meals, you know, things like that. I know we've talked about needing comedy or dueling piano bar, something that makes those students want to come here and not go to Arlington, not go to Alexandria, not go to Vienna, not go to D.C. You know, we go see comedians all the time at the D.C. Improv, and I would love to do that at the Fairfax improv, right? I mean, there's so many opportunities here, and I know that you're working on them, and I know that it takes a person to want to bring this and do those

[02:35:02] things, but I just, and I know it's much easier said than done, but there's so many students there with money and resources and dinners and lunches, and I just, I would love to see us welcome them as much as we can into our city, so I do look forward to the work that you guys are planning on doing with that further so is I know you guys covered a lot but is there anything that you need that you want anything that would be helpful for us to put on our to-do list I mean I know we've talked about your budget extensively and I do

[02:35:40] recognize that the travel that you do is different than what other departments do for travel here you know I'm not going to tell you can't go to Korea because I think that that has been proven to be a really good use of your resources, a really good use of your time.

[02:35:57] I mean, I think that what that brings back here pays for itself in spades, and I think that there are so many great programs that you all offer. So I recognize you have all your own commissioners. You do things on your own, and we're here as a partner, but I also do very much see what you all do, how you all do it independently as much as you can under your own legalese, essentially.

[02:36:21] And so I would welcome you to continue to do that and let us know how we can support. Okay. There's a lot of questions I have. Yeah. So I think I would want to talk with city leadership first about coming up with a list of things that could help us.

[02:36:36] But I would say the strategic work plan, as published, actually has things that we don't have the capacity to do. That's not a secret. that's not something i'm reporting the first time tonight it actually calls for the creation and this goes back now a couple of years of a real estate and reuse and redevelopment specialist we don't have that person so right now we sort of all perform that function but i realized that you know then the mayor and council have to weigh the you know the resource demands of other departments as well but that is something that you know if we were to list a need that's an example of a need

[02:37:11] Responding to the GMU piece, some of that falls into tourism, some of that falls into PR and marketing. You probably all saw a note earlier this week or last week about a partnership that we're doing with the Mystics that's coming up. If not, nope, you didn't see it. We'll tell you about it. Is that private? Is that bad that I said that? Okay. So we'll make sure that you all have that we're stretched very thin in terms of staff, but we have people working on tourism or in other divisions that are 0.75 employees.

[02:37:46] The strategic work plan, even for the recently updated piece, calls for a full-time employee to implement half of that. So we are kind of in triage mode a little bit where we're picking and choosing the things with the highest potential for impact, which is good, but there are things that we won't be able to do that are in our strategic work plan, and so we'll spread them out over a series of years right now.

[02:38:08] - Sounds very good, thank you. - Council Member Petersen. - Thanks, a couple quick questions. One, you have a vacancy, and it'd be helpful to know what sort of skillset you're looking for and the degree to which you are proactively reaching out for that, we would love to be helpful, but that would be helpful to know.

[02:38:29] - Sure, and I'm happy to send you the posting if you'd like, it's for the senior assistant director. Oh, I'm sorry, you're talking about the commissioner vacancy, yes. Well, we have a commissioner posting in the works, if not completed as well, so we can send that out to you.

[02:38:45] But we generally look for people that can respond to either the specific industry that we want to work with. So Kristen is here for hospitality or Mitchell can be, you know, applied to government contracting. We look to fill one of those roles and to make sure that their expertise, you know, can sort of respond to that need.

[02:39:03] Great. Big picture. Once upon a time, we were 70-30 commercial residential flipped. How much of what you do is focused on moving back in the other direction? 99% of it.

[02:39:19] I think we certainly want to develop programs that residents enjoy and that improve quality of life here in the city because that, too, is economic development. I think maybe slightly biased in saying this, but a lot of what the city does is economic development, even if it doesn't come out of our department.

[02:39:36] But at the end of the day, we're working to grow the tax base here. And so that generally means stronger businesses, more businesses, and retaining businesses and jobs. And there's a whole list of metrics that go into that least square footage, assessed value of buildings. But at the end of the day, to answer your question directly, I would kind of tongue-in-cheek say 99%, but it's up there.

[02:39:57] Okay. And I know the issues come up when we've looked at specific decisions on land use and they're overlayed with corridors that are designed for commercial development. So it sounds like that's something you're very much focused on. We have very good partnerships with community development and planning.

[02:40:12] Great. Kind of a hard question, but so you focus on recruitment of businesses, but you also focus a bit on retention. And this is kind of the moral hazard question here.

[02:40:31] How do you ensure as you're doing that that you are rewarding successful businesses and not failing businesses that really um may not be structurally in tune with the market how do you deal with that so let me i'm just going to give a quick answer and then marie can um expand on that but as it as it relates to our programs that we operate there are generally qualifications that businesses have to meet in essence we have to make sure that we feel comfortable enough and we propose all these programs and guidelines to the commissioners that we and the commissioners feel

[02:41:09] comfortable enough that the business that receives any package or support from us has staying power so and they're all sort of guarded and guided by compliance agreements so there's always a claw

back if a business were to move or to you know regrettably close or something like that so there are a couple of safeguards put in place I don't know if you want to expand on on outreach uh I missed part of your question so you want me how do we ensure that we're can you repeat it one more time. You are retaining businesses that in Director Bruno's words have staying power as opposed to

[02:41:44] those who do not. So I mean retaining is a lot of things. It could be financial incentives. It could be connecting them with resources that they don't know exist here in the city. You know so it could be a business that's running into trouble. Either they're growing and they're having some growing pains or they're introducing like a new line of business and they might not know that there's free resources from the SBDC. So a lot of, you know, some of what we do also is just being that connector. We need to be aware of what tools we have in our toolbox or who else out there that we can connect them with. And so that's kind of the time intensive part of the job is making sure

[02:42:20] that they get connected with the resources or if they're getting handed off to the city, it's the right person and things like that just to save them as much time and money as a business owner as possible. Does that answer your question? Well, so it sounds like it involves some degree of screening, and then based on that, some determination of the right course of action.

[02:42:42] A little bit of diagnostics goes into that, and then you decide what works. Is that? That's correct. There's a lot of time that goes into the relationship management. This is very behind the scenes, but we have a very sophisticated platform. It's called Blue Dot, where we track each interaction with each business, and then we grade it sort of as, you know, cold, hot, medium. And then there are a couple of other things that we rank businesses on.

[02:43:06] And it allows us to make sure we're following up with the right businesses and making the best use of time. It is also, this is kind of adjacent to your question, but I think it's important to mention that financial incentives are the last sort of option that we visit. And I would say more, much more often than not, the business retention work is not providing a financial incentive. When it is, we've done enough research to make sure that we will realize the return on investment from that. And we are extremely confident that we will realize that return on investment rather than giving out money to that business. Okay. I guess the general,

[02:43:44] yeah, much appreciated, but the general, you know, point is always in these kinds of things to respect the marketplace and its ability to make the smart decisions and not to really try to be smarter than the market, if you will, and to be respectful of that.

[02:44:00] So it sounds like there's a little bit of a balance there and you're mindful of that, if I could. I believe so, yes. Okay. My last thing, which is maybe to just follow up on the, it's not just a question about Mason and connecting the dots there.

[02:44:15] It's a slightly bigger question, although I will note there's a student population with Mason, but there's an enormous alumni population that's here in the city as well. But we bumped into each other at the Asian Festival, and it was an interesting experience because we have a festival that has drawn quite a bit of visitation and a lot of vendors, street vendors, which is great, except that it doesn't necessarily draw people into the businesses that are located in the old town.

[02:44:47] And it would seem to me that one of the leveraging things you want to do and the mainstreaming things you want to do is when festivals take place, draw people into the local businesses as

opposed to temporary, you know, businesses that are there. And I understand that's something that you also are focused on.

[02:45:04] But I'm curious to know because there's also the notion of having many events or something that is a more frequent way of kind of inducing people to come and then actually go into existing businesses. And I'm just wondering where you are on that what you're describing is actually one of the primary functions of a business improvement district They are essentially the death of the the district marketing organization For a defined district and they have a plan generally a district plan and they create events and at events They they leverage those events to bring people and to connect them

[02:45:41] With the the businesses that are within the district we've started that work with the old town fairfax business association they've made incredible strides over the last couple of years they are functioning now as a merchants association and they do receive some quasi dedicated funding from the old town service district they are not yet at business improvement district stage i firmly believe that this is something that has to be sort of grown from the ground up from the business community and the property owners and i think they're moving in that direction so right now we continue to support them but that is the type of organization that would do this type of work and it takes us out of the

[02:46:17] position of picking favorites too which is always good thank you council member maquillen thank you and i'll try to be quick i know we're two minutes over so um i too would be in support of the increase to the tourism tax um i had a question about the potential reassignment of the visitor center where would that occur so would that be reassigned to it hasn't i wouldn't say that's been decided yet i think that's something that and my recommendation and we've had some early preliminary conversations about this uh would be to propose to first the city manager and then to

[02:46:56] the city council a number of alternatives for the best operating um the best operating trajectory for the visitor center going forward over the next year or so and then what would you do with the current one i don't think that means well it may not but it also doesn't necessarily mean a physical relocation. It may just mean an operational relocation. Gotcha. Gotcha. Thank you for clearing that up. Why are the intern positions currently vacant? The intern positions, so our interns generally operate on a semester school schedule basis, and so we just haven't been able

[02:47:32] to hire them going forward. I don't know if we want to talk about city hiring policies right And now I don't know if we want to get into that. That's what you're on the spot. I know we just signed off.

[02:47:50] We just approved one. So the city hires the, I mean, they're technically on the city's books because the EDA doesn't have the HR infrastructure, although they provide, essentially they give back funding to pay for those.

[02:48:07] So it's coming out of their budget allotment. So as you know, we have instituted a hiring freeze as part of our budget balancing efforts for the budget that you just adopted. And so we go through a process where we talk about urgent and non-urgent positions.

[02:48:27] So they presented one so far, and it's been approved for hiring. So that was the business investment intern position, which I think was just approved on Friday or Wednesday. last wednesday yep and the business investment manager position is is also approved as well so the two the the two vacancies that they presented have been approved for for hire and then um so this is not going to be a fun topic to discuss but our fiscal year 2026 budget was just approved

[02:49:06] what do you see that how do you see that affecting um because i know the discussion of travel and hiring has come up as we've discussed how is that going to affect i think like every other department um economic development is is having to make some decisions and i think on a case-by-case basis and and hopefully through some of the conversation tonight we've shown that the service that we provide is a little different than some of the other services so um you know it probably will affect some things a little bit but also at the end of the day in order to to move forward on the actual programmatic implementation I think there's now hopefully space for

[02:49:44] conversation about this offline maybe councilmember Bates thank you thank you all for the very informative presentation I want to briefly mention that I was on the tourism stakeholder group and that was very interesting and And I think fulfilling and productive experience.

[02:50:16] And a couple of the main things that we discussed during the initial meeting were what the city's brand is going forward. I think that's really a key issue for us to all think about what is unique to Fairfax, what really kind of defines Fairfax as a destination.

[02:50:38] We also went over the, you know, FXVA website and the relationship with that that was discussed earlier. And also a lot of really valuable data and insights were discussed.

[02:50:57] And I certainly look forward to seeing what fruit that process comes to bear. And I think it's a very important process to consider going forward. Okay, then. So, thank you all.

[02:51:13] great presentation. I love doing economic development with our team here in the city and our EDA, because I do think it is the engine that drives everything else in the city and makes our vision possible. So thank you for your work, and I look forward to doing more amazing things with all of you. Thank you so much. Our next item is an update on the Urban Forest Master Plan MPREN's UFMP project and a review of the city's urban forestry operations.

[02:51:45] I will recognize Anna Safford, our urban forester, to provide the staff presentation.

[02:52:03] Good evening, Mayor and City Council. Let's talk treats.

[02:52:20] Tonight, we're here to provide an update on the Urban Forest Master Plan. I'm here joined with Dr. Garrett Wolfe from Marcel Day, leading our stakeholder engagement and outreach. Not with us, but on the project team is Davie Resource Group and WSSI. So with that, I will hand it off to Garrett.

[02:52:40] Thank you, Anna. before we get into the presentation i'm just going to give you a quick overview for tonight's meeting we'll start off with a brief overview of the project and where we're at in our process it's been a busy few months and we have a lot of updates as well as some key takeaways to highlight as as mentioned and we'll present on the findings from the operations review as well as recent projects that were completed both prior to and during the master plan we'll then share some outcomes from the non-native invasive species assessment and some preliminary goals and recommendations while these goals and recommendations are preliminary we want to

[02:53:16] demonstrate how the involvement of the community and various stakeholders has informed this initial content and of course afterwards there will be time for questions or discussion as you're likely aware this effort will create the first ever urban forest master plan for the city of fairfax phase one of this project kicked off in the early summer of 2024 during the approximately nine months of phase one the

team was highly involved in engaging the community conducting analyses and understanding the state of fairfax's urban forest we're now working through phase two

[02:53:51] during which we'll continue community engagement and develop the master plan phase two will wrap up hopefully by the end of the year when the final master plan is complete various outreach activities and assessments have all aimed at creating an actionable and well-informed plan for the management of Fairfax's urban forest over the next 20 years. The master plan's success in part depends on the ability to address the needs of its stakeholders. For this reason, the plan includes many outreach and engagement opportunities throughout both phases one and two. The team

[02:54:25] continues to synthesize the input, comments, and questions received to ensure that the master plan is well thought out and responsive to the conditions in Fairfax. So phase one began, as I mentioned, in the early summer of last year.

[02:54:41] Phase one placed an emphasis on information gathering and outreach, which forms the basis of the master plan's goals and objectives. Over those nine months, we held a variety of events, performed assessments to better understand Fairfax's urban forest. And through these efforts, the team engaged with more than 100 individuals and stakeholders in the community.

[02:55:02] and the project's Engage page has had more than 2,000 unique individual visits. The first public meeting, which occurred last July, functioned as the public kickoff for the project and informed attendees about the project and its purpose. The second public meeting took place in October, which was a visioning session where attendees discussed challenges, opportunities, and community involvement related to the urban forest.

[02:55:27] The project team has also tabled at public events such as Fall Fest, back to school nights and community connection night to help spread the word about the project and solicit additional feedback. We also held a public survey used to gauge community values, preferences, and perceived challenges.

[02:55:45] Stakeholder interviews have been held with internal city departments, boards, and commissions such as the Environmental Sustainability Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council, and with a group of external stakeholders such as HOA members and volunteer organizations. City staff also did targeted outreach with surrounding urban forestry programs and partners such as the city of Alexandria, Fairfax County, as well as George Mason and the COGS Regional Tree Canopy Committee.

[02:56:16] The project steering committee is made up of city staff and members of organizations such as the ESC. It meets on every other month basis to review work products, dive into deeper conversations about planned content, and discuss next steps. To better understand existing conditions of the urban forest, the team also reviewed the city's tree maintenance operations, analyzed tree canopy data, and conducted an invasive species assessment. Phase one wrapped up early this year, and we're now beginning phase two, and I'll turn it over to Anna for an operations review. So next I'll

[02:56:54] provide the operations review that was completed through the urban forest master plan, as well as some projects that were completed prior, but relate to the plan and will inform it. So who maintains are urban forest. Urban forest maintenance and management is shared amongst three departments in the city, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Community Development and Planning. Right of Way has eight permanent staff that spend about five to ten percent of their time on tree

maintenance. Parks has 14 permanent staff and spends five to ten percent of its time. And in planning, we have two full-time staff members, including myself, as well as our stewardship

[02:57:34] coordinator. Thank you all again for approving FY26. Each department has one ISA certified arborist. Together it's equivalent of approximately three FTEs, one of which is the compilation between right-of-way and parks time. Each department focuses on different urban forestry tasks. Right-of-way maintains our street trees, our city facility trees and landscaping maintenance, as well as they're the lead for the private public tree risk inspections. So when there's a tree on private property, threatening the public right of way.

[02:58:10] Our right of way supervisor is typically the one that inspects it and coordinates with myself as well as code enforcement. Parks focuses on our park and trail trees. They're also a big support with volunteer programming, with volunteer programs that interact with the urban forest.

[02:58:28] And they're also lead on the city jobs program, which we've recently expanded to include tree planting as well as hope to expand it for invasive removal. In the planning division, which is again where I am, About 50% of my time is spent on development plan review, as well as city project review and support.

[02:58:45] I also administer the tree removal permits on private property or zoned parcels in the city. The other portion of my position focuses on long-term planning, such as this project for the Urban Forest Master Plan. We're also the lead for non-native invasive management, both with contract services as well as volunteer initiatives.

[02:59:05] We lead the Sprout Initiative, which is community stewardship focused. And then we also do program development and coordination across the three departments to try to help improve efficiencies and coordinate different needs. Through that, we also are trying to promote public communications to provide notification prior to tree removals, as well as promote the successes we're having.

[02:59:26] We do have a number of contracts to help support the work. The ones that have asterisks are the ones that are because of staff capacity constraints. A new one to note is the non-native invasive plant control, which will be starting in the next couple weeks.

[02:59:43] Diving into funding. Our 2024 funding, this is first noted for a calendar year. It's how we report to Arbor Day Foundation for our Tree City USA designation. It's split into four categories.

[03:00:02] Tree removals, management, tree maintenance, and tree planting and care. Management includes staff salary and benefits, training and certificates, certifications, as well as special projects such as the master plan in 2024. So approximately a little less than \$700,000 goes towards urban forest maintenance in the city. About half of it is from the general fund and the other portion is the stormwater utility fund which funds my position as well as again special projects. This does not include the sprout grant since that is temporary funding

[03:00:38] and was not city funded and so that does not get reported in the Tree City USA city annual budget. As a part of the Urban Forest Master Plan, we did benchmarking to how our municipal forestry budget compares to other cities.

[03:00:56] There is a 2016 study that was done using 2014 census data. It's the most recent study that is out there. There's a new one in development right now using 2020 census data. The study focuses on public

tree operations, so it does exclude staffing and resources specifically for development review, policy, and code enforcement, which to note is mostly my position.

[03:01:24] So when looking at this chart, moving left to right, the first three are 2014 budgets for all cities, cities located in the south, which the city of Fairfax is located in, and cities of comparable size. Next we have Fairfax City's budget in 2018 and 2024. Two things to note for our budget. You'll see a slight decrease from 2018 and 2024. That was not due to a decrease in allocation. That was due to a change in reporting to Arbor Day Foundation. And so it's just a change in efficiencies.

[03:02:00] And then also in 2024, again, my position was not included because it was not included in the study of 2016. If it were included, it would bring up our forestry to municipal budget to 0.28%.

[03:02:15] So as you can see, our budget is significantly lower than surrounding cities of a similar size. Moving to program drivers. These are the regulations, policies, and standards that manage and drive the urban forest in our city.

[03:02:33] Most of our tree regulations are in our zoning ordinance, Chapter 110, specifically the Chesapeake Bay Act, the tree removal permits, and landscaping section for land development review, all of which have been updated since 2022. Chapter 38, Environment, includes regulations regarding tree risk, and our public facilities manual has recently, in 2024, added a tree preservation and landscaping guide, which I'll touch on shortly.

[03:03:00] Other policy and standards, we have plenty of goals and actions identified in our comprehensive plan relating to tree canopy. We also, as staff, follow the best management practices of the International Society of Arboriculture. The city is a tree city USA and has been for 39 years.

[03:03:20] And then hopefully coming soon would be the Urban Forest Master Plan being the largest driver of a future urban forestry program. I also wanted to provide in this presentation an overview of an urban forester's review during land development projects.

[03:03:38] So an urban forester enforcing, reviewing, inspecting those regulations related to trees. This was a new role added into my position as of fall of 2022, which is when we created this workflow. The cert boxed in red are updates that we did to policy, administrative procedures.

[03:04:00] Since 2022, we have two workflows. The top one is a workflow for when a plan requires zoning review itself and meeting those requirements of our zoning ordinance. And then the second one below that are projects that may not require zoning review but still are expected to be reviewed for tree requirements or tree best practices. Moving left to right, the biggest highlight there is during the pre-design phase, typically before a project has spent money, you identify tree preservation priorities trees are very challenging to preserve through

[03:04:37] construction and they require significant space and considerations and so the time to identify it at least a high level is that the pre-design phase as the project moves forward through design you make minor changes as you have an inventory and limits of disturbance you start to identify specific trees you want to or should be preserved as you move further you make sure you're meeting code requirements. You start adding details, best practices for tree protections and planting, and then it gets to construction. Prior to construction, it's very easy to do tree

[03:05:13] preservation on a page. It's very much more challenging to do in practice, and so through the construction process, you need an urban forester involved through much of that phase. It starts with a pre-construction meeting, and typically an urban forester's inspection is one of the last inspections to be done before bond release.

[03:05:31] This workflow was created, again, when I first started. There was an acknowledgment that there were many both private and city projects that were already underway, and so we created it to set an expectation for both me as to where to focus my review, as well as to provide project managers as well as other private project managers an expectation as to what to expect as we made updates and as my position got more involved.

[03:06:05] Continuing to dive into tree preservation, again, this guide was added to our public facilities manual in 2024. Prior to that, we did not have standards for land development to meet our zoning requirements. Page six was included in the staff report.

[03:06:21] It highlights the tree preservation overview. It's broken into three phases, planning, design, and construction. The planning phase identifies the tree preservation priorities that I focus on, the majority of my job is approving removals. Tree removals through land development is inevitable. The hard and most important part of my job is identifying when and where we can preserve them. And so those are outlined on that page. And when you kind of take a zoomed out look at those priorities, most of them are from those program drivers that I listed

[03:06:57] before, coming from our zoning ordinance, comprehensive plan, and other regulations. Next is a project we completed prior to the Urban Forest Master Plan, and those are various tree canopy studies. In this chart, we have four studies, three of which are highlighted blue.

[03:07:19] They use the same data source and analysis, and so those are the studies to look at when you're looking at change over time for the city. I also included the study that was done by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, since that was done in partnership with COG. COG is hoping to create a regional tree action plan with goals for the region, as well as each locality now has their canopy assessment through this study. So when comparing us to Vienna or to Montgomery County in Maryland, I would encourage you to look at the Chesapeake Bay programs. The big takeaway with tree

[03:07:55] canopy studies is you cannot always compare apples to apples. They must use the same analysis and data source. And so you have to be very cautious when comparing different studies. So in 2023, our city's most recent tree canopy assessment, it was at 37.86%. Some data trends that were seen in that assessment, most of our tree canopy expansion was from existing trees or trees planted in land development. Specifically, our planned development districts in the city had the largest

[03:08:30] growth of tree canopy over the past 10 years. That's largely because the developments, it takes about 10 years for trees to be seen on aerial imagery, and so we saw that growth in developments that were done in the 1990s and early 2000s. We had loss, of course, in areas that we had land development. Tree canopy is not evenly distributed citywide, and areas with the lowest canopy coverage also had the least canopy growth. To me, that indicates we have to have targeted initiatives in those areas. Something we don't know is how invasives might be impacting this data.

[03:09:10] Invasives might be showing up as canopy coverage, inflating the data, but it's also hurting reforestation, that natural regeneration. We also have invasive pests. In the early 2010s, we had emerald

ash borer come in and kill our ash trees. And so there's much unknown from invasives in canopy data.

[03:09:32] But the key takeaway is urban forests change. What I just presented on was a 10-year scope. If you zoom out to a 100-year scope or even further, this area originally was a forested area. It moved to agriculture, which we had canopy loss.

[03:09:49] Then it moved to suburbia, and you had canopy growth. Now we're having rapid urbanization and infill, and you're having loss again. They keep changing. It's infrastructure that is not static and will continue to change on a daily basis. So what's the point of canopy data?

[03:10:05] How do we use it? It sets the baseline. maps the distribution of trees and plantable areas in the city. It identifies where we have opportunities to preserve as well as areas to plant. It allows us to set data-driven goals as well as actions, which I'll provide examples in a moment, and it tracks trends towards goal benefits. A lot of times you hear about cities or localities adopting a canopy goal and that being the fixation for that city's tree canopy, but you need to take it one step further as to why

[03:10:41] you're setting that goal. Is it for flood mitigation? Is it to help reduce public health impacts to vulnerable populations? Is it trying to provide access to green space? Then you use the canopy data to track if you're moving in the correct direction towards those desired benefits.

[03:11:00] It identifies areas that are being most impacted. It identifies shareholders. You can overlay with census data, zoning data to understand who owns the urban forest and what that population looks like, and you can identify gaps in policy in the management needs. So some quick examples that I've done actions since doing these canopy assessments. 76% of our citywide tree canopy is privately owned. That's why Sprout is community focused and volunteer driven. 61% of all plantable

[03:11:35] area in the city is on residential single detached properties. We have a free tree giveaway as a part as a part of sprout. It's not enough for our city staff to plant trees on public property. We need residents to be planting trees too. And in our mixed-use residential and commercial areas, we have 1% tree canopy coverage, 99% impervious surface. In 2024, we adopted a commercial urban canopy requirement as well as soil volume requirements because we can't just be planting trees. We also have to be providing the space and the resources they need to actually grow.

[03:12:12] So again, these are just examples as to how you can use canopy data to inform actions and not just get fixated on a canopy percent. The Urban Forest Master Plan will be continuing to use this data in terms of making recommendations and actions. All right.

[03:12:33] Now we're going to talk a little bit about the non-native invasive species assessment, and then we'll move into more of the recommendations from the master plan. So for the non-native invasive species assessment, The project team assessed 25 sites throughout the city, including maintained parkland, non-managed woodlands, and trails.

[03:12:53] The assessments were conducted in late June of 2024, and these sites ranged in size from half an acre to 48 acres. While not every park and trail in the city were assessed, a variety of sites were visited to develop a representative characterization of the status of non-native invasives in the city.

[03:13:12] It's important to understand the condition of non-native invasive species in the city because these species, as Anna mentioned, pose economic and ecological threats. When NNI species become established, they disturb forest ecology and displace native species.

[03:13:28] The species included in the assessment were based on the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Invasive Species Plant List. A total of 30 species were identified. They predominantly made up of Amura honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and English ivy.

[03:13:44] The assessments were performed to assign four scores to each site. These scores then produce a cumulative score, which indicates the site's priority ranking for invasive species treatment activities. And I'll talk a little bit about scoring and the results on the next slides. So, as mentioned, there are four scores for each site.

[03:14:03] These include the ecosystem score, the non-native species score, the civic engagement and cultural value score, and the environmental justice score the ecosystem score is essentially an average of biodiversity and disturbance non-native species score average of infestation and control difficulty civic engagement and cultural value score a sum of the amenities plus volunteer engagement and the environmental justice score community vulnerability so the four scores on the previous slide are then summed to determine the cumulative score for each site a higher cumulative score

[03:14:42] indicates a higher priority for invasive species treatment. All 25 sites were then ranked on priority. Kuttner Park ranked the highest with a score of 11.13, while Wilcoxon Trail ranked the lowest with a score of 4.9. In terms of next steps, the assessment recommends a variety of control strategies including mechanical removal, cultural control, foliar treatments, and cut stem treatments based on whether the target species are trees, shrubs, vines, or herbaceous species.

[03:15:14] the forest rescuers program is a part of the response for this assessment and has been used to guide the program's volunteer efforts and focus as Anna mentioned earlier contract services where the parks box in red will receive the first round of contract management work these sites were selected based on the assessment some high-ranking sites were skipped because of temp either temporary construction projects or because it's more feasible for them to be treated through volunteer efforts. This is a good example of using the assessment as a baseline and then adjusting work plans based on current conditions and resources. The results and

[03:15:53] recommendations of the assessment will be integrated into the objectives and strategies included within the master plan. So now I'm going to go into a little bit on phase two in terms of the timeline and preliminary recommendations. So as I mentioned at the beginning, phase two is currently in progress. In phase one, the team developed the preliminary objectives for the plan, and in phase two, these preliminary objectives are being refined and adjusted based on feedback from the steering committee and other stakeholders. An outline of the master plan was developed back in February and has continued to be refined to best capture the

[03:16:29] needs and desires of Fairfax's urban forests and its stakeholders. The outline has also served as the basis for several drafts of the master plan, which will then undergo review by the project team and the steering committee the master plans implementation plan is also currently undergoing edits in coordination with anna and the objectives and strategies for the implementation plan will be used in a voting activity at the upcoming public meeting to better understand what residents of fairfax view as the priorities for the city similar to phase one the public outreach will continue

[03:17:03] this will include public this will include tabling at public events two more public meetings and continued steering committee meetings recently the team tabled at history day and is exploring additional dates for tabling at events this summer public meeting number three is scheduled for 6 p.m on june 11th

at the Sherwood Center at this event residents will be invited to drop in and cast their vote on which implementation strategies should be the highest priority for Fairfax. There will also be an online voting platform available to collect feedback from those who cannot attend the meeting. Public meeting number four will be the last public

[03:17:41] meeting and will serve as a presentation for the final master plan to the public with an opportunity for questions and answers at the end. It's anticipated that this event will take place late in the fall so you can see timeline referencing some of those benchmarks that I mentioned so currently a spring photo contest which opened in April and is running through the end of the month. This is encouraging people to be engaged with the urban forest as well as generating content that we will then use in the master plan steering committee meetings and public events such as tabling will continue as I mentioned. Public meeting number three is coming up on the on

[03:18:19] June 11th and public meeting number four will be in late fall. Drafts of the master plan will be developed and refined throughout the summer with a final version anticipated in November and the project will conclude with a final presentation and proposed adoption of the plan before the end of the year.

[03:18:38] Some key takeaways. So over the last 11 months, the team has gained, of course, valuable insights into Fairfax's urban forest and the community's wants and needs. While we can't recount every important finding here, we'd like to highlight a few.

[03:18:53] First the urban forest is a part of Fairfax's unique character. Longtime residents have expressed concerns about recent changes that they've observed in the tree canopy. On a related note, Fairfax's residents show an extremely high level of support for the urban forest. The public clearly values the urban forest and the benefits that it provides, and the community would benefit from clear ways to be involved in urban forest stewardship. While there are many threats to the urban forest, a few recurring concerns have arisen during our assessments. These include development, planting and management practices, and invasive species.

[03:19:28] Addressing these concerns will require a variety of strategies including policy considerations. Organizational changes, volunteer involvement and others. Currently the urban forestry functions are shared across several city divisions as Anna mentioned in her operations review. Efficiency and a more targeted tree care and more targeted tree care can be realized by centralizing the forest management responsibilities together with other findings from phase one. These key takeaways are part of informing the master plan's preliminary goals and objectives. Our in discussion of our preliminary goals and objectives

[03:20:05] Our outreach and analysis efforts so far have guided the team to develop goals, objectives and strategies for the master plan. The objectives, strategies and supporting actions will continue to be refined over the coming weeks as we receive additional feedback. Currently this includes three preliminary goals, six preliminary objectives, and their associated strategies. Each objective is supported by five strategies and additional supporting actions that will assist in the implementation of that objective. During this meeting, we're just going to focus a little on the higher level goals and objectives, and we'd like to emphasize that this information is still preliminary, and we expect to make continued updates as we continue to receive feedback from

[03:20:44] stakeholders. Updates may include adding or revising objectives, as well as restructuring the organization of the goals, objectives, and strategies or other changes as necessary. So the three goals

represent the vision and overarching themes for the more detailed objectives.

[03:21:03] Each goal is supported by several objectives. The first goal is to champion and sustain a resilient and equitable urban forest in Fairfax. This goal strives to build and maintain a resilient and equitable urban forest in Fairfax. This includes physical conditions such as ensuring evenly distributed tree canopy cover across Fairfax's neighborhoods as well as policy and management actions to protect trees and ensure diversity in the species that are planted.

[03:21:31] Second goal, increase in Fairfax's capacity to care for trees. This seeks to increase the city of Fairfax's capacity to care for its public trees. This goal helps ensure that the city's investment in its urban forest is maximized through adequate appropriate tree care the third goal strengthen community strengthen the community support and involvement in the urban forest as I mentioned Fairfax's residents are passionate about the urban forest but we've heard that the public often do not know where to find information or how to get involved the master plan also aims to identify ways to improve the public's perception of the city's communication with residents and to strengthen the relationship

[03:22:10] between the city and community regarding trees so the team has developed six preliminary objectives. I am just going to hit the high level and not go into my detailed notes for time, but if there are any questions, by all means. The first objective seeks to protect trees and woodlands against future threats. I've mentioned some of those threats already. The second objective aims to ensure that healthy and abundant trees are available in all Fairfax's neighborhoods. This is really shaped by trends in public tree removals and a need for increased urban forest species diversity and of course a desire for equitable urban

[03:22:47] forest distribution the third objective encourages the use of accurate data to inform decision-making guide planning and track progress and I talked a little bit about data and in her operations review it's extremely important that that data is both captured and well understood the fourth objective suggests establishing an urban forestry division centralizing the responsibilities for the urban forest for increased efficiencies. The fifth objective aims to deepen the community's engagement in tree stewardship. Throughout the outreach process, we've heard that residents want

[03:23:25] to get involved, and there are plenty of opportunities to do so. Some of the fruits of that have already been seen through the stewardship position that Anna also previously mentioned. The final objective seeks to strengthen the city's tree protection policies. Ensuring that trees are adequately protected requires a combination of planning management and policy together these six objectives aim to address the wide-ranging opportunities and concerns identified by the community and city stakeholders because they are preliminary we anticipate continued updates and

[03:23:56] revisions as well and to the associated strategies so on to some next steps so of course as always we appreciate the opportunity to update you all on the on fairfax's urban forest master plan the preliminary goals objectives and strategies will continue to be refined we have two more public meetings the next of which as i've mentioned but just to remind you all because i hope to see you there is on june 11th at 6 p.m at the sherwood center it will be drop-in style so whatever time you can spare us we would love to have you thank you again for the opportunity we have some hopefully

[03:24:34] some time for questions and discussion and i just want to note that if there are any points that we can't fully dive into tonight we are happy to go back to our team for additional details and follow up with you thank you so much for the presentation councilmember Amos speaking of time I think I'll go ahead and preface I think since it's 10:25 let's give it to 10:45 so we have adequate time for discussion on

the GST because this will come back before us and we can also ask our questions offline I councilmember Peterson we have an agreement

[03:25:10] the agenda and we have people here in front of us and we have the opportunity to engage in questions here I would prefer we either take advantage of this opportunity or we have everybody come back with a stretch of time when we can actually put some quality time into this but I don't think it's fair to cut short the quality time that's necessary to respond to this issue this is a very very significant body of work so I'd prefer we take the time that's necessary NOW UNLESS WE'RE PLANNING ON SCHEDULING QUALITY TIME WITHOUT INTERRUPTION.

[03:25:46] COUNCILMEMBER HARDY CHANDLER. THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT DISCUSSION AND AS WAS OFFERED AT THE END, THERE'S OPPORTUNITY TO FOLLOW UP OFFLINE AND TO FOLLOW UP IN THE FUTURE. SO I DON'T BELIEVE THAT EVERY ASPECT OF THE MASTER PLAN HAS TO BE COVERED TONIGHT.

[03:26:07] WE CAN COVER KEY ASPECTS AND STILL STAY WITHIN THE TIME, WHICH WOULD BE MY PREFERENCE. COUNCILMEMBER AMOS. also believe in terms of being reasonable, having people stay here past midnight is not reasonable. So I am sticking with the 1130 cutoff.

[03:26:25] Council Member McQuillan? Getting down to business. All right. We had our joint meeting. The council has, first of all, thank you for that presentation. I appreciate all that information. Very thorough. We had a joint meeting with the Environmental Sustainability Committee, and during that meeting, the chair mentioned that parks and recreation is also working on their master plan do you coordinate with them at all as you're developing your plan they were concerned there might be some you know lack of coordination there yeah so on our steering committee we do have our parks director as well as our parks manager

[03:27:04] and then we upcoming i will be sitting as a stakeholder interview for their project and they were stakeholder interviews for multiple interviews for this project i do anticipate i've spoke with Stacey and we do hope to have a meeting that we kind of coordinate those once that I think for a while that project was still needing to get further along and so I think that hope is for the sometime this summer. Excellent thank you and then on that slide with the breakdown and the allocation of the funding and where it's going how does that compare to other localities like

[03:27:43] or saw of our size other municipalities around this area of our size that i will have to look into to see if we have that so what we took was our budget um from our arbor day foundation since we aren't one centralized uh division it's that is our best source of compiling the different divisions budgets and then we compared it to a study and so i'd have to see how the study broke down their budgets in that one so i can follow up with that okay thank you i think that's all thank you okay councilmember Peterson yeah thanks guys lots of great information and

[03:28:20] work here I'm trying to figure the I guess it's slide 11 on the drivers the program drivers I'm trying to connect the dots between that set and then the outcome and I won't go back to the final slide but essentially there's an outcome that moves forward from there are we mapping as a part of this the

[03:28:48] effectiveness of the current mechanisms that we have and then in addition to that gaps that need to be filled in terms of them becoming more effective at achieving our overall goals that the simple

case and point but not the isolated case is the Chesapeake Bay Act so uh a couple points there as I'm sure I know you're aware of but also for public awareness with Virginia being

[03:29:25] A Dylan rule state our tree regulations are largely through the state code as to what is allowed our Chesapeake Bay Act is what's required our canopy requirements through land development is what is allowed for us to adopt we are I have worked with the Virginia Department of Forestry to review our regulations to try to identify where we may have gaps within our ordinances where we could adopt other allowable regulations.

[03:29:56] Our Chesapeake Bay Act was amended in 2024. I believe it was in July of 2024 to add the state-required regulations for mature trees. It strengthened tree regulations in the Chesapeake Bay Act, but our Chesapeake Bay Act is up to date, and then our other regulations are being reviewed right now, I would say, And we have much of our state-allowed regulations, and we may make amendments probably after the master plan.

[03:30:26] I anticipate probably recommendations in the master plan as to what the priorities are. A couple that come to mind are street trees, protecting trees, and the public right-of-way is allowed, but we don't have those regulations at this time. Just to follow up, so if I understand this correctly, and I want to make sure I do.

[03:30:49] So we will develop a more clear understanding about the role that these drivers play in achieving the goals that come out of this process. And we will be able to understand the current role they play, their effectiveness, but also where more needs to be done.

[03:31:14] And as we do that, where there are limitations, for instance, based on Dillon rule or for whatever reason there might be limitations, but then possibly options for things that we can do to achieve our goals through alternate mechanisms.

[03:31:29] Is that a fair characterization of what we will be able to see at the end of this process? Yeah, there are certain recommendations that we're building out more objectives and sub actions, not objectives, more actions for in terms of priorities.

[03:31:46] And I would say policy and our regulations is certainly a priority that we've heard from the public, as well as things that I've seen. Also, to note on your point of do we know if they're being successful or not? One case study that was done was actually in Fairfax County.

[03:32:03] They partnered with Virginia Tech to look to see if their 10-year tree canopy requirement during land development was successful, and it was. It's actually exceeding the requirement through land development and canopy growth. That study is available online both through Virginia Tech as well as through Fairfax County.

[03:32:23] Happy to share it with anyone that's interested, but they are seeing that the state requirements are being successful in land development. I just want to add that one of the elements of the master plan is discussing metrics and identifying metrics that can help the city determine what is being successful and how successful it's being.

[03:32:45] Because currently the city, by and large, related to these, is not tracking that on a regular basis. And so understanding what data needs to be collected, how to review it, and on what regular basis it

should be reviewed. And I would say that's also connected to when Anna was talking about sometimes people get caught up in a tree canopy percentage.

[03:33:06] But what you're really looking at is, you know, what are your goals? Stormwater, urban heat island, things like that. So understanding, you know, the layers of data that you might need and what pieces of data are relevant to that, whether that's canopy or any other data that might be needed to be gathered or tracked.

[03:33:25] And just to pick up on that, so there's a part of this right now, you're doing regulatory review. And on a recurrent basis going forward, where does that get handled? Does that go to the Environmental Sustainability Committee, for instance?

[03:33:43] I know the charter there requires annually to do regulatory review, but I'm just curious because it sounds like it's been a while, and it sounds like that's something that is important to stay on top of going forward. Where will that function reside?

[03:33:58] how will that be carried out right now again most of our true regulations are within our zoning ordinance our zoning ordinance the update process is handled through the community department of community development and planning our it's a compilation of staff both in zoning as well as the department at large and typically sometimes we engage with outside consultants to draft text amendments as we did with the chesapeake bay act and then it's usually brought forward to planning Commission and City Council. As we are seeing with the small area plan text amendments,

[03:34:34] there's public outreach. Sometimes we engage with other boards and commissions like the Environmental Sustainability Commission. For the 2024 amendments we did to landscaping, we did with ESC. And so it is different based off the amendment package, depending on how broad of a scope it might be. And so I anticipate if it's an administrative amendment, it might be more internal versus if it's kind of a rewrite of tree regulations there would be significant public outreach and engagement with boards and commissions. Is that a function then that in terms of mapping that planning that series of things is that a function of your job position? Okay. Yes yeah

[03:35:13] that's my position. One one last well one more question which is probably going to be a familiar one tree canopy so in terms of metrics and I think this came up early on is that when you say tree canopy, is that really a proxy for something that's taking into consideration ground level structure and vegetation? Or are you literally just looking at that geographic level that is above the ground that's creating a canopy? And the obvious issue here is that not all canopy

[03:35:49] is created equal. You can have manicured canopy that has nothing underneath it except bare ground versus an actual forest. And so the question is whether you are at a metric basis looking at forest cover or forest use and and it's a big issue because you could lose forest land but gain canopy right so how is this handling that issue so to answer your question about the canopy data that is using aerial imagery so it's doing land classifications using lidar where you're

[03:36:23] using heights of canopy or vegetation or lack thereof to determine what the land cover is we did do a tree inventory for our street trees and our park maintained trees to get more of the boots on the ground species diversity age size condition the next step would be a some sort of woodland forested assessment to get more of an understanding of where the composition is on the forest i know that's one of the main recommendations within the action items for for this plan would be that next

[03:36:57] step um and so it's the canopy data is just aerial imagery i just want to add that obviously when we're looking at canopy data we're also looking at land use or land classification that we're not just getting from the the canopy data you know but like based on particularly for public lands so parks woodland areas trails um you know city staff as well as our folks who've been doing the inventories have a have a good idea of how the land classification how the land could and should

[03:37:32] be classified and so the combination of those things the land classification and the canopy can help tell us you know this obviously this canopy is a street tree this canopy is occurring in in a woodland area or a forested area but anna's right that next level of detail understanding composition and that's also of course related to invasive species and ultimately the treatment of those species and hopefully replacement with native species either naturally or planted and is that not going to be a part of this plan but will become a recommendation of the

[03:38:06] plan is that the correct way to understand this so so the the land classification and the canopy data is part of this plan but the recommendations for those next steps are recommendations within this plan, but that work is not being carried out in this plan. It's not part of this scope.

[03:38:28] Councilmember Hardy-Chandler. So thank you very much for going over your master plan. I really appreciate it. I also appreciate the thoughtful attention to the fact that forests do change, urban forests do change, and touching on the sort of complex dynamics that go into looking at this data looking at how the plan evolves one of the things that you noted was that of course there

[03:39:04] were things that were not done historically prior to your position right and as everyone I think in Fairfax knows I'm married to a forester and so when your position was even posted we were celebrating the fact that our city was investing in urban forests in this way so I guess my question and addressing the elephant in the room when there are projects that were started in the past you mentioned kind of getting on board with projects that are in process how does your master plan

[03:39:38] sort of address the fact that moving forward in a dynamic environment recognizing that there is history and there is future and you're coming in at some certain point what talk about the master plan in approaching things that are in progress, like the George Snyder trail. We heard a lot of comments about the trees. And so I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about that.

[03:40:08] So when it comes to projects that are in progress, the master plan, we tried to engage with stakeholders to hear what their experience has been so far and where, of course, there, whether it be challenges, upsetment has been and kind of what they would like to see done differently and what tools we could provide to try to facilitate that.

[03:40:36] I think the master plan is not looking at specific projects or specific plans that need to be updated to be better in line with urban forestry objectives. We're trying to identify in the different actions, the stakeholders and departments that we can partner and coordinate with to help improve those to try to promote and partner with instead of be in opposition of.

[03:41:03] I think the biggest thing, again, is trying to promote communication as well as understanding of what the different roles are. And that's why I wanted to provide that workflow of what an urban forester or how an urban forester is reviewing a project.

[03:41:23] And again, we used it when I came in with different projects and understood. We mapped out ongoing projects onto that workflow as to where they are in those different phases.

[03:41:35] And I think the biggest thing is that there, unfortunately, there's a lot of nuance in trying to communicate that is very challenging. And so trying to provide transparency as to what the process is, kind of what the priorities are, and so that people can understand then why and how I'm making decisions for those ongoing projects, to provide at least some understanding to bridge the, again, the upset.

[03:42:05] potentially between trees and in other projects I just want to add that sometimes hot-button issues can help reveal priorities or gaps you know areas that can be improved and so while they can be painful to have they can also improve you know process and decision-making for the future and I do think that the master plan has benefited from that frankly Councilmember Hall just a couple hopefully quick questions first one kind of random but what is the permit timeframe for a homeowner if they need

[03:42:44] to have a tree taken out typically I try to turn that around within seven calendar days thank you the city jobs program you said that it currently includes tree planting and the hope is that it would include invasives in the future are there challenges in getting that set up or what is the hold up or is just time, like everything. Mostly it was the holdup of the stop and go with the grant. And so trying to figure out where the funding was. But I think ultimately, Sophia and Parks are going to

[03:43:17] work together to continue expanding city jobs. Okay. My neighbor had had a meeting too. David Boliva and Salim were there. And I made very clear that while we appreciate the efforts for the Invasives grants and things like that, to actually have a company come in and take things out would be really, really helpful. I think we had the deep cleaning conversation before. It's easier to kind of maintain once it's been done. So I don't know if anything will come of it, but I did rally on our behalf. Just a question about the tree canopy from page 15. I'm just

[03:43:53] trying to understand how to interpret this exactly. So the green is the new growth over and above what the red was previously. Okay. And you'd said before that you weren't exactly sure what made that up. It could be that some invasives or things like that were also adding to the canopy. Did I understand that correctly? So what I've talked with other urban foresters in the area about is, so LIDAR looks again at height. And so if a dead tree is still standing, but it's covered in ivy, we're not really sure if that's being captured as bare soil or if it's still being

[03:44:30] captured as a tree because of that height and that live vegetation from the invasives. So there's a lot of unknown based off of needing tree condition if it was just a mat of invasives that would be coming up as shrubs or grassland okay or grass and then so then how do we interpret this moving forward is there is this something that you can run any in any given time is this like a big involved process to get a picture of this like is this something we do every year every five years like what's that plan moving forward just my question too is as we are more successful in

[03:45:05] eradicating, well, reducing invasives, you know, could we be able to see what that effort looks like if we went in and, for example, did a huge clean out at Kuttner Park or another place? Like, could we see what that impact might be on a small area easily or not? Yeah, so NAEP, Aerial Imagery from the USDA, it's federal funded or federal sourced imagery that is used for these assessments.

[03:45:32] They typically come out every two to three years, and so usually at most you're doing it every two to three years. Typically jurisdictions do it every five in terms of updates, and they usually do it in coinciding with an update to the urban forest plan of some kind.

[03:45:51] I know that's going to be the recommendation in COG's tree action plan is to do it every five years and to try to coordinate localities. Great. Still gives us a good idea, a good barometer of what we've done in a certain area to be able to see did we plant more or was it just you know we took about out a bunch of things that made it look a little less dense maybe yeah and for invasives we are looking at the various metrics specifically for invasives that we should track besides just canopy coverage um so more to come that will be in the master plan itself okay great i look forward to more information but thank you

[03:46:22] for now i appreciate you coming in council member peterson just to go back um to a question in a specific case. So on slide 14, you've got a listing of snapshots of canopy essentially that have taken place, if I understand it correctly. When is the next one? So I think for this area, we probably would have imagery in 2025, maybe 2026. And so we would do an assessment typically thereafter.

[03:46:59] And the area being citywide? Citywide, yes. So then just as an example, as you do that, how will the area that's gone through stream restoration be treated how will that actually show up in this data likely it will show up as bare soil or it might show up as grass depending on when the imagery is taken meaning what year the imagery is taken if it occurs in 2025 it likely would be bare soil if it's 2026 it might show up as grass okay and and you're expecting

[03:47:37] likely that this happens in 2025 or not sure? Again, the imagery is done through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And so they do regional flyovers. And so the 2023 data was delayed. And so when we did our 2022 assessment, we were hoping to have better imagery. But so it's a little bit dependent on the federal government. I just wanted to add that, you know, at the delay. So there's there's always a lag and when the picture was taken and then it's processing and it's delivery

[03:48:14] to the consumer whomever that might be and so that's the difference of whether that will show up as bare soil or grass or you know for 2025 data that may have been taken in 2024 for example um but that's i'm not saying that's the timeline i'm saying if that were the case then you would still see the trees because the photographs would have been taken in 2024 so you you know you need to, and you, all that data is available. You can see when the photo was taken. And so you can, you know, there are always ways for you to manually update data for known changes.

[03:48:51] Well, yeah, that sort of, thanks, because my next question was the frank one about the degree to which the imagery program is at risk. It's federal, it's a federal program. And if you know, it'd be great to know. If you don't, the question I think is, what is the alternative if in fact this does become discontinued. Do we have any sort of alternative for collecting the same or similar data so that this is not going to be stopped as a consequence?

[03:49:26] I would say probably a bit unknown. Of course, similar to all the changes in federal government, states, nonprofits, universities are trying to scramble. Who we did the study with, Planet Geo has come out with tools to provide tree canopy data on a more universal for more localities to have for free on their website.

[03:49:53] And so there are, through AI, a lot of different tools evolving very rapidly, but right now, unsure. You could also, of course, as Anna mentioned, see the state of Virginia step in to do flyovers, which they would probably do, you know, regionally and stagger them over years.

[03:50:14] I mean, obviously, all of these decisions are monetary-related, ultimately. The city could, of course, pay for someone to fly a LIDAR-equipped drone over the city and capture that data.

[03:50:30] But there's a cost to that. Councilmember Bates? You mentioned before looking at what the state code allows in terms of regulations and restrictions related to the urban forest.

[03:50:54] Would you also be looking at how what's allowed by the state might change throughout the process of making this plan? Or when, at what time, would you be kind of pulling from what's allowed under the state code to that end?

[03:51:10] Yeah, so certainly tracking the bills that have been getting proposed and recently vetoed over the past few years by the governor that have been trying to expand tree regulations during land development, and so certainly tracking those, hoping that they pass one day.

[03:51:29] I think our area in the state does have additional regulations that are allowed that weren't allowed or aren't allowed in other parts of the state, and so we do typically see if sometimes a staggered approach in those regulations, and so it would just be something to keep track of, and we probably would be the ones to benefit before the rest of the state if that were the approach.

[03:51:55] That's good to hear. Thank you. Any additional questions? All right. Thank you so much for the presentation. Ms. Shinneberry. Our last work session item is a discussion on the George Schneider Trail. I'm going to recognize Brian Foster, our city manager, to provide the staff report.

[03:52:18] Good evening, Mayor, members of council. We have talked about this project. I think most meetings, the last several meetings, has been a topic of discussion. Just to summarize sort of the recent history, We had an opportunity to submit a suggested alternative plan to VDOT, which we did.

[03:52:49] They came back and said that it deviated too much from what the funding was approved for, and they said that was not an option for us to go forward. Subsequent to that, I know that VDOT held the six-year plan public meeting at which there were folks from Fairfax that spoke.

[03:53:18] That was the first week of May. And then subsequent to that, VDOT on the 12th of May sent a letter basically telling us that we have two options, and they would like a decision by June 30, the two options being either to move forward with the plan, the approved plans, or to cancel the project.

[03:53:46] Those were the two. They asked for a decision by June 30. That letter, of course, is in the agenda packet for review. We don't have a presentation. It's just more of council discussion and, again, direction as far as we were prepared to prepare resolution to either to do either of those depending on council direction for a future meeting you have two two meetings left regularly scheduled business meetings next one being on June the 10th which is would we would

[03:54:26] suggest you take action but you do have again based on the letter till June 30 and we'll happy to answer any questions if you have that you may have council member Amos yeah I'll I'll be brief a few things one just wanted to let council know that I my intention is at 11 30 I will ask council to close the work session so anyone who has questions I probably won't be talking right after this uh I have said before not I do not like the environmental impact of the project I'm also not

[03:55:02] a fan of owing 3.7 million dollars back and the implications of that and so in terms of action I think prep oh geez prep a resolution for both options to be presented June 24th and we can have that prepared what I would like to add on to that is having looked at VDOT's letter I think it in from my interpretation is fairly clear there is not really room for negotiation when it comes to the date and alternative options.

[03:55:38] What I would like to assess, which is what I wanted to bring before council, is the opportunity for potentially getting the third option back with no changes. Now I know what that sounds like, not to throw everyone for a loop there.

[03:55:55] I think that what VDOT wants more than anything is a decision and a commitment. So there's no point in us meeting with VDOT if we're not committed to something. I think we could get there with the third option, as Councilmember Bates has brought up in the past.

[03:56:12] So if we can get majority votes here, I would like to meet with VDOT to see if we can get the third option back and just let them know, like, we have majority support and we're willing to pass it as soon as we get approval. Councilmember Hardy-Chandler.

[03:56:28] So one thing I want to reiterate is exactly what you said, City Manager, and that is on April, I believe it was 22nd, and I'll speak for myself my vote was for permission to submit that modification I've heard it characterized in different ways support of a pause support of other things or an anti-trail position but that's not what it was the motion was to submit a modification

[03:57:05] and that I feel was part of our due diligence in trying an array of things depending on or based on conversations that we've had so I just wanted to make that clear because I don't think that has been accurately characterized when it's been brought up so I believe that we've done that due diligence I agree with council member Amos that the parameters of what VDOT is saying IS CLEAR AND I WOULD CERTAINLY NOT BE IN FAVOR OF DRAGGING THIS ON HOPING FOR YET ANOTHER RESULT

[03:57:45] THEIR RESPONSE WHEN THEY SENT THE LETTER WAS ACTUALLY IN ALIGNMENT WITH INFORMATION THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED REPEATEDLY BEFORE THAT THAT IF THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATION IT WOULD BE ESSENTIALLY CONSIDERED A NEW PROJECT SO THEIR FEEDBACK WAS NOT A SURPRISE TO ME IT WAS COMPLETELY in alignment with information that we had gotten previously so my question about going back to the third option is a timing question I would like this to be done by June 30th I don't know

[03:58:22] if the third option and some review of that option can be done in that time but ultimately VDOT has said do something or get off the pot and I quite frankly agree that we should the options have been explored the information has been presented we know their position we know where we stand I think I actually appreciate the deadline for us to act so that we can move forward with this so I guess my only question is with the going back to the original third option which I'm assuming

[03:59:01] council member Amos is the half trail right um would be how plausible it is to get feedback on that from VDOT in the timing that we need and if we don't get feedback on that particular option under the current deadline where do we stand we're we're just in the place of responding to the resolutions correct so I think VDOT has um I mean I think they've been clear I don't think there's the third option I mean we can always ask the question the fastest way to do it it would be

[03:59:39] for um for us to reach out us being the staff reach out to the the VDOT Nova district uh staff and ask that question um in terms of setting up a meeting that just would take time not that it couldn't happen VDOT would have to agree to meet I don't I'm not sure that they would be obligated

[04:00:03] to have a meeting, but this has been, I understand, you know, this is a project that has stirred up a lot of emotion and strong feelings within the community, and that, you know, VDOT has basically I mean the the challenge I think I appreciate the the comments you know that that um folks have

[04:00:42] made about trying to negotiate and and so forth but the reality is when you use somebody else's money they set the rules um and so if we want to the mo if we're willing to spend our own money we have the most flexibility to do whatever it is that we want but we are not in this particular instance using our own money and so the that money comes with strings attached and so we've been told we we have made the effort we were working with staff to try and come up with alternatives you know and so it's gotten to the point I

[04:01:22] mean at the at the the last meeting where folks from the city spoke at the six-year plan you had the Secretary of Transportation you had the VDOT commissioner you had our ctb representative you had the nova district engineer so you had the top level of vdoc at this meeting and then after all of that comments from folks from fairfax they then send us a letter that says you have two choices please decide by june 30. i certainly interpret

[04:01:54] that as there's really not a lot of wiggle room but we can certainly ask that question but i can't quite honestly i think that time has passed they they it's been communicated to us uh that you know is from from the from the governor on down is that they want projects completed that have been approved that the funding's out there and so that's sort of been their marching orders that's what i understand from them so um they've given us uh you know they we've basically i think our

[04:02:30] window of opportunity is is virtually shut and we have we have two choices it's you know it's again the it's there's not necessarily an easy choice but we have two choices um which we can is to either move forward or cancel the project and so that's the and you know and if we uh cancel we can always try to come up with something different and for the future we can apply for try to apply for additional funds we can there uh there are those options um in the future but

[04:03:05] that's post making a decision on the issue at hand which is um which i think is very much a binary option i think i think it's an either or i don't i think they've been very clear um with us to this point um and um if if if the if the majority of council wants us to re-approach um vdot with some alternative or to ask for something else i'm certainly happy to do that but um again i just

[04:03:41] can tell you based on my experience i've been doing this a long time as has the staff i think that this is where we're at with them and um i i i just don't see there being um really another alternative at this particular moment council member hardy chandler i agree with your interpretation of the letter completely um i question where there whether there will be satisfaction unless

[04:04:15] that question is asked and i guess my question to you would be what would be the risks of asking that question um in spite of what they've communicated to us because clearly um there is a timing connection that you're making between comments that were made and the risk and the receipt of that letter um i don't know how deeply to interpret that but there's a timing connection And so I guess my question would be, I agree with your interpretation.

[04:04:53] Everything has benefits and risks. Can you speak to the risks of going back with that question with an entity that clearly wants us to act, wants us to act? Well, I think I've commented this before, and I'll sort of use the discussion that you heard this evening from the EDA.

[04:05:19] And they talked a lot about relationships and the importance of relationships. And so I think we have historically had a good relationship. Will this, you know, so I would always be concerned about taking actions that would have a negative impact on the relationships that we have built.

[04:05:42] Certainly in asking the question, does that put us much at risk? It's hard to say. I do think that my sense from the letter, and this is not, this is just my, I'm just telling this is my perception, I think there's probably some frustration, I think, as far as on their side, as far as we're not moving forward, and so if my perception is correct, not that it is, but if it is correct, I think asking and trying to do something else is just going to exacerbate that frustration, if that, if in fact does exist, so there's certainly

[04:06:21] that risk but you know we can always ask the question but again I think the letter speaks for itself and so I don't personally I don't know that there's much to gain from from continuing to try and ask to do something different than what they've already told us that's that's different from the choices that they've given us so I would just like to say that you know we have this letter and I

[04:06:58] think if we did pose that question they would really need to retract this letter and send us a new letter because this letter is the final document so I think what we'd be asking them is to revise this letter and send us a new letter are giving us an additional option? And also, I don't actually think they can answer the question.

[04:07:21] It's a CTB decision, ultimately. So all they could do is tell us whether they, at the staff level, would support it. And my guess, based on the letter, is that they would not even support going to the CTB because this has been given. And Bill Cutler received this directive from his superiors. And so I'm not, I don't think that at a staff level, they would be in a position to opine in any way that is different than what is in the letter.

[04:07:49] And so, yes, I think, of course, you can go ask them the question, and I think the answer is going to be we've been given pretty clear direction. It's a binary choice. That's my two cents on this. Council Member Peterson? Assuming you all are correct, and I'm not going to suggest that you're not, the one thing that I do think we haven't done that a lot of people in this city would appreciate, and I suspect the council would appreciate is to understand more clearly the option for cancellation,

[04:08:27] how that actually could be done in a way that might be beneficial to the city in ways that haven't yet been discussed. So there's been a lot of questions that have been asked about what are the real costs of moving forward? What are the real benefits? How could those be understood adequately?

[04:08:45] I think people express themselves fairly clearly in the public hearing this evening, and it's consistent with feedback certainly that I've gotten, where they still would like to understand more clearly that set of issues. And then I think we would be able to make a better informed decision going forward.

[04:09:08] And there are a series of things that I think we haven't talked about that we could and we should that would help with that decision and making it a fully informed decision. And I think the community would appreciate that quite a bit. I'm certainly prepared to go through a series of questions that are along those lines that people are quite interested in being able to have responses to.

[04:09:32] But I think that is one very constructive thing that we could and should do here as we move forward that will enable us then to act on this directive we have from VDOT in a way that people are comfortable with it, at least in knowing that they had a chance to get a whole lot of questions answered that they don't feel have yet been answered.

[04:09:52] And I'd suggest we have the opportunity to do that. Well, I will opine that I don't think that the CTB is obligated to answer our questions. We have a contract. Previous councils and mayors obligated this city to build this project, and now we're saying there's a question about whether we will.

[04:10:13] And we have spent, I've spent two and a half years listening to the public comments that I heard tonight, in some version, the same comments over and over again. You spoke directly to the Secretary of Transportation and the representative from CTB and VDOT, and the result of that presentation was a letter saying, either build the project or don't. We have a contract. We are a government. This is how governments operate with

[04:10:48] other entities in our government like the commonwealth transportation board and while we may have questions and while we may not like it it is not their obligation to answer our questions this is a contract we made it either we're going to honor it or we will not honor it and if we don't honor it it's very clear that they have said we owe them back the money that we spent we are not more special than any other jurisdiction in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The CTB manages billions

[04:11:24] of dollars of contracts. We are at 100% design. It should have gone out to bid in April. And after this meeting, where members of our council were present, their response to those remarks was either build it or don't or pay back the money. So you can go and ask them, but here's what I'm going to tell you. We have canceled in the first five months of this council. We have summarily canceled the Country Club Hills Connector without putting it on the agenda, without having a public hearing, and we gave \$5 million back. And now we're talking about canceling a trail, first five months

[04:12:02] of this council. How do you think our grant proposals are going to be viewed in the future? Like we're a reliable partner? Because I don't think that we are showing ourselves to be a reliable partner with this council. And you know who that handicaps? All the future councils that come after you. Because up to this point, we have had a perfect record, and that is because of our staff.

[04:12:25] We submitted the proposals, we got the grant awards, and we built them on time, on budget, on time. Up to this council, that's what this government has done, and that's not what we're doing now. So we can go and we can ask and ask and ask and ask and ask, and they're going to wonder at the level that our government is functioning, that we can't understand a letter asking us to perform a contract. We have on time. Council Member Peterson. Just to be clear, I wasn't

[04:13:02] suggesting we should be asking anybody other than our staff questions here that the community is interested in. And I think it would be great to have the opportunity to ask a series of questions that are of interest here as we go forward. But I don't suggest that we are going to try to burden VDOT or CTB with that.

[04:13:28] I think that our own information needs are what we're focused on here. I would just also note that part of what I think is important to understand more clearly is what would be involved in possibly doing a restart.

[04:13:49] And I know we know the funding implications, et cetera. On the other hand, the letter is clear, saying if you want to go forward and do something that you find more suitable, you're certainly welcome to do that. And the letter is certainly suggesting that can be done without prejudice.

[04:14:06] So, again, what I would like to do is have a chance to be able to work through some questions that are important to folks understanding what's involved in the decision to cancel so that we are eyes wide open here. And it could take a little while to do that.

[04:14:25] Well, we have until June 30th, because I'm assuming if we do nothing before June 30th, because we paused, the council voted to pause, so if we do nothing, I'm assuming June 30th rolls around

and the council, the contract is in default. That is my assumption, if we do not say one way or another, since we internally voted to pause any movement on our trails going forward.

[04:14:49] That's the first thing. The second thing about that \$3.7 million and the cavalier way in which people are like, well, just give it back. Well, that comes out of our general fund, and that impacts potentially our AAA bond rating because Wall Street looks at how we spend our money, and spending \$3.7 million out of our reserve fund to get absolutely nothing potentially impacts the interest rate at which we will borrow money for our school bond referendum.

[04:15:19] So this is more than just about trees and a trail, And it's more than the Cavalier will pay back the \$3.7 million. There are ripple effects to all of that. So, yes, I do think that every person in our community should understand exactly what this means because I don't think that has been clear.

[04:15:36] It certainly has not been demonstrated in the comments I heard tonight that that is clear. Council Member Peterson? Well, with that, I'd love to have Mr. Martinez join us so we could have a financial discussion here around this.

[04:15:55] Sure, Council Member Amos. Just because I know there's a litany of questions to ask, I would just like to focus on the action to be taken first. Because, again, 1145, I'm calling it.

[04:16:13] Sorry. And I know there's questions to ask. What I'd like to do first is what is the action we're taking out of this meeting? Again, I don't think it would hurt asking about an option they provided in the past. Now, I know that may no longer be on the table, and if it's not, fine.

[04:16:30] But I also ask that concurrently we prepare those resolutions to be presented at a meeting. I wasn't saying we pause either one. I think they can be done concurrently. So that's all I'm asking, and have fun with the questions. Council Member Peterson.

[04:16:48] So I think one of the things that has been said is the notion that if there is a cancellation and an expenditure associated with that, the result of that is an expenditure with nothing in return. And I wanted to explore that a little bit more clearly here and then the financial implications that might be associated with structuring that in a way that is beneficial to the city.

[04:17:12] And what I'd like to do is I'd like to go back to the decision that the city made to purchase the Blenheim estate and recognize that at the time that was a far-reaching decision that resulted in an expenditure to protect a block of land.

[04:17:31] And I don't know exactly how that was financed, but what I do know is that it happened January 22, 1999, 12.01 acres, the current valuation of that expenditure in today's dollars is just shy of \$4.4 million, and per acre cost is about \$364,000 was the per acre cost on that.

[04:17:58] I don't know how that was financed, but just comparatively, if you looked at the \$3.7 million, If that was structured in a way to develop permanent protection of the forest land and streams and George Snyder, that is, we don't have an exact, exact number, but a knock on the door at 90 acres, 3.7.

[04:18:20] And that per acre acquisition cost, it would actually be a land protection cost there is about \$41,000. So that is 11% on a per acre basis what we spent on the Blenheim estate. And when you run that 5% 25 years, if I get my math right, you come out with about \$266,000 a year as the debt service on that.

[04:18:50] So before looking at the benefits, just to put that in perspective, that is in comparison to, gosh, you add it up. And between the major capital improvement projects and school bond, we're looking at

almost \$382 million of future debt service that the city has to address.

[04:19:11] Now, 3.7 is less than 1% of that. And out of that, if you found even 1% of savings, that that would have paid for the cost of putting the George Snyder Trail into permanent protection.

[04:19:28] And even if you look at a smaller debt package that's more near-term, let's just play with \$52 million, you're looking at half a percent that goes into that. And the question is whether there are opportunities to find savings and offsets for that.

[04:19:44] So that's one series of numbers just on the cost side for how that 3.7 could be viewed. The benefit of that, again, is a 90-acre forest in Stream Valley that has permanent protection. And that could be done in a way with a conservation easement that allows for a gravel foot trail to be installed, which is what was really desired at the very beginning.

[04:20:10] It could be coupled with a restart of this particular project, and I'll go into more detail on that in a minute, that would not be through the woods. So you look at that as an expenditure of funds, and then you ask the question, well, you know, what are the benefits?

[04:20:25] I mentioned the forest, but what we have in addition to that is a series of avoided costs, and these are annual costs, and those costs are things that we face every year. So one of the people who spoke earlier this evening made it clear that going forward, the financial expenses we have with this are not covered by the concessionaire fund.

[04:20:51] They're covered out of taxes, and there are some non-financial costs that are significant as well. there's maintenance and operations i don't know what that number is but it's a non-zero number it's a significant number there's crime and safety control and prevention that's a significant number as well there's potentially more transportation improvements that we would want to at least acknowledge when we took a walk on the washington and old dominion trail one of the things we learned was that because of bike safety issues a separate pedestrian trail

[04:21:25] has been built in parallel to the WOMD to protect pedestrians from bike accidents. And I mean, this is a safety issue that has been raised here. We have a whole series of ecosystem losses that would be avoided.

[04:21:45] Watershed, landscape, tree, wildlife, et cetera. If you look at the valuation of those ecosystem services, The low end of that, according to FEMA, is \$1,729 per acre, \$1,700 is rounded at \$1,700 per acres.

[04:22:02] The high end of that is \$8,400 an acre. And don't trust me, the FEMA document actually has the documentation for the valuation of ecosystem services for this very kind of planning. So there's a stack of costs there that you avoid.

[04:22:19] And I don't know to what extent they have been calculated and compared here for what we're doing. but this is fairly standard fare for cost-benefit analysis. I'll be done in just a minute. In addition to that, we received an email that indicated that right-of-way has not been completed and that we're facing potential litigation.

[04:22:47] First, I knew, I don't know that anybody has known, this has not been disclosed, so I have no idea what the number of acres are and what the price differentials are, what our litigation risk exposure is, but apparently there is litigation risk there that ought to be valued. We need to run an expected value

calculation on that, and that ought to be included here so we understand what we would be avoiding, along with all these other things, if we make this expenditure. There may be other litigation risks here as

[04:23:19] well. I have myself been through NEPA violations back in my federal service days, where there's been determinations of errors and omissions. And looking at what has happened here, I think there is some non-zero risk of litigation in that area. And we ought to have some sort of understanding of how much of a risk there is and what the implications of that are. And if we are to cancel this project, it's a risk we avoid. So there is a whole stack here of costs that really

[04:23:59] ought to be valued and ought to be compared not just to the 3.7, but what the 3.7 would look like if that's optimally financed. And the result of that is a protection permanently of a forest of 90 acres in this city that would be many times the size of the Blenheim estate at a very fractional cost. And I think people would really like to know what do those numbers look like? What does that whole opportunity set look like when we make this decision about whether or not

[04:24:36] we are going to cancel? And also, they would like to understand, if we choose to do that, can we restart the project? And how would VDOT feel about it if we do restart that project? And it may be that they have a fixed payment, and that's that. But it's possible that because they've encouraged us to be open to that in the letter, that it would be helpful for them to know that if we choose to cancel, we choose also to restart with something.

[04:25:04] So I would really appreciate the opportunity to confirm the costs, confirm also the financial options we have here in terms of how a payment could be structured and understand what the comparison looks like for that optimal financing plan and then the avoided costs.

[04:25:26] And just to call out the avoided costs, what I haven't included here is loss of life, people being hit by bikes and killed, or people being hurt. kids that get hit by a bike. These bikes are, I think this thing is designed for them to go 28 miles an hour. Fast enough that on the WOND in Falls Church, they're contemplating banning throttle electric bikes and requiring them to be toned down to just pedal assist because it's become too unsafe. And this is not unusual. We have really significant issues. What I've not included in this is the impact of bodily injury and harm from assaults, which have already been

[04:26:04] documented i've received reports of these we've had gun incidents and so that has not been valued but when you add all of that together it's called full costing and i have not seen a full costing for this project that could be used to compare to cost avoidance of the cancellation payment and i would like to to have that information developed for the benefit of the public so they could be

[04:26:34] able to weigh this decision a little bit more clearly um i don't quite honestly we were not going to be able to do that um you you're making lots of assumptions um that you didn't were to quantify first of all the 3.7 has nothing to do with acquiring the property except for the very small part of right away with that we um don't own yet so we've spent 700 round numbers on right

[04:27:10] of way of that 3.7 so that's property most that property we already own so to say that that you're you're equating that 3.7 to the as like the purchase price for protecting that land you could put it you can you can have the trail and put a conservation easement on that today if that's what council desires and and guarantee its protection. So quite honestly, I don't think the other thing about, you know, the last thing you mentioned was like bodily harm and all those things. The police chief has already

[04:27:49] said at a previous meeting, they don't actively patrol bike paths. We have lots of them in the city already. They do not, if you think that there's like a dedicated police patrol, that there's a cost involved that is not how we operate today and so to say that we have to calculate that cost for something new when we don't even calculate it for something that we already have again is a false comparison so we if the majority of council we'll just put it this way we don't have the capacity to do that in the time frame in which you need to make a decision

[04:28:27] So if a majority of council would like for us to do that, we will certainly make our best effort. But absent that, the staff, we don't have the capacity, nor quite frankly would I say that that's even needed to make the decision that you have in front of you.

[04:28:49] But if the majority of council wishes to do that, then we'll make our best effort. And it does come down to a majority of the council. So presumptions like this should be a conservation easement and this money pays for that, the council never directed that property to be a conservation easement. So right there, the foundation upon which you're building all of this is not something the council has decided.

[04:29:09] It's something you decided, Council Member Peterson. So please understand, I understand you are interested in inquiring, but I have not heard a majority of this council backing you up on wanting this information. And that's how a governing body works.

[04:29:27] it works by vote of the majority council member amos i wanted to deflect to council member mcquillan first i just want to focus on the action we're leaving with because some of these questions should be asked offline i think prep both resolutions and if we can ask if if we can get the third option back as originally designed then i think there is majority support for moving forward with the third option if we are able to get it back and we can let vdot know that so they know there's a decision on the table that's that's it for me councilmember

[04:30:07] McQuillan I'm in support of councilmember Amos's proposition to speak with VDOT I'm also in support in getting that information that councilmember Peterson is requesting in terms of operating costs moving forward with this trail also the cost should we not move forward with the trail the cancellation the 3.7 million is it a lump sum payment how is that how does that work if we do cancel the trail

[04:30:43] how does that part work what are our options i didn't even realize that that's even a potential option to purchase and and safeguard the land so i didn't i i understand that you didn't you're you're upset about that but i didn't know about that until he brought it up i i'm just saying so i would be interested to learn a little bit more of what he's even bringing to the table here because this is the first time I've heard about it.

[04:31:09] If I might. Councilmember Peterson. Well, in a previous life, I worked with the Nature Conservancy. Land trust organization, we protected properties through a variety of different means against a variety of different potential threats, and there's a whole menu by which that can be done, but it's not uncommon to purchase some form of right so that it is extinguished and it is protected against some harm to the property.

[04:31:45] So right of ways, it's very, very common for right of ways to be the rights of them to be purchased to protect an area from being developed. But there's a lot of different ways you can do this.

[04:32:01] The net of it is if you want to protect a property from something, there is a way to do that so that it's protected and that threat is removed. If, you know, you made a comment, Mr. Foster, about putting

an easement on having the trail, the problem is that won't be classified as a conservation easement.

[04:32:21] It's a development easement for a right-of-way, for a road building. That's a different form of easement. I would also just say I'm a practitioner of all this sort of analysis, and it could be done rather quickly, at least in a rough manner, so that the public could at least have some basic understanding of the set of things that are going to be impacted and how much of an impact that's going to be so they could see this all together.

[04:32:52] I'm really very surprised that we don't have that kind of analysis for this project and for other projects because this is pretty standard fare. It's actually codified in most states and many localities through regulatory impact analysis requirements that would cover projects like this so this is all quite doable the point on the safety is not putting a cost on the patrol of the police folks here the question is what value do we associate with the avoidance of people getting hurt when they're on a transportation infrastructure when they're on a road when they're on a trail that's all stuff

[04:33:30] that is benchmarked and easily retrievable and easily formulated into a fairly simple accounting statement, a pro forma that says, gosh, here's the downsides potentially that you're looking at. Valuing litigation risk assessment should be and is standard fare.

[04:33:50] And I can appreciate that, but that's not really the question that we're here to discuss right now. So, Council Member Hardy-Chandler? I would like to know if there's consensus around the earlier suggestion to have two resolution resolutions available at a future meeting before the deadline we'll start with councilmember Amos is there do you support that yes councilmember Hall no I would like to have an opportunity to speak I was just letting others go first so maybe we should finish with a conversation before well we kind of have a question so we can come back around but the question we're

[04:34:28] calling the question would you support the preparation of two resolutions no Okay, councilmember Hardy Chandler. Yes councilmember Peterson. No councilmember Bates. Yes Councilmember Quillen. Yes, so I believe that there is a majority of people who want to pursue preparation of two resolutions now councilmember Hall So I I I'm actually open to the Western portion

[04:35:01] I had really hoped that this was going to be coming back around as an opportunity to have a bit of a different conversation about it But I also do support Councilman Peterson's request for the additional information, especially with related to the RPA and how that could be codified and used in a land conservation trust.

[04:35:22] I mean, these are all, I think, really outside the box ideas that the average person might not be aware of. I certainly don't know about these things. And, you know, one resident spoke up earlier about the fact that, and it's right near my house, where the townhouses and the apartment complex, or the townhouses and the, I believe the assisted living facility, they're built in RPA.

[04:35:51] So we can protect something, but there's also the concern that it still ends up getting developed on at some point, or it's over areas that maybe shouldn't have been developed on. So I don't know all the answers to that. just, you know, I'm listening to a lot of comments tonight from our residents and it's just drumming up some things in my mind that I think are very curious. I also did want to say one thing, you know, you mentioned relationship building and that it's very important to maintain our relationships with our outside entities and these other regional partners and I wholeheartedly agree with that

[04:36:25] but I also want to say I think the relationship with our 24,000 residents is pretty darn important to. And I hope it doesn't come down to choosing one over the other, but I think that that's not a relationship that we should really take lightly. And so I think that that same level of concern should also really be passed down to our residents here. If there is consensus to proceed with a conversation with VDOT, I would suggest that our letter, our email, possibly a request for a meeting be sent to VDOT Commissioner Stephen Brick.

[04:37:04] I think that actually is probably the person that is going to be able to help us navigate through here what we need to do. And I will also say I did not like the implication that members of council and community members going to the VDOT meeting and speaking up and sharing their opinions, like so many other jurisdictions did, had any impact on us receiving a letter.

[04:37:31] And I think that that was not a very kind statement to have put on us that attended the meeting or on our residents. And I really don't appreciate that. I think our residents and council members had every right to be there and to be present, just like those other constituents and taxpayers were.

[04:37:53] And so I don't really appreciate where that direction came from. Thank you. And I agree with you that everybody has a right. It was a public meeting. However, the fact of the matter is we have not heard from 24,000 people about this trail. So when you say we have to pay attention to what the people in the city want, you're right.

[04:38:10] But we have not heard from even a majority of the people in this city. So yes, VDOT did whatever VDOT did for whatever reason they did it. So the fact of the matter is at this point is we need to move forward and decide what we're going to do from this point forward. I think what is on the floor right now is that Council Member Peterson has asked for the staff to come up with additional information as he outlined.

[04:38:34] What we need to determine is, is the majority of this body supporting directing the staff to do that? Council Member Amos? I would like that information to be emailed around first, that request, so I can actually take the time to review it, because I wish I had been sent earlier.

[04:38:51] So I can't support it at this time. Council Member Hardy-Chandler? I think we have to keep in mind, when we give staff major projects, there is a cost to that particularly when the outcome is not worth the investment of time and energy so we think that requesting certain things are free and they're not they're investments of time and energy and staff have background experience knowledge to know whether or not that is a worthwhile investment so while in general i think the request for information is helpful

[04:39:27] I have seen situations where requests have not been based on the indication that there's going to be a return on the investment of that time and energy. So I think at this point, with a deadline, I am just concerned about that effort not being fruitful.

[04:39:48] And one other comment. I do just want to say that I don't think that the relationships have to be an oar, that we can work on our relationships with other entities and sustain our relationships with the community I don't think it's a dichotomy I think it's something that we need to pay attention to on both levels our relationships with other entities is in service to our residents so they both matter councilmember Bates the question on the floor is do we direct city staff to look

[04:40:27] into the information is requested by councilmember Peterson well I mean I think the city manager was pretty clear that he's not confident that we have the capacity to do that before the deadline

and absolutely do not support pushing this out beyond the deadline and seeing what happens and I am also satisfied with the answer that that he's given us and we've also previously discussed maintenance costs roughly estimated and so no I do not

[04:41:00] Council member McQuillan this is a question about the 3.7 million if it was to be canceled How does that work when you have to repay that is it one lump sum? Is it something where you can do optimal? Financing of that like how does that work since we've never done that before sure and thanks for asking the question Um, so regarding the 3.7 million. I just want to be clear here So if we cancel it as was stated in the letter we would have to pay it back. In a previous communication from VDOT, they would actually

[04:41:34] issue us a payment plan or payment schedule. I'm assuming that would be negotiated. Those are my words, not theirs, of how that would look like, whether it's a lump sum or a payment plan. To Council Member Peterson's suggestion, I'm not aware. I'm not saying that it's not possible of trying to reallocate those funds for some type of purchase of the property. What I want to be very clear to council though and this is not just me so our auditor for the city was actually here last week because we were starting our preliminary audit for fiscal year 25 and while he was here I

[04:42:11] had a conversation with him again just confirming given the information that was received earlier in the month and I showed him the letter and again I've communicated this to the previous council and I want to reiterate that I'm going to read it verbatim here in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles the city is obligated to disclose any potential liabilities whether known or materially likely in a note 17 commitments and contingencies within the notes of our financial statement section of the annual audit in discussions with our auditor we would

[04:42:51] either know or it's materially likely known by June 30th whether we have to set aside that 3.7 not necessarily pay it back but I have to set it aside as a potential liability because at that time we don't know if we are going to have to pay it back to VDOT and or redistribute it for a land purchase or whatever until that point in time I have to set it aside and it goes actually into I have to take from general fund and assign fund balance which would reduce our anticipated fund

[04:43:25] balance for FY25 from 17.7% down to 15.6 or about 0.6 above the minimum threshold or a million dollars above the minimum threshold of 15%. It would live in the committed fund balance for a potential future either disbursement to VDOT and or other activity at that time, but I would have to take it away from there. Council Member McQuillan. While it's sitting there, does it Gain any interest anything like that? It does. It's it's on our balance sheets. It's on our books

[04:44:00] It's just in a different line of I think there are four or five different categories of fund balance This would be the second highest restriction when it's committed, but it is still on our books Council member Peter one more follow-up. Okay, sure. Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead. I'll be quick So I'm sorry could you restate that number that it would just leave us above would you say 1 million something?

[04:44:25] Sure. So if we did have to set aside the \$3.7 million from general fund unassigned fund balance, the reassign amount, again, would go to committed, and it has to be specifically used for the constraints that the local government has to identify.

[04:44:44] As a result, the estimated FY 2025 general fund unassigned fund balance would decrease from 17.7 or about 31.7 million to 15.6 or about 28 million dollars leaving us 0.6 percent above or million dollars

above the minimum threshold of 15 percent as outlined in our adopted policy council member peterson so just to be clear the 3.7 what i'm not suggesting is that that is redistributed for repurchase.

[04:45:24] The act of spending it itself on a cancellation is the removal of the threat. Subsequently, there is a cost to putting an easement in place, but it doesn't require an acquisition cost because the land is already in ownership here.

[04:45:41] So that's done. It's just the legal work, getting an easement in place, which has been there, done that. That's not a big-ticket item. The second question is that it would be helpful to know how Blenheim was financed.

[04:45:57] I don't know whether you know off the top, but I see a hand in the back here. Well, that's not germane. So this is not germane to this discussion at this point. So where is this going, Council Member Peterson? Well, to our CFO's point here in terms and to Council Member McQuillan's question, how would this be handled in terms of our accounts?

[04:46:22] And if it's structured as a long-term debt, and I don't know, we'd have to see what terms VDOT would offer here, that goes in as a part of a debt package. That's really common. I don't know whether that's the way it was done the first time around.

[04:46:39] I know roughly at that time a lot of open space acquisition and protection was happening here in the city that was being funded through, I think, essentially the real estate tax but some other mechanisms. But once again, like any other capital improvement project, that's what this could be considered as and potentially financed.

[04:46:58] But we'd have to look into that and see what they would be open to. So just to be clear in terms of how that might work. Also, in terms of the resolution here, there were two resolutions. I wasn't clear on what those two resolutions were. It's full project or cancel.

[04:47:14] Okay. And on the cancel, then, interesting procedure, because what I would have suggested is that the option to cancel, the resolution for that is a resolution that would include the option for doing exactly this, for putting in place a protection agreement and for financing the 3.7 optimally as a part of that.

[04:47:36] And so that would be how you would go about canceling, and that would be an option that the city, the residents, could understand as a possibility here let us know how they feel about it councilmember Amos with this discussion I wish a lot of these questions have been asked earlier because there's a lot of unknowns and numbers being thrown around I would like to go ahead and suggest that we close the work session I don't feel like any more progress will be made tonight is is there support on the dais for closing the work session

[04:48:11] councilmember Hall I think councilman Peterson still looks like he has some questions so if we're being pressed for a deadline if we're being told we have to come up with a resolution i understand that it's late but unfortunately when we have a full agenda and we put the george schneider trail at the end again we've already turfed at one time now we're here to have the meeting we can talk about this endlessly we have talked about this endlessly and i think

[04:48:47] council member amos's point is that we will be here until one o'clock in the morning having the same circular conversations over and over and over again when the issue on the table is what we're

going to do about the letter VDOT sent us giving us a deadline. But with all due respect, I feel like the items that Councilman Peterson are asking are things that have not been broached before in a public setting with staff present to have a day as conversation.

[04:49:14] I mean, people like to do things behind the scenes, but I think there's also a lot of value in a conversation like this with a topic like this being covered in a public setting. It's a very interesting topic, but it is out of left field because that's not what we were here to discuss. We're not here to discuss conservation. We're here to discuss what's happening with the George Snyder Trail. Council Member Amos. I mean, just to reiterate, asking for my support on financial and legal ramifications when I haven't seen the information beforehand, I just can't support that so I don't feel like we're going to get anywhere tonight with this line of questioning

[04:49:53] that's why I think we just close it email the questions and then if it makes sense then I'd support it so council member Hall you would like to continue the discussion council member Hardy Chandler council member Peterson would you like to continue council member Bates no I think that it's perfectly fine if we just as council member Hall suggests email the questions in and just see we can get answered and then we can discuss the next meeting and this is not the end of this issue councilmember McQuillan no I have been asking that

[04:50:32] question about the 3.7 million to be paid back how that would work I've been asking that for a long time and I just now got the answer to that this is the first time I've heard that there's an opportunity to potentially do some protection of this this area and that's an option potentially I don't even know because we haven't heard if how that would work so I I do think that there is more information that needs to be discussed and I'm getting the same kind of feedback from by email from constituents having similar questions to what you're discussing here so it's actually been helpful for me and I know it's not the popular answer I'm sorry well we've got three people who wish to

[04:51:11] close the work session we have three people who want to continue discussion and the mayor is going to close the work session. So the work session now is... Point of order. Yes, Council Member Peterson. Point of order. With respect to a work session and the timing of it, is that something that is decided by tie vote, or is that something that requires a council decision?

[04:51:44] Simple majority, the mayor can break the tie. Okay. There we go. Thank you so much. The work session is now closed, And we are going to go into our manager report out before we go into a closed meeting. City Manager Foster, do you have anything to share with us?

[04:51:59] Just one item. We should have in the next day or so the completed draft of the citizen survey. And once I have that, I will distribute that to council so you all can see it.

[04:52:16] And you'll be able to see all the questions that we'll be able to benchmark and all the questions that are proposed to be asked on the survey. And so then we have a work session on Tuesday, the next Tuesday.

[04:52:33] And just if there are any questions that anybody has, we would like to go ahead and get that buttoned up. because I know that's been a desire of council to get that survey completed and get that feedback from our residents.

[04:52:48] So I just want to let you know that will be forthcoming. Thank you very much. Council Member McQuillan, thoughts to share? Council Member Bates? Comments? Council Member Peterson? Well, just to

follow up on our last discussion, I think I heard Council Member Amos say that he would welcome additional information at our next meeting on the financial issues, And I'd certainly like to take him and the rest of the council up on that so that we can get a little bit more clarity on the option to do cancellations so that that could be fully understood.

[04:53:26] So I'd love to have the opportunity when we get together next time to be able to continue that conversation. That is not what I heard. I heard him say that he wants to know exactly what you're asking in an email, exactly what you're asking in an email before he can support or not support directing staff.

[04:53:43] that's what I heard. Can we hear from members of the council? Councilmember Bates? That's what I heard too. Councilmember McQuillan? Really sure what he was asking. Just the ability to have a continued conversation. We're lacking time tonight, but to pick the issue up in terms of the option for how this might be structured and how it might be financed to center to understand that more clearly for more we can do yes we can hear direct you know council member Hardin Chandler we can certainly hear directly from him what I heard was

[04:54:23] a request for that information in the email so that he could read it so we're now debating what you asked for so so what was so what the what the question on the floor is before directing staff to expend time on councilmember Peterson's extensive questions. We understood that what you had suggested or were moving is that those requests be sent in an email so we can understand exactly what is being asked before we decide whether this dais is going to support by majority directing staff to do that. That is

[04:54:59] correct. That is what I believed. So, um, so Council Member Hall. Is this for comments or? No, this is, did you hear what? Yes, but I think he already said straight from the horse's mouth, but yes, That is also what I heard him say.

[04:55:19] Okay, great. Well, before my comments aren't done, I guess my question was whether we will have an opportunity to discuss, again, the issues that I raised in terms of how a cancellation option might be structured so that that could become a part of a resolution.

[04:55:39] If we're going to look at two resolutions, one to cancel and one to approve going forward, The motion to cancel is one that could include also a motion to structure it in a way that provides, you know, a land protection option as a, for instance.

[04:55:55] So that would be a resolution that could be structured for further consideration. And I'd like to have the opportunity to put that before the council. City Manager, did you have? I think what Mr. Peterson said does not need to be in the resolution for VDOT.

[04:56:13] That could certainly be done on its own. I think all VDOT needs to know is, are we canceling or are we building? The other piece that he's speaking of, if that's something that council wishes to do, certainly does not need to be in the resolution to cancel as far as what VDOT needs to hear from us.

[04:56:34] That's all I was going to mention. And what Council Member Amos requested is to know exactly, specifically, What Council Member Peterson is requesting staff to do before the dais decides whether they want to direct staff to expend staff time doing it.

[04:56:51] Well, maybe just to clarify, I think what I'd like to see is I understand two resolutions are being developed. And one of them for cancellation as a resolution that should, as a part of the resolution, to be

very clear here, explore further a land protection agreement and the structuring of the cancellation payment to support that.

[04:57:21] And that could be described a little bit better. But I'd like that to be a part of the resolution to cancel. Mr. Lopkeman. So I understand what you're asking. I doubt sincerely there are many ways to do conservation of property, as you well know.

[04:57:39] We also will not have clarity on the VDOT structure for repayment of the funds in the time that's remaining. I think that's why the manager was suggesting bifurcating the questions.

[04:57:55] We have two resolutions from the last time this happened last year. I think staff's intention would be to simply present those resolutions again. Actually, I think there were three at the time, including the Western option. I think cluttering, and that's not a pejorative, but I think cluttering the termination resolution, if that's the way the council wants to go, may not be necessary.

[04:58:22] You can still have the discussion on directing staff to explore conservation options, financing options, et cetera. frankly, the repayment to VDOT would be something staff would be exploring anyway on ways to mitigate the impact, to stretch it out, to reduce the impact if possible. But I don't think we can get any of those answers prior to, certainly not by the next meeting, and almost definitely not by the last meeting in June. Well, if I might, that raises perhaps a more fundamental issue that Council Member McQuillan raised, which was she has been, as I understand it, trying for some time

[04:58:58] to understand how the \$3.7 million payment would be structured. And that is, as I understand it, going to depend on VDOT to be able to explain that. And so what I am hearing is that we won't know how that could be structured by June 30, and that's a material point because if it could be structured, there are ways that it could be structured that are more acceptable than others, right?

[04:59:30] And, you know, it could go into long-term financing, et cetera. And what I'm hearing is we're not going to have any idea how this would be structured by June 30th. I think that's fair, unless the manager will. I think it's two different things.

[04:59:47] Even if we make a lump sum payment, they demand payment within 30 days, we can structure it however we want. If we want to borrow funds or issue debt or stretch it out on our own books, we can do that and still pay VDOT a lump sum whenever they, you know.

[05:00:04] So in essence, we don't really need to know. I mean, we would absolutely, as the city attorney mentioned, try to reach an amicable agreement on how to make that payment. So maybe we don't have to pay it all at once or be able to make installment payments.

[05:00:21] But at the end of the day, if we want to do something different, ourselves, we have that option and still pay them a lump sum up front. Okay. So, you know, the work session's over. We're in council comments. Do you have any further comments, council members, who you just said before we move on?

[05:00:37] Well, as a part of council comments, I'm trying to see if we can reach agreement on action here. And I think my question is whether we could have the chief financial officer do exactly as you say, which says regardless of what happens here, it's within our own authority to structure this, and it would be helpful, I think, for everybody to know exactly what that might look like because I think there is an impression, which may be a false impression, that this is a lump sum payment that has a certain time burden associated with it, but that's not necessarily the case.

[05:01:15] This could be structured so that it does not, and I think that would be a very helpful piece of information to have available to us when we and the public makes this decision. Thank you. Council Member Hardy-Chandler? No comments at this point. Council Member Hall?

[05:01:32] Just one question as the work session closed before I really got clarity on this, but Council Member Amos had suggested the western side. I think Council Member McQuillan was open to that. I know that I was. I'm not sure that we actually got feedback from Council Member Hardy-Chandler or from Council Member Bates on that.

[05:01:52] So did we? Maybe I missed it here. I'm just wondering, as we're talking about what to generate, maybe there should be three options, which would include the Western. So I believe that Council Member Amos asked if we could reach out to VDOT asking if that was still an option.

[05:02:11] I believe that there, with Council Member Amos, that is at least four people who are like, ask the question. Okay, so just to be clear then, So then we are directing staff with four votes at a minimum to ask the question.

[05:02:27] Staff can reach out and ask VDOT to clarify, absolutely clarify, that the third option, the western half, is off the table. However, they're going wordsmith that. Okay.

[05:02:43] Then again, I would like to suggest that we reach out to VDOT Commissioner Stephen Brick to start with that there as opposed to... I think part of the challenge, too, is that the staff at CTB has changed, some of the staff at VDOT has changed. I know there's all these changing, not staff, but the people that are in these roles have changed, just like our council has changed, right?

[05:03:04] There's people that have different ideas, different thoughts, so that would be my suggestion. Thank you. Okay. Council Member Amos? No, nothing? Okay, so we are now going to go into... Before you do that, I have a question for the attorney. Council Member Peterson, what is your question for the attorney?

[05:03:22] Council comments. Are council comments a time for council members to be able to raise issues and seek agreement with other council members on actions? Ordinarily, council comments are just that comments, but that is certainly an opportunity if there are items under which council members wish to seek consensus, that's fine.

[05:03:43] And the procedure for doing that, if we do? It happens at many meetings. A council member will simply say, you know, I'd like some study about having this event with, you know, the concurrence of my colleagues. Can we ask staff to look into that?

[05:03:59] As simple as that. Well, I was trying to do that, and I think I got cut off, maybe, and was hoping that we could have exactly that for our CFO to be able to help us understand how, under any circumstance, a \$3.7 million payment would potentially be structured.

[05:04:19] Well, the only comment I'll make, Mayor, to the point of privilege, the only comment I will make to that is some of this is a little bit of a chicken and egg discussion. VDOT hasn't demanded repayment yet. they won't demand repayment until and if the council terminates. So there's a lot of uncertainty as to the structure of any potential repayment, including the exact dollar amount, which has, you know, there's some calculations that need to happen, and I'm sure we will be hearing about that.

[05:04:45] But I guess I'm just kind of confused what exactly you're looking to have. There are many ways to structure things on our end, but some of that, or a lot of that, may depend on sort of what VDOT demands it it may but I think the public certainly a number of people have expressed an interest in knowing whether and how this might be done in a way that is doable that is feasible that is acceptable and part of that is flexibility on how you structure financing and I'm simply asking because I think this is something that would be done in advance of a decision you'd

[05:05:22] certainly want to prepare for a conversation with VDOT by understanding what sort of what your preferences are. It's a pretty straight up thing. I mean, I already ran some of the debt numbers, but that's all I'm asking is just an understanding of how this would be handled. Well, I think that's a lot of staff time building data based on conjecture. So it might be more useful for staff to build modeling on what we know. Council Member Amos?

[05:05:48] If we cancel, then we can do that, but we should wait for the decision. So no from May. Let's move on. So I move that the City Council convene a closed meeting under Section 2.2-371 11.87 of the Code of Virginia for consultation with legal counsel regarding non-litigation. All council members in favor of the motion, please signify by voting aye. Aye. Those opposed to the motion, vote nay. The vote is unanimous.

[05:06:11] In favor of the motion, counsel retired into closed session at 12.07 a.m. on Wednesday.



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