



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 11, 2024, 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Richmond Room, 450 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond, California

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Call to Order: 11:37 AM by Chair Wear

2. Roll Call & Check In

A quorum was present with the following commission members:

Present: G. Sewell-Murphy, D. Thompson, C. Jackson, D. Wear, C. Kenney, O. Willis, M. Gliksohn, K. Lynch, C. Jackson

Absent:

Council Liaison: Cesar Zepeda

3. Approval of Minutes

November 13, 2024, Meeting Minutes

1st – C. Kenney, 2nd – D. Thompson

4. Chair Report

Chair Wear announced her farewell as Chair of the Economic Development Commission (EDC) and provided her final report. She stated her intention to remain on the EDC as a commissioner and expressed confidence in the strong structure of the commission, noting that commissioners have been receptive and engaged.

She highlighted the success of Taste of Richmond, particularly its early planning efforts that began in January, and emphasized that structural changes within the EDC—including major subcommittee efforts—have been a positive step forward. She credited this new format and direction with helping to enhance the EDC's impact within the City.

Chair Wear also acknowledged the EDC's work on the Green-Blue New Deal, particularly its focus on job creation. She noted that the Appracel consultant, Justine Burt, identified 40 potential green projects, which were then narrowed down to 10 to be further developed in collaboration with City Council.

Chair Wear encouraged more active participation from commissioners, stating that although the commission has fewer members, engagement levels have increased, demonstrating a quality-over-quantity approach.

She also referenced Commissioner Gliksohn's recent suggestion about conducting research on the types of businesses operating in Richmond. She emphasized that having a comprehensive understanding of Richmond's business landscape would be valuable for the commission and could help inform discussions with City Council.

Chair Wear concluded by stating that there are many important projects ahead, and she is optimistic about the EDC's direction and future efforts.

5. Old and/or New Businesses

a. Nominate and Elect new Officers for 2025

Vice-Chair Kenney nominated herself for the Chair position, and Commissioner Thompson nominated himself for the Vice-Chair position.

Commissioners voted by paper ballot, and the results confirmed Vice-Chair Kenney as the new Chair and Commissioner Thompson as the new Vice-Chair for the 2025-2026 Calendar Year.

6. Subcommittee Reports

a. Sustainability – Lead, G. Sewell-Murphy

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy shared that she almost missed today's meeting due to the recent passing of her older brother, David Sewell. She was able to make the meeting and maintain her perfect attendance record.

She mentioned discussing with Chair Wear the creation of a list of potential volunteer opportunities for the commission. Additionally, she spoke with Staff Lizeht Zepeda, who informed her that because the commission is a City entity, a fiscal sponsor would be required for the proposed Sustainability Expo.

Staff Lizeht Zepeda explained how Taste of Richmond operates under a fiscal sponsor, which manages insurance, payments, sponsorship collections, record-keeping, and other administrative tasks.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy shared that when she contacted the Richmond Memorial Auditorium, she was informed that City departments and City-sponsored events are not required to pay rental fees.

Vice-Chair Kenney noted that the cost structure for Taste of Richmond varied depending on its format. This year, costs primarily covered activating spaces/restaurants, hiring a DJ, and food expenses. In previous years, when the event was held in the courtyard, additional costs included venue rental fees, insurance, and restroom facilities. She recommended that Commissioner Sewell-Murphy consult an event planner specializing in expos to gain insight into potential costs and logistics.

Vice-Chair Kenney explained that Taste of Richmond had a dedicated event planner, contracted for \$5,000 per year for two years, which was key to the event's success. She stated that the event planner, may not have experience with expos, but have done conferences, which are similar. The Taste of Richmond subcommittee operates with an account managed by its fiscal sponsor, and the Sustainability Expo subcommittee would need a similar arrangement.

Commissioner Gliksohn inquired about the funding sources for Taste of Richmond. Vice-Chair Kenney clarified that this year was the first time City funds were allocated from the General Fund. In the past, the event relied heavily on sponsorships from organizations such as Chevron, Mechanics Bank, and Kaiser, which served as the primary operating budget. Looking ahead to 2025, Vice-chair Kenney the goal is to expand Taste of Richmond, securing sponsorships from companies like Hello Fresh and Blue Apron. Additionally, efforts will focus on creating an incubator program to help non-brick-and-mortar food businesses transition into permanent locations, leveraging the commercial space available in Richmond as part of a long-term economic development model.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked how this initiative could tie into the Mobile Vendor Program. Vice-Chair Kenney responded that she has been in discussions with Aaron from the Richmond Farmers Market about rebranding existing marketplaces at the Marina, Civic Center, and within the Mobile Vendor Program.

Commissioner Willis asked whether the Sustainability Expo would follow the same funding approach as Taste of Richmond, securing seed funding and sponsorships. Staff Lizeht Zepeda noted that while she was not present during the initial Taste of Richmond launch, however, records indicate that a fiscal sponsor was always involved. She believes the event originally relied on sponsorship funds to get started.

Vice-Chair Kenney offered to assist Commissioner Sewell-Murphy in developing brand decks to present KPIs and sponsorship opportunities to potential funding partners.

Staff Lizeht Zepeda highlighted additional partnership opportunities, including UC Berkeley, particularly its Cannabis Research Center. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy emphasized the importance of distinguishing industrial hemp from cannabis. She also shared that she had connected with Mariah Bruce, Senior Academic and Student Services Manager for Economic and Workforce Development at Contra Costa College. While the college does not have a dedicated sustainability program, it offers related programs and students interested in sustainability careers, presenting a potential partnership opportunity. She also mentioned engaging with industrial hemp farmers, primarily in East Contra Costa County and unincorporated areas like North Richmond, and expects to receive a list of active participants in the sector. Her vision is to highlight Richmond's pioneering efforts in sustainability, as it is among the first cities of its size to adopt a sustainability clause in its General Plan. She proposed an event or summit recognizing local sustainability pioneers.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy reflected on her time working for the City of Oakland as the founding executive director for the arts council, where there was no dedicated department. She inquired about the organizational structure of the City of Richmond's Economic Development Department. Staff clarified that the City of Richmond has an Economic Development Department with six divisions. Chair Wear further explained that City Council sets policy, while commissions serve in an advisory capacity.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy referenced her reading, which stated that the Economic Development Commission (EDC) is responsible for advising on the City's Economic Development Plan. Vice-Chair Kenney confirmed that a third-party consultant developed the plan, which acknowledges the EDC and its initiatives.

Commissioner Willis requested that the sustainability clause from the General Plan be located and shared with commissioners before the next meeting for review. He also asked Commissioner Sewell-Murphy to clarify whether the expo would focus solely on industrial hemp. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy clarified that the event would cover broader sustainability and business topics, which would create more opportunities for sponsorships and participation.

Commissioner Lynch added that she researched industrial hemp and found that Mississippi and Georgia have legalized hemp, integrating it as a major part of their economies. She plans to present additional research at the next meeting.

Commissioners expressed their condolences to Commissioner Sewell-Murphy on the passing of her brother. She shared that she considered him her other half, as they grew up together while their two younger siblings were ten years younger. She noted that he passed away quietly.

b. Cannabis – Lead, K. Lynch

Commissioner Lynch shared that the Economic Development Department and the Cannabis Subcommittee have been working to reapply for the State's Cannabis Equity Grant. The current focus is on verifying individuals for the program, with 13 people currently verified and a goal of approximately 20 verified participants.

The City has engaged a technical assistance provider to help verified applicants navigate the process of starting a business through online courses and other resources. One key discussion point is how to fund the program moving forward. In other cities, cannabis tax revenue funds cannabis equity programs, but Richmond does not currently allocate cannabis tax revenue for this purpose.

Looking ahead to 2025, plans include (1) A proposal to direct cannabis tax revenue toward the equity program; and (2) Exploring Amsterdam-style cannabis cafés, which would allow on-site consumption in restaurant settings, similar to initiatives in Oakland and Sacramento.

Commissioner Wear inquired whether cannabis remains a priority for the City Council. Staff Lizeht Zepeda stated that she was unsure if it is still on the official council priorities list but noted that small business support and economic development remain key council priorities. She also mentioned that an ordinance amendment is under consideration to add equity retail licenses and other cannabis-related updates.

Commissioner Lynch added that the ordinance amendment process had been paused due to political concerns this year, including issues with illegal smoke shops. However, efforts are underway to

strengthen the Cannabis Equity Program, with the goal of revisiting the ordinance in 2025 to include an expansion of cannabis business licenses.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked how many cannabis dispensaries currently operate in Richmond. Staff confirmed there are three. He also inquired if 7 Stars was among them, to which a commissioner confirmed yes, noting that the commission previously toured the dispensary during a special meeting.

Regarding Amsterdam-style cannabis cafés, Commissioner Lynch explained that Oakland and Sacramento are taking the lead on implementing these establishments, where cannabis is actively sold and consumed on-site.

Commissioner Thompson asked how a cannabis tax initiative would be introduced—whether it would require a commission proposal, staff recommendation, or a community vote. Commissioner Kerby agreed to research how other cities fund cannabis equity programs through taxation.

Commissioner Willis asked about the source of the Cannabis Equity Grant. Commissioner Kerby clarified that the grant comes from the State of California's GO-Biz program and is specifically the Type 2 Cannabis Equity Grant.

Commissioner Willis also asked about foundations or private organizations that have funded similar programs. Staff responded that Richmond's program is currently grant-funded, but there is potential for City investment or expanded funding sources in the future.

Vice-Chair Kenney mentioned that a new dispensary recently opened in Richmond, which also functions as an art gallery. She suggested exploring partnerships between cannabis businesses and the arts sector to create unique collaborations and community engagement opportunities.

Commissioner Kerby stated that the Cannabis Equity Program is still in its early design phase, but such collaborations could be incorporated into future programming. Vice-Chair Kenney added that the art gallery has attracted visitors beyond cannabis users, demonstrating broader community engagement potential. She suggested that Commissioner Lynch provide a more detailed presentation on Cannabis Equity in early 2025 and expressed interest in joining the Cannabis Subcommittee.

Chair Wear emphasized the importance of aligning the three subcommittees—Sustainability, Cannabis, and Taste of Richmond—to create a more cohesive narrative for the Economic Development Commission (EDC). This integration could raise the profile of the EDC's work and strengthen its case to City Council for additional support.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy asked if the commission had seen Chevron's new campaign. She suggested that Chevron could be approached as a potential sponsor for the Sustainability Expo or other economic development initiatives.

Commissioner Lynch also referenced the \$550 million Chevron settlement and inquired about its allocation. Chair Wear responded that a committee/commission has not yet been formed to determine how the funds will be distributed, but one will be created for that purpose.

Report from City Council:

None

Public Comments/Announcements/Handouts

Cordell Hindler extended his condolences to Commissioner Sewell-Murphy on the passing of her brother. He also mentioned the Youth Council meeting on November 20th, noting a positive reception from youth interested in participating with the Economic Development Commission.

Additionally, Mr. Hindler invited the Economic Development Commission to attend the Contra Costa Mayors Conference on January 9th in Oakley, East Contra Costa County. The event will feature a presentation from John Muir Health on mental health. The cost is \$70 per person, which includes food.

He also highlighted the Santa Fe Neighborhood Council's Hug Dinner at the Galileo Club on December 12, 2024, at a cost of \$50 per person.

Furthermore, he also shared that this year marks the 25th Silver Anniversary of the Annual Senior Winter Ball, a significant milestone. The gala will be held on Saturday, December 14, from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Richmond Memorial Auditorium and is open to all ages.

Lastly, Mr. Hindler shared that the Richmond Rotary Club's Annual Holiday Auction will take place on Friday, December 13th.

Staff shared that the Downtown Holiday Festival will take place at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, December 12th. The Mobile Vendor Plaza will be relocating to provide food for the event.

Next Meeting: January 8, 2025, 11:30 AM

Adjournment: 12:37 PM