THIS IS THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC INITIATIVES…

2022 Year in Review

Fairfax County Department of
economic
initiatives
NAVIGATING WHAT'S NEXT

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC INITIATIVES (DEI) LEVERAGES COUNTY RESOURCES AND DEVELOPS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POSITION FAIRFAX TO BE AN ECONOMICALLY COMPETITIVE AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY. IT ALSO WORKS CLOSELY WITH SMALL, LOCAL BUSINESSES TO ADVISE AND GUIDE THEM AS THEY GROW.

"THE WORK THIS GROUP HAS DONE IS PHENOMENAL. I HEAR FROM BUSINESSES ALL OVER THE COUNTY WHO HAVE BEEN POSITIVELY IMPACTED BY DEI. IT HAS BEEN REMARKABLE THE WAY THEY HAVE PIVOTED AND HELPED US THROUGH THE PANDEMIC."

– CHAIRMAN JEFFREY MCKAY

BIZEX EXPANDS ITS REACH ASSISTING BUSINESSES WITH RESOURCES

The Business Experience Partnership ("BizEx") program provides direct assistance, process and resource guidance for people seeking to establish or grow their small business within Fairfax County. As has been the case since its inception in 2018, the demand for services is increasing. 2022 noted a 17% growth in direct assistance and 88% of those helped were new BizEX customers.

Some notable accomplishments in 2022:

- Provided direct assistance to more than 529 customers looking for resources.
  - 18% of those contacted BizEx multiple times.
  - 468 of those contacts were new to BizEX.
- Presented to 863 entrepreneurs, prospective entrepreneurs, and small business ecosystem partners at a variety of educational events.
- Created an educational events calendar for entrepreneurs on FairfaxCounty.gov where people can find free and low-cost events hosted by Fairfax County and our economic development ecosystem partners. Between the launch on March 1, 2022 and the end of 2022, more than 125 events were promoted.

DEI FACILITATES GRANT FOR VISIT FAIRFAX TO EASE TOURISM RECOVERY

Tourism continued to experience the aftereffects of the pandemic. To help local attractions ease the burden, DEI staff worked collaboratively with Visit Fairfax to receive the $4.17 million Virginia ARPA Tourism Recovery Program grant.

Grant activities will be led by Visit Fairfax to promote Fairfax County and increase visitation to local attractions. Visit Fairfax anticipates between a 3:1 and 5:1 return in terms of tourism taxes generated, with a corresponding benefit in employment and related economic impacts.

The Virginia ARPA Tourism Recovery Program grant was made possible by the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) who received $50 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Fairfax County received the largest grant in the commonwealth. DEI staff led engagement with VTC, local approvals and processes, and handled execution of the grant to ensure compliance. The DEI team now manages the fund and assists with the implementation and grant management.

"THROUGH ITS CONTINUED FOCUS ON INNOVATION, DEI IS PREPARING FAIRFAX COUNTY FOR JOBS THAT DON'T EXIST NOW."

– SUPERVISOR RODNEY LUSK

DEI BREATHES LIFE INTO VENDOR PITCH PORTAL

DEI, the Department of Procurement and Material Management (DPMM)and the Department of Information Technology (DIT) developed and launched Fairfax County's first Vendor Pitch Portal. The Vendor Pitch Portal (VPP) is a single, business-friendly point of entry at FairfaxCounty.gov which allows prospective vendors to share information about their products and services with county agencies that may be potential customers, including Fairfax County Public Schools.

The goals of the VPP are to increase opportunity for small businesses, diversify the vendor pool, reduce the impact on front facing staff, and streamline the process. Agencies can become aware of purchasing options, supporting supplier diversity. Submissions are quick and easy and are directly transferred to purchasing staff, who can reach out if they are interested in the product or service. It's another way the county is delivering opportunity for businesses to grow.

BEANSTALK GROWS THANKS TO DEI ENGAGEMENT

DEI supported the expansion and retention of Beanstalk Farms, an indoor vertical farm and distribution facility in Herndon. This innovative, homegrown company brings 29 new jobs and more than $2 million of new capital investment to a long-vacant warehouse facility in an area Fairfax County has targeted for development. Beanstalk Farms received a $100,000 grant from the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund, and Fairfax County contributed $100,000 from its Economic Opportunity Reserve (EOR) as a local match to expand the innovative vertical farming company.

DEI worked with the company and Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services (VDACS) to obtain the state grant and county match which encouraged them to remain in Fairfax County. After the move, DEI further coordinated with the company, county agencies and the Governor's office to host a ceremonial ribbon cutting that showcased the office and highlighted the indoor agricultural emerging business sector.

Beanstalk uses proprietary hydroponic technology and heirloom seeds to produce leafy greens, herbs and vegetables, which it currently sells to Harris Teeter and direct-to-consumers. The headquarters also breathes new life into an empty space in Herndon. Beanstalk is a member of the Made in Fairfax network, which connects local small production manufacturers to networking groups, marketing opportunities and potential customers.

Small businesses grow into large ones, and this is just another example of how the county nurtures its up-and-coming industries.

DEI BROKERS PARTNERS FOR MADE IN FAIRFAX RETAIL SALES

DEI and the Department of Planning and Development coordinated a pop-up storefront opportunity for Fairfax makers in 2022. For a six month period Made in Fairfax members have an opportunity to sell their goods at the Workhouse Arts Center in a specially branded section of the retail shop. By utilizing and collaborating with existing retail locations, DEI is helping these small and growing businesses to reach new customers.

The DEI team developed the concept and then engaged with the Workhouse Arts team and the Department of Planning and Development to connect with and select vendors, set up the space and promote the pop-up shop.

This opportunity provides Made in Fairfax members an opportunity for new sales and customers, expanded visibility of their products through a pop-up event, and shared marketing opportunities.

DEI FOSTERS SMART CITY INNOVATIONS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Fairfax County participated in two Smart City Challenges in 2022.

DEI led the Fairfax Carbon Neutral Pitch and Pilot in October, partnering with Smart City Works and the Office for Environmental and Energy Coordination (OEEC). This annual competition seeks solutions in response to identified challenges. In 2022, this included decreasing carbon emissions, improving air quality, promoting clean energy, and improving health outcomes. The winner was Dynamhex, an artificial intelligence-based platform that helps individuals and communities track and reduce their carbon footprint. Dynamhex was chosen because its platform can help county owned facilities with carbon accounting and management, and also support residents to understand their individual carbon footprint and incentivize reduction actions. As Dynamhex employs their solution, DEI staff will support the implementation.

The 2022 Smart City Challenge Innovation Competition for Smart City Solutions took place May – June, 2022. DEI was a partner to Smart City Works, Refraction, and Virginia Tech. Companies were invited to propose innovative solutions that make our region smart, livable, resilient, and sustainable. Thirty-four companies rose to the challenge and three winners were selected based on innovation, equity and inclusivity, practicality, and regional impact. Awardees included TuConsejeria, which provides telehealth to the Central American immigrant population; Pupils to Parklets, a TJ student team designing a program to teach students how to build parklets, and Asoleyo, the design-centric solar panel company. DEI is currently working closely with Asoleyo on the implementation of decorative solar panels at county facilities.

"HAVING AN ORGANIZATION COMPLETELY FOCUSED ON INNOVATION, SMALL BUSINESS AND CATALYTIC PROJECTS HAS BEEN A GAME CHANGER. IT'S BROUGHT NEW ENERGY AND LIFE INTO OUR ECONOMIC PLANNING PROCESS."

– SUPERVISOR JOHN FOUST

DEI SUPPORTS STRATEGIC ASSETS: PEOPLE AND PLACES

In its second full year, the DEI liaison with Fort Belvoir continues to yield significant results. In 2022, DEI:

- Supported three job fairs, including two led by Fairfax County Economic Authority (FCEDA) at the National Museum of the United States Army. More than 430 attendees and 75 employers resulted in a successful fair and many hires.
- Initiated relationship with National Geospatial Intelligence Agency to collaborate on a tree replacement strategy for new development at the Fort Belvoir North Area.

Increased collaboration, communications and regular meetings have set the stage for projects that will benefit the personnel on the base as well as the surrounding Fairfax County community.

Through 2022 DEI worked with many county partners to further catalytic development projects seeking to address strategic priorities, meet county goals, and maximize value. These will continue through 2023 and include the Workhouse Arts Campus, Reston Station, Original Mount Vernon High School (OMVHS), and a potential arts project in Chantilly.

ECONOMIC ADVISORY COMMISSION ADVANCES OPPORTUNITIES

DEI expanded engagement with the Economic Advisory Commission (EAC) in 2022 to identify and debate initiatives that respond to the most pressing employer and community needs in Fairfax County.

At the April 2022 Economic Advisory Commission (EAC) and September 2022 Economic Initiatives Committee (EIC) meetings, DEI and its partner, the Department of Family Services (DFS), presented an overview of the current Work-Based Learning (WBL) options highlighting ways local employers can address workforce shortages, expand talent pools and reskill our local workforce. An EAC workshop earlier in the year led to the development of a comprehensive briefing paper and proposed solutions. As a result, DEI and DFS are designing the proposed Work-Based Learning Opportunity Fund to help employers open new talent pools and connect previously overlooked talent with new career opportunities.

At the October 2022 EAC meeting, DEI led discussions on place-led economic development, a concept to leverage the unique assets and empower community stakeholders to create economically vibrant and competitive communities. In advance of the EAC meeting DEI convened several member working sessions led by expert facilitators. The outcome of the working sessions and EAC meeting confirmed or uncovered aspects to create and maintain an economically competitive community, and some processes that Fairfax County can use to empower communities. As next steps, DEI will continue to collaborate with county and community partners to further place-led economic development activities and programs already in the works, as well as initiate analysis of commercial areas to assess the economic health and areas of need or opportunity.

DEI SUPPORTS IMPLEMENTATION OF TYSONS COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

As part of the Tysons Vision work group, DEI supported the focus, design and establishment of the new Tysons Community Alliance (TCA). The projected trajectory for Tysons is robust, and the next generation organization will help ensure Tysons is maximized as a major job-center for county residents, an attractive destination for visitors and residents, and a revenue generator. DEI's participation in the Tysons Vision work group included working alongside a diversity of stakeholders to evaluate best-practices, develop a vision, mission and proposed scope for Tysons, and model a process and solution that could be applied to other communities in Fairfax County.

TCA began operation in October 2022 and is focused on place-led economic development and community growth with a vision to catalyze the continued transformation of Tysons into an inclusive, vibrant, and globally attractive urban center. Four pillars of focus include "Livability through Walkability and Connectivity," "Activating the Public Realm, Communication and Branding," and "Inclusive Economic Growth."

Fairfax County, through the Economic Opportunity Reserve (EOR), provided initial funding to support this reorganization. DEI's role included managing the EOR funds and DEI will manage the administrative oversight of the new entity and serve as the initial liaison between Fairfax County and the TCA.

ON THE HORIZON

DEI is nurturing and launching major projects in 2023 together with our partners. When introduced, these pioneering projects will offer new resources and support to Fairfax County businesses and contribute to community prosperity.

- Fairfax Founders Fund (FFF) will deliver early-stage capital to startup companies in Fairfax County. The fund will target emerging technology companies with technical assistance grants of up to $50,000 to help them prepare for later stage investments. Outreach will focus on underrepresented founders including women and founders of color.
- THRIVE Technical Assistance Grants will provide eligible small companies with business counseling and consulting services to help them adapt to economic conditions, consumer shifts and support their future planning.
- An **entrepreneur and small business resource portal** will be an online navigator to connect business inquiries to the most appropriate assistance. It will give businesses the right resource at the right time and highlight the many unique services offered by entrepreneurial ecosystem partners.

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