



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 13, 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: 11:36 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, C. Jackson

Absent: K. Lynch

Council Liaison: Cesar Zepeda

3. Approval of Minutes

September 11th, 2024 and October 9th, 2024 (special meeting)

1st – D. Wear, 2nd – D. Thompson

4. Chair Report

- a. Chair Wear announced Commissioner Lee's resignation from the Economic Development Commission and the Chamber of Commerce.
- b. Commissioner Gliksohn emphasized the importance of economic development for any community and expressed excitement about joining the commission during its revitalization. He highlighted his professional background, which includes accounting, affordable housing, financial management, and magazine publishing. He also noted his involvement with various boards over the years. Commissioner Gliksohn expressed an interest in the Green-Blue New Deal and plans to learn more about it. He suggested that as the city develops its businesses, it would be helpful to establish a baseline—such as a business census—and explore ways to increase economic activity. While he was unable to attend the Taste of Richmond event due to being on vacation, he expressed support for the Mobile Vendor Program and has visited vendors.
- c. Chair Wear discussed the measures of accountability set by the EDC at the beginning of her term. She acknowledged her own efforts, along with those of Kerby Lynch, Don Thompson, and Christina Kenney, who have all spoken at City Council meetings in recent months. She noted that these efforts have aligned with the commission's goals and deliverables for accountability.
- d. Chair Wear addressed accountability regarding the Taste of Richmond event. She observed limited participation from EDC members in both planning meetings and the event itself. She posed a question to the commission: if this is meant to be the commission's signature event, what does that truly mean? She encouraged commissioners to reflect on their roles in stepping up and showing up. Chair Wear also suggested exploring whether the event should involve a collaborative effort with other boards or commissions.

5. Small Business Grant Support – Shifra de Benedictis-Kessner

- a. Senior Business Assistance Officer Shifra de Benedictis-Kessner introduced herself to the Economic Development Commission. She shared that she has over 10 years of experience working with the City of Oakland, Business Improvement Districts, and the Chamber of Commerce. A lifelong Richmond resident, she continues to live in the city.

Shifra announced the launch of the ARPA Small Business Grant Support Program, with applications set to open next week. The City of Richmond is partnering with the Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center to offer technical support, application workshops, and informational sessions. Flyers with program details were distributed to the commission.

The first workshop is scheduled for Thursday, November 21, from 9:00 to 10:00 AM at the Employment and Training office. Additional application assistance and informational sessions will also be offered at CoBiz Richmond. Shifra emphasized that the program's long application window ensures an equitable process, as it is not first-come, first-served.

Chair Wear asked how the commission could best support the program, and Shifra encouraged members to promote the program and spread the word within their networks.

Commissioner Gliksohn inquired if program details would be mailed to all registered businesses in Richmond. Staff clarified that emails have already been sent to all businesses with registered licenses. Shifra added that the scoring criteria for the program is still being finalized. She explained that the grant pool is \$300,000, with individual grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The program will be offered in both Spanish and English.

Chair Wear asked if the distributed flyers were bilingual. Staff confirmed that the flyers and information are available in both Spanish and English. Chair Wear noted her experience during community outreach, where many Spanish-speaking businesses reported not receiving emails.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked for more information about the Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center. Vice-Chair Kenney, who has been a consultant with Renaissance for eight years, explained that it is a free resource for new and existing small businesses. Renaissance has approximately 12 sites across the Bay Area and offers business and specialized expertise in both Spanish and English. Vice-Chair Kenney shared that she teaches marketing and branding curriculum through Renaissance and provides support in these areas.

Commissioner Willis asked about eligibility for the program. Staff clarified that the eligibility criteria are being finalized as part of the scoring process. The program is intended for small businesses, particularly those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Presentation – Commissioner Orrian Willis on Workforce Development

- a. Commissioner Willis shared that, just before the tour of Chef's Warehouse, he had returned from Germany, where he participated in a delegation to study their apprenticeship program. He described

Germany's robust middle class, which he attributed to its strong apprenticeship system. Unlike the U.S., Germany heavily invests in human capital rather than military spending. Germany has developed a dual education system that allows students, starting at age 14, to choose between a traditional academic pathway leading to college or a vocational pathway. The vocational route offers training in approximately 350 professions, and by age 19, participants are fully certified—equivalent to earning an associate degree. Remarkably, two-thirds of German students choose the apprenticeship track over college. Additionally, Germany's workforce is highly unionized, which contributes to a resilient middle class and reduces the number of individuals falling through the cracks.

b.

Commissioner Willis contrasted this with California, where only one-quarter of high school students complete college, leaving three-quarters without a clear pathway to the middle class. He highlighted parallels with Richmond, noting that the city's economic peak occurred during its shipbuilding era, but it has struggled to regain that status since the end of the war.

He emphasized that the Green-Blue New Deal presents a significant opportunity to attract investments for job training and business creation. Many jobs in the renewable energy sector—such as those in electric vehicles, wind, and solar—require specialized skills that the local workforce currently lacks. These industries have been offshored for so long that building a skilled workforce is essential to attracting major businesses to Richmond.

Commissioner Willis stressed the need for comprehensive workforce training and collaboration with entities like RichmondWORKS, local colleges, Rubicon, and the Workforce Team. The subcommittee plans to engage with stakeholders like Justine Burt to discuss the implementation of the Green-Blue New Deal. He also has a meeting scheduled with Tamara Walker from the Workforce Development Department.

Reflecting on his experience in Germany, Commissioner Willis found it inspiring to see students who reminded him of his younger self—individuals who preferred to work after high school rather than pursue higher education. He shared that he later realized the value of further education to increase earning potential, noting that an apprenticeship program would have been an invaluable alternative, saving him from significant student debt.

Commissioner Willis remarked on the importance of future planning around investments. While the Trump administration is expected to return to office, potentially leading to changes in federal apprenticeship policies, he expressed optimism. Apprenticeships are broadly supported as they are beneficial to businesses and improve their bottom line. He believes the focus should be on protecting critical aspects of apprenticeship programs.

Richmond is well-positioned to secure grants and federal dollars under initiatives like the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). He noted that the Just Transition 40 (Just 40) initiative requires that 40% of federal investment benefits disadvantaged communities, such as Richmond. Furthermore, cities must demonstrate the integration of apprenticeship programs for local workers to qualify for major federal infrastructure investments.

Commissioner Willis concluded that Richmond stands to gain significantly by adopting the apprenticeship model, which aligns with the Green-Blue New Deal and other strategic goals.

7. Old and/or New Business

a. 2024 Taste of Richmond Summary, October 7-13, 2024

Vice-Chair Kenney provided a recap of the Taste of Richmond (TOR) event, highlighting the key achievements and outcomes. She emphasized that as we continue discussions on how the Economic Development Commission (EDC) can contribute to workforce and economic development, it is important for the EDC to review the City of Richmond's Economic Strategic Plan. Many of the objectives, including those related to Taste of Richmond, focus on building capacity and relationships within the city, which is referenced in the strategic plan. Despite some challenges in EDC involvement, the event served as a platform for these goals, with TOR contributing to the city's growth by showcasing Richmond's food culture. Taste of Richmond was driven by the energy of food and purpose.

TOR was a week-long celebration, from October 7th to 13th, dedicated to showcasing diversity, culinary talent, and dining culture within the City of Richmond. While the event on the 12th had to be canceled due to low ticket sales, discussions with Perfusion Winery have already secured their participation in the launch event for TOR 2025. Perfusion Winery also supported other local eateries throughout the week. The event brought together local restaurants, residents of all ages, visitors, and people from outside Richmond to celebrate the city's unique food scene. From established eateries to emerging chefs, the community had the chance to highlight Richmond's restaurant culture.

Some highlights included the participation of one of the executive directors from Seven Star RT Dispensary, who attended all the events and provided social media shoutouts. Across five events, there were 700 attendees, helping to raise awareness of the local restaurants. Among the diverse offerings were "I Love Granny's Kitchen" at CoBiz, a pop-up vegan food event; Assemble at Craneway Pavilion, featuring American cuisine; Johnny Boi's smash burgers; Prajam Thai's Thai food; El Tucan's Mexican food; Waffle and Cream's desserts; Factory Bar's drinks; and The Backyard's American food. The variety of options attracted a wide range of attendees.

Media highlights included the creation of a dedicated website, which garnered over 500,000 impressions across digital platforms. On the day of the event, the social media presence grew by 50 percent, with five new followers gained. The economic impact was significant, with participating businesses and restaurants reporting an average 50% increase in sales.

The core of the campaign was marketing. In today's world, people rely heavily on recommendations through platforms like Yelp and social media when choosing where to eat, shop, and more. The campaign aimed to increase visibility and attendance, raise awareness of events and participating restaurants, drive economic impact, encourage residents and visitors to dine locally, foster community, strengthen community pride, and connect people through shared experiences of Richmond's food

scene. The primary platforms used were Facebook and Instagram, with a mix of content including graphic design, photography, videography, short- and long-form content, and interviews. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with Sarah Wally noting that the content was widespread and well-received.

The event also launched branded hashtags #TasteofRichmondCA and #FoodandPurpose, referencing Richmond's slogan of pride and purpose. There was a cohesive narrative around dining and supporting local businesses. Every restaurant involved in the event promoted the campaign to their own audiences, and many owners expressed how thrilled they were with the intentional effort to support their businesses. Johnny Boi, the owner of Johnny Boi's restaurant, shared that the energy from the event is still felt, with increased customer traffic and press coverage, all of which he attributes to Taste of Richmond.

Chair Wear and Vice-Chair Kenney conducted multiple interviews with news publications to discuss Taste of Richmond (TOR) and its format change. The biggest excitement came from the new approach and the intentional focus on supporting small businesses. This shift not only highlighted the work of the Economic Development Commission (EDC) but also emphasized the City's commitment and its indirect partners. Press releases were sent to 21 community partners, and at least one representative from each of these partnerships attended an event. Additionally, Vice-Chair Kenney and Chair Wear presented at the Richmond Rotary, who also came out in support of the event.

On-the-ground marketing was another key strategy. Vice-Chair Kenney gave a shout-out to Chair Wear, Commissioner Thompson, and Councilmember Zepeda, who all helped with canvassing and distributing flyers door-to-door in neighborhoods. Originally, the marketing would have been entirely digital, but Vice-Chair Kenney emphasized that Chair Wear advocated for on-the-ground guerrilla marketing, which had a significant impact. This approach not only supported restaurants hosting physical events but also encouraged other businesses to submit their information to be highlighted in the future.

In terms of community engagement, there was an increase in restaurant sales and ongoing foot traffic, even a month after the event. This was crucial in determining whether the momentum would continue or fade out.

When it came to financials, the focus was on providing support to the restaurants. Instead of giving out checks, restaurants were asked about their needs, and they said they required foot traffic. As a result, incentives were provided to encourage visits. No restaurant had to cover any overhead costs for the event, as the EDC fronted the bill for DJ services, marketing, and other expenses. This was similar to the original one-day TOR event, where vendors didn't incur overhead costs, although they had operational expenses. For this version, however, no one suffered a loss. The EDC is still waiting for the \$10,000 from the City, which will serve as a launchpad for TOR 2025. One of their recommendations is to secure sponsorships early, as most organizations finalize their sponsorship budgets in Q1.

By promoting local dining, TOR stimulated the local economy, reinforcing the importance of shopping locally and circulating money within the Richmond community. This aligns with the City's upcoming "Buy Local" campaign, further enhancing the economic impact of the program.

There were some success stories from the event, including one from Factory Bar. The event manager's parents, lifelong Richmond residents, had never heard of Factory Bar despite living close by. TOR introduced them to the restaurant, and many other Richmond residents had similar experiences. The event's professional photography and videography highlighted the behind-the-scenes process in the kitchen, which excited participants and strengthened local identity. As a brand developer and strategist, it is important for the City of Richmond to establish and own its brand narrative. The event gave local restaurants the opportunity to define who they are, stand by their business, and showcase their everyday operations to the public.

Taste of Richmond also supported the goals of the Economic Development Strategy for the City. A key objective is capacity-building and relationship-building, and the event helped the EDC advocate for the City of Richmond. The conversations with entrepreneurs and small businesses have revealed a real hunger for change, with businesses eager to find the right people to help drive that change. Restaurants have expressed interest in forming a coalition for TOR 2025, and there is a clear dedication to supporting businesses and their well-being in Richmond.

While the event had many successes, there were also challenges, especially given the limited preparation time. The team dreamed big and worked hard, but life sometimes revealed limitations. Some aspects that did not work out included hiring youth workers, securing additional sponsorships, and launching merchandise due to a lack of capacity. However, the team was able to pivot quickly, such as when Perfusion Winery canceled their event on the Wednesday before the event. With more preparation time, and with Vice-Chair Kenney having been involved in TOR since its inception, the recommendation for next year is to plan earlier—potentially eight months in advance. This would allow for more strategic planning, enabling the team to focus on the experience and relationship-building rather than last-minute logistics.

Another challenge was the limited representation from City leadership. The Mayor and some Council members were absent, though Councilmember Zepeda was present at every event he could attend. Restaurant owners specifically mentioned that Councilmember Zepeda was always there to support and advocate for local businesses.

For Vice-Chair Kenney, the hardest aspect was reviving the social media accounts, which had not been active for a year. Bringing energy back to the account required additional effort, as there was a gap in activity. The team had to work hard to get restaurant owners engaged and build momentum. A recommendation to address this issue is to keep the social media presence consistent, ensuring the accounts remain active and engaging year-round.

Some key lessons learned include the importance of strengthening communication with participating restaurants. Since TOR was a new concept, with most other restaurant weeks following a prefix menu format, many restaurants needed education on how to host their own events and showcase their business. Additionally, there was a need to reduce confusion around marketing materials. Streamlining these strategies for future partners will be key, as the restaurant packets created some confusion.

Strategic planning earlier in the year is also a top priority, including identifying and integrating key partners sooner. There are several individuals both inside and outside of Richmond who can be pivotal for marketing and financial support, and early collaboration with these partners is essential.

Another recommendation is to renew the contracts for marketing and events, which are set to expire at the end of this year. The team believes the marketing efforts should continue to build on the work already done. Keeping a social media presence alive is critical to maintaining momentum, as the online interest in Richmond continues to grow. Vice-Chair Kenney will continue volunteering her time as an EDC Commissioner to manage the social media accounts and keep the visibility alive. One idea is to pair up with other commissions to visit local restaurants throughout the year, have lunch, and promote those restaurants as part of TOR and EDC efforts.

In terms of community engagement, the EDC should consider other events throughout the year, with TOR being the marquee event. The Vice-Chair thanked everyone on behalf of the Economic Development Commission for attending in 2024 and expressed excitement for TOR 2025. She also mentioned that the City's upcoming "Buy Local" campaign could offer a great opportunity for collaboration with EDC and TOR. As always, she encouraged participation in the Taste of Richmond subcommittee for the following year.

Chair Wear inquired about the new timing for the event in October, asking if it worked well. Commissioner Kenney explained that the timing was effective. As TOR Restaurant Week is a new concept for this side of the Bay, it doesn't conflict with other restaurant weeks since most events are in festival season, whereas Richmond TOR comes in afterward. The only potential overlap is with San Pablo Restaurant Week, which starts on the Saturday of TOR's event, but this isn't much of an issue since San Pablo's event uses a prefix menu, and the dates were only announced on that Thursday. Commissioner Kenney also noted that July would be too early, especially if the event grows in 2025.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked how the event could involve more restaurants. Vice-Chair Kenney responded that a 2025 plan is already in place, which includes shifting to Monday-through-Friday lunch and dinner options with a festival on Saturday. The festival format is still impactful, but the original festival didn't benefit restaurants as much as hoped. The plan is to identify restaurants to participate during the five days of restaurant week, while the Saturday festival will likely take place near Craneway Pavilion, making it easily accessible for people across the bay via ferry. The festival could feature a stage for local artists, though food would be for sale at the event, making it free to attend. Richmond's large coastline and freeway access would make it a convenient location for this kind of event.

Vice-Chair Kenney also highlighted that Richmond lacks a comprehensive tourism and branding campaign. Currently, Taste of Richmond is the primary initiative representing the city, and there's no clear "Visit Richmond" branding for travel, entertainment, or local shopping. She mentioned discussing marketing strategies with the owner of Craneway Pavilion, especially for a potential pickleball tournament, which could bring 6-8 million dollars in revenue to Richmond. However, securing such a tournament requires demonstrating the venue's viability as a host.

Chair Wear asked about the possibility of a booklet or magazine that had been discussed earlier, likely in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, to feature the Best of Richmond winners and nominees. Vice-Chair Kenney acknowledged that it was still a possibility, but the execution of the idea was uncertain.

Commissioner Jackson praised Vice-Chair Kenney for her outstanding work in transforming Taste of Richmond, not just as a food event, but as a major platform for local businesses and branding. She emphasized how Kenney's efforts were helping rebrand Richmond, overcoming negative perceptions from people unfamiliar with the city.

Finally, Staff member Kyle Lam asked Interim Executive Director of Richmond Main Street, Sarah Wally, whether Richmond Main Street Initiative would be interested in renewing their fiscal sponsorship for Taste of Richmond for the next two years. Sarah Wally confirmed that they would be interested.

b. Nomination new officers for 2025; election at December meeting

Chair Wear noted that her term as Chair, as well as the Vice-Chair's term, is coming to an end. She asked Staff about the procedure for nominations and elections. Staff clarified that in the past, nominations were made at one meeting and elections held at the following meeting. Tony Tamayo from the Mayor's Office mentioned that the Arts and Culture Commission conducts both processes at the same meeting. The EDC will follow suit and hold both nominations and elections at the next meeting.

8. Subcommittee Reports

a. Cannabis – Lead, K. Lynch

No report.

b. Sustainability – Lead, G. Sewell-Murphy

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy discussed the Sustainability Business Industrial Hemp Expo which is Richmond through its sustainability lens. The reason that came to mind is that Richmond, for a city of its size, is historically thought of as a pioneer in this area in terms of having a sustainability clause in its General Plan. She summarized the mission of the proposed Richmond Sustainability Industrial Hemp Expo, which is to explore how the city's current sustainability network can continue to integrate into segments of our business community and urban farmers. A sustainability-focused business industrial hemp expo can also be seen as important for businesses to increase exposure and innovation, for

industrial experts, and for Richmond's future image rebranding. She invited commissioners to provide their input.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy discussed honors for Richmond's sustainability pioneers. She remembered reading years ago about certain organizations and individuals who were deeply involved in Richmond's sustainability efforts, so it came to her mind that we should recognize those pioneers with certificates or other forms of recognition. She also mentioned staff members and Richmond workers who have come up with innovations in terms of sustainability. She discussed a list of proposed invitees and sustainable speakers. She urged the commission to be interested in innovations in research. She shared that she had been reading about Purdue's research into field-to-shelf products using industrial hemp and what it can offer in terms of food agriculture. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy will continue this discussion at the next meeting. .

Commissioner Willis stated that there is a good overlap with the Green Blue New Deal, and there could be joint efforts in planning. Commissioner Gliksohn asked about the timeline, which is slated for September 2025. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy confirmed that this is the proposed date, but it could change as we work on it next month.

Report from City Council:

Councilmember Zepeda shared an update and thanked the Commission for their work on Taste of Richmond. He looks forward to an official presentation to the City Council to highlight the investment that City Council made in Taste of Richmond and demonstrate the impact of the \$10,000 investment on the community, potentially asking for additional funding.

He would like to see a list of participating restaurants, and if there is one, to have it broken down by district and create a sharable version. He currently has a list for District 2 that he is working with. This is important for initiatives like buying local, such as purchasing from Richmond restaurants during meetings and events.

Staff shared that, as part of the Buy Local campaign, they are working on a business directory.

Regarding Taste of Richmond, if they are looking to organize a festival, they need to consider the timing, as the road in front of Terminal 3 is set to be redone.

Councilmember Zepeda also shared that the City has a sister city relationship with Regla, Cuba, and the City will be putting up their art as part of the City Council Art Chamber. The art will go up this Friday and will be showcased by Tuesday. There may be a small reception as well. The art will remain on display until the end of January.

Commissioner Zepeda also mentioned that for those who may be terming out, there are opportunities to join other commissions. Councilmember Zepeda is also a liaison for the Environment and Community Investment Agreement (ECIA). They have about \$5-6 million available, with the goal of appropriating it for greening

Richmond's transportation infrastructure. There is a need for more commissioners, and for the first time in a long while, they achieved quorum.

Public Comments/Announcements/Handouts

Cordell Hindler introduced himself to the commission and provided several updates. He shared that he attended the Youth Council meeting last month and received some interest from the group about the Economic Development Commission. He will also be returning to the Youth Council later next week. He mentioned that on December 3rd, there will be an El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce Christmas Party at Mechanic Banks. The Contra Costa Mayor's Conference will be held on December 5th, hosted by San Pablo.

Staff member Kyle Lam shared that there will be a Job Fair on November 21st at the Richmond Auditorium. He also asked the commission about potential interest on a Green Business Toolkit.

Next Meeting: December 11, 11:30 AM

Adjournment: 12:58 PM