



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Special Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 8, 2025, 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Richmond Room, 450 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond, California

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Call to Order: 11:45 AM by Chair Kenney

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: K. Lynch

Council Liaison: Cesar Zepeda

3. Approval of Minutes

December and January Meeting Minutes will be agendaized for approval on the February 12, 2025, meeting.

4. Chair Report

Chair Kenney expressed her excitement about assuming a leadership role within the Economic Development Commission (EDC). She acknowledged the strong momentum created under the previous Chair, Commissioner Wear, and emphasized her desire to build upon that energy in 2024. She noted that the EDC had been working to establish synergy in defining its goals and making a meaningful impact.

To guide their efforts, EDC members were provided with meeting minutes from January, February, and March of the previous year to review past discussions and goals. Chair Kenney encouraged the commissioners to use these references to set actionable objectives for the year ahead.

Additionally, she shared a personal update, stating that she has recently moved back to Richmond. Her family has been in Richmond since the 1940s and 1950s, and she is currently settling into her grandmother's home following her passing two years ago.

Chair Kenney emphasized the importance of commissioners being able to present intentionally for both new and existing businesses, as well as having the opportunity to contribute agenda items. To facilitate this, she has created a calendar invite with a set deadline for agenda submissions. In accordance with the Brown Act, the deadline for adding items to the EDC agenda is the last Thursday of the month.

Upon reviewing last year's meeting minutes, she noted that accountability was a key area of focus. She believes that implementing this structured process will help ensure greater accountability moving forward.

5. Old and/or New Businesses

a. Staff Updates

Staff Lizeht Zepeda and Kyle Lam provided an update on recent City Council actions. Economic Development staff brought three items to the Council for approval. The first contract was with Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center for the Small Business Beautification Pilot Program, which will support improvements of building exteriors of small businesses, including windows and paint. The second contract was with Empower Soul Studios to manage events and marketing for a Buy Local Campaign, focusing on the Coronado, Iron Triangle, and Santa Fe neighborhoods. The third contract was with Bludot Technologies for the Open Rewards program, with \$200,000 allocated—\$170,000 designated for Open Rewards funds and \$30,000 for administration.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked for clarification on whether the \$170,000 in Open Rewards funds would be available to the entire community, and staff confirmed that it would. He also inquired about Bludot, to which staff explained that it is a woman-owned, Bay Area-based business that provides services such as Open Bludot, a business directory used by cities like Walnut Creek and Danville. Staff highlighted that Bludot is also a useful backend tool for city staff to contact businesses through targeted emails, allowing for more direct outreach, such as notifying salons about upcoming workshops relevant to their industry. Chair Kenney asked about opportunities to meet with Bludot.

Commissioner Willis asked whether Bludot was replacing Empower Soul Studios. Chair Kenney clarified that they are two separate initiatives, with Empower Soul Studios focusing on marketing and events and Bludot managing the rewards program. She referenced the RFP, which outlines six planned events, and noted that there is a lot of intersectionality between the Economic Development Commission's goals, the Buy Local campaign, and the broader economic development priorities for 2024. She emphasized the importance of discussing ways to engage with City Council, and Councilmember Zepeda offered the EDC an opportunity to meet with the Council for a strategy session.

Chair Kenney also shared that at the previous night's Council meeting, there was discussion about whether local businesses had been contacted regarding a videography and photography RFP. Staff Lizeht Zepeda explained that the small business support contracts align with the Transformative Climate Communities grants, which focus on the three pilot neighborhoods. The goal is to use the collected data to inform citywide efforts in the future. She clarified that the Council was initially uncertain about the funding structure because, while they had allocated \$1.25 million for small business support, portions of that funding were tied to existing agreements and commitments, making the approval of these contracts essential.

In response to the discussion about the photography and videography RFP, staff explained that the City has an open bid process that allows any business to become a vendor. The City also recently hosted a large purchasing workshop, which included agencies such as CalTrans, UC Berkeley, and Lawrence Lab. Staff noted that, while local photographers and videographers often express interest in working with the City, the challenge lies in ownership rights. Since work done for the City becomes public record, photographers lose the ability to resell or license their images, which may discourage participation. Chair Kenney highlighted the importance of licensing in creative industries, noting that a one-time payment of \$2,000 for a photograph could significantly undervalue its potential revenue if licensed over time. She suggested that promotion and visibility could be leveraged as incentives to attract more local creatives to City projects.

Commissioner Gliksohn revisited the discussion on Open Rewards, asking how the \$170,000 would be distributed. Staff explained that small brick-and-mortar businesses can sign up for the program at no cost. Customers can then make purchases at participating businesses, submit receipts, and receive a reimbursement or reward, typically ranging from 5-15%. Staff further explained that the City opted for Bludot over models like Concord's gift card system because it eliminates administrative burdens on businesses, such as paperwork or program management.

Chair Kenney provided the commission with a copy of the Richmond Business Action Plan, written in 2020, as a reference for guiding EDC's work. She initiated a discussion on whether the plan remains relevant and if it should be updated or amended. Staff responded that the plan is a useful framework but that the City Council's strategic goals take precedence in shaping economic development initiatives. Vice Chair Thompson asked whether the plan is actively managed and whether periodic reports are provided to City Council. Staff explained that while the plan was initially taken on by the commission and staff, the City Council's strategic planning process ultimately drives economic development priorities. However, there is alignment between the strategic goals and the action plan, and both documents are available on the City's website. Vice Chair Thompson recalled receiving previous reports and asked whether any updates or revisions are expected. Staff indicated that while an update is unlikely, Council will receive a report on progress related to strategic goals.

Commissioner Jackson expressed interest in reviewing how economic data has changed since the plan was developed in 2019/2020 and how those changes may affect goals moving forward. Staff suggested Transparent Richmond, the City's open data portal, as a resource. Commissioner Willis asked about the City's long-term economic development strategy, and Chair Kenney confirmed that the action plan has a second phase, with capacity building being a central focus. She noted that much of what is outlined in the plan aligns with discussions within the EDC and City Council's strategic goals, particularly around information sharing, marketing, financial support, regulatory relief, and workforce development. She posed the question of how to effectively integrate all these efforts into a cohesive strategy, given that the commission meets only 11 times per year.

Commissioner Gliksohn raised a previous conversation about the number of restaurants in Richmond. He referenced page 15 of the action plan, which states that there are 167 establishments under food services and accommodation. Chair Kenney added that the Mayor recently shared that Richmond is part of the Bloomberg City Data Alliance, which includes cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and Atlanta, as well as international cities. She also revisited a discussion from last year when the Mayor expressed interest in forming a Small Business Development Committee, and she proposed that the EDC revisit that idea.

City staff Lizeht Zepeda shared that this is the second time Richmond has participated in a Bloomberg initiative, with the first project focused on the Port. Commissioner Wear asked whether Chair Kenney was suggesting the formation of a Small Business Development Subcommittee. Kenney confirmed that the idea has been discussed at various points and noted that, since the Taste of Richmond subcommittee is mostly seasonal, the only active year-round subcommittees are cannabis, sustainability, and policy/Green-Blue New Deal. Commissioner Wear pointed out that small business development aligns with the Green-Blue New Deal subcommittee's focus, as many of the top job sectors identified in the consultant's report are

tied to small businesses. Chair Kenney acknowledged that there is potential for overlap and suggested that a subcommittee within a subcommittee might be a possibility.

Vice Chair Thompson asked about the status of the City's implementation of Green-Blue New Deal projects. Staff provided a written update from the Environmental Manager, who will meet the following day and provide more information to the EDC at the February meeting. Chair Kenney concluded by stating that with four active subcommittees, the addition of a Small Business Development Subcommittee could help fill gaps in supporting businesses that are not currently encompassed in existing efforts, such as nail salons and barber shops. She emphasized the importance of capacity building and advocacy for these businesses.

Commissioner Willis noted that much of the capacity-building language in the action plan was a direct result of EDC's comments on the first draft, where the commission stressed the need for staffing and resources to ensure the City qualifies for capital investment opportunities.

Staff provided additional updates on grant applications. The City applied for a Cannabis Type Two Grant and a separate grant through the Port for the EPA. Staff also shared updates on the ARPA Small Business Support Program, which Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center is contracted to administer. So far, 69 applications have been received, though about 10 percent may not qualify due to being new businesses that were not impacted by COVID-19. The application window remains open, but staff anticipates that the full grant amount will be distributed in the first round.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked whether the ARPA funds administered by Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center were structured as loans. Staff clarified that the funds are grants, not loans, and that the contract was approved in 2024. Staff also noted that ARPA funding requires extensive auditing, and Renaissance has a strong track record in managing these types of disbursements.

b. Commissioner Updates

Commissioners were given the opportunity to provide updates. Chair Kenney initiated a discussion by asking Commissioner Gliksohn about his goals and vision for the EDC. Commissioners were provided with meeting minutes from January, February, and March 2024, during which the EDC had discussed what they wanted to see in the City of Richmond. In April, each commissioner shared their skill sets and specific interests, and Chair Kenney wanted to confirm whether those interests remained the same or if any adjustments were needed. She reviewed the goals outlined in previous discussions, including developing a brochure, presenting objectives to the City Council, identifying business projects to highlight—particularly in youth development, homelessness, and community resources—and engaging with sustainability experts and consultants working on the Green-Blue New Deal.

She read each commissioner's previously stated goals, beginning with Commissioner Willis, who had expressed interest in business attraction and support, workforce development, and initiatives such as the Green-Blue New Deal. Councilmember Zepeda had stated a desire to promote business-friendly policies and ensure that Richmond conveys a welcoming message to businesses. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy had focused on fostering positive change and helping Richmond reach its full potential. Vice Chair Thompson had prioritized the Green-Blue New Deal workforce plan and aligning efforts with Council Strategic Goals 1, 2, and 5. Chair Kenney herself had outlined goals related to intergenerational business and community

development, emphasizing a commitment to revitalizing Richmond, addressing the downtown food desert, and advocating for rebranding efforts to showcase the city's potential. Commissioner Lynch had concentrated on the Cannabis Subcommittee and its role in supporting the Council, particularly in demonstrating how cannabis can be a tool for social justice initiatives. Commissioner Gliksohn had not yet provided his goals and planned to do so at an upcoming meeting. The meeting minutes did not reflect Commissioner Wear's goals, and she shared that her initial focus had been on structuring the EDC. Moving forward, she wanted to work on the Richmond Green-Blue New Deal, narrowing down the 40 potential jobs identified by consultant Justine Burt into a more actionable list of 10 and developing a concrete execution plan. This could involve initiatives such as high school programs, union partnerships, or workforce training efforts, with a timeline to ensure implementation. Commissioner Willis expressed interest in joining her on this effort and exploring funding opportunities through partnerships with Contra Costa Community College, the East Bay Economic Development Alliance, and similar regional organizations that could support Richmond's grant-seeking efforts. Commissioner Wear also wanted to take a more active role in small business development by participating in events like Taste of Richmond and engaging with business owners directly. Chair Kenney noted that the East Bay EDA, which she works with, includes the City of Richmond as a member.

Commissioner Jackson's goals were also not included in the meeting minutes, and she shared that her focus was on small business development. She expressed enthusiasm for the formation of the new Small Business Development Subcommittee and saw a lot of synergy in its work. She also wanted to emphasize the workforce development and job training aspects of the Green-Blue New Deal, particularly as a way to create opportunities for youth and introduce people to industries they might not have otherwise considered. She hoped to help small businesses thrive in Richmond by ensuring they are financially sustainable, promoting financial literacy, and addressing the challenges businesses faced in recovering from COVID-19, as reflected in the Economic Development Action Plan.

Chair Kenney mentioned opportunities with RYSE and shared that Commissioner Lynch had invited her to a presentation by RYSE students about an economic development project exploring the intersection of their school experiences with homelessness. The students had expressed interest in learning about non-traditional career paths, including those in creativity and AI, and were seeking mentors to support them. She inquired whether the EDC had a designated Youth Commissioner, and Cordell Hindler responded during public comment that Mary in the City Council office was the staff liaison for the Youth Commission.

Commissioner Willis shared that RYSE had provided a grant to Roots of Success to support environmental literacy training for students. Justine Burt had mentored the students, and as a result, several were now beginning college with studies focused on environmental fields. He highlighted the success of the initiative.

Chair Kenney stated that for the next meeting, the commission should take this information and requested that staff resend the City Council's strategic goals and provide updated data from Transparent Richmond. She suggested that each commissioner submit three actionable goals to her by the last Thursday of the month. These goals should follow the SMART framework—specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely—so that they reflect priorities commissioners are passionate about and can be effectively pursued.

Commissioner Gliksohn asked for clarification on email communications and whether there were specific protocols to follow. Staff advised that commissioners should copy staff on emails when making requests, such as for printing or administrative support. Chair Kenney reminded commissioners that they all have City of Richmond email accounts and encouraged them to use those for official communications.

Commissioner Willis noted that City email accounts are subject to sunshine laws, meaning they are public records and can be subpoenaed. He cautioned that if commissioners use personal email accounts for City business, those accounts could be accessed as part of a public records request. Staff Lizeht Zepeda shared that when she worked for the City of San Jose, there was a sunshine task force that required management to publicly share their calendars. Staff also clarified that commissioners cannot email a quorum of commissioners directly, and if necessary, BCC should be used for group emails exceeding quorum limits. Staff will coordinate with IT to ensure all commissioners have access to their City email accounts.

Commissioner Willis inquired about the process for requesting agenda items and mentioned topics such as the Transformative Climate Communities grant and Chevron funding. Commissioner Gliksohn asked for clarification on what the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) grant entailed. Staff explained that the initiative, called Richmond Rising, is a \$35 million grant-funded project involving multiple community partners. City staff Beatriz and Matias in the Community Development department are managing the grant, and Economic Development's role focuses on the Displacement Avoidance Plan. Commissioner Wear asked whether there was a designated City Council liaison for the project. Staff was unsure but noted that a report had been provided to City Council in December.

6. Subcommittee Reports

a. Sustainability – Lead, G. Sewell-Murphy

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy expressed her gratitude to the commissioners for their condolences and support following the last meeting. She provided an update on her follow-up conversation with Mariah Bruce at Contra Costa Community College, who expressed interest in forming a partnership and working with the commission. Mariah Bruce serves as the Senior Academic and Student Services Manager for Economic and Workforce Development. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy also inquired whether any commissioners knew who oversees Common Ground for Chevron, the group behind the "We Believe in Richmond" campaign. She had reached out to them regarding potential collaboration but had not yet received a response. Her outreach was focused on sharing the commission's sustainability initiatives and the upcoming Expo, with the hope that Common Ground and "We Believe in Richmond" would be interested in participating and potentially providing financial support for the initiative. Chair Kenney noted that she has a connection with Chevron's Community Engagement Manager and offered to facilitate an introduction.

Commissioner Sewell-Murphy also brought up that it appears there will not be a new Farm Bill this year, as there was none last year. She highlighted research being conducted at Cornell University on hemp and its evolving applications, particularly their excitement around the potential of hemp seed meal as a new type of poultry feed.

She inquired whether reserving the Civic Center tentatively would require payment. Staff Lizeht Zepeda clarified that while they would still need to complete an application, the final determination on fees would come from the auditorium and Civic Center staff. Chair Kenney expressed her support for the planning process and noted that she would assist alongside event planner La Marla. Commissioner Sewell-Murphy will also need a fiscal sponsor to help secure funding for the event.

Commissioner Jackson shared that she had conducted research on the legalization of industrial hemp in other states and found that similar events were being planned elsewhere. She offered to connect with Commissioner Sewell-Murphy offline to support planning efforts and ensure the event is developed in a sustainable manner. She also researched various county and city ordinances regarding the reallocation of cannabis tax funds and how those funds could potentially be directed toward social equity initiatives. She plans to share her findings with the commission.

- b. Cannabis – Lead, K. Lynch
None

Report from City Council:

None

Public Comments/Announcements/Handouts

Cordell Hindler invited commissioners to the Bayfront Chamber of Commerce mixer on January 27 at La Strada from 5:30 to 7:30 PM, with a \$15 entry fee per person. He shared that he would be attending the Richmond Youth Council meeting on the 23rd and planned to suggest that members apply to fill the remaining seats on the commission, emphasizing the value of fresh perspectives. Commissioners were also invited to the Contra Costa Mayors Conference in Moraga, with more details to come. He also mentioned that he is working on new projects related to economic development.

Next Meeting: February 12, 2025, 11:30 AM

Adjournment: 12:57 PM