

**ALBEMARLE COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY MINUTES
Room 3400
994 Research Park Blvd
Charlottesville, VA 22911
February 17, 2026
4:00 p.m.**

Directors present: Don Long, Chair; Steve Hood, Vice-chair; Andrea Johnson, David Storm; Frank Friedman, Bill Mechnick, Andrew Cox

Directors absent: None

Staff present: Emily Kilroy, Director of Economic Development; Ashley Hernandorena, Business Development Manager; Avery Thompson, Management Analyst III; Sabawoon Ahmadzai, Senior Manager of Economic Development; Lauren Bodhan, Senior Assistant County Attorney; Bea LaPisto-Kirtley, Board of Supervisors Liaison to the Economic Development Authority (EDA), Rivanna District; Trevor Henry, Deputy County Executive

Staff absent: None

Other Presenters Present: Rebecca Haydock, Venture Central; Hope Lawrence, Venture Central

1. Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

2. Matters from the Public

There were none.

3. Approval of Minutes

January 20th, 2026

Avery Thompson, Management Analyst III, noted there was a correction to the role.

Motion to adopt the minutes as amended was made by Ms. Johnson and seconded by Mr. Hood.

MOTION: The motion carried unanimously.

4. Financial Report

FY26 as of February 11th, 2026

Avery Thompson, Management Analyst III, provided the financial report.

5. Unfinished Business

a. Follow up from Steven Pedigo's, Civic Sol, presentation on Feb. 5th

Mr. Long said that this was a chance for directors to share any thoughts or comments arising from the discussion at the last meeting. He said that Mr. Pedigo had drafted a memo, and he planned to distribute a copy to the directors after staff had time to review it.

6. New Business

a. Food and Beverage CPG Accelerator

Mr. Long recused himself from the discussion because he was a member of the Venture Central Board.

Hope Lawrence, Project Manager for Venture Central, discussed a food and beverage accelerator program that directly supported six of the County's economic development strategic plan strategies. She highlighted the program's focus on addressing the challenges faced by food and beverage manufacturers in the region, noting that 92% of manufacturers operated under \$1 million in revenue. She said Venture Central was requesting \$25,000 per year for two years from the County. She said that the budget was \$380,000 over the two years, or about \$190,000 per year.

Mr. Hood asked how entrepreneurs would find out about the program.

Ms. Lawrence said that they would perform outreach via their contacts, working with the Chamber of Commerce, and through word of mouth.

Rebecca Haydock, CEO of Venture Central, highlighted the program's connections to various organizations and entities across the state, including the Virginia Accelerator Network. She also discussed the online resource platform and local events to bring together food businesses. She noted that the region was already thriving in the specialty foods industry and that there was a need for support to help businesses grow and succeed.

Mr. Friedman asked how many businesses they expected to serve from the County.

Ms. Lawrence said that placement in the program was based on an application process, so she could not guarantee a number. She noted that about half of the businesses in her database were based in Albemarle, so she believed they would represent a good percentage of the participants.

Mr. Friedman asked what commitments they had secured from other municipalities.

Ms. Haydock said they had commitments from the City, Nelson County, Fauquier County, Madison County, and Orange County for one year. She said that the Town of Culpeper, Culpeper County, and Rappahannock County expressed interest in

revisiting an investment. Louisa County was considering a commitment, and Greene County could not participate financially, but they wanted to be an in-kind partner.

Ms. Johnson asked if the application process ensured the businesses were viable before being approved for the program.

Ms. Lawrence said that was correct. She explained that as part of the marketing and outreach efforts, they had started gathering revenue information from businesses that expressed interest.

Ms. Johnson asked if they would ensure a diversity of food businesses which were accepted into the program.

Ms. Lawrence said she had not considered categorizing the businesses, but she did not think she would exclude two businesses that were producing the same thing.

Mr. Storm asked if they had pursued grant opportunities to address funding needs.

Ms. Lawrence explained they had hired a grant writer, and they were already considering a number of grants.

Ms. Haydock said the goal was to create a self-sustaining accelerator program.

Mr. Hood asked how they determined the \$50,000 request amount.

Ms. Haydock replied that the request was based on a per-capita value.

Motion to adopt the Resolution to appropriate matching funds to support Venture Central Food and Beverage Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) Accelerator was made by Ms. Johnson and seconded by Mr. Hood.

MOTION: The motion carried (6-0-1). (Mr. Hood, Mr. Cox, Ms. Johnson, Mr. Friedman, Mr. Mechnick and Mr. Storm voted aye; Mr. Long abstained)

b. Staff Report

Ashley Hernandorena, Business Development Manager, provided the staff report. She reported that since the last meeting, business retention and expansion efforts included two agribusiness and food processing visits, three biotech and life science visits, and one complementary sector visit. She said that Cville BioHub held the Device and Tech Expo, which had more exhibitors than ever before.

Ms. Hernandorena discussed several upcoming events, including the Tourism for All conference and the Piedmont Ascent Business Conference. She noted there was a potential direct flight service in the works from Charlottesville Albemarle Airport to Boston, which would be beneficial for local biotech and life science companies.

7. Other Matters

a. Commonwealth Bio-accelerator - Update on first year ops, and tour

Nikki Hastings, Co-founder of Cville BioHub, shared a video presentation. She explained that \$7.5 million in seed funding would enable the construction of a new 18,000 square foot innovation building across the street. She said the facility would feature wet lab space, which would allow the accelerator to grow and serve both early-stage and growing companies, doubling the lab access and enabling continued operations until 2030.

The EDA received a tour of the Cville BioHub facilities.

8. Adjourn

Chair Long adjourned the meeting at 5:36 p.m. The next meeting is March 17, 2026 in Room 241.

Teste: _____
Don Long, Chair

Approved: _____
Emily Kilroy, Assistant Secretary