



# Interactive Town Hall

Shaping the Future of Stafford  
& Greater Fredericksburg

## INTERACTIVE TOWN HALL: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF STAFFORD & GREATER FREDERICKSBURG

### SYNOPSIS

*What follows are our collective “notes” from the Virtual Town Hall we held with our partner RIoT for the launch of our (Stafford and our Region) entrepreneurial program. These are “notes” and we welcome continued community and business dialog. For ongoing information please follow our website as we will be updating in regularly*

<https://gostaffordva.com/riot-stafford-partnership/>

The opening session allowed for introductions of [RIoT](#) to the Stafford and regional business community. Tom Snyder, Executive Director at RIoT, provided background and context to RIoT, as well as its history and mission. He noted that he and his team are pleased to be invited into Stafford and the Fredericksburg Region as a collaborator for economic development with a focus on entrepreneurship. He explained that in addition to being a collaborator and convener, one of RIoT’s core philosophies is that the economy changes and business grow “at the edge of technology” and that “technology is a catalyst for changing economy and society.”

John Holden, Director of [Economic Development and Tourism](#) welcomed all and seconded Tom’s comments noting that technology has driven social and economic change. From the invention of fire, the printing press, the combustion engine, the personal computer, internet, to the explosion of data in our society. It is data that, with governance and security in place, will drive the next explosion of our economy for all sectors of business.

John introduced the Chairman of the Stafford Board of Supervisors, Meg Bohmke, and Chairman of the Stafford Economic Development Authority, Joel Griffin, both of whom thanked all for attending and noted that the launch of this new venture with RIoT will improve business growth in our region and foster entrepreneurship.

A keynote address was given by David Ihrie, Chief Technology Officer, with the [Virginia Center for Innovative Technology \(CIT\)](#). David started by highlighting the just published Business Facility Magazine

that ranked Virginia as #1 for cyber security, unmanned automated vehicles (UAVs), and digital infrastructure. David highlighted the role of CIT in fostering new technology development and business growth in the Commonwealth with a variety of programs, including entrepreneurship. David ended by emphasizing the collaboration with the Fredericksburg region and CIT's Smart City initiative. He shared that as Stafford develops its new Downtown Stafford with CIT, they will do so as a Smart City, built upon the technology being tested in the Stafford Smart City Testbed.

The purpose of the event was to facilitate dialogue and collaboration on a host of topics: cybersecurity, COVID-19, entrepreneurship, IoT & technology, business innovation and smart cities. After David Ihrie's keynote, participants were directed to breakout sessions that were self-selected upon registration. To encourage honest answers and candid conversation, the breakout sessions were not recorded. The following are notes taken during the session that include discussion, Q/A and key takeaways. A recording of the event can be found [HERE](#). Participants were encouraged to join the RIoT-Virginia [Meetup page](#) to get connected and stay updated on future events and programs.

## KEY BREAKOUT SESSION TAKEAWAYS

### CYBERSECURITY

- Firms need clear plans and “pathways” for expansion into cyber(security) work. Programs offered to assist will lead to more contracts and increased job growth.
- More opportunities for “hands on” learning for both K-12 and working professionals.
- Workforce development is important to attracting other technology/cyber firms.
- Workshops and “test labs” can help existing businesses expand and innovate.

### BUSINESS POST-COVID

- Needs to be a platform and channel of communication for connecting businesses within industry sectors. Potentially some type of workshop(s) for future collaboration.
- For this Region to sustain growth in the technology, innovation, and manufacturing sectors more focus and programming needs to be dedicated to incubating startup companies. May cities, Pittsburgh for example (PGH Labs), works with early stage tech companies to attract seed funding along with programs to pilot their technology in real-life settings, typically within the government setting/network.
- “People” will, as it always has been, be the region's biggest resource. Organic collaboration needs to continue until a “real” program, which is needed, is put into place.
- A physical space for learning and collaboration is needed.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Coordinating and communicating existing programs is important—possible role for this program?
- Facilitating and communicating “the plan” is important. Once such ‘deliverable’ of this Go Virginia funded project.

- An established entrepreneurial process and convener (i.e. ecosystem) is needed.
- Workforce development and talent attraction is important for existing businesses and, perhaps just as important, for new business creation (i.e. entrepreneurship).

### SMART CITIES

- “Smart Stafford” needs to be scaled safely and efficiently.
- Data security and privacy must be paramount.
- Smart Stafford and Stafford Downtown will serve as a model for the Commonwealth in Smart City technologies.
- Citizens want a sense of “place” and welcome smart technology for experiential opportunities (e.g. retail, dining, entertainment).

### IOT & TECHNOLOGY

- Event on IoT (targeted to general community).
- Event on Data governance, security and privacy.
- Interested in network of entrepreneurs, tech professionals, businesses, and educational institutions and professionals.

### BUSINESS INNOVATION

- A uniformed place for entrepreneurs to gather and collaborate—IN ONE PLACE.
- A strong economic policy and attention to entrepreneurship is critical.
- A rising tide lifts all boats: retraining current workforce to meet needs of businesses.
- Capitalize on existing assets in the region.

## BREAKOUT SESSION NOTES

### CYBERSECURITY

Session facilitators were Joel Scharlat from the Cyber Bytes Foundation and Mark Nichols from Spanalytics.

Joel Scharlat noted a large government contracting and cyber presence in Stafford County and encouraged networking and additional connections with others.

- What programs can be offered to help strengthen cyber businesses in the region? What skills and/or partnerships are needed?
  - Firms need clear plans and “pathways” for expansion into cyber(security) work.
  - Firms need internal plan to define pathways.
  - Firms needs assistance with security clearances plans.

Stacy Brinkley at Cask Government Services suggested and encouraged ways to get young persons into cyber careers. She noted that Cask is starting a provisional program in the coming weeks to provide training in specific programs.



**Has your view of data reliability/usage changed?**

**Yes - 36%**

**No - 64%**

Curry Roberts at the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance (FRA) noted that labor needs are key to economic development; everything starts and stops with workforce development.

- Are there opportunities to put IoT “tools” and labs and develop training programs for schools? Mark Nichols at Spanalytics suggested a training gauge between the labor market and school training.

Jeanne Wesley noted that Germanna Community College (GCC) has labs for IT and Cyber training. Germanna also has a pending grant to support these efforts.

Joel Scharlat noted that “hands on” training is important and there needs to be more opportunities for both youth and working professionals.

- Is there any interest in existing firms to innovate to other industry/markets?
  - Test lab(s) built to deploy IoT technology and cyber simulations. Workshops and 101 sessions would garner interest.
  - Jeanne Wesley mentioned that GCC has cyber/IT labs and would be interested in collaborating with other organizations.

## BUSINESS POST-COVID

The conversation was led and moderated by Angela Freeman, Business Development Manager at the City of Fredericksburg and Nick Minor, Director of Economic Development & Tourism for King George County.

After brief introductions, several members of the session shared personal insights/thoughts on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their businesses. Most members of the group related to how their “business” has required modifications in how it operated—primarily around the limitations placed on face-to-face meetings.

- What are current, most-relevant technological issues businesses are facing?

The group briefly discussed how Stafford County’s existing digital infrastructure will play into how effectively a prolonged “work-from-home” culture can be sustained. During which, it was discussed that the core urban service areas of the County have “adequate” cellular and high-speed internet access capabilities/capacity though too said level of services are not always a given. As more and more “traditional” office workers will be increasingly working remotely, along with a now a prolonged K-12 education system educating from home, readily accessible and reliable high-speed internet access is becoming a *necessity* not a luxury. It was noted that the County is aware of the current high-speed internet and/or cell service capacity issues facing several parts of the County. The County is currently partnering with private internet service providers(s) to extend broadband service into parts of the Widewater, Hartwood, and Rock Hill districts of the County.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Session facilitator was Rachael Newberry from RIoT and Darren Smith from GigEast and the City of Wilson NC.

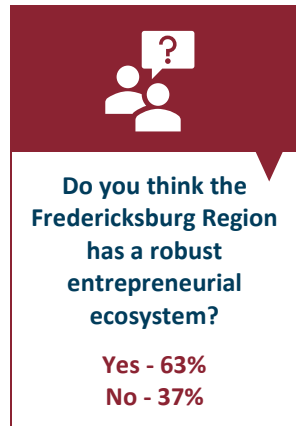
Stafford, and the Fredericksburg region, needs to be innovative in its approaches of attracting talent and business. The old model is not working.

- What assets exist? What challenges exist? A bit of “SWOT” was offered:



### Regional Strengths

- Great foundation of businesses from local to federal contracting companies- a lot of tech out there.
- Have foundation for greatness - academic institutions, surrounded by a ready set of clients.
- Have supportive government partners who help develop very entry-level positions (have experienced tremendous growth there) - someone disagreed with another who said this was difficult.
- Blank slate is an opportunity - the broken systems are an opportunity. Dramatic opportunity to bring people to Stafford. Data trends show that people are leaving cities - particularly DC. We've got to get really aggressive in thinking about the future - smart cities, etc.



### Regional Challenges

- It is very challenging to get people to support trainings, gatherings, etc., and very difficult to appeal to groups and get people to attend events. Even when it was free, participation is low.
  - So busy in their own lanes that they don't see benefit in collaboration. Have tried some of these efforts locally and have not been successful.
  - Very family-centric - Hiring, recruiting, retaining talent - don't see a lot of recent graduates or 5-10 years out of college in population. These folks aren't looking to immediately settle in Stafford. Hiring Jr. to midlevel range is challenging.
  - Challenging to compete with other companies that have perception that salaries and benefits are going to be exponentially better in NoVa. Keeping talent local is tough. Want to be able to show our local community that we have jobs here.
  - Getting people to stay here or move is tough.
  - Very limited support or experience - what's the plan? What does that roadmap look like?
- What are your critical needs?
    - A lot of heavy lifting needs to be done, a lot of creativity necessary to break the mold and make it attractive to customers.
    - Regulatory issues that involve support from government officials.
  - What is the entrepreneurial process in Stafford?
    - An entrepreneur starting out probably wouldn't know where to go.

Vernon Green from G Cubed, Inc. explained the experience of a previous incubator: Quantico Innovation Center (cybersecurity and IT startups) in Stafford. There was initial investment but did not take off quickly enough. Momentum was lost and eventually failed. Vernon stated, "I've used the same model under my own company. We hold nonprofit business roundtables for startups (10 people or less). I can share those lessons learned with startups, give access to the proposal process, help with banking and financing, help with books, etc. We don't focus on any particular stage of companies we work with. It's open to anyone."



## SMART CITIES

David Ihrie, with Virginia CIT, explained the partnership with Stafford County in more detail and shared that the Testbed will be a center for testing new, innovative technologies. These technologies may be permanently implemented in the County and used to provide smarter and more efficient solutions for its residents.

- What challenges does a Smart City face post-COVID?
  - Attendees shared that the current infrastructure is not “ready” to handle the full scale of a Smart City/Downtown Stafford initiative and that the County will need to take the lead on expanding infrastructure capacity throughout that area.
  - Continuing to educate the “public” along with finding and implementing the “right” smart technology will be imperative for the project’s ultimate success.
  - The Smart City initiative needs to be inclusive and regionally focused.

## IOT & TECHNOLOGY

Session facilitators were John Holden, Director and Theo Zotos, Economic Development Specialist from Stafford County Economic Development and Tourism.

How is your business using tech and what way might you want to?

- Will Robinson—IoT Consultant
  - Work in data science, analytics, and optimizing...new insights into domains. Connecting everything with sensors to control and optimize large areas. AI has so much possibilities.

What resources might you be missing to help you add tech into your company?

- Martha O’Keefe—VP at Germanna CC
  - Tech training to meet the needs of area business. Learning more to upscale students. Students’ confusion on what interest will give me a job in that field. Will it be helpful for the community to have an event to explore more subject matter experts together to talk in practical terms about what it is and how to harness it. Germanna needs the community’s help.
- Lynn McDaniel—Consultant at CIT
  - Context matters. When you say IoT to people in the fray of tech it means different things. An overview, any device that connects to the internet is IoT. We have become very data driven in personal lives. People don’t think about TV’s, fridges, or home networks. Your car uploads and downloads data. To narrow the jobs that focus on IoT is significant and therefore a challenge to put our arms around that scope. Compared to when the cloud became a thing a couple years ago and how we understand that now. Give it a couple years and it will be the same.
- Mike Cannon—CTO at Stafford County
  - This is fuel growth in the security sector. Cyber security is an opportunity to create new companies, building military grade security around IoT devices with block-chain. Building data governance model.
- Camille Madon—Stafford County Resident
  - Starting a homeschool program. Looking to incorporate children, teens and adults in IoT and grow and learn.
  - Many development kits, through laptops, kids will need to know basic computer coding.



**Would you be interested to participate in programs that support entrepreneurship and small business growth?**

**Yes - 94%**  
**No - 6%**

- Melody Gratic—Executive Leadership Coach
  - Data helps make informed decisions.
  - Access to increased data helps leaders.
- Donald McGowan—Network Manager for Central Rappahannock Regional Library (CRRL)
  - Would be interested in a data governance and security event.

## BUSINESS INNOVATION

Session Moderators were Tom Snyder with RIoT and Megan Hutchinson from Cherry Bekeart.

What does innovation mean to you?

- Helping a business startup, pivot, create a voice, evolve, and help them to move forward.
- Things that have not been seen yet—thinking outside of the box. How do we create an epicenter?
- Creating technologies for the market.
- What problems are we trying to solve? Leverage solutions to create a model for the ecosystem, that then constantly evolves.
- How do I disrupt the current business to be at the forefront?

What are the challenges of business innovation in Stafford County?

- We have a well-educated population, but live in a bedroom community. This is a blue-collar working community and all of the white-collar individuals are traveling to D.C. to work. How can we shift this dynamic where people can live-work-stay here? How do you create a better (higher) tax base here in the community? For example – creating more white-collar business assets in the community. Blue-collar jobs are currently our tax base.

What are the opportunities of business innovation in Stafford County?

- How do we get salaries (white-collar individuals) down here working, instead of Northern Virginia?
- There are opportunities to build data warehouses or data centers.
- 5G is disrupting the industry in a positive way. How can we capitalize on that?
- Getting high-tech jobs here in Stafford. Creating a new lifestyle.
- Capitalizing on the existing assets in the region: fiber, military, schools.

