

State of Texas

County of Brazoria

City of Freeport

BE IT REMEMBERED, that the Historical Commission and Main Street Advisory of Freeport, Texas met on Thursday, August 21, 2025 at 5:00 PM at the Freeport Freeport City Hall located at 1201 North Avenue H, Freeport Texas for the purpose of considering the following agenda items:

Board Members: Irene Ocañas
Edith Fischer
Sandra Leavey
Betty Lopez
Melanie Oldham
Vacant
Jeff Crisp
Lon Siddall
James Wood

Staff Members:	Maria Lopez	Main Street Coordinator
	Robert Johnson	EDC
	Chris Duncan	Interim City Attorney
	Dan Pennington	Interim City Manager
	Wade Dillon	Museum Director
	Jarvis Davis	Council Liasion

CALL TO ORDER:

Call to order-Irene Ocanas, Chair

Chairperson Ocañas called the meeting to order. She noted that six members were present; which constitutes a quorum.

Irene mentioned that Lon Siddall would be running late.

Invocation/Pledge

Betty Lopez led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Maria Lopez led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments-This is an opportunity for citizens and visitors to address the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board on any agenda or non-agenda item. Individuals must register in advance and adhere to a (2) two-minute time limit.

There were no citizens signed up for the public comments.

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Staff Announcements

Museum Update (Wade Dillon)

Museum Director Wade Dillon reported they had begun installing the new school exhibit. He noted that the shark exhibit had been taken down in just two days. Dillon mentioned that he had moved his office into the expansion space which they were preparing to open soon. He also reported that museum visitation had decreased significantly with the start of the school year.

Dillon announced that in September 2025 the Museum would begin hosting the "Free Time with the Freeport Historical Museum" lecture series. This lecture series will start September 6th with a historical lecture by Andy Hall about the Texas Navy. Wade clarified that this would coincide with the opening of the school exhibit and KidFest. Dillon also informed the board that the museum's expansion space would be available for Main Street meetings, with the front lobby being prepared with tables and chairs as needed. He requested that, in the future, the board coordinate with museum staff to ensure the space would be ready for meetings.

Main Street Update (Maria Lopez)

Main Street Coordinator Maria Lopez provided an update on her activities over the previous two weeks. On August 13th, she participated in a new manager check-in with Molly Miller, Community Liaison for the Texas Historical Commission's Main Street program. Ms. Miller provided updates and guidance on accessing the Main Street Resource Library. Miller also provided contact information for other Main Street managers to whom Lopez could reach out with questions. On August 19th, Lopez attended a Texas Main Street virtual board meeting, where she learned more about resources available to the board. The meeting emphasized the importance of fundraising, volunteerism, community engagement, and public awareness. Lopez also mentioned that she had been invited to attend subcommittee meetings over the past two weeks.

President's Comments

Chairperson Ocañas discussed several items, noting that almost all accountability agreements had been signed and collected, with one still needed from Melanie Oldham. An "Accountability Agreement" was given to Melanie to complete by the end of the meeting. Irene thanked the board for signing and submitting.

She then discussed the importance of inviting the Main Street Coordinator, Maria Lopez, to all subcommittee meetings to stay updated on their progress for the "Transformation Strategy Plan." She also suggested a written report to be submitted to Maria outlining items discussed in order to successfully keep track of subcommittee progress for Main Street quarterly reports. Irene reminded board members about applications being available for those still working on forming their subcommittees.

Melanie Oldham asked if any Freeport resident could be part of the subcommittee. It was noted it could be Freeport residents or non-residents, typically people that will be an asset to the board with a background or skill in the subcommittee intended. Irene suggested subcommittees keep track of volunteer hours for each board member and volunteer. Robert Johnson gave examples of when to track volunteer hours. He used the upcoming event, Kidfest, as an example and suggested hours to be turned in to Maria Lopez, Main Street Coordinator.

After volunteer hours were discussed, Melanie asked if there was a prior vote to the time frame allowed for public comments. Irene then added this could be voted in the future if a longer time frame was desired. She said she would look into the charter to possibly change to four-minute public comments and also wait for council to approve.

BUSINESS-REGULAR SESSION

Consideration and possible action to approve the August 5th, 2025, and July 17th, 2025 meeting minutes.

A discussion ensued regarding needed corrections to the minutes. For the July 17th minutes, it was noted that Wade Dillon was incorrectly listed as the Main Street manager rather than the Museum Director. For the August 5th minutes, there was discussion about whether guests and city employees who attended should be listed, though it was clarified that there was no requirement to list audience members in the minutes.

Motion by Lon Siddall, seconded by Sandra Leavey, to approve the August 5th, 2025, and July 17th, 2025 meeting minutes with the noted correction(s). The motion passed unanimously.

Discuss FY2025 Progress, Activities, and Accomplishments.

Robert Johnson presented the accomplishments of the past fiscal year, including:

- Meeting with Bay City for training
- Completing the University of Texas at San Antonio Downtown Study
- Planning the alleyway project
- Receiving Scenic City designation under Scenic Texas
- Receiving Tourism Friendly Community designation under Travel Texas
- Achieving Main Street accreditation
- Hiring a Main Street coordinator
- Developing bylaws as recommended by Texas Main Street
- Creating an accountability agreement
- Successfully completing the plastic recycling drive twice
- Establishing a larger social media presence

Chairperson Ocañas added that significant time was spent on finding a replacement for the previous Main Street manager. She also mentioned the continuation of the plastic collection drive and suggested promoting it again on social media to increase participation.

Wade Dillon noted that both benches acquired through the plastic recycling program were at the museum and ready to be installed downtown. He mentioned that the Brazosport Lions Club, who collaborated on the project, would make plaques for the benches, and the text would be determined by the board.

Sandra Leavey mentioned that Lanier school grades had participated in the plastic collection drive, suggesting future coordination with schools for such initiatives.

Ocañas and Robert Johnson reported they have been working on developing a low-interest loan program for downtown buildings, including procedures and application processes, though it is still in draft form.

Melanie Oldham requested additional input regarding the Alleyway Project and TIRZ. Robert Johnson reported there was a project completed near Tuberville Construction. TIRZ progress has been delayed since the June 6 meeting, as CenterPoint Energy did not attend. They are currently in the process of rescheduling.

Discuss Main Street Four Point Approach.

Maria Lopez discussed the subcommittee guidelines and requirements, emphasizing the importance of tracking volunteer hours for quarterly and annual reports. She requested that subcommittees invite her to their meetings so she could learn about their activities and help. Lopez distributed subcommittee member applications for

those who wished to add valuable members to their subcommittees.

The board discussed whether subcommittees should report at each meeting to keep everyone informed of ongoing activities. It was noted that this would be addressed during the work session.

Update on the process for quarterly reports.

Maria Lopez reported that she had contacted the Texas Main Street office in Austin and spoken with Molly Miller about concerns regarding maintaining accreditation. Lopez explained that due to the vacancy in the Main Street Coordinator position, quarterly reports for quarters 1 and 2 had not been submitted, but Texas Main Street understood the situation and there would be no negative impact on Freeport's accreditation.

Lopez stated that the next quarterly report would be due in October for quarter 3, and she was already working on it. She requested that board members provide information about hours worked and activities conducted before she joined, which would help with the upcoming report.

Robert Johnson clarified that the concern about reporting was from board members, not from the Texas Historical Commission, which had assured them that the missing reports would not affect their standing. Wade Dillon added that according to the previous annual report, the Main Street board and subcommittees had recorded 189 volunteer hours.

Consideration and possible action on Kidfest matters and the purchase of t-shirts for the event.

Maria Lopez announced that t-shirt orders for Kid Fest had been placed and showed a mock-up of the blue t-shirts to the board. She created a sign-up sheet for board members to volunteer at the Main Street table during the event.

It was noted that to receive a free t-shirt, attendees would need to follow Main Street on Facebook to increase public awareness. The t-shirts will be distributed from the Main Street booth.

Maria Lopez passed out a sign-up sheet for Kidfest Main Street booth subcommittee volunteers.

WORK SESSION:

Design Committee Chair Betty Lopez status announcements and comments

Betty Lopez reported that the Design Committee had met for lunch and discussed four key items:

- Reaching out to downtown business owners to gauge interest in grants for renovation, beautification, and landscaping
- Purchasing planters for downtown, with Sandra Leavey planting canna lilies for them
- Revisiting the list of allowed businesses in downtown, which relates to zoning regulations
- Investigating the possibility of sending a delegation to the Texas Downtown Association meeting in Waco in November, which provides valuable networking opportunities and information

Betty Lopez mentioned that the committee was also researching Alamo Alley in Brenham, Texas, as a potential model for entertainment venues in Freeport's alleyways. She stated they were working on a 12-month written work plan and seeking additional members with relevant skill sets to join their subcommittee. The committee planned to have a working lunch the following day at 11:30 in downtown to assess the area from a visitor's perspective and identify defining characteristics to guide their future efforts.

Organization and Promotion Chair Edith Fischer status announcements and comments

Edith Fischer reported that the Organization and Promotion Committee had primarily focused on Kid Fest preparations. They reached out to BISD to help distribute flyers to schools in Freeport to help promote the event to families.

In addition to the activities already discussed, she mentioned that James Wood had suggested reaching out to downtown building owners to potentially open their buildings during future events to showcase available spaces.

James Wood elaborated that this would allow people to see what's inside the buildings, beyond just the storefronts, giving visitors better insight into what spaces are available downtown, even those in need of repair. He also suggested a street banner to announce Main Street events. It was discussed that it would be a great idea for future events.

Betty Lopez recalled a successful Halloween event where property owners decorated and passed out candy, bringing foot traffic downtown. She noted positive progress with the painting of buildings downtown, creating a more cohesive color scheme.

Edith Fischer added they discussed fundraising for school supplies to be given at next year's Kidfest. Additional event features would include water bottles donated by Coastal Ice, hot dogs provided by the Lions Club and cooked by the Salvation Army, bounce houses, water slides, and free sno-cones for kids.

Economic Vitality Committee Chair Irene Ocanas status announcements and comments

Chairperson Ocañas reported that the Economic Vitality Committee had been working on developing a loan program for downtown buildings. They had invited bankers from First State Bank in Clute, First National Bank in Lake Jackson, and the local credit union to a meeting to discuss the program. She reported positive responses from the financial institutions.

Ocañas explained that there were fair lending regulatory considerations to navigate, as banks must offer their products to everyone, not just a specific sector. However, with federal regulator approval, they could create a special program for the downtown area. The goal was to offer an alternative to SBA loans, with lower costs for borrowers, by potentially using market evaluations instead of formal appraisals and title searches instead of title policies where possible. Irene mentioned bankers being invited to walk around downtown and gave positive feedback by saying there was a lot of potential in the downtown area.

She emphasized that the loan program would be one of many tools to encourage downtown development, with future plans potentially including TIRZ funds, grants, and fundraising efforts.

Melanie Oldham suggested grants from EDC be offered in the downtown area. It was discussed that this is already a work in progress, including tax incentives making this visible on the city website.

Sandra Leavey raised concerns about insurance challenges for downtown building owners, describing difficulties with her own commercial insurance policy following storm damage. Despite having what appeared to be comprehensive coverage, exclusions in the policy led to claim denials and ongoing legal battles. She suggested that establishing relationships with reputable insurance companies that provide reliable commercial policies would be beneficial for downtown property owners.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION- NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Future Discussion Items for Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board

The board identified several items for future discussion:

- A workshop to review the University of Texas at San Antonio downtown plan
- Annual board training, which Maria Lopez was working to arrange either in-person or virtually

- Planning for the Dia de los Muertos event
- Fundraising strategies for smaller downtown projects

ADJOURNMENT

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A motion was made by Betty Lopez and seconded by Edith Fischer to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:13PM.



Maria Lopez, Main Street Coordinator