

THE CITY OF

1201 N. Avenue H Freeport, TX 77541



FREEPORT

979.233.3526 • Fax 979.233.8867

**FREEPORT HISTORICAL COMMISSION & MAIN STREET ADVISORY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024 AT 5:00PM
FREEPORT CITY HALL, 1st FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM
1201 N. AVENUE H, FREEPORT, TX 77541**

STATE OF TEXAS

COUNTY OF BRAZORIA

CITY OF FREEPORT

BE IT REMEMBERED, that the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board met on Thursday, April 18, 2024 at 5:00 PM at Freeport City Hall, 1st Floor Conference Room, 1201 N. Avenue H, Freeport, Texas for the purpose of considering the following agenda items:

Chairperson:

Margaret McMahan

Board Members:

Keith Stumbaugh
Ronnie Martin
William Leitch
Betty Lopez
Edith Fischer
Melanie Oldham
Lucy Martinez

Vice Chairperson:

Irene Ocañas

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Margaret McMahan called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. The following attendees were present:

Board Members

Margaret McMahan
Irene Ocañas
Ronnie Martin
Keith Stumbaugh
William Leitch
Melanie Oldham

Staff Members

Ana Silbas, Main Street Coordinator
Robert Johnson, Freeport EDC Executive Director
Jerry Cain, City Council Liaison

Guests: Sandra Leavey, Denise Leitch, Sandra Wood-Wicke and Jeff Pena, Councilman-Ward A

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Robert Johnson and Invocation was led by Margaret McMahan.

PRESENTATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS: Announcements by Board Members and/or Staff.

Main Street Update (Silbas)

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas thanked the board for participating in the Community Visioning Session hosted in partnership with UTSA regarding the development of downtown master plan and design guidelines. Silbas stated it was a great success and she is keeping the dialogue going with Ian Caine.

Silbas informed the board that the Cinco de Mayo Celebration is scheduled to be held on May 3rd from 5pm to 8pm in downtown. Silbas stated thus far, she has confirmed Mariachi Orgullo and Westside Elementary Ballet Folklorico performances. Silbas is currently still accepting vendor applications.

Silbas reminded the board about the planning of a Business Development Breakfast in partnership with the Freeport Economic Development Corporation. Silbas met with the Freeport Economic Development Corporation Staff regarding the breakfast. Silbas stated the tentative date for the breakfast is June 25th and an alternate date is June 18th. The Freeport Economic Development Corporation is looking to have the SBDC as the presentation speaker. The host location will be Ann's Party Place.

Also, Silbas informed the board that the Houston Galveston Area Council will be hosting their Brining Back Main Street Roundtable. The event is set for April 23rd in Columbus, TX and Ronnie Martin will be in attendance.

Silbas reminded the board that the NexTrex Community Recycling Challenge is still ongoing and thus far 324.7 lbs. of plastic have been collected.

Silbas gave an overview of events/initiatives she has been involved with, which included: Grapevine Gifts 25th Anniversary Ribbon Cutting and Ann's Party Place Ribbon Cutting hosted by the Brazosport Area Chamber of Commerce. Lastly, Silbas thanked the board members that were in attendance at Grapevine Gifts 25th Anniversary Ribbon Cutting.

Melanie Oldham inquired if all Main Street/ EDC Board Members are invited to ribbon cuttings. Silbas stated she does try to include events that are happening and registration links to workshops in weekly Friday emails.

Museum Update- Recent Exhibits/Events (Dillon)

Museum Manager Wade Dillon was not present due to attending the Texas Association of Museums Conference in Lubbock, TX. Silbas stated the Fort Velasco Exhibit is set to open in Mid-May and the Fort Velasco Living History Event is set for June 22nd from 9AM-2PM in Downtown Freeport.

Additionally, Silbas stated in efforts to increase museum outreach, Dillon is participating in a countywide passport program. This program is set to kick-off at the Lake Jackson Museum with the closing event to be held at the Freeport Historical Museum on August 10th.

Board Member Announcements

Margaret McMahan stated that she has been the Chair of the Main Street Board for the last several years and her term will be up the end of May. McMahan stated she will not be submitting an application to reapply for not just this board, but any board.

Furthermore, McMahan stated she has multiple members of her immediate family experiencing very serious ongoing health issues. As she is retired and able to offer support, she stated her priority has to be her family and caring for them. McMahan emphasized City of Freeport is very important to her along with the Historical Commission and Main Street Board.

Lastly, McMahan stated it has been an honor and a privilege to serve on this committee, to serve you (the board) and to serve our city. She wanted the board to be aware that she will not be returning due to the health situations in her family.

Ronnie Martin stated he hates to see Margaret McMahan go. Martin addressed the board and stated he would like for them to begin working on ordinances for the historical district. Silbas stated Post Oak Preservation Solutions is working to create a recommendation for the boundaries of a historical district. Additionally, Silbas mentioned the development and maintenance of buildings would be addressed in the design guidelines.

Keith Stumbaugh stated he would also not be reapplying to be appointed to this board in the future. He mentioned his current and ongoing commitment to care for his mother daily and additional obligations to his rental properties. Stumbaugh stated he does appreciate everyone's effort and wishes the board the best and Freeport the best. Additionally, he added that his heart and soul has always been in Freeport and he has spent decades trying to do what he could for the City of Freeport.

Leitch stated as the board probably knows by now, there was an effort to try to have him removed from the board for reasons that have not been stated clearly. He is curious to know who initiated his removal and why it was done in the manner it was done. Leitch stated he was informed two business days before the City Council meeting, where it was brought up to have him removed.

Additionally, Leitch stated to the best of his knowledge, no one else on the board was informed about it and it appears to him that the attempt was to have him removed before this meeting occurred today. Also, Leitch stated he is really curious about these procedures and he does not understand that if someone had a problem about his actions why it was not brought to his attention. Leitch continued addressing the board by stating only Margaret and Ana were informed, who both were on the email he received last Thursday evening.

Melanie Oldham stated she is sorry to hear that Margaret and Keith are not going to renew their membership. She has heard good things that both Margaret and Keith have done on the committee, but she understands the priority of family.

Additionally, Oldham stated she befriended Mr. Hickey and his dream, along with Mary Stotler, was to make a historical district. She also stated that there are ordinances that were created to address the creation of a historical district and we should work towards implementing to bring about positive changes.

Irene Ocañas thanked the board for attending the community visioning session. She stated there was a good turnout, especially of board members, city officials and employees. Ocañas stated she would have liked to have more participation from the public and we should work to encourage neighbors and friends to attend events like the community visioning session.

Additionally, Ocañas stated she hates to see Margaret go, as she cannot be replaced. She also stated that Margaret McMahan is such an integral part of what the board does and since she been on the board feels the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Board has come a long way. Lastly, Ocañas stated she hates to see Keith Stumbaugh go, as he has lots of experience being a member of the first Main Street board –his experience and knowledge will be greatly missed.

BUSINESS-REGULAR SESSION

Consideration and possible action to approve meeting minutes from March 21, 2024.

On a motion made by Keith Stumbaugh, seconded by William Leitch, with all present voting “Aye”, the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board **unanimously approved** the meeting minutes from March 21, 2024 with the necessary corrections of listed board members.

Update and Discussion on Community Visioning Session with UTSA’s Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research.

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas provided an overview of recent updates for the UTSA Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research project. Silbas thanked the board for taking the time to be a part of this initiative and attending the community visioning session. Silbas stated she would like to see more public participation. She mentioned that related to the community visioning session ---it was publicized on social media, city website and an ad in The Facts.

Silbas stated currently she is discussing with Ian Caine potential logistics for the upcoming session set to be hosted in July. Also, Silbas stated a draft of the work for the master plan and design guidelines will be presented and as a community we will be able to review it and suggest necessary changes. Silbas is working to analyze the survey data from the community vision session and will present to the board at the next meeting. Lastly, Silbas stated the biggest takeaways from the community visioning session were related to: addressing the overall characteristics of downtown, infrastructure, cleanliness, better engage property owners and creating collaborative relationships needed to move not only the program, but our project forward. The implementation phase will be the next step in this specific project. Silbas thanked the Freeport Economic Development Corporation for sponsoring the food at the community visioning session.

Update and Discussion on Demolition of 208 West Park Avenue and Freeport Economic Development Corporation- Gensler Community Vision Session.

Freeport Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Robert Johnson provided an update on the demolition of 208 West Park Avenue. Johnson stated the building is scheduled for

demolition. Additionally, Johnson mentioned another engineer did look at the building and a report is being composed by Kimley-Horn, which will state the building needs to come down.

Johnson stated the front façade was taken off long ago, the roof is falling in and the EDC does have demolition from the City Code Department. Johnson made it clear that the board was adamant that it is time to take the building down, as this has gone on for too long. Additionally, Johnson stated that the 208 building went through the public hearing process, board vote and City Council vote. Lastly, Johnson stated the contract/performance agreement is being worked on at this time—after this is signed, the contractor will begin work on the building.

Melanie Oldham stated she was at the two EDC meetings, where the whole EDC Board did discuss the issue, and heard different opinions. She feels the board was unsure about the building, as they were getting different information. Oldham stated, that she has spoken like others, that if the building is not dangerous, let us just wait until after the visioning session.

Robert Johnson stated to be clear --a notice has been received for immediate demolition from the city and Kimley-Horn engineers have said it needs to come down. Additionally, Johnson stated that he had a meeting with Main Street Coordinator and Megan with Post Oak Preservation Solutions. Johnson informed the board that he did ask about the demolition of the building but the consultant stated she was not qualified to talk about whether the building should come down or not.

Melanie Oldham stated she went back to look at supporting documentation regarding this topic and the Code Department did say it was unsafe and might need to be demolished. She stated that it was interesting that the company that signed off on that was Turbeville. Robert Johnson stated Code Department did not say it might need to come down—Code Department said it needs to come down, they were definitive. Oldham asked if the frame would be left and Johnson stated no. Oldham thought the EDC board believed and understood the frame would be left—but seemed to be confused about whether the whole building would be taken down or leave the frame, which some people have recommended. Johnson stated, as far as he understood it, the two supporting walls would remain up and be braced. Additionally, he stated he is not a contractor, but the EDC has talked to the contractor about how its going to be done with consideration for stabilizing the two building to the right and left.

Bill Leitch stated he had a meeting down at 208 West Park Avenue with Robert Johnson, two guys from Turbeville Construction and he brought his engineering inspector. He stated the group walked through the building and his engineering inspector told everyone there --yes, this is a salvageable building, the roof structure could be removed and they could design a new roof structure for the building. Additionally, Leitch stated the group had a long discussion about the problems that are there and what it would take to repair them. Leitch stated even the Turbeville Construction guys that were there looked at Robert Johnson and said— “Bill is right about all of this”—Leitch stated—Did they not?

Leitch stated towards Robert Johnson --they told you I was right about everything I was telling you about that building in that it could be salvaged and it could be repaired. Leitch continued on by stating they told you multiple times, Robert, you had to remember it. Robert Johnson stated yeah.

Additionally, Leitch stated the problem here that he sees it —is that somebody has an agenda and somebody wants to tear that building down and be done with it—they don't want the hassle or whatever it is—to fix it and maintain it. Leitch went on to say EDC owns three buildings there and they are not doing anything to maintain them.

Lastly, Leitch stated, if you own a building you have to take care of it. He stated he takes care of his building and it costs him some money. Leitch went on to mention the 208 building is in the condition it is now, because nobody has maintained it for years.

Robert Johnson stated that another consideration was that it was cost prohibitive to just simply go in the building and start fixing it. Leitch stated if you are trying to maintain the downtown, if you are trying to rehabilitate the downtown, reinvest in the downtown —what you do is you fix the buildings up, you find people who want to go in there and open a business, you rent it to them with a three year lease for \$1 a month---- and let them get in there, get a business going, get on their feet and in three years, you give them an option to redo the lease at a regular rate or purchase the building. Additionally, Leitch stated the only way we are going to get the downtown moving is to give incentives to people to open a business—and to open a business down there, the problem is you don't have a lot of foot traffic. Lastly, Leitch stated the problem he sees here is that the EDC and the City Council are not listening to the people in the community, as he has heard multiple people step up and say we don't want to tear down any of these buildings. He went on to say the same people want to fix the buildings and rejuvenate the downtown. Leitch stated the fact is, you have EDC and City Council working against the ideas of the Main Street. Also, he stated Main Street is supposed to promote the downtown, rehabilitate these buildings and get a viable downtown again.

Ronnie Martin stated the board has already been to City Council and talked to them. He stated his understanding is that the board really does not have any say in this because the board does not have teeth because there is not an official historic district. William Leitch and Melanie Oldham stated that's a problem.

Martin said the issue should go before City Council and needs to be said in that way—the discussion here would not change the matter. Leitch inquired if what we do doesn't matter, then why are we here and why do we have a board?

Martin stated we are here to try to solve some of the problems and he understands that we cannot solve them all. Martin also mentioned he does not agree with tearing a building down—ever. Martin listed the conditions of the building. He believes it could be salvaged but City Council made the final decision.

Melanie Oldham stated in the past the EDC has tried an incubator program and she agrees to give people three to six months rent free. She stated she remembers with the EDC purchased the last two buildings for \$43,000 apiece and she has not seen anything done since that time. Oldham stated the power was turned off at some point in these buildings. She went on to address the issues with the alley back to when she and her daughter had a shop in downtown. Lastly, she stated she believes Mr. Petty and City Council are working with the utility company to do the right thing.

To address the purpose of the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board, Margaret McMahan read the mission statement. Also, McMahan stated, the board cannot force City Council to make the decisions or come to the conclusions to which the board arrives.

Melanie Oldham stated the only difference between the three EDC buildings and the private owner buildings is that EDC is funded by our tax money, which we should have more say to how that money is used wisely.

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas stated she works collaboratively daily with Robert Johnson to help move the Main Street program forward.

Sandra Leavey stated she has a couple of concerns, as she has a little bit of history. She mentioned that she purchased her first building 27 years ago and listed her personal matters she has had to handle, while also trying to tend to her building. Leavey shared city history related to the alley and factors that have contributed to its current state.

Leavey stated her concern with demolition is the access to the building. She addressed the trash service and gas line issues. Through the first Main Street Program, Leavey stated there were people who came down to look at the building and mentioned there is a connection with a way the buildings were made and the infills were done. Lastly, Leavey stated she is worried about how the demolition will affect the other buildings. She stated if we have to take the building down, we should be mindful of the other building conditions. Additionally, she would rather see us reach out to somebody and get someone who is willing to come in and purchase the building with the guarantee that they would do the renovations—that is what the Main Street Program was working on when City Manager Jeff Pynes dismantled the program.

Denise Leitch, 216 West Park, stated a lot of money has been spent on her building and it is the most beautiful building on West Park. She stated she wants the downtown to thrive and she wants it more than anything, because all it will do is make her building more valuable. Mrs. Leitch went on to say she would like to stress that if this building comes down, she believes there is going to be lawsuits that hit the City of Freeport—because when the water is no longer contained and starts coming toward her \$900-1 Million-dollar building, there is going to be problems. She went on to say she thinks something has to give and if EDC and City Council are going to fight Main Street, and everyone cannot get on the same page, she does not understand what is going on. Additionally, Mrs. Leitch stated everyone needs to have the same mindset to try to work together. Also, she stated, her and Mr. Leitch worked with a historical person on their building and the reason they did not go historical, was because they were going to give them \$500 and they had to restore their building the way they wanted them too, which no offense was not pretty or attractive. She stated if they were going to reface their building, it was going to look the way they wanted it. Again, Mrs. Leitch stated she wanted to go historical because they live downtown—but it was just not feasible for them personally. Lastly, she stated she just wanted to make people aware, if we lose that building, she doesn't know if this is true, but she has heard of the attempt to try to put a pocket park, which she completely does not understand, when there is a humongous park right across from it.

Discussion on 2024 KidFest

Main Street Coordinator gave an overview of 2024 KidFest, which will be held August 3, 2024 from 3pm to 7pm. Silbas stated the theme for this year is: Wildlife Adventure and she is currently in the planning process and working to bring community partners together for this event.

Melanie Oldham stated the events have been great and the goal should be to hold a monthly event. William Leitch mentioned the success of the Summertime Blues Festival.

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas stated that the Promotions and Organization subcommittee is not currently active to help in the above-mentioned endeavors.

WORK SESSION

Design Subcommittee Chair Margaret McMahan stated the UTSA Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research has taken the reigns of the design guidelines and the committee is waiting on the pending data to allow for input.

Economic Vitality Subcommittee Chair Irene Ocañas stated the subcommittee met to finalize survey that was given at the community visioning session. She stated results will be shared with the board and committee.

Upcoming Events

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas gave an overview of upcoming events:

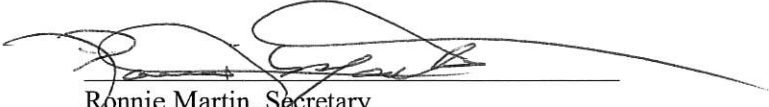
Cinco de Mayo (May 3rd), Fort Velasco Exhibit (Mid-May 2024), Fort Velasco Living History Event (June 22, 2024| 9am-2pm), Countywide Passport Program Closing Event- Freeport Historical Museum (August 10th) and KidFest 2024 (August 3, 2024)

ITEMS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION-NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory meeting is scheduled for May 16, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Ronnie Martin, seconded by Irene Ocañas, with all present voting "Aye", the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board Chair Margaret McMahan adjourned the meeting at 5:58 pm.



Ronnie Martin, Secretary
Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board



Ana Silbas, Main Street Coordinator
City of Freeport, Texas