



**FREEPORT HISTORICAL COMMISSION & MAIN STREET ADVISORY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MAY 16, 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, May 16, 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 5:01 pm. The following attendees were present:

Board Members

Margaret McMahan
Irene Ocañas
Betty Lopez
Lucy Martinez
William Leitch
Melanie Oldham

Staff Members

Ana Silbas, Main Street Coordinator
Wade Dillon, Museum Manager
Jerry Cain, City Council Liaison
Lance Petty, City Manager
Jennifer Howell, Assistant City Manager/Police Chief

Guests: Sandra Leavey, Denise Leitch, Jose Lopez, David McGinty and Michelle Backman

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Betty Lopez 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 began with an overview of upcoming events and professional development sessions. She highlighted the Freeport Economic Development Corporation Community Engagement Session, Houston-Galveston Area Council Bringing Main Street Roundtable and Freeport Economic Development Corporation Business Development Breakfast. Silbas stated she would send out additional information in her weekly Friday email to board members.

Museum Update- Recent Exhibits/Events (Dillon)

Museum Manager Wade Dillon introduced himself to new members and the public in attendance. Dillon stated the museum would be closed this Saturday due to short staff. Additionally, he stated the current museum attendant would be leaving soon to pursue a different career path and 50 applications for the attendant position have been received thus far.

Dillon informed the board about the opening of the Fort Velasco Exhibit with eight new panels and new artifacts displayed, which will run until June 29, 2024.

Also, Dillon mentioned he is currently preparing for the 4th Annual Fort Velasco Day Living History Event. Dillon provided a list of some of the 55 living history volunteers who participated last year, which included individuals from: The Alamo, San Jacinto, Goliad, San Felipe de Austin and folks from Louisiana and Alabama. Dillon stated demonstrations would include: artillery, musket firing, textiles and more. Lastly, Dillon stated he will need volunteers for Fort Velasco Day and the event will be free to the public with access to living historians, Fort Velasco Exhibit and newly restructured museum.

Regarding museum improvements, Dillon mentioned the company who repaired the roof in 2019 was located by City Manager and did return to make necessary repairs. Additionally, Dillon stated the Public Works Department installed a concrete slab in front of the museum to prepare for the installation of a bike rack for local residents to use during their visits.

Lastly, Dillon addressed issues related to illegal dumping in a city dumpster behind the museum and the soundscape in the Texas Navy Room. Dillon stated the Public Works Department placed a sign by the dumpster to deter illegal dumping and the IT Department is working to fix the soundscape in the Texas Navy Room. He also stated the Freeport Historical Museum will be appearing prominently in a new map developed by the Brazosport Area Chamber of Commerce.

Board Member Announcements

Margaret McMahan stated this would be her last official meeting as Chair and also as a member of this commission and advisory board due to multiple family health situations. She stated she truly has enjoyed her time here and she has felt like she was a part of something bigger and she was serving a purpose. Additionally, she stated hopefully with time she will be able to return and be appointed again as a member.

McMahan welcomed the new board members and read the board mission statement.

As Chair, McMahan expressed her disappointment about interactions that transpired at the last board meeting. She stated this is not the place to call out, intimidate, embarrass or in any manner resemble bullying a director, the board members or that organization—whether the board agrees with them or not. She also stated that going forward without her, that any negativity/issues be brought before the proper board/commission. Lastly, McMahan thanked everyone for letting her be a part of the group and reminded the board that this is about all of us, not any one of them—the board members are not here to promote their own business, own agenda—the board is here as a group for the betterment of Freeport.

Betty Lopez stated she was dismayed that she was unable to attend the April meeting due to major surgery. Additionally, she stated she is sorry to see Margaret McMahan go, because McMahan has been a great leader, kept the board on task and always keeps the board within a time constraint. Lopez also mentioned she would like to address agenda item four. She concluded by stating she feels that everyone is passionate about where everyone wants to see the board go, where they want to be and when they are going to get there. Lopez stated it saddens her that this has become emotionally charged to the point where the board has to be reprimanded as if they are in school. She believes that everyone wants the best for Freeport and how we get there is going to be another story.

Melanie Oldham stated she hates that Margaret McMahan is leaving but she understands completely—family issues come first. Oldham stated she did enjoy going to the visioning session and thinks it went really well. Additionally, she mentioned she was really impressed with the two facilitators doing the study. Oldham is anxious to hear what recommendations they have.

Lucy Martinez introduced herself as a new member of the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board. Martinez stated she did read over the minutes Ana Silbas sent out from the last meeting. She stated not really knowing or being here, she really did not understand but could sense in the wording the emotions and the stuff going on. She was unable to attend the last meeting due to her niece getting married in New York but has spoken with her boss to make arrangements to ensure she is here in attendance at all the meetings.

Irene Ocañas stated Margaret McMahan knows the board will miss her and she is sorry to see Margaret go. Ocañas stated she wishes Margaret McMahan well with her family, for her not to be a stranger and she is always welcomed.

BUSINESS-REGULAR SESSION

Consideration and possible action to approve meeting minutes from April 18, 2024.

On a motion made by Irene Ocañas, seconded by Melanie Oldham, with all present voting “Aye”, the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board **unanimously approved** the meeting minutes from April 18, 2024 with the necessary grammatical corrections.

Consideration and possible action to remove board member.

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas provided an overview of William Leitch’s actions that do not align with the board’s accountability agreement, which included: failure to promote harmonious and respectful relationships with others and seek to resolve conflicts, remain aware that his words, actions and behavior in part define how others view the board and the program,

unify in respecting and supporting the decisions of the board as a whole and the Main Street Coordinator in the fulfillment of the efforts to advance the goals and priorities of the program and demonstrate civility and courtesy toward others, act with honesty, professionalism and high ethical standards in relationships with others and in the performance of his responsibilities. Silbas stated Leitch's actions were observed at the Community Visioning Session and several board meetings. Silbas also stated when collaborating with outside groups, such as Freeport Economic Development Corporation, Leitch continuously speaks of filing lawsuits regarding the demolition of 208 West Park Avenue.

Sandra Leavey stated she has been involved with Main Street before the very first filing and she helped LeAnn with the application when this board was put together. Leavey stated she has worked with Bill and so many of the downtown owners over the last twenty-five/thirty years of being down there. She thinks what is identified as being negative and disrespectful is Bill just being genuinely concerned about some of the major things that need to happen down there before we can even start over again with getting new businesses in, which over the last 20 years has sort of fallen on deaf ears from Council and EDC. Leavey went on to say it is frustrating – frustrating when you have invested money down there and then have issues that are not addressed.

Leavey continued on by stating she does think that people who volunteer their time and energy on boards should not be removed. She mentioned that the board removed Sandra Wood-Wicke and Sandra Barbree who worked countless hours just to get this back up. Leavey stated she thinks Bill is very dedicated to saving the downtown area, being involved and ultimately with the restoration of that area. Additionally, she stated she thinks his expertise as far as buildings, wind codes and the types of infrastructure needed down there to support businesses is needed on this board.

Betty Lopez stated she has been reflecting on this quite a bit for longer even than the month when all of this came to a head. She states she has several concerns and does agree completely with Sandra. Lopez went on to state that Bill's dedication and his passion comes from the very positive place. Additionally, she stated it does come across as negative and rough to many people who are not accustomed to his gruff not born in Texas nature—he is not a Texas good ol' boy—definitely not. Lopez stated he is here now and ours and he is very passionate about what he does and what he believes is right.

Lopez stated she has some confusion in her mind because she loved the joint meeting with TIRZ, EDC and Main Street. Additionally, Lopez stated she thinks ultimately everyone wants and desires the same thing. She stated sadly she believes some of the walking tour was lost, as not everyone entered the building tasked for the boards to look at.

Lopez stated she has a concern removing Bill from the board because a man with his level of knowledge, experience and expertise of construction should be the sorts of resources wanted on the Main Street Board. Lopez continued by stating maybe now that he has received more than a slap on the hand, he can acknowledge that a different tone of voice is required and that conversations with others should be held outside of these meetings. Lopez stated she believes the board needs his knowledge, expertise and he is the eyes on the ground, due to living in downtown. She stated who better to serve than a businessman and resident of the area the board is trying to develop, promote, create and bring more foot traffic. Lopez stated it was vague in the

beginning as to why the notion had even come up to remove him and she is glad it was expounded on. However, Lopez also stated in regard to the stakeholders at the community visioning session, she mostly remembers it being the board. Lopez went on to state there were few people from the community that had attended, including a couple of council people, but there was not as many residents as we wanted there. Lopez stated she is still a little confused about who came forward with this issue.

Lopez stated Bill was just being Bill—he was expressing his frustration and his hope and desire that we can move forward. Lastly, Lopez stated we are a bit stuck where we are at because we have not really gained a lot of foothold and part of it is waiting on the UTSA report. Lopez mentioned she is very anxious to see what they have to say but she is also anxious and a little concerned to hear what they have to say about us punching down the building before they can even give us the report. Lopez stated the decision was very fast tracked.

Margaret McMahan stated we did make that clear and we had wished they would have come to the board before it got on the Council agenda at least as a professional courtesy and received input from Main Street—it did not happen and it is their building. Lopez stated she tried to buy those buildings twice from EDC and they were not sold at \$43,000 but at 38k each. She stated she was willing to do something with those buildings and had already presented ideas to Robert and to Courtland.

Additionally, Margaret McMahan stated we all have from our life careers many different skill sets at this table, many different areas of expertise but we are not to bully those into this group. She stated we are here as a team and we have to watch how we behave in a public setting. McMahan went on to state if she had a personal desire, agenda or something she wanted to make happen, the worst thing she could do is be aggressive and confrontational. Additionally, McMahan stated the things that Mr. Leitch can do—his construction experience with all his skills and abilities, we would not have Mr. Leitch or his company doing the things presented to the group, because it would be a conflict of interest, so other people would be hired. McMahan stated ultimately what the board decides and the City decides is up to each group. Lastly, McMahan said he along with everyone else is going to have to adhere to meeting procedures, meeting protocols and follow that.

William Leitch stated he never intended to do the project because he retired a year ago and he turned off all his insurance. He stated what he has done is offer his expertise for free. Margaret McMahan stated it would be the City's determination to accept that or not.

William Leitch stated Ana has put together quite a list and he was actually surprised. Leitch continued by stating a lot of the things she has on her list —things he said or did—are taken out of context. He stated it was not a complete overview of what was said. Leitch stated it was mentioned that he brought in his own engineer like he went in against everybody to bring in his own engineer to analyze the 208 building. Leitch went on to state for it to be checked with Mr. Johnson, if he will own up to it, but he did not offer to do it to begin with—Mr. Johnson asked him to bring in his engineer. Additionally, Leitch stated Mr. Johnson asked multiple times to bring someone down if he thought he could get someone to do it cheaper to save the building. Leitch stated Mr. Johnson asked him three separate times to bring someone and he did. Leitch stated it makes it seem like he went against the committee or EDC, but Mr. Johnson asked him to do it. Leitch stated he brought his engineer, met down there and talked about the problems on the

building and the possible solutions for it. He stated what he offered and was asked of him is being turned around to hit him and believes that is a lot of what is going on here. Leitch stated he has run a successful construction company for 45 years and has done multimillion-dollar projects in this area. He stated he knows what he is talking about and if you all don't want to hear it, that's okay.

Melanie Oldham stated she was at the EDC meeting, where the EDC voted. She stated it was a very interesting meeting. Oldham stated that she addressed the EDC board and inquired about what the rush was to tear down the building, if a community visioning session was a week and half away. Additionally, Oldham stated that Mr. Johnson told her he had someone look at it recently and it is dangerous. Oldham stated prior to Mr. Johnson's arrival, the EDC had subcommittees, where members would go out to look at things and take bids. Lastly, Oldham stated we have different ways of expressing our opinions and sometimes we get emotional. She went on to state when she moved here fifteen years ago, she rented one of the EDC buildings. Oldham stated there was a business there for 6 months, but there were already problems with the alley and flooding in the back and here we are fifteen years later. Oldham stated she can understand why downtown business owners have frustration and sometimes it just has to be expressed.

Margaret McMahan stated we all have individual personalities and individual ways of expressing things, but as a member of this board and commission, we need to always represent ourselves as professional, courtesy and be collaborative. Additionally, she stated if you are going to be expressing your own unique personality—you need to do it as an individual to the board or commission responsible for making those decisions.

Betty Lopez stated on the issue of being respectable and professional, she really takes issue because she was there at the visioning session and she does not believe that Mr. Leitch bullied anyone. She stated he loudly proclaimed his view and he reiterated a lot of the same things talked about, but she takes issue with him being called a bully. She also stated she was in the education field and she knows all the definitions of bullying.

Irene Ocañas stated that she was one of the leads for the tables and Mr. Leitch came in and interrupted everything and everyone just looked at him. She stated he did not want to listen to the program, he was told what they were doing at the table and he went off—it was very disruptive and disrespectful. Ocañas stated she is sorry but she is telling the truth and everyone saw it.

Melanie Oldham stated she was at the visioning session and she was in two of the groups that Mr. Leitch was and in there he made some good points—knowing his background, maybe people did not like the way it was expressed, overall, she did not see any issue. She stated other people were speaking up and sharing their opinions because that is what they were there for—to throw out opinions and listen to people who have different expertise. Oldham stated she was not in Irene Ocañas' group.

Main Street Coordinator stated the board could give Mr. Leitch the opportunity to resign, if not accepted, the board would vote on his removal.

On a motion made by Irene Ocañas, seconded by Margaret McMahan, in a 3-2 vote, the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board approved to recommend the removal of William Leitch.

Consideration and possible action to approve submitting a letter of support for Freeport Historical Museum Expansion.

Museum Manager Wade Dillon presented a layout of the space he is wanting to acquire that is connected to the exhibit hall. Dillon stated the common door between the two spaces shares as a security risk. Additionally, Dillon gave an overview of the former Brazosport College space, which includes a front lobby, two restrooms, two office spaces and a server room.

Dillon went on to state that as the Freeport Historical Museum is seeing exceptional growth, he is wanting to utilize this space for the museum. Additionally, Dillon mentioned that the Police Department does use one of the rooms to store Blue Santa gifts, while he uses the back room for museum storage. He stated it is his hope within the next fiscal year to be able to hire a Programs Coordinator, because currently as the Museum Manager, he handles everything from the museum –from content and exhibit creation, collections management, budgeting and event coordination –he wears all the hats. Furthermore, Dillon stated a Programs Coordinator would assist with all programming from history lectures, children’s activities, networking events, while he continues to work on big picture stuff such as pursuing donors, sponsors and museum upgrades. He stated aside from the exhibit hall, there is no single room spacious enough for large activities---he is not able to fit a field trip into the current children’s room and if the exhibit hall has an exhibit installed, the space cannot be used.

Dillon stated the front lobby would be an ideal use for this space. He stated a single office would be used by museum staff and double as a conference room and the second room would be used as much needed storage space for the museum. Dillon stated the server room in the back, which the museum does not currently have, would safely hold the museum’s internet, phone and security line. Dillon mentioned that in using this space, he would name it the Nat Hickey Education Center, after the museum’s founder. He stated he is requesting a letter of support from Main Street to encourage City Council to approve this endeavor --without it, the museum is locked in place without room to grow.

Irene Ocañas asked if this space is right next to the museum. Dillon stated yes, the white sliding barn door separates the two spaces. Ocañas asked if there would be a space for Main Street to utilize. Dillon stated he could potentially put a large square table in the center of the lobby. He stated he would want to use the lobby for office space if he gets a Programs Coordinator or any additional staff. Melanie Oldham asked if the space being discussed is owned by the City. Dillon stated yes.

Mayor Jerry Cain inquired about the Blue Santa Program. City Manager Lance Petty stated the City would have to rent a climate-controlled storage unit year-round to store the Blue Santa Program items. Additionally, City Manager Petty stated Blue Santa would potentially be moved to the Velasco Community House during the time period, which would also eliminate anyone renting the Velasco Community House.

On a motion made by Irene Ocañas, seconded by Lucy Martinez, with all present voting “Aye”, the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board **unanimously approved** submitting a letter of support for Freeport Historical Museum Expansion.

Update and Discussion on Community Vision Session #2 with UTSA’s Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research.

Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas stated Community Vision Session #2 is set for July 18, 2024 at Freeport Riverplace from 6pm-8pm. Silbas stated she would send the board an email and calendar invite with the event information and she is currently working on the event flyer. Additionally, Silbas stated the goal of the session is to review the draft of downtown plan and design guidelines. Lastly, Silbas stated the logistics are still being discussed.

Silbas stated Ian Caine is going to meet with the Design Subcommittee on June 4th to do an overview of design concepts, historic district boundaries and design guidelines. Also, Silbas stated a meeting would be set up for the Economic Vitality Subcommittee to discuss economics.

WORK SESSION

Design Subcommittee Chair Margaret McMahan stated a new Chair will need to be selected.

Economic Vitality Subcommittee Chair Irene Ocañas stated survey results are in from the community vision session. Main Street Coordinator gave an overview and said there will be a survey to go out to the whole community.

Upcoming Events

Museum Manager and Main Street Coordinator Ana Silbas gave an overview of upcoming events: Fort Velasco Exhibit opened May 15th and runs until the end of June, Brazosport ISD Local Perks—Buy One Museum Admission, Get Any Admission Free, Fort Velasco Living History Event (June 22, 2024| 9am-2pm), Summer Museum Passport Program Closing Event-Freeport Historical Museum (August 17th) and KidFest 2024 (August 3, 2024| 3pm-7pm).

City Manager Lance Petty provided an overview of developments related to downtown area: 8.8 acre EDC Waterfront Property, Walker Royall Site and O.A Fleming Site.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION-NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory meeting is scheduled for June 20, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Lucy Martinez, seconded by Irene Ocañas, with all present voting “Aye”, the Freeport Historical Commission & Main Street Advisory Board Chair Margaret McMahan adjourned the meeting at 6:08 pm.



Ana Silbas, Main Street Coordinator
City of Freeport, Texas