CITY OF FREEPORT
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

430 North Brazosport, Freeport, TX
Tuesday, September 10th, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

FEDC BOARD MEMBERS: Quorum Present

Directors:

Josh Mitchell	President
Sandra Loeza	Vice President
Ken Tyner	Treasurer
Shonda Marshall	
Mark Parker	
Ronnie Martin	
David McGinty (Absent)	

Robert Johnson: Executive Director
Lance Petty: City Manager
Jerry Cain- City Liaison
Loren Smith: EDC Attorney
Rachael Cohen: EDC Staff

I. Call to Order

Josh Mitchell called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present.

II. Invocation and Pledge

Shonda Marshall led the invocation and Ronnie Martin led the pledge.

III. Citizens Comments

There were no citizen comments.

IV. Consent Agenda

1. **Approve Meeting Minutes for August 13, 2924**
2. **Approve Monthly Financials**

Ken Tyner made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Shonda Marshall seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

V. Public Hearing

CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION OF THE FREEPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, AUTHORIZING AND APPROVING THE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT GRANT BUDGET INCREASE FROM $150,000 TO $300,000 TO COVER THE EXPENSES REQUESTED BY BUSINESSES THAT WERE DAMAGED DUE TO THE HURRICANE IN JULY OF 2024.

Josh Mitchell opened the Public Hearing at 6:11 p.m.

The public hearing was called to discuss a proposed budget increase for the Business Improvement Grant. The proposed increase was from $150,000 to $300,000, retroactive to address the impacts of Hurricane Beryl. During the hearing, there was a discussion regarding waiving the work start requirement for businesses that were adversely affected by the hurricane, aiming to provide additional flexibility and support to those struggling to recover.

There was significant community interest in the grant, with multiple applications already pending. It was clarified during the discussion that the grant process requires the completion of paperwork and documentation from code enforcement, ensuring that all applicants comply with the necessary regulations. It was also anticipated that there would be an increase in grant requests in the upcoming fiscal year, reflecting continued community demand.

Shonda Marshall inquired about remaining funds from the fiscal year 2023-2024 and addressed the mega grants quantity, confirming that the number of available mega grants had not increased but remained at one, with provisions to adjust the grant parameters as needed. A performance agreement and requirements for grant recipients were mentioned, highlighting that no substantive changes had been made other than the increased funding amount and the work start date waiver. Robert Johnson reminded the board of the decision to split the Four Corners Grant with one award in the current fiscal year and another awarded in the next fiscal year (FY 24-25)

Josh Mitchell closed the Public Hearing at 6:17 p.m.

VI. Discussion and Action Items

1. **Discuss and update on Main Street: Kidfest**

   Mr. Wade Dillion introduced himself as the new Museum Main Street Director for the City of Freeport. Mr. Dillion took over this position after the vacay spoke about the 14th Annual Kid Fest. This event was originally postponed due to Hurricane Beryl but was ultimately held successfully. Despite the challenges of rescheduling, Kid Fest attracted approximately 1,000 attendees, including families and children, and showcased a variety of local organizations including dry inflatables due to water boil notices, music, face painting, and a caricaturist. Other organizations included the Friends of the Brazoria Wildlife Refuge, the Texas Marine Mammals Association, the Freeport Library and the Freeport Salvation Army, and other communities to strengthen the community bonds. The Salvation Army cooked and handed out over 300 hotdogs for free thanks to the Brazosport Breakfast Lions Club. The Freeport Historical Museum was open that day and recorded over 200 visitors. The event helped strengthen community bonds and allowed local organizations to engage with residents.

Robert Johnson further outlined the previous sponsor request for SiAcoutics and the speaker system, with a caveat from Ms. Sandra Loeza for weather refund restrictions, was canceled due to pre-work that had to be done by the company and as a result, they were not able to meet those requirements and thus, Mainstreet never went forward with the contract.

Josh Mitchell thanked Wade Dillion for his reports.

2. Discuss and update on UTSA Mainstreet Vision Session #2

Wade Dillion provided an overview of the UTSA Downtown Vision Session 2, which took place on August 27th at the Freeport Historical Museum. The event was well attended, with nearly 50 community members actively participating in discussions about the future of downtown. Ian Caine, the Architect and Director of the University of Texas in San Antonio leading this venture and design guidelines was very happy with the turnout, which included downtown property owners, Mainstreet Board Members, City staff, local leaders, and so on. Mr. Cain shared the results of the project with those in attendance and would be presented by him and UTSA staff on October 15th which was pushed up from the original August deadline.

Wade Dillion noted that the event was a vital part of the ongoing efforts to gather community input for the downtown development plan, and emphasized the importance of these guidelines in shaping the revitalization and business strategies for the downtown area.

Robert Johnson, Ian Caine with UTSA, and Jamie Crawley, the architect and design lead for the Texas Historical Commission and Texas Mainstreet program will meet Monday morning to discuss façade design guidelines so that interests in EDC properties can potentially move forward.

Wade Dillion thanked the Board for their interest in the comprehensive downtown plan and for being a Kidfest sponsor. Wade Dillion has been a Mainstreet liaison since 2021 and recognized and appreciated the collaboration and partnership between EDC and Mainstreet and hope to carry that forward to ensure a revitalized historic downtown Freeport.

3. Discuss and take possible action on a new mowing contract

The next item on the agenda was the discussion of a new mowing contract for EDC properties. Previously tabled, this discussion was resumed with the presentation of three bids submitted by potential contractors: At-Ease Services (Joe Garcia), Gardner Campbell, and VT Enterprises. David McGinty had requested time to speak with a few contractors that didn't materialize. Those prospects didn't have the equipment although they wanted to do the job.

Rachael Cohen made a chart outlining the weekly, biweekly, and monthly payment options for each vendor. The board members conducted a thorough evaluation of each bid, with prices ranging significantly between $50,000 and $91,000. After a detailed comparison of the bids, which included reviewing the contractors' experience, pricing details, and service delivery proposals. Josh Mitchell mentioned the initial bidding discussions earlier in the year, where Mr. Mitchell was able to speak and hear from Mr. Garcia, before rehiring the prior lawn care specialist, and was impressed with Mr. Garcia's presentation. Mr. Mark Parker commented on the big spread in pricing and Ms. Sandra Loeza questioned the difference in pricing between the three presented contractions, wondering if the equipment or other services were factored into the presented cost. Mr. Robert Johnson was unsure since nothing of significance was noted.

Ms. Sandra Loeza asked if the EDC staff checked references for how long the prospects had been in business, their references, and things of that nature. Mrs. Cohen responded that she had used their services in the past and had referred them to several other potential customers through online recommendations. Mr. Garcia has never had issues with communication, to and from, plus, during H. Beryl, was utilized around the county for tree and lawn services. While a relatively new company, Mr. Garcia has applied for FEMA qualifications for natural disasters to help make that process easier and faster. Mrs. Cohen continued with the discussion on Gardener Campbell and his services around the city. This is a vested interest for Mr. Campbell due to owning property around the EDC properties, but also, this is Mr. Campbell's hometown. VT Enterprises, Van Tomlinson, drove through the properties and recognized they needed maintenance. Having done the work before,

Another question brought up was concerning who the City of Freeport uses to mow their properties. Ms. Cathy Edzell noted that while the City has a crew that mows some of the properties, the City recently sent out a bid request for the right of ways and voted on using L&M, the landscaper that does the City of Lake Jackson is the one that won.

Mark Parker made a motion to accept the bid from At-Ease Services, Joe Garcia. Ronnie Martin seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

4. Discuss and take possible action on Skinner Street Property #2

The board reviewed a proposal for the sale of the Skinner Street property, which had been previously discussed regarding its zoning restrictions. Gardner Campbell had expressed interest in purchasing the property to develop it for mobile home use. A few months ago, the discussion on this property became a concern due to the zoning restrictions. This lot is zoned for multi-home and can only be rezoned for residential. Being under that restriction and the EDC restrictions on residential lots, Mr. Campbell would like to develop the property and offered to purchase the appraisal to continue the discussion on the possible release or purchase of the property. The EDC cannot assist other than the appraisal since the property is residential.

Josh Mitchell agreed to listen to the upcoming plans and noted the need for the appraisal. Mr. Ken Tyner reiterated the conversation about the property being zoned wrong. Mr. Johnson noted in the past, a battery company wanted to purchase the property but because of zoning restrictions, had to move on. Mr. Mitchell encouraged Mr. Campbell to come forward with his plans. Mr. Mark Parker noted an appraisal is part of the game plan and agreed for an impartial third party to get an idea of the price of the property. Mr. Ken Tyner asked about the number of residential properties around the property. Mr. Johnson noted about 14 mobile homes could fit into the property but was unsure of the exact number of regular homes around the property. Mr. Mark Parker noted his conversation with Mr. Campbell, stating his (Parker's) understanding is there would be some homes as well. Mr. Campbell informed the EDC office of having a main building for administrative purposes, and then putting several mobile homes in that lot. All the Board members agreed to have Mr. Campbell present his interest and plan to the Board and move forward with an appraisal.

The Board agreed to move forward with obtaining an appraisal for the property, with the cost covered by the EDC.

5. **Discuss the Freeport EDC Administrative Office Intern Program.**

   Ms. Cathy Edzel explained to the Board about the establishment of an internship program in partnership with the local high school. This initiative aims to rotate interns through various city departments, including the EDC, giving students an opportunity to gain meaningful work experience. It was noted that this internship program, which involves three high school seniors working three days a week, one hour per day, is unpaid but offers valuable life skills and experience. The discussion emphasized the importance of building relationships with young people and providing them with exposure to city government operations. Ms. Edzel stressed this is for students to get real experience, not just for them to complete filing and mundane chores, but to learn from the city about real experiences in topics of accounting, information technology, marketing, and city systems. They will be supervised by Gensis Martinez, Human Resources Assistant, as part of her desire to grow within her position. Ms. Martinez is closer to their age and able to relate to the students more easily. This program not only develops the young students of the area but also the young people in the city departments for supervisory roles, to move up city career ladders and gives them the chance to do those things.

   Mr. Robert Johnson remarked about his introduction to one of the interns, a young gentleman who came in and wants to go to Texas Tech and has many different pathways he has chosen. This experience will help guide his college and future career path while he decides which direction to choose. Mr. Johnson is excited about this program and has experience in programs such as this from his previous positions. This will foster a good relationship between the local schools and teach the students some of the workings of their local city government.

   Mr. Ronnie Martin remarked on his feelings about the program, stating "I think this is great, it's the best way in the world for them to figure out if it's something they really want to do because when I was growing up, I wanted to be a school teacher and when they made me do a Title 2 program, I went back and changed my major." Ms. Edzel agreed and noted her desire to be a nurse before becoming an accountant.

   The Board agreed this is a great program and is excited to see more going forward.

6. **Discuss and take possible action on the ethics agreement.**

   Mr. Robert Johnson reviewed the adoption of an ethics agreement. Mr. Johnson noted he wanted direction on any changes before adopting it. Mr. Josh Mitchell asked for the opinion of the other board members. Mr. Mark Parker did not see anything that caught his attention and remarked it was well-written and thought out.

   The board debated the nepotism clause, which initially prohibited awarding contracts to relatives of board members. Ms. Shonda Marshall inquired about the wording of the nepotism clause, wondering if she or any board member has a relative who is interested in a job within the EDC, or a contract if they would be excluded from being able to apply because they are related to any of the board members or EDC staff. Loren Smith, Legal Advisor from Olsen & Olsen for the EDC Board, confirmed this is the case. Ms. Marshall remarked this may be difficult because the city is so small and as a Freeport resident, if we want to support locals, we need to be more open to resident support, even if the person is on the board. Mr. Smith suggested an adjustment to the contract with the removal of the nepotism portion and paragraph 4 notes the absence of a vote should the board member find a relative on the discussion for a possible contract.

Ms. Marshall also inquired if this was city policy as well, and Ms. Edzel stated "The answer is no, our purchasing policy does not allow it. It does not allow the relatives of the city employees to bid on contracts. We just adopted a new nepotism clause that, as of Oct 1, 2024, no relative of a director can be an employee within the city."

Ronnie Martin also clarified the request for this policy was not that anything was done wrong in the past, but it's the perception from the general public to stop anything from being said.

Ronnie Martin made a motion to approve the ethics policy. Mark Parker seconded. An amendment to remove paragraph 5, the nepotism clause, with emphasis on abstaining from voting on issues involving family members is to be added before signed by the board. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

VII. Board and Executive Director Comments

VIII. Executive Session- Adjourn into Executive Session

It is now 7:09 p.m. and I hereby recess the regular session of the Freeport Economic Development Corporation meeting and do hereby convene into executive session in compliance with Texas Government Code: Section 551.071 (Consultation with Attorney), 551.072 (Deliberations about Real Property), Section 551.074 (Personnel Matters)

1. **Update on Pending Litigation: Realty World and A&T**

Reconvene into an Open Session

Board President's statement:
It is now 7:22 p.m. and I hereby close the executive session of the Freeport Economic Development Corporation and do hereby reconvene the regular open session and take possible action on items mentioned in the executive session.

IX. Adjourn

Josh Mitchell requested a Motion to adjourn the board meeting. Ronnie Martin made the motion, and the motion was seconded by Sandra Loeza. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Josh Mitchell adjourned the board meeting at 7:24 p.m.