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CITY OF FREEPORT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

430 North Brazosport Boulevard, Freeport, TX

Tuesday, May 13th, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

FEDC BOARD MEMBERS: Quorum Present

Directors:

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

Robert Johnson: Executive Director

Lance Petty: City Manager

Jerry Cain: City Liaison

Loren Smith: EDC Attorney (*digital*)

Rachael Cohen: EDC Staff

I. Call to Order

Josh Mitchell called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

II. Invocation and Pledge

Ken Tyner led the invocation, and Mark Parker led the pledge.

III. Citizens' Comments

IV. Consent Agenda

1. **Approve Meeting Minutes for April 8th, 2025**
2. **Approve Financials**
3. **Approve Quarterly Investment Reports.**

Ken Tyner made a motion to approve the consent agenda with the spelling changes. Ronnie Martin seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

V. Discussion and Action Items

1. **Discuss and take possible action on a Business Improvement Grant Application – On the River.**

Drew and Becka Ryder, owners of On the River restaurant, addressed the Board to present their Business Improvement Grant application. The couple expressed their appreciation to Robert Johnson, Rachael Cohen, Patti, and Holden for their guidance throughout the application process.

They explained that the improvements were intended to revitalize the storm-damaged building, particularly the front facade and guest entrance. Their renovation plan included a new roof, reconfiguration of the front porch to create a more inviting entryway, and the creation of an open-air seating area with space for live music.

The old front section of the restaurant had already been demolished due to water damage caused by Hurricane Beryl. The Ryders planned to rebuild it using a "like-for-like" footprint while incorporating upgrades such as new garage-style doors to facilitate alfresco dining when weather permits. Becca emphasized that while the exterior would retain its nostalgic character, the interior would reflect a fresh and vibrant update aimed at enhancing the guest experience. The improvements would serve not only to modernize the space but also to attract younger patrons and host local musicians, enriching Freeport's dining and cultural atmosphere.

ADA-compliant restrooms, which had been destroyed, would be reconstructed with upgraded fixtures. The Ryders confirmed that they would maintain accessibility standards and were working with Bottom Dollar Construction on the rebuild. Landscaping components were deferred until Fall 2025, when planting conditions would be more favorable. Robert Johnson assured the Board that the applicants would be eligible to reapply for a separate grant for those elements in the next fiscal year.

Patti from the building department provided an update on the permitting process. She confirmed that as of May 7, two building permits had been submitted—one for the roof and one for interior demo/remodel work. Although the initial windstorm (WPI-1) certificate had the wrong address, a corrected version had since been submitted, and the roof permit was officially issued. Final engineering plans had also been received for the interior renovation. The only pending item was completion of the City's formal plan review process, expected within a few days.

Robert Johnson recommended approval of the grant, contingent upon completion of that final step. Ronnie Martin made a motion to approve the full reimbursement request of $23,500 for On the River, with the stipulation that the required permitting process be completed. Ken Tyner seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**.

2. **Discuss and take possible action on a Business Improvement Grant Application – Lone Star Fishing Co.**

Alyssa Lopez, co-owner of Lone Star Fishing Company, presented a grant application to support the installation of a commercial ice machine at a newly leased property near Ike's Welding. She shared that she and her husband had returned to Freeport after building a fishing boat in Maine designed to harvest local waters. They recently acquired use of the long-vacant Trico Shrimp facility and had already begun operations, landing 21,000 pounds of fish in their first quarter.

Alyssa described their broader vision to provide ice access for both recreational and commercial fishers along the Brazos River. With Freeport Marina currently lacking such services, their business would fill a critical gap, making the area more attractive for visiting and resident boats. The facility includes a warehouse, dock space, office, and bathrooms, and houses its own vessels as well as others.

The project scope included installing a repurposed insulated container for ice storage, converting rooms into cold storage using modular "CoolBot" units, and upgrading the facility's electrical capacity. She explained that this approach was cost-effective and scalable for future growth. Alyssa also detailed how their efforts contribute to Freeport's economic ecosystem—selling fresh catch to local and Houston-area restaurants and supporting marina revitalization.

Sandra Loeza Martin made a motion to approve the grant for Lone Star Fishing, up to $!0,000.00. David McGinty seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. **Discuss and take possible action on the sponsor request from the Freeport Lions Club: Fishing Fiesta.**

Jimmy Birmingham, representing the Freeport Host Lions Club, presented a sponsorship request for the Club's annual Fourth of July community celebration. Mrs. Birmingham expressed appreciation to the EDC for its previous support and outlined how the event benefits the local community by attracting visitors and reinforcing civic pride.

She noted that the Lions Club was again coordinating the fireworks show and related festival activities and emphasized that local families and regional guests look forward to the celebration as a highlight of the summer season. The Club requested **$12,500** in sponsorship from the EDC to assist with the cost of the fireworks display.

Board members responded positively to the request. Ronnie Martin acknowledged the Lions Club's dependable track record and praised their ongoing service to the community. Ken Tyner commented that funding family-friendly events that attract regional foot traffic aligns with the EDC's mission to support quality-of-life initiatives and stimulate local commerce.

Ronnie Martin made a motion to approve a $12,500 sponsorship to the Freeport Lions Club for the July 4, 2025, fireworks celebration. Ken Tyner seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**.

4. **Discuss and take possible action on maintenance issues at 210 & 212 W. Park.**

Robert Johnson noted a text from James Tuberville stating he was unable to make this meeting to discuss anything further on repairs, and so the topic was asked to be moved into executive session.

(For context, see minutes from April 8, 2025, Section V, Item 3)

5. **Discuss and take possible action on allowing a "grace period" for Business Improvement Grant Applications.**

The Board discussed the challenges that some grant recipients have faced in completing their approved Business Improvement Grant projects within the required time frame. Ronnie Martin raised the issue, citing a recent applicant who had nearly completed their work but missed the project deadline by only a few days due to unavoidable scheduling delays with contractors and inspections.

Ronnie proposed that the EDC consider implementing a grace period or a formal extension clause in the program guidelines. He suggested that this policy allow for a brief extension—perhaps 30 days—if the applicant provides a written explanation and documentation.

Josh Mitchell supported the concept in principle. Robert Johnson stated that the current grant policy did not contain language for discretionary extensions and agreed to review other cities' grant models for best practices.

Mark Parker made a motion to approve the 30-day extension. Ronnie Martin seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

6. **Discuss and take possible action on the Veteran's Memorial Park replacement monument request.**

   Robert Johnson introduced a proposal to replace a damaged monument at **Veteran's Memorial Park**. The existing monument, originally erected as a tribute to local veterans, had suffered visible weathering and physical damage, including cracked stonework and faded inscriptions. He shared that the condition of the monument had drawn concern from community members, veterans' families, and city staff.

   To support his presentation, Robert provided photographs of the existing structure alongside conceptual images of the proposed replacement. The new monument would maintain the original's commemorative integrity while improving on materials and design durability. It would feature updated granite panels, weather-resistant finishes, and re-engraved names to preserve historical accuracy. The inscription and dedication elements would remain consistent with the original version.

   Ken Tyner emphasized the importance of maintaining the visual and emotional significance of the park and stated that restoring the monument should be prioritized as a matter of public honor. He and Ronnie Martin both agreed that a visible commitment to veterans sends a strong message of civic respect. There was general agreement among the Board that the EDC's support of the project aligned with its broader goals of enhancing public spaces and promoting community identity.

   Cost estimates had not yet been finalized, but Lace Petty indicated that he was working with a local monument company and expected to stay within budget for public art and beautification projects.

   Ken Tyner made a motion to approve the replacement of the monument at the Veterans Memorial Park as proposed. Ronnie Martin seconded. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**.

7. **Discuss and take possible action on the Business Front of the Month program (McGinty)**

   The Board reviewed progress and expectations for the Business Front of the Month initiative, which aims to highlight local businesses with outstanding storefronts using the EDC's social media presence. The purpose of the program is to publicly recognize and promote businesses that contribute positively to Freeport's visual appeal and commercial vibrancy.

   The conversation clarified that the intent was not to give monetary awards or physical prizes. Instead, the focus would remain on promotional features—such as social media shoot-outs, photo spotlights, and recognition on the EDC's website. One Board member raised concerns that offering physical awards could "open up a can of worms" in terms of expectations or legal issues related to gift-giving. That concern was acknowledged, and the group reiterated that the program's scope would remain as public recognition only.

   There was general support for continuing the program as a way to build goodwill, encourage aesthetic improvements, and increase engagement with local merchants.

   No motion was made. The Board affirmed consensus to continue with the program in its current form, focusing on visibility and morale-boosting rather than financial reward.

8. **Discuss and review Main Street updates from the previous month**

The Board reviewed updates concerning the **Main Street program** as part of its regular monthly reporting. Robert Johnson acknowledged that the **Main Street Director position remains vacant**, which has impacted the program's continuity and oversight.

Despite the staffing gap, Johnson noted that coordination efforts had continued through **weekly meetings between EDC staff and the City's Building Department**. These sessions allowed ongoing dialogue on downtown improvement priorities and strategy alignment. The team received **drawings and project updates** during those meetings, reflecting work still progressing on certain design and beautification elements.

The discussion did not involve any votes or new actions but was positioned as an informational update to keep the Board apprised of progress. Board members agreed to continue monitoring developments and expressed interest in seeing movement on hiring for the coordinator position to restore momentum in the Main Street initiative.

9. Discuss and update on Wayfinding efforts. (McGinty)

The Board held a substantive discussion on the status and direction of Freeport's wayfinding signage initiative, identifying it as a key component of broader downtown and Main Street improvement efforts.

Robert Johnson and David reported that while substantial progress had yet to be made, communication with relevant stakeholders—including the city and external designers—was ongoing. They emphasized the need for more research and a phased implementation approach, beginning with basic and affordable improvements rather than large, costly installations.

Initial recommendations focused on starting with simple measures such as updating the city location map, installing pier signage, evaluating the cost of landscape architecture elements at city entryways, and introducing banners and directional signs as part of the first phase. The Board collectively agreed that monument-style signs, such as those seen in Lake Jackson or Angleton, would be an aesthetically valuable addition but were likely too expensive for initial efforts and should be reserved for future phases.

Josh Mitchell stressed the importance of acting and advocated for starting with manageable signage efforts that could be achieved in the short term. The Board reached consensus that staff should move forward with implementing basic navigation tools and visual markers immediately, while continuing to research and plan for more substantial signage features over a multi-year, phased development strategy.

VI. Board and Executive Director Comments

VII. Executive Session- Adjourn into Executive Session

It is now 7:12 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. Discuss and update on the Skinner Street property negotiations.
2. Discuss and update on possible upcoming projects related to Economic and Community Development Matters.
3. Update on ongoing litigation: Realty World and A&T.

Reconvene into an Open Session

Board President's statement:
It is now 8:09 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.

VIII. Adjourn

Josh Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Ronnie Martin made the motion, seconded by Mark Parker. **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Josh Mitchell adjourned the board meeting at 8:10 p.m.