

City of Freeport
Strategic Planning Workshop
March 23, 2015 Meeting Minutes

I. Meeting Opened

The workshop to discuss the 2015-2016 Strategic Plan for the City of Freeport was opened by Mayor Russ Barley at 12:30 p.m. in Council Chambers of the Freeport City Hall.

Council members present: Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilwoman Kasey Cuchens, Councilwoman Janice McLean, Mayor Russ Barley and Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon.

Staff present: City Clerk Gary Mattison, City Planner Latilda Hughes-Neel and City Parks & Recreation Director Dana Weiler.

II. Invocation and Pledge

The Invocation was given by Councilman Farris, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

III. 2015-2016 Strategic Planning

Mayor Barley asked the City Clerk for the format of the workshop. City Clerk Mattison stated that staff would take notes of what the Council wants and flesh out the notes into workable goals.

Mattison distributed a Freeport survey and results that were conducted by Jason Bryant, a former employee of Walton County. Councilwoman Cuchens asked Planner Hughes-Neel if the City had adopted the survey results and recommendations. Hughes-Neel stated that the City had not taken any action on the survey; it was done as a class assignment of college courses being taken by Bryant. He was not directed by the City Council to conduct the survey or provide results. Mattison suggested the Council might like to conduct a similar survey; adjusting the survey for residential versus business.

Mayor Barley: infrastructure for new development

Councilwoman Brannon: would like to see measurable goals come out of the workshop

City Clerk Mattison: staff is looking at expanding in the area of grants; working waterfronts, nature trails, lighting and sidewalks

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Councilman Farris: need to look at citizen needs: sidewalks are needed near the Dollar General on Old 331; need to get Preble-Rish looking for sidewalk funding; East and West Bay Loop need to be connected with sidewalks. There are areas in Freeport which need to be made more attractive. The Preble-Rish 2008 report on growth opportunities lists some of this; need to see if Preble-Rish can branch out and look for other types of grants for sidewalks, multi-modal paths, lighting, etc.

Councilwoman Brannon: the Council needs to expand Preble-Rish's contract; much less expensive than hiring additional personnel.

Councilwoman Cuchens: The Bay Loop multi-modal path was done with a grant by the County.

Councilwoman McLean: DeFuniak Springs is putting in sidewalks; if Preble-Rish is not interested, there are individual grant-writers around.

Councilwoman Cuchens: What kind of contract does the City have with Preble-Rish?

Councilwoman Brannon: continuing services contract.

Councilwoman McLean: Preble-Rish shared a list of grants with the City Council and explained what the City would qualify for; there are a lot of small pots of money out there.

City Clerk Mattison: the City is on mid-process to acquire 6-acres and develop a park adjacent and below Marina Village. The property was given to the City by the Dept. of Interior years ago but reverted back when the City didn't develop the park. George Ralph Miller and Scott Brannon are working on behalf of the City to reacquire the property and develop the park.

Councilman Farris: on the Freeport Community Center expansion, I (Farris) will get with Cliff (Preble-Rish) and get second quote to remodel the structure without expanding; it needs so much work. The remodel would include a new roof and replace everything that has rotted or been water-damaged.

Councilwoman Cuchens: we need to expand for 5-10 years down the road and get a grant to build a new community center.

Councilwoman Brannon: we need to save the existing building, but we need to build a new building too.

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Councilman Farris: we have to get the existing building repaired.

Mayor Barley: I (Barley) thought we might have an opportunity on the property west of City Hall, but it is very expensive.

Councilwoman Brannon: that was the Portofino property; it may be reduced; I (Brannon) will check on it.

Parks Dir. Weiler: there are re-habilitation grants to revitalize blighted areas.

City Clerk Mattison: AmeriCorp has some funds.

Councilwoman Cuchens: grants are the ticket.

Councilwoman Brannon: the City needs build-ready projects so that they are ready on a moment's notice to submit for legislative appropriations.

Councilman Farris; it's important that we expand Preble-Rish's contract.

City Clerk Mattison: if the City wants to get grants, shovel ready projects have to be prepared.

Councilwoman Cuchens: has Cliff (Preble-Rish) been before the Council to request that the Council expand their services?

Councilwoman Brannon: Cliff (Preble-Rish) has mentioned several times that they are capable of applying for grants for the City.

Councilwoman Cuchens: I (Cuchens) would like for Preble-Rish to make a presentation to the Council regarding expanding their services to include project design and grant applications; I want Preble-Rish to copy their earlier report to the entire Council.

Councilwoman Brannon: with an expanded contract, Preble-Rish can prepare multiple projects to have on standby for grant opportunities.

Councilwoman McLean: for the council meetings, I need a written report on legislative matters from Elizabeth (Councilwoman Brannon).

City Clerk Mattison: Project Target; how much marketing is being done for Freeport?

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Councilwoman Brannon: the Rural Enterprise Zone program is sun-setting. Have we considered forming our own Economic Development Alliance/Economic Development Council?

Mayor Barley: I (Barley) attend all those meetings and it's always about Mossy Head.

Councilman Farris: there are businesses that want to expand, but the County is pushing Mossy Head.

Councilwoman Brannon: DeFuniak Springs has a city revitalization program and City EDA.

Councilman Farris: we need marketing and advertising.

Councilwoman Brannon: nobody knows how much waterfront Freeport has

Councilwoman McLean: I (McLean) have talked to the McDonald's people; they will come when the 4-laning project is complete.

Mayor Barley: I (Barley) talked to a couple looking at developing an extended stay facility.

Councilwoman Cuchens: we need to expand our services with Preble-Rish to include grants, we need to renovate the exiting community center, and need a city marketing program.

City Clerk Mattison: would the Council like to distribute surveys to get community feedback?

Councilwoman Cuchens: I am interested in establishing a youth council.

Councilwoman Brannon: I still want the council meetings streamed on-line.

City Clerk Mattison: we need to find out what the deterrents are to city council meeting attendance.

Councilwoman McLean: we need to start setting up reserve accounts

City Clerk Mattison: we would like to see a total meter cost estimate with a cost/benefit analysis.

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Councilwoman Cuchens: our water rates are too low.

City Clerk Mattison: in the City Budget, we need to put in Capital Outlay.

Councilwoman McLean: our reserves need to be placed in a cd so that the reserves don't look like spending money.

Councilwoman Cuchens: we're looking at months of workshops.

Councilwoman McLean: we have 3 meeting internally before the next workshop.

Councilwoman Brannon: we need to expand the scope of services for Preble-Rish.

City Clerk Mattison: we will take notes and organize into categories for the next workshop

Councilwoman Cuchens: the 331 Corridor...we need a corridor plan so that the City represents well.

City Clerk Mattison: will communicate with Preble-Rish to discuss expansion of their scope of services and report back at the next council meeting.

Councilman Farris:

IV. Adjournment

Mayor Barley called for a motion to adjourn the workshop. Councilwoman McLean motioned to adjourn. The workshop was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

FREEPORT CITY COUNCIL

Mayor

ATTEST

City Clerk