

Minutes

FEDC Board of Directors Meeting

July 26, 2022

1. **Welcome and Introductions.** The hybrid meeting convened at 7:34a in Town Hall and on Zoom. New Board member Stefanie Millette introduced herself to Board members who were unable to attend the June Board meeting.

Attending Board Members: Mary Davis, Candice Rinaldi, Mark Malone, Chip Gray, Nikki Yanok Schneider, Dan Bacon, Sarah Tracy, Jason Sulham, Tawni Whitney, Stefanie Millette.

Not Attending. Leanne Barschdorf-Nichols, Rebecca Doten-Lizotte, Peter Joseph, James Hendricks

Others. Dan Piltch, Brett Richardson

2. **Consent Agenda Items**

- a. **Minutes of June 28, 2022, Meeting.** The minutes for FEDC's June Board meeting were unanimously approved.
- b. **Financial Report as of June 30, 2022.** The financial report was unanimously approved.

3. **Elder Outreach Update.** Stef provided an update on meeting of elders pulled together by Council Ed Bradley in Council Chambers at Town Hall on Thursday, July 14th. Stef reported that the participants agreed to share their thoughts on the Downtown Vision and participate in a gathering in mid-to-late August to provide input on the implementation priorities that emerge from the Downtown Vision Task Force coordinated by Council Chair Dan Piltch. Stef shared that attendees had also shared concerns about the aesthetics of a proposed downtown housing project and changes to parking requirements.

Mary shared that FEDC can make a significant contribution by elevating data in the community's conversations going forward as the community navigates change. Mary shared that data from the Planning Department exists demonstrating significant vacancies, but the data is largely unknown throughout the community.

Mark and Chip shared concerns about engaging a small group now for input when the Downtown Vision was based on robust participation. The threat of a

few loud voices sabotaging the process is real and that the elder/thought leader outreach should not continue.

Tawni suggested that reinvigorating the Community Connectors from the Downtown Vision offers a middle road to continue the outreach to the community.

Stef suggested that FEDC could use its website to help inform the community.

Brett shared concerns that playing a role of neutral convener will make it hard to advocate for projects or policies that advance economic development.

Dan Piltch and Mark highlighted the current reality that Freeport's ordinances haven't been updated yet to reflect priorities in the Vision.

Mary suggested that we communicate with Ed the concerns of the Board about the risks of continuing smaller meetings.

Stef shared that many public comments represent a "patchwork" of incomplete info that lead to a narrative that lacks context.

Sarah noted that the Project Review Board does not have a webpage on the Town's website and that a PRB page would be a good start in increase accessibility for the community.

Dan B. proposed that FEDC can help connect the dots and create context for the community.

Discussion lead to the conclusion that the town (not FEDC) would be the most appropriate catalyst for communicating as the Downtown Plan is absorbed into formal town policy via our town boards, or as stakeholders take on projects within the task force.

Town communication efforts could

- Make the organizational change unknowns evident, but remove responsibility off of any one organization (like FEDC) for those unknowns
- Keep communication logistics coordination off of the FEDC; allowing us to focus on building Freeport's relationships with economic partners, and developing economic-data driven recommendations.

Action. The Board agreed that FEDC should look for opportunities to be a source of information, context, and data, but should reserve the right to advocate for specific projects and policies and maintain integrity in the community to be a trusted source of information. Staff will communicate the Board's concerns with Councilor Bradley and will report back to the Board.

4. **Approve Downtown Vision Plan.** Brett shared Dan B. suggestion that FEDC formally approve the Downtown Vision Plan as a basis for supporting relevant

projects and policies. Mark made a motion to approve the Downtown Vision Plan, which was seconded by Dan B.

Action. The Board voted unanimously to approve the Downtown Vision Plan.

- 5. Parking Ordinance Input.** Brett shared that FEDC had previously endorsed the position of advocating to the Planning Board that the parking standard for downtown residential units should be lowered to .75 shared parking spaces and 1 non-shared parking spaces per unit. The Planning Department has proposed 1 shared space per unit and 1.25 non-shared spaces per unit. The Department has also included a critical change to allow developers to use both shared and non-shared parking to meet their requirement. Tawni offered to reach out to local businesses to encourage their participation in the August 3 Planning Board public hearing. Mark and Dan B. shared that it is important to make clear that FEDC is advocating for a lower minimum parking standard, but that developers should retain the flexibility to exceed the minimum if desired.

Action. The Board unanimously agreed that FEDC advocate at the PB public hearing on 8/3 that minimum parking standard for downtown residential be lowered to .75 shared spaces per unit and 1 non-shared spaces per unit, and that developers retain the right to exceed the minimum if desired.

- 6. Opportunities to Support Housing Projects in Pipeline.** The Board discussed residential projects in the permitting platform. Tawni shared that its important that FEDC and individual Board members do what they can to share support for downtown housing.

Dan P. clarified that commenters sharing concerns about upcoming projects generally support downtown housing, but have various specific concerns, such as aesthetics.

The Board discussed opportunities for FEDC to contribute to positive meeting dynamics. Dan B and Mary discussed the tone of discourse between applicant and review board could be improved.

Mary highlighted that FEDC has a role to play to help developers respond to PRB feedback.

The Board discussed rising costs for development and high sewer connection fees and opportunities for a Downtown TIF district to support quality projects. Mark shared his perspective that Downtown TIF is critical, and that foot traffic in Freeport is down and retailers are under pressure. Combining downtown housing with retail is the national trend.

Mary reiterated the benefit of creating a downtown district in advance of requests from developers.

Dan P. stated the importance in promoting the benefit of a District by emphasizing what will be lost if projects don't happen.

Dan B. suggested a workshop for Town Boards and Committees about a Downtown TIF to make sure that Town leaders understand the entire package of activities and how each entity fits into the whole.

Brett discussed the required Downtown Redevelopment Plan as tool for outreach once drafted with support from Town staff.

Dan P. updated the Board that the Downtown Vision Implementation Team will be finalizing recommendations to Council that prioritize implementation projects, which will help drive the Redevelopment Plan.

Action: Mary suggested the following timeline: the Implementation Team shares priorities with the Council in September and in October FEDC hosts a Redevelopment Plan workshop.

7. **Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned at 9:34a.