



## **City of Freeport**

### **REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

November 9, 2021, 9:00 AM  
Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilman Tripp Hope, Councilman Mark Martin, Councilwoman Elizabeth Haffner

Staff Members Present: City Manager Charlie Simmons, City Attorney Clay Adkinson, Planning Director Latilda Neel, Finance Officer Sara Bowers, City Clerk Kathie Gatewood, Parks Director Travis Digges, Sewer Supervisor Robert Fawcett, City Engineer Alex Rouchaleau, Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle

#### **1. Meeting Called to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

#### **2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

The invocation was given by Councilwoman Haffner, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

#### **3. Recognition of Guests**

Mayor Barley recognized guests Mr. Bill Imfeld, Walton County Economic Development Alliance Executive Director and Mr. Keith Kelly, Head of Freeport Football and Cheer.

#### **4. Consent Agenda**

a. Bills

(Tab 1)

b. Minutes – Regular Council Meeting October 28, 2021

(Tab 2)

1. Purchase of a generator

Water Supervisor Larry Tuggle asked the Council for permission to purchase a budgeted generator from Taylor Power Systems for \$119,450.00.

Moved by: Councilwoman Haffner  
Seconded by: Councilwoman Brannon

*To approve the purchase the of a generator from Taylor Power Systems for \$119,450.00.*

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris:	aye
Councilman Hope:	aye
Councilwoman Brannon:	aye
Councilwoman Haffner:	aye
Councilman Martin:	aye

Carried.

- b. Sewer
- c. Parks

1. Freeport Football and Cheer Fee Waiver

Parks and Recreation Director Digges told the Council Keith Kelly, Freeport Football and Cheer Chair was present for the meeting. He said Freeport Football would oversee flag football for the first time this year. He told the Council Freeport Little League was unable to oversee flag football this year and Freeport Football, after being approached by him, immediately agreed to oversee the program, which has over 200 children participate a year. He requested the Council waive the park and concession stand fees for Freeport Football & Cheer. Mr. Kelly thanked the Council and the City for their continuous support.

Moved by: Councilman Farris  
Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner

*To waive park and concession stand fees for Freeport Football and Cheer.*

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris:	aye
Councilman Hope:	aye
Councilwoman Brannon:	aye
Councilwoman Haffner:	aye
Councilman Martin:	aye

Carried.

Councilman Farris agreed with Councilman Hope that the land meets the city's needs. He also stated land prices will continue to rise in Freeport. He said if the city can work this out it will be a huge opportunity to get one or more defense contractors to relocate to Freeport to provide our community with good paying jobs. He expressed his thanks to everyone for their work on this transaction.

Councilwoman Haffner asked if the Council could give direction to continue price negotiation and then come back and do a revote when it is on the agenda.

City Attorney Adkinson told the Council if they are not willing to go above appraised value then the city is wasting their time and should stop the process.

Councilwoman Haffner said she was not against going above appraised value because it will bring the city more on the backend.

City Attorney Adkinson told the Council if they approved the property purchase, for example, with 700 (Seven Hundred) ERCs, which is approximately 5.6-million-dollars, Mr. Duncan may still say no, and their decision today is not a final action at this point. He said if the Council does not authorize City Manager Simmons to go back to negotiate a number that the city will go above appraisal value within reason then there is simply no way for the city to move forward. He said he regretted an item of this size being an add-on, there's a secondary issue of City Manager Simmons having a Letter of Interest for the defense contractor which has a deadline date. He said the city will give a timely response contingent on acquiring the property and the Council approving authorization above appraised value. He agreed that a special meeting with advertising for this discussion would be very appropriate.

City Manager Simmons stated this meeting, with Council approval, would give permission to start negotiating and hear the Council's feelings on the matter.

Councilwoman Brannon said she was not against paying above appraised value for a piece of property with value, but she wanted to be sure they are careful about how many ERCs would be committed and all other portions of the process to be sure a plant is not built that nobody will ever use. She stressed that ultimately it is money and not just credits and the city should be cautious with each step. She raised concern over previous defense contractors who wanted to relocate here and then backed out, to which City Attorney Adkinson said the city has received a Letter of Interest from the defense contractor. He said the city has not gone this far with any other defense contractors. He asked if the Council would be willing to authorize City Manager Simmons to further negotiate and bring back to the Council a revised contract and closing documents for consideration.

Councilman Martin weighed in telling the others he believes the benefits far outweigh the city paying a little more than we probably could or should. He agreed with Councilwoman Brannon that it is money, but it is interest free money and that the landowner is willing to do a swap with the city is a huge benefit. He expressed concern that someone else could step in and offer the landowner more money and the city would be out of luck. He said he did not see how the city could not purchase the land.

Bearing relocates to Freeport, it creates an opportunity to recruit their subcontractors and suppliers to bring other similar businesses here and establish something more diversified than tourism. He said this could be the start of a tremendous long-term economic engine for diversification for good jobs. He said American Metal Bearing has many years of contracts lined up for continued growth. He said their California facility is very modern so he believes they will be building a similar facility in Freeport. He praised everyone's efforts to date and offered to answer questions.

Councilman Farris showed appreciation for Mr. Imfeld's involvement. He said this is an opportunity to have something good come to the City of Freeport that will benefit everybody. He expressed how proud he is of the city and that people are looking at Freeport to relocate to which could be just the beginning. He said he wants to see our kids be able to graduate from college and come back to the city to live and have families. He expressed interest in making a motion to avoid missing the deadline.

Councilwoman Brannon said she did not have an issue negotiating with American Metal Bearing to give them the property, the taps and expedited permitting but it must be contingent on them promising a certain number of jobs, etc. City Attorney Adkinson replied that would part of a standardized reply to ask for things of that nature. He said if the Council was agreeable the city could choose to allow the Walton County Economic Development Alliance to conduct private, confidential negotiations under Florida Law and bring it back to the Council.

Moved by: Councilman Farris  
Seconded by: Councilman Martin

*To approve a response to the American Metal Bearing Letter of Interest, to reciprocate interest with an offer contingent on the city acquiring the property and adequate development assurances.*

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

A roll call vote was ordered, and the vote was as follows:

Councilman Farris:	aye
Councilman Hope:	aye
Councilwoman Brannon:	aye
Councilwoman Haffner:	aye
Councilman Martin:	aye

Carried.

3. City Manager Simmons gave the following updates:

He thanked the Council and Mayor Barley for attending the 331 South Sewer Project groundbreaking event along with all their work and relationship building with the Walton County Commissioners to accomplish how far this project has come.

City Manager Simmons said he has been meeting with officials and engineers to discuss potential road improvements throughout the city.

- The existing reuse system only needs the monitoring wall completion report. With the new treatment plant, they were relocating the monitoring well and DEP is waiting for those completions reports that should hopefully be completed this week so an inspection can be scheduled.
- 331 North Sewer Project has a meeting scheduled next week with all the utility providers in the area. We will be issuing a notice to proceed, and work should be able to begin after Thanksgiving.
- RBM Construction will be starting work on the Barrier-Free Park on November 15, 2021.

City Manager Simmons told the Council they will be posting photographic updates regularly to the city website and social media.

**10. Old Business**

**11. New Business**

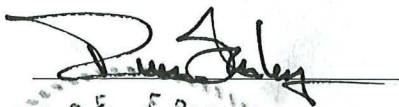
- a. Mayor Russ Barley
- b. Councilwoman Brannon
- c. Councilman Farris
- d. Councilwoman Haffner
- e. Councilman Hope
- f. Councilman Martin

**12. Public Comment**

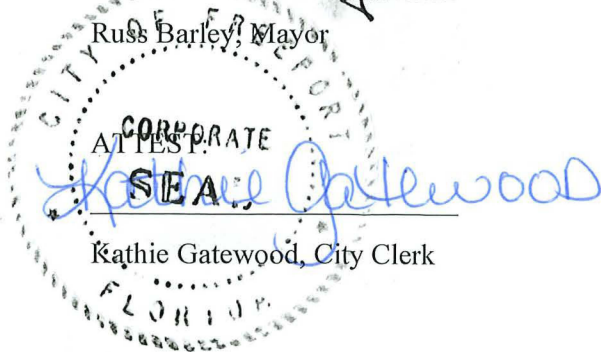
Tim Ard, Project Chair for the Freeport Veterans Memorial, addressed the Council giving them a summary of this year's upcoming Veteran's Day Ceremony itinerary at Freeport's Memorial Park. He thanked Parks and Recreation Director Travis Digges and his crew for helping to beautify the park for the event. He also thanked Tom and Barbara Tillman for their dedication to the park. He informed the Council the Memorial Park will be debt-free after November's fundraising golf tournament and any monies left over will help to offer up to eight scholarships countywide to students who intend to further their careers in military service.

**13. Adjournment**

Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM.



Russ Barley, Mayor



Kathie Gatewood, City Clerk