

CITY OF FREEPORT REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

April 23, 2026, at 6:30 PM

Council Chambers, Freeport City Hall

Council Members Present: Mayor Russ Barley, Councilwoman Elizabeth Haffner, Councilwoman Heather Hurst, Councilman Eddie Farris, Councilwoman Elizabeth Brannon, and Councilman Tracey Dickey.

Staff Members Present: City Attorney Clay Adkinson, City Manager Mark Martin, City Clerk Rebecca McLendon, Finance Director Bruce Simmons, Planning Director Latilda Hughes – Neel, Deputy Planning Director Samantha Graves, Parks Director Charles Bartlett, Wastewater Supervisor Paul Johnson.

Clerk's Note: Some item locations were moved from placement on agenda.

1. Meeting called to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor Barley in the Council Chambers of Freeport City Hall.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Councilman Farris gave the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag was recited.

3. Recognition of Guests

Mayor Barley introduced Miss National Peanut 2025 LaRae Smith and The Chairman of the National Peanut Committee Ms. Angela Brannon.

Mayor Barley also introduced the Freeport Queens who came to support Miss National Peanut. Little Miss- Peighton Smith, Junior Miss- Lennox Baker, Young Miss- Rikki Leigh Smith, Jr. Teen Miss- Kennady Arroyo, and Miss Freeport 2026- Tinleigh Tripp.

4. Consent Agenda

- a. Bills
- b. Regular Council Meeting Minutes – April 14, 2026
- c. Expenditure and Revenue Reports through March 2026

5. Public Comment on Consent Agenda

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

6. Approval of Consent Agenda

Moved by: Councilman Dickey

Seconded by: Councilwoman Haffner

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

To approve the Consent Agenda, as presented.

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

Councilwoman Haffner	aye
Councilwoman Hurst	aye
Councilman Farris	aye
Councilwoman Brannon	aye
Councilman Dickey	aye
Carried.	

7. Consideration of Additions and/or Deletions to Agenda

8. Approval of Agenda with Additions/ Deletions

9. Staff Reports

a. City Clerk

b. City Manager

c. Engineering

d. Finance

e. Human Resources

f. Legal

g. Mosquito Control

h. Parks

1. E-bike Discussion

Parks Director Bartlett asked to open discussion on what can be done about E-bikes in the park. Councilwoman Haffner asked if there was a Florida Statute regarding E-Bikes that they would need to follow? Parks Director Bartlett stated that he could look into that. He is aware that the County is currently having issues with them and are addressing their situation with an Ordinance. Councilwoman Haffner stated that she didn't have a problem with putting together an ordinance to address this, but she would like to speak with the City Attorney about it before. City Manager Martin stated that he had talked to City Attorney Adkinson and he wanted to have it on the agenda to hear what Council's direction. Councilwoman Haffner stated that she would like to see what the county comes up with and to see if there is a Florida statute then we could come up with something for the city. Councilwoman Hurst stated that we definitely need to start the process of putting something on the books. City Attorney Adkinson arrived and stated that Florida Law is pretty straight forward. E-bikes cannot be treated any differently than any other self-propelled bicycle. So, the county sets the rule for all bicycles. They can only be on designated roadways as opposed to fields or anywhere else in the park. You have to remember that the State of Florida allows bicycles to be on primary roadways. You can't say that they have to be on a bike path because they

have the same right to the road as any driver. He will be glad to see what he can do to come up with a designated area, but the location of the problem is Hammock Bay and the roads, but to the extent that a bicyclist can use the roads. That's where it is.

Attorney Adkinson stated the he and the Planning Director can talk to the Hammock Bay Owners Association about restrictions that they may wish to put in their neighborhoods that we may be able to provide some additional assistance with, and a combination of those two can get us outside of the biggest limitations of the Florida Statutes. Councilwoman Haffner stated that the HOA already has restrictions for the e-bikes. They have to use the roadways and not the paths. Attorney Adkinson stated that the problem with pushing them off the paths is that it floods the roadways. A concept being looked at is to designate a lane for bikes. Several communities have gone with making bike lanes to suggest a place for bikes. Attorney Adkinson will bring back the County Ordinance after approval for the city to see if we can incorporate the language. Councilwoman Hurst asked if they were looking at speed in this ordinance? That's a big issue. Attorney Adkinson stated we can't treat an e-bike differently in where it can go, but you can look at safety ratings and speed. That's one of the things that you look at when you direct traffic, slow speeds and make areas lower in speed. It is a multifaceted approach. Speed is one of the big things we're looking at and the congestion, as well as the ability to yield the roadway. Attorney Adkinson stated that he would bring this back at the 2nd meeting in May.

i. Planning

1. Park Ordinance

Planning Director Hughes-Neel introduced the Park Ordinance. The only addition is the following language:

Section 4: Activities I Park for Financial Gain or Non-Profit Fundraisers

No person shall conduct any activity or utilize any park or park area in a manner which will result in financial gain unless prior permission is granted by the Parks Director and the appropriate fee is paid. Non-profit organizations may conduct fundraisers with prior approval of the Parks Director by obtaining the proper permit.

Staff is asking to hold first reading of this ordinance and to advertise for second reading and adoption. Councilwoman Haffner asked what the appropriate fee is. Planning Director Hughes-Neel stated that it depended on the circumstance. If they're doing a special event in the park there is a special event permit. If they're going to use a section of the park that requires rental fees. They have to get the proper information in, and the Parks Director has to tell them that they are allowed to be in this part of the park doing what they're doing. Councilwoman Haffner stated we're not changing the parts of the park that we rent correct. Planning Director Hughes-Neel stated that no we were not. They will not be able to take up a spot that is not available for rent because those must be open to the public. Councilwoman Hurst asked since we started talking about this if anyone has anyone reached out to parks and tried to do what is necessary. Parks Director Bartlett stated not yet.

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Moved by: Councilwoman Haffner

Seconded by: Councilman Farris

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

To approve first reading of Park Ordinance and advertise for second reading.

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

Councilwoman Haffner	aye
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Councilwoman Hurst	aye
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Councilman Farris	aye
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Councilwoman Brannon	aye
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Councilman Dickey	aye
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Carried.

Planning Director Hughes-Neel held first reading.

**AN ORDINANCE PERTAINING TO CITY PARK USAGE WITHIN THE
INCORPORATED LIMITS OF THE CITY OF FREEPORT; PROVIDING FOR
AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE, CONFLICT SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE
DATE.**

2. Update on Housing Summit

Planning Director Hughes-Neel stated that she put out a flyer for everyone. The county with cooperation with the Walton County Health Department, and the Walton County Affordable Housing Institute will be putting on a Housing Summit on May 13th in Freeport at Destiny Worship Church. There will be a number of speakers talking about all kinds of housing problems. This is set up specifically for Councilmembers and elected officials so that when you are asked you will have answers.

3. Update on Walmart

Deputy Planning Director Graves stated that Walmart had completed technical review. Next steps are paying fees and holding a preconstruction meeting. Once that is completed, they will be issued a DO and can start construction.

3. 31 Azalea Drive Rezoning

Deputy Planning Director Graves introduced item as the property just south of Freeport Elementary School on the north corner of Azalea and Business 331. They are requesting a change from medium density residential to residential commercial because they want to put in an office complex like the one across the street. Requesting approval for first reading and to advertise for second reading and adoption.

Moved by: Councilman Farris

Seconded by: Councilman Dickey

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

To approve the Azalea Drive Rezoning for first reading and to advertise for second reading and adoption.

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

Councilwoman Haffner	aye
Councilwoman Hurst	aye
Councilman Farris	aye
Councilwoman Brannon	aye
Councilman Dickey	aye
Carried.	

Deputy Planning Director Graves held first reading.

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE ZONING MAP SERIES INCLUDED BY REFERENCE IN ARTICLE 3 OF THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE OF THE CITY OF FREEPORT, SPECIFICALLY THE PARCEL IDENTIFIED WITH PROPERTY REFERENCE NUMBER 10-1S-19-23000-022-0010 CONTAINING APPROXIMATELY 0.74 ACRES MORE OR LESS AND DESCRIBED BY THE LEGAL DESCRIPTION CONTAINED IN SECTION 1 BELOW AMENDING THE ZONING ASSIGNMENT FROM MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL TO RESIDENTIAL COMMERCIAL.

4. Children's Art Public Art Piece

Planning Director Hughes-Neel introduced item to council stating that this is a sculpture by Creative Climbables. This songbird is large enough for a child or two to sit inside of it and on the outside all of the oval slots are to climb on, over, and around the entire songbird. We would like to put this piece in the Children's Playground out behind City Hall. There is an area coming toward the parking lot that is all white sand. We think that would be a beautiful place to add this bright blue songbird. They have a wood based climbable and a poly wood based climbable, which we think is a better value long-term because it will last a lot longer. They have a service contract that we can do by the year where they come in and tighten all the screws, redo the paint etc. Ms. Hughes-Neel stated that she had talked to the Parks Director and there is money to cover this sculpture. Requesting approval to spend \$10,400.00 on this sculpture with an annual maintenance service contract of \$300.00 per year. Councilman Farris asked if there would be a lot of white sand under it in case a child falls. Planning Director Hughes-Neel stated that yes there was.

Moved by: Councilman Farris
Seconded by: Councilman Hurst

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

To approve spending \$10,400.00 on the songbird sculpture with an annual maintenance service contract of \$300.00 per year.

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

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Councilwoman Haffner	aye
Councilwoman Hurst	aye
Councilman Farris	aye
Councilwoman Brannon	aye
Councilman Dickey	aye
Carried.	

j. Sewer

1. Root Rake

Wastewater Supervisor Johnson asked council to approve the cost of a root rake for the skid steer tractor. This is needed to remove debris from the soil from back when the RIB site was a dumping ground. This debris is breaking the tiller that is used there. It costs \$1000.00 each time the tiller has to be fixed. Wastewater Supervisor Johnson stated that the cost to have someone come in and do the removal once was \$11,000.00. There is room in the budget for this purchase per Finance Director Simmons.

Moved by: Councilman Brannon
Seconded by: Councilman Haffner

Mayor Barley called for public comment and there was none.

To approve the purchase of a root rake for \$8379.59.

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

Councilwoman Haffner	aye
Councilwoman Hurst	aye
Councilman Farris	aye
Councilwoman Brannon	aye
Councilman Dickey	aye
Carried.	

k. Utility Billing

l. Water

10. Old Business

11. New Business

a. Mayor Barley

1. Key to the City Presentation

Mayor Barley presented the Key to the City to LaRae Smith, the current Miss National Peanut. She was Miss Freeport in 2025, she then went to compete in the National Peanut Festival Pageant and won, putting Freeport on the map.

- b. Councilman Dickey**
- c. Councilwoman Brannon**
- d. Councilman Farris**
- e. Councilwoman Hurst**
- f. Councilwoman Haffner**

12. Public Comment

Mayor Barley announced that after the council meeting tonight there will be an unveiling of the first phase of our lighting project. This phase is the Veteran's Memorial Park and Casey Park. He invited everyone to stay and enjoy the refreshments and see the unveiling.

13. Adjournment

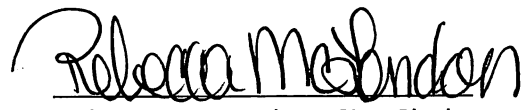
With no other business, Mayor Barley motioned to adjourn at 7:00 pm.

Minutes were prepared by City Clerk McLendon and approved by the City Council on May 12, 2026.

ATTEST:



Russ Barley, Mayor



Rebecca McLendon, City Clerk

