

QUARTERLY REPORT

Q2 2020



The purpose of this quarterly report is to give members of the Greater Freeport Partnership a clear understanding of the goals and progress of the organization in an easily noted format.

VISION

The Greater Freeport Partnership is the place where organizations and people unite to advocate for the region, drive economic growth and champion a talented, workforce-ready community.

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

On behalf of the Greater Freeport Partnership, I would like to thank you for your continued support. On a personal note, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve as the Partnerships' Executive Director. Having started at the midpoint of the 2nd quarter, I owe much of the report to our highly skilled and adaptive staff for keeping the Partnership on track while working remotely for the first half of the quarter.

The Industrial Sector in the Greater Freeport region has been relatively steady. The industrial sector has not been impacted significantly by the pandemic as some of our manufactures were deemed 'essential businesses' and were permitted to continue to operate. Activity in the value-added agriculture industry is especially high as we are working with three food processing companies considering expansions in Stephenson County. Solar Energy continues to grow as Acciona Energy advances plans to construct its 100 MW solar farm in western Stephenson County.

The Commercial/Retail Sector in the Greater Freeport region has been hit extremely hard by the pandemic through forced closings and social distancing requirements. Much of our work has been focused on transitioning from providing relief assistance to recovery assistance as businesses start to phase in reopening from restrictions and from civil unrest damages. We are currently meeting with owners and representative brokers of large retail centers in Freeport in an effort to retain current retail operations, fill vacant space with new retail and explore repurposing possibilities for different mixed uses.



Public Sector Partners:

- Held bi-weekly meetings with the Freeport City Manager to discuss ongoing projects related to contracted services and provide support when needed.
- Met regularly with County Board Chairman to discuss advancing County ongoing projects and provide support when needed.
- Provided update and report to the County Planning and Development Committee
- Provided support for the Stephenson County Rebuild IL Grant Submittal for reconstruction of McConnell Road.
- Appointed to the Blackhawk Hills Regional Council Board and attended its annual virtual meeting.
- Held introductory meeting with the Freeport School District 145 Superintendent.
- Held introductory meeting with Highland Community College President.

Private Sector Partners:

- Held scheduled meetings with Board members, partner-level members and business community leaders to introduce myself and learn about their businesses in our region.

Enterprise Zone:

- Held first Enterprise Zone Advisory Board meeting and approved Greater Freeport Partnership Contract for Services
- Met with solar energy company on plans to expand 50 MW solar farm
- Began work to identify undevelopable areas to delete from the enterprise zone in order to free up capacity for future boundary expansions.
- Met with enterprise zone administrator to begin plans to expand enterprise zone boundary for future projects and update digital enterprise zone map.

New Areas of Focus and Improvement

Entrepreneurship Ecosystem:

There are several thoughts of how and where new business and self-employment opportunities will rise from our pandemic induced economic crisis. Regardless of where the "place" of the worker or business is located, it will be paramount that we establish an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem that underpins and supports sustainable business development. For this reason, staff has been mapping out the existing entrepreneurship resource network and identifying the service gaps. The next steps would be to: organically grow the services locally, connect to and leverage regional services and connect to services virtually outside the region.

Simultaneously, we have been meeting with Transform Rockford Economic Recovery Principal Organizations Team – developing a regional entrepreneurship/innovation ecosystem framework focused on: Cluster Development, Entrepreneurship, Capital Network Development and Innovation Culture Development.

Marketing & Communications:

What makes our organization unique is our ability to strategically shift our storytelling to different audiences. Storytelling used for the tourism industry will easily shift and message well with the instinct of an entrepreneur. This will play a significant role if and when there is an expected urban flight of businesses, talent and remote workers that seek a more resilient life-style in second tier and rural-urban regions.

Work is underway to develop direct channels of messaging to specific industry/business sectors, corporate brokers and realtors. Improve upon our messaging to our members and weekly and monthly reporting.

C. Mark Williams,
Executive Director

Q2 PROGRESS ON KEY INITIATIVES

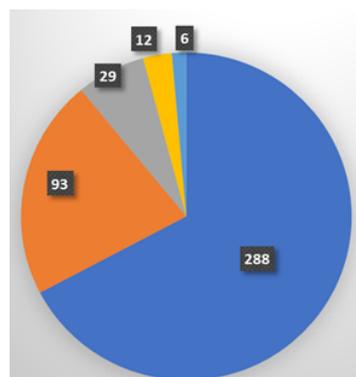
Economic Development

- Enterprise Zone:
 - The Enterprise Zone continues to be a valuable development tool. We have discussed expansion plans with four companies and provided data on Enterprise Zone incentives and application process. Additionally, the zone nears capacity. We are beginning to identify parcels within the zone that lack development potential and could be removed from the zone to free up capacity for future opportunities.
- Industrial Sector:
 - Held multiple conference calls with DCEO officials on potential funding programs that could support future company expansion and infrastructure improvements.
- Commercial/Retail Sector:
 - Responded to five space inquiries. Parties were either interested in leasing retail space or purchasing a building in Downtown Freeport.
- Entrepreneur Ecosystem:
 - Working with fellow directors to develop an understanding of our existing local entrepreneurial support network, identify service gaps and build alliances with regional resources to fill gaps.
 - Finalized and posted on our website “Starting A Business: A Resource Guide.”
- Census:
 - Provided Census update for the Monday newsletter and crafted two Census awareness posts for social media channels.
 - Coordinated and installed Census yards signs in various locations throughout Stephenson County.
 - Provided a Census story for the Rolling Stone publication.
 - Sent monthly programmatic and financial reporting to Region 1 Planning to comply with IDHS Census Grant. This round of grant funding ended June 30th.
 - Attended monthly virtual regional and Freeport Complete Count Committee meetings to continue coordinated outreach effort and receive updates on grant reporting requirements.
 - Coordinated purchase of Every-Door Direct Mailers for Census Outreach into zip codes in rural Stephenson County. Sent mailers to 2,895 addresses in eight different zip codes.

Membership

Membership Summary

- Basic Members - 288
- Subsidiary Members - 6
- NFP/Gov't/Religious/Individual - 93
- Major Partner - 29
- Premier Partner 12
- Total Members - 428



Beautification

- Coordinated cost share of maintenance of seasonal planting in the downtown with City officials. Deininger Floral installed plantings and is providing on-going watering and weeding throughout the downtown during these summer months. Cost is being shared by City of Freeport, Greater Freeport Partnership and Freeport Downtown Events.
- Sent thank you letters to all landscapers who are donating labor to help maintain flower beds adjacent to 'Welcome to Freeport' gateway signs. Received a favorable response, all landscaper plan to continue participating in the program.
- Planned and executed a County-wide Clean-up week.
- Project managing the #FreeportReflections, a vacant storefront window art activation program. The program was scheduled to open in April, but postponed due to COVID. Project was restarted in June. Artists are installing art in July with a scheduled opening of July 30th, 5:30 - 7:30 pm.
- Publicizing the grant award of \$20,774.00 funding 21 pieces of streetscape furniture for Downtown Freeport from the Dr. Louis & Violet Rubin Fund of the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois (CFNIL), had been halted because of the pandemic. After discussion with CFNIL it was agreed promotion of the grant award should wait until the height of the pandemic subsides and the story wouldn't be lost in the news cycle.

Business & Community Outreach

- Women's Enrichment Network (WEN):
 - Held monthly WEN meetings via zoom. Average attendance for virtual meetings was 15. Topics covered were: 'How to Avoid Decision Fatigue', 'Financial Planning & Retirement for Women', and 'Women's Health & Stress'.
 - We currently have 47 paid group members.
 - During the Stay-at-Home order group members desired some social connection so we held a virtual Happy Hour; 12 women attended.
- Data Support:
 - We routinely receive and filter numerous grant opportunities. We sent grant opportunities to 35 area non-profits, all Stephenson County School Districts and Stephenson County elected village officials.
 - Worked with county officials, a local engineering firm, and a business to secure letters of support for Rebuild IL grant submission.
 - Worked with the City to contact Chicago Ave. businesses to secure letters of support for a grant application.
 - Worked with fellow directors to file grant applications for US Bank Community Grant and IL Humanities Grant.

Marketing & Tourism

Tourism:

- Stephenson County Visitor Center reopened on June 15 after being closed since March 21 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Health and safety guidelines have been established to keep the staff and visitors as safe as possible.
- Commemorated National Travel & Tourism Week with a "Virtual Road Trip" video of Stephenson County which was published on social media as part of the US Travel Association's Spirit of Travel campaign and was picked up for national Twitter campaign.
- Created and implemented "Plan B" for community guide distribution placing 7,000 guides as insertions into the Freeport Journal Standard and Monroe Times on Memorial Day weekend.
- Worked closely with Looking for Lincoln statewide working group to distribute marketing of the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area evenly to all communities, including Freeport.
- Participate and contribute in weekly tourism conference calls for Illinois Office of Tourism and like agencies as well as Facebook group for information on reopening, grant opportunities and other recovery data.

Events:

- Working with the Stephenson County Health Department and City of Freeport, created plans to work within health and safety guidelines to host Cruise-Only Freeport (in place of Cruise Night) on August 15 and a modified Pretzel City Brewfest experience for September 26.
- Made the decision to host all Music on Chicago events virtually from locations throughout Downtown Freeport.

Marketing:

- Continue to create and publish ALL IN Stephenson County digital weekly events guide. During COVID-19, staff curated content that residents could participate in from home to celebrate holidays, warmer weather and other special occasions.
- Highlighted the special offerings, hours, and other new information from Stephenson County businesses to our "Stephenson County Pick-up and Delivery" page on Facebook created to help residents and visitors frequent local businesses and restaurants.
- Led web development agency in redesigning Partnership website templates and site map. Estimated launch date in August 2020.
- Launched Partnership Cash 50 percent off program with grant funding from the Freeport Community Foundation.
 - Residents were able to purchase Partnership Cash at a 50 percent discount to be used at local businesses as a way to stimulate the economy during COVID-19.
 - The certificates sold out in 18 hours with only one social media video post.
 - Post-sales campaign focused on encouraging certificate holders to spend certificates soon and purchase gift certificates for businesses not currently open.

COVID-19 Emergency Response

- Coordinated, planned, and hosted 11 webinars to inform Stephenson County community about business support grant and loan programs, reopening guidelines, and the Clean Hands Open Doors program.
- Reviewed countless federal, state, local and industry guidelines and websites for the most up to date COVID related information. Information was then distributed via multiple channels: social media, the Partnership website, and emails.
- Wrote application and was awarded a grant from the Freeport Community Foundation and United Way's COVID-19 Response Fund for a program that would encourage shopping at local businesses. The program was titled, Partnership Cash 50% Off'. To date over \$8,000 has been spent at local small businesses.
- Conducted two membership surveys, one at the end of March and another at the end of May to ascertain the concerns and issues that members had regarding COVID-19 and business reopening. The surveys provided us with direction and ideas about what information members needed to know.
- Partnered with agencies in Winnebago and Boone Counties to launch Freeport Clean Hands, Open Doors web site and health campaign to instill consumer confidence.
- Prioritize daily web updates regarding COVID-19 financial resources and reopening information with additional web pages, links to partner agencies and webinar information.
- We worked with many members one-on-one to help them access information and resources they needed and provide them with needed support.
- The entire team worked to developed a series of webinars designed to address the needs of business both during the early phases of the Restore Illinois, government and other support available to businesses and best practices for reopening as we moved into later phases of the state plan.
- Communicated relevant information about the COVID-19 situation out to industry groups and individual business as appropriate. Counsellled individual businesses about how to access appropriate information and resources.
- Worked with the City of Freeport, Stephenson County and the Stephenson County Health Department to get accurate and timely information to businesses in Stephenson County.