

QUARTERLY REPORT

Q1-2022



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.

Q1 PROGRESS ON KEY INITIATIVES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Lead Generation & Tracking: Business attraction is a core service of the Greater Freeport Partnership. Our team provides assistance to new business prospects seeking to locate in the City of Freeport and Stephenson County. Using staff knowledge and resources, relationships are built with referrals that come from various sources.

- Responding to request for information (RFI) leads from Intersect Illinois
- Responding to RFI leads from the State of Illinois
- Contacting economic development related prospects referred by the City of Freeport
- Contacting economic development related prospects referred by Stephenson County
- Contacting economic development related prospects referred to the I-39 Logistics Corridor
- Working with state and federal organizations to respond to RFI's
- Working with utility and transportation providers to respond to RFI's
- Attending meetings with the City of Freeport's Administration and Community Development Office
- Establishing relationships with real estate individuals via one-on-one meetings
- Establishing relationships with existing companies and potential suppliers
- Participating in national and regional trade shows
- Responding to contacts that connect through our digital marketing channels

Advancing Greenfield/Site Development: Stephenson County approved an agreement for InGrown Farms to provide \$2,000,000 in funding to the county for the infrastructure project of extending water and sewer service along Lamm Road from Walnut to Mill Race Crossing Industrial Park. The county also approved the professional engineering agreement with Fehr Graham to complete the design, permit and bid specifications. The team began meeting with property owners to secure easements.



Projects are then managed through a lead tracking and management system. Below is a running list of business attraction and property redevelopment projects. There were five new RFI's in first quarter.

Project Stages

1-Initial Communication, 2-Solution Development, 3-Client Evaluation, 4-Negotiation, 5- Committed

Q1 2022 - Attraction Projects				
Sector	Potential Investment	Potential Jobs	Project Stage	Status
Industrial	TBD	Unknown	3	Open
Commercial	TBD	Unknown	2	Open
Food Processing	TBD	Unknown	3	Open
Industrial	TBD	Unknown	1	Open
Commercial	TBD	Unknown	3	Open
Industrial	TBD	Unknown	1	Closed, no existing available building meeting specifications
Solar Manufacturer	TBD	700 FTE	1	Closed, no existing available building meeting specifications
Food Processing	\$400-\$500 million	400-500 FTE	1	Closed, no existing available building meeting specifications
Food Processing	\$5 million	110 FTE	1	Closed, no existing available building meeting specifications
Automotive - EV	TBD	200	1	Closed, no shovel-ready sites

Property Redevelopment

Q1 2022 - Project Redevelopment/Rehab		
Sector	Project Stage	Status
Commercial	1	Open
Industrial	2	Open
Mixed Use	1	Open
Residential	3	Open
Mixed Use	1	Open
Mixed Use	1	Open
Commercial	4	Open

Enterprise Zone

A board meeting was held to discuss the expansion of the zone to facilitate two commercial, one residential, and one industrial project. Approval was given to move forward with applications. Staff are processing the boundary expansion applications for local and state approval from DCEO. The process includes scheduling public hearings and meeting with six designating units of government for approval. We've received one EZ application in 1Q but have provided information about the zone and application process to multiple property owners.

Enterprise Zone Projects		
# of Projects	Total Investment	Jobs Created
1 - Commercial in City of Freeport	\$2,000	1

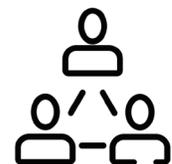
Business Retention/Expansion

- Currently working with local developers, contractors and DCEO for business relocation to Mill Race Industrial Park. This is to be considered a business retention project as well as an expansion project.
- In discussions with three manufacturing companies looking at future expansions.
- Outreach discussion with Furst-McNess on headquarters relocation, employee retention and the plans to auction the building assets.
- Assisted local manufacturer to secure warehousing space in Freeport.

The Partnership regularly receives notices of grants or related opportunities. Over the last quarter we have distributed:



34 GRANT OPPORTUNITIES



TO 22 PARTNER NON-PROFIT AGENCIES & AREA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Small Business Navigator for the Back2Business (B2B) Grant Program: The B2B application period ended last year. The state is still reviewing applications. All but one business is in Freeport. The Partnership has entered into an agreement to offer the same business outreach services for the forthcoming round of B2B-part two funding. We are awaiting program details and launch date from the state.

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APPLICATIONS AWARDED

\$815,000

IN GRANTS AWARDED FROM \$5,000-\$85,000

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: We continue to prioritize support to entrepreneurs and new small businesses by focusing energy in the following areas: Met with the Rockford Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to understand what business services they offer to their members and how we might collaborate. Follow-up meetings are scheduled.

National League of Cities – City Innovation Ecosystem: Working in conjunction with the City of Freeport, Partnership staff have filed an application with NLC for \$15,000 to work with Rising Tide Capital (RTC) to implement a Digital Community Business Academy (DCBA). If awarded, Partnership staff and Rising Tide Capital will use summer months for planning, promoting, and recruiting academy applicants. The DCBA cohort will start in the fall with graduation in December. The goal of the program is to help informal entrepreneurs understand the steps required for permitting and licensing to formalize their businesses. The Partnership helped to plan and participated in the Accelerating Creatives and Entrepreneurs (ACE) event. This two-day event (one virtual and one in-person) was focused on connecting entrepreneurs in the region with available resources.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The workforce challenges of 2021 have not diminished in the first quarter of 2022. Employers in every sector are having difficulty finding and retaining qualified workers. In Q4 2021, we connected area employers to Avance USA, a private consulting firm that specializes in workforce recruitment from Puerto Rico. This is a potential out-of-the-box solution that some area employers are still considering. The Workforce Development Committee met March 7th. Topics of discussion were developing internship/ job shadow opportunities with area businesses for graduating FHS seniors, sharing of employment data, and an update from our partners. The Partnership will assist FHS in distributing informational material about the internship program to area businesses. Additionally, staff met with HCC Career Services Department to develop a better understanding of how their office connects HCC students with area employers and how we share job opportunities. The Partnership staff also worked with The Workforce Connection to plan a job fair to be held in Freeport in April.

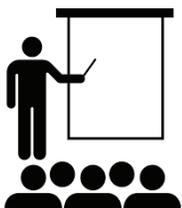
Business & Community Outreach

- We hosted Rise n' Shines at the Salvation Army and Workforce Connections/HomeStart, and a Business Before Hours at FHN's Burchard Hills campus. All three events were very well attended.
- We have added four new Ambassadors this quarter. The Ambassadors are celebrating their 50th anniversary of community service and business support by hosting business celebrations, offering a scholarship, recognizing the businesses that employ Ambassadors among other activities.
- The Women's Enrichment Network (WEN) connects, empowers, and inspires female leaders to serve one another and our community by providing personal and professional growth resources. First quarter meetings covered topics of imposter syndrome, influencing strengths and the power of communication, and Women's History Month.



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ENTREPRENEURS ASSISTED AT VARIOUS STAGES OF THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



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ENTREPRENEURS ATTENDED ACE EXPO IN PERSON OR VIA ZOOM WITH GREAT RESPONSES



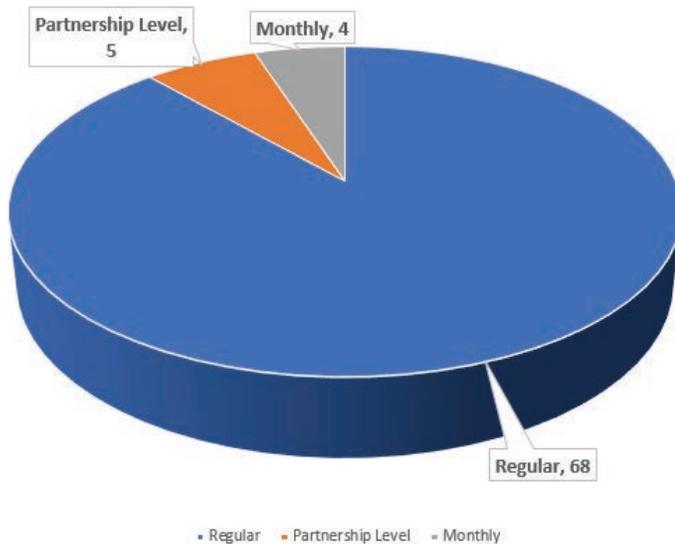
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WEN MEMBERS WITH AVERAGE MONTHLY ATTENDANCE OF 28

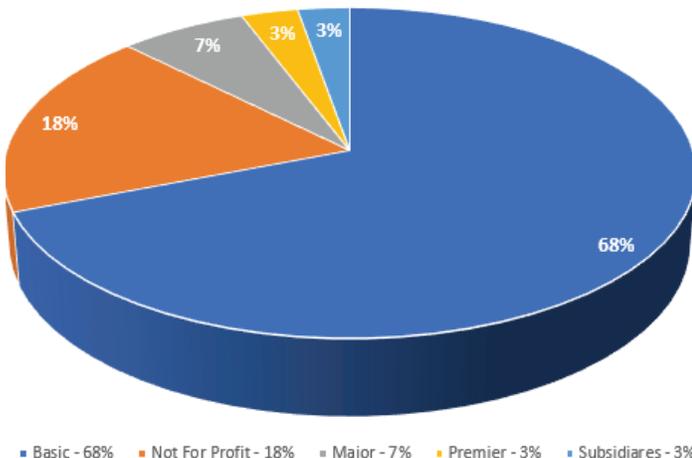
MEMBERSHIP

- 13 new members joined the Partnership in the first quarter of 2022, including two members who came in as Partner Level members.
- 97 members started or renewed their memberships in the first quarter.
- We held two New Member Orientations in Q1-2022. 18 people have attended orientation, which is designed for new members but open to any member who would like to learn more about the Partnership and the advantages of membership. The orientations have earned an average success rating of 4.75 out of 5 regarding the “usefulness of the orientation.”
- Five ribbon cuttings in the first quarter of 2022. Three were for new businesses, one was for a relocated business, and one was for a new program at Highland Community College. We have four more ribbon cuttings scheduled in the next six weeks (three new businesses and one new program) and many more being discussed but not yet scheduled.

Q1 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS



PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MEMBERS



DESIGN & PLACEMAKING

Committee efforts in the first quarter were centered around engagement, growing committee capacity, and messaging in preparation for Chicago Avenue Streetscape Project. Additional focus areas include Main Street accreditation; planning for the downtown pocket park; planning seasonal planting; and developing a historic walking tour.

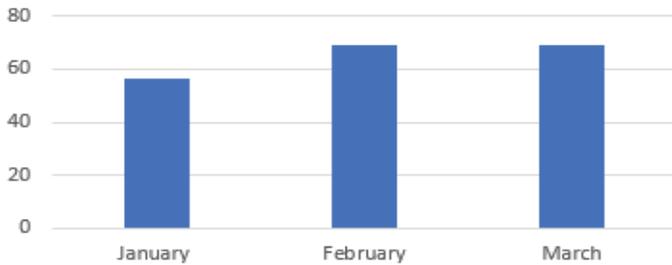
- Design & Placemaking Committee Capacity: We have successfully recruited three new members to the committee. Priority projects will be managed by subcommittees with involvement of Partnership staff. Purpose of committee meetings are to allow subcommittees to give an update to the group and discuss larger issues.
- Chicago Ave Streetscape Project: Partnership staff coordinated a meeting between Fehr Graham, City of Freeport, and owners of buildings along Chicago Avenue around access to coal vaults. Additionally, staff have coordinated discussions with All Together, a placemaking and design studio, to assist with developing messaging, marketing themes, and communication channels around the construction of the Chicago Avenue Streetscape Project. Messaging will target multiple audiences: adjacent property owners, downtown businesses, and the larger audience of any downtown visitor.
- Main Street Accreditation: Partnership staff is currently working on the application to be submitted by mid-May. Additionally, staff will be meeting with downtown building owners to understand vacancy of commercial and residential rental rates.
- Pocket Park: Partnership and city staff are reviewing updated cost estimates and outline a construction timeline.
- DT Seasonal Planting: Working with local vendor to establish a cost estimate for planting and summer maintenance.
- Historic Walking Tour: The subcommittee has met multiple times, developed a short list of buildings to be featured in the first phase of the tour, contacted corresponding building owners, and potential research resources.



TOURISM

Freeport Hotel Rate Occupancy Percentages

Occupancy rates are determined by a seven-day average each week of the three major hotels in Freeport. Country Inn & Suites has been remodeling rooms which has taken some out of service.



Social Media & General Promotion

In addition to the promotion of local events, businesses and developments, the Partnership highlighted initiatives including local celebrations of Black History Month, call for Uber drivers, weekly blogs by Partnership staff, profiles of Partnership board members, Stephenson County She-roses (greaterfreeport.com/sheroes), and the ACE Expo.

MARKETING

2022 Campaigns

Group Tours: Attended the Midwest Marketplace group tour conference in Bloomington, MN to meet with 40 tour operators from across the country who are scheduling trips for 2022 and 2023. There was a great response from tour operators about all we have to offer in Freeport and Stephenson County!

Chicago Avenue Streetscape Campaign: The redevelopment of Chicago Avenue is of great importance to Downtown Freeport and the rest of the county. The Partnership has secured a consultant to help with messaging of the development to build excitement and positive energy for the project with residents, business owners and visitors.

Be A Trailblazer Campaign: Advertisements have been placed in regional and local magazines to promote the trails and outdoor spaces in Stephenson County. The campaign will be featured with a new web page and targeted display advertising encouraging travelers to leave the highway and “Be a Trailblazer” in Stephenson County. Photography and videography assets will be produced as the weather improves.

Come Home Campaign: More than a dozen Stephenson County residents have been identified as “Come Home” ambassadors to be featured in this recruitment campaign. Marketing will be focused on reaching alumni of Stephenson County schools to return to the area for work, family experiences, and affordable living.

1Q Visitor Center Traffic

1,791
VISITORS

\$3,405
SALES

The Stephenson County Visitor Center was reset in February after the close of the Holiday Gift Show to allow for the monthly attraction displays as well as additional space for year-round merchandising of local projects. In March, five additional merchants moved in to sell their goods. Attraction displays included giant chess in February and Women in Stephenson County history in March.



Events

Arctic Ale & Art Walk was held March 5 with 3,469 people in downtown staying longer than 60 minutes.



The first Downtown Winter Mania Punch Card was promoted as a “frequent shopper” program with 28 businesses participating January 14-February 28.



The Partnership is currently planning

- Back Country Roads Concert – April 9
- Pretzel Fest – April 23
- Restaurant Week – April 22-May 1
- Pretzel City Winefest – May 21



STEPHENSON COUNTY
Restaurant Week

