

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY
GROUP OF THE CITY OF HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS**

October 28, 2025

Pre-Session Conference Room – Highland Park City Hall
1707 St. Johns Avenue, Highland Park, Illinois

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Falcon called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Advisors Present: Chair Falcon, Vice Chair Kerch, Advisors Bernstein (Arrived at 6:03 PM), Center, Gimbel, Garber (Arrived at 6:04 PM), and Porte

Advisors Absent:

Staff Present: Business Development Manager Jamie Elder, Business Development Specialist Corey Cohn

Also Present: Councilmember Barisa Meckler-Bruckman and Councilmember and Ex-Officio DeKalo

Members of the Public: None

III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Vice Chair Kerch moved to approve the regular meeting minutes for February. Advisor Center seconded the motion. Voice vote, unanimous.

Advisor Center seconded the motion. Voice vote, unanimous.

Chair Falcon declared that the motion passed.

IV. BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

None

V. NEW BUSINESS

a. **Approve 2026 Meeting Resolutions**

Chair Falcon asked for a motion to approve the 2026 Meeting Resolution. Advisor Center seconded the motion. Chair Falcon declared that the motion passed.

The approved schedule below aligns with BEDAG's current schedule, which is the fourth Tuesday of the month.

- January 27, 2026
- February 24, 2026
- April 28, 2026
- June 23, 2026
- August 25, 2026
- October 27, 2026

b. Approve 2026 Work Plan

Chair Falcon asked for a motion to approve the 2026 Work Plan. Advisor Gimbel seconded the motion. Advisors proceeded with discussion on the plan.

At the August 26, 2025, meeting, Advisors discussed modifications and changes to be made to the 2025 Work Plan for the 2026 year. Those changes were reflected in what was presented to the Advisors at this meeting. Recommendations from the collective included the following:

- Remove the objective to "provide feedback about zoning considerations or sign code," as the comprehensive review of these regulations was successfully completed in previous years with no anticipated projects on the horizon.
- Remove the general task to "promote business incentives to businesses," as this assignment should be integrated into the daily functions of the City's economic development staff, not the advisors who have more limited knowledge of the incentive programs.
- Revise the Update the Business Development Strategic Plan objective to review the completed Business Development Strategic Plan and assist City Staff in identifying progress with an annual report.
- Advisors should contribute feedback to the C.A.R.E.S. program by providing feedback to Staff and relevant stakeholders about businesses that may be struggling or require targeted attention, creating an early warning system to prevent closures.

Additionally, prior to this meeting, Advisors were to evaluate the Work Plan with those suggested changes. The following changes were submitted to staff for consideration and are reflected in the new draft ahead of the Advisory Group:

- Modify Objective 2D to include "Provide feedback on sign and zoning code projects including signage for special events when applicable."
- Modify Objective 3C to include "Advise and engage in dialogue with City representatives on business recruitment and retention efforts. Additionally, Advisors can notify Staff of businesses in need of additional assistance or support."

During the meeting, the Advisors inquired whether the 2026 Work Plan included specific provisions for targeted outreach toward critical businesses and high-sales-tax producers who typically do not participate in public forums. While this sparked a discussion on the importance of engaging these key stakeholders, no formal amendment was introduced. Additionally, the Group requested several refinements to the Work Plan's language, specifically seeking more descriptive copy for Objective 2B regarding the identification of complementary uses for desirable sites and Objective 2F concerning the modernization of commercial spaces.

Regarding the group's operational role, Staff addressed questions about Objective 2E, explaining that the Advisory Group will support the City by gathering feedback on the efficiency of licensing and permitting processes to help inform future policy recommendations. Clarification was also provided on the hosting of business district forums, which will maintain a structure similar to the previous year. A suggestion to modify the purpose and jurisdiction statement to emphasize "engaging in dialogue" was discussed, but the motion failed to proceed as it did not receive a second.

Vice Chair Kerch moved to approve the 2026 Work Plan, incorporating the specified copy edits and clarifications requested by the Advisors during the meeting. The motion was seconded by Advisor Center and passed via a unanimous voice vote.

Chair Falcon officially declared the motion carried, finalizing the adoption of the updated 2026 Work Plan.

c. Presentation 2026-2030 Business Development Core Area (WP 5)

Business Development Manager Elder presented modifications, additions, and deletions for the Business Development Strategic Plan. These changes reflect feedback gathered from business stakeholders during BEDAG forums, business visits, and the City Council Committee of the Whole meeting held on September 8, 2025.

After Business Development Manager Elder's presentation, the Student Advisors inquired about how to incorporate community partners like the Highland Park High School into the Business Development Strategic Plan. Business Development Manager informed the group that Chair Falcon and Staff are making a concentrated effort to work with the District 113 School District and others moving forward.

During the presentation, Advisors raised questions regarding the City's plans for a cost-benefit analysis of streetscape bumpouts in high-traffic pedestrian areas. The conversation then shifted to the C.A.R.E.S. program and its potential to support struggling businesses. Staff explained that the program is in the development phase and will be formalized once the best framework for assistance is identified. The Advisors also requested a deeper dive into market metrics, specifically asking for a comparison between vacancy and absorption rates and how each will serve as a KPI for the Business Development Strategic Plan moving forward.

d. Finalize Nominations for the Business District Liaisons

As part of the proposed 2026 BEDAG Work Plan, the 2026 outreach strategy includes hosting meetings with business stakeholders in business districts. To ensure connectivity both before and after the forum, Chair Falcon has recommended establishing the role of Business District Liaison.

The Business District Liaison's primary function is to serve as the active conduit between the local business community and the City's economic development partners. As a trusted local business owner or stakeholder, the liaison will be responsible for encouraging business stakeholders in their district to attend their business district informational meeting.

Advisors wishing to submit nominations were requested by Staff to complete the survey sent prior to the meeting. Staff will review the suggestions and present them to Assistant City Manager Jason and City Manager Neukirch.

At the time of the meeting, Staff only received a few nominations. Staff better explained the use of these liaisons and asked the advisors to make nominations ahead of the January 28, 2026 meeting.

I. **Other Business**

a. **Staff Report**

Business Development Manager Elder and Business Development Specialist Cohn provided the Advisory Group with a comprehensive update on business activities conducted since the August 26 meeting. Supplemental to the written memo, staff highlighted two key items: an invitation for Advisors to submit nominations for the upcoming Highland Park Awards Ceremony and a notice of a forthcoming Placer.ai data report.

b. **Chairman's Report**

Chair Falcon reported that he, as well as Staff are working with the school district to encourage participation of Highland Park businesses in the school's incubator and entrepreneurial programming. Chair Falcon wants to focus on this collaboration moving forward in 2026.

c. **Highland Park Chamber of Commerce Report**

Chamber President Dekalo presented the Chamber of Commerce Report, highlighting several upcoming initiatives, including the Scholarship programs, Chamber Membership Day, and a newly formed Home-Based Business Cohort. Additionally, she provided updates on recurring programming such as First Wednesday Connections and a schedule of upcoming ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

d. **Advisor Comments**

None.

II. **ADJOURNMENT**

Advisor Bernstein motioned to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Kerch seconded the motion. Voice vote, motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 6:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Corey Cohn, Business Development Specialist

Corey Cohn