

Minutes of Pilot Commission  
Port Freeport  
January 30, 2025

A Special Meeting of the Pilot Commission of Port Freeport was held January 30, 2025, beginning at 12:05 PM at the Port Freeport Administration Building, 1100 Cherry Street, Freeport, Texas.

**This meeting agenda with the agenda packet is posted online at [www.portfreeport.com](http://www.portfreeport.com)**

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Commissioners present in person:

Mr. Ravi Singhania, Commissioner  
Mr. Rob Giesecke, Vice Chairman  
Ms. Barbara Fratila, Secretary/Treasurer  
Mr. Rudy Santos, Commissioner  
Mr. Dan Croft, Commissioner  
Mr. Kim Kincannon, Commissioner

Staff Members present:

Ms. Phyllis Saathoff, Executive Director/CEO  
Mr. Rob Lowe, Chief Financial Officer  
Mr. Chris Hogan, Director of Protective Services  
Mr. Brandon Robertson, Director of Information Technology  
Mr. Jesse Hibbetts, Director of Operations  
Ms. Missy Bevers, Executive Assistant  
Ms. Amy O'Brien, Controller  
Ms. Amanda Veliz, Public Affairs Manager  
Mr. Grady Randle, Legal Counsel

Also, present:

Capt. Ross Coviello, Brazos Pilots Association  
Capt. Daniel Blanton, Brazos Pilots Association  
Capt. Billy Burns, Brazos Pilots Association  
Capt. Sean Kelly, Brazos Pilots Association  
Capt. Matthew Krohn, Brazos Pilots Association  
Capt. Theron Pfeifer  
Capt. Connor Willcox  
Mr. James Nash, WGMA

1. CONVENE OPEN SESSION in accordance with Texas Government Code Section 551.001, et. seq., to review and consider the following:

2. Roll Call.

Commissioner Singhanian noted that all Commissioners were present in the Board Room.

3. Public Comment - There were no comments from the public.

4. Public Testimony - There was no testimony from the public.

5. Approval of minutes from the Special Meeting held October 24, 2024.

A motion was made by Commissioner Santos to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kincannon with all Commissioners present voting in favor of the motion.

6. Receive recommendation from the Brazos Pilots Association for the appointment of Deputy Branch Pilots.

Capt. Coviello stated that with all the growth in the port complex, the need for more personnel to help support the growth is evident. The pilots reviewed approximately 38 deputy pilot applications that have been submitted over the last four years. He noted that all of the Brazos Pilots have United States Coast Guard Unlimited Masters License, which is the highest license to navigate a ship of any tonnage worldwide. The field of applicants was further narrowed down with that baseline requirement to about 25 candidates that met the licensing. The pilots held multiple meet and greets and other settings to get to know some of the candidates and then conducted formal interviews. Two gentlemen rose to the top, impressing the pilots with their backgrounds in the maritime industry, community involvement, personalities and how they would contribute to the overall success of the port complex. The first candidate, Theron Pfeifer, is a Texas A&M Maritime graduate, holds a Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation, holds the United States Coast Guard Unlimited Master's License, is currently a tug captain (tug master) with G&H Towing operating on the same classes of tugboats we have here in Freeport and had experience on the Freeport Channel on some of the tugs supporting the LNG movements. Additionally, he also has large scale offshore oil and gas experience, managing 150 personnel onboard the deepwater drill ships. The second candidate, Connor Willcox, was nominated by Senator John Cornyn to the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Logistics and Intermodal Transportation, holds the United States Coast Guard Unlimited Master's License and is currently a tanker captain which specializes underway replenishment. Capt. Coviello explained that underway replenishment is traditionally done from a military type vessel or an auxiliary vessel that goes to active duty destroyers and combatants. The operation has since been transitioned to civilian tankers, basically a fuel station at sea. Capt. Willcox is a captain of the vessel that pulls up within feet of these Navy destroyers, cruisers, not just U.S., all NATO allies and refuels them at sea in all types of weather conditions. Capt. Coviello stated that should the Commission approve the candidates for the program, the pilots request that the Deputy Pilot certificates be post-dated for February 15 in order to gain full access to the two-year training period and have every single day to make sure they're the best trained well qualified pilots as well as allowing time for the candidates' transition from their current positions, relocation, etc. Capt. Coviello

introduced Capt. Willcox who addressed the Commission thanking them for the opportunity to be a deputy pilot for the port promising to do everything he can to be the best steward possible for Port Freeport. Capt. Pfeifer also thanked the Commission for the opportunity promising to fulfill the duties expected and drive the vessels into the port safely.

7. Review and consider selection of Deputy Branch Pilots for the Ports of Brazoria County.

The Brazos Pilots recommend the selection of Theron Pfeifer and Connor Willcox for the deputy branch pilot program and making the term effective February 15, 2025 - February 15, 2027.

A motion was made by Commissioner Giesecke to approve the selection as recommended. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Santos with all Commissioners present voting in favor of the motion.

8. Receive update from the Channel User Advisory Group.

There was no update from the Channel User Advisory Group.

9. Receive update from the Brazos Pilots Association.

Capt. Coviello reported the dispatch service is operating very well and been well received by all port users noting that at the end of 2024, there are now 260 registered users for the dispatch service. He also noted the system demonstrated resilience through Hurricane Beryl as the pilots were able to stay up and running in a remote location and had zero interruptions during the last freeze event also working from a remote location. Channel dredging is underway and continuing with the current Dredge 58 from Great Lakes working in the jetty channel. The pilots have been coordinating very closely with the dredge to move in and out of the channel to increase their safety margin and also give the dredge some latitude to continue to work as the vessels pass to keep the efficiency and uptime where it needs to be. He stated the dredge still has to complete the Freeport intersection work noting that after Hurricane Beryl, the dredge cleaned out the intersection that shoaled in and then moved into the jetty channel. The intersection is to be completed and will take close coordination between the pilots, the Intercoastal Waterway tug traffic to make sure it's completed safely. He reported the hopper dredges that were supposed to complete the offshore section of the dredging has been pushed back to April and May. Capt. Coviello gave an update on the new pilot boat sharing a current picture of the boat which is under construction at Beaux Bay Craft in Louisiana noting the framing is being completed on the underside of the hull. The name of the boat will be Freeport Pilot with the original Freeport Pilot donated to Texas A&M Galveston for the cadets to use. He also shared a picture of a boat under construction for the Houston Pilots noting the design is what the pilots are shooting for with minor changes to the interior and equipment capabilities. Anticipated arrival is June 2026. The loan balance for the Metal Shark Boat Brazos Pilot at the end of 2024 is \$261,000 with the pilots continuing to put out an average monthly payment of \$35,000. As previously discussed, the pilots plan to pay off the boat and utilize funding to receive the new boat in June of 2026. Capt. Coviello shared a pie chart showing vessels calling the Freeport Harbor Channel by dock. Brazos Harbor has the largest share of vessels at 30%, 16% for LNG, 21% for Phillips 66, 8% for Seaway Enterprise Docks, 24% for VOPAK and 1% at BASF. Next, he shared vessel count data from 2024 with 1215 ships call on Freeport Harbor Channel compared to 1157 in 2023. For the Brazos Harbor there were 366 vessel calls compared to 279 in 2023. BASF is a little down and LNG had a slight marginal uptick with 192

vessels in 2024. Phillips had a small uptick approaching 260 vessels at their terminal while Seaway was down to 92 vessels from 128 the prior year and Vopak slightly down as well. He also shared a chart notating the pilot vessel movements for the harbor that includes the inner harbor and shows the number is up by about 100 movements from 2024 to 2023 from 2337 to 2446. With regard to training, the pilots completed CPR and AED training for the dispatch staff and new deckhands. New deckhands had training to gain their United States Coast Guard Captains License of 100 tons. Captain Krohn and Captain Blanton completed advance ship handling in man models. The pilots also engaged in an exercise with the United States Sector, Houston-Galveston Airship and Air Station who landed at the pilot station and did a full familiarization with the boat cruise on the rescue basket, the rescue swimmer, and safety protocols with lowering personnel in the basket up and down from the vessel. Once training was completed onshore, the pilots went offshore with the Coast Guard dolphin helicopter and completed multiple lifts of baskets and personnel. Capt. Coviello noted it was a very valuable training exercise with the Coast Guard in getting them used to the pilots' operations here. 2025 training includes dispatch leadership training, medical and trauma training in February as well as operational fatigue management training for new and current pilots. Portable pilot units are also on the schedule to train new pilots which is the equipment pilots carry on board so they can set up their own independent navigation equipment. Advanced ship handling man models will take place once the new pilots get some experience on the ship channel and the pilots also do regular continuing training on man overboard search and rescue patterns so they can recover a man out of the water as quickly as possible. Commissioner Singhania stated that with the completion of the channel project later this year, he inquired if the pilots will be doing any simulation on the larger ships to bring into Docks 7 and 8. Capt. Coviello stated the last official study done was for a 960 foot x 106 foot container vessel which was the pre-cursor to the project being completed for the bend easing. The pilots have not been approached about simulations for any other particular size ship to go up to the docks. He added the pilots don't go into the simulator with the largest vessel you can do, rather its usually for a specific project to show the validity of it and they would require that information so they can evaluate the ship handling aspect of it, the safety aspect of passing other vessels on the channel to complete trainings and simulations to be ready for it. Commissioner Singhania also inquired if the simulator at San Jacinto College has been programmed with the new channel. Capt. Coviello stated that he would have to check with George Berkley at Maritime Pilots Institute. Ms. Saathoff noted that as the sections of the channel are accepted by the Corps, its updated. Mr. Hull added that both the college and the consultant confirms when a section has been added. Commissioner Croft inquired about security risk as it relates to computer espionage and what the pilots are doing for mitigation. Capt. Coviello stated the pilots use a third party company that manages the software for e-mail servers and dispatch and has cyber protection protocols weaved into the software. For the dispatch system, they use a company that also provides piloted software to multiple pilot organizations across the country, and who has cyber protection measures in place that work to firewall a backstop so that cyber intruders can't get into the system and wreak havoc adding it's a package that is purchased through the pilot dispatch software and not something they do only in house. With regard to the charts mentioned earlier, Capt. Coviello stated the deputy administrator for NOAA will be here February 10th. The pilots sent in some items to be addressed at the meeting which include updated land mass flyovers, update the electronic chart cells that go into the portable pilot equipment and the navigation charts on the ships to be more condensed Freeport specific cells and lastly, update the dredge box on the navigation chart with the alongside bathymetry for all the terminals. Ms. Saathoff noted the requests were added to the draft agenda to the deputy administrator. With regard to the vessel size stimulations, Commissioner Giesecke inquired about the cost (in dollars) and what a timeline looked like. Capt. Coviello stated that he would refer him to the

Maritime Pilots Institute George Berkley to look at the simulations they've done noting it would be more cost effective utilizing the one at San Jacinto Maritime noting the dollar amount goes up for the more time used for the simulation and the utilization of the simulator, but he doesn't have exact numbers. Mr. Hull stated that with regard to the full channel specifications, his understanding is that the two new container cranes (that are forthcoming) have not been added, lights on the bend easing also need to be added and the old Gottwald crane needs to be removed in addition to other small graphic updates. Mr. Hull estimates approximately \$50,000 to update the simulator to current status. Additionally, there is a fee of \$8000/day for the pilots to use the simulator. Mr. Hull suggested waiting until the as-built surveys have been completed by the Corps which will be toward the end of the year, load that data, confirm it and then make the updates to the charts before doing a simulation on a certain class vessel. Capt. Coviello explained that when performing a simulation, the pilots input the size of vessel in the simulator, for the hydrodynamics, aerodynamics, etc. They first try it under ideal conditions for daylight and nighttime, then ramp up weather parameters with wind, current, etc. Dictate what tug package might be required to move the vessels in and out under those weather conditions, and once all that's established on a certain class of vessel, they deem it to be safe enough and mitigate the risk down to as little as possible, they can move on but understand, there is a lot that goes into it for one class of vessel. He also clarified the pilots volunteer their time to execute the simulations so there is no cost from the pilot perspective. Ms. Saathoff added that once all the design parameters are in, it'll be good to look at what future project the port might need to keep advancing the port and increase its capability for the next channel project but in the meantime, staff has stayed with the design parameters of the channel project as a reference for carriers told them as the port nears the end of the project and had good data, we would begin to further assess.

8. Adjourn.

With no further business before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at 12:51 PM.