



City of Sugar Land

Independent Ethics Review Board Agenda

Sugar Land City Hall
2700 Town Center
Boulevard North
Sugar Land, TX 77479

Wednesday, July 29, 2026
Independent Ethics Review Board Meeting
Cane Room 161
5:00 PM

I. Attention

Members of the City Council, Board and/or Commission may participate in deliberations of posted agenda items through video conferencing means. A quorum of the City Council, Board and/or Commission will be physically present at the above-stated location, and said location is open to the public. Audio/Video of open deliberations will be available for the public to hear/view; and are recorded as per the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The meeting will live stream at <https://youtube.com/live/Ssv1vNCgQwU?feature=share>.

II. Call to Order

III. Public Comment

Pursuant to Texas Government Code section 551.007, citizens are permitted to address the City Council, Board, and/or Commission in person regarding matters posted for consideration or workshop on the agenda. Each speaker must complete a "Request to Speak" form and give it to the City Secretary or designee, prior to the beginning of the meeting.

Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes, speakers requiring a translator will have 6 minutes, regardless of the number of agenda items to be addressed. Comments or discussion by City Council, Board, and/or Commission members, will only be made at the time the subject is scheduled for consideration.

For questions or assistance, please contact the Office of the City Secretary (281) 275-2730.

IV. Minutes

A. MINUTES

Consideration of and action on the minutes of the April 22, 2026, meeting.
Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk

V. Recent Articles of Interest

A. ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Review of and discussion on recent articles of interest.
Krista Stegemiller, Chair

VI. Adjournment

The Independent Ethics Review Board reserves the right, upon motion, to suspend the rules to consider business out of the posted order. In addition to any executive session listed above, the independent ethics review board reserves the right to adjourn into executive session at any time during this meeting for the purpose of consultation with the attorney as authorized by Texas Government Code Sections 551.071 to discuss any of the matters listed above.

If you plan to attend this public meeting and you have a disability that requires special arrangements at the meeting, please contact the City Secretary, (281) 275-2730. Requests for special services must be received 48 hours prior to the meeting time. Reasonable accommodations will be made to assist your needs.

I hereby certify that the above notice was posted on the outside bulletin boards, a place convenient and readily accessible to the general public at all times, City of Sugar Land City Hall, 2700 Town Center Boulevard North, Sugar Land, Fort Bend County, Texas, 77479, and on the [City Website](#) under meeting agendas.

Posted on this 22nd day of July 2026 at 3:00 P.M.



Independent Ethics Review Board Agenda Request

July 29, 2026

Agenda Request No: IV.A.

Agenda of: Independent Ethics Review Board Meeting

Initiated by: Nicole Fontenette, Agenda & Public Meeting Coordinator

Presented by: Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk

Responsible Department: Admin

Agenda Caption:

MINUTES

Consideration of and action on the minutes of the April 22, 2026, meeting.

Recommended Action:

Consideration of and action on the minutes of the April 22, 2026, meeting.

Executive Summary:

Consider the minutes of the April 22, 2026, meeting.

Budget

Expenditure Required: n/a

Current Budget: n/a

Additional Funding: n/a

Funding Source: n/a

Account Number (ORG-OBJ-Project): n/a

Attachments

1. 4.22.26-Independent Ethics Review Board Meeting Minutes



City of Sugar Land

Independent Ethics Review Board Minutes

Sugar Land City Hall
2700 Town Center
Boulevard North
Sugar Land, TX 77479

Wednesday, April 22, 2026
Independent Ethics Review Board Meeting
Minutes
City Council Chamber
5:00 PM

I. Attention

Members of the City Council, Board and/or Commission may participate in deliberations of posted agenda items through video conferencing means. A quorum of the City Council, Board and/or Commission will be physically present at the above-stated location, and said location is open to the public. Audio/Video of open deliberations will be available for the public to hear/view; and are recorded as per the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The meeting will live stream at <https://youtube.com/live/gNC8mz1NeJ4?feature=share>.

II. Call to Order

Krista Stegemiller, Amy Suhl, Andrew Wolf, Chris Crosby, and Doug Earle were present. Sarah Calobrisi arrived at 5:17 p.m. Marc Martinez was absent.

III. Public Comment

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For questions or assistance, please contact the Office of the City Secretary (281) 275-2730.

No members of the public addressed the Board.

IV. Minutes

A. MINUTES

Consideration of and action on the minutes of the January 7, 2026 meeting.

Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk

A motion to **Approve the minutes of the January 7, 2026 meeting**, was made by Chris Crosby and seconded by Doug Earle; the motion **Passed**.

Ayes: Krista Stegemiller, Amy Suhl, Andrew Wolf, Chris Crosby, Doug Earle

Absent: Marc Martinez, Sarah Calobrisi

V. Recent Articles of Interest

A. **ARTICLES OF INTEREST**

Review of and discussion on recent articles of interest.

Krista Stegemiller, Chair

Krista Stegemiller, Chair,, led the discussion. The Board discussed the recent articles that appeared in U.S. newspapers regarding ethics and local governments.

VI. Workshop

A. **PROPOSED REVISIONS TO CODE OF ETHICS**

Review of and discussion on proposed revisions to the Code of Ethics.

Krista Stegemiller, Chair

Krista Stegemiller, Chair, led the discussion. The Board reviewed and discussed proposed revisions to the City of Sugar Land Ethics code.

VII. Adjournment

A motion to **Adjourn at 5:45 p.m.**, was made by Amy Suhl and seconded by Andrew Wolf, the motion **Passed**.

Ayes: Krista Stegemiller, Amy Suhl, Andrew Wolf, Chris Crosby, Doug Earle, Sarah Calobrisi

Absent: Marc Martinez

Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk





LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Ethics experts: Fort Worth mayor should abstain from data center votes, urge transparency

by Cecilia Lenzen
June 24, 2026 6:59 pm



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Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker speaks during an event at the Ridglea Country Club on Oct. 21, 2025. (Maria Crane | Fort Worth Report/CatchLight Local/Report for America)

But the experts all advised that Parker abstain anyway from such decisions, to maintain public trust and avoid the appearance of an ethical conflict of interest as data center developers increasingly seek to do business in Fort Worth and as the city council weighs **regulations** on the supercomputer hubs.

The unusual **absence** of a board or commission to independently review such ethics complaints at City Hall leaves it to Parker and other elected officials to maintain a greater degree of transparency with the public, experts said. Fort Worth is the only large city in Texas without a standing ethics review commission.

“The best thing to do from an ethical perspective would be for her to abstain, which isn’t to mean that she has a conflict of interest directly — but indirectly, there is a conflict here,” said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University.



Parker’s husband, David Parker, is one of six partners at the Austin-based consulting firm Longbow Partners. One of the firm’s clients is the Virginia-based Data Center Coalition, which **lobbies** for data centers by advocating for policies that support their growth and touting their economic benefits to state and local officials.

Responding to a request for comment Wednesday, Parker’s spokesperson referred to the mayor’s **statement** last week: “Let me reiterate again, David Parker has never advocated for or received any compensation from

David Parker also **denied** that his employment poses a conflict of interest for the mayor, maintaining that he has not financially benefited from the coalition or even met with its employees.

The Data Center Coalition does not lobby in Texas and has never been involved with Fort Worth, David Parker said last week. None of the group's data center-operating clients, which include Google and Amazon Web Services, appear to be building or seeking to develop in Fort Worth.

Still, local activists and data center critics have suggested Mayor Parker sit out future city council votes related to data center projects, saying her husband's connection to the coalition could impact her decision-making.

"Even if he doesn't take a penny of lobbying money, he is still a registered lobbyist for data centers, and he's a part of a company that's doing that," Fort Worth resident Michael Raulerson told council members at their June 23 **meeting**. "That should be immediately a red flag for everyone."

The core question in determining if there is a conflict of interest is whether or not it appears that Mayor Parker may be serving her own personal financial interest instead of the public interest, said Kedric Payne, senior director of ethics for the Campaign Legal Center, a Washington, D.C.-based **nonprofit** that advocates for ethical government.

"It is always a priority for a public official to give confidence to the public that their priorities are being served and not any personal financial interest," Payne said. "If the mayor believes that there's no financial interest, yet still recuses (herself) simply to build trust with the constituents, that is a positive thing."



Fort Worth City Council members and Mayor Mattie Parker listen during a work session meeting March 31, 2026. (Maria Crane | Fort Worth Report/CatchLight Local/Report for America)

In recent weeks, some residents have asked the city council to halt or pause data center construction via a moratorium, giving the council and staff time to develop standards to regulate the centers. Those residents join a growing chorus across the state of people pushing back against data centers in their communities.

Fort Worth City Council is scheduled to vote Aug. 11 on zoning **regulations** that would require a minimum of 250 feet between data centers and residential homes, as well as landscaping standards to create more boundaries.

The mayor and council receive guidance from the city attorney's office on when to recuse themselves or disclose potential conflicts of interest. A city spokesperson said last week there was "no known reason" for the mayor or any council member to disclose a legal conflict of interest regarding data centers or recuse themselves from such discussions.

interests.

Although she does not appear legally required to, abstaining from council votes on data centers would likely help Mayor Parker foster public trust while avoiding the appearance of a conflict of interest, said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political science professor at the University of Houston.

“Any kind of public sector activity should maintain a high degree of public trust, and that means that elected officials should avoid any conflict of interests — either real or perceived,” Rottinghaus said.

The ethics scrutiny may also be driven, or at least heightened, Rottinghaus added, because data centers have become “such a political boogeyman in modern politics.”

Jones, the Rice University professor, said the increased scrutiny can lead to added pressure on elected officials when ethics concerns arise, regardless of whether there’s actually an ethics violation.

“Elected officials have to decide for themselves, even if they are not required by law to recuse themselves, from a perspective of fairness and equity, would recusing themselves be the best alternative?” Jones said.

Fort Worth is an **outlier** among top U.S. and Texas cities because it does not have a standing commission that meets regularly to review ethics complaints and compliance with the city ethics code.

The city council **voted** in 2019 to modify city code that mandates the ethics review commission, which had not met since 2012. The commission shrank from five members to one, a city attorney appointed by the council. That position is currently held by Carter Burdette.

City officials should consider reinstating the commission, Rottinghaus said, especially after Fort Worth **claimed** a spot in the country’s most populous 10 cities this year.

“There needs to be a sort of nonpartisan adjudication of these issues, because increasingly politicians can’t be relied upon to act on their own with these issues,” Rottinghaus said.

Today, the ethics review commission only meets after a sworn ethics complaint has been filed, or by direction of the city council or city manager, city secretary Jannette Goodall said via email. When that happens, four

The size and format of ethics review boards and commissions varies across Texas and the country. In Dallas, a 15-member ethics advisory commission meets quarterly to review ethics complaints.

New York City has a Department of Investigation, headed by a commissioner of investigation approved by the city council, that serves as the city government's independent, nonpartisan watchdog.

In Chicago, the third largest U.S. city, a board of ethics is composed of eight full-time employees appointed by the mayor and approved by the city council. The board meets monthly.

The bigger a city's population, the more complicated its politics, Rottinghaus said. Big cities have a heightened need for responsive government when conflicts arise, he added.

In March, the council faced backlash from data center critics because the mayor and eight members, including one who has since stepped down to run for state office, had **accepted** a cumulative \$46,000 in campaign contributions from the CEO of the energy consortium Black Mountain, which is **developing** a data center in Fort Worth. Council members said at the time that the contributions have not influenced their decision-making on the project.

Generally, campaign **donations** do not necessitate a recusal or abstention from city decision-making because Texas law already mandates transparency around donors and caps donation amounts, Payne said. Candidates and elected officials are required to disclose their donors in publicly available campaign finance reports, which lets voters hold their elected representatives accountable, he added.

Still, an ethics commission could bring clarity and guidance to concerns around the campaign donors, as well as potential conflicts such as David Parker's employment, Payne said.

"Major cities typically have an ethics commission for this particular reason," Payne said. "You're going to have complicated situations that come up where clear rules, clear advice and clear enforcement are needed to build public trust in government."

Cecilia Lenzen is a government accountability reporter for the Fort Worth Report. Contact her at cecilia.lenzen@fortworthreport.org.

SCOOP: Liberal city mayor hit with ethics complaint over alleged lavish gifts

By Deirdre Heavey

Published June 03, 2025

Fox News

FIRST ON FOX: A nonpartisan government watchdog filed an ethics complaint against Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser on Tuesday morning.

The complaint by the Foundation for Accountability and Civic Trust (FACT) requests the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability investigate Bowser for allegedly accepting illegal travel and hospitality gifts on high-profile trips to Doha, Qatar, for the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the Masters Golf Tournament in Augusta, Georgia, and trips to Dubai, Las Vegas, Miami and Mar-a-Lago.

"The basic standard for elected officials is honest transparency, which means following all disclosure laws and willingly answering the public's questions. The mayor's unwillingness to provide basic information about numerous high-profile trips is unacceptable," Kendra Arnold, executive director of FACT, shared first with Fox News Digital.

FACT cited WJLA's investigation into missing records from Bowser's prominent trips, in which they discovered Qatar paid Bowser and four staff members \$61,930 to fly to the Middle East in 2023.

SCHUMER MOVES TO BLOCK TRUMP DOJ NOMINEES AS HE SEEKS ANSWERS ON QATARI JET TO DEFENSE DEPARTMENT



Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser speaks at a press conference outside the U.S. Capitol on March 10, 2024. (Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images)

"It is not simply the Qatar trip, but a troubling pattern from Mar-A-Lago to Doha to Augusta National – the District has no record of who paid for these trips or what public purpose they served, if there was one at all," Arnold said. "The ethics rules exist to protect against corruption, and when they are ignored, the public's trust erodes. I urge the Board to investigate and enforce the law without delay."

SANCTUARY CITY MAYORS TO TESTIFY AT HOUSE OVERSIGHT AFTER AG BONDI CUTS THEM OFF FROM FEDERAL FUNDS

While the Middle East trip should have been disclosed in order to be accepted as a legal donation to the District of Columbia, FACT said in the complaint that there is no record of who paid for the trip.

"When questioned by the press, initially the mayor's office said the trip was paid for by the D.C. Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber said that was not true. Then, the mayor's office said the trip was paid for by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. That was also

false," FACT claimed.



Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser speaks at a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington on Monday, March 10, 2025. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

Then, in February 2025, the mayor's office requested the trip's expense breakdown, labeled it an "in-kind donation" and sought a "retroactive donation agreement," despite the two years that passed, according to FACT.

"Yet, unbelievably, it wasn't until a reporter's Freedom of Information Act request in March 2025 that this information was publicly revealed—more specifically that Qatar paid more than \$61,930 for the trip the mayor's office was now attempting to retroactively describe as an 'in-kind donation.' As of May 2025, the District still does not have a record of Qatar paying for Bowser's 2023 trip," according to the complaint.

Again, citing WJLA's investigative reporting, FACT said the District of Columbia has no expense records for several more trips, including to the Masters Golf Tournament in Augusta, Georgia, and trips to Las Vegas, Miami and Mar-a-Lago.



Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser speaks at a press conference after testifying for hours before the D.C. City Council outlining the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget in Washington, D.C., on April 3, 2024. (Craig Hudson for The Washington Post via Getty Images)

FACT accused Bowser of violating a "fundamental ethics principle" that prevents corruption and discourages elected officials from accepting bribes and donations.

Under Washington, D.C., law, government officials cannot accept certain gifts, including trips, lodging and transportation. The law allows donations to the district itself if the government entity "uses the gift or donation to carry out its authorized functions or duties."

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In that case, detailed and accurate records must be available for "audit and public inspection." Those donations to the district must be "recorded and approved before the donation is used."

"Clearly Mayor Bowser's trip to Qatar qualifies as a gift, and one that elected officials are personally prohibited from accepting. Additionally, this gift would not qualify as a donation made to the District because the donation was not recorded and approved

before the donation was used. The District still does not even have a record of it," FACT concluded in the complaint.

Deirdre Heavey is a politics writer for Fox News Digital.

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Three City of Cairo council members — including new mayor — under investigation over ethics complaints

City Attorney William Bass, Jr. confirmed in a statement to WCTV Thursday that the complaints were received from “members of the public”

A City of Cairo board is investigating three council members — including the newly elected mayor — after residents filed ethics complaints about them to the city clerk.

By [Abraiya Ruffin](#), [Jamiya Coleman](#) and [Chasity Maynard](#)

Published: Aug. 21, 2025 at 2:37 PM CDT|Updated: Aug. 21, 2025 at 8:37 PM CDT

CAIRO, Ga. (WCTV) - A City of Cairo board is investigating three council members — including the newly elected mayor — after residents filed ethics complaints about them to the city clerk.

City Attorney William Bass, Jr. confirmed Thursday that Mayor Edgar Robinson, Charles Renaud and Demario Byrden are under investigation. In a statement to WCTV, he said the complaints were filed by “members of the public.”

Robinson and Byrden’s complaints accuse each of them of abusing their power to benefit themselves or someone with whom they are close. Renaud’s complaint accuses him of violating city and possibly state rules on confidentiality.

The city’s new Board of Ethics is responsible for looking into the allegations. Bass Jr. said that the Ethics Board is made up of a member appointed by the mayor, a member appointed by the council and a member appointed by the board itself. The board appointee is required to be a good-standing member of the Georgia Bar.

All three current Ethics Board members are Cairo residents. The most recent mayoral appointee is Howard Cochran and the council chose Margaret Tyson. The Georgia Bar member is David Berschauer.

The city attorney said Thursday that the board would not comment on the complaints.

“The members of the Board of Ethics are dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the review processes and maintaining confidentiality regarding deliberations except to the extent those procedures are public,” Bass Jr. wrote. “They will not comment about individual complaints which appear before them for review.”

Councilman Demario Byrden:

A complaint letter dated August 5 raises concerns that Councilman Demario Byrden abused his power as an elected official.

The notarized letter raises four main allegations:

- Byrden “allegedly used his elected position to secure privileges or advantages for himself or others” in a way that violates the requirement of “impartial service;”
- he allegedly “failed to disclose relevant conflicts of interest prior to participating in discussions or votes that may have benefited himself or associated parties;”
- he allegedly used his position in an “inappropriate” way that would violate rules banning city leaders from receiving “compensation, gifts, or rewards;”
- and he allegedly “used his position to improperly influence or intimidate others.”

The letter requested that the city conduct an investigation in a “transparent manner” and provide the resulting information to the public.

The complaint is not the first public scrutiny Bryden has faced recently. Last month, Bryden publicly acknowledged that [he was fired from his day job](#) with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice.

Councilman Byrden denied the allegations, calling them “baseless” in a statement sent Thursday to WCTV.

“My dismissal from the Department of Juvenile Justice has absolutely nothing to do with my role as a City Councilman. These two positions never overlapped, never conflicted, and any suggestion otherwise is flat-out false.

This is nothing more than a calculated, attack on my character during an election year and an attempt to smear my name and discredit me as Councilman. I will not be intimidated, distracted, or silenced by political games.

For the last 8 years, I have served this community with passion, transparency, and dedication and I will continue to do so. My commitment to the people I represent is stronger than any false narrative or smear campaign. I remain confident that this baseless ethics violation will be dismissed.”

Demario Byrden, District 2 City of Cairo Councilman

Councilman Charles Renaud:

Resident Wilbert Young Jr. wrote in an August 8 letter that Renaud violated city rules and potentially violated Georgia law “concerning the confidentiality of executive session discussions.”

The complaint also included three options of requested action, including “a formal public reprimand, a vote of censure or a request for resignation.”

Young Jr.'s letter referenced a February 24 meeting between the mayor and council.

The letter alleges that Renaud "publicly disclosed information that had been discussed in executive session – information that is lawfully protected and confidential." Additionally, the letter says the disclosure happened "immediately upon returning to open session, and it was made intentionally and without hesitation."

The letter said that other council members reprimanded Renaud after his disclosure, but he was allegedly undeterred.

"Despite being corrected and reminded of his ethical and legal responsibilities, he [Renaud] publicly and unequivocally stated that he intended to continue disclosing executive session information in the future – even when informed that such actions violated City policy and state law," the letter said.

During a Thursday interview, Renaud denied any wrongdoing. He [referenced a fiery March council meeting](#) in which the former mayor stepped down to accept the job as the interim city manager.

"A closed session is meant so that the city can discuss things and negotiate in a closed setting. But after that closed session, that's when it becomes open, and when it became open, I made the motion to hire our city clerk on an interim basis, and it was voted down 2 to 3," he said. "Then there was another motion made to hire the then-mayor as interim city manager, and that passed 3 to 2."

He defended his comments, saying the public has a right to know the information he shared.

"I am required to let the public know what happened with that vote, and what happened was they agreed to pay over \$6,000 more a month and a special election that we did not need to have."

Charles Renaud, District 5 City of Cairo Councilman

Mayor Edgar Robinson:

The complaint against Edgar Robinson is surfacing just two months after he was [named mayor by winning the aforementioned special election](#).

Concerned resident Phyllis Crawford claims in a letter notarized this week that Robinson disobeyed three ordinances that prohibit conflicts of interest, granting "special treatment not available to the public" and "using an official position to benefit family members."

The letter alleges that Robinson appointed his family member, Jerry Cox, to the Ethics Board last week without disclosing the relationship to the public. The letter says that Cox is married to Robinson's first cousin, Ellen Thomas Cox.

"Before the appointment, councilmembers cautioned one another about the risks of naming family members or others with potential conflicts to the Ethics Board. The City Attorney also

addressed the full Council, emphasizing the importance of independence and avoiding even the appearance of bias. A citizen in attendance also referenced a section of the city ordinance intended to prevent this exact type of appointment,” Crawford wrote. “Despite these cautions, the Mayor proceeded.”

The mayor did not disclose his relationship with Cox until a Councilwoman Annette Higdon asked him about it after the meeting concluded, Crawford wrote.

“Without this inquiry, it is doubtful the relationship would have been disclosed,” she wrote.

Cox resigned the next week after the mayor reportedly asked him to step down, but Crawford said that she was also dismayed by how the mayor replaced him.

“Instead of filling the vacancy during a public meeting, the Mayor appointed another person outside of any open session,” she wrote. “This has created the appearance of a “backroom” arrangement, bypassing public discussion and damaging public trust in both the Ethics Board and the process used to assemble.”

Robinson has denied all wrongdoing. In a statement, he wrote that he expects to be cleared of the allegations.

“My appointment of Mr. Cox was an attempt to be fair and just.

He was highly recommended by several citizens. Nothing underhanded nor illegal. Certainly there are no ‘backroom arrangements.’

I have complete faith in the ethics committee in determining right from wrong.”

Edgar Robinson, Mayor of Cairo

What’s next?

The city attorney said that if the board decides a complaint isn’t immediately baseless, they must conduct at least one public hearing with testimony within 60 days of its receipt.

If the Board finds that an ethical violation took place, it can offer two recommendations to the council, according to Bass Jr.: It can recommend the council reprimand a public official or request their resignation.

However, that is where the board’s power ends. It cannot enforce rules or make any officials take any action, according to Bass Jr.

If someone wishes to dispute the board’s findings, the attorney said they can appeal to the Grady County Superior Court.