

# MINUTES

## HOUSTON FIRST CORPORATION

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

November 13, 2025, beginning at 8:00 A.M.

Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, Suite 200

Houston, Texas 77010

HOUSTON FIRST BOARD ROOM

The Board of Directors ("Board") of Houston First Corporation (the "Corporation"), a Texas local corporation created and organized by the City of Houston pursuant to TEX. TRANSP. CODE ANN. §431.101 et seq. and TEX LOC. GOV'T. CODE ANN. §394.001 et seq., held a meeting at Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, Suite 200, Houston, Harris County, Texas 77010 on Thursday, November 13, 2025, commencing at 8:00 a.m.

Written notice of the meeting, including the date, hour, place, and Agenda for the meeting was posted in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act.

- I. **Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order at 8:02 a.m. A quorum was established with the following Board Members in attendance: Jay Zeidman (Chair), Elizabeth Brock, Sofia T. Gonzalez, Nicki Keenan, Shareen Larmond, Wea H. Lee, Dawn Fu-Kuei, Ryan Martin, Roxann Neumann, Bobby Singh, and Council Member Joaquin Martinez (ex-officio).
- II. **Public Comments.** None
- III. **Minutes.** Following a duly seconded motion, the minutes for September 18, 2025, were approved as presented.
- IV. **Presentations, Reports, and Updates.**

A. **Chairman's Remarks**

Jay Zeidman, Chairman, discussed the significance of the Board's work and reviewed priorities for 2026. He highlighted ongoing support of arts organizations in Houston, from major institutions like ballet and opera to smaller community groups, ensuring a diverse and robust arts community. He noted that recent resolution of labor agreements is a positive outcome, reflecting the Corporation's impact on city experiences.

Mr. Zeidman announced an upcoming construction tour of the downtown campus, to be led by John Mooz and Hines team, to discuss project progress and financing details. A mid-December Board meeting, he noted, will be scheduled to further brief members on this project. Mr. Zeidman stated that, to enhance corporate governance for new board members, annual training on ethics and conflict of interest will be organized.

#### B. President & CEO Report

Michael Heckman, President & CEO, highlighted the importance of leadership in delivering quality service and achieving organizational goals. He commended Jacques D'Rovencourt, General Manager of Hilton Americas, for his exemplary leadership and consistent results. He announced that Mr. D'Rovencourt has been recognized by Hilton Worldwide as the General Manager of the Year in the Hilton category for large hotels, an accolade that underscores his impactful contributions.

Mr. Heckman mentioned the upcoming State of the Visitor Economy and reported on the successful hosting of the Michelin awards ceremony in Texas for the second consecutive year, celebrating Houston's culinary achievements. He stated that the Corporation looks forward to future events that showcase Houston's leadership in the hospitality sector.

Nathan Tollett, Sr. Vice President, Sales & Client Services addressed the Sales strategies and opportunities for the Corporation, noting a recent positive trend in short-term meetings after a slower period. He highlighted the importance of conversion rates and year-to-date performance, noting several challenges faced in finalizing contracts with hotel partners.

Emphasizing economic development, Mr. Tollett pointed out that conventions play a crucial role in attracting decision-makers to the city. He also discussed successful strategies and efforts to maintain relationships with clients shifting to different organizations. Personalized visits to potential clients, he said, were initiated to strengthen these relationships and showcase the city's offerings effectively.

Jorge Franz, Sr. Vice President, Tourism & Industry Relations, addressed the importance of maintaining a strong presence in competitive markets which are now investing in areas traditionally not targeted. He briefly mentioned a recent trip where area hotel and companies were able to showcase Houston's offerings to travel professionals. Mr. Franz concluded by expressing optimism about continued growth in the Mexico market and noted the recently celebrated anniversary of EVA Airlines, which continues to provide a vital connection to Houston from Southeast Asia, via Taiwan.

### C. Convention District Update

John Mooz, Senior Managing Director at Hines, provided the Convention District Construction Update. He reported strong progress, with significant milestones achieved by September. He noted successful completion of major excavation and foundation activities, including deep pier drilling, site excavation, and placement of garage and Convention Center foundations. Coordination with neighboring stakeholders was emphasized by Mr. Mooz, particularly regarding utility and sanitary sewer line work.

Mr. Mooz reported that structural analysis and installation of vertical framing, fire protection, and exterior enclosure systems are complete. He added that garage construction has advanced substantially, with vertical foundations underway, as well as continued excavation supporting tunnel activation and ramp demolition near the Convention Center. He concluded by saying that that while some work elements are not highly visible, they are critical to the project.

Michaël Heckman, President & CEO, highlighted that work of the design and emphasized the positive feedback received on the design, with a focus on aesthetic appeal and functionality.

### D. Financing Plan Update

Mr. Heckman provided an update on financing efforts, noting that staff and financial advisors have advanced work since the last presentation and finalized next steps.

Drew Masterson, with Masterson Advisors LLC, noted the financing is currently in the documentation phase, with legal counsel completing preparation of the official statement and related disclosures materials. He emphasized the extensive work required to present the full story of the project, and the City of Houston, including all legal and financial aspects. All items remain on schedule, according to Mr. Masterson, with anticipated City Council approval as part of a two-step process, after which the financing will proceed.

Frank Wilson, Chief Financial Officer, stated that while financing is necessary, the proposed structure prioritizes favorability and innovation and is guided by the key objectives of supportability, ensuring the ability to service the debt; flexibility, to manage potential economic downturns; and access to capital under varying conditions. He noted that the team has worked collaboratively and cohesively to align all components of the financing strategy with these objectives.

Mr. Heckman provided an update on the construction funding. He emphasized the importance of Board oversight regarding expenditures.

He addressed the ongoing dynamics of pricing and finalizing the drawings, noting that the approval of smaller increments of spending authority, which he referred to as task orders, allows for adjustments in scope without exceeding the initial spending limits.

Mr. Heckman projected that the Board would approve a guaranteed maximum price later next year and requested that additional spending authority be considered in the interim to maintain project timelines.

## **V. Board Business**

### **A. Consideration and possible approval of a resolution electing and appointing the Officers of the Corporation.**

Paula Whitten-Doolin reported on the annual election and appointment of corporate officers, stating that the Bylaws require reappointment each year. Ms. Whitten-Doolin requested Board approval to reappoint the same slate of officers as last year: Mr. Heckman as President & CEO, Mr. Wilson as Treasurer, and herself as Secretary and Investment Officer.

Following a duly seconded motion, the Board approved the item unanimously.

### **B. Consideration and possible approval of a resolution approving the CY 2026 Corporation Budget.**

Elizabeth Brock Chair of the Finance and Asset Management Committee stated this item was discussed at its meeting on November 10, 2025, and said that a detailed analysis of the corporate strategy and an overview of major elements factoring into the 2026 budget was presented. After review, according to Ms. Brock, the Committee unanimously recommended this item for approval by the Board.

Mr. Heckman discussed the Corporation budget and strategic outlook for the upcoming year, emphasizing a successful year despite economic challenges. He noted the importance of managing expenses and highlighted strong hotel performance. Looking ahead, he identified key upcoming sporting events as opportunities for growth.

He emphasized the need to align resources with the Corporation's mission and the importance of strategic priorities, including enhancing the visitor experience and advancing the development of the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Mr. Heckman stressed the significance of brand synergy and the importance of promoting Houston positively and the local film industry.

Holly Clapham, Chief Marketing Officer, outlined the strategy to maintain a strong national and international presence through integrated media. According to Ms. Clapham, this approach includes advertising, earned media, social campaigns, storytelling, and influencer marketing. Ms. Clapham emphasized the importance of familiarization tours and the resulting creation of original content pieces to promote Houston. She explained that current campaigns focus on generating hotel bookings and noted a strategic shift towards the luxury market, leveraging events to attract different audience segments.

Nathan Tollett, Sr. Vice President, Sales & Client Services emphasized the importance of relationships and experiences in the Sales strategy and highlighted the need for effective messaging to accurately reflect the excitement surrounding new developments. Feedback from visitors, according to Mr. Tollett, has praised improvements in walkability, signage, and overall navigation of the campus.

Mr. Tollett discussed upcoming events and noted the potential for new opportunities in attracting previously untapped market segments, like for-profit trade shows, due to expanded space.

Mr. Tollett stressed the importance of attracting high-value business, especially in sectors such as engineering, technology, and healthcare, while also focusing on summer business to stabilize revenue. Additionally, Mr. Tollett mentioned initiative events to create personal engagements within key markets, reflecting the Corporation's commitment to community connections.

John Gonzalez, Sr. Vice President & General Manager presented an overview of the Corporation facilities and the commitment to enhancing customer experiences. He emphasized the focus on personalization, exclusivity, and attention to detail, implemented through an initiative that empowers staff to deliver memorable experiences.

Mr. Gonzalez highlighted the successful hosting of a recent event and briefly discussed plans for customer service training to ensure consistent high-quality experiences.

Jorge Franz, Sr. Vice President, Tourism and Industry Relations discussed initiatives aimed at enhancing hospitality and visitor experiences, announcing the addition of participants to the hospitality ambassador program. This program, according to Mr. Franz, focuses on training frontline staff to promote the city effectively. He also noted the importance of local industry events to encourage networking and collaboration within the hospitality sector.

Mr. Franz briefly outlined efforts to boost domestic luxury travel by partnering with organizers to market Houston's luxury hotels and unique experiences. He emphasized collaboration with the leisure travel trade in Mexico to facilitate

easy bookings for attractions and educate travel professionals on selling Houston as a premier destination through online training.

Frank Wilson, Chief Financial Officer, provided an overview of the budget design and funding strategy for the upcoming fiscal year, forecasting a strong performance in revenues with operating revenues exceeding expectations and effective expense management. He noted that non-operating expenses are projected to be significantly under budget, with key revenue drivers including parking performance and food and beverage sales.

Mr. Wilson highlighted the importance of adapting to economic conditions, projecting moderate revenue growth amidst inflation and potential economic uncertainty. The performance of the hospitality sector and the anticipated increase in major events, particularly with upcoming sports events, were also emphasized by Mr. Wilson.

According to Mr. Wilson, the budget for the next fiscal year includes projections for total revenues to exceed expenses, focusing on increased hotel occupancy and facility rental income. Mr. Wilson discussed the importance of managing operational expenses and maintaining consistency across services, along with necessary investments in workforce development and marketing to enhance Houston's visibility as a premier destination. Overall, Mr. Wilson stressed the focus on strategic funding allocation to support growth initiatives while ensuring fiscal responsibility.

Following a duly seconded motion, the Board approved this item unanimously.

C. Consideration and possible approval of a resolution approving GMP Change Orders with Gilbane Building Company and Flintco, LLC, a joint venture, for ongoing construction work in the Convention District.

Elizabeth Brock, Chair of the Finance and Asset Management Committee stated this item was discussed at its meeting on November 10, 2025, and explained that it relates to construction spending with the joint venture building companies on the convention center project. As was described to the Committee, according to Ms. Brock, this item authorizes additional scope and spending authority for the next phase of work to stay on schedule.

Paula Whitten-Doolin, General Counsel, briefly outlined the need for additional scope under the Gilbane contract. She explained that this request seeks an additional amount to address various essentials and construction-related issues, including key elements like the multipurpose hall. Ms. Whitten-Doolin highlighted that the steel mill order for this portion requires prompt approval to facilitate timely spending, thereby resulting in the request for the necessary enhancements.

Mr. Mooz emphasized the strategy of providing the development in manageable segments, discussing the next phase of construction for the specific trays outlined. He noted the team's diligent collaboration over the past two-and-a-half months on the design development drawings, allowing for risk mitigation on behalf of the owner. Mr. Mooz reiterated the importance of timely steel orders, as foundations will be ready to receive the steel.

Following a duly seconded motion, the Board approved the item unanimously.

D. Consideration and possible approval of a resolution approving certain spending authority in connection with hosting the 2026, 2027, and 2028 National Cheerleading Association (NCA) All Star Championships in Houston.

Elizabeth Brock, Chair of the Finance and Asset Management Committee, stated this item was discussed at its meeting on November 10, 2025, and that this resolution enables spending in connection with securing a very lucrative piece of business for the next three years. Ms. Brock explained that the Committee heard about the potential impact of the events and reimbursement through the State Events Trust Fund.

Ms. Whitten-Doolin expressed enthusiasm about securing a significant series of events expected to attract thousands of attendees and have a substantial impact on the city. She outlined specific incentives and requested authorization to allocate funds necessary to support these incentives over three years.

Mr. Tollett discussed the impact of securing hotel contracts, highlighting their role in enhancing brand awareness and supporting local partners, especially as they prepare for upcoming events with significant attendance.

He emphasized the competitive landscape faced and expressed excitement about being awarded the event pending Board resolution. Mr. Tollett mentioned ongoing efforts to secure future business, stressing the importance of maintaining a robust pipeline of events. He highlighted the potential economic impact of such events on the local community and expressed optimism about upcoming opportunities.

Following a duly seconded motion, the Board approved this item unanimously.

**VI. Adjourn.** The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.