

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA  
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

The Council of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana, met in regular session in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse in Covert, Louisiana on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, at 6:17 p.m., following the public hearing.

On roll call, the following were recorded present: Council Members Alvin St. Pierre, Jr., Jason Amato, Ryan Louque, Mason Bland, Clyde Cooper, Donald Nash, and Chairwoman Vondra Etienne-Steib.

Those also in attendance were Linda Hubbell, Council Secretary; Peter Dufresne, Parish President; Ingrid Bergeron, Human Resources Director; Eric Deroche, Emergency Preparedness Director; Felix Boughton, Finance Director; Rick Webre, Operations Director, and Adam Koenig, Legal Advisor. Special Counsel, Marty Maley was also in attendance.

The Honorable Vondra Etienne-Steib, Chairwoman, duly convened the Council of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana, and stated that the Council was ready for the transaction of business.

Councilman Amato offered the invocation and Councilman Cooper led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES**

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Amato the minutes of the January 18, 2023 public hearing were approved as distributed, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

On a motion offered by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Louque, the minutes of the January 18, 2023 regular meeting were approved as distributed, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

President Dufresne presented this report to the Council:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Good evening, everyone.

- I would like to start off my report by mentioning that today is the start of Black History Month, also known as African American History Month. This has been celebrated officially every year since 1976 when President Gerald Ford officially recognized it, however its roots go back as far as 1915. Black History Month is an opportunity to recognize achievements by African Americans and to celebrate their central role in U.S. history.
- The Operations Department submitted a final document for the first round of the water sector grant and we have been awarded \$2.1 million dollars. Funding will be used to install automated gas and water metering system and to rehab all of the above ground storage tanks in St James Parish water infrastructure.
- St James Parish crews will be completing two much needed projects on the West Bank of the parish, – La 642 Drainage project, and the Spruce St Drainage project. Immediately upon completion our drainage crews will enter the canals to continue clearing hurricane debris from the Vacherie Canal towards Lake Des Allemands, portions of Coteau Canal, Lasseigne, and all of the Brazen canal. St James crews will then move to the East Bank and clear debris from the Bourbon and M-2 canals.
- Sunday night, an unauthorized and unidentified person entered the weir pumping station and was able to activate the electrical system and open the weir flood gate. This caused an increased level in the Vacherie Canal Water Shed, and allowed water to enter the road rehabilitation project on the end of Ellis Street. Because of our electronic monitoring system that we installed at the weir where our workers can monitor remotely, the issue was quickly noticed, identified, and resolved.
- Waste Management's new trucks should be implemented in March. If there are still any residents with unresolved issues such as additional cans, we will assist in communicating with Waste Management.
- On yesterday, Operation Director Rick Webre and I, along with Crescent Engineering, met with Commissioner Jay Dardenne of Facility Planning to discuss our current Capital Outlay projects. Everything seems to be on track and all funding mechanisms are on schedule.
- I, along with Chairwoman Etienne-Steib, Councilman Jason Amato, Councilman Shark St. Pierre, and Councilman Ryan Louque attended several meetings in Washington last week. We were able to meet with many members of our Washington Delegation and advocated for continued funding and support of the Westshore Levee Project, and other projects crucial to making progress in St James Parish. Mayor of Lutch Patrick St. Pierre and several Lutch Alderman were also in attendance, and we partnered with them to request funding for their town. We are aiding them as they seek funding to reduce flooding on King St. in Lutch, one of two entrances into the town which has flooded on many occasions.
- We also partnered with the Port of South Louisiana, St John Parish, and St. Charles Parish to host the River Region Economic Development Initiative Breakfast. This breakfast helps to promote development in our region, and brings over 200 businessmen, industry executives, state officials, parish leaders and economic development groups together to promote progress in our region.
- We received \$78,314.00 from FEMA for our COVID expenses that were not covered by the American Recovery Act. This was an 100% reimbursement with no match, and it paid for items to get our transit service back in operation during COVID, putting screens and petitions up so the Department of Human Resources could see clients again in their office, printing of information, and deep cleaning and sanitizing of parish buildings, as well as the access control on the entry doors of the courthouse, so we could reopen and screen people as they entered the building.
- With the new merger of the fire departments, a fire chief has been selected by the board of directors. The new fire chief is DeVon Jackson.
- The St James Parish High School Tree Planting Initiative for Arbor Day a huge success. This was a wonderful event, as oak trees and magnolia trees were planted, creating a new legacy for students at St. James Hight. My mom graduated from St James back in 1957, and I was proud to be able to plant the tree that represented her class.

- St. James Council on Aging (COA) received a total of \$550,000.00 in financial assistance from Capital Area United Way (CAUW) to support St. James Parish following Hurricane Ida. The breakdown of the funds included a \$50,000.00 award to support the immediate housing needs for displaced residents, while \$500,000.00 was awarded to support the Long-Term Recovery efforts.
- Capital Area United Way wanted a large portion, approximately half of the allocation of the funds, to support staff salaries to perform the work. However, the COA Board agreed to put all financial resources directly into the community recovery efforts. No residents received direct payment of funds.
- The funds were used to assist residents with, temporary sheltering, debris removal and cleanup through dumpster program, furniture replacement for those who had to relocate, which includes individuals who were renters, emergency assistance, and finally home repairs. As to date, of the 496 applications received, 373 applicants have been served through one or more of the service options. 87 applicants have not completed the application process.
- The Hurricane Ida program has now entered into the final stages of recovery and is working through the home repair applications to provide direct assistance and/or referrals to outside agencies, including the RESTORE and FEMA programs.
- As of today's date the following expenditures are reported.
  - Total: 496 applicants/373 served.
  - Total expenditures: \$446,198.38
  - Total remaining expenditures: \$103,801.62
- For more information regarding the Hurricane Ida program and additional questions, please contact the department of Human Resources Director, Ms. Ingrid Bergeron.
- The Department of human Resources has several upcoming events.
  - DHR Elderly Program will be hosting its annual Senior Carnival on February 9th at Rose's Catering from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm.
  - St. James Arc will participate with St. Charles Parish ARC and St. Charles Parish Recreation at their Mardi Gras Ball on February 17th from 10:00am - 1:00pm.
  - DHR will host its quarterly commodity distribution on February 27 and February 28th. Applicants can begin pre-registering by calling (225) 562-2447.
  - LIHEAP call in will be scheduled for Monday, February 6, 2023, starting at 8:30am. If residents called in during the January call in, please do not call in for this round. Residents will only be eligible for one benefit per year. Call in number is 225-562-2201.
  - DHR will be assisting through Capital Area United Way Volunteer Income tax assistance (VITA) tax preparation for residents with incomes less than 50,000 per year, starting February 13th. Please contact DHR for more information at 225-315-9639.
- We were just informed today that the 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit court of appeals overturned a local court ruling involving the 5<sup>th</sup> district recreation building. The ruling allows a surety bond to be considered as part of the lawsuit, which means the Parish will be in a much better position to recover damages as a result of past performance. As we learn more details, I will continue to update the Council.
- As a result of today's meeting in New Orleans, CPRA and USACE expect to sign the cost sharing agreement this week for the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Resiliency study that will look for opportunities to improve the resiliency of hurricane and storm damage risk reduction in St. James Parish.
- St. James Parish and USACE will work together to optimize the use of State funds the Parish has received to pursue the "West Shore Connector Levee" and Federal study funds by sharing data and knowledge to progress both efforts.
- Going forward the existence of St. James Parish's "West Shore Connector Levee" effort will be considered by USACE when developing alternatives for the Federal resiliency study.
- St. James Parish and USACE will work together to preserve St. James Parish and the State of Louisiana's ability to request credit towards their project cost share if portions of "West Shore Project" as this becomes part of the Federal project in the future.

This concludes my report. God bless everyone here tonight, and God bless your families.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No comments were received from the Public.

Chairwoman Etienne-Steib said she sat on the redistricting committee, and as an African American she took all of the comments seriously and look into it. She read an email she and Josh had in regard to District 4. It stated that the demographics in District 4 had already shifted so the District is no longer a minority district prior to this redistricting. She said so back in 2010 District 4 has already lost its minority majority status. She said she had been doing her research trying to make sure they are fair and equitable. She said she and the council have no control over whether or not the people did the census. She said she requested different alignments to see how it would impact the 4th District and according to the demographics he came up, the 4<sup>th</sup> district is 54.7% white and 41.9% black, and said it didn't happen in the 2020 census, it had been this way since at least 2010.

#### **PRESENTATIONS** – None

#### **APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS** – None

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

Update of drainage study for Forrestal Street to Pool Lane – Councilman Nash inquired about cleaning of Coteau Canal and how it would affect Pool Street. Mr. Webre said Pool Lane will be added to the next round of the road rehab.

**ORDINANCE 23-01, AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH AND DEFINE THE ST. JAMES PARISH VISIBLE PRECINCT BOUNDARIES AND POLLING LOCATIONS**, having undergone the hearing process, was offered

and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, the ordinance was adopted.

**ORDINANCE 23-02, AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH AND DEFINE THE ST. JAMES PARISH COUNCIL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES**, having undergone the hearing process, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and was seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the ordinance was adopted.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

**RESOLUTION 23-16, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE FEBRUARY 3, 2023 PAYROLL**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-17, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS TO PAY PENDING CURRENT INVOICES AND PAYABLES**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-18, A RESOLUTION ACKNOWLEDGING JANUARY 26, 2023 AS KAWASAKI DISEASE AWARENESS DAY IN ST. JAMES PARISH**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre. Councilman Louque offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-19, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING CHANGE ORDER #1 FROM LA CONTRACTING ENTERPRISE, LLC FOR THE BUDDY WHITNEY CANAL DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-20, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH J. P. CAVALIER CONSTRUCTION FOR THE CONVENT COURTHOUSE COUNCIL CHAMBER RENOVATION PROJECT**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman St. Pierre. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**INTRODUCTION OF PROPOSED ORDINANCE 23-03 , AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 26, CIVIC AND CULTURAL FACILITIES AND AFFAIRS TO REPEAL SECTION 26-1 - PARISH RECEPTION HALL; USER FEES ESTABLISHED; TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR USE; REPEAL SECTION 26-2 – ST. JAMES PARISH WELCOME CENTER PAVILION AND GROUNDS; USER FEE ESTABLISHED; TERM AND CONDITIONS FOR USE; REPEAL SECTION 26-4 – CONVENT COMMUNITY CENTER, AND TO AMEND CHAPTER 74, OFFENSES AND MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS, TO REPEAL SECTION 74-3 - RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE USE OF RECREATIONAL PARKS AND TO REPEAL RESOLUTION 10-70, RELATING TO DISTRICT 6 PARK RENTAL, AND TO CREATE CHAPTER 27, ST. JAMES PARISH RECREATION PARKS AND FACILITIES, SECTION 1, RULES AND REGULATIONS**, was introduced on a motion offered by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, the ordinance was accepted and ordered filed with the Secretary for public inspection and publication of Notice of Public Hearing, which was scheduled for 6:00 p.m., on Wednesday, February 15, 2023, in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse Annex in Vacherie and on Wednesday, March 1, 2023 in the Council Chambers in Convent.

#### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**RICK WEBRE** – met with Material Resources, Crescent Engineering and are starting to hammer out the next round of rehab streets for the Parish.

#### **COUNCIL MEMBER'S REPORT**

**COUNCILMAN ST. PIERRE** – Councilman St. Pierre said he received contact information from a AT&T representative while in Washington. He thanked Flo, with Entergy, for assisting with an issue in his District and he thanked Ms. Bergeron and her staff for assisting a resident in his District.

**COUNCILMAN AMATO** – Councilman Amato wished Happy Birthday to President Dufresne. He acknowledged Fire Chief Devon Jackson and recognized Mr. Sean O'Conner, Assistant Chief and President Damien Laiche. He said today was monumental, meeting with Corps., adding he appreciated everyone's contributions and leadership.

**COUNCILMAN LOUQUE** – Councilman Louque thanked Eric for taking the initiative and taking that effort and getting it done. He then provided a history of the fire system and how it needed to move forward.

**COUNCILMAN BLAND** – Councilman Bland inquired if anyone was able to get in contact with the RN Rail representative. He said they received the State's approval to proceed with the bathroom for the District 4 park on Central Crossing Street.

**COUNCILMAN COOPER** – Councilman Cooper requested a condolence letter to the family of Irma Jones Taylor. He said the confusion with the precincts in his District had been straightened out, it was a misunderstanding. He acknowledged Black History Month and said he is proud that his father, Mr. Oliver Cooper, Sr., was the first African American to be elected in 1968.

**COUNCILMAN NASH** – Councilman Nash asked if anything could be done where the water settles on the back part of the street where they are doing the asphalt. He questioned if security can be placed at the weir.

**CHAIRWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB** – Chairwoman Etienne-Steib requested a status of the cameras/lights at the Magnolia Park area. Mr. Deroche said the recurring costs are about \$10,000-12,000 a year. She asked him to explore alternatives.

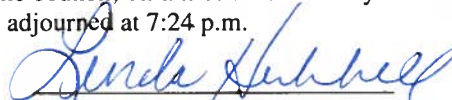
An **EXECUTIVE SESSION** convened at 7:06 p.m., on a motion offered by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried. Members of the Council, President Dufresne, along with Mr. Marty Maley withdrew to an adjoining chamber to receive a status report from special counsel concerning:

1. State Of Louisiana vs Timothy Roussel, Docket No. 8336, Div., Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana
2. State of Louisiana vs Blaise Gravois, Docket No. 8479, Div., Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana
3. Timothy Roussel vs Berkely Insurance Company, Civil Action No.: 2:20-cv-03154 Section: T, United States District Court Eastern District of Louisiana
4. Blaise Gravois vs Berkely Insurance Company, Civil Action No.: 2:20-cv-02981 Section: T, United States District Court Eastern District of Louisiana
5. St. James Parish Government vs Millennium Galvanizing, LLC, Docket No. 41179, Div.: "B", 23rd Judicial District Court, Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana

All returned at 7:24 p.m. Chairwoman stated that no action was taken.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Cooper and carried, the meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

  
Linda Hubbell, Secretary