

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA  
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2020**

The Council of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana, met in regular session in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse in Convent, Louisiana, on Wednesday, September 16, 2020, at 6:30 p.m.

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

Those also in attendance were: Linda Hubbell, Secretary; Peter Dufresne, Parish President; Felix Boughton, Finance Director; Richard Webre, Operations Director; Ingrid Leblanc, Human Resources Director; Eric Deroche, Emergency Preparedness Director; and Cody Martin, Legal Advisor.

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

The Honorable Alvin St. Pierre, Chairman, 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.

**MINUTES**

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash, the minutes of the September 2, 2020 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:

- We dodged a bullet with this storm. We had minimal impacts here. Thanks to our EOC Department for continuously monitoring the storm and keeping everyone abreast as to the forecast and the storms track...they are good at what they do and I want to thank them again.
- Mother nature is always unpredictable, so it is always best practice to have a plan in place and have supplies on hand in the case of sudden forecast or track changes. We learned with this storm just how quickly a track can change. If ever an evacuation order is issued, that is not the time to start planning, that's the time to start driving.
- Thank you to our operations crews for working through the weekend getting us prepared.
- Residential garbage service – not expecting any interruptions this week.
- There was a scheduled Water Shut Off and Boil Water Advisory for today for the residents on Water Tower Street to Burnside Street in Convent. Our utilities department had to make repairs to the water line and the water was shut off at 8:00 a.m. while these repairs were made. Water is restored, a boil water advisory will be in effect until notified by the state.
- Our offices, local and state representatives, and Entergy representatives met last week to discuss and attempt to resolve recent, numerous power outages affecting Paulina residents. Entergy has committed to resolving these issues as soon as possible, and we look forward to meeting with them in the near future to confirm these outages are fixed.
- I spoke to St. James Parish Hospital yesterday. They encouraged me to stress the importance of getting your flu shot this season, as fighting the flu and COVID together could be dangerous. The hospital's annual Flu Shot Fair begins this Thursday, September 17th. This year's event is by-appointment only and will be held in St. James Urgent Care located inside of the medical plaza next to the hospital. Vaccines will be offered every Thursday through Monday during urgent care hours. To schedule an appointment, call 225.258.2040.
- As we are all aware, the Governor moved us into Phase 3 last Friday. Public gatherings have now increased from 50 to 250 people or 50% of the building capacity. For now, bars here, in the Parish, are to remain closed. Based on the state's requirements, only five parishes were allowed to open their bars and unfortunately, we were not one of them. The criteria on reopening is based on 5% or less positivity rate for two consecutive weeks. Believe me, I want everything wide open in St. James Parish as quickly as we can, but we can't overstep the CDC guidelines. As soon as we fall within the guidelines, we will allow all bars to open. The guidelines still require individuals to wear a mask and practice social distancing. I reached out to our other public officials and we collectively decided to open the courthouse buildings and other government offices to the public yesterday.
- Phase 3 also allowed our School System to make the decision to resume 5-days a week beginning October 14<sup>th</sup>.
- Please remember to take the 2020 census. September 30<sup>th</sup> is the deadline to get our parish properly counted.
- The Soccer League registration is complete, and they are now in the process of drafting teams. Games are scheduled to begin Saturday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> at Gramercy Park.

Councilman Bland commented that they haven't experienced any power outages in the Paulina/Hester region since they bypassed the faulty equipment. He then said, speaking about bars, that he is getting conflicting information. If you look at the updated map that was posted today, we are one of the five parishes. President Dufresne said he doesn't think we have been less than five for two consecutive weeks.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** -.

David Mitchell, from the Advocate, stated that you need to look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> map, the positivity map, on the LDH dashboard.

**PRESENTATIONS**

Corrine Van Dalen, Earthjustice Staff Attorney gave a response to FG LA LLC's letter regarding RISE St. James and Louisiana Bucket Brigade's requested that the parish rescind its land use approval for Formosa's planned 14-plant chemical complex. A letter that provided additional details related to the presentation was given to the council members.

Chairman St. Pierre read the following statement

*The issues Earthjustice is talking about goes back to their letter of December 2019 asking us to rescind Formosa's land use approval. Formosa responded to that letter in January 2020. The new letter Earthjustice sent to the council is a rebuttal to Formosa's position. We only received it yesterday, but it should be looked into. The letter and attached materials contain a lot of information and technical points that we need to understand with the help of the administration and our advisors.*

**CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED** - None

**APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

Councilman Cooper offered and moved for adoption **RESOLUTION 20-193, A RESOLUTION APPOINTING CHERISH JASMIN AS A DISTRICT 5 REPRESENTATIVE TO THE KEEP ST. JAMES PARISH BEAUTIFUL BOARD.** Councilwoman Etienne-Steib offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

**RESOLUTION 20-194, A RESOLUTION REAPPOINTING JOELLYN HEBERT AS A DISTRICT 1 REPRESENTATIVE TO THE ST. JAMES PARISH PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato. Councilman Bland offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

**OLD BUSINESS**

- District 5 Alternate Access Route – no new update. Will schedule meeting with the Parish Administration and State Officials to move forward.
- North Vacherie Railroad Culvert Upgrade Project Status – One project has been done on N. Bank Street. With that project complete the other project may not have to be done.
- Acquisition of Land for Multipurpose Building Update – A meeting with the hospital will be scheduled to discuss a path to move forward. The building plans are in the design stage, so we can add our needs and desires, and can make adjustments. President Dufresne said that they feel like they can get a much nicer facility by joining together and enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the hospital instead of trying to do two separate projects on the same piece of property.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**RESOLUTION 20-195, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE SEPTEMBER 18, 2020 PAYROLL,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Cooper and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 20-196, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS TO PAY PENDING CURRENT INVOICES AND PAYABLES,** 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 20-197, A RESOLUTION CHANGING THE NOVEMBER 11, 2020 MEETING OF THE ST. JAMES PARISH COUNCIL TO NOVEMBER 10, 2020,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Louque and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, and the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 20-198, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH NATIONAL CORROSION SERVICE, INC. FOR GAS SYSTEM CONSULTING AND OPERATOR QUALIFICATION TRAINING,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, and the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 20-199, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO ACCEPT THE TERMS AND AGREEMENT FOR THE PURCHASE OF DOTD VEHICLES FOR THE OPERATION OF TRANSIT SERVICES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, CAA,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous roll call vote, and the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 20-200, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING ST. JAMES PARISH TO ENTER INTO AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT WITH THE ST. JAMES PARISH SCHOOL BOARD, TOWN OF LUTCHER, AND PONTCHARTRAIN LEVEE DISTRICT REGARDING THE BUDDY WHITNEY DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT,** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, and the resolution was adopted.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

An EXECUTIVE SESSION convened at 7:10 p.m., on a motion offered by Councilman Louque and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried. Members of the Council, President Dufresne, Cody Martin, and Steve Nosacka withdrew to an adjoining chamber for a discussion of the Industrial Tax Exemption Program, including related legal counsel opinions and communications that are privileged under La. Code of Evid. 506(B). All returned at 7:39 p.m., and the regular session reconvened. Chairman St. Pierre informed everyone that no decisions were made.

At this time Chairman St. Pierre requested a motion to amend the agenda to allow a comment period for the Council Members and Directors. Councilman Amato offered a motion, and Councilman Louque seconded. No public comments were received. After a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**FELIX BOUGHTON** – Reminded the council that the deadline to submit your Capital Improvements is a week from Friday. He stated, regarding payroll, that they used this storm as a gauge, and had it all complete Monday afternoon.

**RICK WEBRE** – Working with Felix on the Capital Outlay and is looking at a 3-year program projects. A list of projects will be provided at the next meeting for your help in prioritizing.

**INGRID LEBLANC** – Have been getting inquiries about why the Senior Centers are not open in Phase 3. They will be opened once we are in Phase 4, per the State's Office of Elderly Affairs. The ARC will remain closed until the Department of Health and Hospital gives the go-ahead to reopen. We have been getting inquiries about services such as helping with light poles, Entergy, and Hoot systems. We are working diligently to trying to get funding for those services. Mrs. Leblanc stated that a lot of our resources are geared toward our census. She said the money we get from grants, etc. all comes from the numbers from the census. Councilman Bland thanked Mrs. Leblanc and her team for working with a resident who was displaced due to a fallen tree.

**ERIC DEROCHE** – The last couple of weeks we were very busy with storms and misses, adding we are fortunate with Sally, it was a great exercise. We are still communicating with Beauregard Parish. They are coming along well but still have a long road ahead of them.

### **COUNCIL MEMBERS REPORT**

**COUNCILMAN AMATO** – Thanked the Administration and the Council for their approval of the IGA for the school side drainage project. The Festival of the Bonfires is working on a statement and will pass it by President Dufresne and Amber to review prior to publishing. Will continue to evaluate the Parish's and Governor's orders with hopes that we can have a Festival and bonfires. He said an executive session will be on the next agenda for Berkley, and he requested and update from Mr. Vic Franckiewicz on the environmental study.

**COUNCILMAN LOUQUE** – No comments

**COUNCILMAN BLAND** – Thanked DOTD for the East Bank Road Scrapping Project. The amount of dirt they removed from the shoulders was baffling, especially in Convent. Phase 2 is the digging of the ditches. DOTD has committed to digging with conjunction with the levee board, we need to stay on top of it. He asked, while the equipment is at Romeville Park, can we remove the remaining items for the turnover of the lease. I want to thank our parish crews and parish administration on their continued work on improving our parish and specifically District 4. I don't want this next statement to be negative but more of a push to start prioritizing more in line of the aging of our work orders. I have work orders most specifically in the convent/union area that were discovered during my campaign in 2019 that are still outstanding, and I am now getting text from frustrated residents saying "what is the deal" and why aren't things getting done. I know we are working hard but I cannot let this go without a statement. Mr. Webre said that he takes full responsibility for that and indicated that some of the work orders from the old system did not transfer to the new system and said he may have to assign someone to requeue them into the new system for tracking. Mr. Bland thanked him for continuing to make his District better and the Parish better. President Dufresne said that is why we have the new system in place.

**COUNCILMAN COOPER** – Commended and thanked the RISE group, Louisiana Bucket Brigade and those that have an effort in keeping the 5<sup>th</sup> District and the Parish safe to ensure that industry is doing right by the people in the community. He asked Mr. Webre what's the process if the Parish needs to dig a ditch, adding that a ditch was dug on Dennis Street and the dirt was left on the side of the ditch. Mr. Weber said he'll look into it.

**COUNCILWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB** – Said in the last budget she put \$100,000 to cover the basketball court in Magnolia. She said she noticed the material is there, but nothing is going on. Mr. Webre said the material is on site, the permits from the Fire Marshall's office are ready to go but there is an issue between the Parish and School Board, as to who owns the property that basketball court is on. Right now, it is titled in the School Board's name, adding until he gets an agreement from the School Board, we can't construct it there, they will build Lutchers first while we are in the process of working it out legally. Mrs. Etienne-Steib expressed her frustration. Mr. Martin said he spoke with the attorney for the School Board and it's not going to be a problem, they will do a Donation to us and we will take ownership and move forward. She asked if the remaining \$27,000 could be used for other park projects or is a revision needed? Mr. Boughton indicated that it can be used, since it is not within the 5%. She said she also allocated \$600,000 for the culvert projects, and asked Mr. Webre if we don't have to do the railroad project what were you implying when you said other creative ways while saving money? Mr. Webre said there were two projects that are \$600,000 each, one that her money was allocated to, and one is a grant that we are working on. He said her money is still assigned to her project. The money for the Bank Street project can be applied to somewhere else within the District. She asked President Dufresne to set up a meeting with the Hospital to see which direction we are going in.

**COUNCILMAN NASH** – Asked for the status of the Hwy 643/644 drainage improvement. Mr. Webre said T. Baker Smith has done the engineering and design. They will put poly-coated galvanized metal pipe and custom designed catch basins on Hwy 643 and looking at another outfall just west of that location. The project on Spruce Street is still a little further out and Forrestal Street still needs work.

**CHAIRMAN ST. PIERRE** – Reminded the Council to please look at your emails, some are time sensitive. He said that Gramercy will start to dismantle the pool. He spoke with the Clerk of Court and a decision is needed about voting at the Senior Citizens Centers. He thanked Eric Deroche for the calls and texts regarding the storm. He suggested to the council to "do your homework" prior to the meeting.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman Louque and seconded by Councilman Amato and carried, the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

  
Linda Hubbell, Secretary