

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON APRIL 26, 2023**

The Council of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana, met in regular session in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse Annex in Vacherie, Louisiana on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, at 6:08 p.m., following the public hearing.

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

Those also in attendance were Linda Hubbell, Council Secretary; Peter Dufresne, Parish President; Darnell Jones, DHR Field Operations Manager; 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, 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 Cooper offered the invocation and Councilman Nash led the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash the minutes of the April 12, 2023 public hearing were approved as distributed, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman St. Pierre, the minutes of the April 12, 2023 regular meeting were approved as distributed, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT'S MONTHLY REPORT

The Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for February 2023 was approved on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Dufresne presented this report to the Council:

- Thank you, Madam Chair. Good evening, everyone.
- On yesterday, we launched our Capital Improvement Plan Survey. Over the last three years, we have worked tirelessly to make major improvements throughout St. James Parish. However, there is always more to be done. As we continue to develop and refine our Capital Improvement Plan, this survey will allow us to identify what is most important to the residents of St. James Parish. Please fill out the survey on our website, or in person at the Vacherie Library, Lucher Library, or Convent Courthouse, or here at the Annex.
- Our annual audit has begun, and we are ahead of the game right now in the process due to our Finance Department's early preparation and detailed records. Congratulations to our Finance Department.
- FEMA has started site inspections for the private property debris removal program. Once finished with the inspections, FEMA will either approve or disallow the site from the program. They will then place it into a project worksheet for us to activate our contract for the program. We are still several months out from this work to begin.
- Hurricane Preparedness Week is May 1 through May 7. This week is a time to remind ourselves about hurricane preparedness and to prepare your family for hurricane season. Our Emergency Preparedness department has made several videos to help everyone identify important steps in preparing, which will be released next week. Let's never forget that from when Hurricane Ida formed to when it hit was only 48 hours. Please encourage residents in your district to start preparing now for hurricane season.
- Applications for our 2023 College Student Summer Internship Program open and will close on May 19th. Information about the program can be found on our website. I would like to encourage young adults in every district to take advantage of this opportunity to grow their skills and résumé while serving their community.
- Despite the bad weather, on April 15th, Relay for Life held a wonderful event. It was great to see so many people out in support of such a worthy cause.
- Mrs. Denny Hymel held Ag Day last week, which was a huge success. As a farmer, it was great to see our young people learning about where their food comes from, and trying fruits and vegetables that they may not normally eat. I would also like to thank the many industrial and corporate sponsors, who are too numerous to name but invaluable in making this event a reality.
- I attended the St James Parish School's Business and Industry Breakfast. I would like to thank Superintendent Mr. Chris Kimball for hosting this breakfast. It's always good to see our businesses and industries connecting and working together.
- After a devastating loss to fire, we were happy to see the Ferry Landing Café Grand Re-Opening come to fruition on Sunday.
- On Saturday the Keep St. James Beautiful Board hosted their Annual Clean-Up Day as part of Earth Day and Love the Boot Week. We had over 120 individuals volunteer to clean up litter throughout the parish. Over 100 bags of garbage, 2 loads of shingles, 146 used tires, 2 sofas and 10 bags of recyclables were collected on the weekend. Thank you to everyone who participated! I would also like to thank and acknowledge Nucor, who donated refreshments and free oak trees, and Koch Methanol St. James who donated free reusable water bottles.
- Crescent Engineering's team, led by Dennis Hymel, cleaned up along Highway 3127. They are the engineers who are working on the Highway 3127 4-lane project, and it was awesome to see them out on location working to improve our Parish. This is a community focused local company, doing a local project. The Highway 3127 widening is moving along well, and we are looking forward to this major improvement for our parish and region.

- We had a kick-off meeting with Facility Planning and Control to discuss Capital Outlay Funding for the Blind River Boat Launch docks, and everything is going well for this project. We are also working to include a handicap accessible and ADA compliant kayak launch and fishing dock in the project at Blind River and Grand Pointe.
- The contract for the bridge at the boat launch will be let out in May, with the goal of being completed by the summer.
- We closed out the 2022 road rehab project, and the 2023 Road Rehab Project is under development at this time. Crescent Engineering is developing construction documents and a bid packet.
- Now that renovations to the council chamber are wrapping up in Convent, this will allow us to return to our normal schedule. Our next council meeting will be held in Convent. We will begin renovation to the chambers here at the Vacherie Annex soon.
- The addition to the Vacherie Library is waiting on one permit and then the project will begin.
- The Buddy Whitney and Spruce Street drainage projects are completed. North and South Rosary Street culverts have been jettied and are currently being surveyed for a statewide flood control project to complete a major drainage project in that area.
- The Highway 643 South Vacherie drainage project has wrapped up for now and has reached 98% completion. In 2024, we will budget for an additional 314 feet of culverts to add to that project.
- Our recreation team is still working to implement a new facility rental system for our parks. While we had hoped to have this system in place by May 1st, that timeline has had to change due to production time. We are signing a contract next week with a company that will allow us to easily and efficiently rent all our parks and buildings, as well as simultaneously improve our registration system for recreation events and for the parish fitness center
- Red Bud Street from 643 to the Vacherie Canal and the surrounding area is being surveyed for a drainage project.
- St James parish vegetation control crews have completed 100% of their first pass on the West Bank and 60% of the first pass on the East Bank.
- The bid for the Romeville-Grandpoint natural gas loop at Highway 642 as well as the bid for the relocation of gas, water and sewer lines for the Highway 20 widening project will open tomorrow, April 27th.
- Our first line dancing class was a huge success, with around 100 participants at each event. Our last scheduled event is tomorrow from 6:00 - 7:00 pm, however we are working with Instructor Susan Bailey to make this a regularly scheduled event on our recreation calendar.
- The West Bank Natural Gas purchase point is still on schedule to be installed before the beginning of the 2023 hurricane season. We are expecting this project to be completed by the end of this month or early May.
- A teleconference was conducted between St James Operations, two local engineering companies, and DOTD pertaining to the Statewide flood control grant program. Two projects will be applied for 2023, North and South Rosary drainage improvements, and the hydrologic control structure at the lateral 4 canal just north of the Gramercy sewer pond.
- The community development block grant that had been lingering on the books for several years has finally been resolved. The document required by the Office of Community Development was obtained from BLD Services and the Parish President that acknowledged the contract extension and payments have been completed. This document will prevent St James Parish from repaying 369,000 dollars in grant funding.
- In the current legislative session, HB2 contains the 2024 Road Rehab Program with \$300,000 in priority two and a million in priority five. The Welcome Center project did not make this legislative session but will hopefully be considered in future. The funding currently listed in HB2 is insufficient to fund a 2024 road rehab program for the parish.
- Yesterday, the Amite River Basin Commission Sub-Committee for project inventory met, for the first time all five parishes agreed to support each other on their first priority drainage projects. Amite River Basin Committee has committed to St James Parish to provide letters of endorsement from the other four parishes as well as a resolution supporting a 30-million-dollar pump station for the West Shore Interconnect Levee.
- St. James Parish Government, Department of Human Resources, will be celebrating Community Action Month and St. James Council on Aging (Non-Profit), 50th year of providing services for St. James Parish Residents in the month of May. There will be an event in South Vacherie, at the West Bank Reception Hall, at Lucher Park, and the Convent Community Center. We will be releasing more information about these events very soon.
- May is also Older American Month. The 2023 theme is Aging Unbound, which offers an opportunity to explore diverse aging experiences and discuss how communities can combat stereotypes.
- We will also celebrate Transit Week in May. Our transit program provides a valuable resource to community members who need transportation. After consulting with DOTD and determining we have access to additional funding for this program, I am pleased to share that we will no longer charge fees for our transit services starting in May.
- On May 16th we will be hosting a Senior Picnic and Health Fair in conjunction with the St James Parish Hospital in celebration of May being Older American's Month. The fair will offer free screenings, education, entertainment, prizes, and a meal for participants. Vendors interested in participating can register online with the St James Parish Hospital.
- Monday, May 1st is Senior Day at the Capitol. Our Elderly Services team will be bringing residents on a trip to the State Capitol to meet officials and tour the Capitol. If you can attend, I know our seniors would love for you to join them in Baton Rouge
- I would also like to invite you to our St. James Parish Day at the Capitol on May 2nd. We will be meeting with legislatures and hosting lunch at 12pm at the Pentagon Barracks.

God bless each of you and your families tonight, and God bless St James Parish. This concludes my report.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

PRESENTATIONS

St. James Parish Schools Superintendent, Chris Kimball, introduced himself to the Council. He said he has been on the job for 1½ months and said he is honored to be the leader of the St. James Parish School District. He said it is important that we work together for the betterment of our district and students. He said we have a great District and

Parish, and it is important that we have a great Public School System. He said the more we can partner and work together the better it is for our students and our Parish. He then answered the Council's questions on Sales and Use tax, what can we see different from his perspective as Superintendent, and security.

A Resolution of Condolence was read aloud, and a plaque was presented to the family and friends of Gerald "Jerry" Wood.

Sean Gorey, with DE Shaw Investments, provided the following information regarding the installation of the MET Station. It is specifically 6 meteorological stations within the project fence line. They are specifically meant to measure wind speed. They are 10 meters tall, as opposed to the existing 3 meters tall stations. He said they want to install the taller stations because they will measure wind speeds at a taller height which will better measure the distribution of wind speed across the project so the rotating tracker equipment can better respond to wind conditions to go to a stow position, in order to protect the equipment. He provided a construction timeline of the project. He indicated the ITEP contract was fully executed in 2019. The contract is for an 80% personal property tax abatement for 5 years with a 3-year option to extend, that abatement begins in 2024. He said, as of today and for several months, the project has been in compliance with all filings and all indications that the LED staff is in agreement with this fact. Various supplement letters have been sent to the Parish Assessor outlining some of these details of all the up-to-date filings, and those that can be expected over the next year.

Councilman Nash asked if the MET stations were originally part of the solar farm project. Mr. Gorey explained that the original project had 3 meters tall MET stations. After the hurricane and after many months of damage assessment and root cause evaluation with the construction company and equipment vendors it was recommended by the engineering teams and equipment tracker supplier that it would be in their best interest to put taller MET stations to better measure the wind speed and better prepare them for higher wind events in the future.

After Mr. Gorey then answered questions on windspeed, wind rating, and safety, Councilman St. Pierre requested to add the resolution to the next agenda.

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS - None

OLD BUSINESS

Update of drainage study from Forrestal Street to Pool Lane – no additional update.

Update of West Bank Multi-Purpose Complex – no additional update.

Bellevue Lakes Development and Drainage Update – no additional update.

ORDINANCE 23-06, AN ORDINANCE SETTING AND DESIGNATING THE ADOPTED PROPERTY TAX MILLAGE FOR THE YEAR 2023 LEVIED ON ALL TAXABLE PROPERTY WITHIN THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES STATE OF LOUISIANA, having undergone the hearing process, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the ordinance was adopted.

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTION 23-82, A RESOLUTION OF CONDOLENCE TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF GERALD "JERRY" WOOD, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Cooper. Councilman Nash offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-83, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE APRIL 28, 2023 PAYROLL, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-84, 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 Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-85, RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE BID OF BUNKER GEAR SPECIALIST, LLC FOR BUNKER GEAR, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland. Councilman Cooper offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-86, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE BID OF MUNICIPAL EMERGENCY SERVICE FOR SELF-CONTAINED BREATHING APPARATUS, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland. Councilman St. Pierre offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-87, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN A CONTRACT WITH INDUSTRIAL EMERGENCY SERVICES, LLC FOR PROFESSIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND SUPPORT SERVICES, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-88, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE BID OF CAZENAVE MOTOR COMPANY, INC. FOR ONE (1) F-350 TRUCK FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF OPERATIONS, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre. Councilman Louque offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-89, RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH GOVERNMENT TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT A PRE-APPLICATION TO THE STATEWIDE FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM

FOR ASSISTANCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT FOR THE PURPOSE OF REDUCING EXISTING FLOOD DAMAGES; PROVIDING FOR THE NECESSARY DOCUMENTATION OF SAID FLOOD DAMAGE; AND PROVIDING FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-90, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE TO ADVERTISE AND ACCEPT BIDS FOR THE FY 2023 ROADWAY REHABILITATION PROGRAM, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Louque. Councilman Bland offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-91, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES CONTRACT WITH OLS DATAWARE, LLC, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-92, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING CHANGE ORDER #2 FROM J.P. CAVALIER CONSTRUCTION LLC FOR THE CONVENT COUNCIL CHAMBER RENOVATION PROJECT, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-93, RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH GOVERNMENT TO PREPARE AND SUBMIT A PRE-APPLICATION TO THE STATEWIDE FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM FOR ASSISTANCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT FOR THE PURPOSE OF REDUCING EXISTING FLOOD DAMAGES; PROVIDING FOR THE NECESSARY DOCUMENTATION OF SAID FLOOD DAMAGE; AND PROVIDING FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-94, RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE SIGNING OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH ST. JAMES PARISH HOSPITAL, was offered and move for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the resolution was adopted.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

FELIX BOUGHTON – We are in the middle of our annual audit and will email the Council a copy of the transmittal letter for their review. He will also send a copy of a proposed retiree health insurance ordinance that was adopted in 1971, which is outdated.

RICK WEBRE – **District 1**: working with LSR to clean the roadway along the bridge; working with Gramercy Recreation on their master plan any unresolved issues with the IGA. **District 3**: will clear and grub Bourbon Canal from 3125 to 642; will be on the back side of Bourbon Canal after completion of the canal; coordinated with Bellevue's contractor on the next phase. **District 4**: cleaned out Bayou Acadiens from the River Road to Hwy 3125. **District 5**: coordinating with DHR for the summer camp; will begin working to level the baseball field. **District 6**: should be moving along soon with the jack and bore project in Magnolia; received a letter of no objection from RES to begin digging the west ditch. **District 7**: surveying North and South Rosary to apply for Statewide Flood Control; will use federal highway funds for the Apple Street ditch.

DARNELL JONES – No comments.

ERIC DEROCHE – Wrapping up with the Convent Council Chamber renovation project, training will be held on Monday at 2pm.

COUNCIL MEMBER'S REPORT

COUNCILMAN NASH – Councilman Nash – no comments.

COUNCILMAN COOPER – Councilman Cooper – no comments.

COUNCILMAN BLAND – Councilman Bland – inquired about the District 4 restroom. Mr. Larousse indicated it will be wrapped up next week. The engineer will meet with Levee Board and DOTD on Tuesday on the Mississippi River bike path and everything should be wrapped up for the disbursement of funds.

COUNCILMAN LOUQUE – Councilman Louque – no comments.

COUNCILMAN AMATO – Councilman Amato was absent.

COUNCILMAN ST. PIERRE – Councilman St. Pierre wished the Council Secretary Happy Administrative Professional's Day. He inquired about the posting of the summer work program. The Public Information Officer indicated it was posted. He requested to have rip rap placed at Colonial Canal.

CHAIRWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB – Chairwoman Etienne-Steib had no comments.

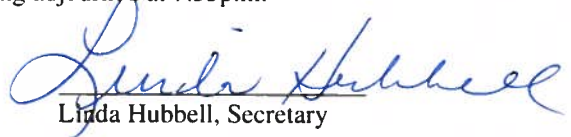
An **EXECUTIVE SESSION** convened at 7:19 p.m., on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Amato absent, the motion carried. Members of the Council, President Dufresne, and Special Counsel Maley withdrew to an adjoining chamber to receive a status report from counsel on:

- Timothy Roussel vs Berkely Insurance Company, Civil Action No.: 2:20-cv-03154 Section: T
United States District Court Eastern District of Louisiana
- Blaise Gravois vs Berkely Insurance Company, Civil Action No.: 2:20-cv-02981 Section: T
United States District Court Eastern District of Louisiana

All returned at 7:53p.m. Chairwoman Etienne-Steib 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 7:55p.m.


Linda Hubbell, Secretary