

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON APRIL 28, 2021**

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 28, 2021, at 6:12 p.m., immediately following the public hearing.

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

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 Adam Koenig, Legal Advisor.

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

The Honorable Alvin St. Pierre, Jr., 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

At this time Chairman St. Pierre asked that anyone wishing to speak should address the Chairman and to speak into the microphone. He asked Legal Advisor Koenig to explain the minutes. Mr. Koenig explained that Robert's Rules of Order gives guidance that minutes are a condensed version of what is done at the meeting, not what is said. Councilman Bland inquired about video recording. Mr. Deroche indicated that it would be a huge expense.

On a motion offered by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib, the minutes of the April 14, 2021 public hearing were approved as distributed, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

On a motion offered by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib and seconded by Councilman Amato, the minutes of the April 14, 2021 regular meeting were approved as distributed, with Bland opposing, and the reading of these minutes dispensed with.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT'S MONTHLY REPORT

The Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for February 2021 was approved on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Amato.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Dufresne presented this report to the council:

I'd like to begin my report tonight with an update from our Department of Human Resources.

- In recognition of April being Fair Housing Month, DHR decided to do a podcast highlighting the importance of fair housing, what does it mean and how to address it if it happens. For more information about fair housing, you can reach out to one of our HUD certified housing counselors, or you can visit the parish's website and social media pages.
- With great anticipation the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs has announced the reopening of the Elderly Senior Center programs in May 2021 with approval of the GOEA. DHR will reopen all senior centers May 24th with limited day activities. Further announcements will be made once reopening plans are approved by GOEA.
- Due to a positive COVID-19 exposure and direct contact at the ARC, it was recommended that we close the center for 7-10 business days. Per our safety procedures, a deep cleaning will be performed prior to re-opening. Please know that information about a person's health is strictly confidential. However, we are sharing with you in an effort to be transparent and keep you informed. The ARC Board of Directors and St. James Parish Government leaders are following the guidance of local health officials. If there are any close contacts of the individuals, they have been notified and directed to quarantine per the Office of Public Health. Although we should expect positive COVID-19 cases as long as the virus is present in our community, please know that we are following all guidelines to provide a safe environment for clients and staff. We will continue to operate in close collaboration with local health officials and in regular communication with our families.
- DHR's Volunteer Income Tax Assistant (VITA) program underwent a remote site visit on March 24th. The site visit audit found the agency to be 100% in compliance with all local, state, and federal requirements.
- Currently, DHR quarterly commodities distribution is being held throughout the parish this week. St. James Parish Government, Department of Human Resources, Community Action Agency along with the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank will distribute commodities to eligible families and individuals in St. James Parish in a drive through on a first-come, first served basis to all registered applicants.

EOC:

- Each year, the first full week of May is recognized as Hurricane Preparedness Week. Our public information office has teamed up with our EOC to create an awareness campaign which will include informative and instructional videos as well as a multitude of resources for residents as we prepare for another storm season.
- Please stay tuned to our parish website and social media pages the week of May 10-14th for the launch of this campaign.

Recreation:

- Our boys little league begins this Saturday with teams playing each Tuesday and Thursday until mid-June.
- Men's slow pitch softball is also expected to begin in Mid-May.
- I am happy to announce, as temperatures warm up, our Parish splash parks will open this Saturday, May 1.
- A few recent recreation projects have been completed including the playground equipment and splash pad at our District 4 Park and the walking track overlay is now complete at Gramercy Park.

Operations

- Our operations department has been hard at work to complete several projects recently. Some of those include:
- The Paulina Gas lines infrastructure improvements, Phase one and two are now complete with residents able to utilize the improved gas pressure. In addition, the Marquette Drive drainage mitigation project in Litcher is now complete.
- Bids for the Humble Street phase 2, Industrial street to South Angelle trunk line and culverts project will open May 3rd. This project is funded by the Hazard Mitigation Grant 1786.
- During our last council meeting, a question was raised regarding the purchase of fleet vehicles by St. James Parish Government. In an effort to remain transparent, I wanted to share some of the information on our vehicles with you.
 - Majority of the vehicles were purchased to replace neglected equipment that had not been routinely maintained and 10 years old or older.
 - Due to our newly implemented in-house preventative maintenance program, we expect to run our new vehicles around 250k miles before replacement.
 - To provide a comparison, a family might purchase a new vehicle once every 10 years. Right now, the Parish owns 93 vehicles, which would equate to 10 vehicles purchased every year.
- During Mr. Webre's Directors Report this evening, he will provide an overview of the water rate adjustments and forecast.
- In closing, Yesterday afternoon, Governor John Bel Edwards lifted the statewide mask mandate with the exception of K thru 12 grade schools, state buildings, colleges and universities, public transit, and healthcare facilities.
- The Governor noted privately owned businesses could determine if they would require masks at their place of business, as well as local governments.
- I have consulted with our local medical professionals this morning to determine the conditions here in St. James.
- Our current percent positivity rate is 2.2% and has remained low in the last several weeks. As we continue to see a decline in positive cases in our parish, and as vaccinations continue to be distributed to the community, it is my opinion that St. James Parish will follow state guidance with masks only required at local schools, healthcare facilities and public transit. I leave the decision up to our privately owned businesses to determine if they will require masks. While I will not require masks at any government building, I encourage our residents to be responsible and accountable for your actions regarding the health and safety of those around you. If you have not been vaccinated, we encourage you to wear a mask and to seek out one of the many locations within the parish providing vaccinations.
- If you are utilizing one of our parish transit busses, we ask that you wear a mask and maintain social distancing due to the confined space.
- I'm open to any discussion, comments or suggestions from the Council regarding the mask mandate at this time. I have a press release ready to be issued if all are in agreement of lifting all mandates with the exceptions I just mentioned.

PUBLIC COMMENT - No public comments were received on agenda items that required a vote.

PRESENTATIONS

Tommy Scott, WIA Executive Director presented the Workforce Investment Agency's Annual Report.

Alfred Mitchell introduced the Trinity Bay Vocational Institute.

Gild Spellman was not in attendance to make her presentation.

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

RESOLUTION 21-82, A RESOLUTION APPOINTING SHELTON SMITH TO THE GRAMERCY RECREATION BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Cooper. Councilwoman Etienne-Steib offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

OLD BUSINESS

- District 5 Alternate Access Route – still developing the capital outlay request and working on the scope. Will meet with facility to put us at a match.
- Acquisition of Land for Multipurpose Building Update – no update

ORDINANCE 21-05, AN ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR THE CHANGING OF THE NAME OF CENTRAL PROJECT STREET TO CENTRAL CROSSING STREET IN DISTRICT 4, AND PROJECT STREET TO MAGNOLIA GARDENS IN DISTRICT 6, ST. JAMES PARISH, LOUISIANA, having undergone the hearing process, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and was seconded by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the ordinance was adopted.

NEW BUSINESS

Veto message for Ordinance 21-67, a resolution authorizing the St. James Parish President to sign and execute a contract with Duplantis Design Group for professional services. President Dufresne said, in reference to the acquisition of land, that he would have issued a task order the very next morning to begin an initial footprint of the design, adding that right now were stuck in the process of purchasing a portion of the hospital's property, due to the building size.

Councilman Bland said a resolution was approved to do the footprint. Mr. Webre indicated that they needed to increase the price of the master contract.

At this time Councilman Bland made a motion to override the veto. Councilman Nash offered a second, and after a roll call vote showing, Bland and Nash in favor, and Amato, Cooper, Etienne-Steib, and St. Pierre against, and Louque absent, the motion failed.

Veto message for Ordinance 21-68, a resolution authorizing the St. James Parish President to sign and execute a contract with Meyer Engineers, LTD for professional services. President Dufresne said the amendment nullified the original intent of the resolution.

Chairman St. Pierre then called for a motion to override the veto. The motion failed for lack of a motion.

RESOLUTION 21-83, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE APRIL 30, 2021 PAYROLL, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-84, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS TO PAY PENDING CURRENT INVOICES AND PAYABLES, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-85, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE APPLICATION FOR AND ACCEPTANCE OF FISCAL YEAR 2021 PORT SECURITY GRANT PROGRAM (PSGP) AND AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT AND/OR HIS DESIGNEE TO SIGN, EXECUTE, AND ADMINISTER SAID AGREEMENT AND ALL RELEVANT DOCUMENTS, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-86, A RESOLUTION REJECTING ALL THE BIDS RECEIVED FOR SECURITY CAMERAS AND RELATED ACCESSORIES, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash. Councilman Amato offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-87, A RESOLUTION REAUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE TO ADVERTISE AND RECEIVE BIDS FOR SECURITY CAMERAS AND RELATED ACCESSORIES, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib. Councilman Nash offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-88, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH ATLAS TECHNICAL CONSULTANTS, LLC TO PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING SUPPORT, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-89, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH TO SIGN A SERVICE AGREEMENT WITH HOMELAND SAFETY SYSTEMS FOR A CAMERA SYSTEM IN THE PARISH JAIL, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilwoman Etienne-Steib. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-90, A RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING AND HONORING ALICE MAE DUPUY ON HER 100TH BIRTHDAY, was offered and moved adoption by Councilman Bland. Councilwoman Etienne-Steib offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-91, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE OFFICE OF THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO ADVERTISE AND TAKE BIDS FOR NECESSARY PRE DISASTER ITEMS NEEDED FOR THE ST. JAMES PARISH DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Cooper. Councilwoman Etienne-Steib offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 21-92, A RESOLUTION APPROVING AN AGRICULTURAL USE IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA (LIVESTOCK BARN REQUESTED BY BAILEY BRACK, ITEM 21-05), was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and was seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous roll call vote, with Louque absent, the resolution was adopted.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

ERIC DEROCHE – Said if there is a specific video topic to please let him or Meredith know.

INGRID LEBLANC – Clarified that we do have a Career Paths Program and it is for eligible residents and must go through an application process, to assist residents with tuition.

FELIX BOUGHTON – Expect a change in the way we provide health coverage to employees. They have been analyzing what's in the marketplace and have a recommendation with substantial savings, provide a broader network, and probably a lower deductible.

RICK WEBRE – presented information on the water rates.

COUNCIL MEMBER'S REPORT

COUNCILMAN NASH – Councilman Nash requested the usage cost for the Molaison Sewer System; requested an update on the Hwy 643 culvert cleaning project, Mr. Webre indicated it will be contracted out; he requested an in-house survey on the elevation level in the back part of Maple Street; and requested an update on Bayou Chevreuil, Mr. Webre indicated it is on schedule and forecasted to be complete in 1½ years.

COUNCILWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB – Councilwoman Etienne-Steib said she and Councilman Nash were able to go on some of the Streets in South Vacherie, She went through Magnolia and have seen the needs there, she still needs to go to Gramercy.

COUNCILMAN COOPER – Councilman Cooper requested a condolence letter for the family of Merita Cooper; requested Mr. Webre look into a ditch situation in Lemannville; inquired about a turn lane on Penn Street; the relocation of a speed bump on Baytree Street; RV issue on Paul Nelson Street; and inquired about garbage cans provided to residents. Councilman Cooper stated that he received a call from Sen. Price and was told that 4-wheelers should be covered with UTV/Golf carts. Legal Advisor Koenig stated that the law doesn't allow 4-wheelers to operate on roads and requested to have the information from Sen. Price sent to him.

COUNCILMAN BLAND – Councilman Bland stated that the playground equipment has been completed at the District 4 park and inquired about the sidewalk. Mr. Webre indicated that if needed they can do it in-house. Councilman Bland said they should receive a ribbon cutting date soon and requested pressure washing, etc. prior to the ribbon cutting. He inquired about the Entergy issues in District 3 and 4. President Dufresne said he reached out to the Public Service Commissioner and Entergy and hadn't received a concrete reason for the outages. Councilman Bland asked for assistance with a towing company putting/piling trailers on property in Convent. President Dufresne suggested he contract the Sheriff's office first.


COUNCILMAN LOUQUE – Councilman Louque was absent.

COUNCILMAN AMATO – Councilman Amato said he will send out an email to schedule a meeting regarding the lighting project for the Interstate Interchange. He stated information is being release at the State level regarding redistricting and hoping to begin with our Parish soon after the information is released. He expressed appreciation to everyone for the work at Lutchter Park. He stated he called- in on the West Shore meeting and said there is a lot of concern about the cost, especially on the St. John side, adding no talk about St. James Parish.

CHAIRMAN ST. PIERRE – Chairman St. Pierre stated that we need to know about money allocated to St. James Parish for the West Shore project. He acknowledged Donald Hains with Waste Management and Mr. Harry Hymel for attending the meeting. He expressed appreciation for the great work on the walking tract at Gramercy Recreation Park. He stated they are waiting on feedback from the Census meeting. He expressed appreciation for the condolences for the passing of his father.

ADJOURNMENT

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Amato and carried, the meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.


Linda Hubbell, Secretary