

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON AUGUST 30, 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 Convent, Louisiana on Wednesday, August 30, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

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

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

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

MINUTES

On a motion offered by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Amato, the minutes of the August 16, 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'd like to start off by extending my condolences to the family of Mrs. Paula Dennis. Mrs. Paula was a retired teacher in St. James Parish and worked at our Library part time. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends, she will be missed.
- The Department of Humans Resources has sponsorship opportunities available for the monthly birthday parties for our Seniors, as well as other events. Please reach out if you're interested in partnering with them.
- We have two new busses being delivered which will help improve our transit services, thanks to DOTD.
- We are waiting on a flagger from US Flag Control so we can continue the project to complete the jack and bore under the Union Pacific railway. This is tentatively scheduled for September 11th but could be postponed.
- The next step for the West Bank Recreation Center is for DGG to complete the schematic design and have it submitted to the Parish for review. This should be done by October 20th.
- The schematic design for the new Vacherie Senior Center is due on is expected by September the 15th for review.
- We are still collecting survey responses regarding the Angelle Gas Loop project, the final day to receive responses is Friday.
- We have received the schematic design for the library archive building, which has been reviewed by library and operations staff members. The next step is submittal of design development which will take about 60 days.
- The notice to proceed has been issued for the District 4 restrooms, and we will start building on this project soon. Mobilization is starting this week.
- The final design has been completed for the Blind River boat launch and we are submitting it to Facility Planning and Control for review. It should be wrapped up at the same time the temporary bridge is completed so we can access the launch for repairs.
- The 2023 road program is nearing completion with the Brooks Apartment being the last portion of the project. This should be completed next week. Final punch list items include shoulder dressing and edge dressing will begin next week as well.
- The manual transfer switch is being installed this week at the Westbank Reception Hall. I'd like to thank Entergy for turning off power to the building so crews could safely install the generator and the manual transfer switch.
- Our Operations Department went to the State Capital yesterday for an Amite River Basin Commission meeting. The Commission approved the pumping station and control structures for the West Shore Connector Levee as one of the top five projects that the Commission will support for round two of the Louisiana Watershed Initiative.
- The DHR building is substantially complete, the contractors are completing their punch list and the building will be finalized in early October. We will be sending out invitations for a grand opening and will be ready to service our residents soon.
- We received today another approved project worksheet for both of the roof replacements of the water plants, as well as vehicles and equipment.
- St. James High School hosted the Salute 1st Inauguration, thank you to Entergy, Koch Methanol, Nucor, DG Fuels and other sponsors for supporting the program. Over 150 young men joined the program. This is over half of the male population at St. James High. This mentorship program teaches youth the skills they need to grow into strong men and members of our community, including character development, emotional strength training, perspective realignment, and leadership principles.
- Yesterday marked the anniversary of Hurricane Ida. Know we are all happy to make it through is far without a storm hitting Louisiana this season, however Hurricane Idalia made landfall today in Florida, and we are praying for our neighbors in Florida. All year, St. James Parish Government works to stay prepared for any natural disaster which may occur. It's peak hurricane season, and I'd like to remind you to prepare your families. Let's learn from Hurricane Ida and have ourselves prepared with a 72-hour emergency kit. While the devastating effects of Hurricane Ida are still fresh in our minds, let's use that experience as a guide to prepare us for the rest of this hurricane season. Ask yourself – what did I need following Ida that I did not have? What would be helpful in the first 72 hours after a storm?

- I'd also like to remind all of our residents that while we did receive some much-needed rain this week, the entire State of Louisiana is still under a burn ban at the present time. The ban was modified as of August 25th, and now bans all burning including for agriculture. This means no open flames, including barbecuing and fireworks. Please be mindful of this and follow all guidelines.
- DOTD announced yesterday that the Bayou Chevreuil bridge will have two separate weekend full closures, between 7:30 PM Friday, September 8, 2023, and extending through 5:00 AM Monday, September 11, 2023. The second weekend closure is scheduled to occur on 7:30 PM Friday, September 15, 2023, and extending through 5:00 AM Monday, September 18, 2023.
- The Recreation Department's full-body workout night classes have been a huge success and are being extended through the end of September. These classes are free for members or \$10 a class for non-members.
- We had over 370 children sign up for our youth soccer season, and teams are being assigned this week.
- I attended the NuLevel Academy Ceremony sponsored by Nucor Steel. This program helps St. James Parish high school students find the right college specific to the career they want to pursue. Nucor sponsors the ceremony and it doesn't require students to pursue a career at Nucor, its any industrial opportunity they may want to apply for.
- Last Thursday was Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, or RSVP, day in St. James Parish. I would like to thank this group again for all the work they do volunteering around our parish and region.
- I'd like to invite you to mark your calendar for September 21st at 8:00am for Chamber Perks with the River Region Chamber of Commerce. For the first time, this event will be held in St. James Parish at our new Recreation Center. Please make plans to attend and support the Chamber and our Parish.
- Our next market day is on September 9th, please make plans to attend and support our local vendors.
- On October 10-15th, we will be hosting our annual Pumpkin Patch. Fieldtrips will be held during the week, with a fall fest and market day on the 14th and 15th. We have sponsorship opportunities available for the event this year, if you're interested in sponsoring please reach out to my office.
- This morning I attended the Lt. Governors Travel Summit in Baton Rouge. Our State is making huge strides towards increasing tourism and boosting our economy. I'm excited to know that we will be seeing some of those benefits right here in St. James Parish and am looking forward to growing tourism in our area.
- God bless each of you and your families.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

PRESENTATIONS

Paul Matthews, Chief Executive Officer of the Port of South Louisiana presented their annual report. He touched on their agreement with Avondale. He said they will be working to put a priority on their St. James West Bank Campus, (the old Petroplex area) and to make sure it is a certified site with LED. He spoke about tonnage through the port. He said they are continuing to work on the Hwy 3127 widening project, a \$32 million expansion, going from 2 to 4 lanes. He said they are also working with the rail realignment process and were able to get into priority 5, an additional \$4 million for the West Shore Levee project, to allow the levee to go around their airport to allow extension of the runway by 1500 feet.

Chelsie Batiste presented a petition and spoke about the need of barricades and safety improvements along the canal on Airline Highway in St. James Parish. Councilman Amato stated that the ball is already rolling, and they have a project number, they just have to get this final improvement into that project. Ms. Batiste indicated that the petition is listed on change.org.

Josh Stutes, DOTD District 61 Administrator, presented information on the roundabout at LA 3274 and the paving Hwy 61 project in St. James Parish from St. John Parish Line to Ascension Parish Line, including possible dual left turn lanes.

Aaron Elizar, Area Engineer, presented information on the LA 20 detour bridge/emergency maintenance inspection project. He indicated that Complete Engineering and Construction is the contractor on board to oversee that the structure stays in good service and working condition until the reletting of the permanent replacement of the Bayou Chevreuil bridge project. He said they will make repairs and maintenance as needed. He said this project was born as a result of the default of the original contractor.

At a request from the President Dufresne, Mr. Elizar presented a timeline of the original project, which was awarded to TL Hawk, who had 300 working days to complete the project. They installed the detour bridge and detour roadway and drove the test piles and then basically they ran out of contract time. After the required notification to the contractor, they were not able to secure the materials required and at some point, the department headquarters decided to put them into default. There have been a bunch of negotiations with the bonding company and are still on going to this day to get the next project going. In the meantime, they brought on this emergency project because they know that this structure needs to be maintained and inspected on a weekly basis.

For the LA 20 project, he indicated that they sent out a press release, so the people understand that maintenance is needed to keep the structure safe until the permanent bridge is complete. He then explained a diagram regarding the emergency work that will soon be performed. He said they aren't expecting future closures for the temporary bridge and the reason for two weekend closure is that they will do one side of the bridge on one weekend and the other side of the bridge on the other weekend. He then answered the question regarding concerns with medical needs. He said they are working with local medical facilities to plan and schedule their resources to adequately have protection on both sides of the river during these two weekends. He reviewed the detour route diagram, adding that the route they chose was Hwy 3127 to Hwy 90 then Hwy 307, then loop back to Hwy 20. He then provided information on resuming the original project, replacing the bridge. He indicated that it will be a wider bridge that will maintain the same horizontal alignment and will be 40' wide and 835' long. He said reletting of the project is schedule for December 13, 2023, with tentative start date of spring of next year. He indicated that all the materials have been secured and piles and girders have been fabricated.

The next project to be discussed was the LA 20 widening project. He indicated that Barber Brothers has been awarded the project at a cost of a little over \$19 million. He said the contract time is 415 working days and the project limits are just north of Hwy 307, near the fire station, to the end of the curb in Vacherie, near Guidry Street. They will widen on the east side of the roadway, approximately 2.9 miles, adding 8' shoulders and two 12' travel lanes. The preconstruction conference is scheduled for September 21st, clearing for utilities is scheduled to begin October 2nd and run through the end of the year, and then about 210 days to relocate utilities. The estimated completion project is Summer of 2026. He said the widening of the roadway and the bridge replacement project will be happening simultaneously.

The next project discussed was the Hwy 70 project by Nicole Dunn, Project Engineer. She said they will be widening the corridor between the Sunshine Bridge and LA 22, with a 700-calendar day project. The 4-lane divided highway will include 11 J-turns, a 3-legged roundabout at Hwy 3125, bridge being built at Panama Canal, ITS cameras, and drainage structures and extensions. She then reviewed the diagram in detail.

President Dufresne requested DOTD perform emergency repairs the dips on Hwy 3127.

Representative Brass said they have a lot going on in St. James Parish, with these project costing almost over \$100 million. He said it is an unfortunate situation with the Hwy 20 bridge, that the contractor went bankrupt, and once that happens there is a process, and they have been working to expedite it. He indicated that we should be seeing progression by the end of the year. He asked for the public's patience. He said their main priority is safety. He then commended Chelsie for her presentation. He said they will continue to communicate with the Parish President and Council to get updates out to the residents. He said State law requires they go with the lowest bidder, so they will work with the new administration to put mechanisms in place to not be forced to accept the lowest bidder.

Senator Price said he is a member of the Hwy 20 Coalition. He said the project did not happen in the timely manner they had hoped for. He said they will continue to provide safe roads for our citizens in this Parish and in the State. He said that all legislators are fighting for funding for roads, and he said that he, and Representative Brass secured over \$100 million for road projects and they will continue to fight for St. James Parish.

Keyojuan Gant-Turner introduced herself as a candidate for the 23rd District Judge, Division E seat.

Nicole Snyder made a presentation regarding forming an animal control committee. She said the main goal is to set up a shelter. Councilman Bland said this would have to be presented to the voters to pass a tax for animal control and a shelter. Councilman Amato said they are budgeting for a study. She said their meeting will be held on September 9th from 10-11:30 a.m. at the Lutcher Library.

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

RESOLUTION 23-179, A RESOLUTION APPOINTING KAMI HYMEL TO THE ST. JAMES PARISH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PARISH PRESIDENT, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman St. Pierre. Councilman Amato offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

OLD BUSINESS

Update of drainage study from Forrestal Street to Pool Lane – will send a budget request for funding for a study.

Update of West Bank Multi-Purpose Complex – timeline was covered in the President's report.

Bellevue Lakes Development and Drainage Update – Donovan Duffy, with Meyers Engineering shared information from the H & H study. There is now a value at the weir. This item will be removed from the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTION 23-180, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE SEPTEMBER 1, 2023 PAYROLL, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-181, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS TO PAY PENDING CURRENT INVOICES AND PAYABLES, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-182, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO ACCEPT THE BID AND ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH PINTAIL CONTRACTING SERVICES LLC, FOR THE CONVENT WATER PLANT UPGRADE PROJECT, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-183, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE TO SELL MOVABLE PROPERTY AT A PUBLIC AUCTION, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland. Councilman Louque offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-184, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF A CONTRACT FOR DISASTER PUBLIC ASSISTANCE AND HAZARD MITIGATION SUPPORT SERVICES, AND ADMINISTER SAID AGREEMENT AND ALL RELEVANT DOCUMENTS, was offered and moved adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION 23-185, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES CONTRACT WITH MCKIM & CREED, INC., was offered and move for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous vote, the resolution was adopted.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE 23-09, AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY BY THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES FROM GRAVOIS FARMS, LLC, was introduced on a motion offered by Councilman Louque and seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous 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, September 13, 2023, in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse Annex in Convent.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE 23-10, AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY BY THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES FROM BLACKBERRY FARMS, LLC, was introduced on a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous 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, September 13, 2023, in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse Annex in Convent.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

INGRID BERGERON – received verbal confirmation that they will receive 2 additional buses in the coming weeks. Council Bland inquired about the FEMA trailer deadline. Ms. Bergeron said if FEMA gives an extension, then they have to abide by it. Councilman Bland suggested to send letters now to inform residents of the deadline. Ms. Bergeron said she attended a meeting at River Parish Community College with the Housing Leadership, LHC and HUD, and conversations are still on hurricane repair/restoration. She said she invited them to St. James Parish to meet with our housing team to see how we can work better with some of the programs to further assist our residents and speak with potential developers on affordable housing.

ERIC DEROCHE – reminded everyone of the burn ban. He said the Fire Marshall is actively patrolling looking for people and are ticketing people who are illegally burning during the burn ban. He said the fire department has been communications with the two high school regarding tailgating and fireworks.

COUNCIL MEMBER'S REPORT

COUNCILMAN NASH – Councilman Nash had no comments.

COUNCILMAN COOPER – Councilman Cooper requested a condolence letter for the family of Paula Dennis. He inquired if small businesses received the letter regarding the Disaster Recovery Restore Louisiana Loan Program. President Dufresne said letter were sent to everyone with a business license. He also inquired if everyone received notice of the incident at Marathon. Mr. Deroche said that it was sent to everyone who is registered with the Parish alert system. President Dufresne said they can assist anyone who may need help registering. Mr. Deroche reminded everyone that the Parish has their own notification system and the Sheriff's office has their own.

COUNCILMAN BLAND – Councilman Bland thanked Ms. Flo with Entergy for her assistance with the recent low flow issues. He said if anyone is still experiencing issues to please contact their council member. The District 4 restroom is underway and hopefully they will be up and running by the end of the year.

COUNCILMAN LOUQUE – Councilman Louque also thank Ms. Flo for assisting with the power issues.

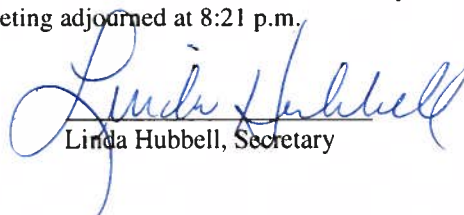
COUNCILMAN AMATO – Councilman Amato attended a meeting with Mr. Deroche and the IT department regarding security cameras. He said Sara is doing a good job and will give them an update soon. He said the Brooks apartment area is beginning to look nice. He thanked Chelsie for her presentation.

COUNCILMAN ST. PIERRE – Councilman St. Pierre also thanked Chelsie for her presentation.

CHAIRWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB – Chairwoman Etienne-Steib asked if any more notice could have been given for the water being off on Hwy 18. Mr. Larousse indicated it was an emergency repair. She also expressed condolences to the families of Paula Dennis and Jake Favorite.

ADJOURNMENT

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman St. Pierre and seconded by Councilman Bland and carried, the meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.


Linda Hubbell, Secretary