

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA  
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 13, 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, September 13, 2023, at 6:15 p.m., following the public hearings.

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

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 Bland led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES**

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Cooper, the minutes of the August 30, 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 July 2023 was approved on a motion offered by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Bland.

**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 recognizing that Monday was 9/11. Let's never forget those emergency personnel who served and sacrificed on that day. I'd also like to take a moment to thank our local first responders who are constantly on call ready to serve our community.
- On September 18th at 8:30am, the Department of Human Resources will have a Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, call in to provide financial assistance to help pay utility bills. Residents are served on a first come, first serve basis, and can only receive assistance once per year.
- The Department of Human Resources has made huge strides in assisting residents who requested aid following Hurricane Ida. Of the 285 applicants, we only have 15 homes still needing to be addressed.
- We have two new busses being delivered for our Transit Services tomorrow thanks to DOTD. All of the needed trucks should arrive by the end of the year. I'd also like to remind you that earlier this year we were able to acquire additional funding for this program, and now all St. James Parish Residents can use the program free of charge.
- After many scheduling issues, a flagger from US Flag Control was able to come out to the railway crossing at Highway 642 so we can complete the natural gas loop connection. The jack and bore under the Union Pacific railway is now complete and pressure testing is underway. If the system passes all tests, residents will be connected within 1-2 weeks.
- To date, 85% of the survey responses received for the Angelle Gas Loop were in favor of proceeding with the project. We are anticipating more responses from residents.
- The notice to proceed was issued for the District 4 restrooms, and we are waiting on a permit from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospital.
- We received an addition \$1.2 million in funding for the East Bank Clarifier from the American Rescue Plan Act Water Sector Program Round Two. This project should be installed in the first quarter of 2024.
- A meeting is being set with Barriere Construction for reconciliation and closing out the 2023 road program. Between last year and this year's projects, we have had 48 streets completely redone through mill, patch, and overlay, and 220 roads that went through the preservation process to extend their life and optimize their use before needing replacement in the future.
- St. James Parish just received a hazardous waste tire permit from the Department of Environmental Quality, and we are now authorized to transport used tires to authorized disposal sites. Waste tires turned in to the land fill will now be processed directly by St. James Parish employees.
- The manual transfer switch that was installed on the Westbank Reception Hall is now ready to receive emergency backup generator power.
- The DOTD closure of Bayou Chevreuil bridge scheduled for this weekend will be from 11:59p.m. on Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, and extending through 5:00 AM on Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup>. The original start time was for 7:30pm on Friday, but as our St. James Wildcats are playing in Thibodaux on Friday night the start time was postponed, giving families time to get home after the game.
- I would like to thank Entergy for replacing 5 poles on Highway 20 last week, as well as putting stub poles 15 feet into the ground and anchoring other poles along Highway 20. Anchoring the poles will improve their durability during weather events.
- I met today with Barber Brothers, the contractor for the Highway 20 widening project. I'm being told we should see work beginning October 2<sup>nd</sup>. They will start the right of way tree removal.
- Congratulations to Rejuvenate Health on their successful Grand Opening. This new business provides a wide variety of services to our community, and it's always great to see St. James Parish residents return home to launch a business within the Parish.

- 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 right now.
- Tomorrow the St. James Parish Retired Teachers Association will be meeting at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Convent at 10:00a.m. Teachers from St. James Parish, Assumption, Jefferson, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. John, and Terrebonne will be attending. I would like to invite our Council Members to join me at this event.
- I'd like to remind you that on next Thursday, September 21<sup>st</sup> at 8:00am, we are hosting Chamber Perks with the River Region Chamber of Commerce at our new Recreation Center in Gramercy. Please make plans to attend and support the small businesses. This is the first time this event is being held in St. James Parish.
- On October 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, we will be hosting our annual Pumpkin Patch. Fieldtrips will be held during the week, with a fall fest and market day on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. We have sponsorship opportunities available for the event this year, if you're interested in sponsoring please reach out to my office.
- This concludes my report. God Bless each one of you, and your families.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** - None

**PRESENTATIONS**

Representatives of Life House Staffing attended the meeting to give a presentation on their operations. Jeffery Robert, Vice-President, stated that Life House began around 20 years ago in Gonzales, helping a couple of men coming out of jail. He said they acquired the St. James Youth Detention Facility about 5 years ago. They showed a virtual tour of their facility. He said they presently have 125 beds, and all are filled. He touched on their other facilities. He said their mission statement is "To partner with the community, to change the world by helping men and women learn to live in freedom every day," they try to give the tools that they may have missed out on in life. They help them through 3 core values: career advancement, community connection, and spiritual development. He said 90% of those that come into the facility are homeless, they have no home, coming out of incarceration, no id, birth certificate, social security, or car. He said help them to get these things to help them start on a tract of financial freedom. William Maher, Director of Life House Staffing talked about his time at the facility and his path moving up to Director. He said they have great partnerships, an online training center with MCCR certification, for electrical, millwright, and welding. He said their goal is to get them a stable job, teach them a craft, something to sustain them for the rest of their lives. Next to speak was Justin Landry, the Program Director. He also spoke about his life's challenges and his time at the facility. He said he lives on the campus full time. Parish President Dufresne and members of the Council thanked them for their work. Mr. Robert indicated that they were donated 100 acres on Highway 3125 and hope to open a retreat center for the men at the facility.

Ms. Dana Groover was not in attendance to give the Housing Authority's annual report.

**APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS** – None

**OLD BUSINESS**

Update of drainage study from Forrestal Street to Pool Lane – As a back-up plan, additional pumps were purchased in case of an emergency.

Update of West Bank Multi-Purpose Complex – DDG is advancing rapidly with the designs of the buildings.

Update of Mississippi River Levee Bike Path – still running in 3 phases, 1) St. Peter Chanel to the Gramercy water plant, 2) Hwy 20 to the existing trail, and 3) Gramercy water plant to the St. John line. A meeting was held with all agencies. Specifics were given to the engineering company that needed to be accomplished before December to avoid losing the extra portion of the match within the grant. The Engineer is confident they will accomplish them before the end of the year. The plan is to let out in the spring. The match cost for phase 1 is \$390,000 and \$312,000 for engineering. Need to enter into a contract for phase 2 to get the design underway.

**ORDINANCE 23-09, AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY BY THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES FROM GRAVOIS FARMS, LLC**, having undergone the hearing process, was offered, and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the ordinance was adopted.

**ORDINANCE 23-10, AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE THE PURCHASE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY BY THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES FROM BLACKBERRY FARMS, LLC**, having undergone the hearing process, was offered, and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the ordinance was adopted.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**RESOLUTION 23-186, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE SEPTEMBER 15, 2023 PAYROLL**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-187, 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 Louque. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-188, RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FEDERAL OFF-SYSTEM BRIDGE REHABILITATION PROGRAM**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-189, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING CHANGE ORDER #2 FROM J.P. CAVALIER CONSTRUCTION LLC FOR THE VACHERIE ANNEX COUNCIL CHAMBER RENOVATION PROJECT**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilman Nash. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-190, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE FILING OF AN APPLICATION WITH THE LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR A GRANT UNDER ANY OF THE FOLLOWING FTA PROGRAMS MANAGED THROUGH LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato. Councilman Cooper offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-191, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING CHANGE ORDER #3 FROM B.E.T. CONSTRUCTION, INC. FOR THE NEW OFFICE BUILDING – ST. JAMES PARISH DHR PROJECT**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and was seconded by Councilman Cooper. After a vote showing, Amato, Louque, Cooper, Nash, and Etienne-Steib in favor, Bland against, and St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-192, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH INTRACOASTAL CONSULTANTS, LLC FOR THE WEST SHORE RISK REDUCTION LEVEE PROJECT.**

At this time Councilman Bland offered a motion to deviate from the agenda to allow Mr. Kevin Beyer to provide a brief update to the West Shore Risk Reduction Levee Project. Councilman Louque offered a second, a second, and after a unanimous roll call vote, with St. Pierre absent, the motion carried. There being no public comment, Mr. Beyer explained they have been working with Crescent Engineering and Mapping and are doing modeling to look at alternatives and recommend to CPRA, the Corp of Engineers, and the local Parish going through the different types of scenarios to connect the levees between the Army Corp of Engineers West Shore Lake Pontchartrain projects and the Gramercy area and Grand Point area and doing a connector levee, to get rid of the 3125 alignment that the Corp has been looking at. They are wrapping up the existing conditions modeling and going through cost estimates to present to the Parish.

After Mr. Beyer's update. Councilman Louque offered and moved for adoption the aforesaid resolution and was seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-193, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH MAGUIRE IRON, INC. FOR THE PAULINA ELEVATED STORAGE TANK REHABILITATION PROJECT**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Bland. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 23-194, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PARISH PRESIDENT OF ST. JAMES PARISH TO EXECUTE DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAMS**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Louque and seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous vote, with St. Pierre absent, the resolution was adopted.

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

Councilman Bland inquired with Ms. Bergeron if the letters went to residents regarding FEMA trailers. Ms. Bergeron indicated that they have not gone out yet but has developed a draft. She is waiting on information from FEMA prior to sending the letters. Councilmen Louque and Bland express their concerns and opinions on who should receive the letters. Ms. Bergeron said they have the information for those that contacted her department.

**FELIX BOUGHTON** – sales taxes for July are in and if the current trend continues, they will be about \$1 million more than last year, or about \$1.8 million more than budgeted. We will collect more in property taxes in 2023 than in 2022, but it wasn't supposed to be that way because we were supposed to be in the last phase of the Shell phase out. He reminded that when the decision came out to close Shell, the Parish President and Council could have rolled forward the millages, but they didn't, keeping the property tax for homeowners the same for 4 years. Councilman Bland inquired about solid waste. Mr. Boughton said they will look at it during the budget process.

**RICK WEBRE** – doing erosion control at the Buddy Whitney Canal in District 2 and will be back in the water channels after that project, then head back to the East Bank. About \$40K - \$60K under budget for road preservation this year. A task order will be written for crack sealing in the winter. Will send the information for the Council's review of the 2024 preservation program. The permit was approved for work on the District 4 restroom. Crescent Engineering is working on the application for the North Rosary drainage. Councilman Bland inquired if there may be grants available for the bike path. Mr. Webre said they are looking into it.

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

**COUNCILMAN ST. PIERRE** – Councilman St. Pierre was absent.

**COUNCILMAN AMATO** – Councilman Amato thanked Crescent for assisting the Town of Lutcher to develop a road program. Mr. Vic Franckiewicz is finalizing the legal review of the solar ordinance and hoping to get it introduced at the next meeting. Forwarded information on the 2 school zone safety lights for St. Pete Chanel and Paulina Elementary, funds awarded from Senator Lambert. He said they are figuring out how to notify residents of early voting in Lutcher since the sign was destroyed.

**COUNCILMAN LOUQUE** – Councilman Louque had no comments.

**COUNCILMAN BLAND** – Councilman Bland had no comments.

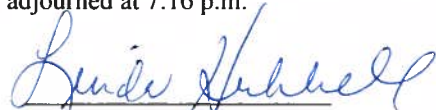
**COUNCILMAN COOPER** – Councilman Cooper requested condolence letters for Keith Mills and Mac Rodrigue families. He inquired about canal cleaning. Mr. Webre said the major drainage going out to the laterals are good, has concerns around St. James canal, getting areas 6 and 7 out of the way, will finish in District 4. Councilman Cooper said there is tall grass growing where the railroad crossing was condemned on Martin Drive. He said a resident needs assistance with a permit for her mobile home she received through the Restore Program. Mr. Webre said he will look into those issues.

**COUNCILMAN NASH** – Councilman Nash said the area on Hwy 643 and Falgoust is getting worse and inquired about that status. Mr. Webre will follow up. Councilman Nash inquired about the water line that was hit by Entergy in South Vacherie. Mr. Larousse said are waiting on a reply from the cable companies.

**CHAIRWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB** – Chairwoman Etienne-Stieb inquired about how often the grass gets cut on the major highways. Mr. Webre said it usually takes 4 weeks to cycle. She dittoed Councilman Amato's remarks about the solar ordinance.

**ADJOURNMENT**

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Cooper and carried, the meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

  
Linda Hubbell, Secretary