

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE PARISH OF ST. JAMES, STATE OF LOUISIANA  
TAKEN AT A REGULAR MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 15, 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, September 15, 2021 at 6:00 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, Jr.

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

Councilman Amato offered the invocation and Councilman Cooper 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**

On a motion offered by Councilman Bland and seconded by Councilman Nash, the minutes of the August 18, 2021 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, Mr. Chairman. Good evening Council, Good evening everyone.

- The boil water advisory has been lifted parishwide. We are no longer under a boil water advisory.
- The last several weeks have been some of the most trying times that our Parish has seen in a very long time. While we were spared the devastating level of damages our fellow river parishes are facing, we were not without significant impacts from Hurricane Ida.
- I'd like to take a moment to offer thoughts and prayers to all victims of this devastating storm, including one right here in St. James Parish.
- We have all learned many valuable lessons during this event, including the extreme importance of preparation. Prior to the onset of Hurricane Season, our staff conducted several pre-storm activities to ensure that we were adequately prepared to handle storm surge and flood waters.
- For instance, had the levee around the South Vacherie Wier not been elevated to bring it back to its original height, South Vacherie would have been flooded and significantly impacted by storm surge. Lac des Allemands rose to a level of 4.6 feet, that's about a foot above the height of the levee prior to making the improvements. The levee improvement was completed about a week before the storm.
- Had we not made significant improvements to our natural gas infrastructure, usage of generators for pro-longed periods of time would not have been possible. We still have another phase of this project to complete to further ensure our natural gas infrastructure will be adequate.
- We lost our water plants for a short time because of the enormous amount of uprooted trees damaging water mains, creating leaks throughout the Parish. Our employees worked diligently to locate and repair leaks so our water distribution system could recover. Water and natural gas were a top priority in the infant stages of this recovery effort.
- Thank you to our residents who prepared for this storm and heeded all warnings. Your preparedness has made our response much easier.
- Preparation is key to our resiliency and ability to recover quickly from any storms that might come our way.
- I want to thank all of our hardworking and dedicated parish employees who began working around the clock before Hurricane Ida had even landed on our state's shores. These hardworking men and women have spent countless hours to prepare and respond to the impacts of Hurricane Ida and continue to do so each day. They have spent time away from their own families and damaged homes to ensure our utilities are repaired, functioning and roadways were cleared. They have worked to coordinate resources coming into our parish and even handed out tarps to residents' door to door. The entire first week following this storm all recovery efforts rested solely on the shoulders of our employees. It was a week before we saw state or federal boots on the ground in St. James Parish – and we have our employees to thank for our immediate response and recovery. We are who we are because of our people. So thank you – to each of our parish employees for all that you do. I see you and I appreciate you.
- I'd also like to thank our industry partners whose quick response efforts brought in much needed supplies to our parish sooner than state and federal agencies could. So many of our industry groups sprung to action and quickly arrived with tarps, water, ice, and chain saws. Since then, many of these same groups have provided meals and supplies to residents at our many distribution sites. Their effort jumpstarted the response and recovery efforts in our Parish, and I am grateful for their continued investment into our community.
- In order to allow each of our directors the opportunity to explain in more detail how their respective areas are continuing storm recovery and returning back to normal operations, I want to keep my report brief this evening. I'll end by asking residents to continue being patient as we all work together to recover from this storm and move our parish forward.
- Anyone in need of FEMA or recovery resources, please visit the homepage of our website, where we have created a page specifically to house all available Hurricane recovery resources for our residents.

God bless each of you and God bless St. James Parish.

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

**PRESENTATIONS**- None

**APPOINTMENTS TO BOARD AND COMMISSIONS** – None

**OLD BUSINESS**

District 5 Alternate Access Route – no additional update

Acquisition of Land for Multipurpose Building Update – no additional update

**NEW BUSINESS/**

**RESOLUTION 21-200, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE SEPTEMBER 3, 2021 PAYROLL**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-201, 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, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-202, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE DISBURSEMENT OF PAYROLL FOR THE SEPTEMBER 17, 2021 PAYROLL**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-203, 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 roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-204, A RESOLUTION REJECTING ALL THE BIDS RECEIVED FOR THE BLIND RIVER BOAT LAUNCH IMPROVEMENT PROJECT** was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland. Councilwoman Etienne-Steib offered a second, and the resolution was unanimously adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-205, A RESOLUTION AMENDING THE CONTRACT FOR DUPLANTIS DESIGN GROUP FOR THE PARISH PRESIDENT'S OFFICE RENOVATIONS**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Nash and seconded by Councilman Louque. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-206, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE BID AND AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A MATERIALS CONTRACT WITH SLATS LUCAS AGGREGATES, LLC TO PROVIDE AGGREGATES FOR PARISH PROJECTS**, 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 21-207, A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE BID AND AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A MATERIALS CONTRACT WITH RENE'S INDUSTRIES, INC. TO PROVIDE AGGREGATES, SAND, SOIL, AND CLAY FOR PARISH PROJECTS**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Cooper and was seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

**RESOLUTION 21-208, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ST. JAMES PARISH PRESIDENT TO SIGN AND EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH CRESCENT ENGINEERING AND MAPPING, LLC FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**, was offered and moved for adoption by Councilman Bland and was seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous roll call vote, the resolution was adopted.

At this time Chairman St. Pierre requested a motion to deviate from the agenda to allow an update from Donald Hains, with Waste Management. Councilman Louque offered motion and was seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried.

Donald Hains provided an update on the Hurricane Ida recovery for garbage collection. He then answered the Council Member's questions.

After Mr. Hains' update, Chairman St. Pierre requested a motion to deviate from the agenda again to allow an update from Dana Groover, with the St. James Parish Housing Authority. Councilman Bland offered a motion to deviate and was seconded by Councilman Amato. After a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried.

Ms. Dana Groover provided an in-depth report of the damages to the buildings caused by Hurricane Ida and the housing crisis. She then answered the Council Member's questions.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**ERIC DEROCHE** – A group of 12 FEMA inspectors have been going around looking into a parish building to open a disaster recovery center, to service residents face-to-face. He said long-term sheltering is an issue in all of Southeast Louisiana. FEMA and GOSEP are looking into all options but the only thing approved is the 30-day hotel voucher. Information received will be communicated. Debris contractor was out yesterday due to weather, they began around noon today. Construction and demolition debris can be brought to the parish landfill on Hwy 3127 from 7am to 5pm for residents of St. James Parish, driver's license required to drop off. Additional trucks will be here on Friday, two of the trucks will be dedicated for construction and demolition, along with vegetative debris. The PODs will be shut down on Friday, due to electricity restored to the grocery stores. Any demolished home, such as mobile home that is complete destroyed, that can be moved to the right of way will get picked up. He then answered the council member's questions.

President Dufresne said they have spoken to everyone on their level all the way up to President Biden and they are doing everything they can for St. James Parish.

**INGRID BERGERON** – She said Ms. Groover spoke about the housing crisis with the Housing Authority but there are other residents who are also experiencing being displaced. She said the parish is working with federal officials to resolve the housing crisis and the only thing available right now is the 30-day vouchers. She said her staff has been doing door-to-door assessments, they are working with community partners with recovery efforts, have already received donations. She has estimated about 12-15 months recovery for social services. Transit services are fully operational. Still providing daily meals to registered seniors and are also doing wellness checks. The senior centers are closed until assessments can be done. The ARC building is closed due to damage. She acknowledged one of her employees, Darnell for working tirelessly, adding that he has not seen his family since the storm, and he has lost everything as well.

President Dufresne said between the Sheriff's office and the Parish employees, there are about 15 employees who are unable to return to their homes.

**FELIX BOUGHTON** – He said they have already begun the process to fund this disaster and asked for patience. He said the parish will have to up-front the cost and it is estimated around \$10 million and is expecting to receive 90% - 100% reimbursement. A formal report will follow.

**RICK WEBRE** – He expressed gratitude for all of his crews. He said the 2021 road rehab project is probably out of the window by now, due to heavy equipment and trucks as part of the recovery process. He said this year's budget will probably be combined with next year's project. He said a post was made today on the permitting process. He said he sent out a report as to what requires a permit and what they are not permitting, adding that those fees are waived. The drop off point for construction debris is on Hwy 3127. They have completed the damage assessment to the buildings, some vehicles and equipment. have also received damage. Temporary pumps are still at the weir and at Coteau. Ask constituents to be patient at this time.

At this time, Ms. Bergeron clarified that the donations received were made to the Council on Aging.

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

**COUNCILMAN NASH** - Councilman Nash had no comment.

**COUNCILWOMAN ETIENNE-STEIB** – Councilwoman Etienne-Steib thanked everyone for helping. She thanked Emmanuel Sterling, who now lives in New York, for sending her gift cards to hand out to some residents who lost just about everything. She thanked Waste Management and Entergy for their work, and she thanked her neighbors for attending the meeting night.

**COUNCILMAN COOPER** – Councilman Cooper gave kudos to everyone involved in the unprecedented situation. Gave a shoutout to all the industries who contributed throughout the parish and region. He thanked the Parish President and his administration for working tirelessly to make things better for everyone. He gave a shout to Trina Mall and Diane Spencer for their assistance.

**COUNCILMAN BLAND** – Councilman Bland thanked everyone in the Parish Government and the parish crews for their quick response after the storm. He gave a shoutout to Meredith for her handling of social media. He thanked everyone for feeding the linemen. He thanked the industry leaders for their commitment.

**COUNCILMAN LOUQUE** – Councilman Louque thanked the Parish Administration and everyone for their response to the event. He said within 72 hours the roads were open, water services were running, adding we were in better shape than most communities. He said he reached out to Ken Brass and Ed Price regarding the Hester post office--Congressman Carter is looking into it.

**COUNCILMAN AMATO** – Councilman Amato recognized everyone's efforts, including the Towns, for their outstanding efforts with the storm. He said it was significant to see the progress the Parish had made, within 72 hours, to restore the services to our residents. He thanked Speaker Clay Schexnayder for his efforts. He requested to have something posted to help people understand the permit process for roof repairs. He acknowledged Waste Management, saying they have a job cut out for them in the next couple of days.

At this time Mr. Webre said they have a new position in the permitting office, a mobile permitting technician, and will get trained as a Certified Building Official. He is currently shadowing the two inspectors now. President Dufresne said this is an effort to bring the permitting office to the people, so they do not have to come to the courthouse.

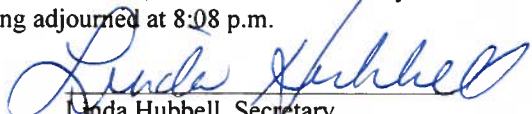
**CHAIRMAN ST. PIERRE** – Chairman St. Pierre said he didn't have problems with Verizon. President Dufresne said he has been having conversations with elected officials that the communications companies should be on standby, just like the electrical companies, with "cellular on wheels" to be ready to respond immediately after a storm. Chairman St. Pierre thanked the administration and directors for information and answered questions. He said a lot of information was communicated through Facebook and suggested everyone to sign up to receive the emails. He thanked the parish employees for their work. He also acknowledged Waste Management for their efforts.

Councilman Bland thanked the finance department for completing payroll and he acknowledged Julie for working on Sunday to complete payroll.

At this time, Chairman St. Pierre allowed Christiane Maasillion to introduce herself as she had information to share on Temporary Housing. Chairman St. Pierre suggested she speak with the directors.

**ADJOURNMENT**

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, on a motion offered by Councilman Amato and seconded by Councilman Bland and carried, the meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

  
Linda Hubbell, Secretary