

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S  
PUBLIC SAFETY AD HOC COMMITTEE  
HELD ON THE 2<sup>ND</sup> DAY OF AUGUST, 2023

The Caddo Parish Commission's Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee met in legal session on the above date, at 5:30 p.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers, with Mr. Epperson, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Chavez, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, and Young (7). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1).

The invocation was given by Mrs. Gage-Watts, and Mr. Epperson led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. David Young came before the Committee and gave the following comment:

David Young representing the Lake Forest Hills Homeowners Association. I have Orlando and Tiffany Green back here and Chad Rachel Gong. I guess its concerns about HOAs response and recovery assistance from the parish compared to the others. We were devastated by the storm, so I called—we had visits from the Sheriff's Office, the EMS, and state agency. Our roads were blocked. Two out of our three roads were blocked way beyond the capacity of our ability to clear. We had visits from the Sheriff's Department, EMS, and State—they knew that we had problems, and they assured us that we were on a list to get our streets cleaned. I called Monday morning, and there was no record of any work order or anything. Thank goodness, I guess because I was—the people in our community kind of look to me to take care of it. Its 28 homes. Its at the end of Jewella on Cross Lake. The highway department did come out and clear our trees. What my concern is, our recovery services. The Parish is picking up debris from streets throughout the Parish, but they deny us that service because we're an HOA. We pay taxes. We do all this stuff. Its not like it's a private residence. It's a community, and we need the support. I called Ken Ward. I called Gary Norman. I was denied by both. I started an email chain with Ken and other high ranking people in the Parish. I was told the only service we could go to was the Providence House, which made little sense. So, since my time's limited, I'd like to know if there were any other incorporated HOA sorts of communities in the Parish that were also denied these services. What's the limitation? I mean, if you need a whole harmless or whatever, what is limitation for you to come and help us? Both of these folks here were covered up with trees that we removed and we got to the street, but we can't get any assistance and debris recovery.

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Young, *that Mr. Young's time be extended by one minute.* Motion carried by acclamation.

Mr. David Young continued:

Is there any sort of tracking services where these Parish representatives were in our community on Friday to find out on Monday that there was no job made or anything. It was represented in one of the emails that SWEPCO had called to get the trees down, but that was me. I called—I was panicked. Some young lady at your office cooked me up with the highway department, and we got that taken care of. We're grateful for that service because we have two elderly members. We have a member that has congestive heart failure that will behind these trees—the blocked roads. So, on the disaster response side, I think we did what we could. My concern is on the recovery side. What services are available to us to help us? Most of us aren't moneyed. We need the same level of support that the citizens of the community of the Parish of Caddo has. Mr. Epperson wanted to know if they are inside the city limits or out. Mr. Young said that they are outside the city limits.

Joyce Rogers submitted the following comment:

First and foremost, i would like to commend the power companies from surrounding areas that assisted and restoring power to the city and Caddo Parish. know they provided a very necessary service. I also commend District 12 Commissioner and any other officials who did their jobs and gave tirelessly to assist their constituents. However, my concern is that not only have the outages occurred too frequently, but also too frequently in the same communities. I have resided in my community for more than 25 years and these outages have occurred for more than 25 years. This should not be. I have contacted AEP/SWEPCO for the many years, and the same issue: no power. I recall one time in particular, there were several

others but I remember the family hovered around the fireplace in the cold and in the dark of winter. Thank God we had a gas fireplace. I would think that after more than 25 years, improvements would have been made. Sadly enough, the situation has worsened. See, I don't believe everyone loses power every time there is an outage—and, if per chance they do, it is relatively short. And seemingly, they are the first to be restored. Person south of I-20 lost power for about two days during the last storm outage. I live north of I-20, and my power was off for five days. Even with the rationale that there is a system as to who is restored first, perhaps the policy or protocol needs to be revisited as it stands. It now appears that certain communities who are first to lose power are consistently the last or near last to be restored. AEP/SWEPCO has adequate time to make adjustments with these outages. Whatever the problems are by now they should not be the same ones that have existed for all these years. The problem lies with AEP/SWEPCO. We communicate with neighbors in various communities and generally we know who has and doesn't have power. It needs to change. During this last storm power outage, I took the opportunity to drive through certain communities. I can't imagine how persons are able to go on while living in such deplorable conditions. There's not been any noticeable government assistance provided in these black communities. Trees from the last major storm are still in their yards. They have not been collected as debris. They're uprooted and are larger than some cars. Who can live with any semblance of dignity and or community life under these conditions and habited dwellings are surrounded with blighted property? Where is the money for these cleanups? Where are the federal dollars? What does the city do to assist these communities? We are losing communities to unkept streets. We do understand that environment plays a crucial role in mental illness. Since mental illness is the buzz government needs to come to the aid of these communities. The government is ordained by God, and there is an accountability for when we fail to do our job. In closing government also needs to address the issue with AEP/SWEPCO.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

- *Welcome and Opening Comments*

Mr. Epperson explained to all those in attendance that this is an informational meeting.

- *Storm Response Participant Introductions & Statements*

Mr. Mike Corbin, SWEPCO, came before the Committee and explained that the first quarter of the year has been wet and warm, creating dense foliage with trees, as well as heavy leaves. The first major storm of the area was on June 16, 2023. It formed in the panhandle of Oklahoma and strengthen as it passed across the south to the northern part of the country. There were in wind speeds of 80-90 mph in the Shreveport/Bossier area. The storm damaged transmission lines, and there was no power to route anywhere. This included hospitals. Over 4,000 utility workers were called in to help restore power to the residents of this area. Exactly one month later, another storm came through the area—not as bad as the June 16<sup>th</sup> storm, but there was loss of power. SWEPCO does have a 5-year rolling plan for rebuilds and upgrades. There is also an annual plan for vegetation and forestry with regards to the electric poles and lines.

Ms. Laphelia Johnson, Caddo Council on Aging, came before the Committee to discuss the effects of the June 16<sup>th</sup> Storm. She said that they referred over 22 households to the local food bank, registered 40 individuals for the 2023 Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program, distributed over 50 box fans to seniors, as well as delivered 5,185 meals through the Meals on Wheels program. Some of the concerns that the Caddo Council on Aging received was that the alerts and other pertinent information was online, which provides problem to those who are not computer literate. She also said that the seniors did not have transportation to the cooling centers. Ms. Johnson explained that there were citizens who are wheelchair bound who could not use the elevators, so they had to call the fire departments to help evacuate those persons. Regular access to food and community transportation is an ongoing issue, and when there's an emergency, it's even worse, she said.

Ms. Martha Marak, Food Bank of Northwest Louisiana, reported that her team received over 200 calls a day of people who needed food to replace their food that was damaged due to the storm. They partnered with various organizations within Caddo, Bossier, and Desoto to help provide food to citizens, with their largest partner being Common Ground. The Food Bank distributed over 170,000 pounds of food in one day with a \$277,000 value.

Dr. Martha Whyte, Louisiana Health Department, came before the Committed and talked about the COVID positive cases. Currently, the region is at a 15.8% positivity rate with the latest report being 3,200 last week. She said that the strain is still Omicron, but it is not putting people in the hospital. People who are testing positive have flu like systems. She encouraged everyone to be mindful of others and mask up if they are not feeling well. She also mentioned that there were not any cases of malaria in

Louisiana. She did say that the cases in Florida were locally acquired, which mean that there are mosquitos in Florida that are infected with the malaria virus.

Mr. Kelvin Samuel, Caddo Parish Animal & Mosquito Control, agreed and said that there are not any cases of malaria in Louisiana. He encouraged everyone who has standing water to dump the water or contact Animal Services & Mosquito Control to spray. He did say that there is one case of West Nile in Louisiana, and is neural invasive.

Mr. Laurence Guidry, Caddo Community Action Agency, said that they were also out of power during the most recent storm. He did mention that they do have a cooling center to help those individuals get out of the heat.

Mr. Epperson asked about the evacuation shelter on Merriweather and Jewella. Dr. Whyte explained that the shelter was sold to another owner, and they are unsure if the shelter will continue to be used as an evacuation shelter. She said that they are looking at another facility on Mansfield Road to become a shelter.

Mrs. Verni Howard, Providence House, explained that their role is to help the Parish vet those persons who are in need and to ensure they meet the guidelines the Commission established. They have staff that take those phone calls, as well as, staff to ensure the work is being done properly. The first they did was create an application and make sure the funding would get to those people who were most in need, weather it was repair and/or tree and debris removal. They would then vet those individuals to ensure the work they are requesting is actually being completed. Ms. Howard said that the calls have slowed down, but they are still assisting where needed.

Chief Wayne Smith, Shreveport Police Department, came before the Committee with regards to crime within Shreveport. He said that crime is on the rise within the City, generally, it migrates to the Parish. Chief Smith also explained that they have been in contact with their public service partners—federal, state, and otherwise—to come up with ideas to help combat the rising crime. He could not go into detail any further with regards to their plans, but ensured there has been a collaboration between their partners to keep the people as safe as possible and hold those responsible for the crimes accountable.

Ms. Nika Echols, AT&T, said that they remained in constant contact with the Sheriff's Office and Office of Homeland Security, as well as other emergency preparedness key staff members. He said that communication is very important, and they worked tirelessly to restore service. She said that AT&T is committed to providing reliable communications before during and after any storm or a natural disaster. They also have a team of meteorologists who help monitor the networks 24/7 and can deploy resources to a disaster area quickly. AT&T also has one of the industry's largest and most advanced disaster response programs to help keep wireless and wireline communications running during times of disaster.

Ms. Madeline Poche, The Highland Center, explained that they are a non-profit in the Highland neighborhood. They were able to stand up the first shelter and cooling center for the first 72 hours following the June 16<sup>th</sup> storm. Red Cross set up cots and a check-in procedure, but The Highland Center's team was able to run the facility itself. They had about 100 people per day coming through, with about 40 people spending the night. She also mentioned that the citizens aided in the food distribution by donating food that was in their freezers. There was also a small computer lab with WiFi so everyone was able to charge their devices. Caddo Parish brought water. Dr. Whyte provided oxygen exchange, and the Red Cross helped with medical referrals. She said that everyone worked together to help the citizens out.

Mrs. Erica Bryant, Parish Administrator & CEO, stated the President, Vice-President, Assistant Administrator, and Communications Manager met day to address any issues that arose. There were several press conferences and press releases to inform the citizens what steps were being taken to address those issues. The Parish coordinated ice distributions, helped with cooling centers, removed debris, and cleared the roads. Mrs. Bryant stated that the Parish's Public Works Department worked around the clock to ensure access so the linemen could restore power to the citizens. She also said that they are still working to remove debris in the Parish right-of-ways. She reiterated that they cannot remove debris on private roads nor inside the incorporated areas.

The Clerk advised that Robert Jump with Homeland Security was unable to attend, but provided that the Parish did not qualify for FEMA Individual Assistance, however, the threshold for the Small Business Administration has been met. The details surrounding their operation will be finalized in the next couple of days.

Mr. Atkins thanked Public Works for all of their hard work during the recovery time. He also commended AEP/SWEPCO for restoring the power for the citizens as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Gage-Watts thanked the Chair for hosting this meeting. She said that it was informational and well needed in case of another disaster. She wanted to know if the 5-year rolling plan was a public plan. Mr. Corbin explained that the 5-year plan has been in place for years and is revised as needed. Mrs. Gage-Watts then wanted to know if there was an available tree cutting program. Mr. Corbin stated that they present a forestry program annually and go to the Public Service Commission for approval. He also mentioned that they are constantly trimming trees, and it poses a challenge in the older neighborhoods where the lines are in the backyards of the homes. Mrs. Gage-Watts then wanted to know if SWEPCO is requesting a resolution of support from the Commission. Mr. Corbin stated that they are not at this time, but will reach out if one is needed.

Mr. Cothran thanked the men and women who worked hard to get the power restored. He also thanked everyone who was in position to help the citizens and did. He pointed out that there are still people who are hurting and cannot remove the debris themselves. Mr. Cothran asked that everyone remember that the recovery is not finished yet.

Mr. Chavez thanked the Shreveport Volunteer Network for helping the citizens out pro bono. He said that they have an app where any citizen could request assistance or volunteer. Mr. Chavez requested that there be a mass pushout for Everbridge. Ms. Beauchamp stated that there is going to be a multi-agency campaign for Everbridge to harness all the agencies together. She said that there are not as many people signed up for it that they had hoped.

Mr. Burrell commended all of the agencies and the Office of Homeland Security for providing as much information as needed to the citizens in a timely manner. He did have some concerns with the broadband issues though. He understands that some of the ISPs in the area received Gumbeaux Grants, but have not provided better services to the citizens. Mr. Burrell said that these services are much needed and asked that an update with regards to this be presented to the Commission.

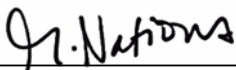
- *Question & Answer Period*

There was no one to speak at this time, so the Chair moved onto the next New Business item.

- *Conclusions, Take Aways, and Next Steps*

Mr. Epperson pointed out that there are several handouts available for the public to take with them to their respective homeowners' associations or neighbors. He also scheduled the next Public Safety Ad Hoc Committee for August 14, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. The Clerk notated the date and put the meeting on the Commission's calendar.

At this time, there was no further business to come before the Committee. The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

  
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Michelle Nations  
Assistant to the Commission Clerk