MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 9TH DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2023

The Caddo Parish Economic Development Committee met in legal session on the above date, at 12:00 noon, in the Government Chambers Conference Room, with Mr. Johnson, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Johnson, and Lazarus (7). ABSENT: Commissioner Jones (1).

Mrs. Gage-Watts gave the invocation, and Mr. Epperson led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

There were no agenda additions or public comments, so the Committee moved to the next agenda item.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Discuss addressing food deserts in the MLK area*

Mr. Johnson introduced Mr. Ronnie L. Bryant to the Committee.

Mr. Bryant stated that he has been in the economic development world for about 30-35 years. He started his career in Shreveport with the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Bryant further explained that they were hired by the City of Shreveport's Community Development Department to determine the feasibility of eliminating the food desert in the Martin Luther King area. He defined a food desert as a low-income area where citizens have limited access to grocery stores.

If the demographics of the MLK area supported a grocery, we wouldn't be having this conversation, Mr. Bryant said. He further explained that the algorithm that the grocery stores use to determine where their next store will be is a negative number.

Mr. Bryant said that he and his group works with communities around the country to determine creative ways to subsidize the grocery store in an effort to provide high quality fresh meat, fresh food, fresh vegetables, etc. What they are proposing is developing a commercial center, and using the proceeds from this commercial center to subsidize the grocery store. The main tenant in the commercial center would be the grocery store with their rent being below market. In this proposed development, there will be a full-service restaurant, Goodwill, SUSLA, executive offices, DMV office, storage center, health center, fitness center, etc. The center will be populated with the needs for the area. Currently, there are two different sites being proposed—one is currently occupied by a school that is no longer in use. The other site is on the other side of Southern, but they are putting their energy into Plan A.

Mr. Bryant said that they are working with the City of Shreveport, developers, grocery store chains, the Caddo Parish School Board, etc. on coming to an agreement. He reiterated that this project is to help that community.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know what would be the ROI for the Parish if funds are allocated. Mr. Bryant said that this would not be a financial investment where the Parish would receive a financial return; it would be to eliminate the food desert in the MLK area and bring other services to the area. Mr. Johnson agreed and said that this is a quality of life improvement.

Mr. Johnson talked about the proposed intergovernmental agreement with the School Board and the Commission. He said that the proposal is $1 per year for 99 years. Mr. Bryant agreed. Mr. Johnson then talked about Plan B, which is private property. Mr. Johnson explained since it is private property, it could be developed with the possibility of an increase in property taxes or those taxes be exempt. Mr. Bryant agreed and said that it would depend on the taxing authority.

Answering a question from Mr. Atkins regarding the requested amount, Mr. Bryant said that the original ask is approximately $2M. Mr. Johnson said that he would suggest between $500k- $1M.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know if the request was for capital dollars for construction or operating dollars for ongoing operations. Mr. Bryant said it would be for construct a new development. Mr. Atkins understood and said that an architect would also advise to build something new. He also said that the project being discussed is a huge project and doesn't feel that the proposed request would cover the costs of it. Mr. Bryant said that it is estimated to be a $22M-$23M project. Mr. Atkins then wanted to know where would the other funds come from. Mr. Bryant said that they are looking at bonding with the financial authority, new market tax credit from the USDA, and other grants.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know what kind of assurances would the Parish have that the project could financially support itself moving forward, if the project were built. Mr. Bryant said that this project is a

multi-tenant build, so the tenants would be supporting the ongoing operations. They would be looking for established, financially stable tenants to occupy the space.

Mr. Burrell wanted to know if it would be easier if the School Board surpluses the property, then sell it to the private investor. Mr. Bryant said that this would add another layer of expenses to the project. Mr. Burrell said that it could be sold for $1. Mr. Bryant said that would be a School Board decision. He pointed out that the School Board has not weighed in on this yet.

Mr. Bryant stated that they will be looking for any incentive they could get to reduce the cost of this project and the cost of operating for the grocery store tenant.

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson,** seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to recommend to the full body an appropriation of $1M over three years for the project, pending approval of the School Board, pending bond approval, and pending City of Shreveport approval and funding.*

Mr. Atkins said that this committee is supposed to show a positive ROI, but the NGO Committee doesn't have that responsibility. According to Mr. Bryant this is not intended to provide an economic return to the Parish; it is a quality of life issue. He respects the need for a source of food for that area. Mr. Atkins also said that the Commission has a fiduciary responsibility to spend the Parish's money on projects that will generated a positive economic return and a positive ongoing sustainable quality of life. I have not seen sufficient evidence on this project to feel comfortable with that decision, he said. Mr. Atkins said that he will voting against this motion.

Mr. Burrell said that creating jobs would create income and taxes. Mr. Bryant agreed and said that this would create jobs in the other businesses. He also said that this project would be a catalyst project and additional developments would follow this.

Mr. Chavez also said that he will voting no on this motion. He said that this project does not meet this committee's requirements. Mr. Chavez wants to know where the local people are getting their food. He said that there are too many unknowns for him to feel comfortable investing in this project. Mr. Bryant understood, but said that building grocery stores is not the answer to eliminating food deserts. He said that there has a to be a way to subsidize the grocery store.

Mr. Bryant is asking for a non-binding resolution from this committee to participate in this project.

Mr. Chavez said that Uber Eats, Grub-Hub, and On-The-Go Delivery puts a huge dent in the food deserts. He further explained that the full-service restaurant will be counterproductive to the food desert itself because it will not be fresh meat, fresh veggies, etc. being served due to profit margins.

Substitute motion by Mr. Epperson, seconded by Mr. Chavez, *that this recommendation be deferred to the NGO Appropriations Committee.*

Mr. Epperson said that this is a good idea. He also mentioned that the Town of Greenwood is looking for something similar to this.

Mr. Johnson pointed out that NGOs could not fund construction. Mrs. Bryant agreed and said that they typically do not put money into bricks and mortar, unless there is an economic disadvantage.

Mr. Johnson also said that property values in the area will go up and possibly additional subdivisions in the area, which would put houses on the tax rolls. He said that the ROI would indirect. Mr. Johnson gave the example of Wal-Mart on Northport. There wasn't anything there prior to that Wal-Mart being built, but now it has "blown up". Mr. Johnson said that the Parish's contribution to the project would be pending the approvals stated in his motion.

Mr. Burrell said that this project does fit economic development.

At this time, Mr. Epperson withdrew his substitute motion.

Call for the Question from Mr. Epperson, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts. Motion carried by acclamation.

At this time, Mr. Johnson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Epperson, Gage-Watts, and Johnson (4). NAYS: Commissioners Atkins, Chavez, and Lazarus (3). ABSENT: Commissioner Jones (1).

There being no further discussion, the Committee adjourned at 3:32 p.m.

M. Nations

Michelle Nations
Assistant to the Commission Clerk