

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
OF THE CADDO PARISH COMMISSION
HELD ON THE 20th DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2024

The Caddo Parish Commission met in a Work Session, on the above date, at 3:30 p.m., in the Government Chambers, with Mr. John Paul Young, presiding, and the following members in attendance constituting a quorum: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Giles, Kracman, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (12). ABSENT: None (0).

Mr. Cothran gave the invocation, and Mr. Thomas led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADDITIONS

It was **moved by Mr. Thomas**, seconded by Mr. Cothran, *to expand the agenda and add Mr. Michael Williams as a Visitor.*

At this time, the President opened the floor for anyone to speak in favor or against the agenda addition. There being no one to speak, Mr. J. Young closed the public hearing.

At this time, Mr. Thomas' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Giles, Kracman, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (12). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

There being no Citizens Comments, the Commission moved onto Visitors.

VISITORS

- Stacy Brown
Shreveport-Bossier Convention & Tourism Bureau

Mrs. Bryant informed the Commission that this item would need to be postponed due to the loss of Mrs. Brown's husband. The Commission offered their condolences at this time.

- Michael Williams

Mr. Williams gave the following comment:

First of all, I'd like to say good afternoon. Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the horseshoe, our officers, and of course, our Madame Chairman Administrator—to my colleague, I served with you, Commissioner Epperson, who I feel is the dean of this body and one of my mentors. When I first came on, Commissioner Epperson took me under his arm, but I didn't listen. I had a hard head. If you want to learn something about politics, talk to Ken. Of course, thank you Stormy for continuing the vision of the Caddo/Bossier Second Chance Initiative—the Expungement Summit—Caddo led the efforts to start the expungement summit in the State of Louisiana. Of course, Roy we know the work for all that you've been doing in the community. My fellow citizens of this body, I rise to say that Dr. Martin Luther King had a movement. The only way that movement can work—it was a nonviolent movement. That movement was arm in arm with black, white, young, old, rich, and poor, democratic, republic, independent, Protestant, Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Muslim—whatever the case may be, but it was a movement of inclusion...bringing our country together during the Civil Rights Movement. But in order for that movement to work in non-violence—the people that control the power, the money, and the policies—must have a conscious. So, I say to you that empowerment days in D.C., the question I asked is for you today, 'do you have a conscious?' We just prayed before every meeting, and we say the Pledge of Allegiance. Is that a form of formality or a ritual or a tradition? Or do you believe in practicing what you preach? Do you really care about the least of these? God said in Galatians that, 'neither black nor white, Jew nor Protestant, we all should be one bud, one body together'. So I'll have to talk about a particular problem. I do, I did pass out a handout for your reference. I've been pass all the statutes from the State of Louisiana from Chicago, Michigan—I scanned it. Supposedly she scanned it, but if you need to make other copies, I do have it. I must admit though that we could talk about this particular issue. For years, we've been rehearsing and rehashing the conversation about voter irregularities and voter suppression. It's unconstitutional that we have pre-trial detainees that was sitting in our current Caddo Correctional Centers right now that have the right to vote, and they're not exercised their right to vote because of voter suppression. Because of any foreign information, misinformation, not education. Because we have allowed the current administration and the Sheriff's Office not to allow them to have that right. This is a disenfranchise. The next factor is that you have the responsibility—according to the Charter, Section 506—the Administrator has the duty and responsibility to appoint a superintendent to oversee the jail. There in which he become the superintendent, it supposed to be reported activities and programs, second chance program, education for them to come back and let the Administration and Parish know of the type of activity going on in your jail—the taxpayers' jail. I can remember a time when Ken and I—we was going to privatize the jail to make sure that we had a accountability and transparency. To make sure the taxpayers were getting what they paid for, but we didn't do that. We decided to let Don Hathaway, at the time, to continue to run the jail. But you have the opportunity, the power, to set out and privatize the jail that you see fit. You have the power to do that. You

know protecting the voter rights of every Caddo Parish pre-trial detainee while they're waiting for their day in court is a constitutional right. They are able and legally to vote. Of course, we have pushback; we have systemic values; and we have voter suppression. We have ineffective transparency. We have no voter registration; we have no voter education; and we have no voter participation. According to your Louisiana Revised Statute Section 18 102.1, the only person who is ineligible to vote not vote is someone that is a convicted felon. People waiting in your jail is not a felon. They're not. They're still entitled to their constitutional rights, but their 14 and 15 amendment being breeched every day. Look at America right now. Our voting is being suppressed, and we're a free man out here. So people behind prison, they haven't been convicted of a crime yet. They're pre-trial detainees. They're still entitled to their voting rights. Now, if this was the Second Amendment, and you infringe anything on the Second Amendment, this place will be packed. But since we are talking about pre-trial detainees that are in prison that haven't convicted of a crime—that hadn't had their day in court, you're infringing on their rights. They're right to be able to exercise one of their most fundamental pay down reparations for African Americans is our right to vote. They're trying to take that away. Each year many eligible are excluded for participating in the democratic process because there are structural barriers to voting system to prevent them from having the access. [inaudible] maybe to have funds and absentee ballots and voting places. In the handout, you will find references all across this America is a very progressive move into allowing voters to vote. From Chicago to Michigan to Indiana, they're voting behind bars, jail, incarceration. A different facility. Our facility is a holding facility they DOC to the State. Its just a holding facility. [inaudible] you got sixty-four parishes in the State of Louisiana. Of course, we lead the nation and capital for locking up, particularly African-American people in our jail. We ranked number fifty when it comes to correction and crime. Ranked 49 in infrastructure. 49 in opportunity. 45 in education. Number two in poverty. In the State of Louisiana. And we want to be better than to be a [inaudible] state and take for serious. We gotta get away from those Jim Crow law. We gotta stop dividing our state and come together as democratic, republican, independent, black, white, Navaho, rich or poor. Our children are looking at us. The right to vote is one of the most sacred votes we have. It's a sacred pillar of U.S. democracy. Democracy works best when everyone is represented yet some citizens while detained are not privileged to all that opportunity because of the parliament of rights that they don't have. This Commission body has the right to do that. We can enact a law in an ordinance and resolution today. We don't have to wait. You have the power to do that. Hopefully, I'll leave you and you look at our package. Look at the reference sheet I left, and you can see that you can have that we can do what other people are doing across America to allow these people the right to vote. So I say to you. I don't need 15 minutes. I'm almost closing. Of course, I recited the two statutes, the State statutes, and of course the Home Rule Charter. Some people need to re-read it and find out the power that you have. Thurgood Marshall Institute saying it's constitutional—its unconstitutional to breach somebody of this right. Your [inaudible] in the 14th and 15th Amendments. We all have the right to basic fundamentals to a house, a job, and pay to go to a public facility to get an education. I mean we out to have these same wake up—we have built this country called America. [inaudible] Republican [inaudible] public colleagues that are moderate and another extremist entitle people to their rights. If you have a conscious, and you say you love God, you just prayed and you said the Pledge of Allegiance and you said 'justice for all'. Justice for who? Our children are watching us. In 1974, it was the Supreme Court that Brian v. Skinnard that eligible people shall not be denied the right to vote [inaudible] satisfied that the right to vote is a privilege. This is neither nor black or white—this is what's right. You ran and when you took the Oath of Office, you took the oath before God and take the rights and the privilege of the people in this City—the poor, the people who don't have a voice. When you swear in on this horseshoe that you protect all the citizens around you. But you know, there's resistance here in Caddo for years under this Chairman, under this Administration, [inaudible]. Every other statement and every other local municipality and county across America are now fulfilling that obligation and allowing people to vote. In 1974, Wayne County, Michigan, filed a lawsuit and won. George Wayne Fain said it was wrong, and now the people have the right to vote. Court and attorneys are in here. Look at Chapter 34, the right to pre-trial detainees is a handout. It tells you about detainees' rights to vote. So I say to you as Thomas Jefferson said in 1776, are we all created equal? He quipped that phrase. Are we all created equal? But we are not treated equal on this side of America. These are facts. Everywhere we go, we see everyday, we watch it in the news, we see the crisis that America had because of hate, racism, and division. Because of our skin and that's wrong. We just got through praying. Maybe you should go to church every Sunday. Wear your Sunday's best, and leave out your Monday face, and come out the same way. God is looking. We're all going to be judged what we've done today on this planet. I do have some recommendations that may help us along this journey to try and change the narrative and the perception about Shreveport and Caddo Parish. I think we need to invest and expand election and education at CCC. We need to facilitate and ensure they have access to material to educate them t o be proactive, not reactive. We have the right to request Parish jails to make sure they have voter registration and that they have access to voting. We need to establish a jail polling location. Last, but not least, we need to have authorized special statutes for pre-trial incarcerated voting. Definitely watch this, this is how you hold people accountable. It don't make sense to have a law, and you have no compliance at all. This is like our Fair Share Program. Right now they can hold it. Back in the 90s, you need to have a compliance officer to make sure that there's equity and fair share into contracts going out besides in Caddo Parish. We need to allow pre-trial detainees their privilege to allow them to vote. And we need to also have a coordinator to ensure that it's going on in our jails, but in the long run, you're going to do what you do. I'm going to wrap up and close. This is something I'm compassionate about. When you stand up for what is right, you have to be willing to go to jail, die, or lose your job.

Mr. Burrell said that they did revamp some of the laws within the legislature to make it easier for pre-trial detainees to vote. He agreed with Mr. Williams that the pre-trials detainees to have the right to vote. Mr. Burrell asked that Administration research the process in which pre-trial detainees have

to do in order to vote. Mr. Burrell also asked that Administration look into the claims Mr. Williams made with regards to the Caddo Parish Commission providing oversight to the jails.

Mr. Epperson requested that the language be posted on the agenda with regards to the time allotted for visitors.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

- Juvenile Detention

Mrs. Bryant said that there are eighteen children in the Detention Center; four of which are OJJ. There are six 17-year olds, and fifteen children at CCC. There are 570 children on probation.

- January 2024 Financial Statements

Mrs. Bryant informed the Commission that the financials for January 2024 are attached to the agenda and placed at their stations.

- Commissioner Requests

Mr. Epperson asked that Administration look into the Governor not accepting federal funding for the SNAP benefits for the summer months. He wanted to know what sort of impact this will have on the citizens. He then asked if Commission has any funding available for the citizens during the summer months.

Mrs. Gage-Watts agreed with Mr. Epperson and said that about 35,000 children in Caddo Parish will be impacted by this. The Food Bank and local grocery stores will also be impacted. She wanted to know if the Commission could apply for these grants. Mrs. Bryant said that she is not sure that Caddo Parish can receive the SNAP benefits. She explained that other agencies can apply for other types of grants to assist in providing food for the citizens, but SNAP has to go through the State. Mrs. Bryant said that she will research this further and bring the information back to the Commission. Mrs. Gage-Watts requested a resolution asking the Governor to reverse his decision.

Mr. Burrell asked Administration to research if the Governor has the power to restrict local bodies from using their funds. He said that this is a grave concern to him.

Mr. Epperson said that he went to Senator Cassidy's Office while he was in D.C. He suggested relaying the SNAP benefits' concern to his office. Mr. Epperson then wanted to know if there was anyone monitoring the special session in Baton Rouge. Mrs. Bryant said that the Parish does have lobbyists and will report back to the Commission. Mr. Epperson understood and asked for a daily update.

Mr. J. Young said that it is his understanding that pre-trial detainees just need to request a ballot in order to exercise their right to vote. Mrs. Bryant agreed. Mr. J. Young wanted to know how many ballots were request and how many were denied during the last election.

Mr. Giles agreed with Mrs. Gage-Watts and asked if the Commission could do something to help the children of Caddo Parish.

Mrs. Gage-Watts wanted to know if there would need to be a resolution to request an additional polling place in the jail. Attorney Frazier said that she will look into it and get back to the Commission.

COMMISSION REMARKS

- Mrs. Gage-Watts announced that the Juvenile Justice Committee will meet on Thursday at 11:30 a.m.

- Mr. J. Young reiterated that ballots can be requested at CCC. He also assured the public that "each of the Commissioners up here have a conscience". He also assured the public that inmates at CCC, pre or post conviction, are exercising their right to bear arms.

NEW BUSINESS

It was **moved by Mr. G. Young**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *that Ordinance No. 6418 of 2024, an ordinance to accept the streets in North Trace Boulevard into the Parish of Caddo Road System, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for introduction. Motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Giles, Kracman, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (12). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *that Ordinance No. 6419 of 2024, an ordinance amending and re-enacting Section 40-7 of the Caddo Parish Code of Ordinances, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for introduction

Mr. Epperson said that this ordinance is to help alleviate the litter in Caddo Parish.

Mr. Burrell agreed and said that the signs clutter up the public right of ways. He wanted to know how this information would be disseminated to the state candidates. Mr. Epperson explained that it is their responsibility to pick up their political signs once their campaign is over. He also said that the candidates could check the South Camp or the North Camp for illegal signs picked up by the Parish.

Mr. Epperson further explained that this ordinance would be attached to the candidate packets, if approved. Mr. Epperson also said that he would like this to be sent to all the printers.

Attorney Frazier said that this law is already State Law.

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Giles, Kracman, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (12). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Cothran, *that Resolution No. 11 of 2024, a resolution opposing Louisiana HB 37 of the regular legislative session and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Mrs. Bryant explained that this bill would add local sales taxes to the exemption for food. This would be approximately a \$13.7M impact to the Parish as a whole, not just the Commission, but for every local entity. She further explained that these entities don't have the benefit of the tax base for the State. Mrs. Bryant also pointed out that a lot of the Parish's taxes are associated with food, so this would be a significant loss in revenue. Administration is in favor of opposing this bill.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know the Parish's impact. Mrs. Bryant said that it would be a couple million dollars. Mr. Atkins said that the Commission has an opportunity each year to evaluate taxes to either roll back or roll forward or to ask citizens to find new taxes. He does not feel that it is appropriate for Baton Rouge to "sweep their hand over and dictate what the Parish can and cannot tax". Mr. Atkins will be in support of Administration's position on this resolution.

Mr. Kracman would like to see the breakdown of the impact to each entity, as well as industry tax abatements. He said that this would give the working class an immense break. Mr. Kracman said that each district in this Parish has a food desert. The cost of food whether cooking at home or going to McDonald's is outrageous, he said. Mr. Kracman is not in support of this resolution.

Mr. J. Young said that this is a difficult topic because everyone needs to eat, but the Parish still has to make ends meet.

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (10). NAYS: Commissioners Giles and Kracman (2). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mr. Burrell, *that Resolution No. 12 of 2024, a resolution opposing the Governor of Louisiana sending National Guard troops to the border of Texas and Mexico, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Mr. Epperson said that the National Guard and Reserves are supposed to be used for natural disasters or emergencies sanctioned by the federal government. Mr. Epperson said that the border issue is political. Our National Guards need to be at home in Louisiana resting and getting prepared for the upcoming hurricane season and tornado season, Mr. Epperson said. He will be in support of opposing sending troops to Texas.

Mr. Cothran agreed with Mr. Epperson. He also said that he has never heard of a National Guard unit being sent to another state with the exception of a true federal disaster.

Mr. Burrell echoed the same sentiments as Mr. Cothran and Mr. Epperson. He believes this is a political ploy. It is his understanding that the U.S. Senate has a solution to the border problem.

Mr. G. Young wanted to go on record as agreeing with Mr. Epperson. He does not feel it is appropriate to refuse SNAP benefits, but wants to take Louisiana troops to the Texas border. He agreed that this is a political ploy.

Mr. Giles agreed with Mr. Epperson, Mr. Cothran, Mr. Burrell, and Mr. G. Young

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Giles, Thomas, and G. Young (7). NAYS: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Kracman, Lazarus, and J. Young (5). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Epperson, *that Resolution No. 13 of 2024, a resolution requesting the Secretary of State to authorize adding an additional early voting location in Caddo Parish and otherwise providing with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Mrs. Gage-Watts is excited about introducing this legislation again. She explained that there would be no additional cost for the additional voting machines, and the infrastructure costs is estimated to be about \$6,000.

Mr. Atkins asked about the infrastructure costs and the location. Mrs. Gage-Watts said that it would be about \$6,000. She also explained that there isn't a specified location at this time.

At this time, Mrs. Gage-Watts' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (10). NAYS: Commissioners Giles and Kracman (2). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to englobo and move the following items to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration and discussion:*

- *Special Resolution for Quinn Echols*
- *Special Resolution for Ronald Jefferson*
- *Special Resolution for Jacqueline Scott*
- *Special Resolution for Lashonda Diouf*
- *Robert Jump as a Visitor*

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Lazarus, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (10). NAYS: Commissioners Giles and Kracman (2). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Burrell, *that Special Resolution for Steffon Jones* be moved to Thursday's agenda for consideration.

Mr. Atkins asked for clarity on this resolution. Mrs. Gage-Watts said that this resolution is to recognize Mr. Jones during Black History Month and his efforts to make the community a better place.

Mr. G. Young is not comfortable with the ideas of seemingly supporting a particular candidate during a political campaign.

Mr. J. Young agreed with Mr. G. Young. He suggested that this Special Resolution be adopted and presented after the election.

At this time, Mrs. Gage-Watts' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Gage-Watts, Giles, Kracman, Lazarus, and Thomas (7). NAYS: Commissioners Blake, Epperson, G. Young, J. Young (4). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: Commissioner Cothran (1).

COMMUNIQES AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Mr. Lazarus said that DOTD is closing LA 525 beginning Monday, February 26 for six days, weather permitting.

- Mr. Cothran thanked Animal Services for all of their consistent hard work.

- Mr. Epperson asked that the Clerk of the Commission add language to the Charter Review Committee nominees stating that the Commission is only appointing six members. Mr. Epperson said that he will be resuming his District Informational Meetings (DIMs) in April.

Mr. Epperson asked Administration to find out information about Mrs. Brown's husband and forward those details to the Commission.

- Mr. Atkins asked about a Finance & Audit Committee meeting. The Clerk of the Commission said that there was a request from P&N to schedule a meeting in the near future.

- Mr. Thomas announced that the Animal Services Committee will meet on Thursday at 1:00 p.m.

- Mrs. Gage-Watts asked Mr. Adam Bailey, MPC, about the purpose of Special Use Permit.

Mr. Bailey explained that it is an approval process for the use of property. He said that they are informed of the process when they apply.

- Mr. G. Young announced that the Economic Development Committee will meet on Thursday at 2:00 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

- *Resolution No. 4 of 2024, a resolution approving the amended 2023 and proposed 2024 budgets of the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory Commission and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*
- *Special Resolution of Recognition to Calvary*
- *Appointments to the Charter Review Committee (Term to expire December 31, 2024)*
- *Appointments to the Health & Human Services Board (Term to expire January 1, 2026)*
- *Appointments to the Citizens Disaster Response Committee*

At this time, there was no further discussion to come before the Commission, so the Commission adjourned at 4:47 p.m.


Assistant to the Commission Clerk