

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 18TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2025

The Caddo Parish Long Range Planning Committee met in legal session on the above date at 2:00 p.m. in the Government Plaza Chambers Conference Room, with the following members were present constituting a quorum: Commissioners Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Kracman, Lazarus, and Thomas (6). ABSENT: None (0).

Mr. Thomas gave the invocation, and Mr. Epperson led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADDITIONS

It was **moved by Mr. Thomas**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to recommend to the full body a resolution of support for House Bill No. 6.*

There was no one to speak in favor or against the agenda addition. At this time, Mr. Thomas' motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Patrick Drew came before the Committee and gave the following comment:

This is rather new to me. I'm a community coordinator. I work for Community Renewal. I live in a Friendship House. If y'all are familiar with the Friendship Houses, they are in numerous of our neighborhoods. My wife and I run the one that is in the MLK area, which is the Cooper Road. It has come to a time for me to open my mouth—like I said, its new to me, but the conditions in my neighborhood—I can't take it. Just riding around my neighborhood looking at the living situations and different stuff like that. I'm what you call "boots on the ground". When a roof is leaking, the elderly, they calling me. And so, uh, I'm just up here trying to make a way for not just the elderly in my neighborhood, but youth in the neighborhood as well. My wife and I, we work with over sixty kids in after school groups from 3 o'clock to 7 o'clock, from ages 6 to 18. We are actually trying to create an apprenticeship program to teach kids carpentry skills, electrician skills, plumbing skills, and different stuff like that. The living situation in the neighborhood—if you guys ride around—I know you have your own neighborhood, its like that in all neighborhoods, but riding around the neighborhood, you know, its nothing to see in the neighborhood. Kids have nothing to look forward to. People have no reason to come back to our neighborhood. I actually—I used to be responsible for tearing down a community because I was actually involved in gangs and different stuff like that, but now, I'm responsible for building the neighborhood—building the neighborhood mentally, spiritually—you know, like I said, working with the kids and trying to create better living situations, especially for the elderly. We have a lot of elderly people in the community. Their houses are just like falling down and stuff like that. They need a lot of repairs. My nonprofit is Restore Cooper Road Community Foundation, so I am trying to start a beautification project, which starts with the elderly and repairing the houses—landscaping, paint, all that different kind of stuff with no criteria. You know a lot of these people are elderly; they don't have money. They are actually living in a house without insurance, whether you know it or not. So, its hard for them to get people to come and work on their houses. So, I created a program, if I can get some funding—I got a lot of people that's willing to do the work, but I need fundings to get started. This program that I've created is going to go beyond the Cooper Road—its going to go Cooper Road, Cedar Grove, Queensborough, and different neighborhoods. But um, its just empty in all them neighborhoods that I just called. I mean if y'all are familiar with them. You ride around—the houses falling down; the streets tearing up; uh, no businesses, you know—especially, on the Cooper Road. So I just really just came out to express my thoughts on the living situations in the neighborhoods. Its just—something needs to be done. I'm just actually one person, but I work on communication and connecting. I have connected with a lot of people that's willing to get me a lot of man hours, but you know, everybody is going to need some money to be able to buy the materials and stuff like that so, I don't know where all of this is going, but maybe it'll help me some kind of way, and I can help some other people. I just came up to express my thoughts on the living situations. It is very trashy and empty in our neighborhoods. We need a lot of help.

There were no Public Comments, so the Committee moved onto New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Discuss Ordinance No. 6518 of 2025, an ordinance amending the Budget of Estimated Revenues & Expenditures for the Solid Waste Fund and the Riverboat Fund to provide an additional appropriation for property standards and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*

Mr. J. Young said that his neighborhood is being burned down by meth users who are seeking shelter in abandoned homes during inclement weather. The houses get burned repeatedly, especially when it is cold. The fire department comes and puts out the fire, but does not board it up, so the squatters come in and set it on fire again, Mr. J. Young explained. He also said that the neighbors' homes are catching fire due to this problem. These homes are historic wooden homes that catch fire quickly. Litter and blight degrade the quality of life for citizens, but these houses are being burned down, Mr. J. Young said. He also said that this proposed ordinance allocates funds to address this issue. The houses that are

not being boarded up are getting burned down by meth heads, he said. Mr. J. Young further stated that that these fires are occurring sporadically and endangering the lives of the neighbors, the livability of the community, and endangers the firefighters. The issue is ongoing and threatens to depopulate the Highland Neighborhood due to safety concerns. Without intervention, the situation is expected to worsen, resulting in substantial property loss within the next five years. Something needs to be done, he said, we are losing about a house a week.

Mr. Cothran referred to Legal regarding this legislation. Attorney Frazier said that there are several laws that apply to property standards. She deferred to the City's Attorney regarding property standards within the city limits of Shreveport.

Shreveport City Attorney, Marcus Edwards, explained that this is an internal transfer, so he deferred back to Attorney Frazier. She understands that this is an internal transfer, but it would be used within the city limits and the City's Property Standards Program. Mrs. Bryant explained that the payment would be made from the Solid Waste Fund to the City of Shreveport. She further explained that the Solid Waste funds are restricted, so they had to transfer into the Solid Waste Fund from another fund in order to be used inside the city limits of Shreveport.

Attorney Edwards said that there is a law within the Louisiana Constitution (Article 7, Section 14) which prohibits one taxing entity to transfer funds to another taxing entity to use those funds for any public purpose. In order to work around this, there would need to be a cooperative endeavor agreement, he said. Attorney Edwards thanked the Commission for bringing this issue to the forefront and said that this is an ongoing issue. Risky behaviors in these properties negatively impact residents, property owners, neighborhoods, etc. He also explained that there is a specific process that must be followed prior to boarding up properties.

Attorney Edwards said that the Squatters Prevention Act that was passed in the previous regular session authorizes considering squatters to be either trespassing or committing a simple burglary if a lawful possessor says that they have told the individual to exit; they've posted signs or boarded up the property; etc. If there isn't a lawful possessor present, there are parameters that the City is bound by prior to removing the alleged squatter. Attorney Edwards said that the City of Shreveport would love to collaborate with the Parish of Caddo to address this issue, but there are existing barriers with removing alleged trespassers.

Attorney Frazier wanted to know if there was list that the City inspects based on reports made. She also wanted to know if there was a priority list. Mr. Green, City of Shreveport, said that the priority is normally the burned structures. He said that property inspection prioritization focuses on structures needing immediate attention, which he managed digitally. Mr. Green also mentioned that he could print or put a list together. He further explained that the speed of addressing property issues depends on factors, such as appeals and filing processes.

Attorney Frazier also wanted to know if there was a priority based on district. Mr. Green said that there is not, but district variations do exist in the number of inspectors based on the size of the district. No priority exists based on districts. Mr. Green also said that the Administrator makes rulings to include deadlines for repairs, etc.

Answering a question from Attorney Frazier regarding the City of Shreveport's Property Standards budget, Mr. Green said that their annual budget is \$5.9M.

Attorney Frazier wanted to know if the Parish does allocate these funds, would it need to go through the mechanism that the Property Standards department uses to inspect properties. Attorney Edwards said that it would need to follow the process, unless a CEA is drafted. He also mentioned that the City cannot allocate funds based on districts.

Mr. Thomas thanked Mr. J. Young for bringing this issue forward. He wanted to know what other steps could be done beyond boarding up the properties. He said that intruders may find alternative entry points, such as accessing areas underneath the property.

Attorney Edwards announced that Mayor Arceneaux has been awarded a grant through Bloomberg Harvard Initiative, and he plans to focus on blight. He also said that a collaboration effort is underway to address complex community challenges. Solutions involve comprehensive strategies to address issues such as affordable housing shortages, mental health support needs, and problems stemming from neighborhood conditions like crime, fires, and dumping of litter. Attorney Edwards said that the City of Shreveport welcomes the collaboration and additional resources are welcomed to address the problems.

Mr. Thomas said that District 3 has several blighted properties and fires as well. He is hoping that the City and the Parish can work together to address these issues. Mrs. Gage-Watts agreed and said that this is also an issue in her district.

Mr. Cothran said that the CEA is needed to solidify this collaboration.

Fire Chief Reese came before the Committee and said that Shreveport Fire Department fought 63 vacant house fires last year with a large concentration in the Highland neighborhood. Chief Reese said that this has been an ongoing problem for several years. Repeat offenders often return to the "crime scene" until the structure is demolished. There has also been an issue with property owners demolishing the

structures after they've been burned. He said that immediate demolition prevents unwanted reoccupation in these structures. Chief Reese said that people are using these abandoned structures for substance abuse and shelter from the cold weather. This situation requires immediate attention to prevent further occurrences. Chief Reese expressed safety concerns for battling fires in unsafe structures. He explained that the homes in Highland are two-story pier and beam homes and pose a risk to firefighters.

Assistant Chief of Police Collette Kelly came before the Committee and said that a significant issue involves the lack of clear property ownership. This uncertainty hinders effective law enforcement responses and prevents appropriate action. The inability to identify owners creates difficulties in addressing trespassing; many property owners have moved away, making identification challenging. Assistant Chief Kelly said that the Sign Program requires written permission from the property owners to allow police to access the property and remove trespassers. She also explained that posted permission from owners is necessary for legal action against trespassers.

Attorney Frazier mentioned that the City of Shreveport proposed an ordinance regarding vacant property registry, which would fine property owners for not registering vacant properties with the City of Shreveport. Attorney Frazier said that this ordinance was tabled by the City Council.

Mr. J. Young wanted to know if the police could remove people from a house that has a "No Trespassing" sign. Assistant Chief Kelly said that they would still need to identify the property owner to determine whether or not that person is allowed in the house. Mr. J. Young then wanted to know if there was a "No Trespassing" sign above a doorway that had no door. Assistant Chief Kelly said that the legality of removing a person from a property lacking doors or windows is complex. A "No Trespassing" sign is insufficient for eviction; clear ownership assertion is needed.

Mr. Atkins wanted to know the outcome of an arrest of someone who is trespassing. Assistant Chief Kelly said that criminal trespassing is a misdemeanor offense, which increase in punishment the more times a person is convicted.

Mrs. Gage-Watts suggested helping promote the signs program that the Shreveport Police Department has in place.

Chief Reese wanted to know the difference between the City's "No Trespassing" sign and one from Home Depot. Assistant Kelly explained that the SPD sign is registered with the police department; the Home Depot sign is not.

Mr. Epperson said that the Pines Road Area Business Association utilizes Caitlyn Ellis to alleviate transient people in places.

Mr. J. Young wanted to know if there was a constructive notice of trespass or a constructive notice of abandonment. Assistant Kelly said that police officers are not trained in making assumptions; they are trained to enforce laws that are in place.

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to have continued discussions regarding Ordinance No. 6518 of 2025, an ordinance amending the Budget of Estimated Revenues & Expenditures for the Solid Waste Fund and the Riverboat Fund to provide an additional appropriation for property standards and to otherwise provide with respect thereto to the March 3, 2025 Work Session.*

Mr. J. Young said that there are several numerous vacant buildings in the Highland neighborhood, and one of them will be burned down in the next few days due to the cold weather. The resulting damage may affect neighboring properties, leading to displacement and permanent vacancy. He said, "It is very obvious when a house is vacant. You would have to be an absolute fool not to be able to tell that a house with no door and no windows and no electricity and no water is vacant. And that the people who are living there—if they're living there, starting fires, have no business being there and should be removed. We need to all wake up. My neighborhood is being burned down."

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried unanimously.

- *Discuss a resolution of support for House Bill No. 6*

Mr. Thomas said that there has been collaboration among the City, Parish, and State to resolve housing issues. He said that three more apartment complexes have been shut down highlighting the urgency of these matters. Relocation efforts are underway for the affected individuals due to landlord negligence. House Bill No. 6 attempts to criminalize the landlords who are not paying the utilities with the funds collected from their tenants.

Mr. Thomas said that the Centenary Garden Apartment Complex had tenants still living there, but people moved into the abandoned portions of the property and burned it.

Attorney Edwards explained that this bill is outside of his wheelhouse, but he explained that there several apartment complexes that are held by LLCs, which can only be fined, not put in jail. He also said that there are questions on whether a single-member LLC can be held liable for racketeering, specifically addressing the element of conspiracy. Challenges increase when dealing with multiple LLCs. Attorney Edwards said that the solution would be to require individually metered apartment units. He said

that this is a costly solution and may be a barrier for development.

Mr. Thomas would like a resolution of support for this bill.

Mr. G. Young said that Attorney Edwards explained the improbability to enact criminal penalties for LLCs. He said that this bill is disproportionate to the little guy. Mr. G. Young explained that this does not solve the main issue of holding LLCs accountable. This is rather a knee-jerk reaction to a terrible problem, he said. Mr. G. Young will not support this resolution.

Mr. Thomas pointed out that this is not to punish someone who inadvertently forgot to pay the bill; it is to criminalize the larger LLCs who are several thousands of dollars in debt to the utility company. This bill is for those landlord's failure to pay utilities despite collecting rent and misappropriating the tenant's funds.

It was **moved by Mr. Thomas**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *that a resolution of support of House Bill No. 6* be forwarded to the full body. Motion carried unanimously.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 3:19 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant to the Commission Clerk