

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
OF THE CADDO PARISH COMMISSION
HELD ON THE 5th DAY OF JANUARY, 2026

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

Mr. Jones gave the invocation, and Mr. G. Young led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADDITIONS

It was **moved by Mr. J. Young**, seconded by Mr. Thomas, *that the agenda be expanded to add Resolution No. 4 of 2026, a resolution approving the holding of an election in Caddo Parish Fire District Number Five, State of Louisiana, on Saturday, May 16, 2026, to authorize the levy of service charges therein.*

Madame President opened the floor for anyone to speak for or against the agenda addition.

Josh Chevallier came before the Commission and gave the following comment in support of the potential agenda addition:

Josh Chevallier, 401 Edwards Street, Suite 1000, Shreveport, Louisiana 71101. My name is, again, Josh Chevallier, I'm here on behalf of Caddo Parish Fire District No. 5 as their legal counsel, asking that you approve the amendment to allow this resolution to advance concerning the renewal of service fees which have been levied in Caddo Parish Fire District No. 5 for fire and police service over the course of several decades now, which are set to expire in 2027, which we'd like to have considered on the election scheduled for May 16th, 2026. The governing authority of the Fire District, the Board of Commissioners of Caddo Parish Fire District No. 5 on November 17th held a meeting where they called a special election scheduled for May 16th, 2026 that's been submitted to the State Bond Commission, who has asked that you all consent as well, as the delegating authority for Caddo Parish Fire District No. 5. They've reviewed and provided technical approval of the form of resolution that's been submitted to you, and we're on the State Bond Commission's agenda for January 14th, 2026 to be submitted to the Secretary of State and go on that May ballot. If anyone had any additional questions, I'd be happy to discuss, but I want to allow you to continue on with the form and substance of your agenda.

There being no one else to speak in favor of, or against, the ordinances, the President closed the public hearing.

At this time, Mr. J. Young's motion to expand the agenda carried unanimously with Commissioners Burrell and Kracmen being absent (2). This resolution was added under New Business.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Heather Boucher came before the Commission and gave the following comment:

Heather Boucher, 9008 Vue Fleur Lane, Shreveport, Louisiana 71106. Good afternoon, Commissioners. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to address you today at the beginning of this new year. I've come before you to discuss a profoundly and critical and devastating issue that continues to impact our community, human trafficking. While the subject is undeniably sensitive and can be uncomfortable to confront, its pervasive and tragic nature demands our collective attention and open discourse as a community. It is imperative that we acknowledge its presence and work towards effective solutions. I extend my sincere appreciation to each of you as dedicated leaders for your willingness to step forward, engage with this challenging topic, and commit to bringing this crisis into vital light of the public awareness and action. With January being Human Trafficking Awareness Month, I thank you all for the resolution. I am honored and privileged to serve on the Free Coalition Board. With is being Human Trafficking Awareness Month, we are hosting a breakfast January 23rd. I'll make sure you all receive and invitation. I'd love to see you all there. We'll have a survivor speak. We had one last year that was phenomenal. She shared her story to kind of give everyone an idea that it's not what you see on the movies, and how it impacts the entire community. So, I just want to thank you all for standing up and speaking out for our community.

Jon Glover came before the Commission and gave the following comment:

Good evening, members of the Commission. Jon Glover, 9100 Walker Road, Apartment 217, Shreveport, Louisiana, zip code 71118. Happy New Year to each of you. As I looked over the agenda for today, there are five pieces of legislation that I, a citizen, does not understand the purpose and intent of those legislations. I'm going to ask that whomever it is that makes the decision as to whether or not during a work session, legislations that can impact me as a citizen be indeed addressed. Often times, we don't get that at work sessions. They are often done on Thursdays in the regular session. But, if you have a work

session that affords me an opportunity to understand why you're putting forth a piece of legislation, then I feel that it should be the responsibility of the Commission to share that information with me as a citizen. You know, we can englobe what is not going to impact me directly, but those things that can impact me, maybe even not in my District, but the Parish as a whole, I still need to know the impact and the effects of such a legislation. So, I'm asking that during your work sessions, that those pieces of legislation that you all will address that can impact me, a citizen, and every citizen, that you all give us the meat of what you're doing.

Calvin Baker, Jr. came before the Commission and gave the following comment:

Calvin James Baker, Jr., 263 North Common Street, Louisiana 71101. We just want to recognize and talk about some things for Operation Santa Claus. We came to a close this Christmas season and we were excited to let everybody know that we did reach our goal. We did reach our goal as far as helping those right here in this community. We want to give a special thank you to not only Commissioner Grace Anne Blake, but also to Town Square Media DJ Erin McCarty. She was actually one of the founders of Operation Santa Claus, started back in 1984. So, this was our 41st year of doing Operation Santa Claus. So, we want to give some special thanks. She did a special gesture as far as if you raise so much money, it was \$20,000, she would shave her head. You know, it wouldn't have bothered me, you know, but maybe if I look around, some of y'all, you know, you might have went on something like that, but not only did she hit her goal, but she raised, she exceeded it by raising \$25,648. Come on, let's give her a hand. And she really did. There's nothing, there's no hair there. There's not. And so, everybody always hears from me, but I want to kind of have a police officer and a firefighter speak on how they, as far as when they went through, they signed up a family, went through the process as far as filling their bags of toys and delivering, and so they can kind of shed some light on their experience. Thank you.

[At this time, a motion carried to extend the speaker's time by 3 minutes as another speaker came before the Commission to supplement Mr. Baker's comments.] Good evening to everybody, I'm Corporal Jessica Maeshack. So, for the experience for Operation Santa, for me, I go to a lot of meetings. So, in these meetings, I kind of look at the people that need help in that area for Operation Santa. So, that's how I chose my families. Corporal Cook was our Santa for this year. So, we just filled bags and I filled the bags like I want to fill for my kids. I'm giving them all the goodies. So, what I think as a child, what I wanted, I'm giving to them plus a little bit more. So, we're not selfish with the gifts. So, like I said, Corporal Cook was Santa and we were slinging toys for two or three days to everybody. So, just to see the smiles on their face is always amazing. I know I had a family, a couple families that cried, so they almost made me cry. So, just to know that this does them well, it fills my heart and this the best time for me, for Operation Santa. Thank you.

[At this time, another speaker came before the Commission to supplement the previous speakers' comments.] Thanks Jessica, that's really hard to follow up on. My name is LJ, I work for the Shreveport Fire Department. I've been with Operation Santa Claus, probably my fourth or fifth year I've been doing this and this was my first year to sponsor a family. I work for the Fire Department as an arson investigator. So, the family that I sponsored or nominated, the kids were victims of a house fire. They lost everything. So, it really hit me hard when I was actually bagging their gifts up. Like Jessica said, when you pick the gifts, you know, you want to make sure all kids get good things. But when you're going there and a relationship with these kids since their fire, talking to their mom, talking to their grandmother, I'm like, "What do you want? You know, I'm Santa Claus. I can get you whatever you want." And you're stuffing that bag and you're getting as big as you can, and to actually be the individual to go there and take the gifts to the grandmother, you know, the mom and to get these text messages after, you know, saying, "Thank you so much. We appreciate you so much." You know, it's veery sincere. It's very rewarding. It's very self-fulfilling. You know that the group, everyone here, fire and police, working together, they do more work than I did, I'm sure. But it was very rewarding for myself and I'm very satisfied with it, and I think, I know the kids really appreciate it, and I know the parents and the grandparents did more.

[At this time, another speaker came before the Commission to supplement the previous speakers' comments.] I didn't plan on speaking, but I will because I have been there since it started in 1984. Commissioner Young, Commissioner Cothran, love the hairdo. I might need some advice later. But the program has grown immeasurably. I cannot begin to tell you guys how huge this program is for our community. These are all local kids that we see out and about in our community every day. We used to keep the toys in the radio station, and if you've ever been out there, it's a pretty big building. The halls were lined with toys. It was packed. It has grown so big that they now have their own facility where the toys are now sent over there to be distributed. I can't thank these folks enough. I mean, I do a little crazy thing every now and then to help them, but they work day and night to get to the families that need it and they see what these families go through every day. And for their work, I mean, I get emotional about it because we used to see the slips the kids would fill out and the kids would write down, "Can I have anything for Christmas?" Just anything. Another child wrote down several times, I've seen these slips, "Can I get a pair of sneakers for Christmas?" My children never asked for sneakers for Christmas. They wanted, you know, the newest gadgets that you could get out there. These are kids that have nothing, folks. And I can't thank you all enough for all you do because I know you all step up and help any time any of them approach you. You go, "What can I do to help?" So, I want to say thank you. I didn't plan on speaking, but they dragged me up here and it's cold. If you got hats for your business, any hats, send hats my way.

[At this time, another speaker came before the Commission to supplement the previous

speakers' comments.] I'm Lieutenant Diana Sanchez with the Shreveport Police Department. One of the things that I don't think that the community realizes is, not only are we able to give these gifts to the children, but we're actually really helping that parent or that guardian of that child. So, you know, we can't thank the community enough for showing up for us this year. I mean, with Erin going and putting that out there to raise more money for us, but those parents, when you see that you've just helped them, you know, ease a burden. We've taken these gifts and we're providing these for your child. So, now they can make that decision to pay a bill, you know, just adjust their, you know, where their money's going to go for that time. So, anyways, we just wanted to make sure that you knew that. [At this time, a motion passed carried to extend the time by 3 minutes.] It's great to see that relief in the parent's face.

[At this time, Mr. Baker came before the Commission again.] So, once again, thank y'all for the opportunity. Thank y'all for recognizing us. We really appreciate it. We don't do it for recognition. We just do it to fulfill a need that's in the community. And we want to thank y'all so much. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity. I want to do a special thanks to Fire Chief Clarence Reese, Jr. for allowing me to assist, allowing all the guys from the fire personnel to assist and help in the community. And also, for Shreveport Police Chief Wayne Smith and also those behind the scenes. We have a lot of behind the scenes, Town Square Media, that help out. There's a lot of other personnel behind the scenes. And it's just like I always tell people, we're just ambassadors. We're not the whole things. We're the ambassadors and it's the whole, everybody together, collective, doing the thing.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

- Walter B. Jacobs Nature Center Grand Opening- January 17

Administrator Bryant announced that the Walter B. Jacobs Grand Opening will be held on January 17, 2026 and invited everyone to attend.

- Juvenile Detention Center census

Administrator Bryant said that there are 9 children in the Detention Center, three of which are OJJ, and one 17 year old. There are 422 children on probation.

- Explanation of Louisiana Act 618 (per request)

Attorney Frazier provided an overview of Louisiana Revised Statute 44:22, which addresses the confidentiality of records involved in active economic development negotiations. She clarified that the statute applies specifically to records in the possession of a governmental entity and is intended to protect sensitive information during negotiations. The statute allows such records to be exempt from public records law when certain conditions are met. These conditions include a written request for confidentiality from the company at the outset of negotiations, an assertion by the company that nondisclosure is a condition of the negotiations, a written determination by the local government's chief executive officer that disclosure would be detrimental to the negotiations, and a vote by the governing body to maintain confidentiality.

Attorney Frazier further explained that confidentiality under the statute is time-limited. The exemption may last no longer than twelve months unless a new written determination is made, and under no circumstances may confidentiality exceed twenty-four months. Additionally, the local government is required to publish general information regarding the confidentiality decision on its official website and in its official journal. It was emphasized that the statute does not mandate this process for all negotiations and does not require current negotiations to be altered or restructured. She noted that many companies often conduct negotiations independently and involve local governments later in the process.

COMMISSION REMARKS

- Mr. J. Young raised a question regarding whether the event center at Walter B. Jacobs Memorial Nature Park remains unnamed. Administration confirmed that it is currently unnamed. A follow-up question was directed to legal counsel regarding whether the facility could be named in honor of the late Commissioner Hopkins. Attorney Frazier responded that this would be permissible, noting that the primary prohibition under state law applies to naming public buildings after living persons. Mr. J. Young indicated an intention to propose naming the facility after the late commissioner on an upcoming agenda later in the month.

- Mr. Cothran extended New Year greetings to his colleagues and the public and provided remarks regarding a recent food distribution effort. He noted that while food drives prior to Thanksgiving are often expected, the second distribution was especially meaningful, as community members were particularly appreciative. Mr. Cothran also acknowledged the Sheriff's Department for assisting with food distribution, including delivering food directly to elderly residents who requested assistance. He emphasized that many of the expressions of gratitude he received were due to the direct actions of the Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Cothran further reflected on the need for continued community support beyond the holiday season, particularly during the summer months. While acknowledging the existence of summer programs, he expressed hope that the Commission would consider additional initiatives during that time,

noting that food insecurity and the need for activities for children persist year-round. He indicated his intention to engage with stakeholders to explore opportunities for expanded efforts moving forward.

- Mr. Jones also offered remarks, thanking volunteers who assisted with her district's food distribution efforts. He recognized the Juvenile Justice staff, and other volunteers, including family members who participated. He described an efficient distribution process and noted the significant demand, with vehicle lines extending from Woodland High School down West 70th Street. Commissioner Jones emphasized the ongoing need within the community and expressed appreciation for the Commission's support.

Mr. Jones also shared his vision for future initiatives focused on food sustainability, including community education on gardening, growing food, and investing in community gardens. He stated his intention to bring proposals forward later in the year aimed at empowering residents to sustain themselves and reduce long-term reliance on food distributions.

- Mr. Burrell then addressed the Commission, thanking all participants involved in recent food drives. He observed that the level of need appeared even greater during the Christmas season than at Thanksgiving. He noted that two food distributions occurred in his district, one at Galilee Baptist Church and another at Sunrise Baptist Church. He shared that he personally participated by distributing toys and gifts to children of all ages, describing the experience as rewarding.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Madame President briefly noted that a respiratory illness was circulating and encouraged the public to take appropriate precautions. She also expressed concern regarding the lack of health insurance coverage affecting residents, noting that the day marked the fifth day without coverage for some individuals. She requested an update from congressional representatives regarding plans to address health insurance access and emphasized the need for action beyond prayers.

There being no Old Business, the Commission moved onto New Business.

NEW BUSINESS

It was **moved by Mr. Kracman**, seconded by Mr. J. Young, *that Resolution No. 1 of 2026, a resolution to authorize design waiver/exceptions to Hosston River Road Bridge which is in the Federal Off-System Bridge Rehabilitation & Replacement program, and otherwise providing with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Mr. Kracman asked that Mr. Josh Bedgood, Assistant Director for Public Works, come forward and provide an explanation to this resolution.

Mr. Bedgood explained that the bridge is a single-lane timber structure crossing Kelly Bayou, with curvature approaching the bridge. The design waiver would allow the bridge alignment to remain straight rather than modifying the roadway curvature. The proposed design would include longer spans and low-girder construction, reducing the clearance beneath the bridge by approximately one foot without impacting flood conditions.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions regarding the Federal Off-System Bridge Program. Mr. Bedgood explained that the program is administered in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and provides funding primarily for rural parish bridges. The Parish submits recommended bridge lists based on established criteria, and projects are selected based on available funding. DOTD facilitates construction and inspection, with funding originating from federal sources and flowing through the state.

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

It was **moved by Mr. Thomas**, seconded by Mr. Epperson, *that Resolution No. 2 of 2026, a resolution approving the amended 2025 and proposed 2026 budgets of the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory Commission and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Commissioners raised concerns regarding the laboratory's operating budget, past administrative issues, and the level of financial contribution from participating parishes. Administration agreed to invite laboratory representatives to a future meeting to provide an update and answer questions. It was also noted that the laboratory would be receiving significant state funding. Additional discussion referenced the construction of a new criminalistics laboratory in south Louisiana and the potential implications for regional resources.

Commissioners clarified for the public that the approval of the laboratory's budget does not directly draw from the Parish's general fund, as the majority of funding comes from other sources.

At this time, Mr. Thomas' motion carried unanimously.

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mr. Burrell, *that Resolution No. 3 of 2026,*

a resolution requesting the Caddo Parish School Board to consider the economic development potential of the site of the former George Washington Carver School, with particular consideration of the site's potential to serve the growing demand for data centers, and otherwise providing with respect thereto be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Mr. Epperson explained that the resolution was intended to encourage consideration of the site as an option, emphasizing the growing demand for data centers and the opportunity to retain economic development within the region.

Discussion followed regarding the intent of the resolution, clarification that the Commission had not approved or selected any specific sites.

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion failed, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Epperson, and Lazarus (3). NAYS: Commissioners Atkins, Blake, Cothran, Gage-Watts, Jones, Kracman, Thomas, G. Young, and J. Young (9). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mrs. Blake**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *that Special Resolution of Recognition for Human Trafficking Awareness Month* be moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration.

Commissioners spoke about the importance of addressing human trafficking despite the discomfort surrounding the topic. Mrs. Blake shared personal observations and experiences highlighting the prevalence of human trafficking in the community and emphasized the importance of education, awareness, and access to resources for victims.

Substitute motion by Mr. Jones, seconded by Mr. J. Young, *that the following items be englobed and moved to Thursday's Regular Session for consideration:*

- *Special Resolution Human Trafficking Awareness Month*
- *Special Resolution Operation Santa Clause*
- *Special Resolution National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day*
- *Special Resolution Caddo High School Principal of the Year, Shannon Wall*
- *Special Resolution Caddo Elementary Principal of the Year, Courtney LeBlanc*
- *Special Resolution Caddo Middle School Principal of the Year, Felicia O'Neal*
- *Confirmation of Human Resources Director*
- *Resolution No. 4 of 2026, a resolution approving the holding of an election in Caddo Parish Fire District Number Five, State of Louisiana, on Saturday, May 16, 2026, to authorize the levy of service charges therein*

Mr. Jones expressed appreciation for Mrs. Blake's leadership on Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Mr. Jones welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the issue and to be better educated on human trafficking. Mrs. Blake responded by expressing appreciation for the support and emphasized the importance of awareness and education. She noted that human trafficking impacts both women and men and explained that public awareness often increases when individuals recognize the issue's proximity to everyday life. Mrs. Blake referenced her background and experience, including exposure to human trafficking cases through a law enforcement family, and stated that human trafficking occurs daily within the community. She indicated that she looked forward to working collaboratively with community partners and local organizations to strengthen awareness and prevention efforts.

Mr. Cothran Mrs. Blake for her advocacy and emphasized that, unless individuals have worked directly in the area, trafficking activity may go unnoticed even when occurring nearby. He encouraged increased education and visibility in the community.

Additional comments were offered highlighting potential indicators of human trafficking and the importance of providing resource information in local establishments. It was noted that community partners have prepared informational flyers that businesses can display, and commissioners encouraged public use of available resources, including dialing 2-1-1 to access support services.

Mr. Burrell added a point of information emphasizing that human trafficking also impacts young males, including homeless youth, and urged continued awareness of that population.

At this time, Mr. Jones' motion carried unanimously.

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mr. Burrell, *to advance the authorization of*

Commission travel to Shelby County (Memphis, TN) to visit local government, and surrounding communities, to gather information relative to data center development.

Mr. Epperson spoke in support of the travel request, referencing past Commission participation in educational visits connected to emerging industries, including prior travel associated with oil and gas development. He stated that when new ventures arise, commissioners should seek balanced information and understand both benefits and impacts. He emphasized the importance of educating the Commission from multiple perspectives and noted that professional contacts through national associations could assist in providing insight.

Mr. Burrell stated that he supported obtaining as much information as possible and acknowledged that when the issue of data centers first arose, he did not feel fully informed. He stated that he supported the travel request if it would provide additional information, whether favorable or unfavorable, regarding data center development.

Opposition was voiced by Commissioners who stated that commissioners had already visited more advanced data center locations, including a prior visit to northern Virginia. Mr. Atkins expressed concern that Shelby County had been characterized as among the least desirable examples of data center development and that a visit there could present an unduly negative impression. Mr. J. Young stated that the Memphis situation had been widely documented and that information could be obtained through existing reports and direct communication without travel.

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

The next item under New Business was the discussion of Chamber decorum by citizens during Commission meetings.

Mr. Epperson noted that while the item was listed for discussion, he intended to revisit the matter at a later time and suggested that changes might be needed to the existing Citizens Comment Card.

Mr. Cothran requested that the decorum discussion be referred to the Long-Range Planning Committee, stating that the topic warranted further review and that additional considerations may exist that were not fully before the Commission at that time.

Mr. Thomas suggested that this be forwarded to the Personnel, Policies, & Procedures Committee.

It was **moved by Mrs. Blake**, seconded by Mr. Cothran, *that this discussion be held in the Personnel, Policies, & Procedures Committee.*

Mr. Kracman requested clarification regarding the specific issue prompting the referral, noting that the underlying concern was not clear in the moment. It was acknowledged that the full discussion had not yet occurred and that the intent of referral was to address the matter in committee before returning it to the full body.

Mr. Jones explained that existing provisions governing citizen decorum are contained within the Commission's bylaws. Any proposed changes to those provisions would therefore require review by the Personnel Policies and Procedures Committee prior to consideration by the full Commission.

At this time, Mrs. Blake withdrew her motion.

It was then **moved by Mr. Thomas**, seconded by Mr. Jones, *that this discussion be held in the Personnel, Policies, & Procedures Committee.*

At this time, Mr. Thomas' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cothran, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Jones, Lazarus, Thomas, and G. Young (9). NAYS: Commissioners Blake, Kracman, and J. Young (3). ABSENT: None (0). ABSTAIN: None (0).

COMMUNIQUES & COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Mr. Thomas requested prayers for his family due to his mother being in the hospital for six days now.
- Mr. J. Young announced an upcoming volunteer opportunity involving maintenance and pruning of fruit trees and other plantings at Highland Park. The activity was scheduled for January 17, with the time adjusted to avoid conflict with other community events occurring that day. Commissioners and members of the public were invited to participate, and coordination details were to be shared following the meeting.
- Mrs. Blake recognized the Shreveport Police Department and Fire Department for their

participation in Operation Santa Claus, as well as appreciation for businesses and citizens who donated toys and funds. Commissioners encouraged local businesses to consider sponsoring the program in the coming year, noting that expanded sponsorship could significantly increase the program's impact and better serve children and families in need.

There were no Citizens Comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

- *Ordinance No. 6604 of 2025, an ordinance providing for the issuance and sale of Limited Tax Revenue Bonds, Series 2026, of Caddo Parish, Louisiana; and providing for other matters in connection therewith*
- *Ordinance No. 6605 of 2025, an ordinance declaring the intent of the Parish of Caddo, under LA.R.S. 47:1236 to acquire full ownership interest in a tract of property in the Manchester Subdivision, within Section 26, Township 18 North, Range 14 West, Caddo Parish Louisiana, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*

At this time, there was no further discussion to come before the Commission, so the Commission adjourned at 4:50 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant Commission Clerk