

The Mayor and Council of the City of Abbeville met in regular session on August 3, 2021 at 5:30 P.M., at the regular meeting place, the Council Meeting Room, located at 101 North State Street, Abbeville, Louisiana, with the Honorable Mark Piazza, Mayor, presiding.

Members Present: Council Members, Francis Plaisance, Brady Broussard, Jr., Terry Broussard, Jr., Francis Touchet, Jr., Mayor Pro-Tem and Roslyn White

Members Absent: None

Also, Present: Ike Funderburk, City Attorney  
Jude Mire, Fire Chief  
Jason Hebert, Police Lieutenant  
Allie Horton, Digital Media Assistant  
Gene Sellers, Engineer  
Richard Primeaux, Engineer  
Tommy Picard, Park Director, QSA  
Clay Menard, Former Public Works Director and his wife Maggie  
Betty Cormier, Former Secretary to the City Council  
Coaches and Players of 9–10-year-old QSA Americans

*Mayor Piazza led those assembled in prayer and also asked for a moment of silence for those who are sick and suffering at this time. Mayor Piazza asked Mr. Ike Funderburk to lead the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.*

*Mayor Piazza welcomed Mrs. Betty Cormier who is their dear friend and the former long-time secretary to the City Council.*

*Mayor Piazza and the City Council recognized the coaches and players of the 9–10-year-old QSA Americans who captured the 2021 South Zone Mustang Super Regional Championship.*

*Mayor Piazza and the City Council gave a special recognition certificate to the former Public Works Director, Clay Menard, for his outstanding service and duty. Mayor Piazza stated this is the first time a certificate of appreciation has been awarded to an employee who resigned and did not retire. However, Clay did such an outstanding job for us that he wanted to recognize him for his hard work, efforts and loyalty to the City of Abbeville. He made such an impression on us and became a good friend to all of us.*

-01 introduced by Mr. Francis Plaisance and seconded by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. to approve the minutes from the July 20, 2021 special City Council meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

*Mayor Piazza asked if there were any public comments on any agenda item prior to action. There were none.*

*Bids were opened for a surplus 2009 Buick Enclave that was awarded to the Abbeville Police Department. Only one bid was received. The bid was from J. J. Merchant in the amount of \$879.79.*

-02 introduced by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. and seconded by Ms. Roslyn White to award the 2009 Enclave to the only bidder, J. J. Merchant, in the amount of \$879.79. The motion carried unanimously.

-03 introduced by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. and seconded by Mr. Francis Plaisance to grant a personal, non-assignable, variance to Mark Albertelly, 509 Fairview Street, for construction of a fence at the end of West Oak Street (permit request 631). The motion carried unanimously.

-04 introduced by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. and seconded by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. to approve the quote from Versalift in the amount of \$5,801.76 to repair a bucket truck. The motion carried unanimously.

*Councilman Broussard reported on CDC guidelines, Abbeville data and Vermilion Parish statistics on COVID-19. We have a rising and threatening variant infection in our community, in the City, in the Parish and across the nation. Today 4,725 new cases of that are in the State. There were 59 new deaths from that today. 2,212 hospitalized because of that variant. The not fully vaccinated citizens are 90% of those cases. 85% of the deaths are not fully vaccinated. We now have 13.4% of COVID infections of all cases. That has never been higher in our State. 2,079 children have been infected with COVID in the State. At our local hospital, in a period recently, 77 patients went through the emergency room and 50% of those were COVID positive. That is the flame burning around us right now. We have the lowest vaccination rate in the country and we now have the highest infection rate in the country. To the people who cannot connect those dots, we will suggest some things for those people. Our employees who get vaccinated, they like the plan of insurance that the City offers, that is affordable. Unvaccinated employees who get infected and are put on a ventilator, will strain the insurance plan and hurt the City budget. Companies are now going to 100% of vaccinated employees. Those include businesses in our City already. We can no longer watch departments in the City slow down or shut down because of repeated COVID infections for non-vaccinated employees over and over and over. The public is not well served if we continue to allow this careless action by so many. One step we can take is to see what incentives can the City Attorney present to us at the next meeting to offer City employees who are not yet vaccinated. Councilman Touchet would also like to reward those who have been vaccinated. Mayor Piazza stated we could ask Ike to see what our option are. Mayor Piazza stated that Councilman Broussard brings up a very valid point. Just this morning, Kathy told me something about our finances. Kathy stated that we are taking a beating with health insurance claims right now. The month of July we paid out \$245,000 in claims. That is a lot more than we put in that fund monthly. We use those funds to pay premiums and claims. Mayor Piazza stated this is eating us up already. It is not going to, it is. It is a direct reflection on COVID cases of employees, their spouses and their family members that haven't been vaccinated. It is a fact. Just look at the numbers. Councilman Plaisance stated we need to encourage our employees to get vaccinated but we can't mandate them. Councilman Touchet asked if a government entity can mandate that their employees take the vaccine. Ike Funderburk stated he would have to do research on that. The EEOC has said that an employer can have several options to give enticements to people who take it, but there will be a group of people because of religious reasons or health reasons that will not be able to take it. You have to do carve outs for them. This is not an easy, simple one size fits all. He will have something in two weeks. Councilwoman White stated she is fully vaccinated and has been since April. She didn't do it for herself. She is healthy and is not worried about herself. She did it for the people she loves like her Mom, her teammates at Broussard Brothers and her teammates at the City. If anybody has some reservations or concerns, she is vaccinated and they can reach out to her. She had no side effects from it and it is the compassionate thing to do. It is the right thing to do. She had her own reservations in the beginning but finally she said there are probably worse things she has done to her body in her life*

*so she will take this vaccine and she had no side effects. Mayor Piazza hopes things level out and we are not forced to go up on insurance rates. People that have been here for years and years would have to pay for some of those that are not doing what they are supposed to. Councilman Broussard stated that is his warning. If we get one employee who carelessly doesn't vaccinate and gets on a ventilator, Kathy will get a \$200,000 to \$300,000 ventilator bill for that alone. That will sink our insurance plan.*

*Councilman Touchet wanted to show a video presentation regarding "Opportunities for Kids". There are a lot of kids that are not as fortunate as others and that is not necessarily their fault. There are a lot of things happening in our community as far as violence is concerned. Think about what happened to you and your family when you were a young boy or girl. We owe it to our kids in the community to provide opportunities because those kids don't have adults to speak for them. The video is called the \$100 race.*

*The video of the \$100 race was shown. (The video can be seen on YouTube).*

*After the video, Councilman Touchet continued. He has been on this Council for 20 years and he will challenge this Council to worry about the kids that did not move a step because they were not given that opportunity. He only moved two steps. Today he provides for his children more than what he had. That is not what some of our kids in our community are getting. Why can the rich people afford it and why can't we have our kids that can't have that same type of opportunity? We need to put our money where our mouth is. We will not have a community that puts economic development where it needs to be if we don't take care of those kids. Some of them don't have a voice because they don't have that two-parent household. That is the only thing he had was a two-parent household. He had to stay put because that is where he came from. Some of those kids don't have that opportunity. This community needs to step up and take care of this or we will lose it to crime. Always remember the \$100 race. This is not about the people who were taking steps forward. He has nothing against those people. There is a difference between equality and equity. Equality is, I will buy a pair of shoes for every person in this room. That is equal. Everybody gets that pair of shoes. Not everybody will benefit from the pair of shoes. Equity is that we look at every one of these situations that we have in our community and we meet the needs of those individual kids where they are. The ones that don't have that two-parent family. The ones that are struggling and they have a hard time going to school because they don't get breakfast. The \$100 race struck him and it was something that resonated with him as a person and him as a Councilperson. We need to put our money where our mouth is. Our kids deserve to have that opportunity.*

*Mayor Piazza stated a big way to go out and reach our kids and get them out of the house and reach other people in our community is by starting in our recreational program. We have a head start by bringing Tommy Picard with QSA. He has a lot of experience and years of dedication. He appointed a committee of Councilman Francis Touchet, Jr. and Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr. to research further development of the Abbeville Parks and Recreation Department and properties. They will meet as often as they need to with Tommy Picard. They will put some proposals together to bring back to the City Council. Councilwoman White asked if they will consider all parks. Mayor Piazza stated that he will discuss that in more detail in his report. Right now, they are looking at some additions to Comeaux Park. The other goal of this committee is to bring economic development and businesses to the community. Councilman Touchet stated that economic development is important but we have to get those kids in those parks. There has to be an incentive for people to go to those parks. What can we provide for them that they can't get sitting at home? What can their parents not afford that the City of Abbeville can provide? That comes in various ways, not just one thing. We have to think outside the box.*

*Councilwoman White presented an update on the community survey for the LDRC program. The survey was launched on July 25, 2021. As of today, we have received 143 responses. She thanked her co-chair, Nikki Vidos. She is a marketing genius and she put together a really great multi-faceted marketing plan. We have been pushing it on social media, the website and the Abbeville Meridional. It got picked up by the Advertiser. There is also QR code that can be scanned by your phone. We also have printed post cards. Allie has those at the Cultural Center if businesses in your districts would like to put those cards out for their patrons to scan and take the survey. She also sent it to the Police Department, the Fire Department and City Hall. She is asking all the employees to take the survey. Hopefully they will do that by next week. We are pushing to have them in by the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. We can extend it if we feel like we didn't get a sample of the community. It is a comprehensive survey. We also have an assessment that is almost completed. Louisiana Economic Development will take all the information and get together an analysis. With that analysis, they will put some goals for us to work together towards as a community to help us get ahead in line for businesses for when they come to Abbeville or when they are looking to invest in Louisiana. It will put us ahead of the game. We know we will have problems but this will bring it to the forefront and allow us to have an honest discussion about them and to see how we can address them as a community. She thanked the Mayor and Councilman Broussard for serving on the committee with her and their participation. We will have some town hall meetings once we get the goals assessed. We are hoping for 1,000 surveys to be completed. We purchased a URL. It is surveyabbeville.com. We also put some QR codes in the lobby of City Hall. It is completely confidential and there are no age limitations. The more opinions we get from a broad audience the better we will understand what we need to work on.*

Tommy Picard, Park Director-QSA

- *Saturday, we had a free football camp. There were between 70-80 kids. We hope to do another one on August 21, 2021 at the indoor facility in Erath.*
- *The football field fence will be completed tomorrow.*
- *Asked if we wanted to order a scoreboard for the football field. It doesn't look like Coca Cola will donate one. The price is around \$9,500 and we would need the time clocks too. Mayor Piazza asked him to bring a firm price and they can bring it up at the next meeting.*
- *They have been trimming trees in the park.*
- *The new key pad is working and they will put a plexiglass material near it.*
- *Put a new combination lock on the new gate.*
- *Look at the tennis court rules and let him know so he can order the sign.*
- *Discussed a grant for exercise station in the park. They have been contacted about that and he contacted Charlene Beckett. Mayor Piazza stated the people walking in the park will not want to exercise at the entrance.*
- *Councilwoman Broussard asked Tommy about tennis lessons. Tommy stated he is trying to get the guy from Abbeville High but he had surgery. He will contact him again once school starts.*
- *Asked what to do when there is lightning and there are kids on the splashpad. Councilwoman White suggested we should get prices for an alarm that would detect the lightning and tell them to vacate the premises because of lightning. It would provide liability protection for us in the event they choose not to leave.*

Mayor Mark Piazza

- *He and Councilman Plaisance, Councilman Touchet and Councilwoman White attended the Louisiana Municipal Association convention last week. Those conventions offer educational seminars, networking with other mayors and council people to discuss issues they have in their communities. The Lieutenant Governor was there as well as the new*

president of LSU and the president of the National League of Cities. They all gave great speeches and were very motivational. There are different booths there. There was the Louisiana Parks and Recreation booth and he met with some of the Lieutenant Governor's employees and there is an individual that will come to Abbeville and help us do long-term planning on all of our parks. He had a long conversation with that individual about LaFitte Park and some of the things we are looking to bring in there. We need to involve all of our parks and make sure we are utilizing them properly and they are being utilized. We have some parks that are not being utilized. He also attended a seminar on the watershed initiative. The gentleman that was there, who is the head of the watershed initiative in Baton Rouge, specifically told him that there is no plan to dredge the Vermilion River in Lafayette Parish at this time. That is not part of the watershed initiative. They are looking at more regional aspects of the watershed and how they can come up with some creative ideas and valuable solutions to utilize the billion dollars that is in Baton Rouge to be used. We are one of the few designated areas and parishes that will get almost 50% of this money. A lot of money will be spent on the Vermilion River watershed. It will take some time but the research has already been completed by UL. Dredging the river in Lafayette Parish is not the answer. That was good news. He also attended another seminar on animal control. He has passed that literature on to Ike. He attended a Community Planning seminar. They encouraged us to do what we are doing with the LDRC.

- The Governor just issued a mask mandate so we will probably have to move our meetings back to A. A. Comeaux Recreation Center. All procedures have been discussed with all departments as far as the mask mandate.

Jason Hebert, Police Lieutenant

- Today he attended a funeral for a 34-year-old officer who died because of COVID. He was healthy and strong. He was not vaccinated to his knowledge. Implementing an incentive program for the employees might be a good idea. After he found out the officer had passed away from it, he reached out to the hospital and they will come in-house to give the shots. Out of our list of 8 people, 3 people signed up for it. It is something we need to do. Only about 25% of the department is vaccinated.
- Thanked Councilman Plaisance and the Mayor and other Council members for the use of LaFitte Drive-In Park for the Fraternal Order of Police function this past weekend. It was amazing and it turned out way better than they could have ever expected.

Jude Mire, Fire Chief

- He has 3 people on extended sick leave and two out with COVID.
- The ladder truck is down and is in the shop in Eunice.
- Discussed calls since his last update. They are also running medical calls now.
- We are taking every precaution to keep everyone protected.
- We are helping the Henry Fire Station since they are shorthanded.
- 19 of the 39 people in his department have been vaccinated.

Allie Horton, Digital Media Assistant

- Created social media content policy with Ike.
- Was accepted into the leadership program with the Vermilion Chamber.
- Promoting Nixle through Facebook and flyer inserts in the utility bills.
- Made flyers for the Adult Flag Football League and Football Summer camp.
- Made content calendars for both the City and Tourist Commission.
- Ran engagement audits on both the City and Tourist Commission Facebooks.
- Put ditty bags together for two baseball teams headed out of town for tournaments representing Abbeville.

- *Priced ads and sent ads for Public Works Director to the Meridional, Advertiser and the Iberian and the ads for the Electrical crew vacancies and equipment operator vacancy to the Meridional.*
- *Made updates to the website for board members and the competitive electrical rates post.*
- *Attended LDRC meetings and promoted the survey which all of you should take.*

Councilwoman Roslyn White

- *Attended the Louisiana Municipal Association convention. She attended workshops on Strategic Planning, Broadband Planning and Hydrology and Watershed.*
- *Is looking into teleconferencing for this meeting and will bring back the costs for it.*
- *The parish COVID vaccination rate is 26%.*

Councilman Francis Touchet, Jr.

- *Attended the Louisiana Municipal Association convention. He interacted with other elected officials and discussed where they are in their finances. We are fortunate to have a utility system we own. Other cities are struggling and living check to check. He discussed the City using LAMATS. Mayor Piazza stated we are already using them. More money will be flowing in from the federal government. Louisiana is the only state that allows cities to sell bonds for borrowing.*

Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr.

- *We have a great contract with Abbeville General Hospital. 22 people went to their urgent care facility and that charge was only \$1,100 instead of \$15,000.*
- *Mandy Mitchell is looking for some opportunity zones to build a gymnasium.*
- *We will make our own economic development.*

Councilwoman Terry Broussard

- *Discussed the school drive to be held Sunday at Soulful Eats. Pastor August donated an 18-wheeler truck of items.*

Councilman Francis Plaisance

- *We received an Honorable Mention award from the Louisiana Municipal Association convention for the park bench project and the dog park project at LaFitte Drive-In Park.*
- *He recognized Stewart Head and thanked him for being able to return after surgery.*

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Piazza declared this meeting adjourned.

ATTEST:

APPROVE:

Kathleen S. Faulk  
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Piazza  
Mayor