

The Mayor and Council of the City of Abbeville met in regular session on August 17, 2021 at 5:30 P.M., at the A. A. Comeaux Recreation Center, located at 300 A. A. Comeaux Memorial Drive, Suite 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., and Francis Touchet, Jr., Mayor Pro-Tem

Members Absent: Councilwoman Roslyn White

Also, Present: Ike Funderburk, City Attorney  
Jude Mire, Fire Chief  
Bill Spearman, Police Chief  
Allie Horton, Digital Media Assistant  
Gene Sellers, Engineer  
Richard Primeaux, Engineer  
Tommy Picard, Park Director, QSA  
Jason Akers, Bonding Attorney  
Bridget Levy, Parks & Recreation Board  
Marilyn Mitchell

*Mayor Piazza requested a moment of silence for Councilwoman Roslyn White's Grandfather, Mr. N. R. "Pedo" Broussard, who passed away and the funeral was this morning. He followed the moment of silence by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison. Mayor Piazza then led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.*

-01 introduced by Mr. Francis Plaisance and seconded by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. to ratify bills paid in the month of July 2021. The motion carried unanimously.

*Mayor Piazza asked if there were any public comments on any agenda item. Ms. Marilyn Mitchell asked for a clarification of item number 3 under new business. The item was to adopt a resolution giving preliminary approval to the issuance of not to exceed \$3,000,000 of Revenue Bonds of the City of Abbeville, State of Louisiana, and providing for other matters in connection herewith. Councilman Touchet stated in the past the City has had the ability to borrow money for certain projects at a low interest rate. We have a debt service that is concluding in March 2022. We own our utility system so we can get that money. Ms. Mitchell asked if the money used to pay the money back comes from our utility bills. Councilman Touchet responded "Yes". Ms. Mitchell asked if there was a project in mind. Councilman Touchet stated that would be discussed later in the meeting.*

-02 introduced by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. and seconded by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. to approve a special event permit for Vermilion Catholic to hold an alumni softball tournament August 20, 2021 through August 22, 2021 at A. A. Comeaux Park and to determine the fields to be utilized with Tommy Picard. The motion carried unanimously.

**Touchet/Plaisance**  
**Resolution R21-28**

*A resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute the Airport Rescue Grant Agreement with FAA.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Jason Akers stated the \$3,000,000 bond issue is a pledge of general fund revenues. Councilman Touchet discussed the projects. We are in dire need as far as getting our kids involved. When you look at truancy, what's happening in schools and with discipline and other things that are happening like crime. It is a direct result that we don't have things for our kids to do. We don't have opportunities for our kids. A lot of that has to do with the \$100 Race video he showed at the last meeting. Not every single person in this room is raised with two parents. Not every single person in this room was raised where they didn't have to worry about food on the table. We have kids in our community that are not given the same opportunities that people who have money do. He is not saying anything bad about people who have money. He is saying the word "opportunity" is what we need to look at. The only way we can get our kids involved is to have something attractive that those kids can go to. We will give them this park. Go to Youngsville, Broussard and Crowley to see what they are doing and see what is happening with their youth. Their youth are being attracted to those facilities. He is looking at this as a two-fold project. One is to provide opportunities for kids and two is to help fill empty buildings. If we don't fill those empty buildings our economy will go down even further. We are up in sales tax dollars now but we have people who are getting checks. Eventually those government checks will run out. There will come a time where businesses, like Chili's, will close down. We better start thinking about 10 years from now. We do not have anything in this City to draw people here. He did not have the opportunity then he was young. He is able to provide opportunity for his children now because of education. He spends over \$1,000 a weekend for travel ball doing things in restaurants and hotels. That is the revenue source he is talking about. We have to be able to pack the restaurants and that sales tax dollars are sustainable. The Councilman in Crowley stated their enrollment is up 400% because the kids are attracted to those facilities. They want to be involved. We have to be able to compete with these surrounding areas. We have to be able to say that here is a place that our kids may get opportunities that their parents may not be able to provide to them. This City will be able to sustain what is happening as far as services for the community. We will have youth that will be here and be a part of this. We are in good shape right but we have an opportunity to go after this money at a low interest rate and pay it after we pay all of our debts. He believes that the revenue we make off of sales tax by bringing people in here could be that complete item as far as the offset in paying that debt back. That is how other communities are looking at it. He will not get into the details of what will happen but he would like to see turf on all of our fields and some renovations of other projects. It is something that the Mayor and this Council will make decisions on. There are no particular details about different things at this time. We have to look at something to get people in here. Councilman Broussard stated the resolution is preliminary. The City is studying a concept to bring 20-25 teams and their families to Abbeville. Take the word from an economist that says 25 teams that go to a community produce \$650,000 of economic development. The people that come eat here, stay here and put gasoline in their car. This is something that is being done in Crowley, Youngsville, Broussard, Zachary and Ruston. Crowley spent \$6,000,000. We can do it much smaller. This is something for the children. Travel ball is February through July. High school baseball can use these fields. We have parking for these people which is part of this pricing. LED lighting and new poles, turfing, asphalt parking and new bathrooms for our children and their parents. After travel ball finishes in July, we want the churches to have tournaments. We want our children to play at these fields when they are out of school for the summer. This is not for outsiders. This is to get the money from the outsiders who*

stay in Abbeville. This is something the Council should study because it is working for Crowley. The concessions in Crowley are \$80,000 per month. That is how big this is. It's all about the children. We hope this will produce a sales tax increase that can maybe fund the construction of a gymnasium and a civic center. We can do that with the extra money we might produce. We can't wait for the oil business to pick up. We have to make our own economic development. That is what this is about. The prices are not in. Tommy is working on that right now. We want to answer every question that the public has. It can work for Abbeville. Councilman Plaisance stated what this is really about is travel ball. It is to bring economic development by bringing in people here for travel ball. That is his primary concern here. He is concerned with all of our children. He would like to see them all playing here. Crowley was brought up tonight. Crowley has a recreation tax and they also run their own recreation department so they collect all the fees, registration and concession sales. We don't get that here. That goes to QSA. How will we pay the debt back? It can't all come from utilities. If we can fill all the hotels and do all these things that we want to do, that would be an excellent thing. Years ago, he was here when we had all the baseball fields full and all the hotels full. That can happen again. He hopes we can bring in other children who are not participating now. That is critically important. That is why he would like to see a gymnasium for kids to play basketball. That is not in this proposal. A lot of kids here want to play basketball and are not interested in playing baseball. He is excited about this in some ways but he is worried about paying it back. He hopes we can include all the kids. We have a lot of things in our recreation program and we can benefit from. We have the skateboard park, the splashpad and other things for kids to do. This proposal adds to that. He hopes this works so that we can draw in those kids that are out there on the street doing nothing. Councilwoman Broussard stated that is her concern too. What are the plans to get those kids that are not already involved here? Councilman Touchet stated that we have to have something that kids look forward to. The reason every high school football program wants to make it to the state championship is to play in the Superdome. Sales tax dollars is a revenue source for paying back debt. We are doing that with our other debts. That is why our systems are upgraded. It will be up to this Council to negotiate with Tommy regarding the revenue sources we can have to keep this thing going. Our hand will be in there. We will be responsible to the taxpayers. The lines of communication need to stay open. Councilman Plaisance asked how will we get the kids involved that can't afford travel ball? Tommy Picard stated we started flag football and we had 50 kids registered. We got Bridget in and she started hustling up kids. He found 27 sponsors that paid for 27 kids. It is time people in the community get off their butts. They will have fundraisers. That money will go to help underprivileged kids. The Recreation Board came to him. He called people he knew and every one of them said yes. Today we are at 102. Whether you like him or don't like him, he doesn't care. He has been here for 47 years and his son is involved now. We have done a lot for this ball park. We did the World Series and we built three hotels because of that. He doesn't care what anybody says. This is a no brainer. Youngsville would be broke if they didn't have that park there. We have been promised from two organizations that they will give us tournaments. Can you imagine 25 teams coming to Abbeville on a Saturday and Sunday? We have to give them something to want to come back. We have a guy giving us a price for a gymnasium today. The City didn't build one of those fields here. The parents did. The City has not invested a lot of money in this park. \$3,000,000 to invest in the facility is a no brainer. Ms. Marilyn Mitchell asked what will happen during the winter months. Where will the children go and what will they play? What will we have for the children after the summer? She is ok with travel ball. Her kids played travel ball. Tommy said we can have adult softball when it is finished. They will offer track and tennis too. You can't expect something to happen in a year. We need the support of the community. All this negative stuff has to stop. Say something positive. Mayor Piazza stated he has been a very conservative mayor. He has been convinced by Councilman Touchet and Councilman Broussard that this is about the survival of Abbeville's economy. All you have to do is read today's headline of the Abbeville Meridional. It says our census number went from 12,300 in 2010 to

11,300 in 2020. That is a 9% reduction in our population. That tells you people are moving to Youngsville and Broussard because they have all these amenities for their children. This is about investing in our kids. This will be the avenue to the kids in a program. We hope to build this program up. We have the right organization to do this that we never had before. We have brought QSA and Tommy Picard back to Comeaux Park. He and QSA can make this happen and bring recreation back to Comeaux Park like we used to have. No one else can do it. They can make it happen. We brought them in last year to do this. The next level is to get this park up to what it used to be when we had all these tournaments and world series. We will be able to compete with Youngsville and Broussard. If we don't do this then we should just shut the whole park down. Or, we can say yes and help our economy and bring it back to Abbeville. Let's get our census back up. The oil and gas industry is not coming back anytime soon. He is looking at this from the economic benefit and because this is the answer to help all of our kids. Councilman Step Martin from Crowley said they have an additional 400 kids join their program because they spent the \$6,000,000. He agrees with Tommy. It is time to set a positive trend here and keep the ball rolling in a positive direction. Councilman Broussard stated they are all about the children. We now have flag football, baseball, girls' softball, brand new tennis courts, biddy basketball, youth basketball, skateboard park, walking trails, shuffleboard, ping pong, disc golf, workouts, fishing and a splashpad. Recreation is alive and well in the City of Abbeville. Mayor Piazza wanted to correct Councilman Plaisance's statement. According to Crowley, regarding the tournaments, according to Councilman Broussard, the concession money and fees for the tournaments come to the program and we can build the program and possibly have a gymnasium one day. He and Councilwoman Broussard spoke about a basketball gymnasium this week. It is definitely on the forefront of our future goals. We will start with this and those revenues will come to this program to build things like a gymnasium. Councilman Plaisance stated he was not being negative. He had two legitimate questions: Will all the children be able to be involved and how will we pay for this? Both of those have been answered. That is where he was going. Jason Akers discussed the debt service coverage sheet he had prepared. Mr. Jason Akers stated he wanted to address a couple of technical things. One is paying for it. On the right-hand side of the sheet, we have years 2020-2031. This is with a \$3,000,000 principal. If you look at the outstanding debt service from 2020-2022 it is \$760,000. It was mentioned earlier that you have an existing debt obligation that will be paid out early in 2022. That debt service is \$500,000 per year. The required outlay for debt service will drop \$500,000 per year. \$3,000,000 over 10 years, with interest, will cost you approximately \$370,000 per year. If we delay that first principal a year because of the existing debt obligation, then that will cost you \$400,000 per year. You will still have an extra \$100,000 of cushion. On the left side of the sheet shows the net excess revenues as of the fiscal year audit of 2020. You have \$1.3 million in excess revenues. When you subtract out the debt service that is currently being paid, at most we are looking at approximately \$700,000 per year. That will still leave you with a \$600,000 cushion for other projects. These are preliminary approvals so we can take the application to the state bond commission and get their approval. This will come back to the Council in an ordinance process with a fixed interest rate and fixed purchasing. We anticipate coming back to you with this in late September. You will have the opportunity to discuss it again and then you can proceed with the projects after that.

**Touchet/B. Broussard**  
**Resolution R21-29**

*A resolution giving preliminary approval to the issuance of not to exceed \$3,000,000 of Revenue Bonds of the City of Abbeville, State of Louisiana, and providing for other matters in connection therewith.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

-03 introduced by Mr. Francis Plaisance and seconded by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. to approve change order #5, relative to the Flood Damage Reduction & Drainage Improvement project, for an increase in the contract of \$27,164.64. The motion carried unanimously.

-04 introduced by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. and seconded by Mr. Francis Plaisance to approve payment of partial payment number 4 relative to the Flood Damage Reduction & Drainage Improvement project, payable to LA Contracting Enterprise, LLC in the amount of \$32,616.96. The motion carried unanimously.

### **Touchet/Plaisance**

#### **Resolution R21-30**

*A resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute the certificate of substantial completion for the Flood Damage Reduction & Drainage Improvement project.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*

Richard Primeaux, Engineer

- *The two permits for the sewer plant are almost complete. They are going through the review period for the public*

Gene Sellers, Engineer

- *The street overlay of Hollingsworth will begin tomorrow.*

Ike Funderburk, City Attorney

- *Two weeks ago, you asked me to do some research on the possibility of incentives for public employees that are not yet vaccinated. The Federal Drug Administration has given emergency authorization to three vaccines to combat the COVID-19 virus. Currently one may be fully vaccinated by having the Johnson & Johnson injection or 2 shots of the Pfizer or Moderna products. Also, in the news, they are now talking about a booster shot so there may be a third one for Pfizer and Moderna. The most current statistics of vaccination indicate that 51.3% of U.S. residents are fully vaccinated; while only 38.3% of Louisiana's are; and only 27.12% of the residents of Vermilion Parish are fully vaccinated. Currently the Delta variant of the virus is running rampant throughout the southern United States and unfortunately Louisiana is one of the "hottest spots" for infection. The upturn is directly attributable to the low inoculation rates experienced in the South. Those not fully vaccinated account for approximately 90% of the new cases, the new hospitalizations and the recent deaths in Louisiana. What does this mean to the City of Abbeville? The employees of the City of Abbeville are essential to the City providing public safety services and utilities to the businesses and citizens of this community. As a result of them performing their job duties these employees are subjected to a population of largely unvaccinated people who may infect them. Without a healthy workforce there will not be an opportunity for effective policing, adequate fire protection, or cash flow from operational electrical, water and wastewater departments. It is thus in the best interest of the City of Abbeville, its businesses, its employees for all of its employees to be protected from this virus. But like members of the general public many of them are vaccine hesitant. What then can the City do to incentivize these employees to be vaccinated? In May 2021, OSHA issued guidance for employers which wish to give incentives to its employees to become fully vaccinated. The EEOC has also weighed in to inform us that incentives given are to be treated as a fringe benefit. Therefore, it should be noted that incentives may not*

*be coercive in nature and the employer must make accommodations for those employees, who because of a documented pre-existing medical conditions, a sincerely held religious conviction or a secular philosophy which prohibits them from submitting to vaccination. These accommodations may require the non-vaccinated to be tested regularly, to attend COVID related training and/or to practice all CDC prevention requirements, in order to still qualify for the incentive. What then may qualify as an incentive? First the incentive may not be so large as to put pressure on the employee to be vaccinated. In fact, the EEOC suggests that it should be de minimis. We know what that means because of ethics training. It should be something of no commercial value. Practically speaking, my research reflects that an incentive is valued in the terms of a small payment, like \$50 per shot, or 8 hours of additional leave to be taken when approved by the supervisor. Who may qualify to receive the incentive? The incentive is available only to those employees who are not vaccinated at the time the incentive policy is adopted. This means that those employees who were vaccinated prior to that date are not eligible for the benefit. This makes sense to me because of the nature of incentivization. After all one cannot incentivize another to do that which is already done. To pay a public employee to take a shot he has already taken would violate the constitution of this state by giving that public employee a bonus. If the City wants to move forward with incentives, what must it do? Before anything can happen, the City must establish an incentive policy to identify all employees who were vaccinated prior to the effective date of the policy. The best evidence of vaccination is the certificate issued by the agency which administered the shots. The City may make a copy of this document and keep it in the employee's confidential medical file for future reference. The certificate will not be subject to production pursuant to the Public Records request. Once the vaccinated are identified then the City may ascertain a list of unvaccinated from each department and offer such incentive as may be approved by the Mayor and Council to maximize the number of vaccinated City employees. The Mayor and Council may also establish a requirement for those who choose to remain unvaccinated. This may include regular testing, he suggests once a week, masking at all times and social distancing as per CDC guidelines. After all, it is entirely possible for an unvaccinated employee to transmit the virus to a co-employee, or a member of the public he is employed to serve. In your packet you will find the first draft of the vaccination policy. Please review the policy at home and get back with him via email with your comments. Councilman Broussard thanked Ike for the draft of the proposed policy. The EEOC has been very clear that employers can do things to curb the infection in employees. He is glad we are considering this.*

Tommy Picard, Park Director, QSA

- *We have been working on this for six months to turf the fields. We have prices to do all the work. We will turf all the fields. This will cost \$1.2 million. We will do the infield only. We will do LED lighting at all the fields. That will cost \$880,000. The City won't have to do the work. There is no parking so we will create new parking places. We will eliminate Badon so we will have 275 spots for parking. It will be asphalt and we will asphalt on the other side of the tennis courts. We will asphalt at Sellers and in back of Delcambre. We will put asphalt in front of Theriot. We will have new stands at Theriot. We will do a concession stand and we will purchase three restroom trailers so they are movable. We can move them where ever we need them. They have seven stalls and are air conditioned. We will put covers if we have enough money. We will do what we can with the \$3,000,000. The turf is definitely going in. He discussed the other projects as shown on the proposed plat of improvements. Councilman Plaisance stated that we really need a gym. Tommy said he will get a price for that. We have 2 letters promising the use of the facilities if they are turfed. The entire proposal as presented totaled \$3.2 million. Tommy stated Crowley*

*has spent \$5.5 million, Youngsville spent \$3.4 million, Broussard spent \$11 million, Ruston spent \$13 million, and Zachary, Sterlington, East Ouchita Recreation and Tioga spent \$3 million each. The company is GEO Surfaces and they have employees locally. They promise a 60-day turn around. We will do this in Erath too. But we are waiting for grant money to do that. Tommy also discussed the construction renovations projects dealing with new concession stands and restrooms as proposed in the drawings he presented. He also discussed that they will go look at the gym at LeBlanc Elementary because something like that could work here. It would be our gym. We need everybody to bring Abbeville back. Mayor Piazza stated that Youngsville and Broussard are working together on these tournaments. Tommy stated people are paying \$30 an hour to use the fields at Broussard. Our fields here are great. It rained in the morning and we were able to play here at 5:00 PM. We didn't have one rained out game here. The fields are rented by them teams for these tournaments. They are rented at some places for \$250.00 per day and if they want to practice it is \$25 to \$30 per hour. Councilman Plaisance asked if we had a guarantee of so many tournaments. Tommy said that is what he has been told. When North Vermilion is rained out, they are coming now to Sellers or Theriot (field). They are eating at our restaurants. Kaplan is the same way. This is all stuff we will have to sit down with the Recreation Board to figure out how much we want the charge to use the fields. It can't be free anymore. Everything should be Abbeville Parks and Recreation. We should no longer allow other people to come in and do things. You have to chase them for insurance and field usage. Mayor agreed that everything should be under one umbrella. Tommy thanked Bridget for her great job getting kids to come and play.*

Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr.

- *There is a Farmers' Market in Magdalen Square this Saturday.*
- *Connect your dots. Lowest vaccination rate; highest infection rate. Get vaccinated.*

Councilwoman Terry Broussard

- *Thanked Bridget for reaching out to the kids to get them to register for flag football.*
- *Thanked Chief Bill Spearman as he will also adopt some kids and pay for their registration.*

Councilman Francis Touchet, Jr.

- *Tonight, is the first step in providing opportunity for kids. All kids will have the same opportunities. This Council is moving forward in history. This will be history and we will all be a part of this. We still have a long way to go but we are moving in the right direction.*

Councilman Francis Plaisance

- *Spoke to Pastor Walter August and he is doing a tremendous job. He would like for us to look into the possibility of donating Williams Park to his project as part of their development out there. Pastor August is very interested in that. He also promised to keep the name of the park the same and to let the kids play baseball there. It would be very much a big asset to him for his future development plans there. Ike stated he would research the topic to see if this is possible.*

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

ATTEST:

APPROVE:

Kathleen S. Faulk  
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Piazza  
Mayor