

The Mayor and Council of the City of Abbeville met in regular session on May 19, 2020 at 5:30 P.M., at the regular meeting place, the Council Meeting Room located at 101 North State Street, with the Honorable Mark Piazza, Mayor, presiding.

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

Members Absent: None

Also, Present: Bill Spearman, Police Chief
Jason Hebert, Police Lieutenant
Lloyd Campisi, Insurance Agent
Richard Primeaux, Engineer
Denise Boudreaux & Whitney Levine
Pastor Willie Williams, Mount Triumph Baptist Church

Mayor Piazza asked Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr. to lead the assembly in prayer. Mayor Piazza asked Councilwoman Terry Broussard to lead the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Piazza asked if there were any public comments on any agenda item. There were none.

Ms. Denise Boudreaux was in attendance at the meeting tonight to discuss crime in the community. She appreciated the Council giving her the opportunity to speak. She is having every kind of emotion that comes out of a dictionary associated with losing a child to gun violence. She is here because she is fighting not only for her son but for these other mothers who have lost their child to gun violence unsolved crime. This has got to stop. Abbeville is not a metropolitan area. It is a small town. She was born and raised here. Times have changed. She is here to plead and to beg as our leaders in this small town, to do something. Make some type of laws and help these police officers. Give them more lead way to do things. They are out here everyday dealing with these people. Her baby was only 29 years old. She just buried another son a few years ago. He was 39. He was sick and she understood that. This child wasn't bothering anybody. He was sitting in his car and got killed. She had to go look at him on the slab with a bullet hole through his head and with his eye missing. And then they had to do an autopsy. They cut his heart and all of his other organs out. They were put in a bag and dumped it back inside him. No mother or parent should have to see this or go through this. She says mother because that umbilical cord is tied to the mother. There is not a man that she knows yet that has had a child. It stopped at my door today but you never know when it will be yours. She is pleading and begging for everyone to come together as a whole and do something. Something has to be done. She is tired of burying children. Nobody wants to bury their child for something like this. It has to stop and it has to come to an end. Some people in the community don't want to talk. But when it is theirs, they want the birds to go to talking, the dogs to go barking and they want everybody to tell it. You are supposed to love your children. But there are some people having children who are the devil himself because they don't care. She did not raise her child to be a thug in the street. She did not raise him to rob and steal. She did not have a problem and he didn't give anybody trouble. To be taken away from her at 29 years of age, the way he was taken, think about it if you have to go look at yours like that. That is why she is pleading for everyone to come together and find some

answers. Give the police department more lead way. She understands that it is all about community but sometimes you have to stand by yourself because community is not always with you. We love our children and we are tired of our children getting gunned down in the streets just because somebody has a gun and they feel they can do what they want. A bullet doesn't have someone's name on it. If they shoot it, it can go anywhere and kill somebody. She has enough. The only reason she still lives in Abbeville is because she has two babies buried here in the graveyard side by side. She doesn't want to leave her babies. They have gotten bold enough, not only to kill my child, but to go to the graveyard and take pictures of the graves of children that they have killed and then post it on Instagram. They say her baby couldn't take a lick. Who in the hell, can you tell me, would survive a bullet hole in the head? It broke all the bones in his head. Who can live through that? But they get on Instagram and brag about it. She will do all she can to fight for her baby no matter what it takes. She is asking the leaders of Abbeville to please try to find a way to curb this stuff. You can't stop everything but something can be done. She feels that anytime a murder is committed within this City, every law enforcement entity in the City should be working together. If you overwork the ones you have and they are so tired, who will pick up the ball and carry it. Everybody took an oath to protect and to serve. Please find a way to do whatever needs to be done to try to get these murders solved. They are letting them out on small bonds and they go right back and kill somebody else. Once a dog has tasted blood, they don't care. It is easy to kill the next one. She had to go buy a gun to protect herself. She doesn't bother anybody and she is not in anybody else's business. People that know her know what type of person she is and she will speak her mind. She will say what she has to say but she doesn't bother anybody. She doesn't give anybody trouble. We need to get this right. People are scared to come to Abbeville. She owns three separate properties and she pays property tax. Her husband is 71 years old and he is still working out of state in Arkansas. This child was the one with her but now some person felt they had to take his life. So now she has had to put cameras on her house and has had to buy a gun. We shouldn't have to live like that. Please come together and find some resolution and some answers. Call who you have to, to come in here to get the job done and to get these guns off the street because they are still affiliated with those previous gangs. Councilman Plaisance asked Chief Spearman what is it that he needs to do and what is it that he is able to do to stop all the guns in the City and the gunfire every night. What can be done? We are getting a reputation from other cities about this. These guys are coming into the City and they are firing guns and then having high speed chases. It is getting to be a real bad situation. It falls on the Chief and Councilman Plaisance sympathizes with that. It is a big responsibility but there has to be something that can be done. What can we do? You are law enforcement and that is your job. Chief Spearman stated if he had all the answers then he wouldn't be here. He would be in Washington D.C. making seven figures. We are doing everything we can. His guys are worn out. We are out there every night. We are taking guns off the street, two and three at a time. We bring them to jail. When we arrest somebody, they give them a low bond and they are back on the street and we have to start all over again. Councilman Touchet asked if there was any way possible that we could get our judges together to talk to them about holding people accountable to the maximum so we don't get those repeaters. He had a family member who went to court and he needed to go to jail but his case was postponed three times. We have to hold them accountable. Is there anything we can do? Ike Funderburk stated there was a committee that dealt with all of this before the virus. Your concerns are the judges' concerns. The 15th J D C Judges have reorganized things so that in the last few years so that the judges that are here, from Vermilion Parish, handle all the criminals. Both divisions have weeks in Vermilion Parish each month. That is 25% of their time spent on criminals. Their dockets have over 100 cases scheduled for trial. That is just not going to happen. They will not go to trial. The status of the law is that you have to keep the cases on the trial docket in order to satisfy the speed trial requirements. They come to court time and time again but you know only the first five or six cases out of those 100 actually will have a chance of going to trial. That is the reality. It is a game that

is played. This the craft you have to practice. You have defense attorneys who are trying to manipulate the system to go their way and then you have the D. A.'s office who are trying to manipulate the system their way and you have judges who are giving 1/4th of their time to criminals and the other 3/4th's is civil. If you want to try to do something, then he suggests meeting with the Chief Judge, Marilyn Castle about this. If you want to try and fix the system that we have, it is not just here in Vermilion Parish and it is not just here in the 15th, it is state wide and everywhere. Mayor Piazza stated the judges are in a tough spot because the jails are full. If the jails are full and they set these bonds where nobody can bond out, then they get sent to other jails where the price you are paying to incarcerate them is so high and the police jury has to foot the bill and then they start complaining. It is a vicious circle that goes round and round. He is not criticizing the Police Chief, but there was one incidence of an aggravated battery on a police officer, that bail was set at \$5,000. That guy got out on a measly \$500. That was aggravated assault on one of our police officers. If he was the Chief, he would have been sitting in that judge's office. Chief Spearman stated they go and talk. They don't like it either. We feel that any firearms related charges should be a minimum of a \$25,000 bond. Especially with repeat offenders. Councilwoman Broussard asked Chief Spearman if they could meet with the judges. Chief Spearman stated he did not have a problem with that. Mayor Piazza told Ms. Boudreaux that he wishes they had better answers for her. Councilman Broussard stated that we have to rally the public behind her because if you look at the data, the police do a fantastic job. In two recent apprehensions, guns that were stolen were in possession of these people. If the public doesn't take action by locking up their firearms and reporting information of these murderers walking around all over Acadiana. Two people were stabbed to death yesterday in Richard. There was a double shooting in Lafayette too. It is happening everywhere but that does not make it right in our City. Councilwoman White stated it is a waste of resources when these people are arrested and then let go on a low bond. Ms. Boudreaux stated it is sad that someone caught selling a small amount of drugs gets a higher bond than a murderer. Councilman Plaisance stated that Tommy Frederick makes the bonds. Ike stated that he is given a schedule by all the judges. He has no discretion in this. The Mayor has it correct. The Police Jury does not want to build a jail. The Sheriff has 150 beds. 50 of those are dormitory so there are really only 100 lockups. There are only so many people that you can keep in there. He already is not keeping DOC prisoners. That is hurting our community. Those are the people that are sentenced to hard labor. They are the ones who go out and clean and do carpentry work and do public work. It is a question of how many beds you can fill. He can only fill 150. He was under a federal court order that he cannot have more than the prescribed amount. They used to have to send in censuses every week to Judge Polozola in Baton Rouge. Mayor Piazza stated that we have to send our own prisoners to New Iberia. He asked Chief Spearman how many beds does the Iberia Parish Jail have. Chief Spearman said 300+. Mayor Piazza stated that Acadia has almost 400 beds but we only have 150. Chief Spearman stated we also need to push for a law that will protect the witnesses. We are picking up stolen guns and we are working with the task force too. Pastor Williams stated he is the pastor at Mount Triumph Baptist Church. He wanted to come and introduce himself to the Council. He wants to be a part of the solution. The church is on Lamar and a lot of his parishioners live in the neighborhoods that are being plagued by the violence. He was brought in in January of this year as the pastor of the church. He has already visited with Chief Spearman. He is not a politician. He is a preacher and he has a background as a policeman. A lot of the things that he and the Chief spoke about, he is familiar with. He was listening to your questions about the ongoing cases and what can be done to solve them. He thinks a lot of that can be solved with trying to get more stringent guidelines from the court systems as far as who you release and how you release them. It is nonsense if you arrested a murderer that they are being released. The problem that he sees a lot of is that you have a lot of good people but the problem is the good people are not moving around and they are not doing anything because of that small criminal element that is causing all the problems. If we can get to the point where we can get that element

out of those communities, then people will be able to sit out on their porch and not be afraid of catching a stray bullet. Having said that, it is not beyond his belief, the solution to most of these problems don't lie in laws that you are going to make. They don't lie in you throwing money at the whole thing. The solution to these problems, starts in the home. We all grew up a different way. We all grew up to where if you did something wrong, you will get your butt cut. Period. End of conversation. If you talked back, you would not have teeth, tongue or gums anymore. We have written laws, in this country, that prohibits and basically puts a pair of handcuffs on parents that have kids that are as bad as barbwire. That is what part of the problem is. The way he looks at it is, that it is incumbent upon him, as a pastor, to begin to try and teach again. We have a whole lot of parents that have no parenting skills. They are not interested in having parenting skills. He wanted everyone to know that he is here to try to be a part of the solution instead of encouraging the problem. If there is anything that he or Mount Triumph Baptist Church can do, please contact us. We want to try and improve our community. That is the only way that this whole thing is going to get better. Mayor Piazza thanked Pastor Williams for coming tonight and encouraged him to visit him at City Hall anytime. Pastor Williams stated that he is currently in the process of planning and learning the City. He wants to be able to go into these neighborhoods and talk to people on a face to face basis. He wants to really try and see what we can do to try to change some of these things. Everybody wants to say that we have to give them something to do. All of that doesn't do any good unless people behave themselves properly. His thing is that he wants to begin teaching and trying to find some programs that will be able to teach parents what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. We also need to work hand in hand with the Chief and the Police Department, the Sheriff's office and the court system in putting a handle on these children as well. The problem is there are no consequences. There has to be a consequence for people who are going to do the wrong thing. Chief Spearman stated when we have meetings or programs and people are upset, they show up. Then they stop showing up until the next shooting. Pastor Williams stated that we can't be like an airplane by continuing to take off and land. We have to get up there and keep it at a cruising altitude.

**Touchet/Plaisance
Resolution R20-08**

A resolution adopting the standards for opening businesses in Phase 1.

The motion carried unanimously.

-01 introduced by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. and seconded by Ms. Terry Broussard to adopt a disaster recover/business continuity plan. The motion carried unanimously.

**Touchet/White
Resolution R20-09**

A resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute the CARES Act airport grant agreement with FAA.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Lloyd Campisi discussed the upcoming renewal of the health insurance plan on 7/1/2020. Having to come into tonight with a mask on during a pandemic to discuss group health insurance is an indication of the challenges we are facing going forward. We were beginning to recover from the worst claim year in our history, two years ago. That was when our reinsurer paid out \$475,000 in claims above what we pay them for the insurance. This has made our work difficult and has prevented us from receiving any competitive quotes for our group health plan for the past

two years. Now the current health pandemic has compounded our efforts going forward. The renewal is July 1st and we are in the process of securing bids, if we can get them, and making decisions about the plan going forward. During the current plan year, we have continued to face challenges with high cost claims. We had our first claim ever where the bill charges exceeded \$1.1 million before discounts. One claimant had prescriptions costing over \$89,000 during the plan year. Another person is receiving chemotherapy costing \$10,000 every two weeks which could reach \$260,000 for the year. All this said, we are currently working with our reinsurer and our administrator, UMR, United Health Care and Optum RX. We are negotiating a renewal where the increase costs for reinsurance is being offset by savings in our administration and prescription drug plans. We have had many meetings. Mayor Piazza and Councilman Broussard, the Insurance Committee Chairman, have worked hard. We are close to reaching an agreement with our insurance partners where our current benefits stay the same and our cost is near to what we are currently paying for insurance, administration and benefits. He is here today to ask you to authorize the Mayor, as plan administrator, to complete those negotiations and accept a renewal that can achieve our goals: keeping our future costs and benefits at current costs and benefit levels. During this crisis with the pandemic, not everyone is working all the time and we had a system failure at UMR and they couldn't get the data over to the reinsurer for their analysis. They have finally done that and it appears that the rates have been sent to him and he is awaiting the receipt of those. Mayor Piazza stated there are two sides to the plan. The medical side and the pharmaceutical side. On the medical side \$50,000 was automatically added to the premium for COVID-19 even though we don't have a case and have never had a case. This was done across the board nationwide. Lloyd and Lisa Ortego went to work on this, and they are still negotiating with them, but they have got the plan down to where they were able to tweak the pharmaceutical side to get additional discounts. The pharmaceutical side will come down \$50,000 and the medical side will go up \$50,000. To do that, it will take some adjustments to some of the prescription medication deductibles especially when it come to specialty drugs. Councilman Touchet asked Lloyd to name a specialty drug. Lloyd stated one of those is Humira. It is a drug to treat a rash and it is \$23,000 every time you fill the prescription. Mayor Piazza stated that we would work on those copays and give them alternatives if they go with the generic medication. Some of the copays were actually lowered so they may pay less. Councilman Broussard stated our drug system is unique that we do receive prescription rebates. We will increase those rebates so that will help with the increased costs. Lloyd stated that he has tried to convince them that our parish does not have much of the virus and we have had very few deaths from it. They come back and tell us that Louisiana has one of the worst incidences of the disease in the entire country and they told me the people you are asking us to insure are the essential workers. They are the people, like the police and firemen and City employees, who are out there meeting the public so they are more likely to get this. If you end up having this spread throughout the community it will probably go through the police department, fire department and your other City workforce. If this happens, it will destroy the plan this year. If it does happen, this would be three years in a row that the insurance company loses money. The company will be gone. If they leave us, when our case is looked at, no one wants to give us a chance. Councilman Touchet stated that we are being held hostage because of the Louisiana numbers. Lloyd stated that is correct because they are setting rates for the state. When they set rates for the state, we are in the pool with New Orleans. We are paying the price for all the cases in the state. No carrier would go down to the parish level. This same thing is happening to everyone. Mayor Piazza stated that with the changes we made with the Abbeville General Urgent Care facility are reflected in the numbers with this renewal. There are several people who are using the urgent care facility instead of going to the emergency room. We are saving a lot of money there. The bottom line is the quote is break even and there are no additional costs to the employees. There will be some differences in the prescription medications. Lloyd added that 95% of our employees are not the problem. It is those

few who have those serious issues. Those people who have those serious issues, and any of us could get those, have bills that go to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

-02 introduced by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. and seconded by Ms. Roslyn White to authorize the Mayor to negotiate and agree to a group health insurance plan renewal as close to the current costs of the plan. The motion carried unanimously.

Ike Funderburk, City Attorney

- *Hope to have an ordinance committee meeting next time to start looking at some alternatives of possibly restructuring our animal section in the code of ordinances.*

Jason Hebert, Police Lieutenant

- *We are out there every night and they are complaining on us. The problem is with the people who are out there who refuse to tell us "I saw". He is having that issue with a witness so what can he do. Should he take this person and go to the courts and get the warrants and lock this innocent person who saw but doesn't want to tell out of fear or whatever the issue is. He is bound by law. Do I protect him or do I solve the murder? That is where we are. The law is our downfall. We have to follow the law. He can't go out there and be a vigilante. He can't go out there and break the law because he will lose his job. Don't think it doesn't affect us. When you pass by my house and see my car, please say a prayer for me. Chief is on us wanting us to do something so even if he doesn't have all the answers, he pushes us to go out there and do what we are supposed to do and we are. You may hear a siren and you may hear something negative about us but we are risking our lives so you can sleep at night and then we go back to work the next day. The money doesn't mean anything to him. Its not worth it. The hours we are making are not worth it. Councilman Broussard stated that is a society problem not just an Abbeville problem. That is why he makes the statement that until the public stands up and has enough of this, and gives you the information that you need and we run them to the next community out of our town. Jason stated he had a witness on the scene cussing at him and saying that he will not rat. If I take him into custody and put him in the unit then the crowd turns against me. You understand that. We are trying.*

Councilwoman Terry Broussard

- *At the last meeting she forgot to thank Mr. Gerald with the Rotary Club for donating some canned goods and other food items when she did Bags for Seniors during the Coronavirus time.*
- *Reported speeding to Chief Spearman on South Guegnon, Prairie and Godchaux.*

Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr.

- *The cat over population in our City is a nuisance to our good citizens and Ike is working on a solution for us. We do have a cat problem.*

Councilman Francis Touchet, Jr.

- *He talked to Clay and Tony Meaux about the expensive repairs on the airport tractor. The tractor is 7 years old. A brand-new tractor is \$45,000. We can continue to repair it but at some point, we have to look because these tractors are always bushhogging. He has also put a stop to just dropping it off without an estimate. We need an estimate before we decide to do the work. We are also handicapped because there are not too many people around here who can fix that. Mayor Piazza stated that we need to look at the number of hours. 7 years is not that old. Councilwoman White stated that she has seen 40-year-old tractors that are run everyday on much rougher terrain and they don't have these*

problems. There is a problem with either your maintenance or your operator not the tractor itself. A new tractor is not the answer. Councilman Touchet stated maybe we need to find someone who will come to the shop and fix it on site. Councilman Broussard asked the Mayor if Langlinais is in the City limits. Mayor Piazza stated it is not. Councilman Broussard stated maybe we could look at Henderson Implement by the golf course or John Deere on Highway 167. Councilman Touchet stated he could talk to Jake and see if he knows of a mechanic. Mayor Piazza stated that Lee Schexnaider, at our Wastewater Plant, is a very good tractor mechanic.

Councilwoman Roslyn White

- *The Sicilian Festival has been rescheduled to 10/17/2020.*

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

ATTEST:

APPROVE:

Kathleen S. Faulk
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Piazza
Mayor