

The Mayor and Council of the City of Abbeville met in emergency special session on March 19, 2020 at 11:30 A.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: Ike Funderburk, City Attorney
Clay Menard, Public Works Director
Jude Mire, Fire Chief
Bill Spearman, Police Chief
Marilyn Mitchell
Jim Quackenbos

Mayor Piazza called the emergency special meeting to order. He thanked the City Council and everyone else who was present. He stated there are a lot of rumors out there and basically there have been 2 confirmed cases in Lafayette. There are no other confirmed cases other than those two. There are a lot of tests that have been sent off and we can expect some additional cases to materialize. There are no other directives from the Governor's office other than the ones that have already been implemented. The directive was about the closure of restaurants and those types of things. There have no additional closures or mandates from the Governor's office at this time. You hear a lot of rumors out there but this comes straight from the Department of Health and Hospitals. They are asking that everyone please follow the guidelines of the testing procedure. There are only two testing sites. They do not want everybody to run to the Cajundome just because they feel bad or have a little bit of a fever. What they want everyone to do is follow protocol. The protocol is to first call your primary care physician. They will screen you and tell you what you need to do. If you don't have a primary care physician, you need to call the 311 emergency hotline number. Somebody will answer your questions and screen you over the phone. That is available to every parish in Acadiana. The screening sites are also available to every parish in Acadiana. If you don't meet certain criteria and aren't screen first then you will not be tested. They are trying to establish a testing site in New Iberia, one in Evangeline Parish and a second one in Lafayette Parish. Those are still days away because there are not enough testing kits at this time to go around. DHH is the head of the task force for this and all this is going through them. If you feel bad then you need to stay home and don't go to work and then follow the protocol to get tested.

The first item on the agenda is to adopt a resolution declaring a state of emergency exists, thus suspending compliance with the applicable City ordinances and the public bid law. The public law has already been suspended by the Governor. Mayor Piazza is requesting the ability to do what he needs to do in the case of an emergency as far as purchasing goes and the distribution of personnel to continue to provide our City services that we need to do. We can assure of citizens that our City services are going to continue and we need to be able to do that expeditiously and not wait to get authorization at a City Council meeting. He needs authority to waive some of the ordinances as he sees fit that restrict him from doing these day to day activities. Mayor Piazza

stated that we took some initial steps. The lobby at City Hall has been closed. We are fortunate that we are spread out in individual offices here. There are no more than two people per office. We are monitoring anyone that is allowed in City Hall. They have to have an appointment. We are conducting all other business through the drive-thru window. The personnel in the field have been informed that they cannot exceed the limit of 10 people per group. They are going to make arrangements and they will not be eating or working together. The grass cutting crew has been split up into two different groups and they are going to work at different times. One group goes to work at 7 and the other group gets to work at 7:30. We have also separated the crews at the Utility Building so that they don't gather in groups. They stay in restricted area. He met with the Police Chief and the Fire Chief. They know that their public buildings are restricted and off limits to anyone that is not on duty. We are fortunate that we have a few fire stations and they are spread out. They know what they need to do to remain compliant. The Police only have one building and they have to perform their duties. They are prohibiting the public from going inside the building. They have a separate entrance for booking somebody. They have sanitizer, disinfectant to spray the unit and gloves. One of the directives from the Governor gives the Chief Law Enforcement Agent of the municipality or parish, meaning the Chief or the Sheriff, to make the determination regarding a curfew. That will be implemented in accordance with the Chief's recommendation. Chief Spearman stated we have always had a curfew for minors. WalMart will be adjusting their hours soon so they will close earlier. This will help with the curfew. Mayor Piazza stated that we have made some provisions to keep our parks open at designated time so people will have some type of quality of life.

Plaisance/White
Resolution R20-03

A resolution authorizing a state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Piazza stated he and Ike were on a conference call this morning with Louisiana Energy and Power Authority (LEPA). The City of Abbeville is a member of LEPA because we own our electrical system. Because we own our electrical system, we are part of a select group of municipalities throughout the State. LUS, Natchitoches, Minden, Rayne, Kaplan and Marksville are a few member cities that are in the same situation as Abbeville. They were all on the conference pertaining to the disconnection of utilities and the Public Service Commissioner's restriction of that. Ike stated the Public Service Commission (PSC) regulates for profit electrical utility companies of the State. The PSC has issued an executive order that prohibits those companies that are under his jurisdiction from cutting off customers for non-payment. The question becomes: Are we regulated by the PSC to the point that we cannot cut of someone for non-payment? The answer to that is no. The PSC does not govern LEPA or its members. We are not controlled by the PSC. The next question was: What are we going to do? There was some spirited debate during the conference call. Terrebonne has elected to follow the PSC's directive and so has LUS. LUS and Terrebonne are in a different position as many others including Abbeville and Kaplan. If we do not get paid for our utilities then that cuts off our ability to pay our personnel like Firemen and Police. It limits us to be able to provide all the services we have to provide in order to maintain the quality of life in this community. Several Mayors spoke about the fact that if someone does not pay their bill then we have to cut you off. We can't continue to let them add on and add on and add on and dig themselves into a trench that they will never get out of. But, for someone who has been laid off or has had their hours cut back and they either have now and/or are hoping to get unemployment compensation and they don't have the cash flow to make their payment, through no fault of their own, because they are not getting a check, we could

waive the disconnect fee one time when they reconnect. That is how several of the Mayors were leaning. Alexandria is not going to charge a disconnect fee. St. Martinville is waiving the late fees. We have to walk a fine line of being responsive to our constituents and us being responsible for maintaining the cash flow that we need in order to support our constituents. We cannot place the City of Abbeville at risk come two or three months down the road to be unable to make payroll and unable to provide services. Mayor Piazza stated that we are not governed by the PSC's directive because we are different. It seemed the consensus of some of the smaller municipalities like Abbeville, Kaplan, Rayne, Welsh, Plaquemine and others during the conference call that we just don't have the luxury of the bigger cities and we don't have the surplus to be able to afford to allow customers not to pay their bills. If we don't collect these utility bills then we will not be able to pay our personnel like the Firemen and Policemen. That is a bigger crisis than we are faced with now. We have to have policemen on the streets. We have to be able to pay them and we won't be able to pay them if we don't collect our utility bills. That is the bottom line and but he does think some concessions should be made. He recommends a one-time waiver of the disconnect fee and a one-time waiver of the late fee. This will be one-time only on both billing cycles. That will take place immediately. The first late cycle takes place tomorrow so we need to know this today. If we waive the late fee, that will save our customers 10% on their bill and it would not burden the City at this point. This would not strap us financially and it would help the citizens. He also recommends looking at some hardship cases for some select individuals like the elderly on fixed incomes since they don't get their checks until the 3rd, that we allow a couple of extra days from the three days that we have in the ordinance. Councilman Touchet stated that this situation could last some time. Ike stated the policy can always be adjusted further down the road. Councilwoman White asked if we would disconnect people for non-payment. Mayor Piazza stated that we would disconnect people for non-payment because we will run short on cash. We can handle everyone on an individual basis and allow a few extra days. Councilwoman Broussard stated she wishes there was a way to work around it for a month, but she understands. Mayor Piazza stated we don't have an answer if the loss of revenues is something that FEMA and the Stafford Act will reimburse us for. We don't know that answer today. It was discussed on the conference call but there was no answer there. We hope that will happen and we can make a different decision at a later date. Councilman Broussard stated that we have a fiduciary responsibility to keep the City running. Mayor Piazza stated we will monitor what other LEPA cities our size are doing. This is an evolving situation and things could change from today. We want to be uniform with other LEPA cities our size and situation. Maybe we will find out later we can get some funding from FEMA and we will be able to make a different decision but we just don't know this right now. This is the reason for taking it one step at a time. Councilwoman White asked if a concession of not disconnecting water service would be considered for sanitary issues. People need to be able to wash their hands and bathe. Mayor Piazza stated that is a very good point and the LEPA organization strictly deals with electricity so we did not talk about that but it would have to be considered. We have to be unified in this action and he will rely heavily on the advice of the City Council on the case by case hardships because you know your constituents on a personal basis. We will look at it from cycle to cycle on the current conditions at the time.

-01 introduced by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. and seconded by Mr. Francis Touchet, Jr. to approve the three recommendations pertaining to disconnection of utilities for non-payment of bills as presented by the Mayor: To have a one-time waiver of the disconnect fee for both cycles, a one-time waiver of the late fee for both cycles and to allow a few extra days outside of our ordinance for those who have hardship cases. The motion carried unanimously.

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

ATTEST:

APPROVE:

Kathleen S. Faulk
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Piazza
Mayor