

The Mayor and Council of the City of Abbeville met in regular session on August 4, 2020 at 5:30 P.M., at the A. A. Comeaux Recreation Center located at 300 A. A. Comeaux Drive, Suite 200, Abbeville, Louisiana with the Honorable Mark Piazza, Mayor, presiding.

Members Present: Council Members, Francis Plaisance, Terry Broussard, Brady Broussard, Jr. and Roslyn White

Members Absent: Councilman Francis Touchet, Jr.

Also, Present: Ike Funderburk, City Attorney
Jude Mire, Fire Chief
Bill Spearman, Police Chief
Jason Hebert, Police Lieutenant
Clay Menard, Public Works Director
Richard Primeaux, Engineer
Gene Sellers, Engineer
Ricky LaFleur, Candidate for District Judge
Danny Landry, Candidate for District Attorney

Mayor Piazza asked Councilman Francis Plaisance to lead the assembly in prayer. Mayor Piazza also asked for a moment of silence for the COVID-19 victims that are currently in the hospital on ventilators, and we hope that the Lord will spare them and ease their suffering. Mayor Piazza asked Mr. Richard Primeaux to lead the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Ricky LaFleur is a candidate for District Judge and he stated he has had his practice in Abbeville since 1992. He is running for judge because he believes we need a fair and impartial court system. It needs to be efficient because there is such a back log of cases. Vermilion Parish voters deserve that efficiency. His plan is to work with the Clerk of Court's office, the District Attorney's office and the attorneys that come before him to get a plan of action together to get the people in and out of the court system in a reasonable amount of time without sacrificing fairness and equality. The people need a judge that is accessible. You are a public servant. Mayor Piazza asked Mr. LaFleur where the bond amount comes from because it seems the bonds are sometimes set too low for the crime committed. Mr. LaFleur stated that bonds are set according to law. The bond is set based on a number of factors including past history of the person, the seriousness of the crime and if they are a flight risk. He pledges, as a judge, to look at each and every case individually. Justice in our system is not black or white, there are shades of gray. Every case deserves specific attention and individual attention. More serious crimes deserve a higher bond and less serious crimes deserve a lower bond. Each bond has to be determined by the facts of the case. It is people over politics. Make sure the courts work is done in a timely fashion and justice is done at the end of the day. Councilman Francis Plaisance asked if the docket could be streamlined. Can the judge come in earlier and not take as many breaks? Mr. LaFleur stated that he does not go to his office at 10 in the morning. He will start earlier than that. Right now, they are staggering people to come into court due to the COVID-19. Why not take a serious look at that? People are there but they don't have to be there any longer than they need to be. You don't want to crowd a courtroom. Make it a more efficient court system because people deserve that.

Mr. Danny Landry is a candidate for District Attorney. He has been with the district attorney's office for 36 years. He served with Nathan Stansbury, Mike Harson and with Keith Stutes. When he started, he was a felony prosecutor, handling the most serious cases. This is all he has done his entire career. The last five years, he has served as a first assistant district attorney. This is a supervisory role over all the assistants in the 15th Judicial district. That has allowed him to prosecute the higher profile cases. He enjoys doing that and this job is really a passion. He has learned what works with each D. A. He will take all the good from the D. A.'s and move the office forward. He has been involved in the budget process and in watching to get the court system to move along. This is a major issue we have in all three jurisdictions. The longer people sit in jail then the longer the Police Juries have to pay for them. There is a budget crisis in every single parish. He will not need any on the job training. The D. A.'s role is public safety and we will have to do with what we have. Three years ago, we implemented a case management system. This streamlined the operations of the office. When the Governor closed the office in March, within 2 weeks we were able to take 105 employees and go virtual. We were able to continue the operations of the D. A.'s office. We have set it up so the reports are delivered electronically. In a perfect world we would have a dedicated criminal division where judges did nothing but criminal work. We have hundreds of cases and you can only try 2 or 3 cases in one week. We will never catch up unless we do something like a super docket. That is how you move the docket. We have a major gun problem in all three parishes. You have to get the community involved. He will be more aggressive than the last 3 District Attorneys to get the community involved. Councilman Plaisance asked how he would get the community involved. Mr. Landry stated that it will have to be a group effort and it will have to start at the bottom. There were two murders last year where there were several witnesses but no one would come forward. It is a huge problem as a prosecutor. You will have to start with the churches. The schools are great areas to start too. The School Resource Officer knows the students and they can identify those kids that are hanging out with the wrong crowd or if they are starting to use drugs. The SRO would go to the church leaders and they would intervene before you have the law enforcement and the D. A.'s office. Those kids may just need resources because the parents may have drug addiction issues and other things like that. Once you identify those and bring them into law enforcement and D.A. with community policing in order to develop a trust. That way, when there is an issue, they won't have a problem picking the phone up and coming to court. This will take a lot of work. In Acadia Parish we started a juvenile pre-trial program. What we are doing, for example, is that a young lady got arrested for shop lifting. She was 16 and stole some diapers and baby formula. She stole it because she had a child and her parents disowned her. She doesn't belong in the criminal justice system. That is somebody who you can point in the right direction for assistance. This program has been very successful. Mayor Piazza stated that there is definitely a gun problem in Abbeville. APD has confiscated a lot of guns. Mr. Landry stated if you have a gun and you have a car, take your gun inside and lock it up. If you leave it in the car, then lock your car doors. If he could figure out how to prosecute someone for leaving a gun in their car and it ends up in the hands of a 16-year-old that doesn't know any better and ends up killing a 40-year-old person, he would. That is a big problem and since the schools have closed because of COVID we have had a major spike in car burglaries and it is all juveniles. They are bored. 10% of criminals are evil and 40%, because of certain home upbringing, have lack of morals. Then you have the other half who have made a mistake. You have to take each case separately. The bond issue are the judges. A majority of these people in the criminal system are represented by indigent defenders, public defenders. Several years ago, they had a restriction of services because they did not have enough money. They were not showing up to court. They were continuing every case they had so that caused a back log. COVID has also caused a back log. It is going to be a big war for the D.A.'s office, the judiciary and the public defenders to get these things moving. Criminal cases take priority over civil cases but civil cases are where lawyers make money. He will have an open door and he is looking for items because there has to be a way to fix this.

-01 introduced by Mr. Francis Plaisance and seconded by Ms. Terry Broussard to approve the minutes from the July 21, 2020 special City Council meeting and the July 21, 2020 regular City Council meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

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

-02 introduced by Mr. Brady Broussard, Jr. and seconded by Ms. Terry Broussard to approve payment of estimate for partial payment number 6 in the amount of \$64,715.25 payable to Glenn Lege Construction for the LA 14 Downtown Abbeville Streetscaping project. The motion carried unanimously.

Councilman Broussard gave a report on DOTD's response to drainage requests. After business complaints we all agreed to a resolution that would ask DOTD to maintain their system and clean their system prior to hurricane season. His customer, Maison Du Monde Nursing Home, is still very fearful of floods they have experienced. They asked if anything could be done. He reached out to Senator Bob Hensgens to see if he could help with DOTD doing some work on their system at the intersection of North Airport Drive and Highway 14. That got some things going. They have a new engineer, Jeff Faust. Jeff is an area engineer for Iberia, St. Mary and Vermilion. Jeff understood and knows the system and he has agreed to clean the three 30-inch pipes west of Jimmy Vorhoff Drive. That is supposed to happen this week. This will help outflow during a big rain event. It will bring water to the larger system on Highway 14. This will take the water away from Farm Bureau, Maison du Monde and all those businesses in that area. He communicated this to Councilman Touchet and this is something that Councilman Plaisance worked on too. This week the Mayor agreed to dig out the ditch that is immediately east of Maison Du Monde Nursing Home. That has been completed. This will also assist in evacuating water quicker to Highway 14 infrastructure which is much bigger. The City limits stop at the north side of Maison Du Monde. We can't do work up to Highway 338 but Juror Paul Bourgeois said he would do that if requested. We can't change mother nature but we can prepare a little better for her. That is what we have done now. Councilman Plaisance stated that for two years he tried to convince Maison Du Monde to build a levee around they nursing home on the west and north side because all that water is coming downhill from Jimmy Noel's property when there is a heavy rain. They have rented those aqua dams. He asked Mr. Richard Primeaux if Maison Du Monde was advised to elevate their building more than they did. Mr. Primeaux stated it was recommended that they build higher but they chose not to. If they put the levee, in addition to what we are doing, it would be helpful. Councilman Broussard agreed that is a good idea and they do have to do what they can to help themselves too. The aqua dam cost \$300,000 every time it is put up. When it is more serious than what the aqua dam can handle then they have to evacuate their residents. This costs them \$1,000,000. They are working with Elray Schexnaider and they met with the Mayor. Elray has been told that they have to do what they can to help in this process. Mayor Piazza stated it is in the works. They have to help themselves and it will take a joint effort. The drainage board is the next step because some of that water that is supposed to go north to the big ditch can't. This makes the water pile up and go south. It is supposed to go north.

Richard Primeaux, Engineer

- *Met with drainage district number 2 today. They gave us permission to work in their prescriptive easement for the Cedar Street drainage project. That part was approved tonight. The second part is on Robert Wells Drive. There wasn't positive flow coming out of that system. The channel that is at Wildcat Drive and then turns by Stonebridge apartments has about 2 feet of silt and earthwork that is keeping that channel from*

flowing positively. He showed this to the drainage board. Their superintendent stated that must be the reason they are having trouble upstream as well. They were very much in favor of regrading this. Right now, the water has to actually rise a foot and one-half before it takes off. That is the reason why they are flooding. This will move the residual water. He will help them shoot grade and all of this will help them with problems upstream too. Both projects were approved by the drainage district.

Mayor Mark Piazza

- *We almost had a crisis yesterday with the transformer at Gertrude Substation. This has happened twice. If you lose one of those big transformers at a substation then you have to pick up the load at some other substation. If you can't do that then you will have hundreds of customers out of power. We actually had that happen years ago and we had to borrow a mobile transformer from CLECO. CLECO had to transport that from Alexandria. It took a day and one-half to do that. That was when we lost one of the transformers at the By-Pass substation. Several years later, the same thing happened to Gertrude Substation. We had to try and locate and borrow a transformer. We were pleading and begging anybody who might have one. We were able to find one to purchase from the City of Houma, who were also members of LEPA. In the meantime, we really had problems with our electrical system because our east side of town was growing and we couldn't supply the power fast enough. Not too long after Katrina, they built the big apartment complex on Rodeo Road. This caused a real dilemma for us but we were able to borrow some money to build the Rodeo Road Electrical Substation. This was one of the largest infrastructure projects for us except for the new Louisiana Electrical Substation that was rebuilt after it was demolished by Hurricane Lili. In the past 18 years, we have built two brand new electrical substations. That is a 10KVA transformer. It will pick up the whole load from St. Theresa Church all the way to Walmart. The By-Pass Sub is two 5KVA transformers. One can pick up the load from the other but we need more power than that. That furnishes power all the way down the By-Pass to Mount Carmel Heights. After the problems, we discovered that we really need a backup transformer. We went out and bought a new 10KVA dual voltage transformer. We have two voltages in Abbeville. Five of our substations are on the 13.2 volts of electricity. The Louisiana sub and the Felicity sub are on 41.60 volts of electricity. In order to have a backup transformer that we can use at any substation, it has to be dual voltage. Thank goodness we bought that spare transformer back then. We needed it yesterday and it took less than one day to put it in service. They had to get a crane, remove the old transformer then put the other transformer in place and hook it up. In the past this would have taken at least two days. Our superintendent, Stewart Head and our electrical consultant, Harvey DuBois did a great job. They were able to do it with just a slight power outage. It was so critical at one point, that at 2:00 PM in the afternoon it was so hot that they had to call Abbeville General Hospital and ask them to turn on their generator because we could not provide power without taking out Rodeo Road Substation. We had to shut down Abbeville General Hospital and make them get on generator power. The Rodeo Road Substation was maxed out at 10KVA. We really diverted a crisis yesterday. We do have some issues coming up. The 5KVA transformer is not worth repairing and we will have to purchase a new backup transformer. It is very expensive to rebuild those transformers. We will have to purchase a 10KVA and that will cost somewhere between \$175,000 to \$250,000. There is also an issue with Riviana but since they are not operational right now, that is not an immediate issue right now. Felicity is in pretty good shape. Harvey will come to a meeting to tell us the condition of all the transformers and what his recommendation is for Gertrude and all the other substations. Keep in mind that in addition to all this, we also bought two transformers at Pete Noel. These were the two main transformers. This is part of our*

bonded indebtedness. That is why we borrowed that money at that time. Both of those transformers are 50KVA transformers and we can run the City on one at Pete Noel Substation. That is not something you can borrow. It is impossible to find so it is not unusual for a system to have two of those so that one can serve as a backup. We are almost finished paying for those. Councilman Broussard asked if our boiler and machinery insurance may cover some of the costs. Mayor Piazza asked Ike to report this failure to our insurance company.

Councilman Brady Broussard, Jr.

- *There is a Farmers Market next weekend on August 15, 2020.*

Councilman Francis Plaisance

- *The Downtown area looks great.*

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

ATTEST:

APPROVE:

Kathleen S. Faulk
Secretary-Treasurer

Mark Piazza
Mayor