

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 18TH DAY OF APRIL, 2022

The Caddo Parish Economic Development Committee met in legal session on the above date at 1:30 p.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers Conference Room, with Mr. Chavez, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Atkins, Chavez, Johnson, Lazarus, and Young (5). ABSENT: Commissioners Burrell, Gage-Watts, and Jackson (3).

Mr. Atkins gave the invocation, and Mr. Lazarus led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Discuss and make recommendations regarding YMCA request*

Mr. Jeffrey Goodman conducted a presentation for the potential baseball complex. He said that the YMCA is developing a youth baseball and softball complex. The current complex is home to the Shreveport Little League Baseball and Softball and opened up over 30 years ago. Since its inception, the facility has virtually remained unchanged. The family that owned the land and leased it to the Little League who was hesitant to put "real money into it" because they thought maybe the family might have a change of heart.

Now the YMCA owns that land. Once the Y bought the land, they went through a needs assessment to determine the best use for the complex. In order to make the complex "tournament grade", additional parking is needed, drainage issues need to be resolved, and artificial turf need to be installed in the fields. He said that if the field does not have artificial turf, that location will not even be considered.

The project will cost about \$7.5M. The Y has raised \$2.3M to date. It is also estimated that there will be a \$5M economic impact in Year One. Approximately 50,000 people use the current facility per year; it is estimated that 340,000 people per year will use the upgraded facility. The funds for this facility have been raised through a combination of public and private monies.

He also pointed out that MLB's RBI (Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities) program increases participation and interest in baseball and softball among underserved youth; encourage academic achievement; and teach the value of teamwork. The complex will also provide a positive outlet where youth can spend time, which correlates to less crime. The Youth Development Baseball Complex will also increase the number of local kids playing baseball and softball, enhance opportunities for local league play, offer free summer baseball and softball clinics, provide career and volunteer opportunities; and it will be a source of community pride, vision, and hope.

Additional uses for the complex include: weekend outdoor health and wellness fairs, family fun nights at the park, community baseball and t-ball games, movie nights under the stars, and events that utilize YMCA's forty current community organization partnerships.

Mr. Goodman mentioned that Mr. Patrick Wesley, Caddo Parish Parks & Recreation Director, has about 1,300 children in Caddo's baseball camps, but he does not have the means to keep these children engaged as they age up. By partnering with the YMCA, those children can stay engaged in baseball through elementary, middle school, high school, and maybe even into the pros.

Mr. Wesley said that he was going to put in the 2023 Budget Book a feasibility study request for a sports complex, but then Mr. Goodman approached him about this complex. Mr. Wesley views this complex as a "win-win". He explained that the youth sports tourism industry brings in about \$19B annually.

Mr. Wesley also said that Caddo Parish does have T-Ball, but then it drops off because there isn't a feeder system. He said that this complex will provide for an academy type setting to follow the children from Wee Ball to T-Ball to baseball.

He also pointed out that when people come for tournaments, those people will spend money in our community.

Mr. Atkins is in support of the project. He knows that there is a demand, but hopes that Caddo is not too late to the game.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know the Y's partnership with the Shreveport Little League and Dixie. Mr. Gary said that they've begun discussions with both entities. The complex will be run just like a YMCA branch. There will be a board who oversees the facility with a manager, employees, etc. Dixie could also lease practice fields, if needed. Mr. Chavez is concerned with providing funding to the YMCA for this complex, only to turn around and charge a lease fee for a team. Mr. Gary said that is the current system, and the team fee goes to maintenance.

Mr. Johnson said that Caddo Parish is at least twenty years behind. He also said that when

he was first elected to the Commission, he asked the Tourism Bureau, “what is Caddo Parish known for?” Mr. Johnson said that he has yet to receive an answer. He would like this complex to be bigger than what is being proposed.

Mr. Gary also said that there are other opportunities for funding the complex. He gave an example of a \$2M appropriation, and the name of the park will be the donor’s name in perpetuity.

Mr. Johnson wants Caddo Parish to be “over the top” and above average when it comes to this complex. He said that as this complex develops, there could be a team in Caddo Parish. He understands that it will take some time because of coaches, participants, and infrastructure, but it could happen. Mr. Johnson also asked about transportation for the inner-city youth coming to the complex. Mr. Gary explained that there is a program in place with the Caddo Parish School System who buses children to the Y. He said that this could be a continued partnership with the complex.

Mr. Johnson also suggested not doing concession stands, but rather have a food truck alley to stimulate the local economy even more.

Mr. Atkins said that the annual budget for Economic Development is \$450,000, but the request for the proposed complex is \$1.4M. Mr. Atkins wanted to know where the additional funding would come from if it were approved. Mrs. Barnett suggested that this come from the Oil & Gas Fund since it is a one-time request. Mr. Atkins wanted to know if they could do multi-year commitments for Economic Development.

Mr. Gary said that the request for funding is \$1.4M. He also mentioned that the complex could be named after the Caddo Parish Commission if they were to appropriate \$2M.

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mr. Chavez, *to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$2M over a period of four years for the YMCA Baseball Complex based on Administration’s recommendation of funding sources.*

Mr. Johnson said that something needs to be done to be ahead of the game because Caddo Parish is missing out on money and population growth.

Mr. Atkins agreed with Mr. Johnson’s vision, but wanted to know how this will be paid for. Mr. Johnson said that the Oil & Gas Fund can be utilized to fund this endeavor.

Mr. Chavez understands that this is a huge appropriation, but could also have a huge economic impact for Caddo Parish.

Mr. Young said that this is a good idea, but would like it to be bigger. He also pointed out that the Caddo Parish Commission has allocated some money for green infrastructure which could be used to control run off water in parking lots, as well as creating food producing plants. He suggested having fruit trees in the parks.

At this time, Mr. Johnson’s motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Chavez, Johnson, Lazarus, and Young (5). ABSENT: Commissioners Burrell, Gage-Watts, and Jackson (3).

- *Discuss and make recommendations regarding Sci-Port’s Game Port project*

Ms. Diane, Sci-Port, provided the Committee with a handout describing the Sci-Port activities during Game Port. She said that the completion of IMAX will be mid-October with several movies, such as Spiderman, Mission Impossible, Black Panther, and Avatar, booked.

In January 2021, the Caddo School Board announced that they are supporting the E-Sports tournament at the school. Sci-Port wanted to support this educational initiative and put together a Game Port event in collaboration with APEX.

Ms. Diane pointed out that there are careers in gaming. The Digital Media Institute (DMI) is located in Shreveport and has been instrumental in promoting this. Sci-Port and the DMI partnered together and had an E-Sports competition.

Sci-Port received \$35,000 from the Commission. Their revenues were \$93,000+, and Sci-Port spent \$24,000 on this initiative. In fifty days of operation, Sci-Port netted \$68,000 in revenues from the drop-in traffic. She said that this does not include the combo tickets, students in coding camps, etc.

Ms. Diane said that there were fifty-four contestants in the Match Brothers Tournament; twenty-five contestants in the Rocket League Tournament; and forty people who came to view the final competition in the IMAX theater.

She also mentioned that there are people who come to Sci-Port on their Free Days. Because of the huge draw, they did an intense marketing campaign for East Texas.

Ms. Diane said that they would like to host another Game Port, but for a longer period of time. The schools would like to participate in the project.

She also talked about Dr. Lonnie Johnson, who invented the NERF Supersoaker. Sci-Port would like to have a family NERF tournament in the building. She said that they reached out to Dr. Johnson to see if he would host the event, but no response yet.

Ms. Diane also mentioned that they have eight Pokemon characters who live in the Sci-Port building. She said that they will also have a booth at this year's Geek'd Con.

Sci-Port would like to host another Game Port this year, but for a longer period of time. They are hoping to have \$90,000 in revenues for the event.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know if this will be a continued request for funding. He also asked what was the previous funding spent on. Ms. Diane said that \$24,000 went to local artist, who create the exhibited. She also mentioned that there was marketing campaign and signs made. Ms. Diane said that everything is listed in the handout she provided to the Committee.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know what would the funding request be used for. Ms. Diane said that it will be used for the artists and arcade machines. She also explained that the exhibits will be modified to target all ages, instead of just young children. Ms. Diane said that they should not have to come back and ask for more funding for this project after this.

Mr. Atkins said that last year's request was a one-time request which netted \$68,000 in profit. Theoretically, those profits could be invested back into the program. Because Sci-Port would like to double the program, "the one-time request has become a once again request", Mr. Atkins said.

Ms. Diane said that the people who come to Sci-Port do not come back if the exhibits are all exactly the same each time they come.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know if Sci-Port has reached out to the people who make the games to help sponsor this event. Ms. Diane said that they reached out to NERF, but they cannot find the grant application for that organization. She also mentioned that DMI contributed approximately \$15,000 with in-kind donations during the last Game Port exhibit.

Mr. Johnson suggested that Sci-Port reach out to the casinos and collaborating with them to possibly package a deal for kids to do while the parents are gambling. Ms. Diane thanked him for his suggestion and will reach out to the casinos.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know when Game Port is set to open. Ms. Diane said May 27, 2022.

Mr. Atkins suggested that the economic impact study be cleaned up and show more focus on Game Port.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know if this is considered a sporting event. Ms. Diane said that it is not, and they were turned down by the Sports Authority because it was ineligible.

Mr. Chavez said that they will continue the discussion on this matter.

- *Update on marketing of Caddo Parish*

Mr. Chavez explained that Mr. Young put this item on the agenda. He identified the pros of living in Caddo Parish, such as low-cost of living, remote work capability, diverse work opportunities, etc. He said that this discussion is to attract people to move to Caddo Parish.

Ms. Krystle Beauchamp, Communications Manager, explained that she and Brent have been working together on how to bring people to Caddo Parish. She's done some research regarding this type of campaign, and saw that most of the programs involves some type of incentive. She also mentioned that there are local companies that do this type of campaign. Ms. Beauchamp explained that a benefit to using a local company is that they know the "local language" of the area. She also explained that they would broaden the target audience using digital commercials, digital ads, and other digital content.

Ms. Beauchamp posed questions such as what region is being targeted for this campaign? How long will this campaign run? She said the answers to those questions would affect the funding for the campaign. Brent agreed and said that the target region would need to be addressed. He also mentioned that they will partner with other entities such as NLEP to make this a successful campaign.

Ms. Beauchamp talked about measuring the metrics for digital ads versus traditional ads. She said that it is easier to measure who accessing the ads; how long they're accessing it; what types of common interests do those people have; and what location seems to be the hotspot for people who are interested.

Mr. Chavez said that there are several entities that want the same results. He said that they need to be looking at the data for the citizens who are leaving, and where are they going. Mr. Chavez does not feel that a blanket approach across America is the "best bang for our buck".

Caddo Parish started losing its population in 2011 and 2012. During that time, young people started moving to places they wanted to live, then finding jobs. Those places then started creating

jobs to keep those people in those places.

Mr. Justyn Dixon, NLEP, said that they market the industrial parks and try to attract manufacturers to Caddo Parish. He also mentioned that north Louisiana is not New Orleans, but that is how people see Louisiana.

Mr. Chavez agreed and said that the question right now is, "what is our bait and who are our fish?"

Mr. Atkins said that the Convention & Tourism Bureau has spent a significant amount of money on marketing campaigns with respect to conventions and tourism; and NLEP is also trying to attract people to Caddo Parish. To me, people don't make life decisions based on a digital ad, Mr. Atkins said. He suggested partnering with those two entities and tweak their content to fit this campaign.

Mr. Chavez mentioned that once people are here, there needs to be something to connect them to the community to keep them here.

Mr. Dixon said that Caddo Parish and this region has several things to offer its citizens, but the citizens talk about the "horribleness" of this community. He said that the mindset of the community has to change in order for this to be a success ad campaign.

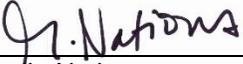
Ms. Beauchamp agreed and said that there are several entities who are working on branding Caddo Parish/Shreveport, and it would be advantageous to work together on this endeavor.

Mrs. Bryant said that this would be a prolonged campaign. The \$100k would be the start of the campaign, but for it to be effective, it has to continue and build. She also mentioned that the Port puts hundreds of thousands of dollars in their budget for marketing each year.

Mr. Chavez agreed that the different entities, such as the Port, Tourism Bureau, NLEP, etc., should all work together to create this campaign. He also agreed that the citizens of this City are its "biggest naysayers". He suggested crafting a campaign for the citizens to love living in their city.

Mr. Young thanked Ms. Beauchamp for starting the work on the campaign. He asked what the budget would be for creating the videos as well as a weekly ad spend for social media.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.



Michelle Nations
Assistant Commission Clerk