

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
NGO APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 9TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2022

The Caddo Parish NGO Appropriations Committee met in legal session on the above date, at 11:30 a.m., in the Government Plaza Chambers, with Mr. Johnson, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Burrell, Chavez, Hopkins, Johnson, and Lazarus (5). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins, Epperson, and Gage-Watts (3).

Mrs. Gage-Watts gave the invocation, and Mr. Chavez led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADDITIONS

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to expand the agenda and add Discuss funding for Caddo Parish Parks' Grab & Go Feeding Program to serve Caddo youth.*

At this time, the Chairperson of the Committee opened the floor for anyone to speak in favor or against the agenda addition. There being no one to speak in favor or against the agenda addition, the Chairperson closed the public hearing.

At this time, Mr. Johnson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Chavez, Hopkins, Johnson, and Lazarus (5). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins, Epperson, and Gage-Watts (3). ABSTAIN: None (0).

NEW BUSINESS

- *Discuss and make recommendations regarding amended funding of NGO's in the 2022 Budget (Robinson's Rescue)*

Mr. Chavez asked for the reason why this amendment, as well as the other NGO amendments, carried over. Mr. Johnson explained that a motion was made during the adoption of the budget to not make any amendments. Mr. Chavez then wanted to know why this particular amendment was carried over. The Clerk of the Commission explained that this was a recommendation from the Animal Services Committee that was made in connection with the mandatory spay/neuter ordinance.

Mrs. Bryant said that Robinson's Rescue has a current appropriation of \$35,000, and the Animal Services Committee recommended that be increased to \$60,000 to cover the additional responsibility related to the spay/neuter ordinance. She also mentioned that the normal appropriation for Robinson's Rescue is \$50,000.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know if Robinson's normally spends the appropriation of \$50,000 every year. Mrs. Bryant said that they always use their funds.

Answering a question from Mr. Johnson regarding if Robinson's has seen an increase in spay/neutering since the passage of the ordinance, Mrs. Bryant said that they have not received the data on that just yet because it is relatively new. Dr. Wilson pointed out that the ordinance covered all animals in the Parish. He also mentioned that the ordinance has not gone into effect just yet.

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mr. Chavez, *to increase the funding for Robinson's Rescue to \$50,000 and to receive the supporting data showing an increase in spaying/neutering to appropriate the additional \$10,000 before the end of the year.*

Mr. Hopkins said that there is a need for more outreach in the northern part of the Parish. We've got animals running everywhere, he said. Ms. Sharon Bihm, Robinson's Rescue, thanked Mr. Hopkins for the recommendation on how to improve education and outreach. She also said that they have plans to work with Animal Services to provide literature to the public with regards to the importance of spay/neuter.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know when this goes into effect. Dr. Wilson said that it goes into effect in June. He also explained that once the ACOs are called, they will have the latitude to enforce the law. If the ACO is called out a second time, and the situation is warranted, Animal Services can initiate the process to get the animal spay/neutered.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know if a PSA or media announcement will be made to make the public aware of the ordinance. Dr. Wilson said that they are working with Animal Services to develop information that will be provided to the citizens making them aware of this legislation.

Mr. Chavez said that he will be in support of this motion because the program offsets the Parish's expenses directly. He suggested that Animal Services create door hangers informing the citizens of the new legislation. Mr. Chavez said that he will reach out to Mr. Young, Chair of the Animal Services Committee, to call a meeting to pre-plan for the law going into effect.

Mr. Johnson suggested that the exemptions be printed on the door hangers as well.

At this time, Mr. Johnson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Chavez, Hopkins, Johnson, and Lazarus (5). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins, Epperson, and Gage-Watts (3). ABSTAIN: None (0).

- *Discuss Ordinance No. 6191 of 2022, an ordinance amending the Budget of Estimated Revenues & Expenditures for the Riverboat Fun and the Oil & Gas Fund in the amount of \$10,000 to provide an appropriation for the Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention associated with the Highland Center and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*

Ms. Madison Poche clarified that she works for the Highland Center, and Frances is a board member for Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants. She reiterated that she is not a legal representative of the organization.

Mr. Johnson asked for an account of the expenses that come in and what the federal government should be paying for. Ms. Poche said that there is a discrepancy of the role that the government should be playing in the post release process. The legal requirement is that the detention center would bring someone, that's legally released and going to their sponsor, to the nearest airport or bus station but that is not happening. The volunteers of LA Aid have been picking up these people and helping them book flights or bus trips to meet their families and friends. She said that gas is a cost, along with phone cards so they can talk to their family members. Also, providing meals for them, rent, utilities, etc. are all costs. Ms. Poche also said that there is an office at the Highland Center where the people can stay until their accommodations are figured out.

Mr. Burrell said that Haitians were the ones who made the headlines. Ms. Poche said that headline caught a lot of people's attention, but people from over fifty countries have come through this community including, but not limited to, people from Georgia, Russia, African countries, and Asian countries. She also said that the people who are coming to Louisiana are asylum seeker who have done the legal right thing by surrendering to the government. They have a credible fear interview, where the government establishes if they have a legitimate fear of harm or torture.

Mr. Hopkins said that the people who are coming here are coming for political asylum. Ms. Poche agreed. Mr. Hopkins said that they have gone through a process. Ms. Poche agreed. Is the federal government not holding up their obligation? Mr. Hopkins asked. Ms. Poche said that the organization has filed civil rights complaints detailing how they believe the government has not been holding up their legal obligation to this point.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know what the Caddo Parish Commission could do to tell the federal government to send funds for these activities. Attorney Frazier said that the Commission would need to pass a resolution and send it to the congressional delegation. Mr. Chavez said that "doesn't have enough teeth". He wanted to know how this could be done through the court system. Attorney Frazier said that a lawsuit would need to be filed, and there would need to be funds expended to have a standing to reclaim them back. She also said that the Parish could do an amicus brief in the lawsuits that are already being filed. Attorney Frazier explained that it is where a third-party organization lends support to a particular side. She pointed out that does not make the Parish a plaintiff; it only lends support for a particular side. Attorney Frazier also said that the Parish could file a lawsuit and request reimbursement, but the eligibility would depend the court's determination. If the Civil Rights Court finds that there has not been a violation, then the Parish would not have a claim. Mr. Chavez said that if the Parish is helping the organization, then they should also recoup those funds back from the federal government.

It was **moved by Mr. Burrell**, seconded by Mr. Chavez, *to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$10,000 for the Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention associated with the Highland Center.*

Mr. Johnson said that the resolution should be sent to the Secretary of Homeland Security, U.S. Senators, Congressional Delegation, and the President of the United States.

At this time, Mr. Burrell's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Chavez, Hopkins, Johnson, and Lazarus (5). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins, Epperson, and Gage-Watts (3). ABSTAIN: None (0).

- *Discuss Ordinance No. 6192 of 2022, an ordinance amending the Budget of Estimated Revenues & Expenditures for the Riverboat Fund and the Oil & Gas Fund in the amount of \$25,000 to provide an appropriation for the American Millennium Project and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*

Mr. Chris Chandler came before the Committee to speak about his organization the American Millennium Project. He said that the organization would provide tours for Caddo Parish local history. Mr. Chandler is requesting \$25,000 for the seventeen historical adventure tours within the boundaries of Caddo Parish.

Mr. Burrell wanted to know if these tours would include the inner-city schools. Mr. Chandler said that every middle school and every high school will have the opportunity to have an American Millennium Project Club, and those students will have the opportunity to go on the tours.

Mr. Burrell then wanted to know how in depth will the history tours go. Mr. Chandler said that he organizes the tours and goes to the places where “the ones that know the history the best stand before my group and tell the history and teach and tell the stories and make it impactful”.

Mr. Chavez wanted to if the American Millennium Project was brought before the School Board. Mr. Chandler said it was not brought before the School Board yet, but Dr. Goree has given him full support. Mr. Chavez said that education is directly responsible for education, so this should go before the School Board. He then wanted to know if any students have gone on a tour. Mr. Chandler said that he has taken students on a tour, and it was funded directly through him. Mr. Chavez said that he is interested in going on a tour.

You show me the money from the other groups, and I might vote for this, Mr. Hopkins said. Mr. Chandler wanted to know if Mr. Hopkins believed in this project. Mr. Hopkins said, “we’re not in the history teaching business”.

Answering a question from Mr. Johnson regarding the cost for AMP membership, Mr. Chandler said that it is \$50 for a one-year membership.

Mr. Johnson then wanted to know why he didn’t talk to the School Board first. Mr. Chandler said that he has been working with Dr. Goree and all of the principals in Caddo Parish regarding his program. Mr. Johnson said that this should start with the School Board first. He mentioned that they also received American Rescue Plan dollars.

It was **moved by Mr. Burrell** to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$15,000 for the American Millennium Project. Motion died due the lack of a second.

- *Discuss funding for Caddo Parks Grab & Go Feeding Program to serve Caddo youth*

Mrs. Erica Bryant explained when the Parish has programs for students, they would like to provide food for the participants in the programs. She said that \$35,000 will go to the food itself, \$5,000 for the equipment, sanitizer, and masks, and the rest of the funds going to promoting the program.

Mr. Chavez wanted to know if the School Board was already doing this. Mrs. Bryant said that this program is for a program such as the basketball or baseball camp where the students are at the events all day.

He then wanted to know where the food would come from. Mrs. Bryant said that the food is secured from different mechanisms. Dr. Wilson said that Mr. Wesley goes to various vendors to buy sandwiches and snacks to put a bag lunch together. Mr. Chavez asked that the information be sent to all of the Commissioners.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know if the grant available. Mrs. Bryant said that it is not available for this year.

It was **moved by Mr. Hopkins**, seconded by Mr. Johnson, to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$50,000 for the Caddo Parks Grab & Go Feed Program. Motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Chavez, Hopkins, Johnson, and Lazarus (5). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins, Epperson, and Gage-Watts (3). ABSTAIN: None (0).

At this time, there was no further discussion to come before the Committee, so the meeting adjourned at 12:54 p.m.


Assistant Commission Clerk