

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION
HELD ON THE 18th DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2020

The Caddo Parish Commission met in a Work Session, on the above date, at 3:30 p.m., in the Government Chambers, with Mr. Chavez, presiding, and the following members in attendance, constituting a quorum: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Johnson, Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (11). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1).

The invocation was given by Mr. Epperson, and the Boy Scouts led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Ms. Ross came before the Commission in support of Ms. Lasonya Moore as the MPC candidate.

Ms. Sharon McDonald came before the Commission in support of Ms. Lasonya Moore as the MPC candidate.

Ms. Lasonya Moore came before the Commission to ask for support regarding her candidacy for the MPC appointment. She is willing and able to serve on this board.

VISITORS

- Master Plan Update
Metropolitan Planning Commission
Alan Clark

Mr. Clark stated that they are in the process of looking at the Master Plan. There have been concerns regarding the efficiency of the Master Plan, which led the MPC to review the Master Plan from page one to the final page of the document. They are proposing a meeting of the Master Plan Advisory Committee (representation from MPC, City Council, and Caddo Parish Commission) in March. Their charge is to make recommendations for changes to the Master Plan when it is appropriate. One of the recommendations of the Master Plan is the Unified Development Code (UDC), which has presented issues and concerns from citizens. They are going to review all of the UDC and “make sweeping changes” to the document as it applies to the citizens outside of the city limits.

When the 2030 Great Expectations Master Plan was created, the intent was to have one code. He said that many municipalities throughout the country have a UDC. He also said that there have been concerns regarding the UDC, and they are in the process of gathering feedback regarding those concerns. He also said that they are going through all of the recommendations of the Master Plan and reviewing them going forward.

He also said that the Master Plan was adopted in 2010. Mr. Clark also explained at the end of every chapter in the Master Plan are recommendations. Those recommendations will be reviewed to see what has been done in reference to those recommendations, and if it has been properly addressed. There will be reviews and updates every five years from this day forward.

Mr. Chavez

Mr. Young asked Mr. Clark to give the top three goals of the Master Plan. Mr. Clark said that the top goals for the Master Plan was economic development, education, and reducing crime. Mr. Young also asked about the MPC part in the Master Plan’s goals. Mr. Clark explained that the MPC has created a welcoming atmosphere for developers and businesses to increase economic development.

Mr. Lazarus wanted to know who from the Parish is on the Master Plan Committee and how they were chosen. Mr. Clark said that the President recommends those persons for the committee. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Jackson are the President’s appointee for the Master Plan Committee. Mr. Chavez explained that Mr. Jackson asked to be on the Committee, so he appointed him on the committee to continue serving. He also explained that Mr. Jackson represents the heart of the city, and Mr. Johnson represents outside of the city limits.

- Mr. John Davis
Rural Fire District Representative

Mr. Davis came before the Commission regarding an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) class. He provided photos of a tragedy that occurred in North Caddo due to a tree falling on a house and crushing a man. The firefighters went out and utilized the USARP training they received and performed flawlessly. He thanked the Commission for providing funding for that training.

Mr. Davis also said that they will be coming back to the Commission to request funding for training with 18 wheelers or heavy equipment on top of a car. He said that Fire District 3 will be the host district for this training.

Mr. Chavez asked for clarification regarding the USAR term and shoring term. Mr. Davis explained that USARP is short for Urban Search and Rescue.

Mrs. Gage-Watts explained that other cities have tornado sirens. She asked Mr. Davis' for further information regarding this. Mr. Davis explained that is a great system to have in highly populated areas, but would not be as effective in rural areas such as north Caddo.

Mr. Hopkins thanked the firefighters on assisting the citizens of Caddo. Mr. Davis pointed out that all firefighters, no matter what district they are in, are invited to attend the training classes they hold.

- Compassion For Lives
Carla Buntyn, Executive Director

Ms. Buntyn explained that Compassion for Lives goes into the jails and offers the incarcerated persons substance abuse training, job training, and workforce development training. They also help the men and women find employment once they leave CCC, but they have had difficulty finding employment for these men and women. She introduced Ms. Sarah Green to the Commission, who was previously incarcerated.

Ms. Green stated that she saw the need for the incarcerated. When she got out of prison, she had nothing. Luckily, she had public defenders who helped her with housing, etc. Due to the needs of incarcerated people, Ms. Green thought it necessary to help others who want to be reintegrated back into society. She helps with substance abuse and counseling. She also helps them get their identification when they get out of prison, but their biggest need is employment. She said that more employers need to stand up and give these men and women second chances. Ms. Buntyn pointed out that they do provide bus passes for these men and women. She also said that Ms. Green drives these men and women back and forth to work every day and houses several of them.

Mr. Burrell commended Ms. Green and Ms. Buntyn for their passion and helping out the ex-offenders in this community.

Mr. Cawthorne also commended Compassion for Lives for their willingness to help others in the community. Ms. Buntyn is asking for any assistance with employers that would give these ex-offenders a second chance.

ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

- Financial Report

Dr. Wilson provided a copy of the quarterly financial reports for each Commissioner.

- Legislative Luncheon
February 21, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.

Dr. Wilson reminded the Commissioners of the Legislative Luncheon that will be held on Friday at 11:30 a.m.

COMMISSION REMARKS

- Mr. Chavez would like additional information regarding who is responsible for the five-mile buffer outside the city limits of Shreveport.

- Mr. Atkins requested that Administration provide a copy of the legislative priorities to the Commissioners.

- Mr. Johnson said that the Appropriations Committee met and approved a motion to fund Ivy Crown for \$7,000.

- Mr. Atkins stated that the Economic Development Committee met today and discussed three issues. He said that the funding for Strategic Action Council was approved to recommend to the full body. Southern University was also discussed and was not advanced to the full body, but it will be discussed at another meeting in the near future. Tomakk's ITEP application was also discussed during this meeting.

He also announced that the Finance Committee will meet tomorrow at noon to discuss millages.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mr. Chavez announced that a Commission calendar with digital calendar invites has been set up. He advised the Commission to look for future invites to Commission meetings.

He also announced that the first UDC Informational Meeting will be held on February 25 at Bill Cockrell Community Center. Another meeting is scheduled for March 10 at 288 Flournoy Lucas Road with additional meetings forthcoming. He encouraged all to attend.

NEW BUSINESS

The Commission then moved onto the first New Business item, *Commission will convene into Executive Session to discuss all issues regarding professional competence/character of Jeff Everson, Commission Clerk appointee.*

Chavez: Attorney Frazier, I don't know if we need to vote on this or not, but rather than clear everyone out that want to watch government—especially the Boy Scouts, could we move this item to the end. That way we could finish our meeting, and they could watch government then we could address it.

Attorney Frazier: Commissioner, you have some items that I think you probably want to address in Executive Session prior to items that are further at the bottom of the agenda. That would not be the logical order to get to those items.

Johnson: That's what I was going to say. We have some items we need to talk about in Executive Session before we get down to it.

Attorney Frazier: I would ask at this time that is unless Mr. Everson wishes to have those items discussed in an open meeting. Per the statute, he does get that opportunity.

Jeff Everson: I would prefer that it happen in an open meeting if that's my right to request.

Attorney Frazier: That is your right to request. We can skip Executive Session and move on.

It was **moved by Mr. Chavez**, seconded by Mr. Atkins, *that Ordinance No. 5945 of 2020, to establish the salary of the Commission Clerk pursuant to Section 3-10 of the Home Rule Charter for Caddo Parish, to adopt a compensation schedule for that position, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's agenda for introduction.

Mr. Chavez would like to move this to Thursday. He said that this ordinance does not pick the person, but sets the salary.

Substitute motion by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Epperson, *to table Ordinance No. 5945 of 2020 until a Commission Clerk is hired.*

Mr. Johnson said that the job was posted for a beginning salary. He believes that experience and background is needed prior to setting the Commission Clerk's salary. He also said that that there currently is not a Commission Clerk. Mr. Epperson agreed.

Mr. Chavez asked that Attorney Frazier provide the range of pay that was advertised for the Commission Clerk. Mr. Taliaferro stated that it was advertised from \$47.94 - \$77.60 per hour. Mr. Young said that was a wide range.

At this time, Mr. Johnson's substitute motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Johnson, Taliaferro, and Young (8). NAYS: Commissioners Chavez, Hopkins, and Lazarus (3). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mrs. Gage-Watts**, seconded by Mr. Cawthorne, *that Resolution No. 12 of 2020, a resolution relative to mental health among incarcerated persons, to endorse and support the Stepping Up Movement and otherwise providing with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's agenda.

Mrs. Gage-Watts explained that this is a part of a national initiative to reduce the number of incarcerated persons with mental illnesses.

At this time, Mrs. Gage-Watts' motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Johnson,

Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (11). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *that Resolution No. 13 of 2020, a resolution of the Parish of Caddo urging the Louisiana State Legislature to strengthen the Louisiana Gun Law by incorporating mandatory requirements for owning and carrying a firearm, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's agenda. Motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Cawthorne, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Johnson, Taliaferro, and Young (7). NAYS: Commissioners Atkins, Chavez, Hopkins, and Lazarus (4). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mr. Atkins, *that Resolution No. 14 of 2020, a resolution approving an agreement with the Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG), the Coordination & Development Corporation (CDC), and the LSUS Red River Watershed Management Institute, for the purpose of applying for grant funding and acting in support of watershed region management activities and in conjunction with the State of Louisiana Watershed Initiative, and to otherwise provide with respect thereto* be moved to Thursday's agenda.

Dr. Wilson said that Mr. Kent Rogers came before the Commission last month requesting this.

At this time, Mr. Epperson's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Johnson, Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (11). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Chavez**, seconded by Mr. Epperson, *to authorize submitting a formal response on behalf of the Parish to the BOR Shreveport Law School Study* be moved to Thursday's agenda.

Mr. Chavez stated that Mr. Jackson is currently in Baton Rouge regarding the law school study.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know who wrote the responses. Attorney Frazier stated that Mr. Jackson wrote it. Mr. Johnson encouraged all Commissioners to read the response.

Mr. Epperson asked that Administration provide feedback to the Commissioners regarding the study.

At this time, Mr. Chavez's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Johnson, Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (11). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

The Commission then moved onto the next New Business item, *authorize discussion of hiring Commission Clerk*.

Johnson: I have a question before I get started on the discussion. Can a motion be made from this discussion?

Attorney Frazier: No, your form of motions are going to have to wait until Thursday. You're voting to move something forward. So if you're going to move something forward to be voted on by the body on Thursday, you can vote on that, but as an action item. If there's action that has to be taken, that has to be voted on Thursday. You can move something to Thursday to vote on and take action on.

Johnson: So I can make a motion today?

Attorney Frazier: Yes.

Johnson: Ok, that was the question. You were saying to make a move on, but you have to make a motion to make a move.

Attorney Frazier: Right. I just want to make sure that whatever motion you made is confined to something that's got to be an action on Thursday.

Johnson: Ok. I guess based upon the meeting that was held in Baton Rouge at the Ethics Board. The opinion that they have decided upon—it seems that there was a conflict of interest with the person that the Parish Commission chose as a clerk. There is possible ways that

that could be cleared up, but I think that the responsibility now lies with the Commission and not the individual because it's still in our hands. Based upon that information, being that person does not meet full employment based upon the conflict of interest. In order to clear that up, there would have to be some type of change made whether the nonprofit organization doesn't get funding—which they've already been approved for funding in the 2020 budget or there's some other thing that could be done—which is third-party, so I won't say what that it is. Now, based upon the opinion, which the opinion of the Ethics Board is what we were waiting upon to determine setting the salary and the start date. Now, since there is a conflict with that, then I would believe that we really need to restart the process and do an internal hiring, maybe change the qualifications up somewhat. Our deputy clerk has been working very hard, and for the last 2 ½ months have been doing an excellent job. Before, we really didn't know how much work she has been doing and how much Todd was actually doing, but now she's doing it all by herself. She's actually proven herself that she can actually do the job and do it by herself. I hate to see where we overlook someone who we see excelling in their job, and doing it by their self—and doing an excellent job. I haven't heard any Commissioners complain about the work that she's been doing. Every time I call about something, she says, 'Commissioner, I'll get right on top of it', and it's done. I think since there is a conflict, we can now step back and then reopen it and maybe consider our deputy clerk for the clerk position.

Atkins: I agree that our deputy clerk has been doing a fine job, however, I also want to remind everybody that we had made a proposal to an individual who's made considerable adjustments to his life to fill this role and take this role as a clerk. He's put his career on hold, and he's been working diligently with the Ethics Board to resolve any conflicts that have been identified. Let's be clear, those aren't ethical issues on his part. They're just conflicts that existed prior to him being appointed to the position. I'd like to give him a period of time to resolve those issues. If we can't get them resolved in a reasonable period of time, a month or two, then I'm willing to work with Commissioner Johnson and go another route. I just feel that we should give this individual who has made sacrifices to serve in this role an opportunity to resolve the issues.

Gage-Watts: I just want to say, I told y'all.

It was **moved by Mr. Epperson**, seconded by Mr. Johnson, *to re-open hiring process for Commission Clerk, starting internally.*

Epperson: Been here and done that. I came down in 92. One of the first issues that we encountered in the hiring process was a young lady that had been working at a commission job for seven years. The Administrator then hired a man over this young lady after seven years. Guess who had to train him? I think it eventually led to a lawsuit. Not only here, but I've seen this so much out in the other employment areas also. It almost appears that there are some things that we figure has to be reserved for men. Some of you may wonder about the efficiency of Ms. Nations, but I don't. You all know what I do down in this office—information that is required. I've been knowing that. I think it's just immoral, unconscionable that somebody would be somewhere in a position all this time. I used to say, 'hey, what if somebody died?' Do you think we were going to stop? No, we didn't stop. These people prepare themselves. Ms. Nations has been going to school. She's articulate. She can do everything, and then we are going to go through all of these changes. We are going to go outside and get somebody else and bring them in over her. Guess who is going to have to train them? It's just not right; it's not fair.

Burrell: I guess sitting on the sidelines and not being a part of this process—some of us were not on the Commission at the time this happened. We're trying to play catchup. I guess my question would be, at the time we were going through the process, were different people eliminated from the process that the people who were internal could not apply for the job?

Chavez: Yes sir, because of qualifications.

Burrell: Qualifications that the Commission established?

Chavez: Correct.

Burrell: and now where we are—now the Commission can change it and put new qualifications? I assume that person is still going to have to follow certain qualifications.

Chavez: I would assume the same thing, but I would have to lean on Attorney Frazier for that answer though.

Burrell: Thank you, Mr. President. I'm just trying to clarify because we are sitting in the dark—some of us, and we want to be fair to everybody. I would like to better understand where we are.

Gage-Watts: When I said that I told you all so, this was one of the things we had a special meeting about. There was—Deputy Clerk, Michelle Nations, was one of the people who was eliminated from the list. I stood alone in trying to say, ‘we need to look at these qualifications again, so we don’t eliminate her totally from the process.’ During the selection period, I said that morning that we selected a clerk, that this was one of the most unfair political procedures that I’ve ever been a part of. That was the reason I made that statement. I happen to believe that I don’t look at a person that’s gender because I want you to look at me as a person who is just who I am. If I do a great job, and I just so happen to be a woman in that stance. I’m not sure why I didn’t have the full support of my colleagues—why people didn’t show up for the special meeting. I just know that she should have been given an equal chance to be a part of our selection. We made the qualifications so it is not something that is set in stone; we can change those qualifications, so she does meet them. As you know that you’ve been here for at least six weeks, and you know that she is more than qualified to perform the duties as a clerk, which she has been for a very long time. Anything that I’ve ever asked her for, she has been willing to fulfill it and has accomplished those things for me. I supported her then, and I support her now for this job.

Taliaferro: I don’t think anybody is questioning the qualifications of Ms. Nations, or the intent—

Attorney

Frazier: If I could interrupt for just a minute, Mr. Taliaferro. I apologize because I normally don’t do this, but someone’s competence and character should be in executive session unless they waive that right to do so. I think we probably crossed a couple of lines here. If we are going to discuss Ms. Nations, then we need to give her notice of an executive session, and she has the opportunity to decide if she wants it in an executive session or an open meeting.

Taliaferro: the qualifications of any of the candidates I don’t think is in question. What I want to see is—because some of us were not part of the selection process. We did, as a Commission, select a certain individual to assume that responsibility. I want to ensure that the process continues to be fruitful. I understand from speaking to Mr. Everson is that there may be some information on how to rectify this situation ethically, and that should be coming within a couple of weeks. I don’t think there’s any rush to judgement now. Maybe we should ask Mr. Everson to clarify where we are in his process since he is the one who initiated the ethics review to begin with. I think in all fairness for the process. I just want to make sure the process works to be fair to everyone involved, and that we do our due diligence in all areas of responsibility going forward.

Call for the Question by Mr. Cawthorne, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts. Motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Lazarus, and Taliaferro (8). NAYS: Commissioners Chavez, Johnson, and Young (3). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

At this time, Mr. Epperson’s substitute motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Cawthorne, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, and Johnson (6). NAYS: Commissioners Atkins, Chavez, Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (5). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

It was **moved by Mr. Chavez**, seconded by Mr. Johnson, *to authorize discussion of start date for Commission Clerk* be removed from agenda. Motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Atkins, Burrell, Cawthorne, Chavez, Epperson, Gage-Watts, Hopkins, Johnson, Lazarus, Taliaferro, and Young (11). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

COMMUNIQUES/COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Mrs. Gage-Watts said that there is a car that has been in a tree for a few weeks in her district. That field has turned into a dumping lot. It is on the corner of Broadway and Tate Street. She asked for Public Works help to remove this car.
- Mr. Johnson asked for clarification on the hiring process through a panel process. Mrs. McGee explained that once the board selects an applicant for employment, then HR will conditionally offer the job to that candidate at which time they would have to successfully complete a background check, drug screen, and credit check (if applicable) before they actually receive the position. Mr. Johnson wanted to know if HR also completes ethics checks. Mrs. McGee stated that they do not. Attorney Frazier pointed out that conflicts of interest are the responsibility of the persons that is being hired because those are the person who will be fined or be removed from the position.

- Mr. Burrell said that often times, the person being hired does not know that there is a conflict of interest themselves.
- Mr. Chavez agreed that Ms. Nations is doing an incredible. He also said that “the theatrics of politics may seem that we outed Michelle from getting the position or we overlooked her, however, the qualifications put in place by this board disqualified her to begin with. We then followed on with the application process. During the process, myself and a lot of my colleagues said that we should look at Michelle Nations, but we were not afforded the availability. So I love that some of us went on record today to say that they would support her 100%, so that if Mr. Everson does not get the job that Ms. Nations would continue fulfilling her role that she’s been fulfilling wonderfully. I look forward to that if the current situation does not work out”.

CONSENT AGENDA

- *Ordinance No. 5943 of 2020, an ordinance amending the Budget of Estimated Revenues & Expenditures for the Economic Development Fund in the amount of \$20,000 to provide an appropriation to Legal Services of North Louisiana, Inc. and to otherwise provide with respect thereto*

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

/s/ Michelle Nations _____
Michelle Nations
Deputy Commission Clerk