

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 31ST DAY OF MARCH, 2021

The Caddo Parish Finance Committee met in legal session on the above date, at 2:00 p.m., via teleconference, with Mr. Lynn Cawthorne, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Cawthorne, Gage-Watts, Young, Burrell, Johnson. (5). ABSENT: Commissioner Atkins (1).

The invocation was given by Mr. Young and Mrs. Gage-Watts led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADDITIONS

It was **moved by Mr. Cawthorne**, seconded by Mrs. Gage-Watts, *to expand the agenda and approve consideration of items under La.R.S. 42:17.1. Motion carried by acclamation.*

CERTIFICATE FOR TELECONFERENCE

WHEREAS, the Governor of the State of Louisiana has declared a statewide Public Health emergency, inclusive of Caddo Parish, in Proclamation Number 25 JBE 2020;

WHEREAS, the Governor, has further extended that declaration via Proclamations Number 158 JBE 2020 and Number 159 JBE 2020; and

WHEREAS, R.S. 42:17.1 allows members of political subdivisions to participate in its meetings electronically under certain limited circumstances.

THEREFORE, in accordance with the provisions of R.S. 42:17.1, the presiding officer of the Caddo Parish Commission hereby certifies that this meeting is to address matters that are:

- (a) directly related to the public Commission's response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and are critical to the health, safety, or welfare of the public.
- (b) that if they are delayed will cause curtailment of vital public services or severe economic dislocation and hardship.
- (c) critical to continuation of the business of the Commission and that are not able to be postponed to a meeting held in accordance with the other provisions of Open Meetings Law due to a legal requirement or other deadline that cannot be postponed or delayed by the public body.
- (d) critical or time-sensitive and have been determined by the undersigned should not be delayed;*

* Consideration of matters under Paragraph (d) will initially require a two-thirds vote of those members present. (This does not affect the vote necessary for adoption or any motion).

Date: March 26, 2021

/s/Lynn D. Cawthorne
Committee Chair

Mr. Cawthorne opened up the floor for Public Comments. At this time, there were no public comments.

NEW BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Committee and began the discussion with the first New Business item:

- *SCEDA Discussion & Presentations*
Quentin Messer
Charles Whately

Mr. Cawthorne moved to the New Business item, *SCEDA Discussion and Presentations*. He explained that the next two speakers are experts in economic development on how they can help Caddo Parish.

Point of Information by Mr. Burrell for details on what the Shreveport Caddo Economic Development acronym is about since he was not a Commissioner nine year ago. Mr. Cawthorne explained that SCEDA was a partnership between the City of Shreveport and Parish of Caddo which was

designated to promote economic development activities. There were four people appointed by each party, but there was a clash over some things he couldn't recall and the partnership stalled. He aims to represent the SCEDA alliance as an opportunity of being chair of the Economic Development Committee. He introduced the next speaker Mr. Quentin Messer.

Mr. Messer, current President and CEO of the New Orleans Business Alliance, explained over his tenure in economic development that the most important take away is the main contact to help new businesses and local businesses consult and help inform and attract businesses for opportunities in Caddo Parish. He advised that the entity they put in place should include representation of assets in the region. As an example, he named 10 major entities in the area including the Biomedical Research Foundation, LSU Health Sciences Center, Centenary College, and the Convention and Visitor's Bureau to have a representative of various interests.

Mr. Burrell asked if Mr. Messer was familiar with Shreveport's economy. Mr. Messer stated he is most familiar with New Orleans and Baton Rouge, however, he finds that universally can the area get businesses to speak with to make decisions. He explained that this is more important than the profile of the economy.

Mr. Burrell recalls 15 years ago there wasn't an entry point for minority businesses for help on entry into the market. And he wanted to know if this system would provide that. Mr. Messer responded that working with their leadership planning will help them to be able to brainstorm how to develop that and his role is to provide objective independent perspective from a practitioner's point of view and help Shreveport Caddo Parish avoid challenges that other counties have faced. He added that some cities are merging their economic development entities.

Mr. Burrell explained he had mixed feelings about the economic development entities that were supposed to encourage growth in Shreveport Caddo Parish, in particular the Northwest Louisiana Economic Partnership. Mr. Messer responded that he is familiar with the NLEP and that it's critical for people to know their role and play their assignment. He added that the NLEP is assigned to represent 10-Parish region of the I-20 corridor, which is why it's important for an integrated single entity to attract interests in Shreveport Caddo Parish.

Mr. Burrell expressed his experience in economic development and concern that there isn't a representation for the Shreveport Caddo area.

Mr. Johnson wanted to know from Mr. Messer how to prevent private record requests when working with local government and more detail on the panel that was mentioned. Mr. Messer responded that the final decision is by the elected officials to select who they want on the panel and recommended to de-politicize the panel with diverse representatives of assets and interests in the Shreveport Caddo Parish. He explained that under Louisiana Open Meetings law of their potentially public body then they may not be able to avoid public records requests.

Mr. Young asked Mr. Messer what industries he recommended they focus on and under what authority should SCEDA be. Mr. Messer recommended that Shreveport Caddo Parish should be opportunistic and "go where the love is" which is to build upon the established successes like the energy sector, biomedical research, and the local movie industry. He mentioned that they must include focuses on small businesses in particular those in BIPOC communities, which studies have proven to show positive benefits when developing solutions and opportunities for BIPOC entrepreneurs and businesses.

Mr. Young clarified regarding the authority of SCEDA is that it would be able to raise a millage to fund projects. Mr. Cawthorne explained that they had not reached the final determination on what they would have the authority to do, however, the City and the Parish were supposed to be the entity for potential economic development deals.

Mr. Burrell recalled that despite efforts to benefit minority businesses, the African American community is not as large as it is now and the economy is leaving them out. He asked Mr. Messer what does he project will occur in our area.

Mr. Cawthorne corrected Mr. Burrell's terminology for the African American/Black majority.

Mr. Messer answered Mr. Burrell's question explaining that in New Orleans they maintain a website that large businesses post opportunities then making that information accessible to the BIPOC community. He recommended expanding opportunities to all and encourage and rewards large entities to invest and support BIPOC communities without violating current statutes by making programs based on color.

Mr. Cawthorne introduced the next speaker Charles Whatley from Atlanta, Georgia.

Mr. Whatley exclaimed how Atlanta manages their economic development and the established authorities that targets specific sectors. He explained that the Atlanta merged four statutory authorities into a one-stop spot and the four authorities share the same board. The City of Atlanta helped communities and economically on a public sector while their Authority handles the private sector. He elaborated that they coordinated the public sector, the authority and private resources operating more like a merchant bank than a government entity. Through intergovernmental agreements they were able to

transfer grants to the Authority which supported several small businesses. He stated that in the past businesses would apply for loans from the City of Atlanta, but many were deterred due to the possibility of rejection being publicized. So, they encouraged their county to support the cities within the county, which had more tools to support economic development than their county did, then they coordinated public-private partnerships to establish where they are now. He gave an example of business recruitment to recognize established industries in Shreveport Caddo Parish that would spawn more businesses there.

Mr. Burrell acknowledged Mr. Whatley and asked how their county and city was organized and how did they keep their authorities separate. Mr. Whatley confirmed that the county and city are not joint and that each Authority are under individual statutes which lists what they can and can not do.

Mr. Burrell also inquired about the overseeing board for their Authorities. Mr. Whatley acknowledged that they have separate boards for three of their Authorities which shared the same members and that the fourth Authority had the same board members in its separate board but less two members. So they have one meeting date with all four separate boards.

Mr. Burrell also wanted to know if they were taxing authorities. Mr. Whatley declined that they were not taxing authorities and their operating costs came from bond issuances, application fees and other non-tax sources.

Mr. Cawthorne explained that unlike Atlanta's prosperity in racial inclusion, Shreveport has not begun making the economy ready regarding that and for guidance on that subject. He added that he understands in order to tackle this large roadblock, they would need to go about it smaller pieces. Mr. Whatley acknowledged that their board would need to represent the assets and businesses in the area and that the extent of key business leaders is involved in the community. He exemplified that their local corporation's connections should be on the same page with their initiatives. He also reminded the Committee that Atlanta still faces civil rights challenges although they have a long history with it. He added that coordination is more than just authority and municipalities but their industries invested, supported and understood their plan as well.

- *Discuss African American Chamber of Commerce annual request*

Mr. Cawthorne introduced Billy Anderson to speak on the African American Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Anderson presented the Shreveport-Bossier African American Chamber of Commerce (SBAAC) established 80 years ago for Black business owners and entrepreneurs to progress Black businesses in Shreveport area sporting 167 members and 12 corporate partners. Their vision is to be the ultimate resource for African American businesses. He discussed their events for the year featuring seminars including free benefits at the Shreveport Empowerment Center, Cash Mobs and Black History Month. Mr. Anderson added that in April 15-17 2021, the SBAAC is hosting a series of informational seminars at the Convention Center.

Mr. Jackson recommended that the Committee supports the SBAAC and move their application forward.

Mr. Burrell requested to know what the financial request is for the SBAAC application. Mr. Cawthorne acknowledged that the appropriation request is for \$25,000 and asked if Mrs. Barnett will update them as well.

Mrs. Barnett confirmed that they have received the application from the SBAAC and are attempting to close on it from the previous year.

Mrs. Brittany Dunn introduced the SBAAC's leadership changes and that she is the current Chairperson of the organization, which delayed their application submission. She apologized for the late arrival and requests that they approve their application.

It was **moved by Mr. Cawthorne**, seconded by Mr. Burrell, *to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$25,000 to Shreveport Bossier African American contingent upon the final 2019 financial report. Motion carried*, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Cawthorne, Gage-Watts, Johnson, and Young (5). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Atkins (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

- *Discuss Sci-Port Request*

Mr. Cawthorne introduced the speaker Mrs. Diane Clarke.

Mrs. Clarke introduced the Sci-Port's mission and being re-established in 2018 and introduced their Marketing Manager Ian Summers and STEM center director Bianca Frazier. She discussed they experienced some challenges but are taking strides post-pandemic to show that they are more than a building and an anchor in the community through partnerships with Rotary Grant for Itty Bitty Scientist, Shreve Memorial Little Library, Brick and Bots Lease Agreement, and KTBS JR Weather Watcher. She discussed their nationally recognized "Bars without Barriers" Program at Caddo Correctional Center by providing science program classes and their visiting relatives. They also provide a

program for immigrant homeless children through GSK Science in the Summer and are the fiscal host for the North Louisiana Stem Alliance.

Mr. Ian Summers explained the Sci-Port special programs and its economic development impact driving traffic to the city and the Sci-Port Discovery Center. Their special programs include free admission days, events at Sno-Port, Military and First Responder's Day, kid friendly Indoor Mardi Gras Parade, Black History Day featuring live actors and music, and moon space themed Moon-Port.

Mrs. Bianca Frazier explained the Louisiana Regional STEM Network is a system of STEM leadership entities strategically positioned across Louisiana, similar to the Regional Labor Market Areas (RLMAs) identified by the Louisiana Workforce Commission, whereby communities, parishes, multi-parish regions and the State can achieve improved access to STEM education, participation and advancement. This includes closing the opportunity gap for underrepresented and underserved populations to engage in Louisiana's STEM workforce and economy. Sci-Port is the Region 7 STEM Network Center for ten Parishes.

Mrs. Clarke concluded that GamePort 2020 is a STEM-based educational opportunity designed to attract visitors of all ages through interactive coding education and gaming opportunities and to enhance workforce opportunities by creating STEM-based career pathway training opportunities.

Mr. Summers added that Sno-Port in 2020 had an estimated 5,776 visitors generating \$115,779.29 from an initial investment of \$30,000.

Mr. Jackson acknowledged the speakers and encouraged the committee to support Sci-Port's application as the benefit of building a diversified, knowledge-based economy.

It was **moved by Mr. Johnson**, seconded by Mr. Cawthorne, *to recommend to the full body an appropriation of \$35,000 to Sci-Port.*

Mr. Burrell wanted to know if Sci-Port had exhausted all applicable STEM-based grants that are available. Mrs. Clarke acknowledged that they have exhausted the available grants within the timeline for their summer programs and that they have 17 on-going grants and will inform the Committee should they find additional resources.

Mr. Burrell inquired about COVID funding sources. Mrs. Clarke acknowledged that they qualified for the PPP loans but is restricted for payroll purposes only and that receiving that loan has limited their ability to qualify for other funding sources.

Mr. Cawthorne asked Attorney Frazier what is the proper way to recommend moving this application to the NGO committee.

Point of Clarification, by Mr. Burrell, that Sci-Port's application is for both NGO and Economic Development.

Mr. Cawthorne acknowledged that he is requesting Mr. Johnson's insight on whether his opinion of this application is best suited in the NGO committee. Mr. Johnson deferred to Attorney Frazier.

Attorney Frazier explained that the committee can vote to move this discussion to the NGO Committee for a hearing or to move it directly to the body.

Amendment by Mr. Cawthorne, seconded by Mr. Johnson, *to appropriate \$17,500 from the Economic Development Committee and \$17,500 from the NGO Committee to Sci-Port.*

Mr. Jackson wanted to know if splitting the funding would require two reports or two applications and if there would be two ordinances. Attorney Frazier acknowledged that they would report on one form and would not require two applications or two reports.

Mrs. Barnett explained that there would only be one ordinance to appropriate funding. She added that Sci-Port identified the purpose of the funding for economic development, which is why they are presented in the Economic Development Committee.

At this time, Mr. Cawthorne's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYES: Commissioners Burrell, Cawthorne, Johnson, and Young (4). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commissioners Gage-Watts and Atkins (2). ABSTAIN: None (0).

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned.

/s/Linda Montgomery
Linda Montgomery
Administrative Clerk II

