

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
PANDEMIC TASKFORCE
HELD ON THE 29th DAY OF JUNE, 2021

The Caddo Parish Commission met in a Pandemic Taskforce Meeting, on the above date, at 4:00 p.m., in the Government Chambers, with Mr. Jackson, Chairperson, presiding, and the following members in attendance constituting a quorum: Commissioners Epperson, , Jackson, and Johnson (3). ABSENT: Commissioners Gage-Watts and Taliaferro (2).

Mr. Epperson offered thirty seconds of personal meditation in lieu of the invocation, and Mr. Jackson led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Tim Huck came before the Committee and gave the following comment:

I'm a local business owner, entrepreneur, and real estate investor. In my concerns with the rental assistance program that we've had going on is that I find that by the time my tenants actually apply for it, I'm already to the point of preparing for eviction. They've already gone time without paying their rent to the point that it's time to do something. And the program seems to be taking a long time for them to get to us. And then when we put all this stuff in, before they even get to a review process to make a decision on what they're going to do with it. Well, I had one tenant who basically from the time they started the process to the time we finished was like seven weeks. Well, by the time the seven weeks is up, I can't continue to leave a house not producing revenue that's been not producing revenue for two months coming into this. So I've already finished an eviction process and move them on. If they figured out how to streamline it a little faster, we would possibly be able to work something out with the tenant, but I can't go long periods of time. Where the downside of this is it's showing that you're not having to pay out as much, which means that money is eventually going to leave Caddo Parish and go somewhere else, if we don't have it paid out locally. And so the process is just very difficult. There's not a lot of communication back and forth, when we when we try to get in touch with them. You go through on waiting for a while, and then you either get to leave a message or we get sent an email and I may get a call back tomorrow. And you know, and it just it's a lot of back and forth for a program. So far, I've had three tenants who put everything in, and it comes back on my system saying something is incomplete. then when we get them on the phone finally they say oh, no, everything's in there, but on the computer, it still shows incomplete. I've downloaded everything. One of them twice. Finally, when they've called me, I'm honest with them. I've told them the person has already moved out, and so they deny it. Well, by the person moving out doesn't make the rent not owed or me not have collected rent. it's just a continuous frustration in the process, where I've got the tenants telling me how your rent's going to get paid by this program. And the program even pulling them up in a lottery system or whatever—and not being able to get it. I don't know that but there's got to be some way easier to streamline the system to keep the money in Caddo Parish—whether I get it or another landlord gets it, I just want it to stay here.

NEW BUSINESS

- The Committee moved onto the first item under New Business: *LSUHSC COVID Wastewater Project, Dr. Kevin Murnane.*

Mr. Jackson wanted to know if this will be testing all of the water systems in Caddo Parish. Dr. Murnane said that they would like to test other areas of the Parish, but it is challenging because not every part of the Parish is on a municipal system. It is more feasible to test from a municipal system. He said that they would be happy to work with the municipalities. He also said that they could do it for the same cost.

Dr. Murnane said that they've been testing wastewater in Shreveport for the past six months to a year, but cannot disclose the exact locations. The technology is useful because you can detect the presence of disease early, so you can intervene as quickly as possible. Currently, they are using it for COVID, but it is a flexible system that can go beyond that.

Mr. Johnson explained that they are using public dollars for the testing. He wanted to know if there would be an issue if those areas were exposed. Dr. Murnane said that they will not release that information unless they were compelled to do so.

Mr. Epperson wanted to know if the City of Shreveport has provided any funding for the testing. Dr. Murnane said that they have provided in-kind services, but not any direct financial assistance.

Mr. Epperson also wanted more information regarding the sampling. Dr. Murnane explained that it can be done a couple of different ways. One is manual depth, which can be done at the wastewater treatment plants or at an individual neighborhood level by utilizing manholes. Dr. Murnane also said that people on septic systems can bring samples to him to be tested.

Mr. Jackson wanted to know how long the testing will take. Dr. Murnane said that once they receive a sample, they can test it and receive results within 24 hours. They are using those results to track changes and research COVID. He said that they are unsure of what's going to happen with it in the fall. Dr. Murnane also said that they are estimating an increase in cases, especially with the Delta variant. They will report to the Louisiana Department of Health, so they can make public health decisions regarding these changes.

Dr. Murnane also stated that this is not a marker for the water being dangerous because you cannot get infected by the water. It will be a marker that people are infected in that particular area with the virus.

Mr. Jackson wanted to know if the Community Foundation is providing funds. Dr. Murnane said that the Community Foundation is providing a two to one match. Mr. Jackson then wanted to know if the State is providing any funding. Dr. Murnane said that the State is providing funding through facility analyses; they are supporting their salaries, building, and infrastructure.

Mr. Jackson encouraged Dr. Murnane to come to the next Regular Session to present this information to the Commission.

- The Committee then moved onto the next item under New Business: *COVID-19 Update—Vaccination Rates, Test Positive Rates, New Developments, Etc., Dr. Martha Whyte.*

Dr. Whyte said that the Louisiana Department of Health supports the wastewater testing.

She also said that Caddo Parish is doing well with COVID. The percent positivity rate is at 2.9%, but they do not have a lot of testing. She encouraged all to get tested.

Dr. Whyte also said that the vaccination is also very low. Caddo Parish is about 29%-30%; as a state, it is at 44%. She encouraged all to get vaccinated.

She also talked about the Delta variant, which is about 25% of all the COVID cases in the southern states. They are expecting that to rise exponentially. Dr. Whyte said that for every person who gets from COVID is a chance for that virus to grow and change in that person and can become a risk for everyone.

Dr. Whyte also suggested wearing a mask in large gatherings, even if you are vaccinated.

Dr. Wilson wanted to know if the vaccine will protect people for a year, or will there have to be a booster. Dr. Whyte said that they are still monitoring people who have been vaccinated, but this virus does not make any sense when it comes to anti-bodies. She thinks that people will need a booster in the winter, but they are researching it at this time.

Mr. Jackson pointed out that there are some European countries who are going back into lockdown mode. Dr. Whyte said that it is the Delta variant that is causing concern. She said that a month ago, there were no cases of the Delta variant here, but now Caddo is up to 25%. Mr. Jackson wanted to know if Caddo was prepared if things change for the worse. Dr. Whyte believes that Caddo is more prepared now.

- The Committee then moved onto the next item under New Business: *Detailed Emergency Rental Assistance Update.*

Mrs. Bryant said that they have provided approximately \$6.5M to assist 1,600 families in need. She also said that they have received over 4,000 applications.

Mrs. Bryant then talked about the selection process. She explained that once the applicant fills out the application, there is a verification process. If the applicant delays in providing the needed information, the process can be delayed as well.

She also explained that there have been some modifications to the programs, such as an appeals process. She said that if a person is denied, they should receive information on how to appeal that decision.

Mrs. Bryant also said that they are close to exhausting all of the first ERAP funding and should exhaust the all of the ERAP monies in the next three to four weeks.

Mrs. Bryant also said that the State has approximately \$11M for Caddo Parish's rental assistance. They are working with the State on how to provide the ERAP funds on a reimbursement basis. They have asked the State to provide those funds on a periodic \$2M draw down because it will be difficult to advance pay the rental assistance and wait for the State to reimburse. She cautioned that Caddo Parish residents may have to start applying through the State for rental assistance.

Mr. Jackson wanted to know if the issues with the hotels have been resolved. Mrs. Bryant said that they can pay for a hotel if that issue should arise, but there are stipulations regarding this.

Mr. Jackson asked about the quality inspections. He's received several calls from Woodlawn Terrace regarding the conditions that they are living in. Mrs. Bryant said that they've reached out to management and the City offices who provide inspections. She also said that they are aware of the problem and "there are some items on the table that can't necessarily be made public yet". Mrs. Bryant said that it is a balancing act, the tenants need to live in good conditions, but also need to pay rent. Dr. Wilson also mentioned that the City is also aware of the issues and is working on it.

Mr. Johnson suggested to get the Department of Human & Health Services involved. He said that no one should be living in those conditions.

Mr. Jackson would also like a printout to show the figures and facts that Caddo Parish has provided to its citizens in regards to the ERAP program.

- The Committee then moved onto the next item under New Business: *Detailed Update on COVID-19 FEMA Reimbursement.*

Mrs. Bryant said that they did resubmit their information to FEMA and are waiting on the fully executed MOU to come back from FEMA.

Mr. Jackson asked that Administration provide a report with a breakdown of what Caddo did not get reimbursed for through the CARES Act.

- The Committee then moved onto the next item under New Business: *Discuss American Rescue Plan Application Process as it Relates to Pandemic Response and Recovery & American Rescue Plan District Meetings.*

Mr. Jackson asked that Administration provide information regarding the applications which were submitted for COVID-19.

Mr. Johnson explained that the application is a worksheet for the American Rescue Plan Committee to utilize, similar to the NGO and Economic Development process. He also mentioned that it was approved through Committee.

Mr. Jackson also said that he would like to have a conversation with Dr. Whyte on how to possibly use some ARP funds to encourage citizens to get vaccinated, especially around the back to school time.

The Clerk of the Commission said that they are in the process of setting up meetings for the rural Commissioners. He also mentioned that it is his understanding that they are using data from the City for the Commissioners inside the city limits of Shreveport.

Mr. Jackson also talked about the deadline for the ARP funding. Mrs. Bryant said that they have to submit a preliminary overview by August 31, 2021. She also mentioned that the Parish has until 2024 to obligate and 2026 to spend.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned.


Assistant Commission Clerk