

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CADDO PARISH COMMISSION'S
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
HELD ON THE 17th DAY OF AUGUST, 2020

The Caddo Parish Natural Resources Committee met in legal session on the above date at 10:30 A.m., via ZOOM teleconference, with Mr. John-Paul Young, Chairman, presiding, and the following members in attendance: Commissioners Chavez, Epperson, Lazarus, and Young (4). ABSENT: Commissioner Jackson (1).

Mr. Young gave the invocation, and Mr. Epperson led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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; and,

WHEREAS, the Governor, has further extended that declaration via Proclamations Number 96 JBE 2020 and Number 97 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.

Date: August 12, 2020

/s/John-Paul Young, Chair

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Young welcomed everyone to the Committee and stated that they will be discussing the following items:

- Walter B. Jacobs Expansion Plan
- Community Garden Development

Dr. Wilson explained that there were several communities throughout the State that were successful in obtaining capital outlay funding. He also believes that the Walter B. Jacobs center would be a worthwhile project. It was built in the 70s and has been well used over the years. He said that the center is outdated. Dr. Wilson also explained that they would like to submit this project to the State because thousands of students visit the park every year. He believes Senator Tarver will be committed to working

with the Parish on this project. Dr. Wilson said that this would be a game changer for Northwest Louisiana.

Mr. Patrick Wesley, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced himself to the Committee as well as Megan with TBI, the architect for the project. Mr. Wesley also introduced Mr. Rusty Scarborough to the Committee. Mr. Wesley agreed with Dr. Wilson and believes that this will be a worthwhile project and increase the quality of life for the citizens.

He also gave a brief background of the current center. It opened in 1976. Over 160 acres was dedicated by Mr. Walter B. Jacobs, a local banker, to provide nature programs and educational opportunities for children and families. Since its inception, between 38,000 to 40,000 people visit the center each year. Mr. Wesley said that they are running out of space and now have to limit the number of participants in their special events.

He said that the purpose of this proposal is to construct a state-of-the-art nature center located at the current site. He said that it would create an indoor space that connects to the outdoor. This center would educate students on ecosystems, wildlife habitats, native plant gardens, archery, etc. He said that the nature center would benefit all citizens of the Parish. Mr. Wesley also pointed out that the center could be used to generate revenue as well.

Ms. Megan provided a description of the project. The new facility will be approximately 13,000 square feet with approximately 6,000 square feet of exterior spaces, pavilions, decks etc. The facility shall have multiple and varied exhibition spaces, a large multifunction lecture/meeting/event room, catering kitchen, several classroom spaces, outdoor learning and event spaces, administration spaces, workrooms for staff, secured dry storage, secured food storage for animals with proper sanitation facilities, aviary, outdoor pavilions, decks and outdoor learning areas. The site will include new parking and outdoor learning areas that can also be utilized for festivals and outdoor events.

Dr. Wilson mentioned that at the current facility, people have to be bused in from other areas due to the lack of parking spaces. He also said that would be taken into consideration when constructing the new facility.

Mr. Young wanted to know if this facility would be added to the current facility. Ms. Megan said that it would go where the current building is. She said that the design of the building is meant to be an exhibit in itself. She further explained that they would take into consideration where the sun sets and rises, heating/cooling efficiency, energy efficiency, erosion control, tree preservation, etc.

Mr. Young asked that Ms. Megan provide more details on the erosion control measures that will be taken in regards to this building. She said that they would landscape the area with local vegetation. She also said that there are some creeks that run alongside the building, so they would work around those areas. She also said that they could conserve rainwater with rain chains into reservoirs. That water could be used to irrigate all of the landscaping.

Mr. Scarborough agreed with Mr. Wesley that this would improve the quality of life of the citizens of Caddo Parish. He also said that they have to plan carefully with this project to minimize the effect on the natural space around it. He also said that this updated nature center would allow for more students to attend the programs that the Parks & Recreation Department put on.

Dr. Wilson said that they would like to move forward on submitting this capital project.

Mr. Young wanted to know the time scale of the construction of the project. He also wanted to know if this would be a reimbursable project from the State. Dr. Wilson explained that they do not have a timeframe right now, but are asking to be included in the Capital Outlay Budget from the State. He also said that they will be moving forward in completing steps such as testing the soil and other site

work that is affordable to the Parish. Dr. Wilson also said that the new facility could generate revenue and those monies could be used for the operation of the facility.

It was **moved by Mr. Young**, seconded by Mr. Epperson, *to recommend to the full body moving forward with Administration submitting the Walter B. Jacobs project to the Capital Outlay Budget for the State.*

Mr. Chavez wanted to know how much of the \$7.5M in construction cost would the State be providing to the Parish. Dr. Wilson stated that he is unsure, but is submitting to the State for the full \$7.5M in costs. He also mentioned that historically, the State has asked for about 20%.

Dr. Wilson also pointed out that they are still looking at different ways to generate revenue with the new facility. Mr. Lazarus said that the estimated rate of return is \$500,000 annually.

At this time, Mr. Young's motion carried, as shown by the following roll call votes: AYE: Commissioners Chavez, Epperson, Lazarus, and Young (4). NAYS: None (0). ABSENT: Commission Jackson (1). ABSTAIN: None (0).

Mr. Young then moved onto the next New Business item, *Community Garden Development.*

He would like to see horticultural education promoted throughout the Parish. He suggested that this be contracted out with Shreveport Green to increase their work in the community gardens within the Parish. Another suggestion that Mr. Young made was to have a dedicated staff person whose role is to be a community garden and food education liaison throughout the Parish, as well as manage some of the spaces that the Parish has now, i.e. MLK Community Garden.

Dr. Wilson announced that the MLK Community Garden received a NACo Achievement Award. He said that garden project is ongoing.

Dr. Wilson also explained that the Parks & Recreation budget is extremely tight. He said that they did not have the luxury of having one in the past because they did it at the detriment of other programs that they do throughout the year. Dr. Wilson said that additional resources would be needed to have a dedicated person. Mr. Young said that he would be willing to propose putting additional monies into the Parks' budget for this person.

Dr. Wilson mentioned that the Parish does provide limited resources to the LSU Ag Center, and this could be something in their wheelhouse.

Mr. Wesley said that Shreveport Green and Shreve Corps are providing gardening services three days a week for the MLK Community Garden.

Mr. Wesley also said that they are expanding some of their program services to recreational wellness, senior programs, etc. He said that ability to expand the gardens with the existing staff is non-existent. The partnership that they have with Shreveport Green and Shreve Corps is working well.

Mr. Young wanted to know if Mr. Wesley would like to have a dedicated person to manage public spaces and expand them. He said that outsourcing and forming partnerships for those types of projects works best.

There be no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 11:09 a.m.

J. Nations

Michelle Nations
Assistant Commission Clerk