

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH COUNCIL
TUESDAY, August 10th, 2010
CHAIR RONNIE SMITH
VICE CHAIR CHERYL MILLET

The Council of the Parish of St. John the Baptist, State of Louisiana, met in Regular Session in the Joel McTopy Chambers, LaPlace, Louisiana on Tuesday, August 10th, 2010, at 6:30 PM.

CALL TO ORDER:

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL: Haston Lewis, Councilman District I, Darnel Usry, Councilwoman District V, Charles Julien, Councilman District III, Cheryl Millet, Councilwoman District VII, Steve Lee, Councilman-at-Large, Div. B, Ronnie Smith, Councilman District VI, Danny Millet, Councilman District II, Dale Wolfe, Councilman-at-Large, Div. A, Jaclyn Hotard, Councilwoman District IV

ABSENT: None

Councilman Julien led the Prayer. Councilman Millet led the Pledge.

Legal Counsels Jeff Perilloux & Kerry Brown were present.

Community Rating System – Presentation – Flood insurance rate decrease

Pam Miller, DOTD Floodplain management program coordinator, was present and presented a plaque for the community rating system and St. John's participation. This will result in a class 8 upgrade and a 10% discount for flood insurance policy holders in all of St. John the Baptist Parish ultimately saving the parish approximately \$120,000.00 a year.

Candidate for U.S. Congress – Ravi Sangisetty

Ravi Sangisetty, Candidate for U.S. Congress, stated, *"Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate this opportunity to introduce myself and let you all know why I want to be the next Congressman from Louisiana's third district. My name is Ravi Sangisetty. I was born and raised right here in south Louisiana. I suppose the way things are going I am going to have to carry my birth certificate around with me as I hit the trail. My parents came to this country over thirty years ago looking to live the American dream. My dad stepped off of a plane with seven dollars in his pocket and he made his life here in south Louisiana. They found their American dream right here. What I want to tell this council is I wasn't involved in politics before. I don't come from a political family. Certainly no king makers told me it was my turn to run for this office but like many I am frustrated with the direction of this country and in particular the federal government. When my dad came here this was the land of opportunity now more and more it is becoming the land for the opportunistic. I think a lot of people feel that Washington is broken. I think it is time for some new blood not career politicians and insiders who have been cutting deals for their friends. It is the working people that have been left holding the bag with all of these Wall Street bail outs and things of that*

sort. So I am here to fight for the working people of south Louisiana. I am the democratic nominee for this seat. I will be on the ballot November 2nd. I would appreciate your support and I appreciate this opportunity. Thank you so much."

Consent Agenda

Items: Approval of Minutes July 27th, 2010, Regular Meeting; Added Permit Approval – Block Party – August 14th, 2010 from 1:30 PM until 6:30 PM – 500 St. Andrews Blvd.

MOTION: Councilwoman Usry moved and Councilwoman Millet seconded the motion to approve the amended consent agenda items consisting of Approval of Minutes July 27th, 2010, Regular Meeting; Permit Approval – Block Party – August 14th, 2010 from 1:30 PM until 6:30 PM – 500 St. Andrews Blvd. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING ON ORDINANCES:

10-20 (Tabled 7-27-10) An ordinance designating and establishing the compensation to be paid to dealers who collect sales and use taxes levied by the Parish of St. John the Baptist, State of Louisiana. (R. Smith)

Councilman Smith asks that this item remain tabled.

10-22 (Public Hearing Held) An ordinance by the St. John the Baptist Parish Council in a Public hearing held on August 10, 2010, which was in accordance with the open meetings law and additional requirements of Article VII, Section 23(C) of the Louisiana Constitution and R.S. 47:1705 (B), that the following adjusted millage rates be and they are Hereby levied upon the dollars of the assessed valuation of all property subject to advalorem within said Parish for the year 2010, for the purpose of raising revenue (N. Robottom)

Pat McTopy, CFO, stated, *"This is the annual millage ordinance that the council adopts each year with a little bit of a twist. The twist is because of the re-assessment that was required by the state tax commission, I have asked our Assessor, Whitney Joseph, to come tonight to explain the re-assessment and why it was required and why we had this millage roll back."*

Whitney Joseph, Assessor, stated, *"We were under order to re-assess the parish, which is what we did. We re-assessed the 2009 tax roll. When you do a re-assessment of that nature you cannot collect any more money than what you collected that previous year. So we added approximately two million dollars to the tax roll due to the re-assessment that we had to do, which means that there was a decrease in your assessed value. This year we will experience a 4.1 million dollar decrease. I encourage the parish administration to roll forward with the mileages because the parish will lose approximately \$162,000.00 in value with rolling forward. So basically that is it unless you have some questions that you want to ask me. One other thing, this is the first year in many years that we have experienced a lost in assessed value. It is due to the economy as a whole. It is also due to the price of oil. Since 2005 we had put about 157 million dollars in a taxable value on the tax roll averaging 30 million dollars a year. This year we are going to*

experience a 4.1 million dollar decrease because of the economy like I said and because of the price of oil and because many plants and companies are reducing their inventory. We are not getting the type of homes that we had before. As you know, if you ever look at statistics and check with the Sheriff's Department we are experiencing about thirty foreclosures every month. So it is not good at this particular time. I do have some good news for the council. Next year we will be experiencing between a 25 and 33% increase in our inventory tax due to the fact that Marathon Plant is coming on the roll, not the plant per se but we will be able to assess the inventory the plant has a ten year tax exemption but we will be experiencing some next year. I think the value will come back to where it was originally. Just for the public, over the past few years and because of the increase in taxable property that we have been having this parish, along with the school board, we are able to reduce our millage from 126 to 117 which is an 8.7 decrease in mileages saving the tax payers dollars. Like I said this year is one of the very few years that we are going to experience a loss. It is not a tremendous amount of money, so I would encourage and I did encourage the council to move forward to the present millage rate like it was before. Basically that is it unless you have some questions that you want to ask me I will gladly answer those."

Councilman Lee stated, "First of all I want to thank Mr. Joseph for being here and explaining something that is quite technical, quite detailed and quite unusual. What I am asking for at this time is not a question of you Mr. Joseph but it is a question of the administration of their recommendation. You have explained the issue. I want administration's recommendation for us to take action on this."

Pat McTopy stated, "It is my understanding, after speaking with Mr. Joseph and our finance manager who has attended training courses each year with the Louisiana Tax Commission that the roll back is mandated. It is necessary, the first ordinance. The second ordinance to roll forward is discretionary however administration recommends that we do roll forward which essentially is going to maintain the current millage rate that we have had. Even by rolling forward we will still, the parish will still have a net reduction in property taxes of \$162,000.00 even if we adopt the second ordinance rolling forward. So yes the administration recommends we adopt both ordinances."

Councilman Lee stated, "Thank you."

MOTION: Councilman Julien moved and Councilman Lee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 10-22. The motion passed unanimously.

10-23 (Public Hearing Held) An ordinance by the St. John the Baptist Parish Council in a Public hearing held on August 10, 2010, which was in accordance with the open meetings law and additional requirements of Article VII, Section 23(C) of the Louisiana Constitution and R.S. 47:1705 (B), that the taxing authority voted to increase the millage rates, but not in excess of the prior year's maximum rates, on all taxable property shown on the official assessment roll for the year 2010 and when collected, the revenues from said taxes shall be used only for the specific purposes for which said taxes have been levied (N. Robottom)

Councilwoman Hotard asked, "Is this ordinance going to cost the

individual home owner more on their taxes every year?"

Whitney Joseph stated, "No they are not. We are simply adopting the original millage like it was in 2009 and I suggest that they do that because of the monies you would be losing. Parish wide we will actually lose about a half a million dollars which is actually not bad when you look at the actual scope of it and we are going to collect forty million. It is not really as bad as it seems. It isn't a whole lot of money. I think that 4 mills that you have for the general fund you will lose about \$47,000.00. It will not cost the tax payers any additional monies. Now because of some re-assessment it is going to cost some tax payers additional dollars but not anything to be concerned about."

Councilwoman Hotard asked, "So the ones that were re-assessed at the time they saw an increase already though right?"

Whitney Joseph stated, "Well what I did was I pro-rated assessments over a period of three years and this is the last year that I had to do that. So the tax payers are prepared. I sent letters out to them three to four years ago with projected taxes. So it won't be a burden."

Councilwoman Hotard stated, "Okay, that is just my concern. At this time even \$100.00 extra a year to a lot of people and like you said if every month we are having 30 foreclosures even a little bit makes a difference."

Whitney Joseph stated, "It will effect some people but not to the extent that they can't pay."

Councilwoman Hotard asked, "So if we don't roll forward then how much is the parish going to actually lose?"

Whitney Joseph stated, "You are going to lose \$162,000.00 if you roll forward or not. If you decide to take the adjusted millage rate you are just going to add to the deficit that you are going to experience. I suggest that you keep the same millage. We reduced the millage from 126 to 118 and it is because of working with the parish government and the school board we were able to reduce those mileages. So that was a savings to the tax payers over the years. I don't think people really knew that but it was a savings. So I think that through the cooperation of the council, the school board and some other taxing bodies I think you have been doing a good job. You have been saving people dollars. So I suggest that you roll forward."

Councilwoman Hotard asked, "Is it something that we have to do tonight?"

Whitney Joseph stated, "Yes. I need to know what the mileages are so I can prepare the tax roll. It is very important that you do it tonight. November 15th is the deadline that I must file the tax roll and I should know what the mileages are before that. This is August before you know it it will be November so yes I need to know that tonight."

Councilman Lewis asked, "That is the money we will collect next year right?"

Whitney Joseph stated, "Yes, that is exactly right. You are going to

experience \$162,000.00 loss in revenues. Now with insurance and other things going up with the parish I think the public will understand that."

Councilwoman Hotard stated, "My concern is just that I don't want to have any additional taxes placed on the public. That is my concern."

Whitney Joseph stated, "The only way to stop that is to stop re-assessment. We need to put a cap on it. I have been trying to get that law passed since I've been here as your assessor. We seem to not be able to do that. That is the only way you are going to do that. If we don't do it we will tax people out of their homes eventually. I have been addressing that issue. I met with my state representative and senators about that but there is nothing that we can do about that now. We need to address that issue."

Councilman Julien stated, "I did have an opportunity to meet with the assessor. If you do have any issues I think you need to go in and see him. He made me at ease and that is what made me support the ordinance. I went with him to see the senator and the representatives and he has basically created a stable situation for us so that we don't have a whole lot of taxes."

Whitney Joseph stated, "Mr. Ronnie Smith also attended that meeting along with Mr. Julien. We did meet about four to five months ago. We tried to get a bill introduced to address that situation. We had Senator Allero that did put a bill in but it never got to the committee. We are going to try to address that situation again sometime in the near future before they go into the next session to see if we can get that bill put on. We are going to need the support of the people of the parish and of this council. If we don't do something we will tax people out of their homes sooner or later."

MOTION: Councilman Julien moved and Councilman Lee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 10-23. The motion passed unanimously.

10-24 An ordinance amending Section 113:445(e)(7)f of St. John the Baptist Parish Code of Ordinances by adding the following language, as shown: Temporary detached signs (M. Henderson)

The administration request to remove ordinance 10-24 from the agenda.

10-25 (Public Hearing Held) An ordinance amending Sections 14-42 and 42-44 of St. John the Baptist Parish Code of Ordinances to read as follows: Residential water meter deposits (M. Henderson)

Mike Henderson, Director of P & Z, stated, "This is just an effort to add to our current code of ordinances the water meter deposit fees. These are the fees that are currently charged. There are no changes. It is just simply adding it to the ordinance book."

Councilman Julien asked, "Mr. Henderson, I am just wondering what controversy or what prompted the change?"

Mike Henderson stated, "There was really no change. It is not a change. It is what we currently do. It was left out of the ordinance when adjustments were made to the commercial fees sometime back. In that

ordinance we included residential and it shouldn't have been part of that ordinance so we removed it and we just never did come back and add residential. So that is what happened."

Councilman Lee stated, *"Just a comment, I had discussion with Mr. Henderson on this along with 10-25 and if I can bottom line it, it is a house cleaning issue to improve the quality of our ordinance and to make sure that those people that have operated properly in seeking the necessary water meter deposits and putting those deposits down are going to dooly receive their deposits back after they have met all the necessary qualifications that the parish requires. So there is no down side to this as I understand. It is nothing but a plus and it is cleaning up a misunderstanding. I think it is a good thing and I support it."*

MOTION: Councilwoman Hotard moved and Councilwoman Usry seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 10-25. The motion passed with 8 yeas and 1 against (Wolfe).

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES:

10-26 An ordinance ordering and calling a special election to be held in St. John the Baptist Parish Sales Tax District, to authorize the rededication of a sales and use tax therein; making application to the State Bond Commission in connection therewith; and providing for other matters in connection therewith (P. McTopy)

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Councilman Lee stated, *"At 6:15 PM this evening the finance committee met. At this time I would ask for a motion from one of my fellow council members to ratify the actions taken by the finance committee."*

MOTION: Councilwoman Millet moved and Councilwoman Usry seconded the motion to accept the recommendation of the finance committee. The committee approved to take the bids for the Balsam St. drainage improvements under advisement, approved to take the one proposal from Acadian Ambulance under advisement, and accepted administration's recommendation and award the West Bank Park Pavement improvements to HHP Construction Group in the amount of \$239,840.80. The motion passed unanimously.

DEPARTMENT/ENGINEER REPORTS:

Dale Wolfe - Personnel Matters

There were no personnel matters at this time.

Dale Wolfe - SWDI Contract

Councilman Wolfe stated, *"I haven't had a chance to talk to all of the council members. I have some deep concerns about SWDI and its contract. There are some things that are going on that I think the council needs to know. So I will just leave it on the agenda until I can do that."*

OLD BUSINESS:

Stacey Cadour – (Tabled 7-13-10) Re-appointment of Sarah Tregre to the Civil Service Board

The administration request to leave this item tabled.

NEW BUSINESS:

Pat McTopy/Hugh Martin – Resolution – R10-31 – A Resolution ordering and calling a special election to be held in St. John the Baptist Parish Sales Tax District, to authorize the rededication of a sales and use tax therein; making application to the State Bond Commission in connection therewith; and providing for other matters in connection therewith

The resolution was removed from the agenda. An ordinance was introduced in its place earlier.

CORRESPONDANCE/COUNCIL BRIEFS

Councilman Wolfe stated, *"I have some concerns about the way we are doing business in the parish. I am concerned about the PO's that are being given out, instead of a contract we are doing PO's. I would like to know first hand on all PO's how much they are, who are they being given to and the length of those PO's. Can I get a response from the administration?"*

Marie Brown-Mercadel, CAO, stated, *"I am sorry Councilman Wolfe are you talking about some purchase orders in particular or are you just talking about that you would like to be informed of the entire process and all of the purchase orders that we generate on a daily or weekly basis."*

Councilman Wolfe stated, *"I would like to know first thing anytime we enter into any agreement with any business, contractors, etc. I would like to know. I would like to be furnished with a copy before the PO's are granted. Now instead of contracts seemingly to me administration is doing PO's to get around contractors. I think it is very important that we have checks and balances. I am not going to sit here and allow administration to go around the process. The Home Rule Charter is a piece of legislation that was passed that would give administration their due process and gives the council our due process. I am not going to sit here and allow that process not to work the way it should work. If you want me to give you an example I would be more than happy too."*

Marie Brown-Mercadel stated, *"Well certainly Councilman Wolfe you absolutely have the opportunity to review all of the PO's that we issue on a daily basis. There are things that we do issue in terms of contracts. We bring those before the council for approval. There are others that we issue and are allowed to issue via the purchase order process. If you want to be aware of them then that is likely a daily review because there are purchase orders that we are issuing on a daily basis so that we can perform the business of the parish but you are certainly able to review any purchase orders that we execute on a daily basis."*

Councilman Wolfe stated, "There was a \$30,000.00, as far as I am concerned, contract given to a firm. Administration came to this council and asked for approval. There was a \$5,000.00 PO issued to that firm even before administration came to this council. We need to have some sort of control over the PO's. If not I would like to get with our attorney and do what needs to be done to correct this. If we can't get any cooperation from the administration, I will ask our attorney to get together, if some of the council wants to do it as a committee so be it, I will be more than happy to be the Lone Ranger. I don't need Tonto. I need our legal counsel. I am not going to sit here and allow those types of business to be conducted by administration. You are going to respect us, in this case me, just as I respect you all. Again I think administration is taking advantage of PO's. I don't appreciate it. I will always talk about it. I will bring it up on the agenda each and every time. We need to learn how to respect each other and you aren't respecting us by giving a \$30,000.00 contract, by doing a PO before you come to this council for approval. Why would you need approval if you are going to give a PO for that contract? Again I would like to work with administration. There are some folks that say we need to stop. They can say what they want to say this big mouth is going to flap as long as I am here. Again we are going to respect each other. If I don't get respect, I will not give respect. I am sick and tired of seeing PO's and we are so concerned about contracts, when we first took office we dilly dallied with some contracts, I haven't heard a thing about contracts since. There are some contracts that are loose, loose, and loose. I haven't heard you all talk about that. I haven't heard you all tightening the screws in terms of contracts. I want it to be known that we are going to work together. We aren't going to try and fool each other. We are going to work together. Again Mrs. Labat, any outstanding PO I would like to know about it before it is issued. I want to know about it. We aren't going to play any games. As far as I am concerned on a \$30,000.00 contract to write a PO then come before this council and ask for approval is a disgrace. I don't need to talk about it anymore because it is going to get dirtier and dirtier."

Marie Brown-Mercadel stated, "Again, we will be happy to share the purchase order process with you. I do think that we need to have a conversation off line to make sure that by bringing those before you for approval that we are not hindering the work of the parish that needs to occur on a daily basis."

Councilman Wolfe stated, "Again I guess you are tickling my fancy if you are going to write a \$5,000.00 PO. There was no urgency in terms of that contract, none what so ever. I don't want to hinder any project. There was no urgency in terms of that \$5,000.00 PO. So we aren't going to start using excuses and making excuses. I have sat here for a long time. I tried to absorb what is going on. As I ride through the parish, I see grass ten feet tall. I see equipment that we should have that we don't have. Are we short of employees? My work is not being done and I want to know why. We have money in the budget supposedly to hire employees, to buy equipment, nothing is being done. I mean nothing is being done. We have pot holes after pot holes and Mr. Bailey I am not talking about you, I am talking about administration as a whole. Seemingly to me we would take a survey or inventory in terms of our needs. I am tired of hitting pot holes. People are tired of hitting pot holes that I represent. We are going to do it right or we aren't going to do it at all. I am tired. I have been nice too long. You know it is

good to tell a person be a better man, be a better person. Work is not being done. I want it done in my division. Now if anybody else doesn't want it done that is up to them. I am going to say what I have to say and do what I have to do."

Councilman Lewis stated, "Mr. Smith I think I talked to you about some chairs for this room."

Councilman Smith stated, "They have been ordered."

Councilman Julien stated, "I just wanted to congratulate Rev. Behring and Rev. Anderson for the block party that was held by Beach Grove and Pilgrim Church. It was a great time and we just want to thank those two churches for doing what they do for the community."

Councilwoman Millet stated, "I want to thank the Sheriff's Office and all the people in the area for the Night Out Against Crime. It was well attended. It was very hot and we all enjoyed a lot of water together but it was well attended and thank you for the support of the parish on this. Also I would like administration to give me an update on the Oakmont Street repair. There is an erosion problem going on and I am just asking for an update if you could get that to me I would appreciate it."

Councilman Smith stated, "I want to echo what Mrs. Millet said. I want to thank not only the Sheriff's department but the constituents in my district that put on the night out against crime. As she said, ours was very well attended. I really want to thank you because those are the types of things that bring our community together and makes our community a better and safer place to live in. So again thank you."

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Natalie Robottom stated, "Just a few updates, a reminder to everyone that school started back up this week so please drive with caution and be aware that the roads may be a little busier in some of your areas and we have children who are walking back and forth to school. You may need to leave a little earlier for work due to the bus traffic as well. Just to give you an update, our presidential advisory committees are winding down. We are in the process of finalizing those reports which as we mentioned before will address every aspect of parish government and will identify strengths, weaknesses, the opportunities for improvement and threats that would prevent us from achieving those, as well as recommendations for a long term strategic plan. I would also like to publicly thank them for their time and commitment and we are looking forward to those finalized reports. It has been a very busy couple of weeks. We did attend night out against crime. There were several neighborhood parties that were extremely beneficial to the community. It was very hot but everyone seemed to be out for a good cause. We haven't quite figured out a way to get to all fifty-two so if anybody can come up with a way for us to do that please share that with us. I was fortunate enough to attend the graduation ceremony sponsored by the Department of Health & Human Services at the Homer Boogie Center. There were twelve adult graduates from the computer class. Mr. William McGee was the teacher. They were very pleased to receive those certificates of completion. These are people who had never turned on a computer and felt that the world opened up to them by being exposed to

that technology. We also have a new sugar queen, for those of you who know her it is former president and State Representative Nickie Monica's daughter, Catherine Monica. She is the new Sugar Queen representing St. John. That pageant was held this Saturday night and as usual the committee did an excellent job and everybody enjoyed that production. A reminder next Thursday, August 19th, the River Region Chamber will hold their general meeting in the River Room in Luling. Senator Chaisson will be the guest speaker and he will be providing a legislative update. Everyone is invited to attend. My administration is currently in the process of planning a wellness fair for both physical and mental wellness for both our employees and their families. We are looking at the month of September. As we get more information we will provide that to the council. There was a little activity in the Gulf today so as a reminder please pull together your hurricane preparedness kits. We are working to be prepared as usual putting our staff on notice. You can sign up for electronic emails at sjbparish.com that is a source of information. You may call the office here is there is something that you need."

There was no executive session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Dale Wolfe - Personnel Matters

Property/Casualty Insurance Agent – 1) Claims, any/all property, casualty, and Workman comp claims 2) Claims, procedures and disposition 3) Coverage's, any/all material changes

Cable Franchise Agreement

Any and all pending legal matters

ADJOURNMENT:

At 7:15 PM, Councilman Lee moved and Councilwoman Usry seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

/s/Ronnie Smith
COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

/s/Jackie Landeche
Council Secretary

