

**ST. LANDRY PARISH COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
MONDAY, MAY 10th, 2021
OLD CITY MARKET, 131 W BELLEVUE ST
OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA**

MINUTES

- I. This meeting was called to order by Chairman Dexter Brown.
- II. Chairman Dexter Brown led the Pledge and Invocation.
- III. **Roll Call:** Present: Jerry Red Jr., Mildred Thierry, Harold Taylor, Gil Savoy, Alvin Stelly, Vivian Olivier, Wayne Ardoin, Timmy Lejeune, Jimmie Edwards and Coby Clavier.
ABSENT: Nancy Carriere and Easton Shelvin.
- IV. **Items for Discussion:**

ORDINANCE NO. 2021-007 (Sponsored by Chairman Dexter Brown)

AN ORDINANCE TO CREATE POLLING PLACES BY DOING AN ALPHA SPLIT IN THE EXISTING PRECINCTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOUISIANA REVISED STATUTES 18:532 AND 18:532.1

WHEREAS, the St. Landry Parish Council has the authority under R.S. 18:532 to adopt prospective voting precinct alpha splits, and:

WHEREAS, to alleviate any potential delays at certain voting precincts due to the large number of voters registered in those certain precincts, it is the desire of the St. Landry Parish Council to divide those certain precincts by alphabetical order, and:

WHEREAS, the polling locations of those certain voting precincts being divided alphabetically shall be the same,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the St. Landry Parish Council, that the following voting precincts are alphabetically split in the St. Landry Parish and shall share the same polling location as described in Exhibit A:

- **Mr. Mike Hefner** addressed the council. He stated, “The staff had gotten in touch with me last week to see about work up the Ordinance to do what we call Alpha Split. It is not a Geographical Split of a Precinct but you have to divide the voters up within a precinct by alphabets. If your last name begins with the letters A – M, then you would go to one table at the Precinct. If you last name begins with the letters N – Z, then you would go to another table. It is a way of being able to divide the voters between two sets of Commissioners and two tables so that one table does not take a big work load if there are a lot of voters in that precinct. It is relatively common to use. They were looking some of the numbers that these particular precincts had. Some of the precincts are voting age population, a little over 2,000 people. The Secretary of the State and the State Statute sets 2,200 Registered Voter limit on a precinct. If a precinct gets over 2,200 voters, then you will need to divide it. Some precincts are divided by Alpha, others are divided geographically. Right now we don’t know exactly how many registered voters there are in the precincts because the Secretary of the State has not put these precincts in their data base yet. When I was creating these precincts from the existing one, I was looking at voting age population from the 2010 Census. That Census gives me an idea about how many people we are going to have that are voting age. Not necessarily registered voters but at least voting age because it gives me a guide. I think the largest one is a little over 2000 of voting age population out of the ones that they picked. I sent them a list of precincts in rank order with the highest order of voting age population to the lowest and I think they picked out the top twelve. If you have a heavy turnout in the fall election this will ensure that the set of Commissioners will not be overloaded, they will be divided among two. Of course that means you also pay for two sets of Commissioners rather than just one. Coby, I believe you had forwarded me some information on the precinct cost. It came out to be \$1,200.00 per precinct here, which is not unusual for a Rural Parish. State Wide averages \$3,300.00. That is the

number that I have told you all before as the State Wide average and that come from the state about two years ago. It is not unusual for it to be less, but it is an additional cost regardless, especially when you are looking at some precincts that may have about 50-60 people in there, that is 4 or 5 dollars per voter that you are having to expend. If you got 2000 then it is a lot less expensive, fifty cents a voter. These Alpha, most likely, will only be in effect until after we do your reapportionment because these large precincts, I anticipated dividing them geographically, either to balance your population between two districts or to adjust the minority voting strength among two districts. It gives me the opportunity to be able to crop out the area that I need so that it will benefit the plan overall. I am not surprised that these are the ones that they want to do the Alpha Split on because they are the ones that is the heaviest in population. These are probably, most likely, but we won't know for certain until we get the Census Numbers, will be divided anyway. Whether you pay for the additional Commissioners for the upcoming fall election cycle, it is going to approximately the same number of Commissioners you will have next year and the following year. I am anticipating that you will probably have, without seeing the numbers, I was anticipating you will have anywhere from 12-15 new precincts created which means you will have to have Commissioners for those new precincts. I don't anticipate any large precincts as far as voter representation, all of these are going to get divided as we do our reapportionment. You will see how we do that. That is not going to be done in a vacuum, me alone, all of you will be part of that process. I will show you which precinct and how we can divide it. You will see how those numbers will change depending on what boundaries we use to divide it. That is the process. Again it was not anticipated when the Secretary of the State office wanted to do this, that we would have a fall election or parish wide, but we do have some not that are having Tax Referendums and I am hearing that we may have some Constitutional Amendments coming up. So look like we are going to have a Fall Election and I think it is appropriate on the heavy ones to go ahead and do an Alpha Split. The Secretary of the State Office has no issue with it at all. This is really just a matter of a decision of the council."

- **Councilman Coby Clavier** questioned Mr. Hefner, "Is it premature at all at this point to make any decision at this time right now?" Mr. Hefner stated, "If you want to do an Alpha Split, you will have to do it now. They need to program their Voter Data Base System. It is called the Erin System. It is an Acronym. That is their election data base. That goes on line July 1. Which mean they have to have the decision of the Council in June so they can program that. If the council does not want to do it, they would just go with what they have. If the council does implement it, it has to be done in June. That is the window that they are giving us. I am working with them and giving them heads up as to what the council is looking at doing. I don't want to catch them by surprise."
- **Councilman Harold Taylor** questioned Mr. Hefner, "You mentioned the limit for Alpha Split according to what you just said is 2200 voters per precinct?" Mr. Hefner stated, "Yes, that is the State Threshold. You will have to divide it geographically which we cannot do right now, at this point or you will divide it alphabetically." Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "The information that was sent to us of the population that each of these precincts in question, none of them have 2200." Mr. Mike Hefner stated, "That is voting age population. That is not even registered voters. If that is the one that I have." Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "The population does not even meet 2200 at each of these precincts, so we are way under. We have plenty of capacity as it is today. Safely, effectively and efficiently the voters these precincts, am I correct in saying that?" Mr. Hefner stated, "I am not familiar with each one of your polling places. Generally I would think that would be a true statement. Particularly since it is not like a Presidential Election coming up. If you have Constitutional Amendments, those are typically a low turnout. If you have Tax Referendum, unless it becomes really controversial, sometimes those are a low turnout." Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "You talking this far, we may have Constitutional Amendments, or other special things that we do. Would you like to share some history of elections such as that as to voter turnout and so forth?" Mr. Hefner stated, "Normally, probably the 2012 and 2016 elections were probably rather unique because they were Presidential Elections." Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "I am talking about Constitutional Amendments and maybe a Supreme Court Justice or something like that." Mr. Hefner stated, "Normally those things are running about 10-15 percent turnout. Maybe if it is something that have generated a lot of interest, typically they are very low turnouts." Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "Thank you." Mr. Mike Hefner proceeded to say, "You have one other element that have come in over the past two-three years. It is early voting. When the Legislature removed having to have an excuse to go get an absentee ballot or early vote. If you want to early vote, it gives you the times and the date. A lot of people are taking advantage of that because it is convenient. They have less pressure at the polls now then you may have had ten year ago."

- **Councilwoman Mildred Thierry** questioned Mr. Mike Hefner, “As I looked at this Alpha List that was presented to us, I noticed that I have two of my polling places that is on here. I have a concern about the other seven that I have. What will happen to those seven? Will there be a split or a change?” Mr. Hefner stated, “There can be a change during Reapportionment.” Councilwoman Mildred Thierry questioned, “A changed of location, voting place or what?” Mr. Hefner stated, “A change in your precincts, then the polling place gets assigned to that precinct. What you want to try to do typically, and what the Secretary of the State is encouraging all the Parishes to do is try to consolidate your precincts into as few polling places as possible. That is why High School Gyms work really well. You can usually have 2-3 precincts voting at the same polling location. You don’t always have a single pooling place for each individual precinct. Some areas of the parish you do because they are Rural in nature. But in town typically you will have what we call consolidated precincts where you may have two, three maybe four precincts come into one location to vote. They just go to their table that represent their precinct number. As far as yours go, it’s really going to depend whether we divide additional precincts in your area and the polling places can take additional voters or not. We may use some of those or we may not. I can say for certain, you will not need all the polling places that you have had in the past. You will be coming out with a lot of fewer precincts even after we do reapportionment.” Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “I receive a large volume of calls from constituents. When I hear the people screaming, (I would like to make that known) they are really concerned about this being done. I even got a text telling me that is Voter Suppression you all are doing, which I don’t see it as that. I just hear the voice of the people and I wanted to bring this up to see if there is anything that we can to keep the people in line and also what is best for the parish.” Mr. Hefner stated, “I don’t think it is anybody intent to have Voter Suppression. I do not see this at all getting to that level. I do understand that people get accustom to a particular polling place and they like to keep it. You also have a budget to deal with and money is not doing terribly well all around the state really because of COVID and its related issues. One of the things they are trying to do is save. The Secretary of the State is trying to save precincts to because they have to buy voting machines for each one of those, actually they have to buy two for each one. That is why they were pushing in 2019 State wide to have this many do this as they can. When we get to that point we will be discussing all of that during Reapportionment. This is not something that will hit you blindsided when we finish this whole process. Remember we are just in the first step in this whole process. This is the first step in about a 3 or 4 step process. The only thing that we are looking at is, what are we going to about the Fall election, where it was not anticipated to have one and what is the best way to handle it.”
- **Councilman Timmy Lejeune** questioned Mr. Mike Hefner, “I would like to know if we can have more Absentee Voting Locations. Does it have to be within the Municipalities or can we put them in the Rural area? There are more and more people that are Absentee Voting. If they are trying and you look how the polls played out, we have probably as many or more people per precinct that have left and come to the Absentee Voting area. Why aren’t we bringing more Absentee Voting into the Rural Area? It is about drive and concern as I read a letter, so when people have to travel, let’s prevent them from traveling across the parish to come to Opelousas and let’s put some precincts in the concentrated rural area and stop all that traveling. That is an issue.” Mr. Hefner stated, “Actually, you are on the right track. Your comments and your observation is actually what the trend is being in several parishes that went into effect for the 2020 election after they saw what the turnout were in the 2016 election. Normal absentees are setting up Satellite Offices. It is really up to the Parish Government whether they want to do that. Desoto added some at their Satellite Libraries, Lafayette added two in their areas. Libraries are fairly common from what I have seen because they are open all day and it is not like voting at a school where you have classes going on. Libraries which are owned by the parish, is a public building, a lot of them have been using that, there is nothing saying that you can’t do that. Actually the voters would probably appreciate it. It is just a matter of having the staffing from the Registrar’s Office and the Clerk’s Office to be able to handle the early voting.” Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated, “It would probably be better to concentrate on that right now this Alpha thing. If they are voting heavily, I have come and voted absentee in this courthouse, and it is standing room only. If we have to make some adjustment, I would rather go thru an adjustment on absentee voting.” Mr. Hefner stated, “A lot of people feel that way.”
- **Parish President Jessie Bellard** questioned Mr. Mike Hefner, “At the end of the day, whenever you are going to make these changes, it will come before the council for their final approval correct?” Mr. Hefner stated, “Not only for the final approval but they will actively involve in the actual design.” Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “Just because we are talking about it right now, it still have to come here for the final decision. I don’t see what is the big issue. It will not slap you in the face at the end of the day. Everybody will have prior knowledge of it. That is our

main focus to make sure that everybody is aware of what is going on.” Mr. Hefner stated, “It will be very public, very transparent and a very informative process. It has been in the past and I anticipate it to be again as well. It won’t be anything that will take anybody by surprise. Even if you do the Alpha, I don’t think you will have the Alpha after you do reapportionment. Because all of those big precincts will be gone. They will be geographically split. It will be unusual if they are not.” Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “Going back to Mr. Lejeune’s comment, a lot of heads were shaking yes, I know in the Registrar of Voters and the Clerk of Court, they have their issues of having more Absentee Precincts in the parish.”

- **Ms. Cheryl Milburn, Director of Registrar of Voters Office** addressed the council. Councilman Timmy Lejeune questioned her about the possibility of putting Absentee Voter Precincts in the Rural Areas of the Parish. Ms. Milburn stated, “That is something for us to think about. I have done it in Eunice. It is just like for the Presidential Election. We had over 11,000 voters that come to vote in our office. We talked about it and we will try to get some other polling places where they can do their early voting.” Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated, “I see in this letter that they had a concern about people driving and having to drive further to be able to vote. They are driving all the way from the Parish Line all the way to Opelousas. Why don’t we stop them in the Lewisburg area, not far from the parish line, a very concentrated area. If we are concerned about that, I think what we need to do is do the same thing in Melville and maybe Krotz Springs. I am very grateful that there is a concern about the problem.” Ms. Milburn stated, “That part of the decision that I have to make myself. I have to go thru the channels to have it done. Being that I am here and you brought it forth, then I can move forward to try to get it done.”
- **Councilman Wayne Ardoin** questioned Mr. Mike Hefner. “I am glad that you have taken the time to come see about us. Isn’t there a bill right now that is being introduced that is giving people ten days to early vote?” Mr. Hefner stated, “Yes there is, because so many people are interested in early voting, they want to extend the hours and the dates.” Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, “We will have more people to come and vote absentee along with Mr. Lejeune’s proposal for absentee locations thru out the parish.” Mr. Hefner stated, “You are a very large parish.” Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, “On the northern end, it is very intensely populated, we have some people in Cankton and Sunset, they come to Opelousas to vote instead of waiting on Election Day. We have some Pro’s and Con’s but like the letter says about the concerns about people traveling. A lot of people will drive all the way from Melville to come and early vote. People put in their mail in ballot also. There again we have a percentage of people that cast their ballot by mail.” Mr. Hefner stated, “A lot of people now want that flexibility to do what they want to do and they want to do it on their own time and their own terms.”
- **Councilman Timmy Lejeune** stated, “The Lawtell area, we could probably use an Absentee there.”
- **Councilman Jerry Red Jr.,** stated, “After listening to everyone speak, we have 12 Municipalities. I think that it would be a big plus for the parish that we put a polling location in every municipality and the people won’t have to drive so far. They could vote right in the place where they live at. For instance, on the North End, you can go to Morrow, Lebeau even Melville or Krotz Springs. On the South End, you can go to Cankton or even Sunset. I think that is a Big Plus. In Lawtell we would just need to find a location.” I know for the last couple of years, I make my business to early vote. I don’t wait for the election. I just go and vote early because I have the opportunity to do it. I think most people do it because it is a big plus. If they give them those extra days to do it, it is a big opportunity.”
- **Mr. Mike Hefner** stated, “There is a process, Registrar is correct. This involves the Secretary of State Office and all of the approvals that have to be made. It is certain criteria’s for each of the polling locations that have to be met. If it is something that the council wants to look at doing, certainly they can go forward with that request and see where it take you.” Councilman Jerry Red Jr. stated, “You are saying if the Parish or the Council would like to have 12 polling locations for early voting for each Municipality, we would have to get with you and it would have to go before the Secretary of the State before it is approved?” Mr. Hefner stated, “Actually I think it is thru your Registrar. I generally do not get involved with the polling locations, the Secretary of the State is involved in that process. They are part of that approval process.”
- **Parish President Jessie Bellard** questioned Mr. Mike Hefner, “So now it will come down to the Cost. One of the things for discussion is cost. If we do that many people as an Absentee, I think we will be exactly where we were for more days. After 10 days, we will have ten days of 11 or 12 precincts of polling places. It will come down to the man power if we have the ability to do that. I agree with Mr. Red, if we can, that would be great, but it will come back down to the cost. Can the Clerk of Court and the Registrar of Voters handle that type of load? During that time, they do hire people, but, is it doable?” *Parish President Jessie Bellard questioned Ms. Debra Sostand but she was not in the area of the recording to pick up her response.*

- **Ms. Cheryl Milburn** questioned, “Are you all speaking in terms of having early voting places in all the Municipalities?” Councilman Jerry Red Jr. stated the reason for asking that question is because No. 1, we got a letter from the Clerk of Court. That letter is stating he would have objected from what we passed in 2019. The reason why we are asking these questions is to get the best answers for our constituents. We are asking these questions to you, we are asking these questions to the Demographer and we are asking question to the Clerk of Court, but we are not getting anything from the Clerk of Court. We are just getting answers from the Registrar of voters and the Demographer. How can we make the best decision for St. Landry Parish and our constituents and the best decision from us because we as a council have to pay the bill. We are trying to do what is best and save dollars and give everybody an opportunity to vote. We are not stopping anyone from voting, they still have the opportunity. We want to put it in a place where they can go and cast their ballot and still have the same opportunity like everybody else.”
 - **Parish President Jessie Bellard** questioned Ms. Cheryl Milburn, “Ms. Cheryl, do we have a time frame to make this request? I know Mr. Hefner was talking about the Alpha Precincts in June. This right here, do we have more time to get more absentee Locations/ Satellite? Ms. Milburn stated, “I will have to talk with the Secretary of the State whether than saying yes and giving out the wrong information. Then I can get back with you all.
 - **Councilman Alvin Stelly** questioned Ms. Cheryl Milburn, “How many precincts does Grand Coteau have? We have four in Arnaudville and we have 2 in Sunset. If you put one Absentee Voting Place, for example, on Hwy 93, you can cut one precinct, do you know how much money you will save? Ms. Milburn stated, “Like I said, I don’t make those decision. It is the council. That is why I came to this meeting, I don’t have anything to do with all of that because. I have to work with you all and that is part of council’s responsibility not the Registrar of Voters to make those decisions.” Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, “Just like Sunset, Grand Coteau, Leonville, we might have about 10 precincts. We could cut that to one absentee voting and we could cut one precinct in each pole when it comes to regular voting.” Ms. Milburn stated, “In each area, you are the person that deal with that. Each Councilman deals with whatever you have to do for your district. You can talk to me, but I can get the ball rolling with the Secretary of the State. They will decide if we can do it or not.”
 - **Councilman Harold Taylor** stated, “I guess where we are today, we have heard from you Ms. Milburn and also the Demographer but we still have not heard from the Clerk of Court Office. I understand it is ok. The guy that put together this meeting, sent a letter out to all the poll folks and told them to call your councilmember and tell them that we should not be doing this. I received a couple of calls. I handled them like I would handle it at any time. This is all premature talk. Nothing is changing until we can reapportion, then it will change, except we will have an election this fall, perhaps you can expect a 20-25% turn out with is probably about 5 voters per hour per precinct and we will go ahead and spend a lot of money doing that because that is the right thing to do. We can’t take any action on this tonight. It is just an Introduction. I certainly would like to ask that the Clerk of Court come to our meeting when we have a hearing in three weeks. He can stand before us and tell us why he needs to do this Alpha Split on these Precincts. I think that is only a fair ask. Thank you.”
 - **Ms. Cheryl Milburn** stated, “I have high respect and regard for the Council. When I need something, I have to come to the Council. I can assure you, if there is anything that I can do, I know I can’t make no final decision on something, but if it is anything that I can help you with, just let me know.”
 - **Legal Counsel Garrett Duplechain** stated, “The Ordinance has been introduced. It cannot be passed for another 3 weeks from now. There will be a council meeting with a Public Hearing before that.
 - **Councilman Timmy Lejeune** asked if he can make a motion to try to get extra absentee voting places.
 - **Legal Counsel Garrett Duplechain** stated, “It is not on the agenda. The agenda could be amended at the beginning of the meeting by unanimous vote but it was not amended. That motion can be made at the next council meeting. Even though the motion is not made by Mr. Timmy, that process can be pursued by the council in the committee meeting.
- V. A motion was made by Councilman Wayne Ardoin, seconded by Councilman Coby Clavier to adjourn this Special Meeting of the St. Landry Parish Council.
 On roll call vote: YEAS: Jerry Red, Mildred Thierry, Harold Taylor, Gil Savoy, Alvin Stelly, Vivian Olivier, Wayne Ardoin, Timmy Lejeune, Jimmie Edwards and Coby Clavier.
 NAYS: None. ABSENT: Nancy Carriere and Easton Shelvin. ABSTAINED: None.
 WHEREUPON, this motion was adopted on this, the 10th, day of May 2021.

**I HEREBY CERTIFY THE FOREGOING TO BE EXACT AND TRUE
KAREN BARLOW, ASSISTANT COUNCIL CLERK**