

**ST. LANDRY PARISH COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th, 2022
OLD CITY MARKET, 131 W BELLEVUE ST
OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA**

MINUTES

- I.** This meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Vivian Olivier.
- II.** Councilman Harold Taylor led the Pledge and Invocation.
- III. Roll Call: PRESENT:** Jerry Red Jr., Nancy Carriere, Easton Shelvin, Mildred Thierry, Harold Taylor, Gil Savoy, Alvin Stelly, Vivian Olivier, Wayne Ardoin, Dexter Brown, Timmy Lejeune, Jimmie Edwards and Coby Clavier. **ABSENT:** None.
- IV. Item for Discussion:**
Interview Applicants for the Registrar of Voters

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Oliver stated, “Tonight as indicated in our call for this Special Meeting is to interview Candidates seeking appointment at St. Landry Parish Registrar of Voters. The Chair will allow each Candidate five minutes for opening remarks. For a timely and efficient interview process the Chair will ask each of the thirteen members to limit their questions for the Candidates to one minute or less while allowing the Candidate two minutes to respond to the question. Each member will be allowed two questions during the interview process. The order of the first question will begin with the Member of Council District 1, Mr. Red followed by Council District 2 member Ms. Carriere and so forth. Once each member has had the opportunity to ask the first question the second question will begin in the same order of the first with Mr. Red of District 1 being first. The Chair will allow each Candidate five minutes for opening remarks. The Candidate will be interviewed in alphabetical order with Ms. Jones being first. Ms. Jones you may approach the podium for the opening remarks.

Ms. Lauren Jones approached the podium and stated, “Good afternoon members of the council. My name is Lauren Jones and I am a resident here of St. Landry Parish. I have been with the Registrar of Voters Office for a total of 18 years. Upon the retirement of Ms. Milburn, I assumed the position of Registrar. In my 18 years I have learned, I have worked and I have perfected a lot with this parish. It is not a small parish and you can’t learn everything about it in a day nor can you learn anything about the people in a day. The area is very diverse and it is a large area. I began my career under Mr. John Moreau and under him I learned a lot. I pushed myself to sit and learn reapportionment. The run of the office is something that I learned from him as well as Ms. Milburn when everything changed hands. Over the years I have gained the trust of the constituents of the parish and the voters. I can remember times when there were people that were strongly against voting and they were elderly. They would say, I don’t want to vote or I can’t vote, but just speaking to them and being calm, patient and explaining to them the process of things, I have gotten a great number of them to actually receive their ballots by mail at home. To me that speaks volume. The networks that I have built in order to continuously do my job, run the office, answer any calls that you all may have, any calls that the voters may have, that does not happen overnight. Keeping a good rapport with people is very important to me and that is something that I have valued this whole entire time that I have been in the office and as the years go that only grows. My goal as the Registrar is to continue to run this office as efficiently and transparent as I possibly can. To work with you guys and the other elected officials of the parish who have also placed their trust in me for redistricting and making sure that their voters are in the correct place and making sure that their voters are taken care of as well as far as voting goes. We have a lot of upcoming elections, very important elections and to keep the transparency, the election integrity and the trust of the community and the voters in this parish we have to move forward in a way that they are going to keep their trust in not only myself but everyone else that is elected to make a decision for them. Thank you.”

Mr. Bryon Stelly approached the podium and stated, “Good evening Madam Chairwoman and members of the council. My name is Byron Stelly and I consider it a true privilege to be before you tonight. I am from Arnaudville, Louisiana and I am a 2012 honor graduate of

Beau Chene High School. I chose to further my education by pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from LSU in Baton Rouge, graduating in 2016. In August of this year I completed a graduate program thru Auburn University which allowed me to become a Certified Elections and Registration Administrator which is the highest honor and certification that any elected official can achieve. My election career began when I started working under Mr. Jagneaux at the Clerk of Court's Office. Since then I have been offered opportunities that have allowed me to better myself and strengthen my experience in elections and allow me to get one step closer to my ultimate goal which is why I am before you tonight. I have so much passion and love for what I do. To be able to bring that love and passion back to the place where my career got started would mean the world to me. I firmly believe that I am the best applicant for this important position because of my well rounded elections background which have proven to be beneficial to me in my current position. I have also successfully completed not one but two reapportionment assignments which have afforded me important growth which is something that is necessary in order to successfully fulfill this position. Again, it would be an honor to bring my knowledge and experience back home so that I can serve the people who have supported me thru out all of these years. I humbly ask for your consideration and support. Thank you."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier Stated, "Ms. Jones, you want can come back up and they can start asking you questions. Mr. Red you may begin."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, "Ms. Jones, did you get the opportunity to contact all thirteen councilmembers?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "I did."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, "My reason for asking this is because I believe it is very important that the council knows the candidate that we will put in that position. So tell me if you did and tell me what you did."

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Yes sir I did contact all thirteen of the councilmembers. Mr. Savoy and I had a phone tag going on. When I did see him it was here at a council meeting and I did speak to him but yes I did contact all of them."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, "Only two questions, is that correct Ms. Vivian?"

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier stated, "One question at a time and then we will move to the next person. The next person would be Ms. Nancy."

Councilwoman Nancy Carriere questioned, "Ms. Jones, I don't want to waste my one question but you said you have been with the office for 18 years, have you always been a resident of St. Landry Parish?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "I have, yes Ma'am."

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, "Ms. Jones, if you were selected to continue working what will the voters of St. Landry Parish expect of you?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "You all can expect the office to continue to run as it has been along with the growth for the changing world, transparency and communication as always. Just running the office along the lines of what supposed to be done under the Legislative Guidelines and the Election Code."

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry questioned, "Ms. Jones, you know we all have an area of strength. What is your particular area that you feel you are strong in the position that you are now holding?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Communication. I consider myself a people person. I love to deal with people, communicate, help and that has been one my strongest most passionate area to make sure that the people of this parish are taken care of when it comes to voting. Doing things in a proper order to get that done."

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, "Communication is the key."

Councilman Harold Taylor questioned, "Ms. Lauren, how are you tonight?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "I am fine Mr. Taylor."

Councilman Harold Taylor questioned, "We heard your qualifications and Mr. Stelly's qualifications. My question would be should you get the appointment as Registrar of Voters, would you consider offering the Chief Deputy's job to Mr. Stelly?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "It is very possible, yes sir."

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, “How are you doing tonight?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Fine Mr. Savoy, how are you?”

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, “You said you have been with the Registrar of Voter Office for 18 years, what were you doing before that?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes sir. Before I actually got here, I graduate high school in 2004 from Beau Chene High School. I work at Champagne’s Marche, a small town in Leonville. From Champagne’s I came here.”

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, “So a lot of this was part time work is what you are saying?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes with the Registrar at the beginning because I was in school where I obtained an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice.”

Chairwoman Vivian Olivier questioned, “Ms. Jones, do you all go to any meetings, conventions or anything to be able to learn different things to keep up to date?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes ma’am we do. Legislative meetings, we go to our annual summer trainings, we go to our annual conference where they basically introduce to us everything that is pretty much new in Legislation. I don’t just sit down and figure the job out, they actually meet with us. They have trainings and it is hands on because the things they do teach us we do have to come back and put into play.”

Councilman Alvin Stelly questioned, “What are your plans to try to improve early voting? We have problems with that.”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “With early voting at the Courthouse and in Eunice, so Opelousas and Eunice are the two biggest cities in the parish. Which is where the state agrees to put early voting sites. Now I know that some people from Melville and Lebeau, areas like that, they have voiced their concerns on it being hard to get to the courthouse for early voting. That would be something that would basically be talked over with the State in order to put additional early voting sites in small towns. It would pretty much probably be in an essentially located place so that they could all get to us. I am not sure if there is a population limit for that to happen or what but that is something that the voters are complaining about and it is a very big deal. That is something that could be discussed with the state to see how we could resolve that problem.”

Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned, “Ms. Jones, you said you have been working at that office for 18 years and some of it part time?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes sir.”

Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned, “Do you feel that that office is serving the people efficiently by the size of it?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes sir, I do. Also there is a position that is vacant, the Chief Deputy Position at this time because we are usually a staff of five.”

Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, “What I am really getting at is not just the personnel. When a person walks into that office, I am talking about the size of it as far as feeling comfortable. You understand what I am saying to you? You answered two questions for me. Thank you ma’am.”

Councilman Dexter Brown questioned, “Good afternoon, with your staff that you have in the Registrar of Voters Office it seems to be a well-oiled machine. Can you ensure us that if we would vote you in that it would continue to be a well-oiled machine and improve as the days, weeks, months and the years go by?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Yes Sir, as the knowledge and the technology progress, yes sir it will stay. We are all on one accord and we all work together to achieve one common goal.”

Councilman Timmy Lejeune questioned, “Good afternoon, Ms. Jones, first of all I want to thank you for meeting with me for a length of time, I appreciate that. Secondly what I do want to know is, do you know if new voting machines are coming to St. Landry Parish?”

Ms. Lauren Jones questioned, “At the Polls? No sir. Not at the time. From what I am understanding they are still bidding and no decision have been made.”

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, “Good evening, with your experience and the years would you continue to run the Registrar of Voters as it is now?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "I would continue to run the office in the same manner. As things change and as they progress of course that would change. I feel with time everybody will have to adjust to someone else being at the top so that will adjust. We will adjust to what is coming toward us and go forth."

Councilman Coby Clavier stated, "Hey Ms. Jones, how are you?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Hi Mr. Clavier."

Councilman Coby Clavier questioned, "This question sort of resemble Jimmie's but it will differ a little. I am the thirteenth one so you know it is not real fair, you know."

How do you feel now, of course you are at the head right now currently, temporarily, do you feel there is a more efficient or better way that it could be ran immediately? Not in the future but immediately with the things that we have going on now and the resources that we have now?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Yes, there are resources that I am sure that we have not discovered yet that we don't really use in this parish. We need the people, the elected officials and everybody to come to us with their concerns so that we can research and we can find the answers and we can find the solutions to what maybe is bothering somebody or what someone sees as a problem. We have no problem with doing that but in order to take care of everyone we need communication as well."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier stated, "We can start with the second questions. Mr. Red you want to start."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned Mr. Byron Stelly. He questioned, "Okay Mr. Stelly, I will go with the same question that I asked Ms. Lauren. She said that she contacted all thirteen councilmembers. Can you answer that question if you contacted everyone?"

Mr. Bryon Stelly stated, "Yes, I did reach out to all 13 members via an e-mail address that I was provided by the Parish Government."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, "I never received one. This is my first time seeing you, I have never heard anything about you and I am just wondering why I did not get a call or a contact, anything to relate your reason for wanting to be the Registrar of Voter in St. Landry Parish. It is not only just the council's decision to put a person in that place but it is for the people of St. Landry Parish. This is something that the council have to understand. We vote for you, whom ever is going to be in that position but it is for all the people that lives in St. Landry Parish."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes sir and I did specifically send your e-mail on Wednesday, June 15th, 2022 at 2:57 p.m. I utilized the e-mail addresses that were provided to me by Parish Government whomever the individual was that I spoke to. I don't know if they were correct but I utilized those based on me receiving them."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, "Not even the phone number?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "They provided me with the e-mail address. The reason why I choose to contact you all via e-mail is because I wanted a record to show that I did make an effort to reach out to all 13 of you."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, "I did not receive it. Thank you."

Councilwoman Nancy Carriere stated, "I just want to make one or two comments first then I will come have a question. I did not know who you were at first, now that I see I think your mom....."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I did graduate with Keila."

Councilwoman Nancy Carriere stated, "I did realize that now that I see you because I did not have any idea who you were. I also, this is just comments until I get to my question, did not receive an e-mail. I would have appreciated a phone call because that way I would have had a chance to ask you some questions. I had no opportunity to communicate with you at all. I always look at my e-mails. With that being said, my question is this, I noticed that 'Upon Request' you would provide references, I would have liked to have that to look at them ahead of time. I don't have that right now to look at any of your reference to just see your previous jobs and the referrals you may have gotten. I am sure you are a very intelligent young man because I do remember you as a little boy. I have no idea and I did not remember you name. I would have liked to have that opportunity to communicate with you before and I did not have that. I feel that it is a lack of communication because we did not get that chance to talk and I would have like that to continue in my decision but I did not have that."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I apologize."

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, “Good afternoon Mr. Stelly. I have reviewed your application and it seems that you are very well educated. One of the things that we are recognizing as we go by as Mr. Jerry indicated is a lack of communication. Via e-mail is great but everyone does not check it. My question is pretty much how could we if you were elected, how could we trust your communication skills?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Well, I will tell you all, the reason why I choose the route to e-mail is because of my experience with the Secretary of the State’s Office. They trained us to e-mail to have everything date stamped and time stamped because of the legal nature behind what we do. I have become accustomed to using that method of communication and that is why I choose to send an e-mail. I believe I sent everybody an e-mail on June 15th, 2022 and I know that I did meet in person with a few prior to that. The reason how that got started is because I saw a councilmember at an event in person.”

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, “I am jumping, I am sorry, it is a continuation of my question. You said something that grabbed my attention that you meet with a few councilmembers, you did not feel that it was important to meet with everyone that did not respond to your e-mail?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “I e-mailed everyone after. I e-mailed everyone on June 15th, because I had not planned on meeting with anyone prior to that until I saw this particular councilmember in person at an event.”

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, “You don’t think that it was important enough to meet with us?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “It was very important but I am still Registrar of St. Mary and I try to pace myself based on my redistricting and my responsibilities I have to fulfill in St. Mary and I wanted to finish that up because I am almost two hours away. It is not easy for me to say I will run on my lunch to meet with somebody.”

Councilman Easton Shelvin stated, “We appreciate you, thank you sir.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry questioned, “Mr. Stelly, should you be the person who gets appointed for this position, you know we have a real huge election right around the corner, we have major changes that is taking place because of reapportionment. Do you think that you are capable of handling that effectively?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “I am confident that I am capable of handling any election of any size. The first election I ever went thru was the Presidential, well the first major election I went thru was the Presidential Election of 2016. That was when I was employed at the Secretary of the State’s Office. I helped administer two early voting sites in Orleans Parish. I am confident that if I can handle Orleans Parish, I can handle any parish because it is its own world. To directly answer your question, I am confident that I will do St. Landry Parish well.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “A continuation of my question, Was it at a time when reapportionment had just been done?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “The last time reapportionment was done I was still in high school.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “So you did not handle a situation where reapportionment had just been handled.”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “No ma’am reapportionment will never occur in a presidential year.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “Okay, thank you sir.”

Councilman Harold Taylor stated, “Thank you Mr. Stelly, I did get your e-mail and I did reach out to you to find out something about you. I do read e-mails every day, hundreds and hundreds of them. I am sorry that everybody does not read their e-mails. Here is my question, should you get appointed what plans do you have with the current staff?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “I can tell each of you here today without hesitation that I plan on keeping everybody in that office who is currently in there. Just as I am willing to give them all a chance, I hope if I am appointed that they give me a chance as well because I really think that we will make a great team and be able to do great things for this parish.”

Councilman Harold Taylor stated, “Thank you.”

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, “I was reading over your Resume Mr. Stelly, pretty impressive. I don’t know what to ask you actually that has not been asked before. Thank you for coming.”

Madam Chair Vivian Olivier questioned, “What is your reason for wanting to come and be the Registrar here?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Like the old saying goes, there is no place like home. The only reason why I made the switch to St. Mary is because I knew that one day this vacancy would occur. I wanted to make sure that I gained the necessary knowledge that it would take to be able to come back home and run this parish effectively and efficiently. Like I said, I have so much passion and love for what I do. It would be much more meaningful to me to carry out that love and passion back home where I got started."

Madam Chair Vivian Olivier stated, "Thank you."

Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, "When I got his e-mail I got in touch with him. I wanted to know more about him because I have never met the boy. I know his daddy real good and he is not kin to me at all. He sent me a Resume and I was really, really impressed with the Resume."

Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned, "Byron, being you had stated that you met with a councilmember we will go back on a little history. I have seen you raised because I was in the business where I would see you every month. When you told me at the Church in Port Barre that you were ready to come home, I asked you what are you talking about. I did not know where you were at but I knew who you were. You told me that you were ready to come home and you asked about this job if Ms. Milburn would retire. I told you then that I would definitely look at you. I am glad that you are trying to come home and serve the people of St. Landry Parish if you would get selected in this position. Now, your qualifications that you have, would it give you an advantage over the other applicant, Ms. Jones?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes sir, I do believe. I believe the first thing that gives me an advantage over the other applicant is the fact that I just completed that Graduate Program thru Auburn. One of the things that I have learned in that program is how to not really be a boss but we are taught how to be a leader and I think that is important. You can still maintain structure, maintain order, professionalism by still creating a pleasant environment not only for the staff but for the voters. I don't believe in dictating or delegating, I believe in educating and motivating. That is something that those courses taught me to be better at."

Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, "Thank you sir."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I would also like to add how beneficial in the future my experience with the clerk of court office would be. It was brought to my attention that Mr. Jagneaux could potentially have an opposition next year. I don't know if the opposition would be successful, I don't know what is going to happen, but I do know if Mr. Jagneaux does not win and if the opposition wins, we will have a new clerk, most of the employees that oversee elections in there are eligible for retirement and I don't know if they will stay with a new administration but the new clerk will be elected next year and they will get sworn in and take office in June of 2024 and what do we have in 2024? A Presidential Election which is a very, very important and critical election to have new staff in the Clerk's Office. My background to be in the Registrar's position will allow this parish to be an advantage because I have the knowledge to assist the clerk in the transition and be able to help to prepare him or her for that busy election. Part of my duties at the Secretary of the State's office was to train New Clerks and new Registrars as well. I think having me in that office will be a huge advantage to this parish because it is inevitable that we will get a new clerk and a new clerk will always take office in a presidential year. It will happen whether it is in 2024 or beyond."

Councilman Dexter Brown stated, "Good afternoon Sir, how are you? I see that you attended Beau Chene High School in Arnaudville Louisiana."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes Sir."

Councilman Dexter Brown questioned, "Who was your favorite Assistant Principal whenever you was going to Beau Chene High School?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Mr. Dexter Brown."

Councilman Dexter Brown questioned, "Okay that is what I thought. That is what I thought. I am glad that you are here in front of us. I thank you and I did receive your e-mail and I received that phone call. We spoke on the phone and everything else. Were you granted the opportunity to come and visit our office over here just to look around and meet the people? I am just asking."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I did visit the office numerous times when I worked here at the courthouse but also as a Secretary of the State Employee part of my duties included serving as a Support Person and overseeing the operations on election night so I did visit the office numerous times."

Councilman Dexter Brown stated, "Thank you sir."

Councilman Timmy Lejeune questioned, “I would like to ask you if there was something that you would change, what would it be?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Well the first thing that I would change and that would be something that could not change overnight because it would require a state approval and of course the parish would be responsible for funding it but I do think that this parish can utilize additional early voting sights. It is possible and it can happen but it would depend on the parish being able to provide us with a sufficient location and it would depend on if the state could provide us with the extra equipment. We were e-mailed by the Commissioner of Elections in July giving each parish an opportunity to request additional early voting machines. I don’t know if you all requested any but that would be the biggest hurdle because this parish is large and it is possible. Not saying every small town but maybe a central location for several small towns. I think that is something that is necessary because the demand for in person early voting is increasing every year. It is becoming harder, it has been a while since I early voted in St. Landry but I know from my experience that we are getting more work and it is getting a lot harder and the smaller the space the more difficulties we will experience in the future. Not only with the space but we are still in a pandemic if you will, while we are not required to social distance our machines anymore, I do because some voters are still uncomfortable with being close and they have every right to have that privacy in regards to that. But also in regards to what is coming to us in the future with our new voting system, right now it is either going to be hand marked paper ballots which will require us to have the space to sit voters down, allow them to fill out their ballot which will probably cause the lines to be longer because it takes a lot longer to fill out a paper ballot than to punch a button on a device. The second option that we can potentially have is a ballot marking device which is similar to what we have now but the voter will get an opportunity to get a printout of what they choose, verify their ballot then go place it into a scanner themselves to be counted. Having that equipment will require more space. It will be hard to accommodate what is coming to us in the future with what St. Landry has now so I would definitely like to get with all of you and the parish of course and the state to discuss what options we have to improve that and be proactive so when that time comes we are ready to get it started.”

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, “Mr. Stelly, good evening. My question is, why I never had an e-mail or phone call from you? This is my first time seeing you.”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “I did e-mail you as well. On the 15th, just as I did everyone else.

Councilman Jimmie Edwards stated, “I went back and checked on my e-mails and I did not receive an e-mail from you.”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Yes, I did send yours on June 15th, as well at 3:05 p.m.”

Councilman Jimmie Edwards stated, “I did not receive it.”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Again, like I said earlier, I did utilize the e-mail addresses that were given to me by whomever I spoke with in Parish Government. I would assume that they gave me the correct one. If it was an incorrect one I do apologize for that. But I did make an effort to reach out to everyone.”

Councilman Jimmie Edwards stated, “Okay, thank you.”

Councilman Coby Clavier questioned, “Hello Mr. Stelly, how are you. I think e-mailing is fine in this day, time and world. I respond to 100 e-mails every day and I don’t miss out on one e-mail ever. I check my spam every day because some does go to spam also. How do you feel about the department currently being ran? Do you see yourself making it more efficient or is there any certain things that you would like to change to make it more efficient?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “I think that there is always room for improvement but most importantly growth. In order for me to determine what needs to be changed and how it needs to be changed, if I get in I would like to do what is called a SWAT Analysis. I don’t know if any of you are familiar with that, you just evaluate everything that goes on in the office in terms of how the office is ran. You evaluate what each individual staff member does and determine their strength, their weaknesses, their opportunities and threats of the changes that is currently being done and how the changes would affect it going forward. Somethings may not need to be completely overhauled and somethings may need a little fine tuning but somethings may need to be completely changed. That is why it is important to carefully evaluate everything that goes on so that way I can make a determination on how and what if anything does need to be changed.”

Councilman Coby Clavier stated, “Thank you.”

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier stated, “We will get Ms. Jones back up to get the second round of questions.”

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, “Okay Ms. Jones, I will go with the same question that Mr. Ardoin asked. Mr. Ardoin asked Mr. Stelly about his experience from having a degree. I will ask you the same question but opposite, hands on experience. You have been on the job, I am looking at his. He has been a Registrar of Voters since 2021 but you have been on the job for 18 years, Chief Deputy for 8 years. Can you explain why you may think that it is more experience that a degree?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Training is a piece of paper basically and it helps, yes it does. Some people read and understand but until you are actually put into a position to utilize what you have learned you gain knowledge of it. A book is a book, like I said hand written training or copy paper, that is a training as a training but until you actually go thru a process, master a process or just go thru a process and have to work thru a problem or a hick-up in that process then you gain full knowledge of that and then you learn from it.”

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, “Now from the degree with the Registrar of Voters Office is it a certain way that that office has to be ran?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Everybody will run the office....”

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, “My point is, in the Registrar of Voters Office whether you get a degree or don’t get a degree there are some things that have to be done a certain way?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Correct.”

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, “That is what I am asking. Thank you.”

Councilwoman Nancy Carriere questioned, “Ms. Jones, I will ask you this question that Mr. Clavier asked Mr. Stelly about improving the office. What are some of your ideas and aspirations on how you are going to improve this off and do you think we need to make some improvements?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “As I have stated as time goes on, as things change, there are going to be changes. There are things that need to be improved and needs to be worked on. We run now, and that is just in my opinion, as a well-oiled machine. Everybody works together for our common goal basically which is an effective voter registration, effective election, election night and all of that. I am sure that there are areas that could be improved but as I stated until we know that and until that is communicated to us can we actually work on those things. My staff and I attend training, if we have questions we are calling, asking and we are learning together. As things evolve we will have to as well. I am not opposed to it, I am for it and I love that stuff and everybody will fall into place and on board as well.”

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, “I have a question that is maybe crazy, let’s say that we will select you, how do you think that Mr. Stelly can be beneficial to your growth?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “Mr. Stelly has knowledge. Mr. Stelly was at the Secretary of the State and he has been my election night support. Basically when I first started doing that role after Mr. Moreau left but since I will have election night help but I will do my own process myself there. I am not saying that he won’t be beneficial for the basic book knowledge that he has obtained. The Clerk of Court side is the Clerk of Court side. I work with them but there is not much with them that actually comes into what I do on a daily basis. I do communicate with them about different things, we work together on different things. That is just any set of offices that goes hand in hand and dealing with these same area which is election. I don’t say that he could be an asset to the office, I won’t say that, I am sure that he has ideas and knowledge that he could bring that could impact a certain area.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry questioned, “Ms. Jones would you consider yourself able to handle stressful situations easily. You know dealing with the public you get all kinds of people. You will reach out and do all that you possibly can and some of them are never really grateful. Do you think you can handle these types of constituents well?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, “A few words, reapportionment 2022. We have had constituents call and some were very pleasant, some were very understanding and some, all we could do was apologize, smile and keep it moving. It is all in how you basically approach a situation that will determine the outcome.”

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “Yes, totally agree. Thank you.”

Councilman Harold Taylor stated, “My question would be: What do you say to voters that are concerned with the election integrity in Louisiana?”

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "I actually offer them to come in and see our process. I have had a lot of them call me and we have stayed on the phone for 20-30 minutes about the whole entire process about our parish in particular. The election integrity of the whole entire state from what I understand, a lot try to model ours so that say a lot just by itself, it is secured. The biggest part for most people is election fraud with paper ballots and they don't understand the process. They think that we get it and we open it right then and there and it does not go thru the process. That is something that I always offer voters also to come in and learn more about. They can come in and sit in on election night if they wish. Some people just by talking to them about it and explaining the process, it puts their mind at ease and they move forward."

Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "Thank you."

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, "Lauren, I was looking over your application and where it states education you have the left side filled out is there any reason why you don't have the right side filled out."

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Can I see, oh I did not put that, I have an Associate Degree."

Councilman Gil Savoy stated, "You did not indicate that is what I am saying and I can't find it anyplace else. No further questions."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier stated, "Lauren, everybody has asked all of the questions that I was going to ask you. So I will ask Mr. Stelly if he wants to ask you something."

Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, "I don't have any more questions."

Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned, "Ms. Lauren, you know we have been back and forth. I have been to your office numerous times. I don't want to go back over what Ms. Milburn had did or tried to do in that office. Right now with the situation with the precincts the way that they are and still not everybody is satisfied because you are still getting phone calls and I am still getting phone calls. Who is at fault with all of this? I want you to tell me as the Registrar of Voters, who is at fault with all of this?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "We did not choose precincts. When the ordinance was turned in the list of precincts were turned in which is actually Exhibit A in that packet. We choose no precincts. I don't know who assigned precincts I mean assigned locations to particular precincts. So who is at fault, who came up with the list? That is the question."

Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, "You are answering my question but when people call your office, I guess it all depends on who they talk to in your office because sometimes it is blamed on the councilmembers and look I have a big backbone and I have been here a long time and I plan on staying here but it just sometimes I think we get blamed for everything and sometimes it could have been handled in a different way. I just wanted your idea of what you think is the biggest problem."

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "We assign voters, like I said that list that is sent to the state they attach that to records. That is no list that we composed."

Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, "Thank you ma'am."

Councilman Dexter Brown questioned, "Hello Ms. Lauren again, a big part of learning is professional development workshops and seminars. Do you have an idea if you get selected to the Registrar of Voters how many workshops and seminars that you would send your staff to get educated with, everything is always increasing in technology. Do you have any idea where you will send them or how many workshops will they attend?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "We try to attend all of the workshops that the state offers. If you are seeking in reference to SARA that was never offered to us. It is not a requirement but it is an option. It is not opposed."

Councilman Dexter Brown stated, "Just checking, thank you ma'am."

Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated, "I have no questions, thank you."

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, "I have no questions, thank you."

Councilman Coby Clavier questioned, "Hello again Ms. Jones, "My question is what do you consider some of the Registrar's most important responsibility?"

Ms. Lauren Jones stated, "Election Integrity for one. Basically upholding our duty to continue to keep voters in their mind frame and at ease that their voter rights are not being violated in no way, shape, form or fashion. Providing options for voters to be able to voice their opinion and of course cast their vote because it is their right. Being a part of the community is big. Our annual Voter Education week is going on now and we are out in the community. Basically upholding our duty to keep voter right correct at the forefront for everyone."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Olivier stated, "Thank you Ms. Jones. I think you did a very nice job. Mr. Stelly will you come up?"

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, "Mr. Stelly, you are 28 years old. Your plans are to stay in St. Landry Parish?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes, if I do get appointed once the council turns in the paperwork that the state requires and I think one of the things they have to submit is a certified copy of the minutes showing how the appointment was made. Then they will send me Commission Papers. Once I receive those Commission Papers I have 30 days by law to transition back to St. Landry Parish."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., questioned, "So your plan is to live, reside, finish in St. Landry Parish?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes, I can't even think about retirement until another 26.5 years."

Councilman Jerry Red Jr., stated, "You are only 28."

Councilwoman Nancy Carriere questioned, "I feel like I have no doubt that you are very educated, like I said it is coming back to me. I have no doubt that you are very, very educated. My question is do you feel that the education trumps the experience and do you feel that Ms. Jones, with her experience is very qualified if she was appointed to this job?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes, I feel that we are both qualified. That is one of the reasons why I do plan on keeping her as well as everyone else because of the experience and the qualifications. Like you said, I am only 28 years so I can't have 18 or 20 years in an office but I work very hard to get to where I am today at my age and I do believe and I want to echo what she said that hands on experience is important and I do have that as well because as I mentioned earlier part of my duties at the Secretary of the State was to train new incoming Registrars and Clerks. I had experience with the Registrar's offices before I even became a part of the Registrars offices. While a degree may not teach you our election code, believe it or not there are more things that we are responsible for than just elections. We still have to know how to operate an office, we have to budget, we have to do those administrative duties. I learned how to become a better administrator and a better leader by taking the courses that were required for the degrees that I do have. I do agree that hands on experience is important. I helped to administer early voting sites not only in Orleans Parish but E. B. R. That taught me. You all know how big those parishes are and my first early voting as I mentioned earlier was the presidential election of 2016. I was thrown right in it but I came out of it experienced and prepared for every other election that would follow."

Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned, "Mr. Stelly, I pretty much have the same question that I asked Ms. Jones. With her education and her experience, how do you believe she would be beneficial to you?"

Mr. Byron Jones stated, "I believe that she would be beneficial to me in terms of relationships with the voters. I was away working at the Secretary at the State's Office although I still lived here. I did not vote here, I only came whenever. I did not vote here because I was always assigned to different parishes for early voting as well as Election Day so I always had to vote by mail because I was always out of town. I know things have changed in the parish in terms of voters and who comes in and vote so she would be beneficial to me in terms of the relationship with the voters because I know that several people have moved out and moved in since I was able to last work in that office. Her 18 years will not go unnoticed. I know I would need her for certain things because I don't have the age to have been in that office for as long as she did. She will definitely bring a lot of good things to the table that would help me better allow the parish and the office to grow."

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry questioned, "Mr. Stelly, as I sit here and listen to you answering pretty much the question that Mr. Red, Ms. Nancy and Mr. Shelvin asked, I have been led to feel that you somewhat feel that because of you having more degrees than Ms.

Jones it makes you more qualified for the position than her who has 18 years of hands on experience, is that the way you actually feel about this?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "No ma'am, as I mentioned earlier, having those degrees benefits me in other aspects of operating the office such as how to run it, budgeting, purchasing and just basically the HR part of the office. I did agree that hands on experience is important and I do have plenty of hands on experience however I don't have 18 years of hands on experience because as I have mentioned, I am only 28 years old but I do agree that hands on experience is important and I would appreciate anything that she would have to offer me if I were to get the appointment."

Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, "It seems as though she has all those qualifications just thru her experiences even though she does not have all of those degrees. Hands on knowledge and actually getting to apply is total different from just having the degrees if you don't have all of that experience. Thank you."

Councilman Harold Taylor questioned, "Mr. Stelly same question that I asked Lauren, what do you say to voters who are concerned about the Election Integrity in Louisiana?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I would echo what she said also. It is our job to make sure the voters understand what we do and how we do it. I would do the same thing. I tell them that I would rather show you than tell you. I invite them to come to our meetings because all of the meetings that we have with the Parish Board of Elections supervisors are open to the public and we do test and seal. On election night we do absentee and count the ballots and I invite them to come and watch us to show them how we do it and that it is safe and secure. I do repeat to people all the time, Louisiana System is modeled by other states because we are self-sufficient. The Department of the State have their own IT Department but we don't utilize that. Elections have its own IT Department, we don't rely on any outside sources, we are a self-sufficient organization, I am going to call it and none of what we do is connected to the internet and I just try to reassure the voters of all of those aspects of what we do and most of the time I can settle a few fires because most jump to those conclusions because they don't know but it is our job to make sure they do know."

Councilman Harold Taylor stated, "Thank you."

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, "Mr. Stelly, this is kind of a two part question. Have you lived in St. Landry Parish all of your life?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes until I made the move to become the Registrar in St. Mary Parish."

Councilman Gil Savoy questioned, "I think you mentioned that you are two hours away from your job as we speak."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "No, I am two hours away from here. I am down the road from my current job."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Oliver questioned, "Mr. Stelly, do you have any plans on purging the records and seeing if there are any people that are voting that are not in their district or where they live?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Well, as Registrar, what I do and what I have trained my staff to do in St. Mary is anytime that we get a piece of mail that gets returned to us or undeliverable we are supposed to, like a ID card, a voter ID card, if it comes back undeliverable, I train them to go and look in the voters records to see what was imputed. It could be human error that we transposed numbers in their address or transposed letters or inputted the wrong information. I like to check that before we actually make a voter inactive because it could be an error on what we inputted. In terms of making sure that people are in their right district, I always have my maps on hand, I always have my legal description on hand and if somebody makes a change or if somebody registers to vote I make sure before we input anything I make sure they are in the right place and the right district especially since we just went thru reapportionment. In terms of purging the records for deceased people, we do have certain protocols that we have to take as Registrar to try to make sure that we do cancel the voting records of the deceased people. Once a month the Department of Health and Hospitals sends the Secretary of the State a report on the deceased people and we do go thru that. I also go the extra mile and I have all of our funeral homes e-mail me with a list of who have passed away so that way I can be on the lookout for their obituary. I can't just cancel them without proof. I always have the funeral home e-mail me the obituary and they do once it is published on the website. Not only do St. Mary but our surrounding parish also just in case somebody passes away or chooses a funeral home that is not within our parish."

Councilman Alvin Stelly questioned, “If you are elected Mr. Stelly are you planning on attending our meeting every once in a while?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Council meetings, yes.”

Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, “We have problems. I have people that have been calling me. The last three times they voted it was three different places, Grand Coteau that first time, Sunset the second time and HWY 93 the third time. That is not the state that changed that every time. I don’t believe. Do you know?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “So whenever we go thru reapportionment, obviously the buck stops with the council because you all finalize it and adopt it. As Registrar there is only so much that we can do but we do have the option to look at the maps because we are asked to proofread everything and make sure everything is correct. We do have the option to express our concerns not only to the council but to the Demographer and I know if I see precincts that I think seem unrealistic or that I may have concerns about I would definitely express that to the council so that we could try to see what works best for the particular area of voters.”

Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, “Every time you change somebody voting place a lot of those old people won’t go and vote. We have a problem with that.”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Our Demographer that we had in St. Mary had to revise my ordinance six times because I caught errors. It is very easy to miss an error. Once you start reading those legal descriptions every line looks the same and when you start looking at the maps one street looks like another. That is why it is important that we have to really, really concentrate. I noticed those errors and I brought it to his attention and even if there were not any errors, of course with our reapportionment none of our precincts changed so I did not have that issue. We had that when we did the precinct merger year before last, I think it was. I was not Registrar then but I worked threw it with my Predecessor. We saw how unrealistic some of those choices were so we did go before the council and the Demographer to try to see about getting those changed and I think the Clerk advocated because they are in charge of elections day precincts as well. They did help us to advocate to get a few of those things changed because realistically, logistically it was just not really making sense for the voters having to drive the distance that it would require to go to this particular precinct and vote.”

Councilman Alvin Stelly stated, “Thank you.”

Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned, “Byron, do you know how big St. Landry Parish is? It is a very Rural Parish. Again I will echo what Mr. Alvin stated. We have people that get changed because they might live just east of Bayou Bouffe or Red Bayou, whatever you want to call it. Do you feel as a Registrar of Voters that you will need someone in your office that would know St. Landry Parish with that Geographical Areas whereas it could better help this council? Like I asked Ms. Jones to help us and let’s sit down and get the situation straight. Like right now in the areas that I represent Flagg Station Road is the Boundary but then you get people that are used to voting at O. H. S. for 30 years and now they have been changed and they have to go to Sunset. So what does that do? It upsets people. Do you feel if you get appointed that you would get someone in here or you where you would look at these lines that are drawn so it would better help the people and make people feel more comfortable to go and vote wherever they are assigned?”

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, “Right and that is something that I would definitely do because that is something that I do currently and would definitely carry over with me to St. Landry. I also think that it is necessary that I would look at a report that we have called the Precinct’s less than 300. Some of them have certain exemptions to where it can be under 300. I would want to look at that report to see how many if any St. Landry have and determine why. Is it a 1 precinct municipality, is it geographically isolated because some of those precincts might be under 300 and just not have been caught or stuff like that. How I did my reapportionment, I did the city of Franklin in July and School Board this summer. Again, none of our precincts changed. Going back to when we did the precinct merger and stuff a couple of years ago because St. Mary dropped a lot so we had to merge a few precincts. I took my map and everything that I had concerns with, I flagged it, highlighted it and highlighted it in the legal description. I got with the council and the demographer and asked them why did you put this boundary here? Is there a reason? To get a better understanding of why they were trying to do what they wanted to do and it help me to understand and it helped them understand what we have to go thru to ensure that the process goes smoothly.”

Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated, “Thank you sir.”

Councilman Dexter Brown stated, “Hello again, do you have any agenda basically for this staff if you get elected as Registrar of Voter for The Professional Development Workshops

seminars? Just to have hands on knowledge of the ever trending technology cycle with the voter's registration and everything else?

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, I do think that continuing education is important. I would definitely offer those staff members who are eligible to take the same graduate program that I did. It is beneficial in many ways. I am on the Legislative Committee within our association and I pretty much live at that Capital during Session unless it interferes with early voting and election day or any other thing that I have to make sure that I handle because the Election Legislation is important and it is important that those elected people hear our voices because we are the ones on the front lines, we are the ones who actually interact and put to fruition what they pass. I definitely would like to attend the meetings during the Legislative Session but it is also important that we attend our quarterly board meetings, our conferences and that is something that I would definitely ask of my employees because continuing education is important and there is always something changing and it is important that we stay on top of it so that we can make sure we make the proper adjustment if there are any."

Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated, "I don't have any more questions, thank you."

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, "Are working in St. Mary Parish right now?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes sir."

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, "Are you living in St. Mary Parish?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Yes sir."

Councilman Jimmie Edwards questioned, "Do you have an address here in St. Landry Parish?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "I do have one to come back to if I were to get appointed. As I mentioned earlier, once I get the Commission Papers, I have 30 days to transition. I can tell you, I won't need the 30 days to transition."

Councilman Coby Clavier questioned, "Hello Mr. Stelly, "What do you consider to be some of the Registrar's most important responsibility?"

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "Well, I think I just said a good chunk of what I think is important and that is staying on top of everything and staying educated. Especially for a Registrar because it is our responsibility to ensure that our staff knows what they are doing because we all have to know what we are doing in order to provide every voter with a free and fair election. So I think staying educated and staying in touch with the State and staying in touch with even some Legislatures to see what we can expect from new sessions or what new processes or features that the state may want us to implement. We have to stay on top of things and stay educated so that way we can run our office the way that it supposed to be ran and be able to deliver to the voters what they deserve."

Councilman Coby Clavier stated, "Thank you."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated, "You are welcome."

Madam Chairwoman Vivian Oliver stated, "Now that we have heard from both candidates, we will have closing statements. Ms. Jones will you come up and make a closing statement."

Ms. Lauren Jones stated in her closing statement, "In closing I would like to thank all of you for the opportunity and I am really asking for your consideration in having me as the next Registrar of Voters for St. Landry Parish. I would love to be awarded the opportunity to continue what we have here and continue moving forth with it to only make this parish greater. Some of those things that were communicated and the questions that were asked I look forward to working with you all and actually resolving those in the best possible way. As I said communication and working with one another is the only way that we can resolve issues. I would love to be awarded the opportunity to continue doing this and continue to serve the parish and the voters of this parish which is all of you as I am doing already. Thank you."

Mr. Byron Stelly stated in his closing statement, "Well first off I want to thank each of you for the opportunity to be before you tonight. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be before you. I am not going to say anything to long or to fancy but I do humbly ask for your consideration and your support. I am confident that what I have to offer combined with the the current staff members have to offer we would make a great team and be able to do great things for this parish. Thank you."

V. ADJOURN

A motion was made by Councilman Wayne Ardoin, seconded by Councilman Jimmie Edwards to adjourn this Special Meeting of the St. Landry Parish Council.

On roll call vote: YEAS: Jerry Red Jr., Nancy Carriere, Easton Shelvin, Mildred Thierry, Harold Taylor, Gil Savoy, Alvin Stelly, Wayne Ardoin, Dexter Brown, Timmy Lejeune, Jimmie Edwards and Coby Clavier. NAYS: None. ABSENT: None. ABSTAINED: None. WHEREUPON, this motion was adopted on this, the 20th, day of September 2022.

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