ST. LANDRY PARISH COUNCIL

SPECIAL MEETING

**TUESDAY, APRIL 25th, 2023**

**OLD CITY MARKET, 131 W BELLEVUE ST**

**OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA**

**MINUTES**

1. This meeting was called to order by Chairman Jerry Red Jr.
2. Councilman Easton Shelvin led the Pledge of Allegiance and the Invocation.
3. **Roll Call: PRESENT**: Easton Shelvin, Mildred Thierry, Harold Taylor,

Gil Savoy, Alvin Stelly, Vivian Olivier, Wayne Ardoin, Dexter Brown, Timmy Lejeune and

Jimmie Edwards. **Ex Officio**: Jerry Red Jr. **ABSENT**: None.

***Councilwoman Nancy Carriere and Councilman Coby Clavier was late for roll call but later joined the meeting.***

* ***Ms. Pam Gautreau request to address the council regarding the budget.*** She stated,

“I want to pass on my thanks to all of you who try so hard to get behind what is in this budget and get the answers that you require so that you are not voting blind. Every first and third Wednesday we watch via Facebook and a lot of people come to the meeting to see what their tax payer’s dollars are doing and how they are working for them. We see the same councilmembers asking the same questions and not getting the answers from the Parish Administration. My question is to your attorney, what is one of your main functions as the attorney when you attend these meeting?”

***Legal Counsel Garett Duplechain stated***, “To answer any legal questions and provide information on legal questions regarding Parish Government.”

***Ms. Pam Gautreau questioned***, “Would you consider it part of your job to keep the Parish Council and the Parish Administration within the confines of the Home Rule Charter?”

***Legal Counsel Garett Duplechain state***d, “Yes, The Home Rule Charter is basically the Constitution of our Parish from which all Ordinances come out of. So the Home Rule Charter has to be followed. I provide a guidance legally as far as following The Home Rule Charter.”

***Ms. Pam Gautreau stated*,** “Thank you for that. The reason behind my question is because on Page 12 of The Home Rule Charter it states that among *The Powers and the Duties of the president is to submit the annual budget and the five Year Capital Budget to the council.* *Make any other reports as the council may reasonably request to enable the council to function.* *Attend Council meetings personally or through a designee and furnish any information regarding parish government requested by any member of the council*. The budget is one of the biggest items that come up as an ordinance for the tax payers of this parish. When the council have financial questions and they are being told consistently that they have been provided the information and all of the back and forth between the parish president and the council members and the councilmember don’t want to vote on an issue because they each represent over 5000 people in their district. If one councilmember cannot get the answers that they need to vote intelligently and to go back to over 5000 voters the other 12 should be solid behind him or her. If that councilmember can’t answer to his constituents in his district you are only as strong as your weakest link. You all are here representing us, the tax payers. If those budget questions do not get answered that is a violation of The Home Rule Charter. If those documents or reports are not forthcoming that is a violation of The Home Rule Charter. The very documents that were seen recently by your Parish President talking about how his duty is to protect the integrity of The Home Rule Charter, well let’s talk about the integrity of The Home Rule Charter, if you are not going to follow it and the Parish President is not going to follow it, why do we have to follow any laws? Why do we have to pay our taxes? Your Parish President recently told you that the budget is just a guide, actually that budget is pretty much just a lie. All you have to do is wait until July when your Parish Audit comes in. This is what comes in every year, the findings by the Parish Auditors. Louisiana Revised Statue #39, requires the Governing Authority to Amend the Budget once notified that an actual expenditure and other uses exceed or actual revenue and other sources fall below budgeted amount by 5% or more. The budget variances as Mr. Taylor have pointed out in prior meetings are upward of 300%. That is a big difference between 5%. Do all of you know about the 300% Variances? To know to vote to amend the budget. It was not brought to you in a timely manner because the Parish President or the Administration did not inform you of those Variances as required by the Home Rule Charter. It says that he is to let you all know immediately and you all are to vote accordingly. Again, any other information that the council may request, the total proposed expenditures shall not exceed total estimated revenue. This parish have gone way over that limit. For those of you that asked the questions and don’t get the answers please don’t vote on any issue that you are not clear on. When your Parish President said that you all did not have the 9 votes to override his Veto on whatever you all decided to do on this budget, how does your Parish President know that you all don’t have the 9 votes to override the Veto? Was that some kind of back door deal made already that the tax payers are not aware of? You represent us. You don’t represent the Parish Administration, you don’t represent the Parish President you represent the people of this parish. Please don’t vote blindly and don’t rubber stamp. If you don’t have the answers that you need to vote accordingly then vote no. I don’t care how many meetings it takes to get the answers that you need. Please do the people’s job. We put you all here. Each of us that represent the 13 districts in this parish. There are a couple of items that are missing out of your budget according to what is listed on the website. I have some questions but I guess I am running out of time but you all have to find the miscoding’s every year, the lack of internal control with the budget and the money and the yearly excuses saying that we are getting new software, we are going to fix it and there won’t be any more miscoding and there won’t be any more lack of internal control by the Parish Audit but that is not true. Thank you all. I wish I could say more but please do your job. Thank you.”

***Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated*,** “I have been troubled. I hope that we all keep in mind that we are all adults. Going forward in this meeting tonight we have to realize that we won’t all agree, we can agree that we will disagree. We don’t have to be upset with each other or yelling at each other because we are the leaders of the parish and we are being watched. I want you to know as she has said that we represent the people in our district. I have over 4000 voters in my district that I represent and when I vote I don’t always vote my heart. I try to listen to my constituents who calls me and want to know about certain issues. I have promised them that I will do my best to be your voice, I will do the best that I can within my power to see that you have a better quality of life. At the same time you all have to understand that as councilmembers we don’t have certain authority, it is in the president’s hands. So I can’t go and say I will do this road or dig that ditch because we don’t have that authority. Some people still don’t realize that we are not under the Jury System, we are under the Home Rule Charter. So I just want to say let’s keep in mind tonight, if someone don’t vote or agree with you, we have to respect that, we are all adults. Let’s go forth and try to do what we think is the right thing to do. Like I have said, I have heard from some of my constituents who I know are voters, because after election I always get a list from the State Department and I know who did and did not vote so all of these people who always contact me about certain issues they are voters. I am trying to do what my people ask me to do so let’s handle ourselves in a professional way. I don’t know if you believe in the higher power but I do and he is not pleased with what has been going on among us. Thank you.”

1. **Item for Discussion:**

* **Discuss 2023 Proposed Operating Budget**

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr., stated***, “I just want to make this clear. This is not for three or four people, this is for all thirteen councilmembers. I would like to see all thirteen councilmembers interject and give us their input and not move in on two or three people so everybody would have a voice in this so we can move this budget forward. With that being said, the floor is open.”

***Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated***, “I have a concern and it is a major concern. I don’t know if I am in order but I will bring it up. I am not as fortunate as some of the majority of you on this council but I have a lot of roads in my district that are little gravel roads and a lot of them need maintenance. Mr. Bellard has done an excellent job but it is so much that was unattended, I still have a lot that needs to be done. My main concern is focused on that Public Works Department. They are the people who actually go out in the field and help to make things happen that the people are concerned about. In the district that I represent they are concerned about their road and the ditches. I have one road to name in particular, each time we get a large rain they have to close the road down. On this particular road you have a dentist, a pediatrician and a beautician and other working people that needs to get out. I was just wondering Mr. Bellard if it is possible for us to look at maybe getting on or two more employees in that area where they actually go out in the field? Last month I had two emergencies that come up in my district on the same day. One of them was a washout and the bus driver was refusing to pick up the kids. When I called they were on another issue in my district that was an emergency and on the opposite end of the parish. The road with the washout had to wait where the bus driver refuse to pass. I am led to feel although we have more employees than we had in the pass which is excellent we still could use one or two more so when a situation like this happens they can cover more.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “We can do some things like that. The problem is normally when we have these washout it is because of the heavy rain in a short period of time for one or two hours. There are washouts all over the parish, I don’t think that we can ever get enough employees to handle that. The day that you are speaking of is the day that we had all of that rain. Some things we just can’t do. I would love to have enough employees to manage the whole parish but we don’t have the money to do that. To hire extra people just to have them just in case, we don’t have that luxury. We do take care of these washouts as soon as we can but we have to take care of the whole parish.”

***Councilwoman Mildred Thierry stated, “***I understand that. I had one lady to call me and said that they have been waiting and waiting for gravel, when is it going to happen. I said I don’t know, I have requested and I have no control. I just want them to hear and know that this is not me, it is just an issue that we have.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***We are getting in more material and that is working a lot better now but everybody needs material, everybody needs the gravel but we are making our rounds with it.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin*** questioned the names of the roads that Councilwoman Mildred Thierry are speaking of.

***Councilwoman Mildred Thierry*** stated the roads are Collins Lane, St. Amand and Rolton Road.

***Councilman Coby Clavier questioned*** the $4,000,000.00 that was expected in this year’s budget but that won’t come until next year’s budget.

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “I gave you all the print-out at the last meeting. It is addressed in the amended part of the budget.”

***Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated***, “I know that you gave us a list of employees and their wages but we hired two investigators and I would like to know how you spread out their salaries. I can’t find it in any funds.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “It is spread out against all of the major funds, the four major funds.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “There is a follow up on that. When you say four major funds they are under the General Fund, Jail Fund, Health Unit and Road and Bridge. What do they do at the Health Unit?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***It is Animal Control basically. It is out of the Animal Control Budget but it is in the Health Unit Fund.”

***Councilman Timmy Lejeune questioned***, “What would they do with Road & Bridge?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***They go out and enforce all of the ordinances that we have on the books. All of the Civil Ordinance that we been passing and everything that is dealing with our road division. Pretty much everything that we have they are the ones that go out and enforce the civil side of it. They jump on the criminal side when it is Animal Control.”

***Councilwoman Nancy Carriere*** stated the Parish President should discuss more about the $4,000,000.00 that Councilman Coby Clavier questioned to let the public know what isgoing on with the funds.

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated*** he provided the documentation to the council at the last meeting. It will be placed on the website and the people can call his office to ask any questions or they can meet with him to further discuss any budget issues.

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “To answer Councilman Clavier’s question regarding the $4,000,000.00. It was taken out of the budget. The funds that got cut were $2,500,000.00 for the purchase of the Equine Center. $500,000.00 for the Assessor’s Software and $538,000.00 for Project Match.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “Project Match is the matching funds for the grants and the Capital Outlay that we get from the state. We have to have that 25% match, it is just the matching portion of the grants and the Capital Outlay.

***Councilman Harold Taylor questioned***, “Does that have anything to do with the Parish Wide Drainage Project?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated,*** “No the other one is the $333,000.00 is the Parish Wide Drainage that we will take out of Video Poker that was discussed at the last meeting.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned*** the purpose of the Finance Director. He questioned why she is unavailable to come to any of the meetings to answer budget questions.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***She can answer any and all questions that the council may have. He chooses not to bring her to the meetings. Her purpose is the Director of Finance for the Parish of St. Landry. She does all of the work that needs to be done.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin*** questioned if the Public Works Director would be available to come to the council meetings to answer questions.

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated,*** “I can ask him to come. I think he would come and answer question, I am good with that, I can ask him to come to the Committee Meeting or the Full Council Meeting.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “Mr. Taylor asked at the last meeting about getting these letters from the Mandated Expense like the City Court, City Judge, District Attorney, City Marshal and the District Attorney’s Office. We did speak with them today and they will have that letter for us. We did send them something and Chad will have it for me by tomorrow. By the time we adopt the budget we will have those letters to give to the council.

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr., questioned***, “Will that be for next year?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “That is for the Mandated Expenses through the ARA Funding. Remember how you all had asked how we are guaranteeing that they don’t ask for the same money again after the money runs out. We got them to type a letter stating that.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “He pretty much touched on it. We will spend $1,700,000.00 of the ARA money on Mandated Expenses. Mandated Expenses is Mandated by the State. We have to pay it before we pay our salaries. My concern is if we don’t have it in writing that this is one time money they could come and say hey, you paid me an extra $400,000.00 last year and now I don’t get any money so now I have to lay people off. I think that we all need an understanding on it.”

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr, stated***, “The investigators, when you ask the council to provide you with investigators, we gave you what you asked for. It turned out to be more of a problem later on. When I said that it became a problem we have the Sheriff, we have the Opelousas Police Department who did the investigation for Parish Government and whoever else we so need such as the Marshall Office. The way that I am looking at it that is over $120,000.00 that we could take out of the budget and it could be used in other places. I am not the only member that can vote to take this out of the budget but I am saying that we need to take this out of the budget and get rid of the investigators. Let the Sheriff’s Office and the Opelousas Police Department and whomever is in that capacity do the job. We don’t need these 2 people doing the job that the Sheriff’s Office and Opelousas Department can do. I understand that it may not be the lacking of your choice but I am speaking for myself and hopefully some other councilmembers may see the same way, this is two salaries. I understand that one of them was given the title of Director of Animal Control and choose to resign and still kept the salary of over $60,000.00. That is not fair and I think that it is a lot of money for two guys just to ride around.”

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr., stated***, “There have been other people who have been hired over the last year that we know. There is too many people that is in the office when we could have more people in the field. Ms. Thierry just spoke about people working in the field. I think that it is very important because when we had to lay off these 17 employees you were not here Mr. Bellard and we had to feel the effect. It was hard for the non-taxing districts but yet we manage to make it because of COVID and the ARA Fund, it helped to keep us out of the red. We need as a council to make sure that this budget passes. We need to stiffen and make sure that they have the funds that they need and the things that they don’t need, we need to cut. When hard times come, what will happen then? What happens when the funds run out, what happens if something bad happens in St. Landry Parish? I understand that Mr. Bellard is the Parish President but yet we are the council. He can only operate on what we give him. He want to veto it he has every right to veto it. I just want to make sure that we have overriding veto power. We the council need to work together and move this forward. I am in favor of cutting out the investigators in the budget. There are other things that needs to be cut and there are several department such as the Human Resource Office. She has two assistants, why does she need two assistants? We need to really look at what is going on in this budget. When I ask you questions about where to find them, where I would look is in the Health Unit. That is where we should find them but they are in 4 different categories. I believe that is one place that we should start.”

***Councilman Coby Clavier*** questioned Parish President Jessie Bellard about his thoughts on cutting the investigators? He questioned if we can do without them.

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “I am not doing that. I would have not hired them if I did not need them.”

***Councilman Coby Clavier*** questioned his thoughts on the Sheriff Department picking up those duties.

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***The Sheriff and I are the ones who got together and decided to do it this way. It is easier for him and easier for us. They are not just handling criminal investigations they are handling civil. We have stuff every single day that come across. When a councilman call about certain things that is who we send to go and look at the situation and find out what the problems are and see how we are going to handle it. At that point we get with our attorney and we move on from there. You have to have someone that understand the law and understand the process and understand our ordinances and that is what these guys do every single day.”

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr., stated***, “Mr. Bellard, with all due respect, yesterday I was at the court hearing. You had about 30 employee inside that courtroom. That was very disrespectful to the people of St. Landry Parish. I am saying that it was very disrespectful because they should have been on their job working. You had them sitting down seeing what was going on and that was not the place for them to be. We have two council clerks. My council clerk wanted to go and I said no, that is not the place for you to be. The place for her to be was working for the parish and she has a job to do. I may see it different and you might see it different but you know what, come May, I am still not in favor and I still say that you may not want it but if we cut it out they are not in the budget.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “Just to make it clear. The council cannot cut employees, I am making sure. We went to court yesterday and the judge ruled what he ruled and I think that everybody was understanding of what the judge said. When it comes to the employees on the Parish Government side that is on me.”

***Chairman Jerry Red Jr., stated***, “This council have every right to cut where they see fit that needs to be cut. When you came to this council and asked for investigators we provided you with investigators.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “I did not ask you all for investigators. We ask the council for a Code Enforcement Officer. They will handle Civil and Criminal cases.”

***Councilwoman Nancy Carriere questioned*** if the Parish President is willing to cut one assistant out of the two assistants from the Human Resource Department

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “No Ma’am.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “I know that we will get the letters from those mandate expense but there is one mandate expense in there that is all on us and that is Prisoner Housing. In 2022 we spent $1, 600,000.00. In 2023 we are budgeting $1,300,000.00. We are actually using $689,000.00 of that $1,300,000.00 for Prisoner Housing. When that goes away something in the General Fund has to be cut. Do you have any thoughts on this?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***We are already down in our inmate population. We are down to 50. The Sheriff has shipped out some state inmates across the street so that has helped us a lot. Our Trustee Dorm is in the process of being taken care of and being built so that will house about 62 inmates. We should not have anything outside the parish other than those who are gang related activities members and that may be four or five. It will be a minimal cost at that point.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “Do you think that we will need the $1,300,000.00 this year?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “I am hoping not but we are planning to have it just in case. We were basing that on $100,000.00 per month and now we are down to fifty. It will take us a little bit further as long as we don’t have a lot of arrest and a lot of trouble but it is out of our control when it comes to that.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “I have gone back a looked at the 2021, 2022 and 2023 budgets. I will give you a statistic. From 2020-2023 we have increased revenue by 49% but we have increased expenses by 75%. Where will we have to look when we run out of ARA Funds? How will we make that up?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***The reason why it is in there is because we have to funnel it through the General Fund and expense it where it belongs. The revenue will reflect it and the expenses will reflect it in that same budget but once it is gone, it is gone. It will not be reoccurring expenses but we had to expense it in the General Fund or in the Health Unit or in the Jail whatever that money was for. If it is for the roof for the jail or the roof here it has to be expensed in that fund. It is paid by the ARA but it has to be expensed in that fund.”

Councilman Alvin Stelly questioned who is taking care of Code Enforcement now?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***We hired a new person. He starts on Monday.”

***Councilman Alvin Stelly stated***, “I have a problem with that. We have things that should have been done 8 months ago. Mr. Ardoin had a place on Don Guilbeau Road that he had cleaned up. They have junk cars in the yard and the grass is 3 feet high.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated,*** “I went there last week. Somebody bought the property and they are cleaning it up now. They had a dumpster and everything else. According to the neighbors somebody bought the property. We are hoping they will take care of the issue.

***Councilwoman Nancy Carriere stated***, “Since you are hiring someone in Code Enforcement and they will start Monday, the temporary person in Code Enforcement, what is her title?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “She was not Code Enforcement. She was taking care of the adjudicated property. She helped me with Code Enforcement as far as sending out letters but the investigators go out and take care of the complaint.”

***Councilman Easton Shelvin questioned,*** “We have heard the things that you are not going to cut, will you share with us the things that you are going to cut?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***We cut salaries already. We cut salaries in the amount of $200,000.00 since the original budget was presented. We already cut and we came back with what we have right here. We cut in different funds to meet that need.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor questioned***, “How many employees does that equal to?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***We did not cut employees. We will not fill certain positions when it comes back up. I will have to look at the positions to tell you all the exact amount. I will present a copy to the council.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated,*** Mr. Bellard, Code Enforcement,you just made a statement, correct me if I am wrong, you made a statement, if I call Code Enforcement about a situation then Code Enforcement contacts the two investigators?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated,*** “They will go out and the will help right now because we don’t have anybody doing actual investigations and going out and looking at situations. But the Code Enforcement Officer is going to be the one that will take care of the issues whenever he starts on Monday. When he learns the ropes and get everything done they will always have the investigators to help them.”

**Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated,** “The investigators, if they fine someone, that money is distributed parish wide, the Judicial System gets some, the DA’s Office get some.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated***, “Not all the time. If they get a ticket for a Civil issue it goes straight to the courthouse and it is in the fund like if it is animal control, it goes straight to animal control budget. It is not a criminal citation but a civil citation so it does not go through the criminal process. It comes here and they just pay the fine upstairs and it is placed into the fund that it belong to.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin questioned***, “Are your people keeping track of that where you can come back to this council and show us that it is paying for itself?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***I would not say that it is paying for itself. They are writing tickets and people are paying their fines based off what the ordinance calls far. They are here to enforce the ordinances that we have in place, nobody ever did that.”

***Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated***, “Mr. Bellard, I know that we have these ordinances in place, these laws in place and I realize that you are writing tickets. Are we doing it wrong? The reason why I am asking that question just like that is because maybe the ordinance needs to be rewritten. Maybe the cost of the fines needs to be higher. Maybe we need to go up. I would like to know how many repeat offenders we have with the operation that we have going on.”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***I will have to ask them to run a report to see if we do have any repeat offenders, I am not aware of any.”

***Councilman Timmy Lejeune stated***, “In Lewisburg we allowed a development there. It looks like a junk yard. It looks like a site that is out of control with debris and all kinds of stuff. I questioned that more than one time in this meeting. I would like for you to give me the phone number that I have to call to talk to those people and have them go out so they can actually do something about that situation because it is very bad. He did not follow anything. Are they responsible for that type of activity?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***In regards to that you all did stipulate to do skirting. I will ask Ms. Sherell to pull it so we can have it as documentation to say that. He agreed to it.”

***Councilman Harold Taylor stated***, “As a follow up on the investigators. Yes we are spending in excess of $120,000.00. As a compromise to Mr. Red’s suggestion can we do with one investigator?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***No, not right now.”

***Councilwoman Nancy Carriere stated***, “What else are you willing to cut?”

***Parish President Jessie Bellard stated, “***I presented you all with a balanced budget. I am satisfied with the budget that I presented. I am not willing to cut anything more out of it.”

***Councilman Wayne Ardoin stated***, “I move that we adjourn.”

1. **ADJOURN:**

A motion was made by Councilman Wayne Ardoin, seconded by Councilman Timmy Lejeune to adjourn the Special Meeting.

**On roll call vote**: **YEAS**: 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. **NAYS**: None. **ABSENT**: None. **ABSTAINED**: None.

WHEREUPON, this motion was adopted on this, the 25th, day of April, 2023.

**I HEREBY CERTIFY THE FOREGOING TO BE EXACT AND TRUE**

**KAREN BARLOW, ASSISTANT COUNCIL CLERK**