

City-Parish Recreation Advisory Commission
July 27, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

Commission

Dr. Jennifer Jackson	Joseph Tidwell	Matt Hulin	Jamison Abshire
Judy Placer	Johnnie Stinson, Jr.	Leroy Barrington	

Staff:

Frank Wittenberg	Todd Robertson	Wayne Wills	David Gary
Royal Hill	William Verret	Walter Guillory	Anthony Derousselle
Nourine Lanerie			

Guests:

Mayor-President Joshua Guillory	Chief Administrative Officer Cydra Wingerter
City-Parish Attorney Greg Logan	Chief Communications Officer Jamie Angelle
Interim Police Chief Scott Morgan	Chief of Minority Affairs Carlos Harvin
Councilwoman Nanette Cook	Councilman Glenn Lazard

Meeting called to order at 5:33 p.m. by Chairperson Judy Placer. Opened with a Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognition of Guests/Staff Members:

Chairperson Judy Placer thanks everyone for coming tonight and for being concerned about the status of parks and recreation in our parish. She welcomes the members from the Administration and the Council who are in attendance tonight: Mayor-President Joshua Guillory, Chief Administrative Officer Cydra Wingerter, City-Parish Attorney Greg Logan, Chief Communications Officer Jamie Angelle, Interim Police Chief Scott Morgan, Councilwoman Nanette Cook and Councilman Glenn Lazard.

Frank introduces the Parks and Recreation staff members in attendance: Nourine Lanerie, Director's Executive Secretary; Royal Hill, Centers and Programs Manager; William Verret, Recreation Coordinator; Anthony Derousselle, Recreation Coordinator; Walter Guillory, Athletic Programs Supervisor; Wayne Wills, Golf Manager at Hebert Municipal Golf Course; Todd Robertson, Golf Professional at Les Vieux Chenes Golf Course; and, David Gary, Golf Professional at The Wetlands Golf Course.

Chairperson Judy Placer advises that the make-up and districts of the commission have changed. As per the ordinance adopted on March 17, 2020, the 11 person commission will be made up of one appointment from each council member and one appointment from the Mayor-President. The only vacancy at this time is from Parish District #4, John Guilbeau.

Leroy Barrington	City District #1, Patrick Lewis
Michael Helms	City District #2, Andy Naquin
Matt Hulin	City District #3, Liz Hebert

Judy Placer	City District #4, Nanette Cook
Douglas Cochrane	City District #5, Glenn Lazard
Dr. Jennifer Jackson	Parish District #1, Bryan Tabor
Brach Myers	Parish District #2, Kevin Naquin
Jamison Abshire	Parish District #3, Josh Carlson
Johnnie Stinson	Parish District #5, AB Rubin
Joseph Tidwell	Mayor-President

Chairperson Judy Placer advises that the commission has not met in person since February 2020 due to COVID-19. Michael Helms and Brach Myers were not able to attend tonight, and Douglas Cochrane will be participating through a Zoom Conference. William LaBar served as the Vice-Chairperson until his term expired. He will be recognized at the next meeting with a plaque. Judy expresses her thanks to William for his service on this commission and to the community.

Chairperson Judy Placer acknowledges that this is the first time we meet without Gerald Boudreaux, who served this department for over 46 years, 35 of those years as the Director. He served under six different mayors and what he was able to do with limited funds was amazing. He managed 35 parks, 10 recreation centers, two (2) tennis centers, three (3) golf courses and a soccer complex. Gerald led us and taught us. He will be greatly missed, but we are blessed that he will continue to serve in our area as a State Senator.

Chairperson Placer shares the function of the City-Parish Recreation Advisory Commission as listed on the Lafayette Consolidated Government website as follows:

"The function is to give advice and assistance for the management of the Recreation and Parks program in the City and Parish; shall be attentive to the needs of all the neighborhood programs and/or organizations."

Chairperson Placer advises that she called this special meeting tonight because on July 17, 2020, a decision was made to close four recreation centers on the north side of town and to lay off 37 recreation employees, and not one person from the City-Parish Recreation Advisory Commission was consulted or even notified. She attended the rally that was held at the Heymann Recreation Center on July 19, 2020, and she felt the anger and hurt of the community. Judy adds that during this difficult time, the health and welfare of our citizens is essential to our well-being, and recreation is even more important.

Interim Director's Report – Frank Wittenberg:

Frank Wittenberg advises that the department has experienced many changes in the last six weeks. In preparing for the budget for the next fiscal year, he was told he had to reduce the operations and maintenance budget by \$3.4 million, which resulted in 37 positions being eliminated and a lot of other things changing within the department. The four recreation centers chosen were Heymann Recreation Center, Domingue Recreation Center, Bowles Activity Center and J Carlton James Activity Center. We are currently evaluating the staffing we have left to see what we can continue to offer. We are also looking at private partnerships. Tennis and swimming has also been eliminated from the budget and we are looking at private partnerships for those as well. All potential options are being explored, especially for our youth. It is not a

pretty budget, but we will adjust and adapt just as we have always done in recreation. We were originally told that the changes would not go into effect until the new fiscal year beginning on November 1, 2020; however, the effective date will now be August 14, 2020.

Commissioner Jennifer Jackson requests that Frank walk us through the process of the budget cuts so that we can understand how the decisions were made, and why the commission was not consulted or even told. Frank explains that he has been with the department for 26 years, but the budget process is completely new to him. He was given information from the Administration on what he had to attain and he went from there. Frank adds that it was his mistake for not notifying the commission. Jennifer asks for more details on what specific reductions he was asked to make. Frank explains that he was told he had to reduce the operations and maintenance budget by \$3.7 million, excluding the golf courses. Judy asks if he was told to cut 52% of the operating budget. Frank advises that he was not told to cut that specific percentage, but that was the amount that needed to be cut to get to \$3.7 million. Judy asks if all the departments were asked to make the same cuts. Frank advises that all departments were asked to cut their budget by 20% and we were asked to cut more to eliminate our contribution from the general fund. Judy advises that the department is still operating on the 1961 millage of 1.78 mills, which totals \$4.90 per month on her personal property taxes. Lafayette Parish has grown since 1961 and so have the number of facilities and programs within the department; however, the millage amount has not grown with us, making it necessary for us to rely on the supplement from the general fund. Jamison Abshire asks if the millage is parish wide or city wide. Judy advises that it is only collected within the city limits of Lafayette. Judy adds that Youngsville and Broussard have a 1% sales tax dedicated to recreation to fund their facilities and our department has a lot to offer including tennis courts, golf courses, pickle ball courts, 35 beautiful parks and 10 recreation centers.

Jennifer requests that Frank explain the process of deciding exactly what would be cut within the department. Frank explains that he spread out the cuts equally amongst the divisions, except for the golf courses. He cut as much of the operating budget as possible, but the ultimate goal was to leave just enough to cover operating expenses. Jennifer asks why the four recreation centers were chosen. Frank advises that he looked at their usage; some were just used for meeting rooms and functions; the other remaining centers were used by our youth organizations. Jennifer asks how much money is saved by closing the four centers and if it equals \$3.7 million. Frank advises that he does not have exact figures, but closing the four centers does not equal that amount. The layoffs will contribute to that final number. Frank adds that Senator Boudreaux and Greg Gautreaux had the same mindset; if the time ever came to make cuts, closing facilities was the only option. Jennifer asks Frank to confirm that as of today, we do not know exactly how much we saved by closing the four recreation centers. Frank confirms that no exact savings has been identified as of today.

Commissioner Doug Cochrane, through Zoom Conference, explains that anyone that knows him, knows that he is not a politician and that he always speaks his mind. He believes that closing the centers is the wrong decision. If the kids don't have a place to go, they are going to get in trouble on the street. Doug tells the Mayor-President that it just does not look right for him to give Carlos Harvin a \$10,000 raise while closing four recreation centers. Doug asks Frank for an explanation on what else was looked at besides the four recreation centers and what is the plan

for the rest of the departmental cuts. Frank advises that all four swimming pools, both tennis centers and the campground will be shut down. The budget cuts in those areas will save us somewhere between \$300,000 - \$500,000.

Commissioner Jamison Abshire requests information on the utilization of those four recreation centers. Frank advises that we are working on that data, but he estimates it to be 1% - 15%, while the usability of the others is 3% - 10% greater.

Commissioner Joseph Tidwell advises that he is new to this commission; he has served about one year. In that timeframe he has seen amazing accomplishments within this department by squeezing a nickel. It has been the tradition to fortify the budget with additional money from LCG for many years. The biggest issue is the abrupt nature of the budget cuts. Joseph adds that he works for a fairly large national company and he understands that when you are given a budget, you have to work within it. He empathizes with Frank and for the process that he has to go through; however, this budget is not a realistic option to continue to offer parks and recreation. If Frank would have come to the commission and asked them to make these cuts within a certain timeframe, such as five years, that would be a reasonable option. You cannot cut 100% of things and be realistic. There has to be some realism in budgeting. Public/private partnerships may be a one-time infusion, but they are not operating capital. Joseph adds that he has visited Austin, Texas, and believes Lafayette could be the next Austin, which has so many beautiful parks and public green spaces; however, that is not attainable if we are forced to live within that 1961 millage.

Jamison asks if the proposed budget is coming from the general fund. Frank advises that it is the proposed budget submitted from the Administration to the Council. The hearing process will begin next week and the budget will be adopted by the council in September. Jamison asks if this budget has any bearing on the Profit and Loss Statement that the recreation centers take in themselves; Frank advises that it does not. Jamison advises that we can get creative on the outside to have gains to subsidize the losses. Jennifer advises that the city and parish councils still have to do their jobs to review the budget. Jamison adds that they have already started that process, as the department has already turned over Foster Park to the City of Youngsville and the process is underway way for the City of Broussard to take over Arceneaux Park. Those are two big assets that LCG is relinquishing. Jamison explains that Youngsville and Broussard have a designated sales tax that goes to fund recreation within their cities. This budget has been sustained by the city, but has continued to cover facilities parish wide. Jamison advises that he is not for closing any facilities, as he has been a coach and volunteer for many years and knows how vital recreation is to children and the positive effect it has on them, especially during the most impressionable time of their lives. If we cannot do it fiscally, we have got to be creative with corporate partnerships. Jamison asks Frank to speak on what the four centers are currently used for. Frank explains that the Bowles Center and J Carlton James Center are primarily used for meeting rooms and activity centers, as they do not have gymnasiums. Heymann Recreation and Domingue Recreation Centers have basketball gymnasiums, but no bleachers. They are used for exercise and other classes, but the basketball courts are rarely used for free play. Jamison asks if the organized sports that are held there can be moved to other centers. Frank advises that they can be moved. Jennifer explains that the recreation centers were built in the neighborhoods to make it easy for the residents/participants to travel there; most centers are within walking

distance of the participants. Jamison adds that having 60 to 70 recreation centers would be ideal, but it is not realistic; not everybody has five parks within walking distance of their house. Frank advises that his decision was made after evaluating the usage of the centers.

Commissioner Leroy Barrington advises that he represents District 1 and Pat Lewis is his council member. He has the longest tenure on this commission and has attended ten budget hearings. Leroy adds that this is this Mayor-President's first budget hearing. This department operated on a \$6-\$7 million dollar budget. This is the money that is allocated to the Parks and Recreation Department to operate. The recreation centers do not bring in money. The reason they are not using it as much is because we put a tax on them. The people making the decisions do not see what these centers are used for; they should drive by and see who is there and who is using it. We have therapeutic activities at the Heymann Recreation Center. The Domingue Center is being used; the kids are playing basketball, they are having girl scouts' meetings; the center is being used by people who have nowhere else to go. The Bowles Center is the latest center that was built. The golf courses are a money maker for us, but to keep those golf courses open and as beautiful as they are, it takes money. So, the money that is made is put right back into the department.

Leroy advises that he is upset. Gerald Boudreaux took this budget for 10 years while he was here and he made it work. He made everything come together. The people who cut the grass did their job, they did not go to the park and sit down and play around; they were dedicated to him. Leroy adds that he does not like that this is Frank's first budget, and he has no experience. Gerald and Greg Gautreaux handled the budget, Frank did not. So, you force Gerald out and make him resign and bring in a guy who has no idea how the budget works, and have him cut \$3.7 million. We have workers that cut the grass, run the recreation centers, we have uniforms, insurance, retirement; not one of those things brought in money, that's why we needed the \$3.7 million in the budget to help cover and make the Parks and Recreation Department work. How much of that money is still in the budget that we didn't use? We don't go to the parish parks anymore. I voted against not serving the parish, those people are citizens, too, and deserve centers, but they are so spread out, they can't get a tax passed big enough to support recreation services there. Gerald took that and made it work, but we don't have that anymore. Look at all the savings that we have; we don't go to the parish, we just stay within the city. We have many parks in the city with playgrounds and in the neighborhoods to serve the citizens. Parks and Recreation takes care of those. We have to be dumb people to sell our recreation facilities and give them away. If you are going to let someone come in and pay \$1 to lease the building, but you have to pay the water and electricity, what does it help? People have a job to do and I understand the position of the Mayor and Frank; they have a tough job. First of all, how much money is in the pot; in the whole system? We need to cut \$26 million, where did that money come from? It might be \$10 million; it might be \$5 million. Every time they said we have a budget shortage in the Louisiana State Capitol, they do an audit and find out there is way more money than they thought. We just have to look and see how much money we have and how much we need, and how we are going to go about it. If it means we have to cut something, I am right there with you, but to cut the Parks and Recreation Department when one man made it work is just not right.

Judy Placer states that a 52% cut would be devastating to the Parks and Recreation Department, it just cannot happen; she encourages the commissioners to talk to their council members to do what they can to find the funds, be creative, and get those parks open. There are people interested in the facilities and there are contracts going on with tennis and swimming. We cannot close Thomas and Beaver Park Tennis Facilities. This is not fair, not right; hopefully more funds will be found somewhere to keep these facilities open.

Chairperson Judy Placer opens up the floor for comments from the public, limiting each speaker to a five minute time limit.

Speaker #1 – Tara Loxie

I am from the four corners area and am a north side resident. It is imperative for our children on the north side to not have idle time. They face gun violence, police harassment, inadequate education; lots of children don't know where their next meal is coming from, if their mom and dad will be home or if their utilities will be on. If you don't understand the struggle as a child coming from a low income home, you won't understand the outcry. Maybe if the north side made more money, Lafayette Consolidated Government would build up the north side of town. We are all in this together. The greatest commandment is that you love your neighbor as you love yourself, not the district you represent or the political party that you favor. Mayor-President Josh Guillory, I am sorry you've been put in this situation, but you need to be educated on the budget. I believe you should get someone with more experience to help you tweak the budget. You gave Juvenile Detention \$60,000, the Sheriff's Department \$2 million, and Carlos Harvin, who has been in his position for less than 7 months, gets a \$10,000 raise from you. You also created two positions to help him do his job and those salaries total \$238,000. We have to suffer on the north side and our children have to be idle. Those recreation centers closed down are in predominately black lower income neighborhoods and those kids will be caught in the street dead. Josh, if you are going to cut our budget, you should cut your salary.

Speaker #2- (No name given)

I am speaking on behalf of the Lafayette Ladies Tennis League. This organization was started in 1977, with 60 women who wanted to play tennis while their kids were at school. Now, over 43 years later, we have over 900 women that play in leagues at Beaver Park and Thomas Park and all over town. Women come from all over to play. We pay a minimum fee to play at these parks during the day while the kids are in school. In the summertime, our organization hosts free clinics for kids at Beaver Park, so that they can learn how to play tennis. The United States Tennis Association also utilizes the courts to play at night and on weekends. Our tennis courts are really important to our community.

Speaker #3- (No name given)

Frank, you said tonight that you evaluated the usage of the centers. At Tuesday's Council Meeting, you said that you did not check the foot traffic at the centers. The figures that you are giving are incorrect. The members of this commission understand the needs of the community. The Mayor has people that are paid a lot of money to help him do his job, some of that could be cut. I love the Bishop Carlos Harvin, but I don't know a human being on this planet who can get a \$10,000 raise for just being there.

Speaker #4 –Devon Morgan

I am a member of the NAACP in Lafayette. Mayor-President, I am still waiting on your call, time is ticking and black people are dying. We are now facing another issue with Parks and Recreation. War has been declared on our people and we have taken notice of that. Today I want to talk to you about a little black boy who went to JW Faulk Elementary School, who got uprooted when his parents got divorced. In my fifth grade year, I went to Charles Burke Elementary School where a teacher put me in a group called the “no nothings” because we were failing. These students were the only black students in the class room. I made it out and went to Judice Middle School where things were a little better; then I went to NP Moss where I felt at home. My mother wanted me to go to Northside High School, but I chose to go to Lafayette High School. All my life I had to deal with issues of my skin. Today, that is still true in the City of Lafayette; we are still dealing with issues based on skin color. The fact is that black children utilize these parks and recreational facilities more than anyone else. You have said that they are not being used as much, maybe it’s because you haven’t invested in this side of town. Black people are most affected by this pandemic; maybe we should increase the budget on this side of town. Most of these facilities are too expensive to rent. We could go somewhere private to rent. Maybe that is on purpose, so that we can be forced into these public private partnerships. Find somewhere else in the budget to make the changes, not in the place where you are taking the power from the people; at a time when we are in a situation where we are the most vulnerable; in a situation where we are just jacked up.

Speaker #5 – Pamela Thibeaux

I am a mother, grandmother and a member of the NAACP. I am here because I am against the closing of the four north side recreation centers. Those centers play a big part in our lives and in our community. I was a single mother of four children and had to play the role of both mother and father. Those centers were and still are a second home for our children and grandchildren, a place for them to talk to the kids who understand them. We have basketball players, football players, wrestlers and boxers; legends that were molded and created from those centers. We don’t have much left on the north side, but the little that we do have; you are trying to strip that from us. Why should our children and our community continue to suffer? The centers have kept our young boys and girls out of the street, detention homes and jail cells. Because of those centers, our kids are mentored by the workers and coaches. Mayor-President, I pray that God gives you a heart like His and a loving, compassionate and understanding heart. I pray God allows you to see our vision through His eyes and through all, that you will keep those centers open. These centers help our children physically and mentally; don’t take that away from them, too.

Commissioner Johnnie Stinson advises that all of the other commissioners have spoken, and he has been listening and taking everything in. He introduces himself and advises that he represents the Scott and Judice area, which have two parish parks. He has been on the commission for a long time along with Leroy Barrington, and this is his last term with the commission. He has been involved in youth sports in Lafayette Parish for over 30 years, including 20 years as president of Scott Park. He does not play golf; he just invests in the youth. If there is any way we can keep those kids playing sports and keep them off the streets, we need to make it happen. All of the funding for the parish parks comes from the City of Lafayette. Every year, we go see the Mayor of Scott to help with Scott Park because there is never enough in the City of Lafayette

budget to take care of what is needed. The City of Scott Mayors have always been willing to help and supply funds because the park serves the youth in the area. We used to have nine associations and are now down to seven. Youngsville and Broussard now have their own, so we are dwindling down. Johnnie advises that he is against closing any facilities, the recreation centers should not close. We have people that work on the budget and there is so much money budgeted for recreation. Gerald would put that budget out there, get whatever he could get and he would make it work. That process has been working for a long time. There's another factor that no one has mentioned; since February, the world has changed. We have this COVID-19 pandemic that has affected so many people and so many industries. We need to work together and see what can be done. We understand that cuts have to be made; so many businesses have been affected because they cannot operate due of the restrictions in place. I have been in Lafayette for over 62 years and I know that we can come together to make everything work.

Speaker #6 – Porsha Evans

I had this conversation on my radio show the other day. People were just outraged. Most of the comments I got were that, in this season of racial divisiveness, the timing for this thing is wrong. We understand budget cuts. Why not cut the budget across the board, Mr. Frank? Why not cut the budget everywhere and take a little from here and a little from there? The only child God blessed me with died from gun violence. I don't want that to happen to anybody else's child. If one can be helped, one can be saved at one of those recreation centers, then that's the right thing for Lafayette to do. I love you to death my friend, Carlos; I voted for you, but a whole \$10,000 raise? In this season, this is not a good time. I know one of those park policemen who has been on the job for 40 years and is now being laid off. When they created the park police years ago, it was for a reason. It was because the drug dealers were infiltrating the parks. That's where all the drug trades were going on. I know this because I was one of those people in the park buying the dope from those people.

Speaker #6 – No name given

I would like to start with Matthew 5:24, which says, "What you do unto the least of these, you have done unto me." I spoke at the council meeting the other night because I think that we are not kin to some other communities who have racial issues. The position that we have been placed in is untenable. To have these constant meetings and being placed in a constant position of dealing with a "from the hip" decision is disserving at best. I would bet that perhaps Mr. Guillory thinks he made a mistake, but I cannot speak for him. We have to do better than the communities that around the nation are having racial upheaval. When we see something that is passionately racist or racially tinged, we must name it. When we do not, it will spread like a cancer malignantly to each corner of our community. I am willing to wager that the members of our council will distance themselves from this decision, because it was ill-thought. What I will say to you as an African-American male that grew up in the projects, I went to those parks and was one of those kids. I had a different opportunity because I had access to a good school, a good principal, and a good community center. I am disturbed that it seems like we are going in reverse. I am disturbed that in this season of racial upheaval, someone would make a decision like this. I guess you can chalk it up to bad decision making or is it just an inability to understand the institutional racism that exists for some people? I would hope that our Mayor-President would take some time to educate himself as we make decisions on behalf of the community at large. I am at a loss for words; the only word that I can think of to describe this is

“offensive.” I am offended as a black male that this was even decided. I am offended by the subsequent wave of lies that came after. There is an individual in this room, whose name I will not call out due to respect for him, who talked to me about a situation that we were involved in that was racially tinged. I am shocked by his response to this and how he can benefit from a raise as a result. I will have that conversation with him individually; I don’t want him to be hurt by my commentary. I don’t know what he said but I think there was a wave a lies that precipated after this bad decision making. This now has the propensity to make us a community of people who are racially at war with each other, when the truth is one person made one really bad decision. Fix it. Thank you.

Judy Placer asks Mayor-President Josh Guillory to explain how he came up with the 43% reduction in sales tax. Mayor Guillory thanks Judy and advises that this is the first time in front of this commission since he took office. He thanks the commissioners for their volunteer service; it speaks volumes about your character. Mayor Guillory addresses the guests and advises that he takes what they say to heart and he appreciates the prayers. As many of you know, the public health emergency caused an economic emergency that is not unique to only us. Our CFO makes a forecast as to what the anticipated revenue will be coming in each year. Two or three months ago, our anticipated loss in revenue was 50%. It is now decreased to 27%. That is still a hit to the anticipated revenue. Let’s talk about Parks and Recreation.

Mayor-President Josh Guillory explains that Parks and Receptions can be funded in several ways. The first way is through what the taxpayers voted on, the millage which brings in roughly 2.8 million. Then you have revenues coming in from rentals and miscellaneous revenues. The third bucket is the City General Fund. When we entered in January, we had an \$18 million deficit. It was forecasted that we were going to spend \$18 million more than what we had in the City General Fund, which is the same fund that is subsidizing Parks and Recreation. Then COVID-19 hits and we had another forecast of an additional \$10 million loss. So, that is \$28 million less in that savings account that has been subsidizing this department. I heard something about timing; I wish I had a time machine. I wish I had the benefit of spreading it out a few years. I wish I had the benefit of not having a budget right now when our country is being torn apart over this needless issue. I wish I had that, but I don’t, and neither do these council members. But, what we do have, are ideas. Tennis is still open; we are trying to find better ways to fund it. Parks are still open, 100% of the parks are still open. The real issue becomes the recreation centers. I heard you at the City-Parish Council Meeting, I heard you loud and clear and I hear you tonight. We agree on this issue. I just laid down how we have revenues, how we fund these centers. All I’m saying is, let’s be creative to find ways to keep all of our recreation centers open. I really do believe in public private partnerships, but you have to put rules in place. The feedback from some of the council members is that we keep things status quo, meaning if you use that gym at the recreation center for free, then you maintain that service for free. We do not know if this is going to work, but we have to do something different. We cannot continue doing the same thing over and over and expect good results because of the financial situation we are in. Imagine if we do have a public private partnership, imagine if we do have someone that comes in and keeps the same services, but it does not hit the general fund. If it doesn’t work, we will go back to the drawing board. I am committed and the Interim Director is committed to finding ways to shuffle resources around if we have to fall back on a plan B. Maybe we take away from a few other recreation centers to keep these open while we figure it

out. I am open to that. We are going to figure it out, I do believe that. I hear you loud and clear and I appreciate you. Mayor Guillory advises that Bishop Carlos Harvin has done a lot for him personally, in my personal growth. You can say what you want about him, but I believe in him and I know where his heart is, and I know that every communication that we have is with good intention. We are not perfect, so please keep praying for us. Thank you and God bless you.

Chairperson Judy Placer opens the floor for open discussion with Mayor-President Josh Guillory and citizens in attendance.

Citizen: Why did you decide to close four recreation centers all in one area? Why not take two centers from another area that do not have a lot of services going on and close those? We have two tennis courts; youth from the north side of town don't care about tennis. If we have to suffer, they have to suffer. Close one of the golf courses down. That is fair leadership.

Mayor-President: That is a fair option. Right now, all of our recreation centers are open under Phase 2 of the Governor's guidelines. We also have time until the August 14th date. We are working tirelessly to see if we can get the Requests for Proposals in, and we continue to communicate with the councils and stakeholders. The public is a pretty strong stakeholder. A better approach might be to take resources from other centers until we figure all of this out. My intent is very clear from a budget standpoint, we have a millage and revenues coming in and we have to live within the means that the taxpayers voted on. Public private partnerships are not the only answer; we have to continue to think outside of the box and look at additional revenue sources that do not hit the bottom line of the taxpayers.

Citizen: How much does it cost to keep the Cajundome open? Can we turn that off?

Mayor-President: The Cajundome will receive \$100,000 less in the budget. If the council wants to cut more, I would be open to that. The Cajundome will probably also get a lot of federal relief.

Citizen: What is keeping you from cutting your staff; from being so top heavy? You have two positions that jointly make over \$200,000 and Carlos Harvin is getting a \$10,000 raise. I expect you to respect him because he gives you what you want. We want you to know that we know that. Why do you need two people to do the same job and make a combined salary of over \$200,000.

Mayor-President: They do not do the same thing and my Mayor-President's budget is 24% less than the previous administration's budget.

Chairperson Judy Placer opens the floor for input from the council members in attendance.

Councilwoman Nanette Cook: I understand we have to have cuts, but why couldn't we have waited until the budget came to us to figure out what we need to do? These facilities have been budgeted as of last year. How much money is left in that current budget? Why did we have to jump the gun before we got the budget?

Mayor-President: As you know, since you've done this four times, the Executive Branch submits a proposed budget and the Legislative Branch has the opportunity to go through the budget process and suggest any changes. I fulfilled my duty when I gave my fiscally responsible

budget. We are saying the same thing, keep the recreation centers open. I am confident that we can do this by continuing to look outside the box.

Citizen: When you made this decision, you did not take into consideration the racial tension in this community that had been growing with the George Floyd situation. The community literally thought you were taking the keys and locking the doors. Our leadership is not aware of what we in the black community are actually faced with.

Mayor-President: I did not consider that before a decision. I'm not saying that I shouldn't have or that we can't learn from that, but I did not look at that. I know a lot of people agree with you. I gave a mission to the interim director and he gave me some recommendations and I adopted those recommendations. I take full responsibility for those recommendations; they are mine and I submitted them to the council. This is part of the process; it is not etched in stone. My intent is that this department lives within its means; a millage that the taxpayers voted on and any additional revenues that come in. I believe we can achieve what we are all wanting to do. Open up all 10 recreation centers within those financial constraints. That is a win for everyone.

Citizen: We need better facilities at those recreation centers. The community's concern is that it was never the point of the initial message and so now it is hard for the community to receive that you actually care. There is a lot of work to do to reestablish trust within the community. Character is everything. Learn the culture of our people and then you will learn how to deal with our people.

Councilwoman Nanette Cook: Why did you jump on it right now and what funds are left? These facilities and the jobs were already budgeted; what is going to happen to those funds? Why couldn't we wait until the new budget that begins on November 1, 2020?

Mayor-President: I just feel like it was the fiscally responsible thing to do. We all have to work with the same facts and the facts are that we have a budget that the new council and administration inherited. That budget has an \$18 million deficit in the fund that funds this department; couple that with the COVID-19 pandemic and the sales tax forecast of an additional \$10 million loss. Thankfully we did have some money in the savings account, but if our spending habits continue, we will run out of money. I wish I had five years to do this, but I don't.

Citizen: Are you going to be announcing additional cuts in other departments or is it just Parks and Recreation?

Mayor-President: At least 37 individuals will be affected by the decision I've made and I do not take that lightly. I gave them as much notice as I possibly could have given them, because that was the fair and responsible thing to do. I made the decision and notified the council 15-20 minutes before my announcement, I did not want to hold that information. It was very similar to Community Development when we had to lay off over 100 people a few months ago.

Citizen: Is it your expectation that the departmental directors are going to talk to their commissions before they make recommendations on budget cuts?

Mayor-President: It depends on if they find it helpful.

Citizen: Why have the existence of commissions if you are not going to respect their role?

Mayor-President: I don't know.

Citizen: Everything we pay for in this city is not part of a dedicated millage, so you can get rid of that talking point that I am hearing today. Your office doesn't have a dedicated millage which funds your salaries. We have a city budget from which we fund things that are priorities. You said that Plan B is to move money around to keep the centers open. Why was that not Plan A?

Mayor-President: It was to move resources around but that is not a long term solution.

Citizen: Why did it come early before the budget cycle was over? It sounds like a political talking point as opposed to dealing with people's lives, their salaries, their families, and our community.

Mayor-President: I respect your opinion, but I respectfully disagree. I believe we can achieve the mission of parks and recreation with the millage and revenues that we have coming in as long as we think conceptually and we think outside the box.

Citizen: How much consideration was given for the families and the people on the north side when this decision was made? Who thought about the kids? I have not heard them mentioned at all.

Mayor-President: When you look at the four recreation centers that are taken out, you still have six left, and two of those are on the north side. So, one-third of the remaining centers are on the north side servicing a portion of our population that does not represent one-third of our city and for sure not the parish. I heard some pretty solid points at the council meeting. I still stand by my intent of living within the millage and the revenues. Thank you.

Action Taken:

Jennifer Jackson motions that the City-Parish Recreation Advisory Commission supports the Joint Ordinance of the Lafayette City Council and the Lafayette Parish Council opposing the closure of four (4) recreational centers on the north side of Lafayette, the laying off of 37 civil service recreation department employees and directing the Lafayette Mayor-President to maintain all employees, and the positions they occupy and to keep all centers open. Leroy Barrington seconds the motion. Vote follows:

Chairperson Judy Placer – Yes

Jennifer Jackson – Yes

Leroy Barrington – Yes

Johnnie Stinson – Yes

Matt Hulin – Yes

Joseph Tidwell – Yes

Jamison Abshire – No

Motion is passed by a vote of 6 Yeas and 1 No.

Next Meeting – August 10, 2020, at 5:30 p.m.

Leroy Barrington motions to adjourn, seconded by Joseph Tidwell; no opposition, motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.