

# **AMERICAN RESCUE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, November 4, 2021**

**Task Force Meeting 3 Minutes-** Thursday November 4, 2021 at the JEDCO Conference Center 701 Churchill Parkway—9:00 a.m.

## **Committee Members in Attendance**

Mike Quigley  
Angela Callais  
Francisco Christian  
Bob Evans Jr.  
Brian Grenrod  
John Litchfield  
Jim Martin  
Oscar Pipkins  
Jim Young  
Steve LaChute  
Victor LaRocca  
Brett Lawson  
Ruth Lawson  
Pamela Watson

Seeing that there was a quorum of task force members, Chairman Mike Quigley called the meeting to order:

### **1. Approval of Minutes:**

Task Force Meeting 2 minutes were forwarded on Monday November 1, 2001. Oscar Pipkins advised his name was misspelled in two places in the minutes. These changes will be made. Jerry Bologna moved and Jim Martin 2<sup>nd</sup> the approval of the minutes. The Committee unanimously approved the minutes.

### **2. New Business:**

- We sent a video of Task Force Meeting 2 for reference and to update anyone that was unable to attend. We will attempt to video all of our meetings.
- Task Force meeting 4 will be held on Thursday November 18, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. Room 405 in the Yenni Building.
- All 7 Parish Council members have confirmed they want to address the task force. The next 2 meetings will be dedicated to hearing their presentations. Councilwoman VanVrancken is here today and she was welcomed.

- The resolution that created the task force limits our term to December 9, 2021. Due to Hurricane Ida we were delayed and we are now getting into the holidays, it was suggested we propose a resolution extending our term until January 31, 2022. There is a council meeting on December 8, 2021 which we can request the extension. It was motioned by Jerry Bologna and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Jim Martin that we seek a **resolution to extend the term of the task force** to January 31, 2021. **The motion was unanimously approved.** The Chairman requested Jeremy Dwyer to prepare the resolution for the December 8, 2021 council meeting agenda.
- We will be scheduling Task force Meeting 5 on December 2, 2021 at the GGB in Gretna.
- Oscar Pipkins at the October 28, 2021 had questioned if an allowable use of the funds is providing services to disproportionately impacted communities and can this be proposed by task force members. The Chairman advised that in future meetings, the members will have a chance to propose initiatives
- The Municipalities have been invited to present to the task force.. The City of Kenner and Harahan have responded but not confirmed any dates. Their proposal should be mutual use of funds which benefit in a parish-wide way. Westwego Mayor Robert Billiot was present and welcomed.

### **3. Presentations by the Business Associations:**

1. Presentation JEDCO by Executive Director Jerry Bologna (see attached):

The JEDCO recommendations are gleaned from their codified Jefferson Edge.

- Broadband Connectivity ... There needs to be a study of where the gaps or the digital divides are located as well as an assessment of the physical infrastructure. This recommendation is likely aligned with the Jefferson Parish Administration, business and the school system. Covid and Hurricane Ida have exposed the weakness we have as a community in regard to connectivity. There will be in all probability other significant sources of funding for broadband.
- Water and Sewer infrastructure—This is another issue made more prominent because of Hurricane Ida. New funding should emphasize Green Infrastructure such as rain gardens in public land.
- Create Equity Services within Jefferson Parish--- Jefferson Parish to establish an Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. There needs for an assessment of minority and women owned businesses. The new office will assist them in finding grants and other sources of funding for their businesses. The office can be under

Jefferson Parish government or one of the business associations, but it will require long term funding.

- Work force Development--- the key clusters are health care, supply chain, environmental, coastal restoration and technology sector.
- Equity Focused Services— A cataclytic change for opportunities for affordable housing is needed. Other housing stock enhancement programs such as grants or low cost loans for façade improvements or general renovations are important. Access to healthy foods is a big issue, there is a food desert in the Avondale, Bridge City area. There is a lack of big grocery stores to provide a variety of healthy foods.
- Small Business Support--- Deploy funding to small businesses through grants. Based on what we have learned from the virus, allow business to make health mitigations improvements such as ventilations, outdoor seating and green infrastructure.

Jim Martin questioned how we implement broadband improvements..... is it done by the government, is it funds given to existing providers or bring in new providers? Is it just put in houses? Jerry Bologna answered that funding is needed to do a needs assessment and to provide information on the best practices in expanding broadband. Further, Jim explained that we need to incentivize to get people to want to move to Jefferson Parish. Incentives should be offered to bring companies that will hire people even if it is working from home.

Tim Coulon asked Jerry how JEDCO accessed the Parish's Economic Development fund. Jerry advised him that they had no direct access and had to have a specific need and request funding from the council.

Brian Grenrod asked Jerry what recommendation in his opinion would be a game changer. He listed the creation of the an Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as #1 and Improving the housing stock as #2, Furthermore he said to bring in new businesses the Parish has to improve the Housing, Education and Workforce. Jerry stated that JEDCO has good track record in reaching out to minority owned businesses and providing low interest loans

Lisa Jennings Barback stated we need to emphasize affordable housing or as she likes to call it workforce housing and wanted to know if JEDCO could facilitate the study for the new office of diversity, equity and inclusion. Jerry advised that JEDCO is capable and willing to conduct such a study but it would be up the Parish administration to determine this. Nonetheless, JEDCO is endeavoring to do an inventory of minority businesses.

Ruth Walker warned that some of our housing stock proposed initiatives need to be aware of NFIP ratings and how it relates to potential raising of homes during renovations.

Jennifer Van Vrancken spoke on the state of the housing stock. In many areas of Metairie the market is taking care of improving housing. But there is a missing element such as condos or garden homes for people that want to scale down. Jerry Bologna referred to it as the “missing middle,” reiterating that older persons that want to downsize don’t have these opportunities. Our housing stock needs more options. Tim Coulon stated that perhaps the Jefferson Parish Finance Authority to move to change its mission to include home renovations.

2. Presentation Jefferson Chamber by Former Chamber President Todd Murphy  
Todd emphasized that the use of the funds need to Move the Needle or be transformative.

- Broadband Internet—we need better speed and capacity for schools and health related (Telehealth)
- Todd spoke of a previous proposal for a Parish Health Dept. He praised the great work of Dr. Joseph Kanter of the La. Office of Public Health. And questioned the necessity of the Parish adding this as a Dept. and whether there is another source of funds other than the American Rescue Plan to fund this. We have some very good health systems in Jefferson Parish and one of them could serve as our official health dept.
- The Federal Government will in all likelihood be providing funds for Broadband. We need to plan to leverage these funds with the State.
- Infrastructure funds need to prioritize resiliency. We need to invest in putting lines underground when possible and strive to keep retail corridors open after our increasingly frequent storms. We need to find better ways to harden our infrastructure.
- The Chamber sponsored the successful Nashville Intercity Trip this year. The key takeaway was that they did long term investments that didn’t come to fruition early on but proved to be long term successes.
- We need to attract people to Jefferson Parish. In spite of its obvious impediments, New Orleans attracts some of our young because it’s trendy and hip. We need to invest in Fat City, Lafreniere sub-area and Terrytown.
- Invest in Marketing and incentives to encourage to move here and engage in best practices in regard to economic development. We need to capitalize on our riverfront and emphasize our Harvey Canal leads to the Gulf.

- Education is key component in the community. There is confidence in Dr. Gray's leadership. We need to leverage the funds the school boards is receiving with Parish funds. The Parish has a high bond rating and a substantial reserve fund and should make investments in the community.
- The Nashville Intercity trip had another takeaway. It was the success of land banking. It helps the local government to control the process. It gives the government-Parish the power of determining its future and a tool for economic development. It will give us control if we decide we are lacking a type of industry. We can attract them by RFP. Nashville cited the examples of land banking bring in the headquarters of Oracle and the development of the Gulch which was an old train yard. When the city land banks in can have it zoned with the proper infrastructure in place so it's ready for use. When a big company is seeking a place to move or expand, bringing jobs to the new area, the land is ready for use.

The land banking idea prompted quite a few remarks from the members of the task force:

Bob Evans cited the Parish's purchase of the 132 acres Lasalle Tract as a great example of land banking. When the Parish did this, it initially did not generate a lot of public support and came under a lot of scrutiny. The Parish at the time of purchase did not have any ideas as to what the use of the land would be at that time. Some may have thought it would have been speculative and risky. As the years have passed, the land is now the home of the New Orleans Saints Facility, The minor league baseball stadium unofficially named the "Shrine on Airline". A JPSO District station, The Performing Arts Center, Lassalle Park Athletic Complex and Urban Forest. All a major benefit to Jefferson Parish.

Tim Coulon advised that Dennis Laucsha, the President of the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans, was the guest speaker at the last Jefferson Business Council meeting. The Saints respect the leadership of our Parish and want to support Jefferson. It is time for Jefferson to take the lead in the metropolitan area. Additionally he advised that Councilman Bonano is in talks with the Saints in regard to further developing a ten acre section of the Saints lease.

Brett Lawson commented that under the leadership of Mayor Belinda Constant, the City of Gretna is in the process of signing a contract(s) to upgrade a dilapidated shopping center, including buying property. He cited the development of downtown Gretna as a very walkable community and can be traced back to the Gattusso's investment in the City.

Jennifer Van Vrancken, citing Bob Evans comments that the LaSalle Tract was purchased without a specific intent, stated if we invest in land banking in areas such as Fat City, we will have to be prepared to support this idea even if there is initial criticism because of the long term benefits of such purchases.

Oscar Pipkins commenting on land banking said consideration needs to be given to the displaced. Typically areas that are prime areas for buyouts and upgrading are blighted areas. There are people in these areas and cannot be displaced without consideration of moving them to viable affordable housing.

3. Adair Dixon, President of the Elmwood Business Association advises that she would defer speaking today and will come and present at a future meeting as she needed to get additional input from her Board.
4. Lisa Jennings Barback, Executive Director of the Westbank Business and Industry Association (WBIA) presented:

She thanked the task force for including the West bank in our considerations and urged us to think holistically.

- The 2 years of stress created by Covid and the hurricanes has taken its toll on low income people the most.
- We need to invest in developing trade skills and childcare
- We need to invest in established agencies to accomplish our goals and essentially don't reinvent the wheel,
- Because of these crisis of the past 2 years, we need to be prepared for a mental health crisis ... post Covid syndrome or long haulers and PTS
- Large companies can essentially take care of themselves, small businesses need help by giving access to connectivity, child care and health care.
  - In the spirit of regionalism we need to step up and help the airport
  - In closing she again emphasized we need to act holistically and be the first in stepping up to fill the many needs.

4. **Presentation by Westwego Mayor Robert Billiot:**

Westwego Mayor Robert Billiot made a presentation to the Task Force:

1. He is reviving an effort to have a ferry run from Sala Ave. to Audubon Park. He is focusing on getting a facility built on the river.
2. He emphasized the food desert referred to by JEDCO, confirming that one exists in Westwego. He cited only having a Piggly Wiggly that doesn't always have fully stocked shelves.
3. The Main thrust of Westwego's presentation is they want to upgrade their water system and bring it up to a sufficient standard whereby Jefferson Parish

will then be willing to integrate it into their larger system. In furtherance of this, he had Mr. MC Gee of Burk-Kleinpeter give a Power Point presentation (Attached) on how the City of Westwego plans to upgrade the water system.

**5. Assistant Parish Attorney Victoria Landrieu reported on Public Meeting and Remote Attendance**

Assistant Parish Attorney Victoria Landrieu addressed the Task Force concerns in regard to remote meetings. She reported the following findings:

- 1) The governor has declared a state of emergency for the geographical area in which the public entity resides.
- 2) The nature of the emergency is such that meeting in person would be detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the public.
- 3) The presiding officer of the public body certifies on the meeting notice that the meeting's agenda will be limited to discussing only the following items:
  - Matters directly related to the public entity's response to the emergency and which are critical to the health, safety, or welfare of the public.
  - Matters that, if they are delayed, will cause curtailment of vital public services or severe economic dislocation and hardship.
  - Matters that are critical to continuation of the business of the public body and that are not able to be postponed to a regular meeting due to a legal requirement or deadline that cannot be postponed.
  - Other matters that are critical or time-sensitive and that, in the determination of the presiding officer, should not be delayed; however, these items cannot be discussed at the meeting unless the voting members approve such by a 2/3 majority.

**6. Old Business:**

None.

**7. Pubic Comments:**

None.

**8. Meeting Adjourned:**

Motion was made by Bob Evans, Jr. and seconded by Oscar Pipkins to adjourn the meeting.

