

Public Hearing
November 9, 2021
Discuss Funding Option for New Parish Jail

As advertised the Police Jury held a public hearing on Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. in the Police Jury Meeting Room of the Courthouse Building, 200 Court Street, Ste. 207, Ville Platte, La to hear public comments and/or questions on the Jury funding options for a new parish jail.

John Mayeaux with Sisung Securities Corporation out of New Orleans, La addressed the Jury in making a presentation on options the Jury has for funding of a new parish jail. The Proposal showed the jail construction with 200 beds at a cost of \$85,000 per bed will cost approximately \$20,400,000. Looking at the General Fund, Mr. Mayeaux stated, as the jail expenses along with other operating expenses have increase, revenue in the General Fund has not grown at the same pace. This fund has been in a deficit position within the past couple of years and cannot sustain the current level of expenditures for the jail. The Police Jury's source of Bond Debt Service for the parish jail include rededication of a portion of the parish library tax, rededication of a portion of the parish health unit tax or use of the Sheriff's sales tax.

Presentation also included the proposal submitted by Sheriff Charles Guillory. Mr. Guillory's plan is consolidate dispatch operations of the Sheriff's Department and 911, and to assume responsibility for 911 and become Executive Director. All parish and local law enforcement and fire districts could upgrade to unified E-force system. Proposed estimated savings are \$105,000 annually from eliminating the Executive Director's salary. The Parish also estimates the Sheriff could save \$250,000 annually from the merger of dispatch operations by repurposing existing Sheriff's Department staff. This would require the Police Jury to assume governing authority of 911 District and appoint the Sheriff as Executive Director. The Sheriff's plan also included assuming the role of OEP Director concurrently with 911; estimated savings are \$9,400 annually from eliminating OEP Director Salary.

One-time surplus funds in the amount of \$2,100,000 to contribute towards construction is derived from ARPA fund, \$1,100,000 (No voter approval needed) and \$1,000,000 surplus funds from the Health Unit Fund, which will require approval to expand permitted uses of funds.

Mr. Mayeaux explained that there are lots of pieces and parts in trying to take different ideas for discussion. This project cannot be paid for out of the General Fund solely. The only way this jail will be able to operate and funded is from some other source of revenues as stated.

Former District Attorney Brent Coreil addressed the Jury in agreement with the needing of a new jail. A short term solution would be to use a vacant building across the street from the courthouse that is for sale and could be converted to a jail annex for less cost. Mr. Coreil stated that he for a new jail however is against the proposal by the Sheriff to build a new parish jail in the Industrial Park which would hurt the park. Mr. Coreil commended the 911 Staff and would love to see it protected for the excellent and dedicated workers.

Police Juror Bryan Vidrine responded to Mr. Coreil stating in 2019 plans were drawn up on how to use the facility across the street from the Courthouse. Unfortunately that plan was rejected therefore could not move forward. The Jury has been working on this since 2015. Whether the jail is located in the Industrial Park or anywhere else, a prison is there to hold prisoners not to release. It may not look good but it will not be a hazard to any local residents or businesses.

Sheriff Charles Guillory addressed the Jury in stating we need a new jail and his proposal is something for the Jury to consider. It was also stated from the Sheriff that the GEO prison in Pine Prairie is too costly to purchase.

District Attorney Trent Brignac then addressed the Jury. Mr. Brignac made a statement that Evangeline Parish does have a crime problem and the Sheriff is doing a good job. He mentioned that the proposed location of the new jail is not a main concern. Business and industry is concerned about not having to worry about crime and also a parish government that is financially sound. Also a main concern is

bankruptcy. The parish will get to a point where they will not be able to pay the bills. Once this happens the parish will no longer be in charge of the parish, the state will come in and take over all operations. Mr. Brignac concluded will stating that if the parish does not come together as a team and get a jail built, in a couple of years there will be regret that no action was taken.

911 Executive Director and Office Emergency Preparedness Director, Liz Hill, also commented, in stating that she wanted to correct a topic of her salary. Mrs. Hill has been serving the parish for the past 27 years. She stated her salary of \$72,384 includes a 4 year college degree, with a major in Criminal Justice and a minor in Sociology. She specified that her salary amount was incorrectly stated in the audit and would like to clarify this information to the Jury and the public. Also Mrs. Hill highlighted that 911 has always had clean audits and has never been in a deficit and has a fund balance of \$974,000 from savings for more than 20 years.

Mr. Kenny Burgess, representing the Town of Basile stating that this decision is a major one and is concerned about the dispatching in their area. A fee is paid every month for 911 to dispatch the Basile area and the smaller communities in the parish and does not want to lose this service and questioned will this service continue.

Ville Platte Mayor Jennifer Vidrine is not against a jail but is for 911 and the office of Emergency Preparedness, in staying where it is and how it is.

Mr. Larry Johnson of Pine Prairie stated he was in favor of the Sheriff's plan to consolidate 911 and the Sheriff's Department as a cost saving.

Police Juror Ryan Ardoin said fatherless homes and sin is rampant in this parish. People don't repent and God has had enough. Until people get on their knees and start repenting, and fathers start taking their children to church and take lead of their home, this will continue. Its takes us to speak to someone in our community in coming together as one, we have to look to our Heavenly Father.

President Ryan Williams concluded the public hearing in clarifying that the jury will review all options available and make a decision on which way to go.

Ryan Williams, President

Donald Bergeron, Secretary-Treasurer