

BOSSIER PARISH POLICE JURY
FIRE DISTRICT COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES

Mr. Glenn Benton, Chairman

March 20, 2024

The Fire District Committee of the Bossier Parish Police Jury met on this 20th day of March, 2024, at 11:30 a.m., in the Police Jury Conference Room, Bossier Parish Courthouse, Benton, Louisiana. Mr. Glenn Benton, Chairman, called the meeting to order, with the following members present:

Mr. Glenn Benton, Chairman, Mr. John Ed Jorden, Mr. Doug Rimmer, Mr. Philip Rodgers

Others present for the meeting:

Mr. Bob Brotherton

Mr. Jimmy Cochran

Ms. Ashley Ezell

Mr. Chris Faulk

Ms. Stacie Fernandez

Mr. Butch Ford

Ms. Julie Gill

Ms. Pam Glorioso

Mr. Eric Hudson

Mr. Patrick Jackson

Ms. Megan Ramos

Mr. Tom Salzer

Mr. Keith Sutton

Benton Fire Chief J. T. Wallace

Mr. Rod White

Mr. Glenn Benton called the meeting to order, advising that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the potential of the parish creating a new Fire Prevention Bureau for the area of Benton Fire District No. 4. He stated that Benton Fire Chief J. T. Wallace is here today to discuss this matter and to explain the purpose of the program.

Chief Wallace stated that he received a letter dated August 23, 2022, from the Louisiana State Fire Marshal, concerning the creation of Fire Prevention Bureaus around the state in an effort to protect life and property from the hazards of fire or explosion, and to ensure the safety of citizens. He stated that Benton Fire District No. 4 immediately began putting the bureau together and creating a board separate from the Benton Fire District No. 4 Board of Commissioners. Chief Wallace explained that once the new state fire marshal came into office, they were advised that this should go through the parish governing authority, the Bossier Parish Police Jury. Chief Wallace added that he received a letter dated February 22, 2024, which advised that the Benton Fire District has 90 days in which to create the Fire Prevention Bureau, which means there are approximately sixty days left to get this matter resolved.

There was discussion of the current process of how a business receives approval to open. Chief Wallace, along with Chris Faulk of Benton Fire District No. 4, explained the duties of the Fire Prevention Bureau, advising that most inspections are complaint driven currently with the state. Chief Wallace and Mr. Faulk explained that there are no fees associated with this inspection and stated that the creation of a Fire Prevention Bureau will result in a better fire rating for the entire district.

Mr. Faulk stated that he currently inspects new construction in conjunction with the area fire marshal representative, and the creation of the Fire Prevention Bureau will give Benton Fire District No. 4 the ability to inspect and look for life safety precautions that should be included in a new business. Chief Wallace stated that there are no fees associated with these extended duties, as the costs saved in fighting fires and other life-threatening events far outweigh the salary the district pays for the inspector. He gave an example of a restaurant that recently opened in the district, who upon opening, did not have a fire extinguisher in the building. He stated this is exactly the type of thing that could be discovered and corrected during a Fire Prevention Bureau inspection before a business opens. Butch Ford, Parish Administrator, stated that the district has already been approved by the state and has received a certificate to perform these inspections and provide the services.

Mr. Patrick Jackson, Parish Attorney, stated that he believes there should be a formal hearing process that is open to the public. He stated the parish should have an education program built in so that the public understands that this could result in positive outcomes in the insurance

rates for businesses. Mr. Jackson stated that the parish wants this to be a business-friendly initiative, with an implementation and education plan in place.

Mr. Benton stated he understands that there are currently no fees associated with the inspection and asked Chief Wallace about the possibility of adding fees in the future. Chief Wallace stated that he does not anticipate ever charging fees for this inspection, as the benefits of the inspection for businesses, as well as the district, far outweigh the cost of yearly salary for the employee who does the inspection. Chief Wallace stated the inspections would continue annually. Mr. Benton stated that he feels this may be a question many businesses will have as the process goes along. Chief Wallace stated that this will result in a better fire rating for Benton Fire District No. 4, and that will mean a lot to businesses, as well. Mr. Tom Salzer stated that in his experience, a fire rating of 1 to 10 results in a huge difference in the cost of insurance.

Mr. Jackson recommended that the parish schedule a public hearing to consider this matter to be held thirty days from now, with notices of the public hearing to be published in the Bossier Press Tribune. He further recommended that a copy of the proposed ordinance be made available in the police jury office, as well as posted on the police jury's website for the public to review. Mr. Jackson also stated that the parish will need to involve the Chamber of Commerce in getting the word out to the public as well as the MPC in getting these requirements on their checklist once adopted.

Mr. Ford provided a copy of a resolution from the Louisiana Legislature giving a property tax exemption, in addition to homestead exemption, to all first responders. Mr. Ford stated that the resolution requires that the governing body approve adding this additional exemption in each jurisdiction. He added that Bossier Parish Tax Assessor, Mr. Bobby Edmiston, is prepared to come to the next meeting to discuss this matter, and Mr. Ford will schedule that Policy and Procedures Committee meeting for April 3, 2024.

Mr. Jackson acknowledged that the state has the authority to adopt this property tax exemption, but it has instead placed the burden on local government. He recommended that the police jury request the school board, towns, and the city governments in the parish to ask for a resolution in support from each entity, as the decrease in tax revenue will have the most impact on their revenue.

Mr. Jackson also reminded the committee that 2024 is a reassessment year for property taxes, and the parish will have the option to either roll forward or roll back its millages. He added that while expenses have continued to rise, the amount of revenue has remained stagnant. These tax exemptions affect the parish's ability to continue to support and maintain infrastructure, both now and in the future.

This concluded the meeting of the Fire District Committee Meeting. The meeting was adjourned by the Chairman at 12:19 p.m.

MEGAN C. RAMOS
INTERIM PARISH SECRETARY

GLENN BENTON, CHAIRMAN
BOSSIER PARISH POLICE JURY