

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CITY
COMMISSIONERS FOR THE CITY OF PORT ST. JOE, FLORIDA, HELD AT
2775 GARRISON AVENUE, February 21, 2023, at Noon.**

The following were present: Mayor Buzzett, Commissioners Hoffman, Langston, and Lowry. City Manager Jim Anderson, City Clerk Charlotte Pierce, and City Attorney Clinton McCahill were also present. Commissioner Ashbrook was absent.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes

A Motion was made by Commissioner Langston, second by Commissioner Lowry, to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 7, 2023, and the Special Meeting of February 10, 2023. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0.

Planning Board Recommendations

St. Joe Company – Windmark Beach North Phase I Parcel #04229-003R

A Motion was made by Commissioner Hoffman, second by Commissioner Lowry, to approve the Plat for Windmark Beach North Phase II Parcel #04229-003R. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0.

City Engineer – Josh Baxley

Long Avenue Water / Sewer

At the instance of Public Works Director, John Grantland, Dewberry reviewed the post construction video and compared it with the pre-construction video. It was discovered that 18 laterals that were identified as “active” were reinstated into the mainline with no lining or replacement. The contractor has agreed to video the laterals in question and either replace or cap.

Long Avenue Paving

Drainage structures for First Street are on-site. There is a drainage issue at the intersection of Long Avenue and First Street. Dewberry is working on this as it involves fiber optic that was not properly identified earlier.

Avenues C and D Paving

The contractor is currently working on patches for Avenue D.

Dr. Joe Parking Lot Paving

The parking lot is completed. The parking area is currently closed as the contractor allows a 30-day cure time before applying the thermoplastic striping. Oil and dirt from vehicular traffic can cause issue with the thermoplastic cohesion and application. The striping is scheduled for March 8, 2023.

Beacon Hill Sewer Design

Dewberry is in the process of finalizing the low-pressure design.

SCOP Grant Application 2023; Resolution 2023-01

A Motion was made by Commissioner Langston, second by Commissioner Hoffman, to approve Resolution 2023-01 for the SCOP Grant Application. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. This will be used to resurface Avenues C and D from Highway 98 to MLK Blvd.

City Attorney

Mr. McCahill did not have anything specific to discuss with the Commissioners.

Old Business

City Projects

Mr. Anderson shared that the City is replacing stormwater pipe on Tenth Street.

Workforce Housing Update

Mr. Anderson noted that the MOU has been signed, and he continues to work on securing an easement for the access road.

Leesa Haire, Port St. Joe Garden Club Trees and Signs on Reid Avenue

Ms. Haire updated the Commission on recommendations from an arborist which included not to remove the oak trees, trim them, raise the canopy, and replace the four dead trees with Drake Elms and Palm Trees.

Ms. Haire requested that signs be added to flower beds along Reid Avenue to direct people to the stores. The cost of the sign slats will be covered by the respective businesses that want a sign.

At a previous meeting, a Motion was made to allow H & H Trees to remove the Oak Trees. A Motion was made by Commissioner Hoffman, second by Commissioner Lowry, to rescind that Motion. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Hoffman, second by Commissioner Lowry, to pay for the trees to be trimmed by Gulf Coast Tree Specialist for \$6,100. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. The costs of signs slats will not be paid for by the City.

Commissioner Hoffman requested that the Commission consider adding a line item to the budget for the Port St. Joe Garden Club to cover work done downtown.

New Business –

Hazard Mitigation 75/25 Grant Approval

A Motion was made by Commissioner Lowry, second by Commissioner Langston, to approve the Hazard Mitigation 75/25 Grant. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. This will provide funding to elevate the control panels for 12 lift stations damaged by Hurricane Michael.

Highway 98 Beautification Grant Award

A Motion was made by Commissioner Lowry, second by Commissioner Hoffman, to sign the Highway 98 Beautification Grant. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. The Port St. Joe Garden Club will be assisting with this project.

Williams Avenue Parking Spots Paving Quotes

A Motion was made by Commissioner Hoffman, second by Commissioner Langston, to approve the quote from Jason White Construction, LLC in the amount of \$4,500 to asphalt the parking area near This is Garden Food on Williams Avenue. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0.

High School Manhole Replacement

A Motion was made by Commissioner Langston, second by Commissioner Lowry, to accept the quote of Mainline Construction in the amount of \$22,098.43 for replacement of the Port St. Joe High School Manhole. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. The Gulf County School Board has agreed to pay one half of the cost of these repairs.

Cheryl Steindorf Gulf County Citizens Coalition for a Healthy Future

Ms. Steindorf stated the coalition was created because of the concerns about LNG and No Petro. She asked about plans to clean up the property across from the Farmacy and Mama Dot's, and looking at the MLK Blvd., infrastructure.

Public Works – John Grantland

RFP 2022-20 Public Works Storage Building

A Motion was made by Commissioner Lowry, second by Commissioner Hoffman, to accept the low bid of \$500,275 from C. Lawrence Construction. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. \$400,000 was budgeted for construction and the remaining funds will come from other sources.

Surface Water Plant – Larry McClamma

Mr. McClamma did not have anything to update the Commission on.

Wastewater Plant – Kevin Pettis

Bar Screen Replacement – Request to Bid

A Motion was made by Commissioner Langston, second by Commissioner Hoffman, to advertise for the Bar Screen Replacement. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. This item is in the budget and on the current CIP.

Mr. Pettis shared there is 1.7" freeboard in the lagoon, the plant will begin discharging on March 6, 2023, and four workers will be attending a CEU class.

Finance Director – Mike Lacour

FEMA Update

Mr. Lacour has spoken with FEMA, the project is still in review step 6 of 8, and they anticipate a decision will be made on the review no later than April 15, 2023.

Mr. Lacour shared that reimbursement in the amount of \$165,000 is close to approval from FEMA for repairs to the Wastewater Treatment Plant from Hurricane Michael.

Code Enforcement – *Request for Demo*

A Motion was made by Commissioner Langston, second by Commissioner Hoffman, to approve the request to demo the house of Brenda Fisher, 214 Avenue E and a house located behind the Knights

of Pythias Lodge on Avenue C. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0. The County will help with these projects, the City will pay for the tipping fees and lien the properties to recover these costs.

Police Department – Chief Richards

Chief Richards did not have anything to update the Commission on.

City Clerk – Charlotte Pierce

Grants Update

Clerk Pierce shared that city staff continues to work with our grant writers on the availability of grants and opportunities of funding for the city.

High School Art Project Request

A Motion was made by Commissioner Hoffman, second by Commissioner Langston, to approve the request of the Port St. Joe High School Art Class to paint selected fire hydrants downtown. All in favor; Motion carried 4-0.

Citizens to be Heard –

Jim Sickels requested help in having the railroad tracks declared exempt for vehicles to stop at. Commissioner Langston, Mr. Anderson, and John Grantland shared that the request would need to come from the railroad owners as FL DOT does not accept requests from the City.

Akojua Gyamfuah, Executive Director Pioneer Bay Community, reviewed their programs and asked about being included in the PSJRA. Mayor Buzzett shared that PSJRA Meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month at 11 AM, prior to the City Commission Meetings and everyone is invited to attend.

The following individuals shared their concerns and opposition to a LNG Plant in Port St. Joe: Suzanne Lyon, Jim Mowbray, Donna Murnan, John Miller, and John Ehrman.

Charles Gathers thanked the Port St. Joe Fire Department for the outstanding job they did to keep the fire from spreading during the recent fire on MLK Blvd. He also asked if the property purchased from the St Joe Company could be cleaned and still used.

Chester Davis asked about an Open House meeting to discuss LNG and allow transparency, noted the training programs they are having at their center, and questioned why the City does not purchase vacant property in NPSJ for workforce housing.

Marvin Davis commended the Port St. Joe Fire Department for their work with the fire on MLK Blvd., while saving two other structures that night, and asked about dealing with a 3 or 4 story building. He stated he felt there was room for improvement.

Discussion Items by Commissioners

Commissioner Hoffman advised those present that the City has never sent a letter of support nor endorsed the LNG Project. He stated that he would not support any permit approval that bypasses FERC, and reminded everyone to stick to the facts.

Commissioner Hoffman referenced a document written by Dannie E. Bolden, A Tale of Two Communities “The White South - & - Black North” & The Failure of Black Elected Leadership Port St. Joe, Fla. He stated that this document made him sick to read and that if you support this letter, don’t support him. He shared that he was hurt by the letter, and that it was very unprofessional. He requested that a copy of the document be included with the minutes.

Commissioner Lowry stated that he has received a lot of information on the LNG project, he will be fair to the company, noted that the City has not received a proposal or application, and that he will hear them out.

Commissioner Langston stated that he will not support anything to hurt this community.

Mayor Buzzett is comfortable with the remarks shared by the Commissioners. He noted that if a Development Order Request is received, due diligence will be done, that he has been 100% transparent and will not do anything to harm the bay or City. The Mayor also shared that, after hearing about the LNG Project and because of the continuous questions, he requested a meeting with LNG representatives. This was a fact finding meeting, and no decisions or commitments were made. He will listen to all sides, study the issue before making a decision, and he will continue to do what is best for the City.

Motion to Adjourn

There was no other business to come before the Commission and Mayor Buzzett adjourned the meeting at 1:50 P.M.

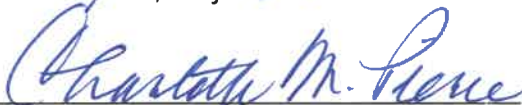
Approved this 21st day of March 2023.



Rex Buzzett, Mayor

3/21/23

Date



Charlotte M. Pierce, City Clerk

3/21/23

Date

A Tale Of Two Communities
"THE WHITE SOUTH -&- BLACK NORTH"
&
The Failure Of Black Elected Leadership
Port St. Joe, Fla.
By: Dannie E. Bolden

A HISTORIAL LEGACY OF STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC RACISM IN PORT ST. JOE, FLORIDA (Part 1,):

The traumatic barriers cause by racism, discrimination, environmental injustice, and economic disenfranchisement have been unrelenting for the "Black" (African American) residents living in the City of Port St. Joe's, Northside Community. For years these barriers along with systemic political, social and cultural discrimination have created physiological and psychological stresses on the overall health and wellness of black residents. These chronic barriers can have a negative side effect on people across all racial and cultural backgrounds. The unique psychological and contextual factors imposed on black people oftentimes go unnoticed, and without explanation. Sometimes black people are unaware of the causes of their stress regardless of their level for acculturation and admittance. Racism in all its forms continues to be a pervasive side effect for people possessing a "dark hue." Now days it not fashionable to talk about race, racism, bigotry, racial discrimination and especially, Slavery, Jim Crow, Segregation, and Lynching. However, I am not someone willing to go along just to get along. My belief is to be silent and sit on the sidelines while injustice is being done to another human being, black, white, brown of any skin hue, is a sin against humanity.

Since 2001, I have used my voice and talents to help bring about positive changes and improvements in the life of my family and their neighbors in North Port St. Joe. However, speaking truth to the powerful and demanding equality access to funding and other resources for North St. Joe has its challenges. The white elites and subserviate blacks have labeled me a troublemaker. A word that is used to describe anyone who, dares to challenge the structure that favors the wealthy and privilege families that runs the City and County. Over the years, I have observed how the tax paying citizens of North Port St. Joe have not received equal access to the resources and opportunities needed to improve their community. For years, white men living on the Southside of Port St. Joe, have had a majority control of the elected City Mayor and City and, County Commission positions. The predominately males who hold these positions are beholdng to and controlled by the wealthier white owned businesses. Up and until it's closing these wealthy white men along with the St. Joe Paper ran the City and County government. For more than 60 years they demonstrated no concern for the health, safety and welfare of the people living in the Black Community of North Port St. Joe.

For many years the words used to describe North Port St. Joe were "Nigger village, The Jungle, Drugs infested and Nasty." Words that were used by some white parents, when warning their children to steer away from North Port St. Joe. Admittedly, today the community of North Port St. Joe is diverse and blended community, but the living conditions are not even close to that of the South Port St. Joe

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORTH PORT ST. JOE PROJECT AREA COALITION (NPSJPAC) REDEVELOPMENT EFFORTS (Part 1,):

Port St. Joe Florida has a history of systemic racism that continues to exist today. For decades, the path to the middle class in Port St. Joe was a job at the St. Joe Paper Company mill and its associated industries. It was a company town. The mill opened in 1938 after “Joe” acquired tens of thousands of acres of timber in the area, bought a nearby railroad, and extended its lines into Port St. Joe. The mill provided thousands of union jobs over the decades—for whites and African Americans—but with a declining market, the company sold the plant in 1996. By then, the St. Joe Company had moved into land development. Final closure of the local paper mill was completed in 1998, after a length downturn in the paper industry. It was adjacent to the target community and was its main provider of jobs. Economic decline took a strong hold on the target area over the next decade. Unemployment rates soared to well over 20% and the town lost half of its population. Vacancy rates skyrocketed. Abandoned properties comprised 16% of all parcels and 52 acres of the total land area within the target black community. By 2008, conditions within the target black community had deteriorated to such an extent that the City commissioned a Finding of Necessity Study, which concluded: *‘The information summarized in (our) report is sufficient for the City of Port St. Joe to acknowledge the described conditions and to adopt a resolution that declares the rehabilitation, redevelopment and conservation of the study area (North Port St Joe) is in the interest of public health, safety, morals and welfare.’* The City adopted a resolution declaring North Port St. Joe a qualified redevelopment area in early 2008.

Since the City of Port St. Joe adopted the 2008 resolution there has not been the financial resources nor investments made, to address or eliminate the identified blighted conditions described in the Finding of Necessity. For 10 years the City Commissioners provided no leadership, guidance nor did they prioritize eliminating the blighted conditions in North Port St. Joe (NPSJ). In-fact the City immediately placed that burden on the backs of the residents and property owners. One City Commissioners said, “If they want to start revitalizing and redeveloping their community, some of the property owners should sell their property and let someone else develop it.”

The City’s Redevelopment Agency Director (CRA) showed no willingness nor desire to write grants nor provide guidance to the Community Redevelopment Agency Board, as to how it could support the redevelopment and revitalization of NPSJ. The facts are the CRA Director, provided no leadership or guidance to Port St. Joe City Commission (Community Redevelopment Board) in identifying and acquiring funding and other resources needed to address the blighted conditions and spark revitalization and redevelopment in NPSJ.

Due to the City’s lack of will and desire to address the blight conditions in NPSJ, the property owners and residents’ living in North Port St. Joe, came together in February 2016, and formed the North Port St. Joe Project Area Coalition (NPSJPAC). The Coalition’s priority was to take a leadership role in implementing the community’s redeveloped strategies, as outlined in their 2016 Update to the North Port St. Joe Community Redevelopment Masterplan. This residents and property owners were determined that their agreed upon Masterplan would be the blueprint for the Community’s revitalization and redevelopment.

Since 2016 the NPSPAC, has achieved successes in its efforts but it still has not received the types of financial support the City of Port St. Joe could provide if it chose to do so. A recent example of how the City's Mayor, Commissioners and staff can work diligently to secure resources, was by how quickly funding and other financial resources were secured to restore and redevelop the Southside Community (A predominantly white community) after Hurricane Michael in 2018. The City Commission along with local, State and Federal agencies prioritized the revitalization and redevelopment of the South Side Community. Currently, single family housing developments are underway throughout the City's South Side. As well, the South Side's Commercial Business District (Reid Avenue) is now restored to its Pre-hurricane Michael conditions. While all this growth and development is underway on (WHITE) Southside of Port St. Joe, the (BLACK) Northside of Port St. Joe, is still in its blighted and unsafe conditions prior to Hurricane Michael. Conditions that were worsened due to the impacts of the storm.

HOW HAS THE ELECTION OF TWO BLACK COMMISSIONERS BENEFITED NORTH PORT ST. JOE? (Part 1,)

The time has come for the residents of North Port St. Joe to realize and "Know Their Value." No longer should the residents elect Black City and County Commissioners who are "Boot Lickers." Individuals who are compromised and beholden to the White Power Structure. Neither of two black elected officials have championed or done anything of significance to promote, nor lead in the advancement and redevelopment of the community they were elected to serve. Their agenda is to sit in the City and County Commission meetings and rubber stamp projects and developments their "White Overseer," put before them. These two current elected officials who have no vision, plans nor a desire to "Improve the quality of life", for the residents of North Port St. Joe. They are unwilling to challenge the City and County on behalf of constituents living in North Port St. Joe.

Elected based on their popularity and family connections these two individuals are completely failing the residents who voted to put them in such an important position of leadership. The truth of the matter is prior to being elected to the City and County commission seats, neither of them were noticeable nor active in the community service, except as basketball coaches. An activity they were paid to perform. In fact, neither was remembered to have attended City or County Commission meetings. Nor had either served as a volunteer on a board or citizens committee. Yet, these two individuals were elected to fill two of those vital and important positions in a community, with no understanding or experience in community advocacy and engagement. As a result of a lack of understanding of the political process, lack of concern for the health and safety of the residents of North Port St. Joe.

City Commissioner Eric Langston, was overheard telling me (Dannie Bolden) on a phone call saying, "I don't give a F—K where they put that natural gas facility, the people in the community who are concerned can kiss my ass and you can too." At the time Pastor Chester Davis, was on the phone call and overheard the remarks made by Commissioner Langston. I was shocked but not surprised by his response. Eric, was only saying and doing what he was instructed to do by his "Overseers." His lack of motivation to champion the needs of the residents of North Port St. Joe can clearly be observed when reviewing old City Commission meeting minutes and videos. Oftentimes showing up late for meeting, appearing unprepared and speaking inaudible and incoherent at times. Langston is completely in over his head as a Commissioner. He doesn't possess the attitude nor temperament to hold in such an important and essential position of responsibility. The time for a change in elected leadership for North Port St. Joe is long overdue.

North Port St. Joe must have elected representatives on the City Commission, who is there to work on their behalf. Although Commissioner Langston was elected to represent the entire City of Port St. Joe, his advocacy on behalf of the residents of North Port St. Joe has been a failure and disappointment.

County Commissioner, Sandy Quinn is elected primarily, to represent North Port St. Joe. He is run for his seat in a Single Member Election District. That means most of the people who elect him to office, live in North Port St. Joe. You would think Sandy's efforts while in office would be focused on addressing the many issues and barriers negatively impacting the quality of life for residents in his district. Issues and barriers that include; the lack of safe and affordable housing both single family and rentals, environmental hazards such a locating a liquified Natural Gas Storage Facility in a flood zone near next to NPSJ, without condition an environmental assessment study, blight removal, and infrastructure improvements such as stormwater and ground water drainage, as well as community redevelopment, entrepreneurship, small business development economic development, and community revitalization and creating community recreation actives that do not require resident to travel to the Southside of town to utilize such as the proposed field of dreams, multiuse sport complex.

Neither Sandy nor Eric offered no objection to the City's planned use of 1 million dollars of COVID Relief money to be used to build the Field of Dreams Sports Complex. Some of those funds should have been direct and use to address a need in NPSJ. Instead of lobbying for resources for the Northside to build out the open classrooms space on the Washington High School Campus, replace the air condition system in the Washington High Gym or even build a water splash park for community children. As always Sandy and Eric bowed to their White Overseers and supported using the COVID Relief funds build the Sports Complex and supported busing NPSJ children over to the southside of town to a facility.

When I think more about it those COVID Relief funds should have been granted to residents in the community who lost their job and needed assistance with recovering from the two years the pandemic held the country hostage. At least the money would have been used to assist the needy and not to build a legacy and memorial for Mayor Rex Buzzett. Which is the name I am willing to bet they will use when naming the Field of Dreams.

Over the next few weeks, I will be sharing more historical and current event updates, in the hopes to shine a light on issues that are impacting the lives Port St. Joe residents.