

MEETING MINUTES OF SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING

4/14/2025

Posted: Thursday, April 10, 2025, at 2:00 p.m

Notice of Special Public Meeting

Washington Parish Council

Special Meeting

Washington Parish Courthouse

908 Washington Street, Franklinton, Louisiana 70438

Council Chambers

Monday, April 14, 2025 @ 4:00 p.m.

AGENDA:

Item No. 1: Call to Order: Council Chairwoman Wagner called the meeting to order.

Item No. 2: Invocation: The invocation was led by Councilman Branch.

Item No. 3: Pledge of Allegiance: The pledge was led by Councilman Culpepper.

Item No. 4: Roll Call: Interim Clerk Danielle Folks called roll. Present were Joe Culpepper, Shawn Rice, Kim Wagner, Steven Branch and Carley King. Absent were Clark Harry and Reginald McMasters.

Item No. 5: Executive Session: Executive Session under La. R. S. 42:17A(1) involving personnel matters to discuss the qualifications of candidates for the Washington Parish Council Clerk position.

Councilman Rice: I make a motion that we go into Executive Session.

Councilman Branch: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: I have a motion by Councilman Rice and a second by Councilman Branch.

Roll Call of the Vote as follows:

YAYS: (5) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Branch, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: (1) Harry, McMasters

Council Chairwoman Wagner: At this time, I would ask that everyone exit Council Chambers and that Mr. David turn off the camera, in order that we interview each candidate. Once concluded, everyone will come back into Council Chambers. *Councilman McMasters entered the meeting. At this time, the Council went into Executive Session.*

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have concluded Executive Session. I need a motion to conclude Executive Session and hire a particular candidate.

Councilman Rice: I make a motion.

Councilman Culpepper: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman Rice and a second by Councilman Culpepper.

Roll Call of the Vote as follows:

YAYS: (6) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: (1) Harry

Council Chairwoman Wagner: At this time, we need a motion to hire a particular Council Clerk. Will someone make a motion?

Councilman King: I make a motion that we hire Jesse Applewhite as Council Clerk.

Councilman Rice: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: I have a motion by Councilman King and a second by Councilman Rice.

Roll Call of the Vote as follows:

YAYS: (6) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: (1) Harry

Item No. 6: Public Participation: Council Chairwoman Wagner: Would anyone from the public like to come forward and address the Council?

Councilman McMasters: As no one has come forward, I make a motion to close public participation.

Councilman Branch: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman McMasters and a second by Councilman Branch.

Roll Call of the Vote as follows:

YAYS: (6) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: (1) Harry

Item No. 7: Adjourn: Council Chairwoman Wagner: As there is no further business, I will ask for a motion to adjourn.

Councilman McMasters: I make a motion to adjourn.

Councilman Culpepper: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman McMasters and a second by Councilman Culpepper.

Roll Call of the Vote as follows:

YAYS: (6) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: (1) Harry



Kim Wagner, Council Chairwoman



Jesse Applewhite, Clerk
Washington Parish Council

Order of Voting:

Joe Culpepper
Shawn Rice
Kim Wagner
Clark Harry

Steven Branch
Reginald McMasters
Carley King

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(All Ordinances, Resolutions, and attachments in their entirety are available at the Office of the Clerk of the Council at 909 Pearl Street, Franklinton, Louisiana or at 985.839.7825, or wpgov.org)

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MEETING MINUTES OF 4/14/2025

Posted: Thursday, April 10, 2025, at 2:00 p.m.

Notice of Public Hearing

Washington Parish Council
Regular Meeting
Washington Parish Courthouse
908 Washington Street, Franklinton, Louisiana 70438
Council Chambers
Monday, April 14, 2025 @ 5:30 p.m.

Council Chairwoman Wagner called the meeting to order.

Ordinance No. 25-751: Adopt an Ordinance Authorizing the Parish President to Engage Pistorius Associates, LLC, as Architect for the Design and Management of Certain Construction Projects for Washington Parish.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Donna, can you speak on this?

Donna Graham, Director of Finance: Washington Parish Government would like to have an architect available when we have smaller projects, not necessarily for when we go out for major bids, but when we must get quotes for jobs. We want to make certain that we have proper specs and that we are following proper permitting and fire marshal requirements, even in our smaller jobs. We just felt as though we needed professional help with projects.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak? *As no one came forward, the Council moved to the next ordinance.*

Ordinance No. 25-752: Adopt an Ordinance Directing the Washington Parish President to Sign and Execute Documents on Behalf of the FY2026-2027 Louisiana Community Development Block Grant Application.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Donna, would you speak on this as well?

Donna Graham: If there's anyone in the audience who did not sign in, the notice is on the podium. Please do so before you leave. We are required to hold this hearing to inform the public that we are going to be applying for this grant, and to obtain citizen input for projects or needs they foresee in our community. These grants always have specific purposes, so the needs would have to fit within the specific purpose of the grants that we can apply for. This is the 2026-2027 LCDBG Program. The funds that will be allocated to Louisiana totals \$23 million, \$12 million in public facilities, \$6 million for a clearance program, \$2 million for economic development and \$2 million for Make a Difference. Any application that is submitted must meet one or more of the programs' national objectives, which are for the principal benefit of low to moderate income people, to eliminate our prevention of slums and blight and meeting the needs that pose a serious and immediate threat to the health and welfare in the community that are not met by other financial resources. The parish has adopted a participation plan, which is required for application to this grant. This public hearing is evidence of that citizen participation plan, because of activities being assisted by these funds. The parish does not anticipate any displacement of people with this

finding. The main purpose of tonight is to entertain comments from the public regarding community needs. At this time, all citizens can submit their views, comments, and their questions in writing to the parish within five (5) days. The parish has a long history in this program, and we've been awarded both water and street improvement projects. Currently, the parish is in the closeout for the 2023 street improvement grant for \$1.4 million, and we completed 5.4 miles of roadway with that. The grant was four (4) different target areas in Mitchell City, and then two (2) other roads, Sleepy Hollow and Mockingbird Hill. With this grant, public facilities are one of the areas that would be for street improvements and sewer applications. We can only do a street project if there is not a severe water need. We would have to confirm that through DEQ and LDH, so there is likely a good chance that a water project may be coming out of these funds. We could do water wells, disinfection of equipment, facilities, elevated and indoor ground storage tanks, pump stations, etc., new water lines and/or waterline replacement. That would be done through one of our two water districts, as in the Bogalusa Water Works or Varnado Water Works, not Bogalusa City Water. As for the streets, again the target areas would be low to moderate income. We could do a clearance program where we clear blighted properties. I believe we are currently working on that, to identify properties that we could clean up or demolish, like dilapidated buildings. This grant is a maximum of \$750,000 for the parish and for the state, they will be allocating \$4 million. I know this is something we would like to look into. Just as a note, these funds cannot be used to demolish publicly owned property, only privately owned property. Those are the main programs that are possibilities in this grant. If any of you have ideas or would like to discuss what might be available for this funding, please reach out. You can comment tonight and for up to five (5) days.

Jackie Tate: On the streets, does it have to be rural streets, or can it be on a state highway?

Donna Graham: This must be on parish roads.

Bill Lewis: *Mr. Lewis asked questions regarding the projects available and what would be considered viable.*

Donna Graham: You can read through the hand out available tonight. Bear in mind that we can only do one of these as a project, whether that be a street or water or clearance or economic development. We can't apply in all of them, and it is somewhat limited. Again, I would be more than happy to talk with you further if you would like to call or come to the office later this week.

We have to get a budget request, and then those requests must meet the requirements. You've got to hit that niche on that area, especially when you are talking about doing roads. I believe this time for the street project; they are only allowing you two (2) target areas.

Bill Lewis: *Mr. Lewis spoke regarding the restoration of the community center, and whether that would be a potential project.*

Donna Graham: This would be something to investigate, but I guess if we have a \$250,000 project on a community center, or do we get a \$2 million for streets?

Donna Graham: The minimum grant amount is \$500,000, but you can't split it.

Councilman McMasters: You can't split it. You must just do one (1) project. It's all where we decide the money would be best spent. Community input is going to be very important, but you must meet the low-income standard. It has to be in low-income areas. Many of us qualify for that. That would help you decide, Mr. Lewis, what you would like to put in for.

Mr. Lewis continued with his perspective on what kind of projects he should work on.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Thank you for your comments. Does anyone from the Council have any questions before we close the public hearing? *As no one commented, the Council proceeded with the Regular Council Meeting.*

Notice of Public Meeting

Washington Parish Council
Regular Meeting
Washington Parish Courthouse
908 Washington Street, Franklinton, Louisiana 70438
Council Chambers
Monday, April 14, 2025 @ 5:30 p.m.

AGENDA:

Item No. 1: Call to Order: Council Chairwoman Wagner called the meeting to order.

Item No. 2: Invocation: The invocation was led by Parish President Ryan Seal.

Item No. 3: Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge was led by Councilman King.

Item No. 4: Interim Council Clerk Danielle Folks called the meeting to order. Present were Joe Culpepper, Shawn Rice, Kim Wagner, Clark Harry, Steven Branch, Reginald McMasters, and Carley King.

Item No. 5: Approval of Minutes: March 24, 2025, Regular Council meeting. Council Chairwoman Wagner: Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak before the Council votes to accept the minutes?

Councilman McMasters: I make a motion that we accept the minutes of the March 24 meeting with any necessary changes.

Councilman Culpepper: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman McMasters and a second by Councilman Culpepper.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 6: Heather Seal, Riverside Medical Center: Heather Seal introduced herself as the Community Champion for Riverside Medical Center and the Delta Regional Community Health Systems Development Program. She spoke regarding Riverside being one of the few rural hospitals across the regional selected to participate in the program, and that being a testament to the commitment of the staff and leadership to improving health outcomes in our community. Mrs. Seal invited citizens to an upcoming community event on July 16 to discuss challenges of the community and how the community can work together to build a healthier future. The event will be held at First Baptist Church at 9 am.

Item No. 7: Proclamation: Fair Housing Month: *President Seal read the proclamation in its entirety, declaring the month of April as Fair Housing Month.*

Item No. 8: Ordinance No. 25-753: Introduce an Ordinance Amending Certain Ordinances Levying Sales Taxes in Washington Parish and Providing for Other Matters in Connection Therewith.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: This is an introduction only and will be further discussed at a public hearing on April 28, 2025.

Item No. 9: Ordinance No. 25-754: Introduce an Ordinance to Levy Taxes for 2025 - Millage at the Same Rate as Prior Year - On Property Subject to Taxation in Washington Parish.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: This is an introduction only and will be further discussed at a public hearing on April 28, 2025.

Item No 10: Ordinance No. 25-755: Introduce an Ordinance Authorizing the Washington Parish Government to Allow for an Ad Valorem Tax Exemption for Qualified First Responders.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: This is an introduction only and will be further discussed at a public hearing on April 28, 2025.

Item No. 11: Ordinance No. 25-751: Adopt an Ordinance Authorizing the Parish President to Engage Pistorius Associates, LLC, as Architect for the Design and Management of Certain Construction Projects for Washington Parish.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We discussed this earlier at our public hearing held prior to this meeting. Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak before the Council votes?

Councilman Branch: As no one has come forward, I move to adopt Ordinance No. 25-751.

Councilman Harry: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman Branch and a second by Councilman Harry.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 12: Ordinance No. 25-752: Adopt an Ordinance Directing the Washington Parish President to Sign and Execute Documents on Behalf of the FY2026-2027 Louisiana Community Development Block Grant Application.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We discussed this earlier at our public hearing held prior to this meeting. Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak before the Council votes?

Councilman Culpepper: As no one has come forward, I move to adopt Ordinance No. 25-752.

Councilman King: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman Culpepper and a second by Councilman King.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 13: Resolution No. 25-1392: Adopt a Resolution Approving the 2025 Annual Operating Budget of the Washington Parish Tourism Commission.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: A copy of the budget is attached to this resolution. Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak before the Council votes?

Councilman King: As no one has come forward, I make a motion to adopt Resolution No. 25-1392.

Councilman Rice: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman King and a second by Councilman Rice.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 14: Resolution No. 25-1393: Adopt a Resolution to Enter into a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the Southeast Louisiana Pregnancy Center for Women and Children.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: At our February 24 meeting, Resolution 25-1377 was passed, allowing Washington Parish Government to enter into a Cooperative

Endeavor Agreement with the Louisiana State Department of the Treasury for an appropriation of \$75,000. The purpose of that is for services rendered to the survivors of sexual assault. This resolution is to enter into a CEA with the Pregnancy Center to give them the \$75,000 for that purpose. Would anyone from the public like to come forward and speak before the Council votes?

Councilman Culpepper: As no one has come forward, I make a motion that we adopt resolution No. 25-1393.

Councilman Branch: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman Culpepper and a second by Councilman Branch.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 15: Public Participation:

Ben Sarro, Franklinton, Louisiana, spoke regarding the shortage of volunteer firemen in the parish, and seeking possible resolutions regarding same.

Councilman McMasters: I believe that the fire departments get their own budgets, and they can do what they want with their money; however, it is up to the fire chief and the board as to how that money is spent. They all receive their own tax money, and we do supersede, but we don't tell them how to spend their money.

Mr. Sarro inquired about pension funds for volunteers.

Donna Graham: We all pay into the pension fund, and every taxing agency that collects taxes is assessed by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's Office. I can explain it better to you at another time. We pay into it from our property taxes.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Would anyone else care to speak?

Councilman Rice: As no one has come forward, I make a motion that we close public participation.

Councilman Harry: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman Rice and a second by Councilman Harry.

Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()

Item No. 16: President's Report

Donna Graham: While I told each of you already, I wanted to formally announce my retirement on June 30. It's truly been an honor of mine to serve Washington Parish. I feel very honored to have the confidence of the Council to serve in this position. I will miss you all, and this has been a pleasure.

Ryan Seal: We are very proud of what Donna has done for our parish.

Alex Sumrall, Director of Public Works: The transportation report is as follows; we have been working on drainage projects, specifically, 52 roads totaling 81 miles. We've poured 395 tons of hot mix on 16 roads for 27 miles. We've installed 12 culverts, graded 34 roads totaling 67 miles. We've hauled 180 yards of gravel on 5 roads for 12 miles. We've bushhogged 190 roads, totaling 375 miles. We've installed 19 road signs. Kelvin Brown's crew picked up approximately 533 bags of trash on 34 roads. In addition to that, parish government workers participated in the "Keep Washington Parish Beautiful" program, where we picked up about 200 bags of trash. We've been mapping out roads for our 2025 road project to prepare to bid. Much of that will be done in-house.

Ryan Seal: We participated in Love the Boot Week last Saturday, and had our own thing here with Keep Washington Parish Beautiful. We had people volunteering on both sides of the parish. I know you are tired of my saying so, but just three (3) of us picked up trash on Penton Road. In about two (2) hours, we had filled up the bed of a truck. We can do better. We had so many tires to pick up, too. Part of our no litter campaign is going to schools to talk to our youth. We went to Thomas Elementary and spoke with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders about littering. We talked about the landfill. Love the Boot is a great program hosted by our Lieutenant Governor.

We also want to welcome a new business here in town, a flower shop called "Pretty Little Petals." We look forward to seeing their business thrive in our parish. Recently I attended a program and heard our Surgeon General, Dr. Ralph Abraham speak, along with the Secretary of Health, Drew Moreno. We met at both hospitals in our parish, and both were very eye-opening programs. I also attended a business forum hosted by SLU and North Oaks Hospital about the care of the Northshore community. I'm very grateful to have Riverside and Our Lady of the Angels serving our community.

Not long ago we talked about the Plainview Ball Field. The Parish government had the opportunity to repair the fence and install new lighting and welcomed the La Diamond Cutters. They had their first practice, and I had got to throw out the first pitch. This is a great group of kids and parents, and they are a very respectful bunch.

Our parish library branches are hosting open houses at their locations, bringing attention to our rural libraries. Last Saturday I was honored to attend Rotary's Night of Giving. I am very grateful to Heather Seal and Kim Wagner for their coordination with the event. It was a nice evening to benefit the Southeast Louisiana Pregnancy Center. As we approach Good Friday, parish government offices will be closed. The Choctaw Landfill will be closed on Saturday, April 19.

Mr. Sarro spoke to you about our volunteer firemen. One thing I've learned is that these volunteers respond to lift assists and medical calls. Their boards work to appropriate funds, and they certainly have my respect. We will do everything we can to help them. Most of the volunteers have full-time jobs and then sometimes get called out late for serious accidents. It takes a lot, and they have my full respect. Thank you for your comments, Mr. Sarro.

Item No. 17: Council Discussion

Councilman King: Donna, congratulations. We certainly appreciate your service to Washington Parish. I'm happy for you, but I don't want you to go. I appreciate everything you've done. While you've said that everyone is replaceable, I'm not so sure about you. I appreciate you. I also want to congratulate Jesse Applewhite on being hired as our new council clerk. Welcome.

Councilman King: I just want to say Happy Easter to everyone. Congratulations, Jesse. We're easy to work with. Mrs. Donna, congratulations.

Councilman Culpepper: Congratulations, Jesse. We're glad to have you. I believe that we will reject Donna's resignation or something. We will miss you.

Councilman Harry: Thank you for coming tonight. We look forward to seeing you on the 28th.

Councilman Branch: Mrs. Donna, thank you for everything you've done. Congratulations, Jesse. We look forward to working with you. Congratulations also to Councilman Rice for receiving the Silver Star for bravery. I also want to recognize soldier Jerry Holcomb and thank him for his service, and to welcome him back home.

Councilman McMasters: Good evening to all those who I've spoken with this evening. Mrs. Applewhite, congratulations. I know you are going to do well. Mrs. Donna, I'm not going to say congratulations because you said you 'might' retire. I don't think y'all really heard what she was saying. Things may change. We are not going to congratulate her right now. We have a couple of months to go. I'm looking forward to one day retiring myself to enjoy my kids and grandkids. So, whatever it is, I pray and hope that God will be with you to enjoy each bit of it. The Demon Football Team will be honored at the school board meeting on Thursday of this week. They represented Franklinton well and put us on the map when it comes to sports. Happy Easter to all. Remember those who are less fortunate than us and keep everybody in prayer.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: Please remember the annual Carry the Cross walk this Friday, beginning at 9 am. I hope you all can come out. Mrs. Donna, we will have big shoes to fill. I am happy for you and will miss you. Thank you to our administration for keeping us informed, and to Mr. David and Matt. We appreciate all that you do. Thank you to the public for being here tonight and we appreciate your comments. Thank you, Heather, for your presentation. You will do well in your new role. Every year, Heather has a dream and a vision for Rotary's Night of Giving. She raises the bar every year and we couldn't be prouder of her. This is Holdy Week and let's remember that a lot can happen in 7 days. Thank you all for coming out tonight.

Item No 18: Adjourn: Council Chairwoman Wagner: May I have a motion to adjourn?

Councilman King: I make a motion to adjourn.

Councilman Culpepper: Second.

Council Chairwoman Wagner: We have a motion by Councilman King and a second by Councilman Culpepper.

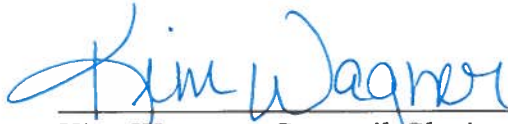
Roll Call of the vote as follows:

YAYS: (7) Culpepper, Rice, Wagner, Harry, Branch, McMasters, King

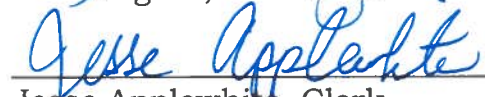
NAYS: ()

ABSTAIN: ()

ABSENCES: ()



Kim Wagner, Council Chairwoman



Jesse Applewhite, Clerk
Washington Parish Council

Order of Voting:

Joe Culpepper	Steven Branch
Shawn Rice	Reginald McMasters
Kim Wagner	Carley King
Clark Harry	

The next meeting will be held on Monday, April 28, 2025

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