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Council Votes to Establish TIF District in Belle Chasse

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Plaquemines Parish Council members approved an ordinance at their April 24 meeting that could allow the parish to receive funds for infrastructure projects in an area of Belle Chasse. Specifically, the ordinance created a special taxing district known as a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district.

It should be noted that this is not a new tax being levied on residents or businesses; rather, a TIF allows the state government to match a certain amount of state tax dollars already being collected and place it in a fund dedicated to infrastructure projects in the approved district.

The ordinance approved at the April 24 meeting passed by a 5-1-1 vote.

Voting in favor were district 2 council member Brian Champagne, dis-

trict 5 council member Patty McCarty, district 6 council member Ronnie Newsom, district 8 council member Mitch Jurisich, and district 9 council member Mark "Hobbo" Cognevich.

Voting against was district 1 council member Tyronne Edwards.

District 7 council member Carlton LaFrance abstained from voting, and district 3 council member Chris Schulz and district 4 council member Stuart Guey were not in attendance.

The process to implement this TIF district began back at the 2024 legislative session when Senator Pat Connick passed a bill that allowed PPG to pursue TIF districts. The April 22 ordinance technically begins that process, but PPG Economic Development Director Kelly DiMarco explained that this TIF district is just one of four that the parish government wants to implement.

How TIF districts actually work is

both simple and complex. According to DiMarco, when a TIF district is established, it establishes a baseline of sales tax collection in that area at a given point in time. Now that the TIF district has been put in place for a part of Belle Chasse near the proposed Peters Road Bypass project, any sales tax collected over that baseline would then be set aside in an account dedicated to parish infrastructure projects. And the state government would provide a matching rate or possibly more.

Important to note here is that PPG receives 1 percent of the sales tax collected in the parish. The state government receives 4.45 percent of the sales tax. So, after the baseline has been met, if the parish were to dedicate all the sales tax it collects (1 percent), the state government would provide "up to 2 percent" of its own collected sales

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Local Non-Profit Looks to Address Mental Health Issues in Parish

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Back in the first half of 2024, a non-profit organization called the Magnolia Blossoms of Plaquemines was founded. The organization, which is now led by Sharon Hinkley who serves as president of the Magnolia Blossoms, is a volunteer effort aimed at assisting those with economic disparities, mental health problems, and other issues all around the parish.

Since its founding, Hinkley explained in an interview, the organization has been busy: hosting a funding raiser in May 2024 and a pickleball tournament in November 2024. Now, Hinkley stated that the Magnolia Blossoms are looking to implement an initiative that will "bring teen Mental Health First Aid" to the parish community.

Hinkley added that the organization has been working with the Metropolitan Human Services District—another organization dedicated to assisting individuals with mental health issues in the New Orleans region—to administer this teen Mental Health First Aid training. Much of the details are still in the process of being worked out, but Hinkley stated that they are looking to partner with the school board on this initiative.

Overall, Hinkley hopes that this is the first of many programs that the Magnolia Blossoms will be able to implement in order to benefit the parish community. While there are many government entities and other organizations that provide good services for the parish, Hinkley said the Magnolia Blossoms are looking to address issues that may not get as much focus as others.

"Our mission is to address things that fall through the cracks. There are lots of issues that, for whatever reason, don't get as much attention. We want to make sure our organization is able to assist on those problems," Hinkley stated. "We have a lot of really talented people in this group from diverse backgrounds, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to make a real impact on the community for the better."

"I also want to emphasize that we're a parish-wide organization. We're not just focused on one area. Whether it's the east bank or the west bank, we want to make a difference in ev-

Civil Service Holds Contentious Hearing On "Wrongful Termination" Appeal

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On Wednesday, April 23 the Plaquemines Parish Civil Service Commission held an "appeal hearing" for former Plaquemines Parish Port Harbor & Terminal District (PPHTD) employee Donnie Sexton. Specifically, Sexton, who was fired from PPHTD back in 2024, is alleging that she was wrongfully terminated and that she was subjected to a hostile work environment during her time with the port.

The April 23 hearing began in the morning and ended late in the evening, running for just around seven hours, but it should be noted that it is still ongoing at this time. While testimony was given by Sexton, Tommy Serpas (who was contracted by the port to assist in handling financial responsibilities while the port lacked an official Finance Director), and Executive Director Charles Tillotson, there are several witnesses in this case who have yet to give their testimony. The hearing is scheduled to continue on May 7 at 11 a.m. in the Belle Chasse Library.

While the civil service commissioners are still parsing through all the evidence and the arguments from both sides to determine whether Sexton was wrongfully terminated by the port, some interesting information was revealed during the lengthy hearing. Most notably, it was noted that Serpas—a contractor with the company R. Johnson CPA & Business Advisors—was improperly supervising civil service employees.

During Serpas's testimony, Sexton's attorney Shermin Khan played a recording from an August 2024 employee evaluation meeting for Sexton. This recording showed that Serpas and Tillotson were the two "port officials" running that evaluation meeting. Serpas stated in the recording that he had created the employee evaluation report. However, he noted that he "could not put his name" on the evaluation as Sexton's supervisor and, instead, placed former Director of Administration Christie Nielsen's name on it.

HEARING— PAGE 2

PLAQUEMINES DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL



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On Wednesday, April 23, Plaquemines Parish Government (PPG) officials made a trip up to Baton Rouge for Plaquemines Day at the Capital. This event, held annually around this time of year, gives local officials a chance to display what the parish has to offer. Additionally, PPG officials are able to discuss issues or legislation that could impact the parish.

During the April 24 council meeting, district 2 council member Brian Champagne and district 6 council member Ronnie Newsom both noted that this year's Plaquemines Day was incredibly successful. The event showcased many of the exciting aspects of the parish while officials got the opportunity to "network" with important state politicians. From left to right are Plaquemines Economic Development Director Kelly DiMarco, State Representative Jacob Braud, State Senator Pat Connick, Woodlands Conservancy Executive Director Katie Brasted and Parish President Keith Hinkley.



Plaquemines Parish Royalty visited Baton Rouge last week in conjunction with Plaquemines Day in Baton Rouge. Before the evening cookout at the Pentagon Barracks, the girls were presented before the legislature at the State Capitol. From left are Plaquemines Seafood Teen Queen Lelia Domingue, Seafood Pearl Mila Hua, Seafood Queen Isabella Richoux, State Representative Jacob Braud, Plaquemines Parish Fair and Orange Festival Queen Alayna Robichaux, Orange Blossom Olivia Munsterman, Orange Teen Queen Grace Gondrella and State Senator Pat Connick.

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