

CHARTER COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2010
705 W. University Avenue, Council Auditorium

Commission members in attendance: Odon Bacque, Dale Bourgeois, Karen Carson, Bruce M Conque, George A. Lewis, Greg Manual, Desmond Keith Miller, Stephen J. Oats, Aaron Walker

Absent: None

Charter staff members in attendance: Vivian Neumann (Assistant City-Parish Attorney), Veronica L. Williams (Charter Commission Clerk)

Council Members/Staff in attendance: Keith Patin, Council Clerk Norma Dugas

Administration staff in attendance: Fire Chief Robert Benoit, Police Chief Jim Craft, City Marshal Earl “Nicky” Picard, Office of Homeland Security Director Bill Vincent, Emergency Operations & Security Coordinator Mike Mouton, City Court Judge Doug Saloom and Chief Financial Officer Becky Lalumia

(5:30 p.m.) AGENDA ITEM NO. 1: Call to order
Chair George Lewis called the meeting to order.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2: Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Bruce Conque was called upon to deliver the invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3: Comments/Announcements from Commission Members
There were no comments and/or announcements.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4: Recognized Public Safety Departments / Offices:

● **FIRE DEPARTMENT – Chief Robert Benoit**

Chief Benoit stated that the Lafayette Fire Department (LFD) was composed of five Divisions.

- Administration handled not only the day to day operations of the Fire Department, but also planned projects and prepared all areas of the department for future growth. The Division had a staff of 3 employees.
- Fire Suppression was responsible for combating fires; saving life and property through fire overhaul and salvage operations. The Division was the largest, with a total of 225 employees.
- Fire Prevention’s goal was to prevent fires and loss of life through code enforcement and public education. This division reviewed plans for new construction to ensure fire codes and building codes were followed. The Division also investigated fires and had a staff of 12 employees. The division handled investigations in both the city and parish.
- Fire Communications Division was responsible for receiving emergency alarms and dispatching all Fire Department equipment to any type emergency in the City. They also dispatched for seven Parish volunteer fire departments (VFDs). The Division had a staff of 12 employees. This division was tied into the Communications District (9-1-1).
- Fire Training provided up-to-date, cost effective training to new recruits utilizing skilled, safe instruction from four (4) Training Officers at the Training Center and provided training to seasoned Firefighters keeping them at the top of their form. The Division had a staff of 6 employees. The facility was located off of N. Dugas Road and was available for use by the VFDs on a regular basis at no cost.

The firefighters worked 24 hour shifts. There were agreements with the volunteer fire departments (VFDs) in the parish to provide an engine company, fire investigation and mutual aid when called to assist. Oats questioned who paid for services provided by the City Fire Department when firefighters assisted in areas outside of the City of Lafayette and Benoit responded that the assistance provided by the City was in cooperation with the mutual aid agreement to help a VFD when called to do so. Vice versa, a VFD could be asked to provide mutual aid to the City, should assistance or additional units/equipment be needed in an emergency. In cases where Hazardous Materials units responded outside the City, the Risk Management Division recouped payment from the business responsible for the waste/spill. Oats asked whether the cost of service had been quantified when City firefighters responded outside the corporate limits and Benoit stated that he would get that information.

Manuel asked how the VFDs were funded and Benoit responded through the municipality they served, Parish funds for calls in the unincorporated area and through solicitation of funds. The VFDs also received a total annual funding amount of \$140,000 for use towards fire service needs, which was shared among the seven (7) departments. Benoit added that the LFD was funded by City taxes and that some funds were received from the Parish to offset the cost of a Communication's Officer and Investigative Services provided by the Lafayette Fire Department. Walker asked if all employees of the department were 1st responders and Benoit responded that all firefighters were certified as 1st responders.

Bacque stated that it did not appear it would be difficult to consolidate fire protection for the entire parish and Benoit stated that there would be costs to consolidate the services, as well as issues related to Civil Service. Bacque asked if it would be beneficial for residents of Lafayette Parish to have a consolidated fire protection service and Benoit reminded that the class rating could be impacted and that Lafayette had a rating of 2 and the parish a rating of 5.

Carson asked what mandated the need for a new Fire station and Benoit responded a major factor was population growth in that particular area. Conque questioned whether water pressure was an issue when combating fires in the parish and Benoit responded affirmatively, adding that water tanker trucks were on hand to bring additional water to the scene of emergencies. In follow up to questions asked about responding outside the City, Benoit reminded that LCG had agreements in place with all VFDs to provide mutual aid in designated geographic areas and added that a breakdown of the calls for assistance could be provided. Oats stated that the perception was there could be more of a cost to the City when the LFD responded to fires in the parish.

Lewis questioned whether discussions had been held in past on merging with the VFDs to form a parishwide Fire Department and Benoit responded that it had not been discussed, as volunteers had full time jobs and were unable to get the necessary training required for a full time firefighter status.

In closing, Benoit stated that there were no items in the Charter, related to the department, that he felt needed to be addressed. Bourgeois asked that the Chief provide information on the different types of agreements that the LFD had with the VFDs.

●POLICE DEPARTMENT – Chief Jim Craft

Chief Craft with the assistance of Police Captain Ned Ewing gave a presentation on the department. The mission of the Lafayette Police Department was to serve the community with a sense of courage, dedication, compassion and integrity and work hard to establish a climate of mutual respect and trust through positive

interaction with the citizens of Lafayette. There was 267 sworn officers and 70 civilian employees, of which, there were five vacancies. Sworn officers were post certified law enforcement officers and civilians were clerical staff and dispatchers. The budget totaled \$25.8 million for the operation of four Divisions, those being: the Administration, Services, Criminal Investigations and Patrol. The Patrol Division was the largest division, having a total of 166 of the 267 authorized positions.

The City of Lafayette was divided into four (4) Police Precincts, headed by a Precinct Commander that held the rank of Captain. The functions consolidated with parish agencies were Metro Narcotics, Crime Scene Investigation and Crimestoppers.

Manuel stated that Iberia Parish had combined their police forces and asked if this option could be considered for Lafayette Parish and Craft responded that a merger was discussed at the time of Consolidation. The City operated under the Civil Service System and the Sheriff did not utilize this system. The Chiefs of Police in the smaller municipalities as well as the Sheriff were elected. The City of Lafayette's police chief was appointed. During the previous discussions on a merger, it was determined that a savings would not be realized by combining the various police departments with the Sheriff. The departments have worked together to merge the areas of service that was beneficial to Parish residents.

Walker asked if there were times when the department responded to calls outside the City of Lafayette and Craft stated that they did under a mutual aid agreement; however, it was not often. Lewis noted that the City had a number of islands that had not been incorporated in the city and questioned how those were handled. Craft explained that officers handled those calls if in that area and that Planning, Zoning & Codes had been working to minimize/eliminate those areas. Overall, Craft did not feel there was a need to change any area in the Charter relating to the department and further, there would be no benefit to changing the manner in which the City Police Department, smaller area departments and Sheriff's Department operated.

● **CITY MARSHAL – Earl “Nicky” Picard**

Marshal Picard stated that the department had been established by legislative act. The Marshal was the executive officer of the Court; and the Office was not considered a traditional law enforcement agency; however, they had the same arrest powers, for certain violations, as the City Police and Sheriff. The jurisdiction of the City Marshal included the City of Lafayette and the 3rd and 10th Wards. City Court was a misdemeanor court and did not deal with felony cases.

Walker asked the total number of officers and Picard responded 17 deputy marshals, including 11 units and a budget of \$1.2 million. Also, the office had two (2) secretaries and one (1) dispatcher. City Court Judge Doug Saloom explained that the Marshal worked under the Lafayette City Court and the Sheriff was an elected position for District Court matters. All City Court employees were not civil service. Manuel asked if other City Court Office's had a City Marshal and Picard responded affirmatively, adding that each City had either a Marshal or Constable.

Conque stated that there was no mention of the Judiciary Branch in the Charter and Saloom clarified that City Court was established and regulated by State law and was not a Charter-type organization. Conque questioned LCG's responsibility as that related to funding the Court and Saloom stated that State law required LCG to fund the expenses of the City Court. On a related note, Saloom expressed concern that City Court employees were not considered “employees of LCG”. He felt it was important that these employees be identified as LCG

employees. In conclusion, Saloom advised that there was nothing in the Charter from a Court or Marshal prospective that needed to be addressed.

● **OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY (also called the Communication's District 9-1-1) – Director Bill Vincent**

Vincent provided a hard copy of information relative to the department and stated that his office worked with various other agencies to coordinate services on a daily basis for 9-1-1 and special events. The office was formed by State legislation, went online in March 1983 and was funded by a telephone surcharge. The office did not receive funding from LCG. The district office was governed by a 10-member Board of Commissioners to oversee budgeting and procedures. The emergency management function was given to the Communications District via intergovernmental agreement, which received a 50/50 City and Parish budget amount from LCG. On the radio system, the City charged a user fee to non-city users to offset cost of radios and infrastructure maintenance. Walker asked how did the various agencies communicate in emergency situations and Vincent responded through the use of the 2-way radios, similar to that of walky-talkies, in addition to bringing all agencies together in one room to discuss the emergency.

● **EMERGENCY OPERATIONS & SECURITY (LCG) – Coordinator Mike Mouton**

Mouton noted that as a result of Consolidating the City and the Parish and following the events of 9/11, the LCG Administration identified a need for a Division that would be responsible for initiating, developing and coordinating all security and emergency management activities for Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government. His office was under the Chief Administrative Officer's (CAOs) Office. Also Mouton served on the Office of Homeland Security/Communication's District Board of Commissioners. During emergencies, the City-Parish President was responsible for making the decisions for the Parish; however, all emergency personnel met in one location, a Unified Command Center, to coordinate the plan of action to handle the emergency.

Walker felt that a city this size needed a separate department dedicated to Emergency Preparedness. Although everyone met at some point in the emergency, the current plan appeared that everyone went in separate directions. Mouton clarified that all entities/agencies came together in one room and worked as a unit to implement the plan of action to address the emergency.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5: Next Meeting Date

Lewis stated that the next meeting would be held on September 27 for a presentation on the Lafayette Utilities System.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6: Comments from the Public.

There were no comments from the public.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7: Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.