

**LOUISIANA AGRICULTURAL FINANCE AUTHORITY  
(LAFA) BOARD MINUTES**

**September 20, 2024**

10:30 AM

LDAF Headquarters

5825 Florida Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) Commissioner, Mike Strain, at 10:33 AM.

**II. ROLL CALL**

The roll was called by Christopher Lowery.

**Present:** Commissioner Strain, Brayden Blanchard, Kent Brown, Devin Davis, and Ronald Petree

Mr. Lowery stated there was a quorum with five members present.

Jennifer Hill entered the meeting at 10:36 a.m.

Also present was board advisor, Representative Troy Romero.

Commissioner Strain welcomed and congratulated new LAFA Board Member, Brayden Blanchard with the LSU AgCenter.

**III. MOTION TO AMEND THE AGENDA**

Chairman Strain made a motion to amend the meeting agenda that would change Item A under New Business from “RFSI Grant Payment Authorizations” to “Update on RFSI Grant.”

The motion was seconded by Mr. Petree.

The motion passed unanimously.

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Commissioner Strain expressed hope that everyone fared well during Hurricane Francine. He stated that the LSU AgCenter is set to conduct a preliminary analysis to assess the extent of the damage caused by the hurricane.

Commissioner Strain spoke of recent discussions regarding future preparedness planning, including the acquisition of pumps for dewatering and discretionary funds for fuel.

The Commissioner also announced plans to return to Cuba in a few weeks to continue a trade mission and is preparing for an upcoming British embassy trade mission alongside five other commissioners.

He also stated he will be going to Washington to participate in discussions with FEMA regarding evacuation procedures for livestock and pets, highlighting the importance of comprehensive planning in the face of natural disasters.

## **V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

Commissioner Strain asked the board members to review the minutes from the June 24, 2024 meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Brown to approve the minutes as presented.

Mr. Davis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **VI. REVIEW OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

Mr. Wayne Tedesco presented LAFA's financial statements to the board and answered the members questions.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to accept the financial statements as presented.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Hill.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **VII. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Strain reported that all projects are currently in motion. He stated that a generator is being relocated and utilized elsewhere as it has become a nuisance in its current neighborhood. Additionally, an emergency canopy for big equipment has been established to store high-value equipment during inclement weather. He thanked the legislature for the appropriations that made these initiatives possible.

## **VIII. INDIAN CREEK UPDATE**

Ms. Melissa Hildago, LDAF Director of Personnel and Policy and manager of Indian Creek, gave an update on recent renovations to the Indian Creek property. She also showed the new Indian Creek Logo and shared upcoming events and projects.

Commissioner Strain thanked and congratulated Ms. Hidalgo for all her work and effort put into the property. He commented that all events continue to grow each year and the property funds itself.

## **VII. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Update on Bob Odom Loop Paving Project**

LAFA Director, Nicholas Cole, updated the board on the current status of the project. He stated that the ad was for the Request for Proposals was published on September 8th and that it closes on October 9th. The current timeline projects construction to start between mid-December/early January and finish sometime in May.

Mr. Cole informed the Board that the estimated project cost has escalated through the planning process and will likely exceed the previously approved threshold of \$600,000; he noted that this limitation could delay the completion of the project.

Commissioner Stain asked for a motion to amend the agenda to add discussion item “Bob Odom Loop Paving Purchasing Threshold.”

Ms. Hill made the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Davis. The motion passed unanimously.

The board discussed the purchasing threshold.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to increase the Commissioner’s purchasing authority for the Bob Odom Loop Paving Project from \$600,000 to \$675,000. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hill.

The motion passed unanimously.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Update on RFSI Grant**

Mr. Cole updated the board on the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure grant that LAFA is administering. He let the board know that the RFSI Team submitted applications to USDA-AMS mid-August.

He stated that there was 37 equipment-only and 3 infrastructure projects submitted. All equipment-only projects and the top infrastructure project will be fully funded. It is estimated that 60 of the 64 parishes in Louisiana will be impacted by the chosen projects.

### **B. Improvement Plans to Woodworth Airport**

Mr. Cole reminded the board about the 2017 application to the DOTD Capital Improvement Plan aimed at improving airports around the state, highlighting safety

inspection citations at the Woodworth airport. He also informed the board about the current conditions at Woodworth airport and provided an estimated cost for the necessary repairs.

Mr. Cole noted to the board that a resolution is required to apply for funding through the DOTD Capital Improvement Plan. He presented the board members with the resolution.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to adopt the resolution, as read, to authorize submission of the DOTD Capital Improvement Program application for the purpose of securing funds to improve the Woodworth Airport.

Mr. Davis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **C. Lacassine Building Construction/Improvements**

Mr. Cole updated the board on the new leases underway at the Lacassine Industrial Park. The lease with Evonik is waiting on signatures to finalize. Tetrahedra LLC has agreed to terms and the contract is in the process of being executed.

Mr. Cole also informed the board that Tetrahedra LLC has requested to build a new 7,500 square foot building. He stated that it is cost prohibitive to set up and run a specialized piece of equipment in the existing building. The plan would call for LAFA to front the cost of the building.

A motion was made by Mr. Petree to authorize Commissioner Strain as chairman to obtain the necessary quotes, enter into any contracts required, and to expend funds up to \$250,000.00 for the purpose of constructing a new building to be leased at the Lacassine Industrial Park.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Brown.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **IX. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Cole reminded the board to complete their sexual harassment trainings and financial disclosures.

Mr. Petree extended a thank you to Mr. Cole, the board, and Lacassine personnel for all their efforts to improve the agricultural community. He stated that the improvements to the South Louisiana Rail Facility have created a very effective system, and it is a great asset to anyone who needs to use the new grain bins. He also thanked Representative Romero for helping with economic development.

**X. ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Petree.

Mr. Davis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 11:46 AM