COLUMBIA PORT COMMISSION November 16,2023

MINUTES MEETING:

COMMISSIONERS: Darron McGuffee, Bruce Frazier, Monty Adams, Jr. Charles Hearns, and Mark McKee

Attendees: Laura Hartt, accountant

PORT DIRECTOR: GREG RICHARDSON

Meeting was called to order at 11:45 by Darron McGuffee at the Police Jury Meeting Room in the Caldwell Parish Courthouse.

READING OF THE MINUTES, **motion was made by Charles Hearns, and seconded by Bruce Frazier to adopt the minutes.**

READING OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENT**, motion was made by Mark Mckee, and seconded by Monty Adams to accept the bank statements, and the motion passed.** Greg and Laura provided an overview of the financial report as well as discussed revision to FY2023 budget and proposed FY2024 budget, Greg informed commissioners the principal on the Bond had been paid off and that USDA funding had been completed and DRA is holding an invoice waiting DRA to determine if the Port will receive additional funds to help with the road/rail crossing. The board was told that we will probably need to use the bond prior to the end of the year, but greg intent of paying off the bond was to demonstrate we are on schedule with grants and construction expenses.

 ITEMS DISCUSSED DURING MEETING Greg informed the Commission of activities since last port meeting:

* Greg presented the application he had submitted to DOT’s Thriving Communities Program, which is a capacity building program in which the Federal Government provides a company to assist with strengthening the Port’s ability to develop grants as well as implement the grants awarded. There are no funding or match requirements but the assistance would be beneficial for our efforts. The Port is partnering with LGF, Caldwell Parish Police Jury, Town of Columbia, and the Village of Grayson. Greg believes this to be a good application which if awarded could have a huge impact on the implementation of the grant applications as well as strengthen the ability of the various groups to work together. Notification of award should be prior to the end of January 2024.
* Greg requested that the port allow him to lease a copier to assist with properly operating the day-to-day activity of the port and to prepare for our annual audit**. Motion was made by Bruce Frazier and seconded by Charles Hearns to lease a copier, motion passed.**
* Greg discussed upcoming application for the LaCRED funding through LED and NELA, which requires a 10% match. The purpose of this grant is to receive funding to assist with implementing the grants which the Port has already been awarded. Greg has been working with the Caldwell Parish Industrial Board (Monty Adams) to ensure that all parties understand the importance of this funding to the successful implementation of the awarded grants. Greg informed the Commissioners about John Holtz coming to Columbia to review our projects and report back to Don Pierson about the progress of the project as well as the dire need for assistance.
* EDA Disaster Supplemental Application has been submitted and the announcement of the awards should be prior to the end of the year. While greg is confident of the application, however issue arose with the creation of new jobs (which Bob provided a Letter, but was instructed not to use all the proposed job since we will need those for later EDA grant applications). Greg made the decision to attempt to win this grant using a fraction of LGF’s job creation which may have a negative impact on the application if job creation is the determining factor.
* Clean Port Program – Greg is working with DOTD and other ports to develop an application for a strategic plan for all the ports in louisiana. Greg believes this to be the best way, to win the grant funding to benefit all the port, in lieu of each port seeking funding.
* PIDP – Our port application did not get funding, neither did any port in louisiana. Greg will schedule a debriefing of our grant application to improve future applications. We still have an opportunity to be awarded the requested infrastructure since greg resubmitted the PIDP grant within the RTEPF application which should be announced prior to the end of the year.
* DRA - $1 million request to assist with the railspur construction has not been awarded, funding was announce for some DRA funding which village of Grayson was awarded funds for a Water Tower. We still hold out hope for funding however receiving back to back DRA infrastructure funds may be difficult based on the number of applications submitted within the state.
* DHS PSGP – the port will soon be entering the last year of funding for our security grant and must start construction on the fence next year. Carol has been doing a great job keeping that project on track and it is now on us to move the project forward. Greg stated his plans to meet with the Tensas levee board and union pacific to move the project closure to construction.
* DRA extension – no word
* USDA rural Development has been closed out / waiting on final payment
* RAISE grant we are still working out details of the Agreement, Greg is fighting for the reinstatement of the Amenities building and once we have an agreement with LGF we will start work at first of year on NEPA study.
* initiated the meeting by extending a sincere apology to the commissioners for rescheduling, with prior board approval, of the monthly meetings from the third Thursday in October to the fourth Thursday. This adjustment was necessitated by personal reasons, including a court case and birthday commitments to attend a Saints football game. Greg emphasized his commitment to minimizing such changes to prevent disruptions to the commissioners’ schedules, reinforcing the principle that he serves the commissioners, underscoring their priorities in the decision-making process.
* Greg recommended the hiring of Wes Shafto, an attorney with Boles Shafto, LLC for the Port. After assessing the Port’s needs and considering Wes’s background with Caddo Bossier Port and Boles, Shafto, LLC’s expertise in bond matters, Greg emphasized the importance of a seasoned attorney for contract negotiations. **A motion to offer the position to Wes Shafto was made to Bruce Frazier, seconded by Charles Hearns, and Mark McKee concurred on Wes’s qualifications. The Motion passed, and details would be finalized at the next board meeting.**
* Greg revisited his comments from the September 2023 meeting regarding the selection of auditors for the Port. He reported contacting two audit firms: Nicholas Fowlkes, with Kolder, Slaven & Company, LLC who does auditing for the Port in Alexandria and Billy Hulsey, in Monroe, La who performs audits for the Caldwell Parish Housing Authority. Timely audit submissions were prioritized due to the increased workload from awarded grants. Greg stressed the importance of securing a committed audit firm for the challenging upcoming projects. Laura added that the proposed audit workload might lead to increased expenses.
* Greg presented LGF’s latest proposed agreement for assigning the option to purchase additional property to the Port. He highlighted modifications requested by LGF and sought assistance from the soon to be hired attorney to finalize the details.
* Greg sought approval from the board to attend and present information about the FY2023 RAISE Award at the DRA Annual Conference in NOLA and the LCORPI seminar in Baton Rouge. **Motion was made by Charles Hearns and seconded by Bruce Fraizer, approving Greg’s participation, motion passed.** Greg also mentioned his invitation to be a panelist for FHWA’s National Coalition on Truck Parking on December 5, emphasizing the potential for valuable relationships with federal and state agencies in future interactions.
* Greg gave update on Port Tenants
	+ LGF is actively engaged with Sumitomo, a prominent Japanese company interested in becoming a significant investor in the development of the Biofuel Facility. LGF is seeking $60 million to complete the essential permitting and design for the facility, and Sumitomo holds the potential to provide the capital necessary to advance this project.
	+ David Gurrero farms, Greg addressed the collection of the $10,000 lease payment for the FY2023 farm lease. Greg urged the payment be made before December 31, 2023. As agreed, upon by the commissioners David has the option to reduce the payment by the amount of crop damage caused by LGF’s drilling rigs in the fields for piezometer installation and the impact of Progressive’s activities during road construction. David expressed interest in a lease for the following year to plant corn. Although a long-term lease is not currently feasible, the Port aims to continue the existing lease, allowing winter wheat planting and potentially soybeans based on the progress of grant implementation.
	+ Terral Riverservices has been slow and concerned over potential restrictions due to depth of channel in the Ouachita River which is impacted by the current drought.
	+ McClanhan , Greg apologized for not stay current with Rodger McClanhan’s lease. Notably, issues with livestock have not been a concern since the beginning of the year.
	+ Adjacent land owner’s Aggregate yard: Although not a tenant, the adjacent land owner’s aggregate yard has moved a major amount of aggregate as part of the Tensas Levee Board’s levee road project. The improved Riverton Campground Road has seen substantial use in facilitating the movement of aggregate associated with this project.
* Greg presented details on the upcoming EDA grant application for the Emergency Staging Area. Greg also requested a resolution for the submittal of the EDA grant application. **Bruce Frazier made a motion for the Port Commission to adopt a Resolution to facilitate the submission of the EDA Grant application, motion was seconded by Charles Hearns, motion passed**.
* Greg gave an update on the work being performed by Stephanie Ryland to assist Greg with developing the need organizational documents necessary for daily Port Operations.
* Greg updated the commissioners on Carol Finches’ progress concerning the DHS Port security grant. He highlighted the submission of the Environmental Report and modification of the agreement with DHS. Carol dedicated support has significantly alleviated paperwork from Greg’s workload. Greg emphasized the importance of commencing construction on phases of this project next year to avoid potential loss of funding.
* Greg relayed the current status of the Riverton Campground Road Project, emphasizing that every possible effort has been made to engage Union Pacific to facilitate the project’s completion. The Port is currently awaiting a response from Union Pacific. Greg expressed concerns about potential delays to Progressive’s work schedule due to Union Pacific’s non-responsiveness, highlighting that the project is approaching its one-year mark since initiation.
* Greg gave update on awarded grants
	+ LaDOTD PPP – Greg reported that all requested funds from LaDOTD PPP have been successfully reimbursed.
	+ USDA RD – The port has submitted the final paperwork for the USDA RD grant. The USDA grant had a time limit of 1 year. The Port was able to utilize the majority of the awarded funds, however due to delays in completion, less than $1500 was not utilized.
	+ DRA – Additional funds have been requested from DRA to address change orders related to the rail crossing. Tracy Ausberry’s exceptional support has made managing the DRA grant workload less challenging, ensuring the Port remains in compliance.
	+ DHS PSPG – Carol has revised the agreement and budget for the DHS PSPG grant. The environmental report has been submitted, paving the way for construction next year.
	+ RAISE – Greg is actively urging DOT to reconsider the elimination of the Administration/Amenity building from the RAISE grant. Collaboration with LaDOTD, the direct recipient of the grant, in underway. Despite the added workload associated with the following another government agency’s rules, it is deemed worthwhile. LaDOTD has assured that there will be no charge for managing the grant, and under their program policy, the Port can request disbursements, aiding in cash flow management.
	+ Earmark – The Port is currently awaiting approval from congress for the earmark grant, which is currently tied up in the congressional budget process.
* Greg gave update on grants we are still waiting on award notification:
	+ PIDP – $11.25 million award announcements should be made any day.
	+ RTEPF – $ 10 million award announcements should be in December
	+ DRA -- $1 million award announcements should be any day.
	+ Capital Outlay - $2 railroad, $3 expansion, will be May 2024.
* Greg gave update on work in progress grant applications
	+ EDA – Greg is actively working on completing the EDA grant application using the new EDGE website.
	+ NELA – LCREP Greg, along with Monty Adams Sr., met with the interim Director of NELA to request the submission of the grant applications before the end of the year. While the NELA position was initially leaning towards waiting for a new Director to initiate the process, the Port actively advocating for an earlier submission. The Port is seeking $500,000 to assist with the implementation of awarded funds.
* **Motion was made to pay all outstanding invoices by Charles Hearns and seconded by Bruce Frazier, motion passed to pay bills.**

**Motion was made by Charles Hearns to adjourn the meeting second by Mark McKee motion passed meeting was adjourned.**