

Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Minutes of Meeting
2021-2022 Interim
March 10, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman
Representative Robby Carter
Representative Buddy Mincey
Senator Rogers J. Pope

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Senator Bodi White, vice chairman
Senator Regina Barrow

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Phillips Fetterman
Beaux Jones
Chris Knotts
Jerry Passman
David Peterson
Paul Sawyer
Tom Stephen
Larry Thomas
Brenda Zeringue

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Doug Carlson
Brandon Rogillio
Eddie Williams

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

LeeAnne Sharlow, House attorney
Carlesia Bibbins, House attorney
Brandy Phillips, House committee administrative assistant

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Myrtis Jarrell, House sergeant at arms
Anthony Christy, Senate sergeant at arms

III. DISCUSSION

Representative Hodges gave a brief opening about the importance of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project and thanked the attendees for their continued diligence on the project. She discussed the impediments to completing the canal and the bipartisan efforts to move the project forward and commended the task force, the Department of Transportation and Development, Congressman Garret Graves' office, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for their commitment to the project. She announced that the committee will receive current updates in today's meeting.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Transportation and Development

Colonel Stephen Murphy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, no phone number provided, introduced himself and briefly discussed some of the challenges that have been slowing the progress of the project with a focus on utility relocation. Colonel Murphy stressed the priority level of the project to the Corps of Engineers.

Secretary Shawn Wilson, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 379-1200, spoke for information only and briefly discussed some of the steps they have taken to move the project forward despite the issues faced, gave updates on the utilities that have been relocated to date and informed the task force on who would be presenting further project updates during this meeting.

Mr. Eric Amundsen, Florida Gas, 34 West Fairbranch Circle, The Woodlands, TX, (713) 204-4646, spoke for information only and thanked Secretary Wilson and Colonel Murphy for inviting their team to the meeting and for the diligent work of the staff on the project. He announced that Florida Gas is there to demonstrate their commitment to the successful completion of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project. Mr. Amundsen briefly mentioned some of the regulations they must follow for relocation to ensure public safety and introduced a presentation that will be given during the meeting to provide updates and allow questions.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Mr. Bobby Duplantier, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 862-1037, spoke for information only and presented a short video which showed drone footage of the progress of the project that can't be seen from roadways due to location. Mr. Duplantier credited this idea to Colonel Murphy.

Mr. Duplantier presented a PowerPoint entitled "Amite River and Tributaries-Comite River Diversion Project" and provided a handout, Exhibit A, which is included in the committee records. He discussed the organizational chart for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Transportation and Development and provided updates on construction progress and the logistics of how each step of the project must be moved forward.

Ms. Christina Brignac, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, (225) 379-1394, spoke for information only and gave an overview of upcoming construction contracts set to begin this year including LA 67, LA 19, and LA 964.

Mr. Duplantier continued the PowerPoint and gave a detailed overview and updates regarding both completed construction contracts (6 out of 18) and ongoing construction contracts (7 out of 18). The percentage of completion was given for each ongoing construction contract and estimated dates of completion.

Ms. Brignac discussed ongoing DOTD tasks and provided updates on the real estate acquisition for the project.

Mr. Eric Amundsen with Florida Gas presented a portion of the PowerPoint to discuss the significance of Florida Gas and some of the challenges they face regarding the Comite Diversion project.

Mr. Michael Futch, Florida Gas, 1300 Main Street, Houston, TX 71102, (713) 201-9181, presented a portion of the PowerPoint and gave an explanation of what the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is and its relation to the project. Florida Gas advised that they want to focus on the continuity of service for their customers.

East Baton Rouge Parish

Councilman Aaron Moak, East Baton Rouge Parish, 5140 Fryers Avenue, (225) 224-6008, spoke for information only and discussed plans to clear and snag the Comite River from Highway 64 to Livingston Parish.

Fred Rayford, City Parish, 300 North Boulevard, Baton Rouge, LA 70802, (225) 389-3159, spoke for information only and elaborated on the challenges that may be faced with the dredging relating to the project but indicated the project is moving in the right direction. Additionally, Mr. Rayford indicated \$500,000 has been allocated for the project.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Ms. Sarah Bradley, US Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 862-1723, spoke for information only and discussed the Amite River and Tributaries Study as well as answered questions that were submitted previously by the task force.

Amite River Basin Commission

Mr. Dietmar Rietschier, Amite River Basin Commission, 3535 South Sherwood Forest Boulevard,

Suite 135, Baton Rouge, LA 70815, (225) 296-4900, spoke for information only and discussed environmental impacts as well as creating a program for maintaining the river once it is cleared.

Mr. Larry S. Bankston, Amite River Basin Commission, 8708 Jefferson Highway, Baton Rouge, LA 70809, (225) 766-3800, spoke for information only, clarified that financial discussions with Florida Gas have been occurring and explained that there was a substantial cost to Florida Gas for relocating the utility.

Witness cards submitted by individuals who did not speak are as follows: 1 for information only. Witness cards are included in the committee records.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Wayne Messina, Central, 7256 Woodlett Drive, Central, LA 70818, (225) 505-7137, spoke for information only. He expressed concern over the failure of rebuilding the weir to control diversion of the Amite River.

Mr. Robert Burns, Concerned Citizens for Drainage Improvement, 13454 Oak Trail, Baton Rouge, LA 70818, (225) 955-4484, spoke for information only and stressed the sense of urgency.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

Approval of the 2019-2020 Interim Minutes

The minutes from the 2019-2020 Interim meetings dated August 15, November 5, and March 4 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges offered a motion to approve the minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 10 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Representative Mincey, Mr. Fetterman, Mr. Jones, Mr. Knotts, Mr. Peterson, Mr. Sawyer, Mr. Stephen, Mr. Thomas, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

Approval of the 2020-2021 Interim Minutes

The minutes from the 2020-2021 Interim meetings dated November 18 were presented to the committee for approval. Representative Hodges offered a motion to approve the minutes. Without objection, the minutes were approved by a vote of 10 yeas and 0 nays. Representative Hodges, Representative Mincey, Mr. Fetterman, Mr. Jones, Mr. Knotts, Mr. Peterson, Mr. Sawyer, Mr. Stephen, Mr. Thomas, and Ms. Zeringue voted yea.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Valarie Hodges
Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Date approved: _____