

Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Minutes of Meeting
2022-2023 Interim
August 17, 2022

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative Valarie Hodges, chairwoman of the Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force, called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. in Room 6, in the state capitol in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Robby Carter
Senator Bodi White, vice chairman
Senator Regina Barrow

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Doug Carlson
Phillip Fetterman
Jerry Passman
Tom Stephens

NON-LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Beaux Jones
Chris Knotts
David Peterson
Brandon Rogillio
Paul Sawyer
Larry Thomas
Eddie Williams
Brenda Zeringue

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES PRESENT:

Faye Talbot, House sergeant at arms
Tony Lumbard, Senate sergeant at arms

III. DISCUSSION

Representative Hodges gave a brief overview 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. She 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, (504) 862-2204, spoke for information only. He stressed the priority level of the project to the Corp Engineers and spoke on the challenges that are slowing project completion down.

Secretary Shawn Wilson, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70801, (225) 379-1200, spoke for information only and briefly spoke on the importance of understanding the process. He ensured that the importance and urgency of this project is shared among the staff and that they are diligently working toward completion in spite of the issues faced. He said the presentation would provide more answers and clarity on where they are in the process.

Representative Hodges recognized that Congressman Graves had arrived at the meeting. In order to allow him to testify and leave for another meeting, she asked that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Transportation and Development continue their presentation later during the meeting.

Congressional Designee

Congressman Garret Graves, LA-06, 2381 Energy Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70808, (225) 442-1731, spoke for information only. He expressed frustration regarding the impediments and obstacles that are coming about while trying to complete the project, and expressed the need to be more agile in having project delivery that reflects project urgency.

Florida Gas Transmission

Mr. Steven Michael Futch, Florida Gas Transmission, 1300 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77002, (713) 989-2765, spoke for information only and provided an update and discussed risks regarding the process along with the effects that COVID-19 has had on the Pipeline Construction Industry.

Mr. Futch addressed questions from Representatives Hodges, Mincey, Pope and Mr. Phillip Fetterman in reference to project progression and what issues are contributing to the hold up. He stated that he is positive that the surveying and designs will be done by December 15, 2022, and at

that time they will have more information about supply details.

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

Colonel Stephen Murphy continued his earlier testimony, 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 due for completion around 4th quarter 2024 to 3rd quarter 2025.

Secretary Shawn Wilson presented a portion of the PowerPoint and elaborated on tasks such as Utility Relocation and Real Estate Acquisitions including LA19, LA 964, and LA 67-CMAR with estimated completion windows.

Ms. Christina Brignac, DOTD, 1201 Capitol Access Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, no number provided, spoke for information only and gave an overview of upcoming construction contracts including LA 19, LA 964, and LA 67 that are set to begin this year.

Colonel Murphy briefly explained how collaborating with Utility Companies and the process of securing real estate and negotiating with homeowners took more time and money than they anticipated, contributing to the delay in project completion.

Mr. Bobby Duplantier, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 862-1037, spoke for information only and responded to questions from Representative Hodges in reference to completion times as well as questions from Tom Stephens regarding East Baton Rouge Parish's anticipated responsibility of maintenance.

Mr. Nick Sims, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 7400 Leake Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 862-2128, spoke for information only, responded to questions from Representative Hodges for verification of completion dates, and provided more details on the weather's effect on the design process.

East Baton Rouge Parish

Councilman Aaron Moak, East Baton Rouge Parish, 5140 Fryers Avenue, (225) 324-6008, spoke for information only and discussed plans to clear and snag the Comite River from Highway 64 to Livingston Parish.

Mr. Fred Raiford, City of Baton Rouge, 222 St. Louis Street, 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 he indicated the project is moving in the right direction.

Mr. Nick Sims elaborated more on the PowerPoint regarding contract awards completion which ranges from one to three years for the channel segments.

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 issues and challenges with the funding process as well as the creation of a program for maintenance of the river to help with clearing and snagging.

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

There were no public comments.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman Valarie Hodges
Comite River Diversion Canal Project Task Force

Date approved: _____