

**MINUTES OF  
SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA FLOOD PROTECTION AUTHORITY-EAST  
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD ON MARCH 20, 2024**

**PRESENT:** Thomas G. Fierke, Chair  
Herbert I. Miller, Committee Member  
Derek N. Rabb, Committee Member

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The Operations Committee of the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East (Authority or FPA) met on March 20, 2024, in the Franklin Avenue Administrative Complex, Meeting Room 201, 6920 Franklin Avenue, New Orleans, La. Mr. Fierke called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Opening Comments:** None.

**Adoption of Agenda:** The Committee approved the agenda as presented.

**Approval of Minutes:** The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on January 11, 2024, and Informational Meeting held on February 8, 2024.

**Public Comments:** None.

**Report of Director of Engineering:**

There was no report by the Director of Engineering due to the anticipated length of the two presentations listed on the agenda.

**New Business:**

**A. Discussion of the proposed public sale of the former East Jefferson Levee District Administration Building located at 203 Plauche Court and recommendation to the Board.**

Kelli Chandler, Regional Director, advised that Martin Eilers, Director of Risk and Project Management, is the lead on the proposed sale of the vacated East Jefferson Levee District (EJLD) headquarters. The building formerly housed the Executive Director, Human Resources and Finance personnel. During the regionalization process, EJLD Administrative staff were moved to the Franklin Facility. The building continues to deteriorate (i.e., roof leaks and mold); therefore, the FPA would like to divest itself of this property, which is no longer needed.

Mr. Eilers explained the sale process, which would be facilitated by the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office (JPSO). The property was appraised by Murphy Appraisal Services. The appraised (fair market) value is the initial sale price that will be requested. The President of the Board would authorize the sale. The proposed sale will be advertised

for a 30-day period in order to give residents of Jefferson Parish time to submit questions or comments about the sale. After the 30-day advertisement period, the property will be included in one of the JPSO auctions that take place each Wednesday. If there are no interested bidders at the initial listed price, the FPA can consider alternative methods for the valuation of the property (e.g., lowering the price based on responses through the sale process). There are no patents in this situation since there is nothing unique or proprietary to the structure.

Mr. Fierke asked the reason the building is deteriorating. Mr. Eilers explained that the FPA did its best to maintain the building and that repairs had been done in the past. Many of the issues are due to the skylights and the roofing system. There are also issues with the HVAC system. The building is a liability because it is unused and has been vacant since 2018 when the new EJLD Safehouse and Consolidated Facility was completed.

Ms. Chandler advised that there had been some controversy in the past about the FPA selling property. The controversy resulted in the passage of Senate Resolution (SR) 172 of 2021, which requires the FPA to notify the Senate Finance Committee for approval. She stated that she would ask President Cosse to reach out to Senator Harris to explain the reason for selling the building and that the FPA is following the proper procedures. She added that Kirk Ordoyne, Executive Counsel, has been involved throughout the process to ensure all guidelines are being followed and the FPA is transparent. The proceeds of the sale would go to the EJLD.

Mr. Miller offered a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Rabb, to recommend that the Board approve proceeding with the sale of the building. Ms. Chandler advised that the Board must approve the minimum sale (appraised) price and the proposed sale. Mr. Eilers added that if a sale of the property at the minimum sale price is not successful, the FPA can request that the price be lowered based on market conditions or the length of time the building is on the market.

Mr. Fierke commented that a better explanation is needed regarding the reason the building was allowed to deteriorate before reaching out to Senator Harris. Mr. Eilers explained that many of the issues existed prior to the completion of the new Safehouse and Consolidated Facility. The FPA tried its best to do patchwork repairs.

The Committee recommended that the Board approve proceeding with the sale of the former EJLD Administration Building.

**B. Discussion of the advertisement and issuance of Request for Qualifications for Debris Management and Disposal Services and for the Monitoring of Debris Management and Disposal Services, in order to pre-qualify contractors for future competitive bidding to provide said services after a storm or other qualifying event in accordance with FEMA Guidelines, and recommendation to the Board.**

Mr. Eilers advised that both the Debris Management and Disposal Services and the Debris Disposal Monitoring Services would be utilized in an emergency situation after a storm. Requests for Qualifications (RFQ) were last advertised in 2019 for these for these services. Responders to the RFQ will be vetted through the qualification process and contracts will be issued. The FPA will be able to quickly implement these services after a major storm. FEMA dictates the cost share arrangement for reimbursement. The quicker services are engaged, the more favorable the cost share arrangement.

Chris Humphreys, Director of Engineering, explained that the FPA's contracts for these services expired and one contractor advised they would no longer provide services. He recommended that the new contracts have at least a three-year term.

Mr. Miller commented that FEMA encourages agencies to be prepared to clean up debris immediately after a storm. The RFQ process is the first step. He stressed the importance of having these contracts in place. Mr. Humphreys advised that in addition to the debris disposal services, FEMA requires that the debris disposal be monitored and tracked. Mr. Eilers added that the FPA had a well-defined project scope that included record keeping, temporary staging of materials, etc., which was used in 2019.

Mr. Rabb recommended having at least three tiers of contracts to call upon. Mr. Humphreys advised that the FPA would like to have at least two or three contracts in place. The last contracts were based on time and materials with unit rates and escalation for the out years based on the Consumer Price Index.

Mr. Rabb asked about past Disadvantage Business Enterprises (DBE) involvement. Mr. Eilers responded that he did not know about past DBE involvement. Mr. Rabb asked that the FPA ensure DBE involvement for these services. Mr. Eilers responded that the appropriate language would be included in the solicitation.

A motion was offered by Mr. Fierke, seconded by Mr. Rabb and unanimously adopted, to recommend that the Board approve the advertisement and issuance of the RFQs.

### **C. Presentation on the Lakeshore Drive - Canal Boulevard to Orleans Avenue Canal Reconfiguration Project.**

Mr. Humphreys advised that the Lakeshore Drive - Canal Boulevard to Orleans Avenue Canal Reconfiguration Project was discussed at the February 22nd Finance Committee meeting and a presentation was requested.

The presentation was provided by Ryan Foster, Engineering Manager.

### **FIRST (2019) PROJECT - LAKE MARINA DRIVE TO CANAL BOULEVARD:**

Prior to the project, pedestrians crossed four lanes of traffic when accessing restaurants, parking, the Mardi Gras Fountain Plaza and other amenities located on either side of Lakeshore Drive. Complaints were received from the public and the Orleans Levee District Police Department (OLDPD) expressed concern about the

interaction between pedestrians and vehicles. AECOM was retained in 2019 to do a safety study. The study took place over a three to six month period. Traffic counters were utilized and vehicular accidents, reckless driving and interaction of cyclists and pedestrians were studied.

The study concluded the following:

- The posted speed limit prior to reconfiguration was 25 miles per hour (MPH). Vehicles were speeding in both directions. Traffic counters and OLDPD officers verified in some cases vehicles were going 60 to 80 MPH.
- Traffic counts verified a very low number of vehicles used the four-lane roadway. The open roadway along with a lack of obstructions allowed drivers to speed.
- Drivers were using Lakeshore Drive as a thoroughfare.
- The crosswalks, which had no signage or lights, were underutilized.

The 2019 reconfiguration from Lake Marina Drive to Canal Boulevard included:

- Signage, lighting, signals and raised pedestrian refuge islands at crosswalks.
- Speed tables (gradual speed bumps), representative of the posted speed limit, at crosswalks to reduce vehicular speed.
- Two vehicle lanes (one lane in each direction), a turning lane and a protected bike/pedestrian lane.

In 2024 the FPA did a Crash Analysis of the 2019 reconfiguration from Lake Marina Drive to Canal Boulevard. The analysis covered a four-year period stretching from 24-months before to 24-months after the reconfiguration. The analysis showed that safety increased in two distinct categories:

- Prior to the reconfiguration 50 percent of vehicle accidents resulted in injury. The percentage was reduced to 10 percent after the reconfiguration.
- Six sideswipe and angle accidents occurred prior to the reconfiguration. After the reconfiguration there were no sideswipe or angle accidents.

### **CURRENT PROJECT - CANAL BOULEVARD TO THE ORLEANS AVENUE CANAL:**

The current project includes:

- Roadway reconstruction (asphalt milling and overlay) from Canal Boulevard to the Orleans Avenue Canal.
- Traffic lane reconfiguration and safety factors.

The transition from four traffic lanes to two lanes will be improved. Currently, traffic at Canal Boulevard turning west onto Lakeshore Drive, as well as pedestrians and cyclists, must quickly and simultaneously transition to the

appropriate lanes. This issue was an unintended consequence of the first project and will be addressed by separating the transitions.

To address the issue of speeding vehicles, the roadway configuration between Lake Marina Drive and Canal Boulevard (one traffic lane in each direction, a center turning lane and a dedicated bike/pedestrian lane) will be extended about 2,500 feet to the Orleans Avenue Canal. The transition for cyclists will be extended closer to the Orleans Avenue Canal. Traffic turning onto Canal Boulevard will use the turning lane. Two enhanced crosswalks with pedestrian refuge islands will be added (1) at the parking bay east of Canal Boulevard and (2) at the Mardi Gras Fountain and ADA compliant plaza area across from the fountain.

- Restriping the east bound lanes from Elysian Fields Avenue to Franklin Avenue to increase the line-of-sight for traffic turning onto Lakeshore Drive at Franklin Avenue.

Mr. Foster explained that the current roadway configuration along Lakeshore Drive does not match its intended use (accessing a linear park). In addition, amenities located on both sides of a four-lane roadway can be dangerous for the public. OLDPD officers have struggled with these issues and their suggestions were taken into consideration.

Mr. Fierke asked was the current project a second increment of a larger project. Mr. Foster responded, no; the first project was to address a specific issue (i.e., safety concerns in the vicinity of the restaurants at the west end of Lakeshore Drive). He and another engineer oversaw the first project. The current project corrects the unintended issue brought about by the first project and expands safety benefits. Mr. Fierke asked did the FPA intend to extend the project farther east. Mr. Foster advised that the FPA did not intend at this time to extend the project east of the Orleans Avenue Canal. Safety issues that may come up in the future will be studied and proposed solutions will be presented to the Board.

Mr. Fierke asked about the funding for the project. Mr. Foster explained that the seawall and adjacent plaza are part of the flood protection system. Lakeshore Drive is used extensively, especially during a storm, by FPA personnel to access the flood protection system. The Lakeshore Drive floodgates are the last to be closed prior to the arrival of a storm. Therefore, Special Levee Improvement Project (SLIP) funds are being used for the project. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the FPA and Lakefront Management Authority (LMA) placed responsibility for Lakeshore Drive and its drainage under the FPA. Lakeshore Drive is owned by the Orleans Levee District (O.L.D.) and potential liabilities must be addressed.

Mr. Fierke asked was the project coordinated with the City of New Orleans. Mr. Foster explained that the first project was coordinated with the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and the City of New Orleans. The involvement concerned connectivity of the bike/pedestrian lane on Lakeshore Drive to the lane on Canal Boulevard and future lane on Lake Marina Drive. Mr. Fierke asked did the FPA know that Canal Boulevard would be restricted when the first project was done. Mr. Foster responded that he was unsure

about the timing of the project, but thought that the Canal Boulevard project was ongoing when the FPA did the first project. Mr. Fierke pointed out that complaints were received that the FPA restricted Lakeshore Drive at the same time the City restricted Canal Boulevard. Canal Boulevard's four lanes were reduced to two lanes between the Allen Toussaint Boulevard and the lake. Mr. Foster pointed out that the FPA safety study did not include Canal Boulevard.

Mr. Fierke asked about the cost of the first project. Mr. Foster advised that cost of the first project was about \$1.3 million, plus change orders totaling \$150,000 to \$200,000. Mr. Fierke asked that the final cost of the first project be verified after the meeting and provided to him.

Mr. Foster advised that both the 2019 safety study and the design of the first project were done by AECOM. The current project was designed by Aptim Environmental & Infrastructure. Mr. Fierke asked the reason AECOM was not used for the current project. Mr. Foster explained that there was no advantage to having one designer do both projects. The FPA was spreading around work to consultants.

Mr. Fierke asked what prompted the safety study. Mr. Foster explained that complaints were reported to the then-President of the Board and the OLDPD. Mr. Arrigo added that there may have been some incidents.

Mr. Fierke referenced the presentation provided on the 2019 project to the LMA Board. Three current FPA Commissioners were on the LMA Board at that time. He explained that some of the representations at this time were not correct or representations made to the LMA Board in 2019 may not have been correct. In 2019 the FPA President at that time was quoted as saying, "don't get excited about this. It is nothing but a crosswalk so little old ladies can go to their restaurant." However, the project became much more on both ends. The LMA received complaints from the Condominiums at 7300 Lakeshore Drive. Last week he heard a reporter, elected officials and several residents ask why was the project being done. This was a small project that somehow expanded in a linear fashion. He pointed out that FPA staff said in 2019, if the FPA decided to do additional work, the public would be briefed. However, he was unaware of any public briefings until this meeting.

Mr. Fierke asked about speeding tickets issued by OLDPD officers. Thomas Harrington, Superintendent of Police, advised that speeding tickets were issued by OLDPD officers as follows: 1,458 in 2020, 632 in 2021 and 671 in 2022. Tickets are prosecuted by the City of New Orleans and the FPA receives no revenue from the fines. Mr. Fierke asked was radar being used by OLDPD officers. Chief Harrington, replied, yes. After OLDPD officers received their motorcycle qualification, they were used for issuing tickets for offences such as speeding, loud music and loud exhaust. Complaints are generally received about cars racing, loud music and speeding.

Mr. Fierke noted that Lakeshore Drive was considered an evacuation route and asked about it being restricted. Mr. Foster responded that he had not seen in his research anything that designated Lakeshore Drive as an evacuation route. He pointed out that

neither the layout of Lakeshore Drive nor the connection on either end make its suitable for evacuation.

Mr. Fierke asked about emergency vehicle access when Lakeshore Drive is gridlocked, such as on Mother's Day and Easter. Mr. Foster pointed out that the problem would exist whether there were two or four traffic lanes. On special event weekends when Lakeshore Drive becomes gridlocked and emergency vehicles no longer have access, the OLDPD closes the roadway until traffic clears and then it is reopened. He stressed safety over convenience and the need to address the interaction between pedestrians and vehicles.

Mr. Fierke commented that when the 2019 safety study was issued, it was suggested that Lakeshore Drive be moved, rather than modified, so that the parking lots on the west end would be located adjacent to the restaurants. The suggestion was rejected. He questioned whether moving the roadway in this particular area could have been accomplished at the same cost as the reconfiguration. Mr. Foster advised that the cost would have been significantly greater to shift the roadway.

Mr. Fierke asked about the budget for the current project. Mr. Foster explained that the construction budget, which is based on the engineer's estimate, is about \$1.2 million. The construction budget includes milling and overlaying the roadway. The design cost is about \$150,000, most of which has been paid.

Mr. Humphreys pointed out that an objective of the current project is to optimize the left turn onto Canal Boulevard for cyclists and vehicular traffic. Mr. Fierke pointed out that this issue was created by the reconfiguration done under the first project. Mr. Settoon pointed out the potential increase in traffic on Marconi Drive because westbound traffic that normally turned onto Canal Boulevard could potentially turn onto Marconi Drive.

Mr. Rabb commented about losing the learning curve by switching designers. Mr. Foster advised that details of the first project and lessons learned were provided to the second designer. As owner, the FPA was very involved and provided comments during the various iterations of the layout of the current project. The FPA allowed the safety study to dictate the design of the first project and provided input.

Mr. Arrigo commented that it seemed that the problem created at Canal Boulevard by the first project would move to the foot of the Orleans Avenue Canal bridge under the second project. Mr. Foster explained the proposed reconfiguration. The left turn onto Canal Boulevard will remain in place with no potential conflict. There will no longer be vehicles in the left turn only lane quickly transitioning to the right lane to continue going west. Westbound cyclists now have to cross one lane of traffic and a turning lane to continue in the protected bike/pedestrian lane. All westbound traffic will be shifted to the left lane, while cyclists remain in the right lane. Cyclists will come to a stop, look for oncoming traffic, and then cross only one lane of traffic. One potential conflict remains; however, it is no more of a conflict than at any regular crosswalk. Mr. Fierke pointed out that the assumption that cyclists will come to a stop is a bad one and that a plan that

includes this assumption is flawed. Mr. Foster explained that the plan had in mind leisure cyclists and pedestrians, as well as limiting liability.

Mr. Fierke asked that the cyclist transition at the Orleans Avenue Canal be explained. Mr. Foster provided the following explanation: Westbound traffic crossing the bridge will transition to the left lane. Cyclists will continue in the right lane (marked bicycle shared access) and after crossing the bridge transition to the shared bike/pedestrian lane. There will be one conflict where cyclists and pedestrians are crossing and vehicular traffic continues. Vehicular traffic can continue westbound to Canal Boulevard, transition to the left turn lane and turn without a conflict with pedestrians and cyclists.

Mr. Miller asked were any of the intersections signalized. Mr. Foster replied, no. The crosswalks have lights that can be activated by pedestrians.

Mr. Humphreys explained that, currently, the westbound bike lane is the right lane and cyclists must transition at Canal Boulevard to the left lane, which is also occupied by vehicles. Instead of crossing from the northern most lane to the southernmost lane in the westbound direction at Canal Boulevard, cyclists will use the southernmost lane from the Orleans Avenue Canal past Canal Boulevard to Allan Toussaint Boulevard.

Mr. Foster advised that an offshoot of the project addresses a safety issue at Franklin Avenue caused by the floodwall interfering with the line-of-sight for vehicles turning into the westbound lane on Lakeshore Drive. Several years ago, the traffic circle at Elysian Fields was restriped to provide one vehicle lane instead of two vehicle lanes. The single lane will be extended around the curve and over the levee to Franklin Avenue for westbound traffic. The right lane will be a multi-use (bike/pedestrian) lane. This will allow a better line-of-sight for drivers turning west from Franklin Avenue onto Lakeshore Drive. In addition, the curve at the traffic circle will be softened.

Mr. Miller asked was the project ready to go to bid. Mr. Foster advised that the design is in the final stages; however, the project will not go to bid until the Bayou St. John Bridge Approaches Project is completed.

Wilma Heaton, Director of Governmental Affairs, noted that for many decades the traffic circle at Elysian Fields has been owned by the City of New Orleans. Lakeshore Drive is owned by the O.L.D. Mr. Foster advised that the striping plan was designed by the City and that the FPA implemented the design to resolve the safety issue.

**D. Presentation on the proposed IH-NC Surge Barrier Multiuse Complex (International Center for Storm Surge Barrier Research, Public Education and Satellite Maintenance Facility) and recommendation to the Board on the scope of the project.**

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Mr. Foster explained that the title “International Center for Storm Surge Barrier Research, Public Education and Satellite Maintenance Facility” was develop to cover all potential aspects of the facility and make it attractive for grants. For the purpose of the presentation the term “Multiuse Complex” was used. The facility will be located on the



north side of the Surge Barrier on vacant lots owned by the O.L.D. Meetings were held with Darren Austin, Director of Operations, Stacy Gilmore, Public Information Director, and maintenance and engineering staff, to determine facility needs. Following are the results of the meetings:

**Established Needs:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Floor - Maintenance: Storage of vehicles and parts, maintenance personnel office space and restrooms –7,500 square feet.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor - Public Outreach, Educational / Research: Meeting rooms, educational and research areas – 7,500 square feet.
- Observation area – 3,000 square feet. The determination of whether the observational area will be located on the second floor or on a third floor will be made after a designer is retained.

**Design Considerations:**

- Phased approach as funding and/or grants become available. The first floor could include Maintenance and Out Reach with future components added.
- Facility is to be higher than the adjacent flood protection system for viewing the surge barrier from the second or third flood observation deck.
- A portion of the facility may be safehouse rated in the event there is a need to house personnel.
- The architect will be selected via a Request for Qualifications process.

**Funding Considerations:**

Updated Square Footage Cost (2024):

- \$625/SF for occupiable space (meeting rooms, research and classrooms)
- \$300/SF for equipment and parts storage areas
- Non-building cost (design, furniture, exhibits and approximately 20 percent contingency) - \$3,000,000.

Current Cost given established needs: \$13 million to 15 million

FPA commitment of \$5 million at this time towards grants

Mr. Foster advised that the FPA’s Grants Consultant explained that grant applications with a commitment of dedicated funds by the applicant have a higher probability of success. An FPA commitment of \$3 million to \$5 million was suggested to reach the FPA’s established needs.

Mr. Humphreys advised that the Surge Barrier has a safehouse for employees. The safehouse component at the Multiuse Complex is an option.

Mr. Miller commented that at the January 18<sup>th</sup> Board meeting a layout with an estimated breakdown for various components and a priority ranking of the components was requested. The cost for each phase of the project is needed so that the Board can decide when each phase should be built. Mr. Humphreys explained that the presentation was kept at a high level because of the fluid situation. The expectation was to phase the construction from a budget perspective. The primary needs are the maintenance and equipment/parts storage, restrooms and some office space (about 7,000 sq. ft.).

Mr. Foster explained that the design and usage of the facility should correspond with the types of grant for which the FPA may be eligible. Certain aspects of the project can be designed to be more attractive for grant opportunities.

Mr. Humphreys advised that the 2017 layout of the facility is a reasonable approach to the project. The square footages in the 2017 layout are roughly the same as those determined by staff. Mr. Miller asked can the components of the 2017 layout be costed out, prioritized and phased. Mr. Humphreys responded, yes; however, the observation component must be higher than the levee so that tourists can observe the surge barrier. Mr. Miller pointed out that the IH-NC Surge Barrier is the largest project built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Therefore, the educational component is extremely important. Professionals and tourists from all over the world tour the Surge Barrier.

Mr. Humphreys explained that, conceptually, if the facility is constructed high enough and ceiling heights are high enough, the observation deck can be located on the second floor. The project has not progressed to the point to determine whether this is feasible or cost effective. The facility must be ADA compliant and include an elevator.

Mr. Fierke pointed out that the information requested by Mr. Miller should be tied to the potential available grants.

Due to the need for additional information, the Operations Committee made no recommendation for action by the Board.

There was no further business; therefore, the meeting was adjourned at 10:27 a.m.