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Sparks fly at hours-long meeting

Ascension council battles over impact fees, parish television access

By **JOHN MCMILLAN**

River parishes bureau

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**Page 1 of 3**

[single page view](#)

DONALDSONVILLE — Some members of the Ascension Parish Council and Parish President Ronnie Hughes battled for hours Thursday night over proposed impact fees and parish television access and guidelines.

The meeting inadvertently was summed up by Randy Osborne, parish government technology manager. Department of Public Works employees told him they like to watch the televised council meetings. “I asked, ‘Why?’ They said ‘It’s like watching a train wreck and we want to see it.’ ”

When Sheriff Jeff Wiley finally got to address the council, he said he wouldn’t talk long. “I’ve been hearing for a couple of hours about the need to be brief.”

On a positive note, the council agreed to hire architect Jerry Hebert to design a 100-bed expansion to the Ascension Parish Jail. Cost of the expansion is expected to range between \$600,000 and \$850,000.

Wiley told the council it carries the responsibility of providing a “good and sufficient” jail. “It’s good, but it’s not sufficient,” Wiley said. Currently, the jail has 264 beds and 286 prisoners.

There is a 1-to-343 ratio between jail beds and the population in Ascension — one bed for every 343 residents — assuming the parish population is only 90,500, Wiley said. The sheriff added that Ascension’s population is probably closer to 100,000.

In Louisiana’s other two fast growing parishes, Livingston and St. Tammany, the jail bed-to-population ratio is 1-to-181 and 1-to-219, the sheriff said.

Early in the meeting, Hughes spoke at length about the need to place impact fees on new development as a means of raising revenue in order to upgrade the parish road network.

Impact fees are a one-time charge placed on new developments to cover the cost of the extra burden the developments place on parish roads and streets.

Last month, the council failed to approve a motion to institute transportation impact fees by a vote of 7-4, one vote shy of the needed two-thirds majority.

Hughes presented a detailed account of money that would have been available to improve roads if impact fees had been in effect since 2005. “We have a sickness in the parish in our transportation system,” he said.


He urged the council to place the impact fee issue on the ballot to let parish voters decide on the issue.

[single page view](#) [next page >](#) 1 | [2](#) | [3](#)

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