

# Planning panel starts up

By RICHARD BURGESS

Acadiana bureau

LAFAYETTE — An effort to craft a plan for Lafayette’s growth in the coming decades formally launched on Wednesday with a meeting of the citizens committee that will help oversee the project.

The meeting marks what city-parish officials hope is the first step toward developing a “comprehensive plan.”

Such plans generally address a wide-range of issues from how to fix flooding problems to where to build roads, sidewalks, parks and fire stations — and how to pay for that infrastructure.

A comprehensive plan could also address less tangible issues, such as how to better develop the arts, how to regulate growth in undeveloped areas or how to encourage economic development.

City-Parish President Joey Durel said the shape of Lafayette’s plan will be driven by public input in a series of community meetings and outreach efforts that are being planned for the coming year.

“If this doesn’t become the people of Lafayette’s plan, it is absolutely destined to failure,” Durel said.

Lafayette had mixed success in the past with developing a similar plan called Lafayette In a Century.

Work on the LINC plan has been ongoing since the 1990s, and various committees have developed a long list of recommendations, few of which have been implemented.

The past work on LINC will provide a starting point for the current effort, said Steve Oubre, principal at Architects Southwest and a nationally recognized community planner who is helping coordinate Lafayette’s comprehensive plan process.

City-parish government has awarded a \$1.2 million contract to the Pennsylvania-based planning firm of Wallace Roberts & Todd to develop the comprehensive plan.

The firm has also developed comprehensive plans for Austin, Texas; Biloxi, Miss; and Albany, N.Y.

Durel said a key part of the contract with the planning firm calls for extensive public outreach to ensure that all areas of the community have a chance to offer input.

One of the criticisms of past planning efforts was that the agenda has been driven by a small group of active community members rather than the community as a whole.

The citizens committee that Durel has picked to guide the project is made up community leaders who are generally enthusiastic supporters of developing a comprehensive plan, but at least one member, City-Parish Council Chairman Jared Bellard, remains cautious.

Bellard said Durel asked him to be on the committee despite Bellard's reservations on the need to spend \$1.2 million on the planning project, but the councilman said Wednesday that he is keeping an open mind moving forward.

The next citizens committee meeting is scheduled for Feb. 13, and the planning consultants are scheduled to be in town this month to tour the parish.

---

Copyright © 2011, Capital City Press LLC • 7290 Bluebonnet Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70810 • All Rights Reserved