

ADVERTISEMENT

THE ADVOCATE
SUBSCRIBE NOW!

TUESDAY EDITION
February 18, 2014
Updated continually

THE ADVOCATE

Baton Rouge, LA
Fog — 63°
Full forecast

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

OBITUARIES CLASSIFIEDS JOBS HOMES CELEBRATIONS WHEELS SHOP PETS NIE

Home NEWS NEW ORLEANS ACADIANA ASCENSION COLUMNISTS SPORTS EATPLAYLIVE ENTERTAINMENT PHOTOS BLOGS HELP

Today's News AP Ascension Baker/Zachary Business Columnists Education Livingston Opinion Police Politics West Side

NEWS

SEARCH

Lafayette looks to combat gridlock, sprawl



Show caption

City-parish officials rethinking policies in order to nudge developers back into city

BY RICHARD BURGESS
rburgess@theadvocate.com
February 17, 2014

0 COMMENTS

L AFAYETTE — City-Parish President Joey Durel has for years lamented the failure of a 2006 sales tax he had proposed for a long list of new and widened roads to ease traffic woes.

“In the last few months, I’ve wondered if that wasn’t a blessing in disguise,” Durel said of the tax failure, an observation that has grown out of some soul searching in city-parish government about whether existing policies might be nudging Lafayette to a future of sprawl and gridlock.

City-parish government is in the final stages of developing a “comprehensive plan,” and for the past two years, community

Tweet 0

Share

0

1

Print article

RESOURCES

Baton Rouge Carnival

Send a letter to the editor to voice your opinion.

East Baton Rouge Parish Homicide Map
A map listing homicides or suspected homicides in EBR Parish.

Gas Prices in BR
Current gas prices in BR area.

SUBJECTS MATTER.
CHECK OUT OUR

Blogs

BY ADVOCATE JOURNALISTS

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT



members, planning consultants and city-parish officials have been hashing out what should be done today to create a pleasant and prosperous city 30 years from now.

“It’s got me kind of rethinking a lot of what we do,” Durel said.

One critical issue the comprehensive plan has identified is the growing number of rural subdivisions in recent decades, developments that are costly to local government because the residents of those new subdivisions want things — roads, water and sewer lines, fire and police protection.

But the taxes paid by rural Lafayette residents are not generally enough to pay for the things they desire, Durel said, and accommodating them only exacerbates the problem.

“I think you call that enabling,” Durel said. “People need to make choices and make wiser decisions about where they buy houses.”

Statements like that won’t make Durel any friends among certain rural constituencies, but the city-parish president, who is serving his third and final term in office, said Lafayette does not have the finances to serve continued sprawl.

Durel said he is not pushing for limitations or bans on rural development but rather the avoidance of policies that nurture it.

The goal, he said, is to nudge developers back into the city, where new developments are less of a strain because the infrastructure is already in place.

The comprehensive plan that is being drafted does not dictate what goes where, but it does lay out a combination of strategies that could guide development to certain areas of the city identified for growth.

Part of that strategy is to streamline the process for developers looking within the city limits and to craft new policies and regulations that make it easier to build the type of projects that make money, said City-Parish Chief Development Officer Kevin Blanchard.

He said the hurdles faced by the **River Ranch** development offer a good example of what needs to be fixed.

River Ranch is one of the largest and most profitable developments in the city, a mix of retail shops, office space and housing that ranges from apartments to cottages to mansions.

But the development was sometimes jokingly referred to as a “waiver ranch” by city-parish staff due to the litany of exemptions the developers had to secure from city regulations for building spacing, street widths and other factors that generally discourage dense, mixed-use developments.

“We just want to make it easier for people to develop in a way that’s different,” Blanchard said.

In recent years, city-parish government has passed regulations that



ADVERTISEMENT

smooth the path for large mixed-use developments such as River Ranch, but Blanchard said further changes are needed for the types of small developments that could fill out the city.

“All of this really points to making it a level playing field for the developer to where it is not so difficult to develop in the city,” Durel said. “We can’t make it difficult to build where the infrastructure already exists.”

While the city could be more inviting to developers, the comprehensive plan also recommends policies that could ultimately make the country a little less attractive, such as evaluating proposals for roads, water lines and other infrastructure improvements to determine if the projects meet the goals of encouraging development in targeted areas of the city.

There is no talk of stopping all rural roadwork, but the strategy could add another layer of considerations in road planning.

In the past, transportation planning has been driven largely by traffic demand, either in and of itself or by the pressure voters who languish in traffic can put on politicians.

Moving traffic efficiently around the parish will always be an important consideration, but the comprehensive plan calls for also considering long-term goals for growth and development as well as whether new projects will pay for themselves through new tax revenue or become a burden for city-parish government to maintain.

City-parish officials are now developing something being referred to as a “Return on Infrastructure Investment Tool,” which in its simplest application is a way to vet proposals for new roads and other infrastructure to determine if the tax revenue generated by the residents and businesses using that infrastructure can pay for it.

“How is this going to impact the short-term and long-term revenue of the city?” said **Downtown Development Authority** CEO Nathan Norris, a planner who is helping draw up the framework for analyzing new projects. “If it is something that will never pay for itself, we ask the question of whether we should do this.”

Norris said the fact that an economically vibrant city like Lafayette is having difficulty paying for new infrastructure should be a wake-up call that current policies might be flawed.

“That should be shocking to most people,” he said.

The next step for the proposed comprehensive plan is consideration by the Planning Commission and then, assuming it’s approved, a review by the City-Parish Council.

No timeline has been set.

The plan itself is just that, a plan, and approval of the policies and regulations to implement the plan is largely at the discretion of City-Parish Council members, most of whom have held back on judgment for the time being.

- **French Quarter sound ordinance on hold while expert holds public meeting**
- **Fans live large, sidle up to fame at NBA All-Star Game.**
- **Our Views: A mayor for himself**
- **George Rodrigue's estate releases posthumous print**
- **Nagin long shown tendency to deny, rewrite reality**
- **10 Things a Burglar Doesn't Want You to Know**
- **7 World's Most Mind-Blowing Homes: Artistic or Atrocious?**
- **7 restaurant gimmicks you shouldn't swallow**
- **Homeowners Are In For A Big Surprise...**
- **Decommissioned Sea Fort Reborn as Luxury Island Retreat**

Recommended by 



Also post on Facebook

Posting as Cecilia Gayle (Not you?)

 Facebook social plugin

Contact Us

 **classifieds**  **jobs**  **homes**  **wheels**  **shop**  **pets**

Copyright © 2014, Capital City Press LLC • 7290 Bluebonnet Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70810 • All Rights Reserved

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policies](#) | [Supported browsers](#) | [Newspaper Archives](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [AdChoices](#) 