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RE: Planning for Our Future

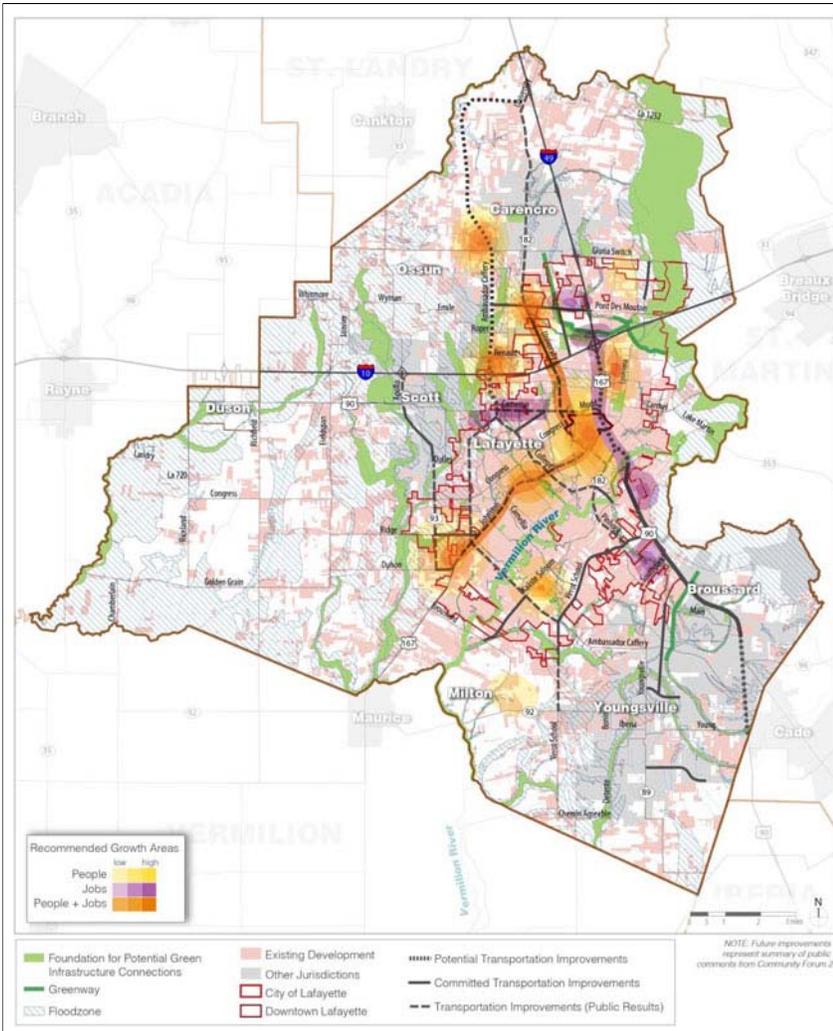
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It's been a hot, humid, frustrating summer for many who give a fig about Lafayette due to the mind-numbing rancor coming from the school board as what has become an obstructionist simple(-minded) majority on the board perfects the art of division. That's the topic for this week's cover story/editorial.

But way behind the scenes, promise: the Comprehensive Master Plan, stalled briefly this spring, is getting its mojo back.

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In late July, the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee met downtown to get an overview of the so-called Preferred Future Scenario. That's a draft version — broad yet threaded with some specifics — of what (hopefully) by the end of this year will be the, ta-da!, Comprehensive Master Plan for the city of Lafayette, a plan that will serve as a guide for development and infrastructure over the next few decades.

The Preferred Future Scenario, AKA “How we want to grow into the future,” is the result of all those forums, meetings-in-a-box and online input from a little more than 1,000 Lafayette residents who filled out questionnaires and participated in other activities over the last year aimed at digging down to what Lafayette really wants, how we want to grow. And how we don't.

One thousand people participating in a city of more than 120,000 would suggest a lack of engagement, but who participated is as promising for the future of Lafayette as the plan itself: college-educated young people. Twenty-four percent were ages 25-34, and 40 percent have a bachelor's degree. In terms of age ranges and educational achievement, the 24 and 40 percents were the largest block in each category. Young, college-educated people don't participate in planning activities for cities they don't intend to actually live in long-term; these people are invested in Lafayette and its future. They want a cool town.

The plan a majority of the participants selected is called the “Multi-Center” plan. In short, it's the proliferation of mixed-use development in pockets spread around the city anchored at major intersections, development encouraged via government incentives but not legislatively mandated: “Build here and incorporate these development concepts and we'll make it easy for you.” But alas, there will always be strip malls, y'all. Sorry.

The Multi-Center plan also relies on what in planner-speak is known as green infrastructure, that is, large swaths of grassy-leafy acreage that serves multiple roles, chiefly as recreation space and a means of dealing with storm runoff. A linear park skirting a neighborhood as opposed to an ugly cement coulee.

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MOST READ

WHO IS RAE TRAHAN LISTENING TO? (SURELY NOT HER CONSTITUENTS)

On the surface, it would seem the city of Youngsville staunchly opposes Superintendent Dr. Pat Cooper and his Turnaround Plan for the Lafayette Parish School System, but that's only if you're listening to what's coming from its representative on the school board, Rae Trahan, whose continued resistance to anything Cooper will warrant a response Thursday by the City Council, and surprise-surprise, they don't agree.

LPSS CUTS LONG-TIME ARTS PROGRAM

Funding has been pulled from PACE — a learning-focused arts program designed to spark creativity among the elementary students of the Lafayette Parish School System — according to a letter sent Tuesday notifying the program's 15 “teaching artists” that their services will no longer be needed for the upcoming school year.

WUESTEMANN CALLED OUT FOR STRONG-ARMING

Gerd Wuestemann, executive director of the Acadiana Center for the Arts, may have acted too soon by sending out Tuesday's letter lambasting Lafayette Parish School System officials over the lack of available money to keep alive an arts program for K-3rd graders due to this year's nose dive in federal Title I funding, says Superintendent Dr. Pat Cooper, who describes the letter's depiction of events as “heinously” inaccurate.

LEVEE BOARD'S SUIT MOVED TO FEDERAL COURT

A New Orleans-area levee authority's lawsuit against dozens of oil and gas companies was transferred Tuesday from state to federal court at the request of one of the companies, but the move may be temporary.

NO CHARTER COMMISH: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The ordinance will be back before the council, no doubt, but if it fails again, there's always the “nuclear option.”
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As here's the really important thing: The plan we're moving toward encourages the growth of these centers — mixed-use "nodes" (think of River Ranch, though not necessarily as swanky) where residential, commercial/retail, government and schools co-mingle, thus encouraging more biking and walking and less time in cars, which literally taxes us all by stressing our transportation infrastructure — chiefly in the heart of the city, downtown and in north Lafayette. These areas have for decades been neglected as developers looked south for open land at cheap prices.

As densely packed as Lafayette is relative to most other parishes, we nonetheless long followed a typical and ultimately wrong-headed pattern — spread out. Yet lots of wide-open, rural acreage remains in Lafayette Parish, and the Multi-Center plan, if we stick to it, if we fund it, if we decide it isn't after all a plot by collectivists at the United Nations to usurp private property rights, will preserve that pastoral aspect of the parish by encouraging density — growing in as opposed to growing out. It will protect the rights of landowners and make it cheaper for everyone to live, work and play.

There remains another round of community forums as this general plan becomes The Plan, and the council still has to sign on off it, but just as the diverse political, cultural and economic interests in this community have rallied around our superintendent and his turnaround plan, so too have those diverse interests rolled up their sleeves and undertaken this planning process. It's a great thing to witness, heat and humidity be damned.

Walter Pierce

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

THIS WEEK IN JUST NOT GETTING IT: RAY GREEN

Semi-professional cumudgeon and full-time angry old man Ray Green got his camo boxers in a wad when he saw a photograph of a gay pride flag wafting in the breeze at Girard Park.

THE LAWYERS OF LAST RESORT

Two slick Baton Rouge attorneys have made a name for themselves over the last year in the Hub City, filing a number of high-profile lawsuits under the guise of fighting the man.

LA. NEAR BOTTOM IN BIZ RANKING

Despite Gov. Bobby Jindal's frequent trumpeting of the state's gains in attracting outside business interests and keeping the ones already here, Louisiana ranks near the bottom — No. 43 — in CNBC's latest ranking of America's Top States for Business.

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE ANTI-COOPER CROWD

With the Lafayette Parish School Board set to make public the results of its evaluation of Superintendent Dr. Pat Cooper on Wednesday, it seems some members have been jockeying behind-the-scenes for his ouster.

TOP 50: SKY'S THE LIMIT

Lafayette's economy has been on the upswing for the past three years, with the Top 50 consistently outperforming the previous year. This year is no exception, as the list is but five companies shy of perfection in achieving across-the-board increases — and three of those five companies' revenues were flat.

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