

Planning meetings on tap

By **RICHARD BURGESS**

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LAFAYETTE — Community meetings are scheduled over four days this month to help create a plan to guide Lafayette's growth and development in the coming decades.

City-parish government is in the early stages of an 18-month effort to draft a "comprehensive plan," which could address everything from where to build new roads, parks and sidewalks to how best to spur economic development, fix drainage issues or manage growth in the rural areas of the parish.

"This is a unique opportunity for people to shape the way that Lafayette looks in the future," said Kevin Blanchard, chairman of a citizens committee that is guiding the development of the plan.

The hope is that the plan will offer practical ways to deal with Lafayette's growth, Blanchard said.

He said the lack of good planning seems obvious in some areas of the parish where unbearable traffic or routine flooding might have been prevented had it been anticipated.

"Twenty or 30 years ago, when people should have been planning for that, they weren't," he said.

Public meetings are scheduled throughout the parish from April 16 to April 19 for residents to offer their input.

Three other community forums are scheduled for the coming months, but the first series of meetings will set the tone and lay out the vision for the development of the comprehensive plan, said Cathie Gilbert, a city-parish planner who is helping manage the project.

She said past planning efforts by city-parish government were driven largely by the work of committees and that the current effort is the biggest public outreach campaign undertaken thus far to bring residents into the process.

Blanchard said that residents need no particular expertise to participate, only a concern about Lafayette's future.

"Not everybody is really a meteorologist, but we all have an opinion about the weather," he said.

City-parish government awarded a \$1.2 million contract to the Pennsylvania planning

firm of Wallace, Roberts & Todd to develop the comprehensive plan.

But what ultimately emerges will be guided by what residents say they want, Gilbert said.

“It is all community driven,” she said.

At the first public meetings later this month, residents can expect to break out into groups of eight to 10 for focused discussions on “issues and aspirations,” Gilbert said.

Residents who cannot attend the public forums will have the opportunity for input through a “meeting in a box” program, which allows neighborhoods or community groups to host their own planning meeting and then submit their ideas to the planning team, Gilbert said.

The community meetings are scheduled for:

April 16, 6 p.m., South Regional Library

April 17, noon, Milton Civic Organization

April 17, 6 p.m., Comeaux High School

April 18, noon, Acadiana Center for the Arts downtown

April 18, 6 p.m., Ossun Elementary

April 19, 6 p.m., Holy Rosary Windolph Hall

ä On The Internet:

<http://www.lafayettela.gov/comprehensiveplan>.