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# Living on the Hedge

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*If Lafayette doesn't make critical public infrastructure and quality-of-life investments, we're playing a losing hand for the future. You can bet on that.*

Before we talk about the comprehensive plan, let's talk about some uncomfortable truths, Lafayette.



Kevin Blanchard

As much as we love to talk about ourselves as a "cool town," that moniker attaches to our culture and people, not our actual "places"—much of our town is no different from any other Southern city our size: unwalkable roads, choked with traffic, with few parks or green spaces.

And as much as we acknowledge our conservative, business-friendly roots, the way we spend our limited tax dollars on public infrastructure is both fiscally irresponsible and financially unsustainable.

Whether we acknowledge it, we are in a "quality of life" competition with other cities. The cities that offer exciting, livable, walkable, interesting places will attract the next generation of high-end jobs. If we are not competing, our children will move to the places that are: Atlanta, Austin, Oklahoma City, Raleigh, even Baton Rouge.

Lafayette has the lowest taxes in the state and region. And yet our current pattern of growth places an enormous strain on those limited public resources. This is fiscally irresponsible. We can do better by making land use decisions that actually take those limited tax dollars into account and consider where the public gets the best return on investment.

For these reasons—competition and fiscal responsibility—we are planning. The next round of public forums will soon be announced for mid-May: Come to the forums, learn and vote for the options that make sense for you. Here is what the planning process has put into focus so far:

## We Must Make Fiscally Responsible Decisions About Public Investment

Projections show that Lafayette Parish will have 90,000 more residents by 2030. Under our current development pattern, we will need to develop 25,000 new acres to house those people, and 80% of those acres will be in the unincorporated areas of the parish.

The strain on public funds to support development in the unincorporated areas is already showing. It's the lowest land in the parish—the new FEMA flood maps make this apparent. Millions of dollars need to be spent on drainage improvements. And the old farm roads out in the parish were not designed to move the necessary traffic, much less to provide walking or bicycling or public transit alternatives.

But while the need for public infrastructure is greatest in the unincorporated areas, there are relatively few public funds to spend there.

The \$19 million parish general fund was patched up with \$3 million in City of Lafayette taxes in the last budget year. Next year, that hole will be \$6 million. As it is politically unlikely—and probably illegal—for city taxpayers to bail out the parish again, something has to give. Taxes will go up, or already paltry services will be cut.

The comprehensive plan offers a way out of this fiscally irresponsible cycle, by providing land use

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<a href="#">Aggreko</a>	GBX1,982.22	▲17.22 (0.88%)
<a href="#">IberiaBank Corp</a>	49.69	▼0.21 (-0.42%)
<a href="#">LHC Group</a>	21.46	▲0.69 (3.32%)
<a href="#">MidSouth Bancorp</a>	15.75	▼0.09 (-0.57%)
<a href="#">PetroQuest Energy</a>	4.74	▲0.14 (3.04%)
<a href="#">PHI Inc</a>	31.99	▲0.84 (2.70%)
<a href="#">Superior Energy</a>	26.90	▲0.08 (0.30%)
<a href="#">Stone Energy</a>	22.40	▼0.48 (-2.10%)
<a href="#">Teche Holding Corp</a>	40.55	▼0.44 (-1.07%)

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Annie Alleman, Leona Sue's Florist

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### MOST READ

#### BETH ARDOIN PROMOTED, NAMED TO FEDERAL RESERVE BOARD IN N.O.

IberiaBank announced that Lafayette's Beth Ardoin, who was promoted to senior executive vice president in February, has been appointed to the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's New Orleans branch.

#### LOU KING PATIN DIES

The IND has confirmed through various sources that Lou King Patin, wife of City-Parish Councilman Keith Patin, was found dead at her home in Lafayette last night of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

#### BRUCE COCKBURN: WRITTEN IN FIRE

On Wednesday, March 6 at Vermilionville, serious music lovers will have the opportunity to fall into the vision of one of the best songwriters in the English language.

#### CITY PROSECUTOR'S EMPLOYEE ON 'VACATION' SINCE MAY

Laura Boudreaux, senior paralegal aide/supervisor for the city prosecutor's office, has been on administrative leave—collecting about \$3,200 a month—since May.

#### GOP REPS: JINDAL JEOPARDIZING TOPS TO BALANCE BUDGET

A trio of Republican state lawmakers are calling on Gov. Bobby Jindal to back off plans to divert tobacco settlement proceeds from the popular Taylor Opportunity Program for Students, which helps students pay the cost of a public university education.

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options that focus new development in areas where adequate public infrastructure is already in place, or provides taxpayers a better return on investment. The most expensive, fiscally irresponsible option is to continue the status quo.

**We Must Compete in the Quality of Life Race, or We Will Not Continue to Thrive in the New Economy**

Lafayette knows joie de vivre. Our food, our music, and our culture are unique and attractive. For every Lafayette resident who grew up immersed in this environment, there's a transplant from some foreign place like Michigan or Baton Rouge who came here for work and fell in love with the way of life.

But festivals and fais do-dos can only go so far.

We have neglected our public infrastructure for so long that its negative effect threatens to overshadow and overwhelm our way of life.

The average commute time to work in Lafayette is 20.4 minutes — the same measure as Baton Rouge. Johnston Street, Ambassador Caffery Parkway, Verot School Road, Pinhook Road, U.S. 90, Kaliste Saloom Road have all been rated an "F" when it comes to traffic congestion.

But if you hate sitting in traffic, there are not many alternatives. Only 30 percent of our road miles have sidewalks — and those are crumbling. Outside of downtown and River Ranch, our roads are not welcoming to pedestrians and bicyclists.

And what about public spaces? Lafayette has only 8 acres of park space for every 1,000 residents, far below the national average. Baton Rouge spends twice as much as us, per capita, on parks. Raleigh, N.C., one of the nation's leaders in the quality of life race, spends three times more than us. And public buildings, like the parish courthouse, are unsightly, unsafe and under-funded.

The comprehensive plan presents an opportunity. We can make public spaces that are more livable, walkable, and well-designed. With the right plan and priorities, our "place" can one day be as attractive as our way of life. The Horse Farm is a great start, but it is only the first step.

The recent \$3.4 million settlement over the city-parish council's denial of a waste transfer facility is an example of what happens when we fail to plan. We literally can no longer afford to kick the can down the road. The comprehensive plan is how we will finally address many of these issues — and it is your opportunity to tell the government what policies they should pursue. Let's make sure our policies help us compete and make sure our tax dollars are spent in a fiscally responsible manner.

*Kevin Blanchard is an attorney at Onebane Law Firm in Lafayette and chair of the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee. Before law school, he spent nearly 10 years as a reporter in the Baton Rouge Advocate's Acadiana bureau, covering Lafayette government and politics.*

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**MAIN STREET AT RIVER RANCH**

**IN CASE YOU MISSED IT**

**TODAY IN SOUR GRAPES: LA SECESSION PETITION**  
Oh, boo hoo! We couldn't try on the Mittens so let's secede from the United States!

**BESE: THE BILLIONAIRE'S PLAYGROUND**  
An investigation by The Nation follows the money and connects the dots in last year's state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education elections.

**HIGH TIME TO LEGALIZE?**  
Marijuana's legalization is getting some hype here, but in a socially conservative state like Louisiana, change may be slow, says a member of the state's Libertarian Party.

**UGLY LIVES TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY**  
Thanks to the eastern part of the new 3rd Congressional District, U.S. Reps. Charles Boustany and Jeff Landry are in a runoff. If you thought the primary campaign was ugly, just wait.

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Deirdre Gogarty's determination to enter women's boxing, and her skill once she arrived, made for a world-championship career.