

State of the Parish 2012

We have a lot to cover today, so let's get right to it.

“The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do, at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves.”

Let's start with a fundamental difference in a government budget from how most of you budget. That difference is in dedicated dollars to two basic sides of the budget: capital and operations. 65% of all sales tax revenues that LCG collects, MUST pay for things like roads and bridges and police cars and fire trucks, not payroll, electricity or fuel, no choice. 35% of that money can go to operations. This is payroll utilities, insurance, fuel, paper, etc. Keep that in mind as we move along here today.

We will focus on the comprehensive plan today, but there are details you need to know, so that you have some insight about why this planning process is so important to our community. The issue that most singularly drives home the need to me is the budget. We have seen the demands on our budget increase, much faster than revenues have.

Since I took office in 2004, pension fund costs that we send to the state, and health care costs, have increased millions and millions of dollars for our employees, including our police and fire departments.

We are still paying for the fire and police lawsuit that was settled in 2008, and of course other expenses continue to increase at a faster rate than revenues. But, most of the huge increase in costs is related to the workforce, much like most businesses.

Now, we are at a crossroads for public safety in our community. This is an area we have invested in heavily evidenced by our successful, Safe Lafayette initiative. I believe the first priority of government is to make you safe.

Since taking office we have increased the manpower of our police force. One of the things I heard from our officers was that they were being put into sometimes-dangerous situations, without any backup readily available.

We have invested in new police cars so that our officers have reliable equipment and our community can be proud of what they see driving on our streets.

We've invested in technology that keeps our officers in your neighborhoods. Eight years ago, we went to a precinct system and started preparing ourselves for putting a substation in each one.

We have done much more, but you get the picture. And the results are positive, our population is up and crime is down.

We are now told that our fire department is not keeping pace with our growth. If we want our fire department to be as responsive as it is today, we must build and *staff* 2 new fire stations as soon as possible.

Remember what I said about capital and operations money? We can build the stations, that's done with capital. The real issue is manning them with nearly 40 firemen that we pay with operations money. That is a re-occurring cost forever.

We have given the council options to consider, and they have to make some difficult decisions...

1) Swap a public safety property tax for half-cent sales tax...THIS IS NOT a real swap, because a half-cent sales tax will raise about \$10M more than the existing property tax.

2) property tax increase

3) a new sales tax (or combination of both)

4) re-dedication of our existing sales taxes. This option does not increase taxes, but will decrease things like road improvements and our ability to fund construction of fire stations. This is the 65-35% split that could go to say, 50-50%

5) make very undesired cuts that DIRECTLY affect services you expect.

6) do nothing at all and we all deal with the consequences (see #5).

There is never a perfect answer, and there are consequences to each.

As it relates to public safety, I don't think the threat of personal financial impact, like the increased cost of homeowner's insurance increasing, is the real motivator.

Most important is ACTUAL public safety. And let me point out again, that the issue is not capital, we can build the fire stations, we just cannot man them.

Based on our population, we are probably short 35 policemen from where we need to be. Like I said earlier, we have invested heavily in law enforcement, and the results are good for all of us. The issue is the old "pay me now or pay me later." If we don't do something to continue to maintain our efforts, there will be higher costs later.

Remember, the Council can only send a proposed solution to the people; the people will make the final decision, assuming the people are given the chance.

The results of the progressive nature of this community are obvious. If we are going to continue that progress, in as efficient a manner as possible, we have got to plan in a way that prevents unnecessary expenses in the future, preventing costly mistakes where we can.

I was asked by a reporter to explain our four “front doors” on I-10, and why they look the way they do. Why we don’t have frontage roads (which has cost us maybe millions of dollars and many jobs over the past 40 years). The answer: lack of planning!

Today, we are embarking on a path that should reverse that issue. I am happy to introduce the firm that has been awarded this huge task and responsibility. WRT,

(Introduction of John Fernsler, WRT)

You are going to be seeing a lot of WRT over the next 2 years as they engage this community. You've heard me say, "If this comprehensive plan is a government plan, it's destined to fail.

This must be a community plan." It's your plan, and it's time to get involved. And, your voice can make a difference.

When we were a small town, Lafayette passed a property tax to help pay for infrastructure needed to attract a university. Any question about those results? This community voted to fund a utility system in 1896. Anyone question that result? Where would we be today without those two decisions? That took vision, progressive thinking, and courage.

Our university president, Dr. Joe Savoie knows a little about history. During the Great Depression, he tells me our city couldn't pay its debts. That included salaries of city employees. Want to hear about civic-minded vision? The city issued I-O-U's to pay its employees. Maurice Heymann allowed the employees to use those I-O-U's at his department store and grocery store, but he also gave them change in the form of cash! Thank goodness he had the financial ability and civic-minded foresight to help his community. The point of this story is that I don't think Maurice Heymann was the kind of man that would sit back and ignore an issue.

Does that kind of thinking exist today? I think it does. Is Lafayette still that progressive, courageous community? I think it is, I hope it is, because we owe it to the next generation.

Lafayette is the sixth fastest growing economy in America today: just two weeks ago, The Wall Street Journal reported that Lafayette is first in the nation in wage growth: At a time when more cities are losing middle class than are gaining middle class, Lafayette has the sixth fastest growing middle class in America! And, of course, we are about to be named The Tastiest Food City in the South! (Just my prediction) You want to be just an average community? That's easy. But, we are a great community!

And, I believe that with Dr. Savoie, Dr. Cooper and I working together with all of the other community shareholders, we can bring Lafayette to a whole new level.

Last year at this time, I told you that if you want to help fix our state, focus on Lafayette, focus locally. I say it again!

This room is filled with civic leaders. It's time to start having your voice heard. They say it takes 90 days to build a house and one day to tear it down. Lafayette is your house, your home, and it has taken us a long time to build it into what it is today. Please don't take that for granted.

We need your help, we need your leadership...

We desperately need your voice.