

COMMON GROUND: WHERE CANDIDATES FOR EBR METRO COUNCIL AGREE



FuturePAC

Supporting Economic Development
in the Capital Region

Compiled by FuturePAC staff

FuturePAC, the only Louisiana political action committee focused on economic development and the PAC affiliated with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, endorses candidates for public office through a thoughtful vetting process. As part of that process, candidates complete a questionnaire based on issues found in [BRAC's Elections Platform](#). As divisive as politics in the current climate may seem, the vast majority of candidates for East Baton Rouge Metro Council responding to FuturePAC's questionnaire agreed far more than they disagreed, signaling that positive, collaborative progress is possible.

For the 2020 election cycle, 81 percent of East Baton Rouge Metro Council candidates (35 of the 43) provided responses to FuturePAC's questionnaire.* Summarized responses provided by candidates seeking FuturePAC's endorsement are outlined below.

**Questionnaires were not completed by: "Bones" Addison (D 1); Alfred Bell (D 7); Andrea Cosey (D 10); Steve Myers (D 12); Tania Nyman (D12) - Ms. Nyman offered to meet with FuturePAC but declined to respond to the questionnaire; Jonathan Snyder (D11); Tyjuana Smith (D7); and Eugene Rico Williams (D 2).*

CANDIDATE RESPONSES TO BRAC'S ELECTIONS PLATFORM

BRAC's Elections Platform – upon which FuturePAC questionnaires are based - is rooted in a call for commonality and civility, urging that candidates take the unprecedented action of creating a bipartisan agenda identifying common ground upon which to lead, act collaboratively, and find real solutions. Ninety-seven percent of the candidates agreed to create a written bipartisan agenda for the term.

The platform is divided into 10 categories. Candidate responses to questions under those categories are outlined below.

Prioritize economic development and job creation, creating a unified vision to accelerate recovery from Covid-19

The months since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Louisiana have erased a decade worth of job growth, making the issue of economic development even more critical to the health and welfare of EBR residents and businesses. The candidates took a very favorable outlook on economic development incentives and included strategies in individual responses such as diversifying the industry mix in Baton Rouge, focusing on small businesses, increasing workforce training, entrepreneurship, and more.

Do you support the use of economic development incentives to spur investment and job growth?

YES: 94 percent

Will you vote to approve ITEP applications that modernize manufacturing facilities or create new jobs?

YES: 91 percent

Develop and drive significant financial investment into redevelopment and economic development in North Baton Rouge

There was a unanimous willingness to support a robust plan for economic development in North Baton Rouge, with only two candidates qualifying their support until they saw a firm plan. Those who did not support one or more of these actions did so on the ground that they don't believe it's the proper role of government or they didn't have enough information about the proposed action.

The questionnaire measured support for the following specific actions in North Baton Rouge:

Implementation of the Plank Road Master Plan (Imagine Plank Road) and the Scotlandville Master Plan

94 percent

Increase the number and type of small businesses and retail stores

97 percent

Significant reduction of the number of blighted and adjudicated properties

97 percent

Drive at least \$25 million in new private investment into the area

100 percent

Attraction of a full-service grocery store

97 percent

Improve and build traditional and multi-modal infrastructure

The people of Baton Rouge spend over 55 hours a year in traffic. Improving the region's transportation infrastructure will improve the quality of life for the residents of the parish. The candidates realize this fact as well and most are willing to work to improve the situation. There is also a demonstrated willingness and openness by the vast majority of candidates to big ideas such as: Bus Rapid Transit corridors, commuter rail linking Baton Rouge to New Orleans, and modernizing the CATS bus system. This type of ambitious thinking will set East Baton Rouge on a path of progress in the years to come.

Implement the Pedestrian-Bike Master Plan

97 percent

Commit to fully engaging in efforts to build a new Mississippi River bridge

94 percent

Make it easier and more efficient to do business in and with the City-Parish

An oft-cited complaint of the business community is the difficulty and time spent obtaining permits required for operating a business in Baton Rouge. Cutting through bureaucratic red tape, implementing a customer-service culture, and driving quicker progress through the process must be priorities for the City-Parish. COVID-19's stay-at-home orders also revealed the relative lack of capacity in the City-Parish to provide services remotely, an issue that will need to be addressed in our COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world. The candidates for

Metro-Council want to see changes that will improve City-Parish services and share a commitment to making government work for the people.

The questionnaire measured support for the following specific actions:

Set a maximum time limit for completing permitting processes

91 percent

Privatize permitting to increase efficiency

57 percent

Move more services online and create a position of Chief Technology Officer within City-Parish government

100 percent

Open to the idea

29 percent

Aggressively drive redevelopment, blight abatement, and public maintenance

To attract and retain talented people, and to improve quality of life across the board, the physical appearance and infrastructure of our City-Parish must be improved. Blight abatement and public maintenance, unsurprisingly, regularly rank high on lists of areas for improvement by the residents and business of Baton Rouge. All candidates agree that litter and blighted properties are huge concerns for the parish, but they differ on whether deterrence is best achieved via greater authority of code enforcement or something else. Critical issues are addressed here, including drainage infrastructure. While candidates propose a variety of strategies for doing so, each commit to making quality of place improvements a priority.

The questionnaire measured support for the following specific projects:

Revival of the LSU/City Park Lakes

89 percent

Address drainage problems throughout the parish

100 percent

Devise a plan to provide parish-wide broadband access to address our digital divides

91 percent

Commit to establishing a Florida Boulevard Gateway Development Plan

86 percent

Increase the number of people earning high-quality, industry-based credentials via EmployBR's workforce development services

All the candidates will hold EmployBR accountable for increasing the number of citizens earning career credentials. The candidates want to see increased opportunities and are willing to support efforts to ensure it is done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Lower the crime rate and increase public trust in law enforcement

Like many places throughout the U.S., Baton Rouge has experienced a recent increase in crime. Our community is also not unique in that public trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system is fragile and imperiled. Metro Council candidates agree that increasing public safety and increasing public trust in law enforcement are concurrent and critical priorities. Most candidates would consider, but are not ready to support, a single consolidated police force (sheriff and police department) as potentially a more efficient model for the City-Parish.

Support increased transparency in law enforcement data and reporting such as universal body cameras, rapid access to body camera footage, and availability of disciplinary reports

91 percent

Support continued training and emphasis on community policing and de-escalation tactics

100 percent

Support reforming the Municipal Fire and Police Civil Service Board

69 percent

Support use of data-driven policing strategies to target bad actors and not communities

97 percent

Support increasing pay for Baton Rouge Police Department officers

86 percent

Willing to consider it

14 percent

Manage an equitable and transparent separation of the city of St. George, if the court challenge fails

The separation of St. George remains a divisive issue for many. The candidates were asked to explain how they would resolve transition of the area into a city if the lawsuit attempting to stop it fails and they generally recognized the need to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. Nonetheless, the issue remains one of the few upon which the candidates do not strongly align. The overwhelming area of concern is how to divide the financial responsibilities for government services and debt between the parish and the City of St. George.

Foster a culture of transparency and accountability in the City-Parish government

The business community is calling for City-Parish government to operate as a goal-driven, transparent, and accountable organization. To ensure local government priorities are in line with the priorities of the parish's residents, it's imperative that performance metrics be set and reported against by City-Parish departments. One hundred percent of metro council candidates agree to require public reporting from these departments, most on at least a quarterly basis. Some candidates emphasized that this requires greater engagement from metro councilmembers than has been the norm of the recent past, particularly as regards scrutinizing and approving the annual City-Parish budget.

Common ground

By and large, the Metro Council candidates share many objectives and strategies to achieve them. This is a promising sign for the future of East Baton Rouge, demonstrating that collegial and effective governing is possible. Baton Rouge's business community emphasized that it wants to see a new level of civility, dialogue, and unity in government leadership. It will be up to the parish's residents to ensure, once the new council takes office, that they remember they have more in common than they might perceive, and that working together will be the quickest and most effective way to move the parish forward.