



Facts about the Planning Commission

Introduction

In the United States, community growth and development are inevitable. Cities can manage growth and direct the uncertain future toward desirable ends through sound planning.

The process of planning is essential to guide orderly growth, provide adequate community services and facilities, encourage development, stimulate business, protect and preserve the environment, and create an attractive place to live. Planning is the “great anticipator” of the future.

City planning predates the American Revolution in this country, and many towns in Colonial America were carefully laid out. Early in the history of Baton Rouge, settler Elias Beaugard conceived the idea of developing a planned community, and in 1806, he initiated a layout – designed in the “grand European manner” – for Beaugard Town. Although its character has developed and changed with the years, the Beaugard Town neighborhood still exists today and has been designated as a Baton Rouge “Historic District.”

The environment, quality of life, and man’s relationship to the natural world have become major concerns of contemporary city and community planners. Planning is a method of ensuring that population and economic growth do not exceed the capacity of available resources.

The Horizon Plan, a 20-year “Comprehensive Land Use and Development Plan,” is at work as our “blueprint for the future.” The plan was created with substantial citizen involvement and adopted by the Metropolitan Council in accord with the Plan of Government, as passed by referendum. The plan guides the community into the 21st century with sound growth management and development. Economic vitality, a high quality of living, and an efficient use of community resources are important goals of the Horizon Plan.

All About the Planning Commission

The City-Parish was established in 1949 as a part of one of the country’s earliest combined city and county (or city and parish) governing units. Previous to the combined form of government,

the Baton Rouge City Planning Commission was created in 1941 under the provisions of State Acts No. 204 and Section 33 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes. The Planning Commission is a governmental agency directed by state law and the Metropolitan Charter to guide the physical growth of Baton Rouge and the Parish (Baker, Central, and Zachary not included) with comprehensive planning and land use controls. The citizens of Baton Rouge voted in 1988 to amend the Plan of Government to require comprehensive planning in the City-Parish. To date, Baton Rouge has the only legally mandated comprehensive plan in Louisiana.

As well as comprehensive and advanced planning duties, the Planning Commission develops zoning and subdivision regulations. The Commission and the planning staff make recommendations to the Metropolitan Council for ordinances, ordinance changes and land use requirements.

The Commission Members

The Planning Commission is a nine-member board that advises elected officials on growth and development issues for the Parish. The Commission decides on subdivision issues that fall within existing subdivision regulations, and serves in an advisory capacity to the Metropolitan Council on any zoning or planning ordinance changes or amendments.

Of the nine members, seven are appointed for a four-year term, on a rotating basis, by the Metropolitan Council. Four of these appointees are selected from residents inside the city limits, and three are selected from residents outside the city limits. Of the remaining two members, one Commissioner is a representative from the Office of the Mayor-President, and the other Commissioner is a representative of the Metropolitan Council. Members of the 2009 Planning Commission include:

Herb Gomez, Chairman
Kathleen Richard Callaghan, Vice-Chairman
Ervie Ellender
Audrey Nabors Jackson
Laurie Marien
Frank Muscarello
Roxson Welch, Mayor-President’s Representative
Tara Wicker
W.T. Winfield

The Planning Commission normally meets to consider zoning and development matters on the third Monday of each month in Room 348 of the Governmental Building, 222 St. Louis Street, in downtown Baton Rouge. During times when the Commission has an increased agenda, two monthly meetings are held; one is for consideration of zoning issues, and the other for development issues.

The Planning Staff

The City-Parish Planning Commission staff works in four general divisions: Administration, Advance Planning and Research, Current Planning and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The Director, Assistant Director, and Planning Project Coordinator tend to administrative duties of the Commission, while the three other divisions concentrate on specific areas of planning and implementation.

Advance Planning: The Horizon Plan

Several planners are actively involved in Advance Planning, which currently is guided by the City-Parish's comprehensive plan -- the Horizon Plan. Recognized as the comprehensive master plan for East Baton Rouge Parish, the Horizon Plan focuses on seven major planning elements: land use; transportation; wastewater, solid waste, and drainage; conservation and environmental resources; recreation and open space; housing; and public services, public buildings, and health and human services. Existing conditions, issues, goals, objectives and implementation actions are established for each of the plan's elements. The Advance planners are responsible for coordination of the entire plan, as well as implementing, creating and updating plans for Horizon's 16 planning districts. This division looks toward the future with long-range planning concepts and solutions. The Horizon Plan, adopted in April of 1992, is designed to direct growth for 20 years.

The Commission and Metropolitan Council use the Horizon Plan as a major consideration in land use and policy decisions. The Horizon Plan has served as a primary guide in zoning issues since the plan's adoption in 1992. The third Five-Year Update of the Horizon Plan was completed in 2007, marking the three-quarters point of the Horizon Plan. Over the next five years, the Planning Commission will implement a new phase of the Horizon Plan with Community Planning at the neighborhood level. Creative planning options include tools such as design guidelines, development incentives, and pedestrian, bicycle and transit links.

The plan sets an ambitious, yet reasonable course for the Parish's development in the future, manages growth patterns, and protects our citizens and valuable natural resources. The Horizon Plan, as adopted, recognizes that it is a guide for development within the Parish. Processes for amendments to the plan and updates to the plan are being developed so that the dynamics of growth can be accommodated. Community involvement was a key element in the creation of the Horizon Plan. It will continue to be an important ingredient in the Advance Planning Division, as planners will seek out and consult with interest groups during the planning process.

Looking to the Future

The citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish, through their

endorsement of the Horizon Plan, have demanded a high quality of development and growth for the future. They desire safe neighborhoods, green open spaces, attractive streets, accessibility and first-rate services. They want high living standards, opportunities to grow as individuals, and comfortable environments in which to raise families.

With the aid of the Horizon Plan, the "blueprint to the future," the City-Parish Planning Commission is dedicated to meeting these goals. With sound planning, citizen involvement and adequate funding, Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish can emerge as one of the great Southern communities in the 21st century.

Geographic Information System Division

A major objective of the Horizon Plan is the development of a Parishwide geographic information system (GIS) within the Planning Commission. GIS involves computer and automated mapping of the entire Parish, and the establishment of a companion computerized information management system, or "database." The database can store information and pertinent data used by planners, such as lot information, zoning districts, subdivision plats, floodplain boundaries, public utility locations and Census information. New technology allows the database information to be analyzed and applied, or overlaid, directly onto the maps.

Current Planning

The staff in Current Planning processes and reviews all applications for zoning changes and subdivisions, and revises and updates the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to meet ever-changing needs. Planners make recommendations to the Planning Commission, which in turn makes recommendations to the Metropolitan Council concerning zoning changes or waivers from subdivision regulations.

Subdivision activity in the Parish, which must be reviewed by the Planning Commission Staff, includes: the division of any parcel of land into two or more lots; the construction of any road through a parcel of land; the "resubdivision" of land previously divided; and development of sites of at least five acres for two or more multi-family buildings, office buildings, shops or store buildings, warehouses or other commercial or industrial structures.

The general public's contact with the Planning Commission often occurs with the Current Planning Division. The staff provides services to applicants for rezoning and waivers, subdividers and those seeking related information.

For more information contact:

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