



PRIORITIES FOR A BETTER
LAFAYETTE

Introduction



PRIORITIES FOR A BETTER LAFAYETTE

Articulating and advancing a deliberate vision for Lafayette’s future is essential to achieving our community’s full potential for economic development, quality of life, and sustainable growth. Based on extensive review by One Acadiana’s members, local partners, Board of Directors, and subject matter experts, the following priorities represent three of the most significant opportunities for our local government leaders to advance the Lafayette area’s economy for the next four years and beyond.

Each priority directly contributes toward realizing One Acadiana’s vision to make our community and region one of the most high-quality, sought-after places in the South for business and talent. Lafayette’s next City-Parish President and City-Parish Council must be committed toward these goals to create the community Lafayette aspires to be. Their leadership, along with strong collaboration with our partners in the community and across the region, is vital to Lafayette’s success.

By focusing on these key priorities and laying out a plan of action, we hope to build a more diverse, competitive economy where our families and businesses can thrive:

-  **Accelerate implementation of PlanLafayette by focusing on revitalization of the urban core and key gateway corridors**
-  **Execute a prioritized infrastructure program to reduce traffic congestion and better preserve roads and bridges**
-  **Fix the City-Parish Charter to provide more equitable representation for both the City and Parish**

The upcoming local elections offer Lafayette residents an important choice to shape the future of our community. In order to accelerate economic development in Lafayette Parish, voters should support candidates committed to pursuing these three policy priorities. A strong Lafayette means a strong Acadiana.



Accelerate implementation of PlanLafayette by focusing on revitalization of the urban core and key gateway corridors

“PlanLafayette outlines specific action items to address our community’s growth and development – we cannot afford to lose the transformational momentum it has generated.”

— Anne Falgout,
President, the705

OPPORTUNITY

PlanLafayette is a long-range comprehensive plan that lays out a vision to accommodate and manage Lafayette’s anticipated growth of 66,000 new residents between 2010 and 2030. More than 2,500 people participated in fourteen planning and educational events to ultimately produce PlanLafayette, leading to adoption of the comprehensive plan by the Planning Commission in June 2014 and endorsement by a City-Parish Council resolution in July 2014.

The design of PlanLafayette is unique and serves three important roles:

- > **Vision:** PlanLafayette provides vision and direction for the future, outlining specific actions with the potential to attract prospective businesses and residents
- > **Guidebook:** PlanLafayette serves as a community guidebook, helping local government to operate more efficiently in its decision-making processes
- > **Balance:** PlanLafayette helps to balance community goals with private interests, especially with regard to land use and community character

PlanLafayette outlines specific action items to address our community’s growth and development through four major focus areas: refining government, re-envisioning natural resources, revitalizing neighborhoods, and reinventing the Hub City. During year one of implementation, nearly 200 of the 465 action items were initiated or completed.

For example, PlanLafayette supported the adoption of a Unified Development Code (UDC) which aligns zoning, subdivision, and land-use regulations with the comprehensive plan. Project Front Yard supported the passage of anti-littering ordinances, facilitated the creation of public art, and encouraged the use of Bayou Vermillion with a paddle trail. On the horizon, PlanLafayette encourages the current development of a Return on Infrastructure Investment Tool to ensure smart and sustainable infrastructure investments in Lafayette.

Within PlanLafayette, two key initiatives have been identified as top priorities for dramatically improving our community's economic competitiveness and quality of life:

- > **Beautify key gateway corridors such as the Evangeline Thruway and University Avenue:** Improving the condition of key gateway corridors will give visitors, prospective new businesses and residents alike, a more positive impression of our community, and will demonstrate a civic pride of place that complements our rich cultural identity. One Acadiana's investors point to this project as a top priority, with approximately 77 percent of respondents calling it "very important" in a recent survey.

- > **Revitalize the urban core of our community, including mixed-use and residential development in and around downtown Lafayette:** A revitalized urban core will attract and sustain business and economic activity, generating more tax revenue (without raising tax rates), and diversify housing options that respond to the fast-changing market preferences resulting from demographic changes across the country. Greater urban residential options will attract a wide range of residents from a rising generation of diverse, young professionals, one and two person households of all ages, and the growing number of empty-nesters and retirees seeking the community services and rich cultural experience that downtown areas afford. "Millennials" already comprise the largest generational segment in the U.S. workforce and will make up the vast majority by 2025. Surveys of their preferences indicate 62 percent want to live in the type of mixed-use communities found in urban centers, with access to shops, restaurants, offices, and transit, while 75 percent also value walkability. Nearly 70 percent of One Acadiana's investors point to this initiative as another top priority, calling it "very important" in a recent survey.

CHALLENGE

PlanLafayette provides a clear vision and planning framework for our community, but its continued implementation will require both political support and sustained funding.

PlanLafayette is not a legally binding document, but rather a tool for guiding the overall growth and development of the community. While state law requires municipal planning commissions to create and adopt master plans for the physical development of both incorporated and unincorporated areas, adherence to the plan is left up to the political entities.

Implementation of PlanLafayette will require strong, sustained leadership from elected officials, supported by partners and community leaders across Lafayette. The plan itself is not meant to be the final word on future development; rather, it provides a strategic framework for addressing the most pressing challenges. In this context, it is critical the next City-Parish President and Council members recognize the benefits of an ongoing planning process that includes public input.

Some of the items recommended in PlanLafayette will require significant funding. For example, the plan calls for improvements to Lafayette's gateway corridors, where significant public and private investments will likely be required to appreciably change the experience of entering our community. As a preliminary benchmark example, Greensboro, North Carolina's eleven-acre, single-corridor "gateway gardens" project cost approximately \$8 million.



PRIORITY ACTIONS



- 1. Develop and implement a comprehensive gateway corridor strategy:** The strategy should be developed with significant stakeholder input and ultimately provide a prioritized plan for beautifying our key gateway corridors from I-10 and the Lafayette Regional Airport in an appealing and efficient manner. The next City-Parish President and Council members should champion the process for developing the strategy and lead its implementation with the investment of significant public funding aligned with the prioritized plan. Another important initiative is the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant project to create a community corridor plan for the Lafayette Connector along I-49 South. Investing in the corridor plan will help mitigate potential issues of community disruption associated with the elevated freeway and build strong, sustainable communities. Dramatic improvements in our community's key gateway corridors will enhance the quality of life for our residents, positively influence the way visitors perceive our community and region, and support increased economic development and talent attraction for our area.
- 2. Stimulate development of mixed-use and residential properties in the urban core:** The next City-Parish President and Council members should champion the cause of creating more mixed-use and residential properties in the urban core through the creative use of public-private partnerships and targeted incentives for developers and investors. These types of investments will make our community more attractive to professionals and families who value "walkability" in their community, as well as to businesses who are seeking this type of operating environment for their workforce.
- 3. Aggressively pursue a clear course of action for repurposing the old Federal Courthouse:** Now owned by the City of Lafayette, the old Federal Courthouse is a vacant, blighted property that currently costs local taxpayers about \$30,000 per year to maintain. If lost sales and property taxes from a redeveloped property are factored in, the opportunity cost rises to about \$200,000 per year. The next City-Parish President and Council members should turn this public liability into a tax generating asset by putting the property back into commerce without further delay, potentially as a catalyst for stimulating mixed-use and residential properties in downtown Lafayette. As part of the overall solution, our elected officials should ensure the facilities concerns related to the current Parish Courthouse complex are adequately addressed.
- 4. Maintain current levels of staffing and funding for PlanLafayette:** Given it is not a legally binding document, PlanLafayette will require sustained leadership and funding to accelerate the momentum of its implementation. Our next City-Parish President and Council members should maintain current levels of staffing and funding for PlanLafayette, including a designated PlanLafayette office, a professional staff composed of six planners, and a strong Chief Development Officer. Without consistent funding levels and staffing, the significant momentum and gains achieved by this important initiative will be lost.



Execute a prioritized infrastructure program to reduce traffic congestion and better preserve roads and bridges

“By shifting how we plan and prioritize infrastructure investments, Lafayette can make more efficient and effective investments in roads and bridges.”

— Doug Place,
CAO, Dupré Logistics, LLC

OPPORTUNITY

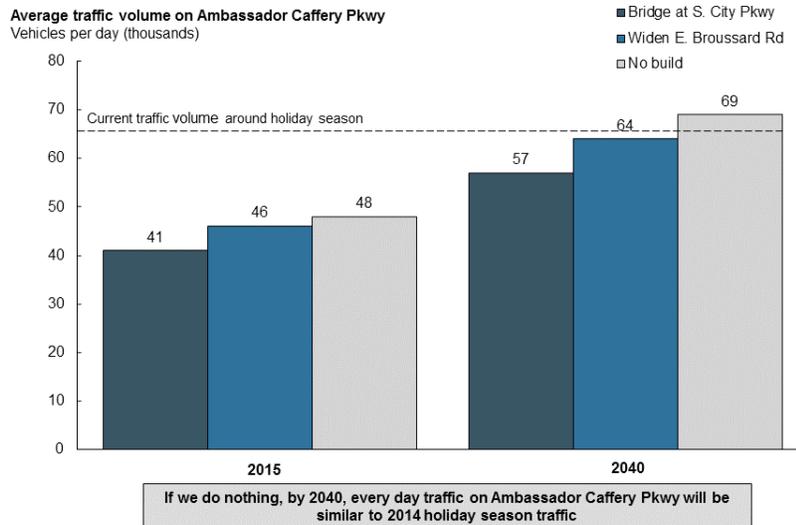
Across the country, communities are increasingly relying on sophisticated technical analysis to guide where and how infrastructure investments happen. Use of traffic models, mapping, and real-time data in the decision-making process allows for detailed comparison of projects to maximize return on investment. While quantitative analysis provides a powerful tool, good planning also involves significant public input to generate community consensus and support. Creating an infrastructure program grounded in both technical analysis and public input will promote a consistent and sustainable decision-making process.

By leveraging the analytical resources available to Lafayette Consolidated Government (LCG) and our Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), our community has the opportunity to better prioritize its infrastructure spending based on return on public investment. Furthermore, local infrastructure planning can be integrated within the broader regional planning framework, thereby leveraging local efforts beyond the parish boundaries for the benefit of other parishes and the region overall.

Initial research has identified three high-impact investment opportunities, which should serve as priorities for reducing traffic congestion in our community.

First, construction of the South City Parkway extension, including a new bridge over the Vermilion River, has been identified as the most impactful project in Lafayette based on traffic demand modeling. The extension would reduce the volume of traffic on Ambassador Caffery Parkway more significantly than an alternative proposed project to widen East Broussard Road.

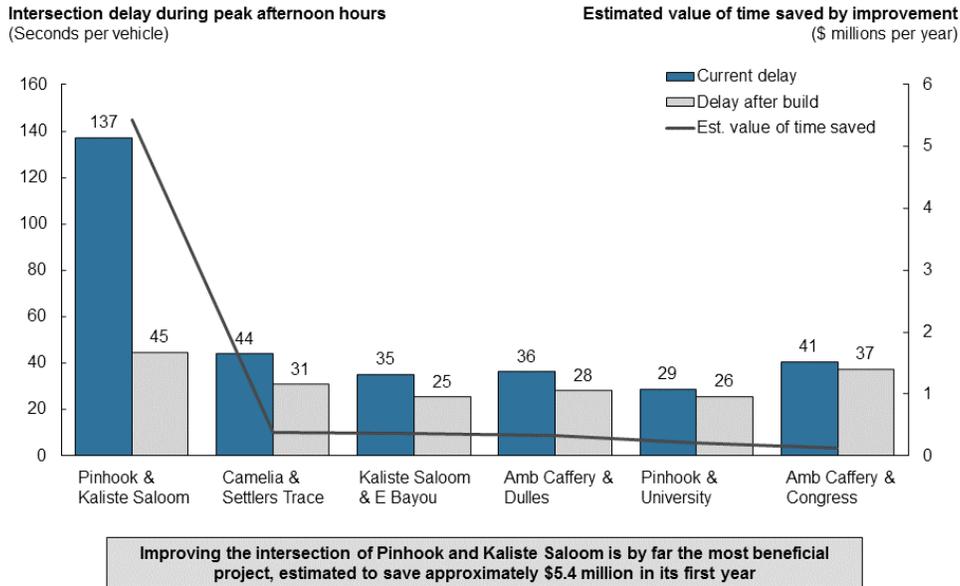
Extending South City Pkwy (incl. bridge) would reduce traffic congestion on Ambassador Caffery Pkwy more than widening E. Broussard Rd



Source: LCG; Lafayette MPO; One Acadiana analysis

Second, improving the intersections of key corridors by adding turning lanes and alternative routes to circumvent intersections would provide high-impact traffic relief through targeted investments. In one particularly dramatic example, technical analysis shows that improving the intersection of Pinhook Road and Kaliste Saloom Road would reduce delays at the intersection from approximately 137 seconds per vehicle to 45 seconds per vehicle. Other identified intersection improvements will reduce vehicle delays by roughly 10-30 percent.

Intersection improvements should be prioritized based on their impact in reducing traffic delays



Source: LCG; Lafayette MPO; One Acadiana analysis

Third, roundabouts offer a cost-effective way to reduce traffic congestion and increase safety. Roundabouts have been shown to reduce traffic congestion by 30-70 percent, overall accidents by 39 percent, and fatal accidents by 89 percent. Our area’s MPO prioritized the use of roundabouts in a comprehensive long-range Roundabout Plan, and its current policy states roundabouts should be the preferred alternative when feasible both for new intersections and reconstruction of existing intersections.

To support implementation of the Roundabout Plan, the MPO may fund 80 percent of construction costs for approved roundabouts by targeting federal dollars for this purpose, with local government providing a 20 percent match. In some instances, where projected safety benefits can be adequately demonstrated, federal funding will cover 100 percent of construction costs.

CHALLENGE

Even in the best of circumstances, the development of infrastructure projects typically spans many years from its planning phase, through the funding and design phases, to completion of construction. Fluctuations in infrastructure funding and changes in political leadership create additional challenges, making it difficult to achieve sustained focus on individual project priorities and long-term planning. As a well-known local example, the Camelia Bridge project was first conceived in the mid-1960s but was not completed until 2003, about 40 years after its initial conception. Even a relatively small project, such as a roundabout, can easily become a multi-year project.

A second complicating factor is local funding streams are significantly less than required for our community's infrastructure needs. The City of Lafayette has modest amounts of funding for capital projects, which means significant political leadership is required to focus its modest financial resources on the most impactful projects. Furthermore, the Parish has severely limited funding available for capital projects, with only about \$300,000 per year available to address roughly \$200 million in road and bridge maintenance needs in unincorporated areas of Lafayette Parish. The discrepancy in available funds means new sources of revenue will be needed in the Parish budget to avoid a return to gravel roads.



PRIORITY ACTIONS



1. Develop a robust local infrastructure plan to prioritize projects with the greatest impact, in coordination with the development of a regional transportation plan: The next City-Parish President, with support from the Council, should collaborate with the MPO to develop a local infrastructure plan that is integrated with the rest of the region. This process should synthesize existing data and planning elements (including the MPO's roundabout plan), establish clear criteria for prioritizing projects, leverage expert technical analysis to evaluate proposed projects, and set clear priorities supported by public input and measured by return on public investment. Lastly, the next City-Parish President and Council members should aggressively advocate for completing I-49 South and maintaining its position as a top infrastructure priority for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development.



2. Make targeted local investments to relieve traffic congestion: The next City-Parish President and Council should make the following infrastructure investments top priorities. Without sufficient political will to focus existing capital funding on these high-impact projects to relieve traffic congestion, our City will need to seek additional sources of revenue.

- > Construct the South City Parkway Extension, including a new bridge over the Vermilion River. If nothing is changed, everyday traffic on Ambassador Caffery Parkway in 2040 will be similar to the volumes seen during the 2014 holiday season.
- > Invest in intersection improvements at key corridors, such as Pinhook and Kaliste Saloom, to significantly reduce traffic congestion. Preliminary estimates indicate each intersection improvement will cost roughly \$1-3 million. These projects have the potential to generate annual time savings worth millions of dollars for our community's businesses and residents.
- > Leverage the MPO Roundabout Plan. These projects are relatively inexpensive, high-impact, and may be eligible for federal matching funds. With federal matching funds, LCG can complete a \$1 million roundabout project with a local investment of approximately \$200,000. As these plans are implemented, it will be important to ensure roundabouts are designed for ease of travel for large vehicles.

3. Secure adequate funding for the preservation of existing roads: If funding is not identified for road preservation, particularly in the unincorporated areas of the Parish, roads and bridges will become impassible. Four bridges are currently scheduled to be shut down next year with more to come if the trend is not addressed. One way to address these needs is the creation of infrastructure districts, where residents are empowered to establish infrastructure priorities and vote on whether to fund those projects with a dedicated tax generated within their district. Our next City-Parish President and Council should energetically champion solutions for the preservation of infrastructure in our City and Parish.



Fix the City-Parish Charter to provide more equitable representation for both the City and Parish

“Developing a solution to the problem of representation will require amendments to the existing City-Parish Charter, while preserving the benefits of consolidated government.”

— *Pat Trahan,*
Vice Chairman, IBERLABANK Lafayette

OPPORTUNITY

Lafayette is an admirable community with many attributes making it a great place to grow a business and raise a family, yet its system of government could be significantly improved by ensuring decisions are more responsive to the needs of residents in both the City and Parish. Communities thrive when decision makers are accountable to individuals with a direct stake in the community. This principle of representative government is the political bedrock of our country.

In 1996, the City of Lafayette and the Parish of Lafayette joined to create Lafayette Consolidated Government (LCG), with a unified executive and a nine-member City-Parish Council to govern the affairs of both the City and Parish. Certain public services were consolidated to reduce overall costs (e.g., Public Works, Parks and Recreation), while other government functions remained separate (e.g., Police, Fire). The City and Parish budgets remained separate (though presented in a single document), with segregated revenues and expenditures. Allocation formulas were developed to support cost sharing of consolidated services. Other incorporated municipalities within Lafayette Parish (Broussard, Carencro, Scott, and Youngsville) retained their own governance and tax structures.

The current structure of consolidated government streamlines services and provides for effective executive leadership through a single City-Parish President, but it does not include a City-Parish Council that adequately represents the interests of either the City or the Parish. City issues are decided by elected officials with substantial constituencies outside the City, including four Council members with primarily “non-City” district profiles. Similarly, many Parish issues—including drainage concerns and road maintenance in unincorporated areas of the Parish—do not receive the focus they deserve from a Council whose attention is often dominated by City concerns.

As the 2015 LCG elections approach, there is an opportunity for our leaders to find the right balance between the City and Parish with a solution that is fair, effective, and equitable.

CHALLENGE

Without a system of government that effectively addresses the distinct interests of the City and Parish, Lafayette will remain hindered by geographic divisions in its basic system of government. Creating a more balanced City-Parish Council structure, where “City issues” and “Parish issues” are decided by the representatives of the constituencies with the greatest stake in the outcome, would ensure more responsive, accountable governance. If the current structure is not addressed, Lafayette will face continued challenges in dealing with its most pressing issues, including infrastructure investments from bridges to drainage, allocation of funding for critical public services, and long-term community planning. On issues where City and Parish interests diverge, the voice of rural residents in majority City districts will be diminished, and vice versa. Solutions for either the City or the unincorporated areas will be harder to achieve and sustain.

Developing a solution to the problem of representation will require amendments to the existing City-Parish Charter, while preserving the benefits of consolidated government. Simple deconsolidation provides an obvious but unsatisfactory solution, having been rejected by voters just a few years ago. Creating separate services, and two separate executives will revive the inefficiencies that consolidation rightly sought to solve.

There is no easy solution or quick fix. Careful development and consideration of feasible options will require substantial public discourse and engagement from community leaders.



PRIORITY ACTIONS



1. Establish a non-partisan Charter Commission: Lafayette needs to study feasible options for equitable City and Parish representation, engage the public, and bring a single recommendation forward for voter consideration. A blue-ribbon Charter Commission including community leaders and experts is the first step towards developing a solution and the only sure way to engage the public. While the Council must establish and appoint members of the Commission, Council members should refrain from appointing themselves to the Commission. LCG must ensure the Commission has funding and/or staff capacity necessary to conduct rigorous research and analysis.

The Commission’s sole purpose must be to address the core issue of City and Parish representation on the Council, but it should be charged with instructions that include:

- > Engaging the members of the general public
- > Inviting local and national experts to provide insight on consolidation and voting issues
- > Examining consolidated governments in Louisiana and across the United States
- > Conducting in-depth reviews with current and former City-Parish staff and Council members
- > Providing periodic updates to the public, City-Parish President, and Council
- > Considering charter amendments that provide a regular charter review by a commission

The next City-Parish President and Council should initiate this process as a top priority during the first year of their term in office and ensure a new option is offered in time for the 2019 elections.

- 2. Develop options to preserve consolidated government, but provide more equitable representation for both the City and Parish:** The primary goal the Charter Commission must be recommending a more balanced City-Parish Council structure, where “City issues” and “Parish issues” are decided by the representatives of the constituencies with the greatest stake in the outcome. Focusing on the “policy-making” function of the Council will allow for a solution to non-resident representation while retaining the benefits of consolidated services and a single elected executive. As the Commission develops its recommendation, strong consideration should be given to the two following options:
- > *Districts with only City and only Parish residents* – a single Council could be preserved if districts were redrawn to include only City residents and only Parish residents, enabling “City issues” to be decided by a subset of the Council representing City-only residents (“Council within a Council” concept).
 - > *Separate Councils* – creating a City Council and a Parish Council will completely separate the policy-making process for the City and Parish, providing equitable representation for the City and enabling much greater focus on Parish-wide concerns
- 3. Maintain a City-Parish President elected at large:** Consolidation of various local government services provides significant cost efficiencies through economies of scale and reduced duplication of services. Such a system of consolidated services requires a single executive to provide accountability to the public and a single point of executive authority over City and Parish government administration. Two (or more) executives within a system of consolidated government creates the potential for significant friction without an effective means to resolve conflicts.



The economic future of the City and Parish of Lafayette depends on the extent to which these priorities are accomplished over the next four years and beyond. Citizens in Lafayette should vote for candidates who will aggressively support these top economic development priorities.



WHO WE ARE

One Acadiana is a bolder, re-energized version of the former Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. We are a business-led organization focused on making Acadiana one of the most sought-after places in the South for business and professional talent. We serve as Acadiana's regional economic development group and as the central business organization for Lafayette.

Representing more than 1,200 businesses throughout a nine-parish region in South Louisiana, One Acadiana is dedicated to moving the region forward. Our strategic approach to improving Acadiana's business climate includes cultivating a portfolio of community assets, marketing and promoting the region, and revitalizing our urban core.

In order to improve the quality and long-term sustainability of our regional community and economy, we believe business needs to contribute effective leadership. We know achieving our full potential will require a collaborative approach, which is why we built an inclusive organization that welcomes members, investors, and community partners to work with us in making Acadiana a place that defies social and political fragmentation by forging alliances and developing solutions.

One Acadiana serves as the regional economic development group and as the central business organization for Lafayette

