

Council Candidates Address Development Issues *Local Housing Industry Associations Hold Forum*

Thirteen Lafayette City-Parish Council candidates participated in a forum last Tuesday held by the Acadian Home Builders Association (AHBA), the Acadian Mortgage Lenders Association (AMLA), and the REALTOR® Association of Acadiana (RAA). Topics discussed included TIF districts, comprehensive planning, and development appeals.

Tax increment financing (TIF) districts use future gains in taxes to finance current improvements. When a development or public project is carried out, there is often an increase in the value of surrounding real estate. This generates increased tax revenues which are then used to finance the debt to pay for the development.

All the candidates agreed that TIFs are a necessary tool for development but that they also can be abused. Several thought the voters in the affected areas should be allowed to decide on whether or not to set-up a TIF district.

"People generally don't trust politicians, so we need to let them vote," said J.P. Morgan.

Walter Campbell disagreed saying, "TIFs are a state law, and it should be a business's right. They are important for Lafayette to compete with other cities."

And, Lloyd Rochon added that TIF districts have their place and should be used more often, citing the successful I-49 TIF in Carencro as an example.

Candidates were then asked their opinion on developing a comprehensive plan for Lafayette's future. A comprehensive plan determines goals and aspirations for community development. It dictates public policy in terms of transportation, utilities, land use, recreation, and housing.

All agreed that a precise plan is essential. Walter Campbell suggested a plan be developed in conjunction with all the cities in Lafayette Parish with the goal of having no more unincorporated areas. He said the plan should also be reviewed every five years to ensure its working and relevant.

Don Bertrand pointed out that Lafayette already suffers today from the challenges of growth and the opportunity it brings. He has been pushing for a comprehensive plan for a long time and wants the people of Lafayette to decide how it is implemented.

"We can't have a plan fast enough," said Keith Patin.

Next, candidates were asked if a developer has followed all the rules and regulations and the Planning and Zoning Commission has approved, how would they vote if the development comes up for appeal before the council because of the neighbors' emotional issues. This is a very important issue facing the housing industry in Lafayette, and all builders in attendance were eager to hear the answers.

Jay Caldwell said that "legality does not equal morality" and he would like to see the developer negotiate with the neighbors if possible. And, J.P. Morgan said he would

also like to see some negotiation early in the development process saying "rules are not absolute."

"Human nature is to follow morality. I have to listen to my voters," said William Theriot.

Several others disagreed.

"Lafayette is already getting a bad rap nationally for denying developers," said Craig Spikes, "If we continue on this path, we will scare away opportunities for economic growth."

"The answer is simple," said Lloyd Rochon, "Deny the appeal." He also suggested Lafayette implement performance-based land use rules like Carencro.

Britt Latiolais offered that he would take appeals on a "case-by-case basis" but that it would be "very hard for him to deny" if the developer has followed the rule of law. Jared Doise and Andy Naqun agreed that while understanding the neighbors' feelings, they could not deny the developer unless there were "extremely compelling reasons."

AHBA endorsed the following candidates for Lafayette City-Parish Council: Kevin Naquin (District 1), Jay Castille (District 2), Lloyd Rochon (District 3), Kenneth Boudreaux (District 4), Britt Latiolais (District 5), Andy Naquin (District 6), Don Bertrand (District 7), and Walter Campbell (District 9).