

**Office of Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome  
City of Baton Rouge/Parish of East Baton Rouge**

**Restart BR: Mayor's Business Roundtable Economic Recovery Group**

*Co-Chairs: Jim Bernhard and Erin Monroe Wesley*

**Economic Recovery Group Meeting #3 (via Zoom video conference)**

*May 20, 2020 – 3-4 p.m.*

**Meeting Participants**

*Members Present:*

Donald Andrews	Dr. Barbara Griffith	Ross Reilly
Paul Arrigo	Veneeth Iyengar (ex officio)	Ann Trappey
Alfreda Tillman Bester	Jerry Jones	Jim Urdiales
Michael Cooks	Adam Knapp	John Valluzzo
Helena Cunningham	Calvin Mills	Mary Werner
John D'Angelo		Erin Monroe Wesley

*Members Not Present:* Jim Bernhard, Greg Bowser, John Engquist, Gary Graphia, Jenni Peters, Mike Wampold, Brandon Williams, Scott Wilson

**Welcome & Overview: Erin Monroe Wesley**

Ms. Monroe Wesley called the meeting to order, sharing that it would be focused on outstanding needs or issues after Louisiana and Baton Rouge progressed into Phase 1 on May 15 and what further measures may be needed to spur economic activity.

**Approval of May 13 Meeting Minutes: Erin Monroe Wesley**

The minutes from the May 13 Restart BR meeting were adopted on a motion by Adam Knapp, seconded by Mary Werner.

**Open Discussion on First Impressions of Phase 1**

Atty. Tillman Bester shared there is a general apprehension to going outside because people still don't feel safe. She noted that some are questioning if COVID-19-related cases are declining, underscoring a lack of confidence by the general public regarding health and safety and an ongoing communications challenge.

Dean Andrews echoed Attorney Tillman-Bester's sentiment, stating that many individuals and businesses are not adhering to the recommended guidelines such as wearing masks or face coverings. He suggested a program that recognizes businesses in the community adhering to

strong public health measures may be helpful in spurring broader compliance with public health guidance.

Mr. Urdiales shared that his restaurant and others did not have as many dine-in customers during the first weekend of Phase 1 as he expected, but takeout and curbside orders were consistent. He also shared that dine-in customers typically did not utilize PPE, even when offered by the establishment. Misti Broussard mentioned that dine-in activity in her restaurant consistently reached the 25% capacity limit, but reiterated Mr. Urdiales' comment that the majority of dine-in customers did not wear PPE, despite it being offered to them. In addition, these customers were very vocal about their opposition to wearing PPE, desiring a return to normalcy.

Ms. Alford shared feedback gathered from local museums, stating that several have reopened and there was very low museum traffic since reopening.

Mr. Knapp shared the Baton Rouge Area Chamber is seeking input from businesses about how they can be best supported as they reopen. He stated that BRAC staff hear many businesses continue to operate remotely, primarily because of childcare issues as well as health concerns, especially for at-risk populations. He identified several areas of concerns for businesses, including PPP loan forgiveness policies and the pressures of unemployment insurance as some people are faring better receiving unemployment and there is no mechanism to prompt employees back to work. He cited the opportunity Baton Rouge has in manufacturing and other industries as some U.S. companies relocate their supply chains from overseas to the states, which BRAC will continue to track, plan, and position Baton Rouge for while sharing relevant data with the community via instruments like the BRAC Economic Indicator Dashboard. He shared that BRAC anticipated a rush back into the office moving into Phase 1, but many companies were able to adapt to and benefit from remote work. He also shared that there were new unemployment claims were declining despite fewer people returning to brick and mortar buildings.

Ms. Werner noted this trend underscores how critical childcare is to reopening Baton Rouge. She emphasized the importance of communicating with the community, particularly childcare providers, program operators, and parents. Mr. Knapp added that there will be an announcement about a partnership with BREC and other community organizations that have begun to organize in-person summer camps. Dean Andrews asked about the availability of an inventory of assets that could offer extra space for childcare programs, to which Ms. Liz Smith stated BRAC is finalizing a survey that will inventory summer programs and identify programs needing space.

Dean Andrews inquired about liability exposure, and Ms. Smith stated that BRAC is tracking multiple pieces of legislation that deal with private and governmental liability. Atty. Tillman

Bester raised concerns about liability and the social safety nets available for vulnerable populations, and Ms. Monroe Wesley suggested that she, Ms. Tillman Bester, and Ms. Smith have a conversation to understand and discuss any shortcomings in the legislation.

### **Near-Term Recommendations Status Update: Veneeth Iyengar**

Mr. Iyengar shared that the Mayor was encouraged by and thankful for the work and recommendations of the task force. He outlined six important updates since the last meeting:

1. The Mayor's Office announced a partnership with the Capital Area United Way and BRAC to expand 2-1-1 services to include detailed resources for businesses who have any questions about the reopening procedures.
2. The Mayor's Office is working to establish a formal structure to collaborate with the leadership of higher education institutions in the area to discuss, align, and coordinate ongoing response efforts to COVID-19.
3. City-Parish departments, specifically the Department of Development and the Department of Transportation, have been working to streamline processes, including permitting, and accelerate capital projects to spur infrastructure spending and related economic activity.
4. The Mayor's Office is researching models to expand or accelerate lending to small businesses, like leveraging local community banks and stimulating low-interest loans or microgrant programs, especially for businesses without a preexisting banking relationship.
5. Community partners and leaders are working to get summer camps operational as fast as possible through partnerships with BRAC, BREC, and other organizations to leverage existing facilities and enable employees to get back to work quickly.
6. The Mayor's Office is focused on policies that will help private sector partners efficiently expand their fiber infrastructure to connect more homes with high-speed internet, especially in an environment where many are working and learning from home.
7. Education is also a key component to near-term recovery efforts, where the Mayor's Office is working to identify how to leverage strategic communications to ensure residents comply with public health guidelines and engage in preventive care.
8. Lastly, the Mayor's Office has been actively looking into how to support entrepreneurial activity following the pandemic, such as through streamlining licensing, connecting entrepreneurs to business owners and counseling services, and messaging to the broader public that Baton Rouge is open for new businesses and start-up activity.

### **Next Steps: Erin Monroe Wesley**

Ms. Monroe Wesley emphasized the importance of positioning Baton Rouge to be strong and resilient as the country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is contingent on input

from the larger group as well as data that helps to inform an understanding of the nuances of the local economy. The next meeting will focus on reviewing such data, especially in Blue Ocean industries, supported by strike team meetings that will occur over the course of the next one-to-two weeks.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:46 p.m. by on a motion by Ann Trappey, seconded by Paul Arrigo.