

**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 #2 (via Zoom video conference)

May 13, 2020 – 3-4:30 p.m.

Meeting Participants

Members Present:

Dean Donald Andrews	Veneeth Iyengar (ex officio)	Ross Reilly
Paul Arrigo	Jerry Jones	Dave Roberts
Jim Bernhard (co-chair)	Adam Knapp	Alfreda Tillman Bester
Greg Bowser	Manard Lagasse Jr.	Ann Trappey
Michael Cooks	Calvin Mills, Jr.	Mike Wampold
Helena Cunningham	Erin Monroe Wesley (co-chair)	Mary Werner
John D'Angelo	Jenni Peters	Brandon Williams
Dr. Barbara Griffith		Mayor Pro-Tem Scott Wilson

Guest Presenters: Liz Smith, Karron Alford

Members Not Present: John Engquist, Jim Urdiales, John Valluzzo

Call to Order: Erin Monroe Wesley and Jim Bernhard

Mr. Bernhard and Ms. Monroe Wesley reiterated the goals of the working group and stated that, after meeting Monday and Tuesday, the strike teams have identified near-term solutions in advance of businesses reopening this May 15.

Approval of May 6 Meeting Minutes: Erin Monroe Wesley

The minutes from the May 6 Restart BR meeting were adopted on a motion by Ann Trappey, seconded by Calvin Mills.

Review of State Guidance for Phase 1 Reopening: Veneeth Iyengar

Mr. Iyengar discussed that the City-Parish plans to follow the state's lead in the economic reopening process. He suggested that businesses register on the state's Open Safely website located at opensafely.la.gov and follow the outlined procedures. Mr. Iyengar shared that much of the feedback from businesses has focused on the need for clear and consistent guidance for how

to comply with public health guidelines. He also reiterated that the Mayor's Office is in close contact with state public health officials to ensure a unified message regarding information, instructions, and guidelines for Baton Rouge businesses and residents.

Strike Team Presentations

Childcare & K-12 Education: Liz Smith

Ms. Smith presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Childcare & K-12 Education Strike Team, which included:

- Develop and distribute ECE provider education toolkit via webinars and other channels that help ECEs navigate the financial management challenges associated with reopening and sustaining themselves.
- Closely coordinate with LDH and LDOE to disseminate consistent and clear public health guidance to ECEs.
- Connect local summer camp operators with large facilities or properties with space or unused capacity that allow for effective social distancing.
- Advocate for statewide Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) funding and preserve budgetary allocation for financial assistance to low-income families.
- Dedicate some federal funding the City-Parish has received to purchase and distribute PPE and sanitizing materials to summer camps in need.
- Facilitate ease of COVID-19 testing for childcare workers that have gone back to work.
- Facilitate a summer care consortium for smaller providers to learn from larger providers what CDC or other guidance they are putting into place and how.
- Work with local donors and philanthropic organizations to create a fund and fundraise for immediate childcare financial needs.
- Closely coordinate with ongoing surveying of ECEs, summer camp operators, schools, and others to leverage real-time data and analysis toward recovery effort.

Business & Finance: Jim Bernhard

Mr. Bernhard presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Business & Finance Strike Team, which included:

- Require use of face masks or coverings, through an ordinance or other mechanisms. Communicate the importance of wearing masks and associated measures broadly, using all available channels and outlets.
- Develop a pool of capital for small businesses to use, potentially supported by local banks or credit unions.

- Create a resource line for businesses, possibly included in or similar to 211.

Health & Human Services: Dr. Barbara Griffith

Dr. Griffith presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Health & Human Services Strike Team, which included:

- Leverage experience and lessons learned of healthcare industry to inform educational materials, messaging, and engagement efforts with local businesses (i.e. public health and safety protocols, preventative care, and recommended PPE for protecting workers and customers).
- Design a program focused on enhancing and addressing healthcare access challenges, including educating the community on preventative care, emphasizing the importance of seeing a doctor, and connecting those in need with available resources.
- Maintain a strong focus on the needs of and impacts to vulnerable populations as economic activity restarts and businesses reopen, including, but not limited to challenges associated with personal health and safety, childcare, transportation, housing, and food insecurity.

Higher Education & Workforce Development: Mary Werner

Ms. Werner presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Higher Education & Workforce Development Strike Team, which included:

- Design, implement, and communicate public health and economic reopening policies that are consistently messaged and applied throughout East Baton Rouge Parish.
- Establish a committee consisting of representatives from the Mayor's Office and area higher education institutions to maintain an active dialogue involving policies and procedures as they are developed and align messaging with key stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty, and the general public.
- In coordination with BRAC and large employers, develop and broadly distribute training materials for employers and employees focused on key topics like safe contact practices, social distancing, PPE use, and more.
- Identify opportunities to connect businesses in need of PPE with the necessary equipment, potentially through small business grants or other means of allocation and distribution.

Hospitality & Tourism: Karron Alford

Ms. Alford presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Hospitality & Tourism Strike Team, which included:

- Develop clear and consistent communication distributed broadly through all relevant channels (traditional media, social media, industry groups, local government agencies, etc.). Messaging should be segmented and targeted based on two potential reopening scenarios for hospitality businesses:
 - Scenario 1: maintain only pick-up and delivery options.
 - Scenario 2: reopen under Phase 1 restrictions in accordance with health guidelines.
- Work with industry groups and restaurants to develop easy-to-understand visuals and other materials that help to clarify and reinforce public health standards and expectations for workers and customers alike.

Infrastructure & Mobility: Ann Trappey

Ms. Trappey presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Infrastructure & Mobility Strike Team, which included:

- Identify ways to expedite the engineering selection process to put the maximum amount of projects with existing funding sources out to bid by the end of 2020.
- Coordinate with CATS and other public health officials to maintain and expand transit operations that consider public health guidance and PPE needs among staff and ridership.
- Inventory and prepare project lists for potential federal stimulus funding, particularly those projects addressing bridge repair, stormwater management, and ped/bike or mobility needs.
- Coordinate with local civic associations to identify tangible needs and projects that meet criteria such as public safety or quality of life and work to position these projects for any federal funding for which they may be eligible.
- Work with BREC and other organizations to promote existing assets that offer public health and mobility benefits (e.g. bike paths).
- In coordination with the private sector, identify and advance policy measures or investments to make Wi-Fi and broadband more accessible and affordable to Baton Rouge residents (e.g. “dig once” ordinance).

Personal Protective Equipment: Adam Knapp

Mr. Knapp presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Personal Protective Equipment Strike Team, which included:

- Continue to direct businesses toward and highlight the BRAC PPE marketplace as the local supply market for PPE. In coordination with BRAC, monitor supply chains and scale sourcing, production, or pick-up locations as necessary based on demand.
- Coordinate with BRAC and industry groups to mitigate high or varying price points for PPE through pooled purchasing within and across industries and taking advantage of bulk buying opportunities.
- Continue to support area healthcare providers with calls for PPE donations.
- Implement public education campaign that leverages public health experts with PPE expertise and well-known community leaders to educate the public on the purpose and proper application of various types of PPE.

Public Policy: Michael DiResto

Mr. DiResto presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Public Policy Strike Team, which included:

- Initiate broad public campaign focused on wearing face masks supported by empowering businesses with educational resources and implementing policy measures that encourage widespread adoption of mask-wearing practices.
- Streamline any existing City-Parish processes tied to stimulating economic activity, such as permitting and zoning processes, and fast-track any projects with existing revenue sources with a focus on putting them out to bid as quickly as possible.
- Assess the fiscal impact of any fee waivers and tax abatements or deferrals. Based on this analysis and subsequent prioritization of those measures that will achieve the greatest net positive impact, consider rapid implementation in coordination with the Mayor's Office and Metro Council.
- In coordination with entrepreneurial assistance organizations like NexusLA, LSU, Southern, LSBDC, and BRAC, design and implement a rapid response program for prospective start-ups and entrepreneurs. This may include streamlining occupational and other associated licensing requirements, connecting entrepreneurs to business coaching resources, and providing access to available and qualified workforce.

Real Estate: Helena Cunningham

Ms. Cunningham presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Real Estate Strike Team, which included:

- Implement an image campaign to position Baton Rouge locally and nationally as a community that is prepared, confident, safe, filled with opportunity, and moving forward.

- Streamline City-Parish processes to facilitate quicker decisions tied to economic activity, such as permitting decisions and zoning requests.
- Leverage existing facilities and real estate (e.g. universities) in alternate or more intentional ways, such as to conduct testing, manufacture or distribute PPE, and to spur investment through surrounding construction.
- Analyze the fiscal impact and feasibility of policy measures such as tax abatements or deferrals, zoning, or other tools that address near-term challenges without adversely impacting local tax revenues.

Small & Disadvantaged Businesses: Calvin Mills, Jr.

Mr. Mills presented the discussion highlights, key considerations, and initial recommendations of the Small & Disadvantaged Businesses Strike Team, which included:

- Facilitate the development of a local small business lending program, leveraging the resources and capabilities of community banks and other lending institutions, to connect small businesses with capital to facilitate their reopening activities.
- Work with local partners to establish a microgrant program that helps to address pressing, lower-cost needs of small businesses (e.g. PPE or short-duration working capital grants).
- Advocate for temporary policy measures that relax barriers, streamline processes, or incentivize economic activity in underserved areas of East Baton Rouge Parish.
- Identify opportunities to leverage pooled purchasing to secure PPE and other resources in a low-cost, efficient manner.
- Clarify, centralize, and promote guidelines and recommendations associated with reopening and operational guidance.
- Maximize awareness and expand availability of technical assistance for small businesses adjusting to the changed environment, leveraging existing resources and organizations (e.g. NexusLA, LSU, SU, LSBDC).

Open Discussion

Ms. Trappey emphasized the importance of having accessible training for businesses in areas like the importance of having an active banking relationship.

Mr. Jones concurred and mentioned that in North Baton Rouge, which is home to many small and disadvantaged businesses, many business owners have very little interactions or established relationships with banks. He cited the fact that there are relatively few banks located in North Baton Rouge compared to other areas, which makes it difficult for business owners there to form a relationship with a bank. Mr. Jones and Mr. Knapp shared that many of these business owners were denied SBA applications after the 2016 floods, leading many to distrust the banking and

lending system and feel navigating it isn't worth their time to apply when they could be focused on their pressing near-term business needs.

Mr. D'Angelo echoed this sentiment, reiterating that many business owners feel like they cannot trust the loan process. Mr. Jones raised the issue that many people in the community do not feel safe enough to patronize local businesses or resume regular activity. He predicted that there will be an increase in activity when businesses reopen, but it will not be up to regular levels. Furthermore, many business owners will also not feel safe or otherwise comfortable re-opening.

Ms. Werner brought up the point that community needs will likely be changed, ranging from how working from home may affect dry-cleaning businesses and preferences for ordering groceries may affect brick and mortar stores. She stressed that this changing environment will be difficult to navigate and will bring to light new issues, but also there is also potential to address known issues like the need to increase broadband access, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Ms. Alford highlighted the reliance small businesses and the hospitality and tourism industry have on each other.

Near-Term Recommendations: Erin Monroe Wesley and Jim Bernhard

The strike team recommendations were approved to be submitted to Mayor Broome on a motion by Adam Knapp, seconded by Jerry Jones.

Next Steps: Veneeth Iyengar

Mr. Iyengar highlighted that many of the near-term recommendations developed by the strike teams are beneficial to enact independent of the current environment. He stated that the Mayor's Office has already been working to implement takeaways from this process, such as fast-tracking infrastructure projects. He shared that the Mayor's Office will work to organize recommendations into categories based on the time and resources they will take to implement.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m. by Mr. Bernhard and Ms. Monroe Wesley.