

Councilmember Gaudet sends letter to Metro Council colleagues seeking denial of proposed Economic Development District

Baton Rouge, LA - Councilmember Rowdy Gaudet submitted the following letter today to all Metro Councilmembers and Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, regarding the proposed creation of an Aztek Cove Economic Development District:

Honorable Members of the East Baton Rouge Parish Metropolitan Council:

I am writing today to strongly urge you to deny the approval of the proposed Aztek Cove Economic Development District at our October 11, 2023 Council meeting. After careful consideration and analysis of the proposal, as well as hearing the overwhelming opposition from residents of our parish, I implore you to join me in both declaring this flawed proposal as not in our parish's best interest, and in opposing its passage.

At a time when we as a Council are evaluating the necessity of asking our residents and businesses to pay a stormwater utility fee under the premise that we do not have adequate general fund resources to appropriately maintain stormwater quality and quantity, the passage of a \$35 million 'refund' of tax revenues to a private developer, for a single piece of property, over a 40-year period, with no associated public infrastructure or public amenity improvements, reeks of political gamesmanship that will significantly diminish the public's trust in our ability as a body to appropriately manage our fiscal responsibilities. If this item were to pass, cries of hypocrisy will resonate if and when our body asks residents and businesses to consider an additional fee to fund stormwater maintenance.

Secondly, we should all be very concerned with the precedent that passage of this proposal will set. I have stated publicly numerous times that passage of this single-property economic development "district," located in a predominantly residential area of our parish that is not seeking to attract additional nearby commercial activity, and that contains no public infrastructure or public amenity improvements, opens Pandora's box for any and every commercial developer to seek a similar arrangement: carving out single-property economic development "districts" around our parish and redirecting taxpayer funds back to the developer over several years. Simply put, if the Council approves it for one, why would the Council not approve it for all? Please consider the dangerous precedent this would set and the long-term, negative fiscal impact this would have on the City-Parish budget.

Finally, and I would add most importantly, we need to be astute enough as elected officials to listen to the sentiment of our residents when they are so overwhelmingly vocal in their opposition. Over the past two weeks, we have all received a significant amount of emails and phone calls in opposition to this proposal from residents living near the development, as well as from those across our parish. At the Oct. 3 community meeting Councilmember Hudson and I held regarding this proposal, 78 attendees signed a public comment card in opposition; there were zero public comment cards in favor. As of the signing of this letter, Councilmembers have received well over 150 emails of opposition. Adding to this, stakeholder groups representing

residential and commercial development interests, as well as those representing citizen's and homeowner's interests, have voiced their extreme concern with this proposal. While I believe sometimes as elected officials, we have to take unpopular positions on issues, in this instance it is abundantly clear that we should adhere to the overwhelming will of the people and deny this proposal.

Colleagues, I urge you to consider these very concerning points as you evaluate your vote, and I urge you to oppose this misguided effort. We were elected into these positions by a citizenry that demands we make informed policy decisions that protect and promote the financial stability and success of our parish. Actions to the contrary diminish the public's trust in us as a body and have long-term negative effects on our ability to work with the public to improve the quality of life in East Baton Rouge Parish.

This proposal is bad policy. I appeal to your judgment to deny it on October 11.

With gratitude,

Rowdy J. Gaudet
East Baton Rouge Metro Council
District 3
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