

Restart BR Meeting #2

Mayor's Business Roundtable – Economic Recovery Working Group
May 13, 2020



Agenda

- I. Call to Order & Roll Call
- II. Approval of May 6 Meeting Minutes
- III. Review of State Guidance for Phase 1 Reopening
- IV. Strike Team Presentations
- V. Open Discussion
- VI. Near-Term Recommendations
- VII. Next Steps
- VIII. Adjourn

Call to Order & Roll Call

Jim Bernhard, Erin Monroe Wesley

Approval of May 6 Meeting Minutes

Jim Bernhard, Erin Monroe Wesley

Review of State Guidance for Phase 1 Reopening

Veneeth Iyengar

Business & Finance Strike Team

Jim Bernhard, John D'Angelo, Adam Knapp, Calvin Mills, Jenni Peters, Dave Roberts, John Valluzzo

Key Discussions & Considerations

What are local businesses' most pressing capital or short-term financing needs? How have supply chains been disrupted and where are they creating the most uncertainty for meeting customer demand?

- **Small businesses that have been shut down or disrupted will need quick access to capital to restart.** These resources will help them adapt to new business models (e.g. e-commerce) and to operate their business safely (e.g. PPE and sanitizing materials). Suggestions included converting equity of government facilities via P3 and distributing revenues to impacted businesses via loans/grants and partnering with area community banks and credit unions to establish a dedicated loan fund for small businesses.
- **Many companies do not understand or are not up-to-date on recent guidance** given it changes frequently, is often broad, and is difficult to adapt to without capital or incoming revenues. Suggestions included establishing a dedicated hotline for EBR businesses, building on the existing 211 model.
- **The public's health and safety, along with their consumer confidence, needs to be a top priority in moving into any phase of economic reopening;** this will require aggressive and broad measures for wearing face masks. The cost and availability of masks, legality of a local mandate, and appropriate messaging are concerns and should be considered as part of any face mask policies.

Near-Term Recommendations

1. 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.
2. Develop a pool of capital for small businesses to use, potentially supported by local banks or credit unions.
3. Create a resource line for businesses, possibly included in or similar to 211.

Childcare & K-12 Education

Dean Donald Andrews, Mimi Singer Lee, Rachel Pierson, Liz Smith, Libbie Sonnier-Netto, Erin Monroe Wesley

Key Discussions & Considerations

How can we facilitate access to childcare services that can be delivered safely and consistently?

- **Local early childcare education centers are struggling, with many non-operational due to major losses of revenue and an inability to maintain workforce** – 40% have laid off staff, 68% are closed due to low enrollment, and one-third say they cannot reopen. Many that are currently open are at capacity with essential workers' children.
- **Grants and forgivable loans are the most requested resources.** These funds are needed to make payroll, pay mortgages or rent, buy supplies, and pay utilities. Traditional funding streams are largely exhausted or at risk, which contributes to affordability and access challenges for parents.
- **ECE owners and operators need guidance and support for how to navigate these financial challenges** – from setting up a business banking account and tracking PPP documentation to understanding good vs. bad debt and scaling operations
- **If ECEs reopen, there are significant workforce challenges.** Many staff make more money on unemployment, and there are liability concerns if there are positive tests. Adult-to-child ratios should not be increased to address capacity issues.
- **Even if ECE centers are open, parents need to know it is safe to send their kids.** There are consumer confidence considerations that must be reinforced by strong public health practices, education, messaging, and other protocols.
- **Children are at severe risk of developmental challenges, both mentally and physically.** For example, if staff are wearing masks and young children cannot see their mouth moving while they talk. These challenges mirror situations and results that stem from other crises ranging from the Great Depression to Hurricane Katrina.
- **There are significant challenges with starting summer camps** – particularly with smaller operators lacking the resources, footprint, facilities, and public health guidance to successfully open.

Near-Term Recommendations

1. 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.
2. Closely coordinate with LDH and LDOE to disseminate consistent and clear public health guidance to ECEs.
3. Connect local summer camp operators with large facilities or properties with space or unused capacity that allow for effective social distancing.
4. Advocate for statewide Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) funding and preserve budgetary allocation for financial assistance to low-income families.
5. Dedicate some federal funding the City-Parish has received to purchase and distribute PPE and sanitizing materials to summer camps in need.
6. Facilitate ease of COVID-19 testing for childcare workers that have gone back to work.
7. 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.
8. Work with local donors and philanthropic organizations to create a fund and fundraise for immediate childcare financial needs.
9. Closely coordinate with ongoing surveying of ECEs, summer camp operators, schools, and others to leverage real-time data and analysis toward recovery effort.

Health & Human Services

Helena Cunningham, Dr. Barbara Griffith, Atty. Alfreda Tillman Bester

Key Discussions & Considerations

What support or resources do vulnerable populations need the most?

- **The healthcare industry has more than two months of experience responding to and operating safely during the pandemic.** The broader business community would strongly benefit from leveraging this expertise and best practices as the economy begins to reopen in areas like education and preventative care. Messaging through traditional media isn't enough and must take many forms to reach the masses.
- **More education is needed from healthcare professionals around PPE and actions that prevent or mitigate the spread of the virus, particularly to guide how small businesses spend limited resources.** This includes how various forms of PPE work, what certain operating environments need the most, and more.
- **Childcare is a significant challenge as businesses reopen and employees come back to work.** This is particularly true for vulnerable populations with limited resources and support networks.
- **There are going concerns about employer and business liability.** While liability relief is a concern, there are also inadequate support systems in place if workers are exposed on the job.
- **Access to health care remains a challenge, particularly for vulnerable populations.** It is crucial to develop a working understanding of how consumption needs and practices have changed, identify innovation that can address these changes, and rebuild consumer confidence in going to the doctor for preventative care. This must be supported by ensuring frontline workers have access to related resources, such as adequate PPE, testing, transportation, and childcare.

Near-Term Recommendations

1. 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).
2. 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.
3. 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

Dean Donald Andrews, Greg Bowser, Calvin Mills, Mary Werner

Key Discussions & Considerations

How does the design and delivery of education and training programs need to change? How well-positioned are workers to reenter the workforce?

- **The concentrated nature and footprint of higher education institutions must involve strong policies, procedures, and practices supported by clear and consistent communications.** Students, parents, faculty and staff, and the local community need to have comfort and confidence in these efforts as institutions restart in-person operations.
- **Strong and ongoing coordination among area universities and colleges will be critical as policies and procedures are developed and implemented.** The Mayor's Office can help to coordinate these interests and facilitate conversations that leverage best practices, awareness, and alignment across each institution.
- **As students return to campus, economic benefits should be balanced with public health concerns.** Education, training, and communication should be targeted toward students to help them understand how to safely interact with one another and the community while supporting local businesses.
- **Workforce training will be crucial as policies are developed.** Employers should work with the Mayor's Office, BRAC, and other resources to ensure policies are aligned with public health guidance and are communicated effectively and consistently to their employees.
- **Business owners will struggle accessing PPE, both in terms of sourcing and their ability to procure it.** The availability of PPE needs to be widely distributed and considerations given to small business owners lacking the financial capacity to purchase it for their employees and/or customers.

Near-Term Recommendations

1. Design, implement, and communicate public health and economic reopening policies that are consistently messaged and applied throughout East Baton Rouge Parish.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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, Emelie Alton, Misty Broussard, Rosehn Gipe, Manard Lagasse, Mitch Rotolo, Brad Watts

Key Discussions & Considerations

What measures and strategies are needed to help restart hospitality businesses in the near-term?

- **Many of the current restrictions for restaurants are not conducive to a viable business model, especially ones limiting capacity for dine-in and service options.** Staffing, inventory, leases, customer experiences, and other considerations are all concerns of restaurateurs associated with being “open” but in a very limited manner.
- **There is confusion among operators and patrons about what is allowed, creating public health concerns and tension when it comes to enforcing restrictions.** Restaurants are concerned about the lack of guidance surrounding their ability to operate and how that same information will be communicated consistently and clearly with their customers.
- **Many restaurants have suggested operating at 25% capacity is not financially viable to reopen.** In addition to prolonging their dormant status or sustaining limited revenues via to-go or delivery orders, this may add to confusion among customers who expect all restaurants to be partially reopened.
- **Hospitality businesses are continuing to pivot their business model based on new guidance and information, often with limited time to do so, which is exhausting operators and is unsustainable.** These changes then must be considered from a technology and service perspective, then communicated in real-time to workers and customers. Many business owners would rather prolong operating restrictions to avoid continued changes and maximize revenues rather than move too quickly into partially restarting their operations.
- **There are concerns about restrictions not being universally applied to comparable businesses in the same industry.** Hospitality businesses and tourist attractions should be subject to the same public health guidelines and able to reopen if they can demonstrate compliance with distancing and other measures.

Near-Term Recommendations

What measures and strategies are needed to help restart hospitality businesses in the near-term?

1. 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.
2. 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

Jim Bernhard, Ross Reilly, Ann Trappey

Key Discussions & Considerations

How can Baton Rouge prepare for any federal stimulus funds? How are travel patterns changing in the near-term that impact our infrastructure needs, mobility options, support services, etc.?

- **The City-Parish should identify and expedite any opportunities to more quickly put construction projects with existing funding sources out to bid.** This includes processes like engineering selection, which could result in several additional MOVEBR projects being awarded by the end of the year.
- **As businesses reopen, more people will again be reliant on public transportation.** CATS and other public officials need to ensure public health is maintained in these close-proximity settings, or provide alternate modes of transit, while preserving a much-needed resource for individuals to get to and from work.
- **The City-Parish should begin planning now for any federal infrastructure stimulus funding package.** This includes inventorying and preparing “ready-to-go” projects that would likely be candidates for such funding (e.g. stormwater management, bridge, ped/bike, and broadband projects).
- **These changing travel patterns and needs are highlighting other mobility options for residents and workers.** As more people continue to walk and bike to their destinations, or for recreational purposes, considerations should be given to what supporting infrastructure will be needed to accommodate this shift.
- **The shift to working from home and distance learning is expected to continue, prompting the need for expanded WiFi, broadband, and other infrastructure.** The City-Parish should consider policy measures and other investments, in close coordination with the private sector, that address connectivity and capacity needs, particularly in lower income areas.

Near-Term Recommendations

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Inventory and prepare project lists for potential federal stimulus funding, particularly those projects addressing bridge repair, stormwater management, and ped/bike or mobility needs.
4. 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.
5. Work with BREC and other organizations to promote existing assets that offer public health and mobility benefits (e.g. bike paths).
6. 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

Steven Ceulemans, Adam Knapp, Donnie Miller, Hugh Raetzsch

Key Discussions & Considerations

What are the most pressing PPE challenges faced by local businesses? What corresponding strategies need to be deployed or actions taken?

- **PPE needs of area hospitals and healthcare providers are ever evolving.** These shifts need to consider the different types and availability of PPE, types of providers, and that other procedures or services that require PPE that were ramped down to accommodate for COVID-19 are starting back up again.
- **One of the most challenging pressure points involves the confusion surrounding PPE use.** This includes differing levels of understanding ranging from how and when each type of mask should be used to the importance of hand washing vs. other actions to mitigate the spread of the virus. These issues may become exacerbated if the public shifts demand for N-95 masks, for example, when cloth masks would be suitable for the general public. Additional education is needed from public health experts and recognizable community leaders to reinforce PPE use.
- **PPE distribution challenges have mostly involved pricing, sourcing, and accurate and timely delivery to meet local needs, although those issues are currently under control.** While local supplies are being closely monitored, any spikes in demand due to reopening activities may prompt the need for additional supply and distribution sites. The BRAC PPE marketplace serves as the central resource for businesses in need of PPE and should continue to be positioned as such.
- **While inconsistencies and variances in PPE price points are largely under control, they must be closely monitored and planned for as demand increases.** Mitigation strategies include centralizing or pooling purchasing power within industries or sectors to manage for pricing variances, leveraging bulk buying, and expanding local manufacturing or sourcing if demand begins to routinely exceed supply.

Near-Term Recommendations

What are the most pressing PPE challenges faced by local businesses? What corresponding strategies need to be deployed or actions taken?

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Continue to support area healthcare providers with calls for PPE donations.
4. 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

Alfreda Tillman-Bester, Michael DiResto, Calvin Mills, Councilman Scott Wilson

Key Discussions & Considerations

What policy measures or programming is needed to remove barriers or ease burdens for businesses to restart?

- **While there is broad acknowledgement of the public health need for wearing face masks, there are varying approaches to how that should be applied on a community level.** This includes any mandates for wearing masks, how the importance of wearing masks is communicated to residents and business owners or workers, and the degree to which masks and other PPE are available to businesses requirements.
- **The City-Parish should focus on streamlining as many processes and moving as many projects as possible into procurement to ignite economic activity.** This should include permitting workflows and processes, encouraging agencies to diversify their vendors and enhance access for small businesses to participate in upcoming procurement opportunities, and putting projects out to bid as quickly as possible where funding already exists.
- **Existing fees, taxes, and other revenue generating measures should be assessed for potential waivers or deferrals, as well as the corresponding fiscal impact, to provide near-term relief and jumpstart economic activity.** Such analyses should include potential measures like property tax abatements for landlords if the moratorium on evictions is extended or occupational license fee waivers. Any measures should be carefully considered against pressing City-Parish financial challenges and budget shortfalls.
- **Baton Rouge should be as proactive as possible in facilitating entrepreneurial activity.** This can include policy or fee waiver measures for new business formation and rapid-response efforts to quickly connect newly formed businesses with counselors, available workforce, and other resources offered through the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Near-Term Recommendations

What policy measures or programming is needed to remove barriers or ease burdens for businesses to restart?

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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, John Engquist, Ty Gose, Mary Werner, Brandon Williams

Key Discussions & Considerations

What are the impediments to near-term development projects? What actions are needed to stabilize them?

- **Various sectors of the local real estate market are experiencing very different realities.** Some larger outlets like grocery and home improvement stores are maintaining ongoing business while smaller, traditional retail are struggling. Large facilities or organizations with significant real estate footprints like universities are in a state of transition, but with unused capacity that could be more effectively leveraged in the near-term. Meanwhile, office dynamics are rapidly changing with expanded work from home capabilities that are expected to continue even as economic reopening takes effect.
- **Baton Rouge needs to invest in its external image and demonstrate to the nation that it is investing in the public health of its residents and moving forward with growing the local economy.** In addition to the benefits for recruiting companies and workforce, the real estate industry relies on out-of-market investors whose perception of the city, parish, and state will influence their investment.
- **Landlords and property owners are experiencing challenges with current rental market.** If the moratorium on evictions is extended, consideration should be given to tax abatements or deferrals that provide similar financial relief.
- **The status of some projects and large developments is unknown.** Businesses can't afford to take out loans to advance these projects and the needs of those these projects are designed to serve are rapidly evolving (commercial and residential). The City-Parish should consider policy measures that help to facilitate those projects that do have reliable financing in place, such as via streamlined permitting processes and zoning requests for properties that need to be converted from commercial to residential to accommodate this changed environment.

Near-Term Recommendations

What are the impediments to near-term development projects? What actions are needed to stabilize them?

1. 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.
2. Streamline City-Parish processes to facilitate quicker decisions tied to economic activity, such as permitting decisions and zoning requests.
3. 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.
4. 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

Dean Donald Andrews, Michael Cooks, Jerry Jones, Calvin Mills, Brandon Williams

Key Discussions & Considerations

How do small or disadvantaged businesses need to be immediately repositioning themselves to provide services in a changed economy?

- **Many small businesses have identified capital as their most pressing challenge.** Many owners experienced challenges with SBA loans after the 2016 floods. As a result they are hesitant to spend their time applying for financial relief only to get declined again and would rather focus on what can make them money today. They are also going to be financially strained to purchase signage, sanitizer, masks, gloves, and other materials necessary to open up.
- **Small businesses are also adapting to new public health considerations for interacting with customers and rapidly shifting business models.** It is unclear for business owners where to go for information, leading to inconsistencies in how policy measures and guidance is interpreted. Many need training to move into e-commerce and other digital channels, but for some training on new skills may be too late in that they need financial assistance now.
- **There is potential to leverage local resources and lending capacity to address these capital needs.** The Mayor's Office should work closely with local community banks, credit unions, and other organizations to identify solutions or programs that can connect a significant pool of capital with small businesses, supported by technical assistance that helps to increase the viability and sustainability of the business.
- **Policy measures should be considered to facilitate greater economic activity among small businesses and the communities in which they reside.** This may include connecting small businesses with City-Parish procurements or advocating for changes to Enterprise Zone incentives that facilitate more impactful investments in underserved areas.

Near-Term Recommendations

How do small or disadvantaged businesses need to be immediately repositioning themselves to provide services in a changed economy?

1. 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.
2. 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).
3. Advocate for temporary policy measures that relax barriers, streamline processes, or incentivize economic activity in underserved areas of East Baton Rouge Parish.
4. Identify opportunities to leverage pooled purchasing to secure PPE and other resources in a low-cost, efficient manner.
5. Clarify, centralize, and promote guidelines and recommendations associated with reopening and operational guidance.
6. 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: Restart BR Members

Near-Term Recommendations

Next Steps

Adjourn