

**FOCUS GROUP: Preserving Community Assets - Jo-Anna Jones and Mart Black**

- Ice Breaker--Getting started [from Mart] Describe/Define St. James Parish in 3 words?
- 1) **Old, historic structures** in Convent [**2 Dots**] –  
How to preserve?
  - Adaptive reuse? Work with Historic Society
  - What is eligible for National Historic designation?
- 2) Need/would like to have **Sidewalks** throughout the parish [**3 Dots**]
  - a. Needed in residential areas
  - b. Need upkeep of existing sidewalks along LA 18 and LA 44
    - i. Current condition impedes walking and neighborly **Connectivity**
  - Potential for **Bike/Walking Trail** on top of levee
- 3) **Preserving Levees** (River Road is Historic – has scenic appeal)
  - a. How to enhance and tell story?
- 4) Maintain traditional bonfires on levee  
[Items 3 and 4 linked]
- 5) **Limiting hazardous cargoes** on certain parts of River Road [**2 Dots**]
  - a. Problems on frequent basis
  - b. Alternative truck route available—require its use.
- 6) Preserve **community parks/recreation facilities**—partner with local industry for this.  
[**One Dot**]
- 7) **Landscaping/beautification in parks and public places**
- 8) **Removal of abandoned, derelict buildings**—make parish look better [**3 Dots**]
- 9) **Scenic waterways**—preserving and enhancing

**10) Lack of community assets in Convent area [3 Dots]**

- a. Need to introduce these in certain areas (shopping, convenience stores)—lack of access to these

Ended with a return to the request to describe St. James Parish in a single word: Responses primarily from Parish President

- o “Green” (trees, etc.)
- o Malodorous (industry along the River)
- o Need Parish-wide sewerage

July 26, 2010

**[ST. JAMES PARISH FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES  
ROMEVILLE COMMUNITY CENTER**

<b>PRESERVING COMMUNITY ASSETS—SWOT</b> <b>July 26, 2010—Jo- Anna Jones and Mart Black</b>	<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
	**Old, historic structures in Convent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to preserve?</li> <li>• Adaptive reuse?</li> <li>• What is eligible for National Historic designation?</li> </ul>	
<b>Describe Parish in One Word?</b> -Green (trees, etc.) -Malodorous (industry along River) (Need parish-wide Sewerage)		Need upkeep of existing sidewalks along LA 18 and LA 44  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current condition of sidewalks impedes walking and neighborly connectivity</li> </ul>	***Need/would like to have sidewalks throughout the parish	
	Preserving levees—River Road is historic, has scenic appeal  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain traditional bonfires on levee</li> </ul>		Potential for bike/walking trail on top of levee  How to enhance River Road and levee and tell the story?	**Limit hazardous cargoes on certain parts of River Road <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems on a frequent basis</li> <li>• Need to require use of alternative truck routes</li> </ul>
			*Preserve community parks/recreation facilities Partner with industry for this	
			Landscaping/beautification in parks and public places	
		***Remove abandoned, derelict buildings—make	Parish has program that has begun to remove abandoned,	

		parish look better	derelict buildings	
			Scenic waterways—preserve and enhance	
		<p>***Lack of community assets in Convent area- Need shopping, convenience stores RR being forced to limit crossing crossings by federal safety requirements—so neighborhoods have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently have to drive distances to access basic services.</li> </ul>		

**I. FOCUS GROUP: Human Services –SWOT Analysis Martha Cazaubon and Simonne Caesar**

<b>STRENGTH</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
Many services provided under one department	Gap in Services 40-49 age group	Campaign to increase knowledge about social service programs	Lack of media access
Industry is a good corporate partner: Shelter in Place program, youth education program, fire prevention	**Gap in health care services for those in poverty	Increase media coverage (no public access channel)	****Declining population
*Parish has strong relationships with foundations, local businesses and neighboring parishes	**River makes it difficult to provide services—cultural attitudes toward travel patterns	*Social media networks	Community will become a bedroom community
Good financial resources	Gap in mental health services		**To dependent on industry to pay bills and they do not want to pay taxes

	<p>**Education system –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No financial planning or life skills offered</li> <li>• Lack of jobs after student receives training</li> <li>• Retraining after job loss</li> <li>• Restrictions on use of funds</li> <li>• High School curriculum is not preparing students that are not going to college</li> <li>• Most expected job growth will be in the service industry</li> </ul>		
	*****Education System lacking or below average		
	Working middle class cannot afford health care insurance		
	People will not move to St. James because of poor education system		
	***Affordable health Care -		

**II. FOCUS GROUP: Economic Development - Cullen Curole and Ivan Miestchovich**

Ivan introduced the session by asking guest to brainstorm about what they would want and what they think St James needs for purposes of improving economic conditions in St James Parish.

The issues/items raised were then prioritized

- 1 It is felt that small businesses are a strong part of the economy of St James. It is recognized that small businesses hire and are owned by people of all races, genders and education levels and that these small businesses often need help to thrive and/or survive. Guests were aware of Small Business Development services and trainings held in LaPlace and felt that these services need to be marketed and held in the Parish to better serve and assist the small businesses of St James.
- 2 It is recognized that St James plants produce many products that are then shipped elsewhere for further processing. Guests feel that we should inventory the products made at local mills and seek manufacturers that can do some of the value-added production here in St James
- 3 Unemployment is recognized as a major issue in St James. Unemployment figures far outpace those of neighboring parishes, especially in the Black community. Guests feel that GED training, trade school training should be improved/enhanced to lift the education and skill level of the unemployed. It was stated that many are unemployable and the group feels that something could/should be done to help employ these individuals
- 4 Recognizing that education and skill levels of St James Labor force is low, economic developers should be recruiting low tech manufacturers, and given St James' proximity between Baton Rouge and New Orleans ed's should recruit companies looking for warehouse and distribution locations.
- 5 Follow item 3 above, St James should prompt its school district to adopt a dual degree option that would encourage industrial arts education in addition to the current college bound curriculum
- 6 A guest would like millages and sales tax levels to be compared to neighboring parishes to see if there is any room for creating incentives for businesses to come to St James. In the same vain, local economic developers should more aggressively match state incentives with businesses looking to locate in St James.

**III. FOCUS GROUP: Public Infrastructure - Jo-Anna Jones and Martha Cazaubon****STRENGTHS:**

- **Good Water Distribution [2 Dots]**
  - PIAL 95% out of 100%
  - About to double capacity
- **Retrofitting Key Facilities [1 Dot]**
  - Hardening for hurricane protection
- **Road Transportation Network**
- **One of top rural transit systems in the state**
  - RPTA and St. James Transit
- **Railroad access—three**
- **Deepwater Port**
- **Recreational Public Docks.**
- **Good natural Drainage System**
- **Adequate Utility Access**
  - Except in communication
  - And power transmission lines
- **Two River Bridges**
  - One of only 3 parishes in the state with more than one crossing
- **Decentralized Community Facilities**
  - Not centralized—COA, Schools, recreation centers/parks, community centers
- **New Hospital [One Dot]**
- **Two Government Offices, two public libraries**
  - Limited service book mobile

- **Volunteer Fire Service equipment.**

**WEAKNESSES:**

- **Communications Systems [1 Dot]**
  - **AT&T cannot provide services to parish residents and government, because population too small**
- **Lack of high-speed internet access in some areas—also limited cable TV service in some areas.**
- **Ruralness—population spread.**
- **Limited libraries—not decentralized**
- **Lack of Youth oriented recreation [1 Dot]**
- **Need to Resurface Roads [2 Dots]**
- **Aging Facilities [3 Dots]**
- **Different levels of service/facilities with communities [in different communities?]**
- **Lack Sewer Treatment [1 Dot]**
- **Deadend, one-land streets cut off by railroad tracks**
- **Railroad is being forced to limit crossings [by Federal government?] and neighborhoods have more limited access**
- **Lack of Volunteer Firemen**
- **Need more drainage capacity**
- **Erosion of drainage canals**
- **Need storage/warehouse for hurricane equipment and supplies**

- **Interstate off-ramp not in parish because exchange is in area designated as wetlands, so access is not allowed**
- **Lack of community businesses/shopping**
- **Lack of Pedestrian Access.**

#### **OPPORTUNITIES:**

- **Increased water capacity [2 Dots]**
- **Improved communications**
  - Opening new markets
  - Adopting new technologies
- **4-Lane 3125 & 3217 [1 Dot]**
- **Interconnected St. James/Gramercy/Lutcher if proper backflow preventer in place**
  - [Water? Sewer?] [1 Dot]
- **River crossing bridges**
- **River and Interstate**
- **Rail terminal expansion at oil storage/sugar refinery**
- **Possible new jobs**
- **Sustainability of facilities/services [1 Dot]**
- **Mid-way between BR and NO—proximity to Houma-Thibodaux**
- **High-speed rail—BR to NO**
- **Include pedestrian/utility requirements in Subdivision regs.**

**THREATS:**

- **Lack of volunteers for fire departments will increase insurance premiums**
  - **Costs passed on to businesses and homeowners [4 Dots]**
- **Rising insurance costs and limited providers [2 Dots]**
- **Lack of adequate hurricane protection [1 Dot]**
  - **St. John levee impacts on St. James**
- **Lack of adequate access to main evacuation arteries**
- **Declining population**
  - **Loss of taxes to fund infrastructure/program sustainability [1 Dot]**

**IV. Infrastructure – SWOT Analysis – Jo-Anna Jones and Martha Cazaubon**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<p>**Good water distribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PIAL 95% out of 100%</li> <li>• About to double capacity</li> </ul>	<p>*Communication Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AT&amp;T cannot provide services to parish residents and gov't, because population too small</li> </ul>	<p>**Increased water capacity</p>	<p>****Lack of Volunteers for Fire Department will increase insurance premiums</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs passed On to businesses and homeowners</li> </ul>
<p>*Retrofitting key facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardening for hurricane protection</li> </ul>	<p>Lack of high-speed internet access in some areas</p>	<p>Improved communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening new markets</li> <li>• Adopting new technologies</li> </ul>	<p>**Rising insurance costs and limited providers</p>
<p>Road transportation network</p>	<p>Also limited cable TV service in some areas</p>	<p>*4-lane 3125 and 3127</p>	<p>*Lack of adequate hurricane protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. John levee impacts St. James</li> </ul>
<p>One of top rural transit systems in state</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPTA and St. James Transit</li> </ul>	<p>Ruralness-population spread out</p>	<p>*Interconnected St. James/Gramercy/Lutcher if proper backflow preventer in place [water? sewer?]</p>	<p>Lack of adequate access to main evacuation routes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RR access--three</li> </ul>	<p>Limited libraries—not as decentralized as other parish services</p>	<p>River crossing bridges</p>	<p>Declining population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of taxes to fund infrastructure and program sustainability</li> </ul>
<p>Deepwater port</p>	<p>*Lack of youth oriented recreation</p>	<p>River and Interstate</p>	
<p>Recreational public docks</p>	<p>**Need to resurface roads</p>	<p>Rail terminal expansion at oil storage/sugar refinery</p>	
<p>Good natural drainage system</p>	<p>***Aging facilities</p>	<p>Possible new jobs</p>	
<p>Adequate utility access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Except in communication</li> <li>• And power transmission lines</li> </ul>	<p>Different levels of service/facilities with communities [in different communities?]</p>	<p>*Sustainability of facilities/services</p>	

Two River bridges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of only 3 parishes in state with more than one crossing</li> </ul>	*Lack sewer treatment	Mid-way between BR and NO—proximity to Houma-Thibodaux	
Decentralized community facilities	Dead-end, one-lane streets cut off by RR tracks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RR being forced to limit crossing crossings by federal safety requirements—so neighborhoods have more limited access</li> </ul>	High-speed rail to BR and NO	
*New hospital	Lack of Volunteer Firemen	Include pedestrian/utility requirements in Subdivision Regulations	
Two government offices, two public libraries [either side of River] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited service book mobile</li> </ul>	Need more drainage capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erosion of drainage canals</li> </ul>		
Volunteer Fire Service equipment	Need storage/warehouse for hurricane/emergency equipment and supplies		
	Interstate off-ramp not in parish because exchange in area designated as wetlands—so access not allowed		
	Lack of community businesses/shopping		
	Lack of pedestrian access		

**V. FOCUS GROUP: Land Use – Simonne Caesar and Mart Black****ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN FOCUS GROUP**

1. Industrial –Residential Land use Conflicts
2. Housing located near industry. Currently there is lots of industry and a need for more affordable housing (Romeville, Convent, etc).
3. There is a need for zoning (separate uses into industrial, commercial and residential)
4. Needed: Community service commercial (amenity type services); schools
5. Needed: Amenities (educational, recreational, etc.) for school age kids.
6. Lack of density of population in local communities works against establishments or urban/community amenities.
7. Maximizing development at crossroads – cluster development (residential and commercial) – opportunity. **IDEA:** Detailed land use by district
8. Industry is attracted to River

**LAND USE S.W.O.T ANALYSIS**

<b>STRENGTH</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
Flexibility and land use (no zoning)	Flexibility and land use (no zoning)	Clustered development – Village style walkable communities which would incorporate various housing types and commercial development.	Lack of parish-wide master drainage plan
Parish appears to have a natural development pattern	Not all river locations are suitable for industrial development		Railroad culverts broken and blocked causing flooding
Still largely rural			Unprotected pipelines
			Lack of community sewerage in unincorporated areas

**Housing –SWOT Analysis – Alexandra Wesley-Smith and Leo Marretta**

<b>STRENGTH</b>	<b>WEAKNESS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
Attractive rural community	Public housing has waiting list	Need community survey of affordable housing	Rent s too high
Historic home value	Emergency housing not available when needed	Need to educate owners about the Section 8 Program	Competition for scarce housing resource
Industrial development	Section 8 not meeting community needs: Owners unwilling to participate in Section 8 program Property owners can get higher rents due to market conditions influenced by post Katrina inflation of rents generally in the region. Section 8 not really affordable... 30% of income cap Program managed by St John; not locally focused??	Trailer Parks are an Affordable option	Apartment dwellers can't maintain rental payments- move back to housing developments
Easy access to job generators- location mid way between the suburbs of New Orleans & Baton Rouge	Depletion of housing stock, due to hurricane damage	Trailers parks could concentrated in attractive communities like Thibodaux (hwy 24)	No housing near Heavy Industry: Need greenspace and buffering between land uses
New neighborhoods	Lack of insurance to rebuild, due to Hurricane damage	Modular Housing: can't tell the difference between modular home and stick built house	Land value based on highest and best use: Industrial or agricultural development

Trailers area spread out in open space	Out migration of owners	Landowners might want to live in a trailer while they are building a new house	Zoning exist in Municipalities only
East Bank appears to have more rentals than West Bank	Real estate market crash, OCTOBER 2009. Credit markets tight	Modular housing are in a fixed location	
	Down Payment Assistance needed. Lack of buyer assistance training programs. Bond money issuance	Need for Financial Education and household budget management	
	Low income can't qualify. Housing prices above community's income	Group wants development to include Town Centers/ Mixed Use/ Mixed Income	
	Jobs created by local industry aren't available to all residents. Local economy does not offer sufficient wages to maintain basic quality of life.	Encourage PPP opportunities between government, faith based organizations and non profits.	
	Lack of available properties for LMI population-see print out	Need Collaborative Efforts for Public /Private Partnerships.	
	Parish Public Housing program has management and operations issues- i.e evaluating tenant's ability to continue to pay rents & utilities	Explore funding options for Housing PPP and mixed use developments/town centers	
	Lack of Parish administered housing office.	Research best practices for Housing/Mixed use developments	
	Need Workforce Housing on West Bank		

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