

Bayou Phoenix selected to begin major revitalization of New Orleans East

By Leah Clark
Contributing Writer

After more than a decade of neglect, a major revitalization will begin after the City of New Orleans selected Bayou Phoenix to redevelop the former Six Flags and Jazzland site in Eastern New Orleans. The city designated an Evaluation Committee which made the announcement on Oct. 11, 2021, after developer Kiernan West and Drew Brees withdrew their proposal.

"This is a huge win for our city. This announcement truly does symbolize my administration's larger approach as we move our city forward in thinking holistically and absolutely having it grounded in resiliency," said Mayor LaToya Cantrell in a press conference. "[This] project is in clear alignment with our overall goal of driving vibrant recovery and creating again a more diverse and equitable economy for our people."

The proposal by Bayou Phoenix, LLC includes locally-owned

Henry Consulting, LLC and TKTMJ, Inc., who together have partnered with Dallas, Texas-based Hillwood, A Perot Company. Local organizations like STEM NOLA have also joined Bayou Phoenix in this \$100 million Phase 1 capital requirement project to revitalize New Orleans East.

New Orleans East Matters, a grassroots collective that advocates for New Orleans East's economic return, had endorsed Bayou Phoenix at the start of the process back in May. The group supported the proposal because it would bring back businesses, entertainment and education to an area that once was bustling with life as well as its attention to community input.

"Our first priority is, first and foremost, the people of East New Orleans. And we are looking forward to moving forward with our partners, and the City of New Orleans, to ensure their needs are fully met," said Troy Henry of Henry Consulting.

Henry, a resident of New Orleans East himself, has witnessed how

far the area has lagged behind in recovery since the former amusement park was abandoned after being devastated by Hurricane Katrina more than 16 years ago. Along with TKTMJ, which is based in the East, they hope to restore the area to what many residents remember with modifications to adhere to the city's requests.

Bayou Phoenix plans to execute their vision of a logistics center, warehousing, hotel, sports complex, and indoor/outdoor waterpark, to name a few. A STEM NOLA district is also set to be part of this redevelopment project to help bring a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education center to the community. As they move forward, Bayou Phoenix said it will continue to promote its commitment to working with members of the community.

"We will continue our community outreach and include the people living in New Orleans East every step of the way. We live and have

an investment here, so we will do everything in our power to make sure this project gets done right the first time," said Henry.

Following Bayou Phoenix's selection, many members of the community have begun to reminisce on life in New Orleans East before its devastation and ways that it could change with this redevelopment project. New Orleans East resident Naya McGill expressed her hopes that Bayou Phoenix will make drastic changes in the right direction for the area. She also said she believes that it will curb youth participation in violence in the area.

"Hopefully, this can decrease some of the crime in New Orleans East. There isn't much for the youth out here, and it gives room for the youth to explore and get into the wrong things. This will give them something enjoyable to do," McGill

said. "I also hope it can be something [the] community will have pride in and love - I want us to take care of it and the area around it."

While many are optimistic about Bayou Phoenix, some residents are not completely convinced that they will fulfill their promises of increasing the quality of life and property values in the area. Alisha Foucha-Mercadel, another New Orleans East resident, believes that Bayou Phoenix will only bring minimal revenue and cannot completely revitalize the area on its own.

"We need way more than Bayou Phoenix to bring back the East. This community was once filled with a richness of businesses. We had a viable mall, plenty [of] eateries, grocery stores, movie theaters...we had it all. Skating rinks, bowling alleys, and the list goes on and on," said Foucha-

Mercadel about life in the area before it was devastated. "But now? We have empty promises and dreams. That's it."

Despite the hesitancy of some residents, Bayou Phoenix said it remains firm in their commitment to restoring New Orleans East to what it once was. It is expected that Bayou Phoenix will reach a final agreement with the city within the next 90 days.

"What was demonstrated through our RFP process is that Bayou Phoenix is also prepared and has the resources necessary to pull this off. No longer [are we] setting our people up. Making them proud on the front end only to kind of bring them down later on because we didn't deliver," Cantrell said. "We're going to deliver, and we believe Bayou Phoenix has demonstrated their ability to do just that." ♦

'A bureaucratic nightmare': Applications to fix Louisiana's failing water systems hit snags

By Rachel Mipro
Contributing Writer

(lailuminator.com) — As the deadline for communities to apply for funding to fix their water and sewer systems approaches, lawmakers are still struggling to untangle the application process.

The program was created by the Louisiana Legislature earlier this year to distribute \$300 million in federal pandemic aid. Eligible water systems can receive up to \$5 million; potentially more for water systems that consolidate.

Hurricane Ida threw off the timeline for funding; the application deadline was extended from Sept. 24 to Nov. 1 to allow communities to focus on hurricane recovery. A second round of funding will open in January.

Sixty-six applications are fully submitted and ready for review, totaling around \$170 million in requests. Around 227 applications have been started but not finished yet, with an estimated \$305 million in requests. Four-hundred-and-fifty additional entities have requested access to the portal but haven't started or submitted anything yet.

The \$300 million the Legislature has set aside is 4 percent of the amount the White House says Louisiana requires to fix its water and sewers' systems. President Joe Biden's administration calculates that Louisiana needs \$7 billion over the next 20 years for its decrepit water systems. In 2017, the Louisiana Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers rated the state's drinking water a D-.

Around 20 percent out of the 1,287 water systems that the Louisiana Department of Health oversees are not up to code, The *Illuminator* reported in May, with close to 2,000 boil water notices issued in the state every

year. A report on Louisiana infrastructure found that 58 percent of drinking water systems were built before 1960.

Many agree on the pressing need to fix water systems in the state—but the complex application process may slow down this round of crucial repairs.

System consolidation is seen as one solution to Louisiana's increasingly worsening rural water supply. By consolidating two small rural water systems into one, the larger customer base would have more pooled money to make upgrades and repairs.

But Water Sector Commission co-chair and state Rep. Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, R-Houma, said it was going to be difficult to get municipalities to consolidate systems. "Part of the problem is there's almost a disincentive to get people to consolidate the way we have it right now because it's difficult enough for one entity to try to develop an application," Zeringue said. "If you try to get several municipalities working together, who's going to pay for it? How are they going to do it? That's a cluster."

In order to complete an application, an engineer-provided cost estimate must be submitted.

State Rep. Jeremy LaCombe, D-Livonia, said he was getting calls from small towns who were struggling to find engineers, or just were confused about the application forms.

"I want to protect the rurals," LaCombe said. "This whole entire program, all of this was done so that rural water districts and rural municipal districts along with others would be able to have an opportunity to reap this funding to get their old, antiquated, dilapidated systems upgraded and brought up to speed and now I'm starting to see what's looking like a bureaucratic nightmare."

Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne said he expected things to go more smoothly in the next application cycle.

"We'll see if there's some way we can get around this," Dardenne said. "I don't know if there will be, but if not as we've all said, the next batch we'll be better prepared and people will know what they have to comply with going forward."

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NOTICE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA SALEM CIRCUIT COURT ROANOKE COUNTY DEPT. OF SOCIAL SERVICES V. CALEB JAMES RAYMOND-CASTRO CASE NO: CJ21-38, CJ21-39, CJ21-40, CJ21-41 ORDER OF PUBLICATION
The object of this suit is to terminate the residual parental rights and respon-

sibilities of Caleb James Raymond-Castro to Noah James Raymond-Castro pursuant to Virginia Code § 16.1-283 and to approve a permanent entrustment agreement which provides for the termination of parental rights of Samantha Raymond-Castro to Noah James Raymond-Castro. "Residual parental rights and responsibilities" are defined by Virginia Code § 16.1-228 as all rights and responsibilities remaining

with the parent after the transfer of legal custody or guardianship of the person, including but not limited to the right of visitation, consent to adoption, the right to determine religious affiliation, and the responsibility for support. The termination of your residual parental rights will permanently end all of your rights and responsibilities to the child named in the petition. The ties between you and your child are severed for-

ever, and you become a legal stranger to the child. It is ORDERED that Caleb James Raymond-Castro appear at the above-named Court to protect his interest on or before February 10, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.
STACY L. OWEN Deputy Clerk
Atty: Marta J. Anderson Publication: La. Weekly 10/25; 11/1; 11/8; & 11/15/21