

BRAC announces support for East Baton Rouge ballot referendums on December 10 ballot

BRAC today released its positions on certain ballot referendums that will go before the voters in East Baton Rouge Parish on December 10. The organization's Board of Directors has considered the economic development impact of the propositions and voted to support those described below.

Green Light Plan for Transportation Infrastructure **BRAC Recommendation: Yes and Yes**

Voters in East Baton Rouge Parish are being asked to fund transportation and infrastructure improvements through the Green Light Plan to address traffic congestion inside the parish. If approved, the new Green Light Plan would authorize the levy and collection of a five mill property tax for 30 years, generating over \$20 million per year and \$450 million through 2046 to build 45 major road capacity improvement projects. A five mill property tax will cost a homeowner with a \$200,000 home about \$62.50 a year, or just over \$5 a month. The program would also, at no additional cost to taxpayers, rededicate the Green Light Plan's original half-cent sales tax to build 150 rehabilitation and community enhancement projects through 2030.

This plan consists of two separate ballot propositions, and it's important for voters to note that both must pass for it to proceed.

As it has persistently been the case for years, BRAC's recent survey of area businesses once again showed that traffic is, by far, the largest obstacle to growth cited by respondents. The Green Light Plan addresses the important challenge of surface street and arterial connections throughout the parish, which become increasingly congested as interstate traffic congestion worsens. BRAC supports the Green Light Plan to relieve congestion to speed the transportation of goods, services, customers, and workers, as well as the community enhancement component of the plan, which we believe will improve the "quality of place" and physical attractiveness of the city-parish.

Mental Health Crisis Stabilization Center Proposition **BRAC Recommendation: Yes**

Voters are being asked to authorize the levy and collection of one and one-half mills ad valorem property tax for 10 years, which would raise about \$6.1 million annually for operating and maintaining a mental health crisis stabilization center that will provide short-term behavioral health services to adults experiencing a crisis related to a mental health condition. For a homeowner with a \$200,000 home, the tax would cost about \$18.75 per year, or just over \$1.50 per month. By providing administrative support funding for these services, passage of this proposition will allow the BRidge Center for Hope to divert individuals out of the criminal justice system and away from the crowded parish prison at the earliest possible opportunity to address behavioral issues. In addition to the more humane and effective treatment these services will provide, the plan is part of a larger strategy to improve public safety and would result in savings to the taxpayer related to the high cost of incarceration.

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Tourism Infrastructure and North Baton Rouge Development Proposal

BRAC Recommendation: Yes and Yes

Voters are being asked to authorize the levy and collection of an additional 2 percent occupancy tax on the rental of hotel rooms, which would raise about \$2.6 million annually, with the proceeds evenly split between the Baton Rouge River Center and Visit Baton Rouge.

The Baton Rouge River Center will reportedly use the revenue to upgrade its arena and ballroom, with improvements made to the convention center allowing Baton Rouge to attract additional visitor-related events. Visit Baton Rouge will use funds for specific visitor-related projects, promotions and events to increase tourism and business travel to the city that will have a positive economic impact on East Baton Rouge Parish. The parish-wide vote on the 2 percent occupancy tax increase would not apply to hotels in Baker, Central, and Zachary, nor the area represented by the Baton Rouge North Economic Development District — a separate ballot referendum in North Baton Rouge that would levy the same 2 percent rate and provide the revenue raised there (about \$260,000 annually) to the North Baton Rouge Economic Development District.

The plans outlined by officials with the River Center and Visit Baton Rouge align with BRAC's strategic goal of elevating the region's external image, as do the plans of the newly established North Baton Rouge Economic Development District align with the goals of BRAC's diversity and inclusion committee to expand economic opportunity in underserved areas.

The hotel occupancy tax increase will appear on two separate propositions, one for the parish as a whole, and one for North Baton Rouge.