

Mayor  
David Barrow



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STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS  
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Today marks exactly one month since myself, city council members, and our chief of police officially took office. It has been quite a month transitioning into office, rekindling old friendships with other governmental officials across the parish and state, and having many meetings. The support and patience from the community has been overwhelming and much appreciated. Since taking office, I have had nearly two dozen scheduled meetings as well as numerous phone calls with other local, parish, state, and federal government officials, business owners, consulting firms, homeowners associations, and everyday citizens.

We have had two council meetings so far, and I would like to commend our council members for getting off to a great start. It's not easy trying to learn ordinances, rules, protocol, and more while seated before standing-room only crowds, but they have handled themselves with decorum and professionalism as well as open dialogue. One of the first issues they tackled was appointment of two Planning & Zoning members. They chose to reappoint T.J. Johnson as well as appointing new member Steven Lumpkin.

The council also confirmed my appointments of three key city personnel. Mark Miley will remain City Clerk. Ti Barnes will remain Administrative Hearing Officer to enforce local code enforcement violations within the city. I am also pleased to bring back Sheri Morris as City Attorney. Her wealth of knowledge is a true asset to the city. I also reappointed Mark Balkin as City Attorney for Planning & Zoning matters, and Suzonne Cowart will remain our Finance Director.

I truly look forward to the future of Central and serving the public. I realize there are a lot of wants and needs out there. There is 66 square miles of coverage and nearly 28,000 citizens to represent. Some issues can be handled through simple solutions and are easy to solve. Other issues can be complicated and may not have an immediate solution, but I, along with our other elected officials, will do our best to stay on top of things.

Our annual budget year starts on July 1 of each year and ends on June 30 of the following year. For the 2018-19 fiscal year, general sales tax revenues are expected to generate approximately \$5.6 million dollars. Automobile sales taxes are expected to generate approximately \$1.4 million dollars, and other tax revenues will generate approximately

\$350,000. This total projection gives us a tax revenue budget of nearly \$7.4 million. The city collects a 2% general sales and use tax. The city does not collect a property tax. I will provide a monthly sales tax press release giving updated revenue amounts to the local newspapers as well as placing this information on our website.

A large portion of our expenditures goes towards paying IBTS, our city services contractor, to handle many of the day-to-day operations of the city, including public works, planning & zoning, permits & inspections, engineering, licenses, code enforcement, and more. That contract amount for the 2018-19 fiscal year is a little over \$4.1 million dollars. The new 5-year contract with IBTS went into effect July 1, 2018 and will increase a little over \$100,000 each year for the next 5 years. I have already taken steps to reorganize and make improvements at IBTS which has already resulted in better efficiency. Late last year, IBTS had a backlog of 944 work orders. As of this week, we have been able to reduce that to 344 work orders, which is a decrease of 63% in a short period of time, while still keeping up with existing work orders.

Very soon, we will be placing the Public Works Work Orders on our website so that the public can see what work was performed each month. I also plan to put our monthly Financial Report on the website as well so that you can see how your tax dollars are being spent. Our website address is [www.centralgov.com](http://www.centralgov.com).

I recently learned through one of my conversations with a state employee that the City of Central had over \$600,000 in funding from the state available to help recover costs from expenses in the flood of 2016. I submitted the request this week, and I look forward to receiving these funds to have deposited into the city's bank account.

CSRS, a local engineering and consulting firm, was hired by the previous administration to handle recovery efforts from the flood of 2016 as well as designing a Master Drainage Plan and providing technical assistance to the city on future drainage projects and grant funding. They have done an excellent job, and the city council recently voted to extend their contract through September 2019. I look forward to the results on the Master Drainage Plan within the next sixty days. There will be many projects recommended in the plan. Some will be small projects that can be locally funded through our dedicated drainage fund account, and other projects will require new funding methods for which CSRS will assist us with grant opportunities. We obviously will not be able to fund all projects recommended in the plan at this time, but as with any planning project, we will at least have a starting point and a plan to guide us in the future as the city grows.

I was recently informed this week that a project submitted last year through the Hazardous Mitigation Grant Program for federal funding for drainage improvements to culverts at almost 150 locations throughout the city has now shown that only four of the culverts submitted will actually produce the benefits necessary to move forward in FEMA's evaluation process. I have a meeting scheduled soon with members of GOHSEP (Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness) to discuss funding opportunities

and other applications for which we can apply to make drainage improvements within the city.

Our Flood Inundation Mapping Project for the Amite River will be ready soon. It is the first and only early warning system for river flooding in the state of Louisiana. This system is designed to give advance warning of potential life-threatening flooding conditions that may occur during heavy storm events. I will be scheduling a public meeting along with the city council to provide a demonstration of the mapping when it is ready. More public meetings to discuss drainage plans and projects will be scheduled as well.

I have already had three meetings with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and City-Parish officials regarding the parishwide drainage channel improvements which includes two projects within the city of Central: Beaver Bayou and Blackwater Bayou. These meetings with the USACE have been very positive. This estimated \$72 million project for our two channels is part of a parishwide nearly \$225 million project which requires a 25% local match, which for Central represents approximately \$18 million dollars. This is a very complicated project, and we are currently working with the City-Parish and CSRS on seeking grant funding for our match share. The City-Parish is also seeking grant funding to cover their share.

As for transportation, the MoveEBR half-cent sales tax passed in December 2018. It is expected for the parish to begin collection of this tax in April 2019. The city of Central is expected to receive approximately \$1.3 million per year from this tax. This dedicated tax must be used on roadway construction and improvements only. We will be using our share of the half-cent road tax to plan and design intersection and widening improvements at some of the locations contained in our Transportation Plan. Turning lanes and/or roundabouts will be considered to improve the flow of traffic at select intersections. Currently, with the use of local revenue, we are performing street repairs and overlays in a number of locations throughout the city.

The Sullivan Road widening project from Wax Rd to Hooper Rd is moving along. Utility companies are still relocating lines. Once their work is complete, DOTD will advertise for construction bids. Once completed, the roadway will be 4-lanes with a center median and dedicated turning lanes at select locations, and sidewalks will be installed on both sides of the roadway. Additional turning lanes will be added at the intersection of Hooper and Sullivan.

As part of the MoveEBR sales tax, improvements to Hooper Road will also be scheduled at a date yet to be determined. Hooper Rd will be widened to four lanes from Blackwater Bayou to just east of Sullivan Rd. A bicycle path will be added from the Blackwater Conservation Area to the Hooper Road Sports Park in addition to sidewalks.

We have received MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) funds for improvements to Thibodeaux Rd. A resolution to sign the Entity/State Agreement for this project will be placed on an upcoming council agenda. This project is part of our Transportation Plan and involves improving this collector roadway by widening the lanes a few feet, improving safety,

as well as installing four larger cross-drains under the roadway to provide better drainage. I will be asking the city council to approve funds for engineering work on this project and scheduling a letting date in early 2021 hopefully. Doing this project with our own funding would cost us approximately \$1.4 million. By using MPO funds, the costs to us will be less than half of that amount according to estimates.

The Frenchtown Road bridge replacement over Beaver Bayou is expected to start near the end of this year. Current plans are to advertise for bids by late summer/early fall, with construction starting early in 2020. This project will last approximately 300 calendar days and will involve a complete road closure during that period. Residents south of the bridge will have to use Thibodeaux Rd and Morgan Rd as a detour route.

As for Economic Development, I have had several meetings with representatives from the Central Chamber of Commerce, and I look forward to working with them on business retention and development. By working with the Chamber of Commerce, I feel we can develop more local involvement and projects. I have also been meeting with a number of our local businesses seeking their guidance and input. We must support our local businesses.

Many of our nearby cities and parishes have recently enacted new, stronger development codes to combat flooding and traffic issues. These codes include limits on the amount of dirt that can be brought on a parcel of land, increasing the storm retention guides from a 10-year storm event to a 25-year storm event, studying the effects of upstream and downstream drainage, and limiting the number of lots that be constructed with only one entrance/exit. The city of Central has fallen behind our neighboring municipalities when it comes to strengthening our development codes. Several of our council members have come to me wanting to make improvements to our codes to make sure that we have not only quality developments in the future but also developments that protect existing property owners nearby. We will be looking at making some of these changes soon. We welcome new development, but we need to make sure that we do not overburden our existing infrastructure (water, sewer, roadways, drainage systems). We must also work with the Central Community School System to handle the effect of developments on the school system.

I will be meeting with our Zoning Attorney Mark Balkin as well as our P&Z staff to look at other changes to our Planning ordinances that they have recommended. I have also met with a number of local builders and developers who have also provided ideas to me that can help our city maintain a quality of life goal that is good for our citizens. Working with our city council, I feel confident that we will enact some new ordinances that will not only provide better protection for our existing residents, but also provide more clear guidelines for developers and builders.

I spoke with Senator Bodi White, and he advised we have several hundred thousand dollars of state funding appropriated for a new City Hall, but this funding may not be available for long if we don't use it soon due to state budget issues. It was made very clear by the public that the previously proposed \$5 million, 17,000 square foot megaplex on the old Central

Middle Property was just too much. During the campaign trail, I made it clear that I did not support that concept, but I did, and still do, support a smaller city hall that would not only provide office space for city officials but also provide permanent city council chambers that would also be used for Planning & Zoning meetings and other community meetings that we may have. Central is the only city around us that I can think of that doesn't have a "city hall". This project has been in the planning stage for many years, and in speaking with the public about this issue, citizens have told me that they could support a smaller city hall building.

In order to avoid the possibility of losing available state funding, I will be assembling a small committee to continue looking into the construction of a new city hall. The committee will consider property locations and building size. I feel that a building in the range of 3500-4000 square feet would accommodate the needed city personnel as well as council chambers. It is important to have public input in this manner, and I will be seeking this during the process. When this project was first considered nearly 8 years ago, we had numerous public meetings, and the citizens were excited about this project. I want to bring that back. While the scope of the design and property will be reduced considerably from the initial concept, I still believe we can do this project at an affordable cost that the public will also agree. Former Mayor Mac Watts has agreed to help with the process and has offered to serve on the committee, and I could not be more excited.

Our police department will be making some changes soon to better protect our citizens. Chief Corcoran and his staff have been doing a great job, and we have a good working relationship, and I look forward to this continuing. I also want to thank Captain Jason Demoulin and all of the great deputies of the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office for their continuing protection of the city as well.

I look forward to a bright future in the city. We have drainage, traffic, infrastructure, quality of life, economic development, as well as overall development issues to handle in the future. We can work on these issues together. Remember, our city council meets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month at 6pm at Kristenwood, 14025 Greenwell Springs Rd.

Sincerely,  
Mayor David Barrow  
City of Central.