

Mayor
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STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
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It is hard to believe that it has already been over a year since taking office. The positive comments from citizens is appreciated, and we truly live in a great city. This summer will mark 15 years since Central was incorporated. We have come a long way in those 15 years to make Central a better community.

I truly look forward to the future of Central and continuing to serve the public. In the past year, many topics have been addressed in a short period of time. With 66 square miles of coverage and nearly 28,000 citizens to represent, there will always be many wants and needs. We can't address them all at once, nor can we solve them all at once; however, we will do our best to continue providing services to the citizens of this city in the best manner we can.

Our annual budget year starts on July 1 of each year and ends on June 30 of the following year. For the calendar year ending December 31, 2019, general sales tax revenues were up nearly 1.54% compared to 2018 for a total of \$5.7 million dollars. Automobile sales taxes were up nearly 3.9% for a total of \$1.45 million. The city collects a 2% general sales and use tax. The city does not collect a property tax. I continue to provide a monthly sales tax press release giving updated revenue amounts as well as placing this information on our website. It is important to remember to shop locally to help support our local businesses and return sales tax dollars to our city.

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 2019-20 fiscal year is a little over \$3.9 million dollars, and this price actually decreased from the previous fiscal year due to contract renegotiations. This contract will increase nearly \$100,000 per year over the next few years. I took steps last year to reorganize and make improvements at IBTS which has already resulted in better efficiency. The phone number for City Services is 225-262-5000, and they are located at 6703 Sullivan Rd.

For calendar year 2019, our Public Works Department handled 1,811 work orders, and as of December 31, 2019, 1,804 were completed and only 7 are pending. This represents

excellent work by our Public Works Department. The Public Works Work Orders are placed on our website so that the public can see what work was performed each month. Additionally, our monthly Financial Report is also placed on the website as well so that you can see how your tax dollars are being spent, and the monthly Permit Report is also placed on our website so that you can see what is being built in our community. Our website address is www.centralgov.com. This is all part of my transparency in government pledge.

In 2019, a total of 318 building permits were issued. Out of the 318, a total of 71 were for new residential home construction. 13 were for new commercial construction. The remainder of the permits were for items such as swimming pools, fences, accessory buildings, remodeling, change of occupancy, etc. The total construction valuation of the building permits in 2019 was \$37,134,815. Valuations are set for building permit and tax assessor's reasons and may not actually reflect the actual value of the structure after construction is complete.

CSRS, a local engineering and consulting firm, completed our Master Drainage Plan (MDP) last year and continues to provide 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 2020. Within the Master Drainage Plan are a total of nearly \$135 million worth of projects. Obviously, we cannot fund all of these projects at this time; however, it gives us a starting point. Some are small projects that can be locally funded through our dedicated drainage fund account, and other projects will require new funding methods.

Two of the projects recommended in the MDP are improvements to Beaver Bayou and Blackwater Bayou. These two projects recommend nearly \$75 million in improvements for widening and channel modifications. These two channels are part of five channels in East Baton Rouge Parish in which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has developed a project called the East Baton Rouge Parish Flood Control Project that carries a price tag of over \$255 million. Last summer, a funding agreement was reached whereby the USACE would provide nearly \$190 million in federal funding, the state of Louisiana would contribute nearly \$53 million, the parish of East Baton Rouge would contribute nearly \$8 million, and the city of Central would contribute nearly \$4 million of local tax dollars. Currently, the USACE is preparing right-of-way maps for the projects and conducting new environmental assessments which could take as long as 18 months. There is a concern that the cost of the project could rise substantially, and the USACE is re-evaluating the project to see where costs could be cut without reducing flood impacts.

Another project in the MDP calls for replacing numerous culverts throughout the city to allow water to flow faster. CSRS completed a detailed cost/benefit evaluation and determined that out of nearly 53 major culverts surveyed, only 19 of those culvert improvements would actually show a positive result. Improving some culverts would result in water traveling faster, creating problems downstream, thereby producing a negative result. The city has applied for a Hazardous Mitigation Fund Grant (HMGP) to fund these multi-million dollar

improvements, and it appears that we will be awarded funds in the future for this work. This project does require matching funds, and we are hopeful that the state of Louisiana will provide the match.

Our Flood Inundation Mapping Project for the Amite River was completed last year, and a public meeting was held and well attended by citizens to learn about this useful tool. 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 based upon gauges on the Amite and Comite Rivers.

We will soon be initiating our Off-Site Drainage Impact Study (DIS) which will allow the city to take advantage of its recently developed 2D Hydraulic Model and use it to perform a more thorough assessment of impacts from proposed developments. Currently, we rely on engineering studies related to drainage when considering new developments. Now, with the use of the computer model, we will be able to see ahead of time the actual impact of the proposed development's drainage on surrounding property. This tool will provide our Planning & Zoning members, our city council, and the public with true models of drainage impacts rather than speculation. This model takes the "guessing game" away and instead provides a true picture of the impact. While the DIS will add an extra step to development applications, it will be well worth it in the long run.

In the meantime, our public works crews tackle drainage issues on a daily basis around the city. I ask for residents to please keep culverts clear of debris in your yards, and please don't throw trash and yard clippings in our ditches and streams. In January, we awarded a contract for nearly \$227,000 worth of drainage improvements in the Frenchtown Rd area south of Frenchtown Acres, and crews are currently working on clearing major channels near Devall Rd, Wood Creek, Rambling Oaks, Hubbs Acres, Morgan Rd, and Bridlewood subdivisions for a total of nearly 4 miles of improvements. The rainy weather the past few weeks has caused delays, but I look forward to completing these projects and starting new ones throughout 2020.

One area that we did fall behind in 2019 was our ditch spraying program. This is a contract handled through East Baton Rouge City-Parish, and the city of Central pays its share for many ditches in Central. The long-time contractor for the spraying program, which we have had since the inception of the city, abruptly gave notice last summer that they could no longer perform the work due to a sale of their company to another. The City-Parish has had difficulty finding another contractor; however, I have been recently informed that a new bid package for the weed spraying program is being prepared by the City-Parish, and I hope to see a new set of bids released soon so that this worthwhile program can continue.

Probably the most talked about issue right now is traffic. As for transportation, we have started collecting funds from the MovEBR road tax. 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 recently awarded a contract for street rehab on Frenchtown Rd, Huntley Ave, and Willowbrook Drive, as well as some modifications on the Lovett Rd roundabout. The total cost of this contract is nearly \$859,000. Work should be completed by June 2020.

The Sullivan Road widening project from Wax Rd to Hooper Rd is at a literal standstill. This project for utility relocation and clearing/grubbing was issued in April 2017; however, the contractor is still relocating sewer lines. Senator Bodi White, Metro Councilman Scott Wilson, and I have had several meetings lately with top DOTD officials to express our frustrations. Once this work is complete later this year, DOTD will advertise for construction bids sometime in the spring of 2021. 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. DOTD is requesting a change to the plans to include bicycle lanes in each direction as part of their new Complete Streets plan. Plans are also being modified to include a large roundabout at the intersection of Hooper Rd and Sullivan Road.

As part of the MoveEBR Plan, improvements to Hooper Road are being planned now as part of the first set of projects to get underway. Funding is in place through the dedicated sales tax. Hooper Rd will be widened to four lanes from Blackwater Bayou to just east of Sullivan Rd. The project will be split into two separate projects with the first being the section from Sullivan Rd to Joor Rd, and the second being from Joor Rd to Blackwater Bayou. Bicycle paths will be included in addition to sidewalks. The remaining section of Hooper Rd from Sullivan Road to Greenwell Springs Rd is in the initial environmental phase to start planning for widening. Funds are not yet committed for the actual widening of this section.

We have received MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) funds for improvements to Thibodeaux Rd. This project is part of our Transportation Plan and involves improving this collector roadway by overlaying and widening the lanes a few feet, improving safety, installing centerline rumble strips, as well as installing four larger cross-drains under the roadway to provide better drainage. This project should let out for bids by late summer with actual construction starting later this year. 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.

As for Economic Development, the city recently entered into an agreement with 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, we can develop a more local and personal involvement with businesses and new projects. We must support our local businesses. A recent study showed that the city of Central is losing nearly \$204 million in retail sales due to unavailable business in our city and residents therefore having to shop outside of Central. Out of this amount, nearly \$190 million is in retail trade, and \$14 million is

in food & drink. This represents nearly \$4 million in lost sales tax revenues for the city each year.

Beautification and quality of life are an important aspect for any city. It's time for everyone to take pride in our city and do your part in keeping our city clean. Recently, as part of our dedicated beautification funds, the two roundabouts on Gurney Rd were landscaped with colorful plantings. A new Welcome to Central sign has been installed on the Central Thruway with many positive comments. We will be having an Independence Day/4th of July celebration this year with the help of local businesses, so mark your calendars. Cooking in Central is scheduled for Friday, March 27, and the Molly Ringwalds will be performing. It should be a great time!

As for planning in our city, no new residential subdivisions were approved in our city in 2019. In fact, a proposed 55-lot subdivision on Denham Rd was denied by the P&Z and the city council. However, there are hundreds of available lots currently available in previously approved subdivisions for new residential construction. 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. Several new commercial developments were approved, including a new shopping center on Sullivan Rd next to Central Pharmacy that is set to begin construction soon with Lit Pizza as an anchor tenant.

This year, we will be working with our city planner to create an overlay district on the Central Thruway, and possibly other areas of the city. The Central Thruway is a beautiful entryway into our city, and we want to protect it by creating an overlay district that would only allow certain uses and have strict architectural standards and design criteria.

Our Code Enforcement division is responsible for responding to citizen's complaints of blight, overgrown properties, junk vehicles, swimming pool maintenance, and other property maintenance issues which violate city ordinances. Last year, we investigated over 200 complaints throughout the city. Out of those, 34 cases were handled through the Administrative Hearing Court process. The Administrative Hearing Court is held on the last Friday of each month.

BREC is making significant improvements and new additions to parks throughout our city. New turf baseball fields are being installed at the Hooper Road Sports Park. The transformation of Jackson Park on Sullivan Rd into a true community park is underway with new walking paths, playground equipment, recreation building, and more. The lakes have been cleaned at Blackwater Conservation Area. The new gym and parking area are almost complete at Lovett Road park. Most exciting is news of a new million-dollar conservation building being constructed at the Frenchtown Conservation Area. This new building will be an attraction to our area and complement the miles of walking trails through the woods. The city is working with BREC and Canadian National Railway on making improvements to the railroad

underpass near the park at the end of Frenchtown Rd to allow school buses and other large vehicles to pass underneath to access the new building.

Central will be getting its first true water tower near the intersection of Wax Rd and Magnolia Bridge Rd across from Demco. Parish Water Company determined the need for the tower to improve water pressure in that part of the city. This new tower will also have a positive effect on the Central Fire Department's insurance rating. A new cell tower is being constructed by AT&T near the intersection of Wax Rd and Willowbrook Dr. This should greatly improve cell service in the center part of our city.

Plans are being discussed for a new city hall using a match of state and local funds. The citizens of this city made it very clear that a \$5 million city hall is too expensive. There is approximately \$1.1 million in state funds available to us. We have three possible locations selected. One public meeting was held in 2019 to get citizen input, and another will be scheduled soon. Citizens at that initial meeting were generally in favor of building a new city hall and council chambers but stated that the size and cost must be reduced significantly from the previous proposal. A survey is on our website to help gather citizen input.

Our police department has made numerous internal changes to better protect our citizens. A 268-page Standard Operating Policy and Procedures manual was put in place last August. We have a total of 20 officers including the chief and assistant chief as well as 4 dispatchers, and an administrative assistant. Chief Corcoran and his officers responded to a total of 3,838 calls last year, including 732 automobile crashes. A complete set of stats is available on our website on the Police Department page. The chief and I 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. We truly have a safe city, and I encourage everyone to please lock your vehicles at night to help deter vehicle burglaries. Also, please make sure you have an address properly displayed near your front door and also on your mailbox. First responders count on this.

We truly have a great city with great citizens. I encourage our citizens to stay involved by checking our website and our Facebook page and also by attending our council meetings and other public meetings scheduled during the year. Our city council meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 6pm at Kristenwood, 14025 Greenwell Springs Rd. Agendas are posted on our website.

Sincerely,
Mayor David Barrow
City of Central.



Beaver Dam along Hubbs Bayou before removal



Beaver Dam removed along Hubbs Bayou

Lovett Road Drainage Improvements



Gurney Road at Joor Rd Roundabout Beautification Improvements





Devall Rd / Wood Creek
Drainage Improvements



Huntley Place
Ditch Cleaning



Bridlewood/ Hooper Rd
Ditch Clearing is underway.



Public Works Director Ray Louis
inspecting a catch basin



Shoe Creek clearing



Mayor Barrow speaking to
Central area businesses.



New Roadway Striping
Being Installed May 2019



Improvements Coming to Thibodeaux Rd to make the roadway safer



Promoting Cooking in Central on WAFB.



Wishing Mr. Daniel at the Central Post Office a Happy Retirement



Mayor Barrow and Congressman Garret Graves