

Questions and Answers from the Public Forum at the Catholic Life Center, November 7, 2006

1. How many branch or regional libraries do Austin and Nashville have?

The Austin Public Library consists of a Main Library, 21 branch libraries, and an electronic kiosk. None of its branches are “regional” in scale. The Nashville Public Library consists of a Main Library and 21 branches.

2. You propose four libraries. The urgent need is to build a new main library. BREC has offered land in Independence Park. Why not concentrate your time and our money on one library—the main library in Independence Park?

The East Baton Rouge Parish Library is a system of libraries. Property taxes are assessed for library purposes throughout the parish. These taxes pay for the operation and maintenance of the entire system, including purchase of library materials, staff, maintenance, contractual services, and capital building projects. Funds have been set aside for many years to construct branches on a pay-as-you-go-basis.

The Library Board of Control has designated the construction of four facilities to finalize the building program through 2015. The branches libraries include a new facility for south Baton Rouge and a new branch to be located on the eastern side of the parish. When the Board voted that it favored a new downtown facility, it also indicated that it would renovate or remodel the Goodwood facility. If a new library is not constructed downtown, the present downtown library will be fully renovated.

In either scenario, four facilities are earmarked for attention. The money that is saved for the purposes of construction cannot be “concentrated” on just one facility. The order under which these facilities will be constructed will be determined by the available funding. Dollars have already been saved for the south Baton Rouge branch. In all likelihood, this facility will be completed first. No dollars have been saved for the eastern branch as this facility was recently added to the construction project list. As such, this facility is planned for the end of the tax renewal period. The order of construction for the remaining buildings has yet to be determined.

3. Has the Downtown Development District met with the Library Board about plans for moving the main library headquarters downtown?

The Downtown Development District commissioners have not met with the members of the Library Board of Control to discuss any matters regarding the library system. Mr. Rhorer, Director of the DDD, at the request of the LBC, has made presentations in the community regarding the desirability of downtown as a location for a new headquarters library. Please refer to pages 1 and 2 of the [Timeline on the Discussion of a New Main Library](#) in PDF format on this website.

Why does Mr. Rhorer believe its “such a visual statement”?

Please contact Mr. Rhorer directly for his personal views at 389-5520.

4. Where can someone find the “overall” plan for the EBR Parish Library System?

See the Strategic Plan in PDF format on this website.

5. I have read your handout and still do not see the answer to “why?” Why did the LBC start thinking about and then embrace, the idea of having a “main” library downtown?

Please refer to the statements on page 1, 2, and 3 of the Timeline on the Discussion of a New Main Library in PDF format on this website. The minutes from the meeting of the Library Board of Control are excerpted in which the downtown location was discussed and voted upon. Please also see the response to question 8.

6. What about parking? Lighting?

If a new library is constructed in downtown Baton Rouge, it will include the construction of an attached parking garage. The usage of the garage will be free to library patrons. It will be well-lit, include a security system, and will be staffed with security personnel.

Will there be adequate facilities for those of us who are senior citizens and who are handicapped to get around through the downtown traffic which is a problem on its own, have parking and all of the handicap facilities that would be a pleasure to go down there?

If constructed downtown, the new library will have adequate handicapped parking to meet the needs of the public, appropriate curb cuts and ramps, and other features to insure ADA compliance.

7. I want to hear the Library Board’s rationale for spending a great deal of money on an inaccessible edifice downtown? Tax money must be divided amongst the facilities.

Since we are a system, tax moneys have been divided amongst all the facilities for operations, maintenance, staffing, and construction. The Library Board of Control set in motion 20 years ago a strategic construction plan to build community and regional libraries throughout the parish. Over the past twenty years, 11 new buildings have been constructed throughout the parish to the benefit of the local communities surrounding the new buildings as well as to all members of the parish who may visit any library they chose. The final facility was to be the central/headquarters/main library. The present main library is 38 years old and has far exceeded its original capacity for housing materials, staff, and service and program areas for the public.

A large, central library to meet the needs of the residents, and those who will use the facility over the next 20 years is indeed costly. In order to support the projected

population growth in the parish, it must be of substantial size. Constructing a building of 150,000 to 200,000 square feet will cost approximately the same amount, regardless of location. Increased space is needed for library collections, programming space, meeting room space, special collections, auditorium, study rooms, computer training rooms, advanced technology, etc. Space for the “back of the house” administrative and support divisions of the library is also included in the facility. A parking facility for 600 vehicles is intended no matter the location of the new headquarters library.

Fifteen surface streets access the downtown area. There are also four interstate exits that provide access to downtown. A study conducted by the Capital Region Planning Commission indicated the average drive time for all persons in the Parish is relatively the same to either location-13.8 minutes to Goodwood and 14.1 minutes to downtown.

8. I came to this meeting to hear this board give their reasons for placing the main library downtown.

Minutes of the July 2005 meeting of the Library Board of Control are included in the Timeline on the Discussion of a New Main Library in PDF format on this website. Excerpted is the portion of the meeting in which the downtown location was discussed and voted upon providing a summary of the rationale for the “favoring of a downtown location”. The vote was a recognition of locating a new library in downtown, in proximity to other cultural, educational, and recreational resources of downtown such as the LASM, Shaw Center for the Arts, Performing Arts Center, State Library of LA, LA Museum of History, the USS Kid Museum, the Political Museum at the Old State Capitol, etc. Downtown is the area in the community which joins north and south Baton Rouge. The Library Board of Control has established a series of community and regional branches throughout the parish, situated in proximity to neighborhoods, schools, small businesses, etc. The construction of a large central library is perhaps the most, important civic building to be constructed in East Baton Rouge Parish. The majority of all civic and governmental buildings are located in downtown. The size and scale of a proposed new library lends itself to the location of downtown.

How much more money will you need?

As to the question referencing more money, the Library Board recognized when it adopted the ten-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP) that the funding for all four projects – regardless of the location of the proposed central library – would require a public fundraising campaign to supplement monies from the property tax millage assessment available for the CIP projects. If construction costs continue to significantly increase, the financial gap could range from \$20+ million to \$40+ million depending on when the construction starts on the projects, particularly, the new central library. In a rising construction price market, sooner is less expensive than later.

A financial gap requiring public fundraising efforts is not unique in the financing of new central libraries. For example, the city of Seattle recently embarked on a \$190

million library building program of which \$88 million was raised from public contributions.

As to the inquiry as to whether constructing the new central library at Goodwood versus downtown would provide significant savings, the following needs to be considered. Assuming that the size of the central library is the same for a Goodwood or downtown location, the two variables are land cost and parking cost. Architectural and engineering fees, construction cost per square feet, and furniture, fixtures and equipment will be the same in both buildings. There would be no land cost at Goodwood and +/- \$3.5 million for a downtown site. Correspondingly, both sites are projected to require a minimum 600-car parking tower as part of the structure at +/- \$12,000 per parking spot (approximately \$7 million). The Capital Area Transit System (CATS) has proposed a downtown transit center (including parking) as part of its future plans. The incorporation of the transit center into a downtown central library could result in 90% of the library's parking costs being paid by the U.S. Federal Transportation Agency (FTA). Under this latter scenario, the parking savings would more than offset the downtown land cost. Therefore, one should be careful in arguing for one site over the other based on total project costs to the EBR Library system. The critical issue is the public fundraising dollars that will be required regardless of where the new central library is built.

9. How can Cyntreniks be considered non-partial when they own property downtown?
How can Brace Godfrey be considered un-bias?

If one reads the final report submitted (see report on library website), it would be quite evident that Cyntreniks and Brace Godfrey have been impartial and unbiased in the fulfillment of the task assigned by the Library Board of Control. The study was for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating the entire LBC proposed ten-year capital improvements program. The role of Cyntreniks and Brace Godfrey was not to do a study showing why a new central library be built downtown. The Board did ask Cyntreniks to determine if downtown sites were available should the Board decide to build the new central library downtown. Various potential sites were listed as possible sites, however, no recommendation was made by Cyntreniks or Brace Godfrey in favor of a downtown site. What the Library Board did in selecting Cyntreniks and Brace Godfrey to do the study was to capitalize on the firm and the individual's expertise, knowledge and objectivity.

How does the Library Board plan to get the next tax renewal passed if they disregard what the majority of tax payers are asking for?

The Library Board of Control was asked by community groups to state its preference for a location for a new headquarters/central/main library before the issue went before the voters. The Board said it favored downtown, and this information was widely circulated in the community. In spite of the controversy surrounding the location of a new downtown library, the tax passed by a 62% approval rating.

It cannot be said that the Board is disregarding what the majority of tax payers are asking for. It is not possible to determine how the majority of tax payers feel on a particular issue. The Board receives commentary on both sides of the issue. It is the responsibility of the Board to determine the vision and direction of the library system. Board members are acting in their appointed roles.

The library system has earned a strong reputation in the community as serving the needs of its users. Approximately 90% of the Library's dedicated tax funds operations and maintenance of the entire system for ten years; approximately 10% goes towards capital construction projects. We trust that the public will take this into consideration when they are once again asked to renew funding for this important educational, cultural and recreational resource. The Library Board intends to continue to be a good steward and, therefore, again, receive the support of the majority of the voters at the next tax renewal.

10. The results of the LBC's March 2005 Internet poll indicated 77.8 % of the 1,166 respondents wanted the new main library to be located in the Goodwood (Mid City) area. In addition, as of September 11, 2006, the LBC has on file over 150 recorded emails, letters, phone calls indicating either that they do not want a downtown library or indicating a preference for the Goodwood area.

How does the LBC justify voting in favor of and seeking available property only in downtown?

There are vocal supporters on both sides of the central library location issue. Both groups have attempted to use unscientific polls, letters to the editor and meeting attendance to argue that their group speaks for the majority of taxpayers. Prior to the last tax renewal election, the same processes were used in an attempt to influence the voters. In spite of the controversy of the location issue, sixty-two (62%) of the voters voted in favor of the tax renewal, evidence that the Library Board has been a good steward of the taxpayers' monies.

The Board action of favoring a downtown location logically set in motion a search to determine if properties were available that were suitable for a downtown library. If the Board elects to maintain the central library in the present location, the LBC will begin negotiations with BREC to determine the intent of BREC's future interest to support the project.

11. What would the Board have to observe here or later to have you change your collective minds about favoring or committing to the Goodwood or Independence Park site for the Main Library?

The Library Board of Control has said on many occasions that it has not made a final decision on the location of the new library. The Board will be evaluating all the issues surrounding the location question of which there are many. There are vocal supporters on both sides of the issue as is evidenced by the number of persons stating

their opinions at the public forum in November. The Board is listening to the voices of the community. However, it is the responsibility of the Board to establish a vision for the future of the library system and carry it out through the capital construction program.

12. Why can't we vote on this?

Section 11.03 of the Plan of Government provides the legal basis for the Library Board of Control to select the location of library branches. The responsibility of funding these appropriations is assigned to the Metropolitan Council. Therefore, the location of a library facility is not a matter for a public referendum.

13. Is the goal of the main library to curb urban blight or is it to give the taxpayers a centrally located convenient library to enjoy for the people who will use it?

The mission of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library is to serve all residents of the parish as an educational, informational, recreational and cultural center through a wide variety of resources, services and programs. While it is not the mission of the library to curb urban blight, each of the 11 library facilities constructed in the past twenty years has served as a catalyst for improving the environment of the surrounding community, and positively influenced economic development. The new library, wherever it is constructed, will be a state-of-the-art facility, enjoyed by all.

But is the money there?

The Cyntreniks report, 2006-2015 Capital Improvements Program Assessment Study has identified the funding gaps the parish library system will experience as it proceeds to implement the program, primarily due to the increased cost of construction after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. See also response to question 8.

Comments from the Public Submitted in Writing

1. Downtown is for everyone. We must think of the future of our children. People who consider moving to BR, are new to BR, go first to downtown to see how our city reflects itself in its cultural institutions.
2. Concern is that no one should be allowed to speak at the public meeting who as [has] a financial interest in the facility in question.
3. We would like to point out that we have great adequate library facilities for downtown already—River City, State Library, and the beautiful renovated Carver Branch on Terrace Dr. (very close to downtown.) Our main library needs to be at Independence!
4. I use the Goodwood and Bluebonnet Libraries and occasionally the State Library.

My grandchildren live near LSU and I would be concerned for their safety at a downtown main library location. My general impress [impression] is that library costs have already gone too high. I recommend staying within funds and not antagonize voters.

5. The main branch of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library belongs downtown. Downtown [downtown] is the heart of our city. The main branch need not be the largest branch of our library but the central administrative offices and major library collection need to be located in our city's governmental center.

6. I think the library should stay where it is in Independence Park—we do not need another parish library.

7. The main parish library should remain at Independence Park.

8. Please keep the library at Independence Park.

9. Baton Rouge currently has library @ two locations—Goodwood & downtown. Both existing libraries in these two locations need substantial upgrades. In addition there is the question where the main library should be located. If Baton Rouge is to be a city and not a town, the main library needs to be downtown. The Goodwood facility can be upgraded working w/BREC to provide a spectacular facility w/grand garden views. The downtown library on the other hand can be connected to all the city perhaps w/even grander [grander] views.

10. Tonight we listened to excellent support for the downtown state of the art facility. I will add one item-I live in Sherwood Forest-I use Goodwood or Bluebonnet usually – and would continue to use them as regional libraries. The architectural excellence of Bluebonnet makes it preferable to my local Greenwell Springs Road facility. Soaring architectural facilities help us to feel better about ourselves and our communities-let's see a great downtown facility-include outdoor terraces and views.- Please continue to pursue a downtown library of excellence to help Baton Rouge's quest for a presence/identify/hub of cultural educational and historical importance.

11. For downtown library and renovate Goodwood – add on phase II to Scotlandville Branch.

12. Very concerned about how the currently downtown library is being kept and how it is only a hang out for folk waiting on jury duty.

13. I support a main library downtown.