

DECEMBER 2020

THE URBAN UPDATE

HOW BATON ROUGE'S LEADING ORGANIZATIONS
WORK FOR A VIBRANT, THRIVING CITY

LEADING THROUGH CRISIS

Issue 3

Many of Baton Rouge's leading organizations have had to significantly adjust their operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During these times of disruption and uncertainty, your organizational leaders have found adaptive and innovative ways to serve you through coordinating efforts. In this End of Year Urban Update, read on to find out how BREC, UREC, MCRA and others have responded to our city's latest crisis by recognizing their interrelatedness.

URBAN RESTORATION ENHANCEMENT CORPORATION

CARL DILLON



Urban Restoration Enhancement Corporation remains laser focused on providing community development services that focus on the well-being of families during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. On the college & career ready front, we facilitated two virtual ACT Prep institutes for high school students and launched our 2020-2021 Pre-Law Institute for high school students in partnership with Southern University Law Center. We continue to provide creative and interactive S.T.E.A.M. based after-school learning to students at Glen Oaks Park Elementary and Geo Prep Mid-City.

Affordable housing also remains a priority at UREC. We recently held a virtual homebuyer seminar and are currently administering emergency COVID-19 rental assistance—in partnership with the City of Baton Rouge and community partners—to families that experienced economic harm because of the pandemic. For regular updates, visit www.urecbr.com, and follow @urecbr on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. [Click here for more information about UREC.](#)



BREC

COREY WILSON



On December 8, BREC will break ground on the first phase of the reimagining of the Baton Rouge Zoo and the surrounding Greenwood Community Park. The Phase I design will include roughly \$40 million in BREC funded improvements and will include a new Zoo orientation plaza with an interactive fountain, a new giraffe exhibit and feeding platform where patrons of all ages can get up close and personal with the giraffes, a new underwater pygmy hippo exhibit, new birds of prey aviaries and a new Jaguar and Bear exhibit. Phase I additions to Greenwood Community Park will include a winding walkway along Cypress Bayou, a Louisiana-themed Adventure Playground that will include uniquely designed play areas for all ages and abilities and a reimagined, more challenging 9-hole regulation golf course. In addition, as part of the overall master plan, the 660-acre Greenwood Park will also serve as a model for green infrastructure for both regional stormwater management and site scale design. BREC is also currently planning multiple other transformative projects that the community has requested, including recreational trails that are part of the parish-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, the revitalization of the City Park lakes, and a brand-new community park on Airline Highway to serve the southeastern portion of the parish which will also serve as a model for green infrastructure.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgency of addressing underlying health issues that plague our community, and it has also highlighted the importance of parks and recreation in being a solution to many of those issues and for the mental health and well-being of our community. Though in-person programs and events have been safely modified to accommodate CDC and state COVID-19 guidelines, many of our program offerings have turned to virtual options to allow patrons to experience the same BREC activities that they have come to know and love, while experiencing them all from the safety of their own homes. We have utilized this method for our Adaptive Recreation programs, Teen programs and even created our own E-sports Tournament, combining traditional recreational experiences with a modern tech twist. BREC remains committed to the health and well-being of East Baton Rouge Parish and will continue to adapt to the changing needs of our citizens to continue to improve the quality of life in our parish.

Given the current social climate and BREC's continuous pursuit of equity throughout our community and our park system, many BREC staff members had the pleasure of participating in a three-hour seminar on the importance of race, diversity, equity, and inclusion in a training called "A Groundwater Approach: Understanding Racial Inequality." It highlighted the importance of each person's own personal awareness of historical issues that still burden our society today and the related systemic bias against people of color. [Click Here for More Information on BREC](#)



PLEASE HELP US KEEP OUR PARKS OPEN



FOR UPDATED CLOSURES + CANCELLATIONS, BREC.ORG/COVID19





Mid City Redevelopment Alliance has been able to maintain our affordable housing production schedule despite COVID. We have two homes on the market and have decided to not only offer them for sale, but to also consider a lease purchase for those needing some time to resolve a few issues. MCRA will be building at least 6 new homes in 2021, so real estate is the top priority for the moment.



PROPERTY FEATURES

This cottage-style, new-construction home is close to downtown and is in the heart of new residential and commercial revitalization.

- ▶ OPEN FLOORPAN
- ▶ 2 BEDROOMS
- ▶ 2 BATHROOMS
- ▶ WALKIN CLOSETS
- ▶ GRANITE COUNTERTOPS
- ▶ HIGH CEILINGS
- ▶ DECK
- ▶ WHIRLPOOL APPLIANCES

OFFERED AT
\$140,000




If you are looking to purchase a home, experiencing difficulty paying your mortgage, or having financial issues and need someone to help you develop an action plan, we can be reached at 225-346-1000, ext. 216. Leave a message and we will return your call. [Click here for more information from Mid-City Redevelopment](#)





ABOUT US

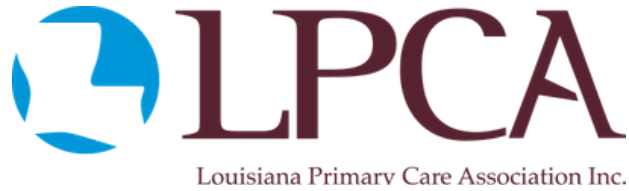
We're a nonprofit building high-quality, affordable housing options in the heart of the city.

We have programs to help you achieve the dream of homeownership, including down payment assistance, homeownership education, and financial counseling. Reach out to our broker, **Shervisa Sullivan Battley**, to learn more!

 231 Or 233 N 26th St
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

 (225) 276-3558
(225) 346-1000

 shervisa@midcityredevelopment.org
www.midcityredevelopment.org



I am proud to report that Community Health Centers across the Greater Baton Rouge region are working tirelessly to respond to COVID-19, improve health outcomes in our underserved and vulnerable communities, and break down barriers to healthcare. Our members are more committed than ever to addressing social determinants of health. We currently have 29 individual health clinics (including school-based health centers) in East Baton Rouge Parish. These are operated by 7 different organizations. We have dozens more facilities in surrounding parishes and communities. Our members are leading the way:

- Educating communities on the importance of regular health screenings and preventive care
- Helping patients manage chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and kidney disease,
- Emphasizing and encouraging positive lifestyle choices through tobacco cessation and healthy eating initiatives,
- Addressing the opioid epidemic and guiding patients through recovery,
- Conducting COVID-19 testing and keeping patients safe by expanding the use of telehealth technology and remote patient monitoring systems.

This year, we are especially proud of the way in which our members have gone above and beyond to address the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Community Health Center members are quite literally serving on the frontlines by conducting COVID-19 testing on-site. All health centers are supporting the work of Louisiana's overrun hospitals by addressing the rising demand for care, assessing patient symptoms, and helping in conducting triage. Health centers, already known for their efficiency and innovation, have quickly redesigned clinical protocols, rearranged their facilities, and are engaging in telehealth services to care for their patients while keeping them safe from exposure [Click here for more information about LPCCA](#)



EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH HOUSING AUTHORITY

J. DANIELS



EBRPHA continues to execute its ACCESS initiative which leverages its housing opportunities to provide greater access and resources to Education, Economic Opportunities and Health & Wellness.

During this COVID pandemic, EBRPHA has been active:

CARE Packages - EBRPHA distributed 'CARE Packages' with vital items, including: 'no touch' infrared thermometers, disposable masks, reusable cloth masks, hand sanitizer, and hand-pumped soap. In addition to the preventative items, the CARE Packages include financial literacy information and physical and mental health guides. The CARE Packages were supported by funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) via the CARES Act to "prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus." EBRPHA worked in concert with the Urban League, at the CARE Package distribution sites to encourage participation in the Census 2020.

Beds for Kids - EBRPHA and Partners Southeast are joining to provide EBRPHA children with a bed frame, mattress, linens, and pillows at an average cost of \$300 each. The fundraising goal was \$15,000. As of July 16, 2020, the "Beds for Kids" initiative has exceeded the \$15,000 goal with a total of \$20,375. Bed delivery and installation began on July 13, 2020. All fifty beds were distributed during the week of July 13th.

Tech Ready - In partnership with EBR Schools, EBRPHA worked to ensure that its families and students were properly equipped and prepared for the new virtual learning environment due to COVID-19. EBRPHA coordinated the delivery of EBR Schools Chromebooks, tablets and hotspots. In addition, our team delivered laptop bookbags, headsets (with microphones), mouse, mousepads, hand sanitizer and disposable masks.

Free WiFi Access - EBRPHA received funding from the CARES Act. The intended use of these funds will support EBRPHA implementation of free, broadband access for our public housing residents in 2021.

Community Gardens - EBRPHA is partnering with the Baton Roots Community Farm to install raised garden beds to raise vegetables and fruits that will produce a sustainable food source for residents at eleven (11) of its communities. ACCESS: Education, Economic Opportunities and Health & Wellness [Click Here for More Information on EBRPHA](#)



On March 19, 2020, the US Homeland Security department of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued a Memorandum on identification of essential critical infrastructure workers during the COVID-10 response - stating:

“If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule”, thereby classifying and requiring Mass Transit to provide “frontline” service during the National Pandemic Crisis period....meaning CATS had to continue providing transit service.”

The Governor’s “Stay at Home Order of March 22nd “concurred with the US Homeland Security CISA directive causing CATS to comply with providing “frontline” infrastructure service. Included with both orders, were the CDC guidance regulations regarding use of PPE’s, health, and safety. As a result of the Stay at Home orders, nearly all businesses and government offices either shut down or closed early. Additionally, we have employees (many are operators and mechanics) who are “high risk” for Covid-19, and CDC required all to “stay at home”, just like all other employees.



As a result:

- We amended our “Disaster” policy to include “Pandemic” occurrences
- CATS created a reduced service plan that incorporated keeping nearly all routes operating, but at reduced frequency.
- Communicated with the general public, that for a period of time, only “essential riders” should be using transit (including hospital, clinic, drugstore, grocery, etc employees; and those riders who have no other way to get to doctors, drugstores, etc.
- CATS operators became rightfully concerned about contacting Covid with so many riders entering the buses/fareboxes all day and night long.
- CATS then created the emergency policy to allow riders to ride for free, but had to board the buses from the rear.
- Additionally, while newer buses already have the “driver barrier” (enclosed driver plastic type bubble”), we had to order another 28 barriers, and they are just now being delivered, for installation.
- We required face masks to ride, combined with PPEs, to protect both drivers and passengers.
- Monitored and Implemented ongoing updates by CDC, the Governor, the mayor, etc.
- Used CARES funding to fill in “gaps” of lost revenue, like the farebox, advertising, etc., and try to anticipate what revenues losses to expect as we finalize the 2021 operating budget.
- Lastly we are anticipating when will the HEROS (next version of the CARES act) will become law, and what changes might take place.

CATS had to reduce service, both quantity and span of time, as a result of these challenges. That means having to possibly furlough or RIF employees due to the service reductions. The CARES act, however, provided a temporary safety net, filling in lost revenue gaps, and supported the procurement of PPEs, driver barriers, temperature checking stations for all of our facilities where employees and customers. [Visit BRCATS for more information](#)



Construction bids for the 30,000 square foot, mixed-use project that BBR is developing on the east side of Plank Road between Calumet Street and Oswego street were recently submitted. The new 2-story site will include an Early Head Start childcare facility run by the YWCA and offices for BBR on the 1st floor, with 15 residential units on the 2nd floor, more than half of which will be preserved as affordable units. Once a contractor is selected, work can begin in 2021.

BBR continues its work on the Plank Road master plan after receiving an Advancing Cities award from the JPMorgan Chase Foundation (more information available [here](#)). As part of that work, BBR has advanced the progress of the pocket park planned at the southeast corner of Plank Road and Myrtlelawn Street. Recently, students from the LSU school of Landscape Design presented their top designs for the park at a public webinar. BBR is pursuing a timeline for construction of the park that could be completed as early as the beginning of 2022.

Related to Plank Road redevelopment, the City of Baton Rouge, CATS, and LA DOTD have recently signed necessary cooperative endeavor agreements for the creation of the Bus Rapid Transit line that will run along Plank Road from Airline, continue through Downtown, and ultimately reach LSU via Nicholson. The project is currently in the design phase. Construction is expected to begin in early 2022 with service beginning in mid-2024. Visit [Build Baton Rouge for more information](#)



About The Urban Update

The Urban Update is a periodic newsletter featuring our city's leading institutions as their solutions, innovations and ideas to address our city's most challenging issues. Each Update is a collaboration between BREC, Build Baton Rouge, CATS, Council on Aging, EBR Housing Authority, Impact Baton Rouge, LA Primary Care Association, MidCity Redevelopment Alliance and MetroMorphosis.