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Broussard continues to plan for its growth

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BROUSSARD - A successful community that often leads the state in both commercial and residential growth, Broussard has seen much of that under the stewardship of Mayor Charles Langlinais.

He had a vision for his then still largely rural community surrounded by sugarcane fields 20 years ago, and this week discussed plans for where he sees the city 20 years down the road.

For him, such long-range planning is key.

"I think like a developer and ask the question, 'What would work well in a particular area of the city and then encourage that kind of development?"' Langlinais said. "You have to be visionary.""

For residents, the planning is obviously working. Langlinais was reelected for a sixth term this fall by a healthy margin.

"Broussard is cool," said Carol DuBoise, having her car washed at a local garage. "It's not a small town but it still has that small town feel. You don't have to go far to find what you need."

The city also has a sense of community that many consider Broussard's best quality.

"We all get along well together," said Malcolm Broussard, who is 70, but was working with teenagers and people of all ages to help bring Christmas decorations at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church.

"We have the usual small-town problems, but nothing major."

The city's roughly $14 million annual budget is almost entirely funded by sales taxes. Property taxes are collected, but current estimates show that all goes to funding parish government.

At least for his city, Langlinais argues parish consolidation hasn't been a good idea.

"The only thing we have gotten out of that in the last 15 years was the Cypress Bayou dredging. There has not been a single road or bridge in Broussard," Langlinais said.

As a result, he is currently backing a plan to deconsolidate the parish, which he predicts will pass if it ever gets on the ballots.

As sales taxes are the driver for Broussard's economy, business and commercial development are Langlinais' top priority, especially along the U.S. Route 90 corridor.

Towards that goal, the city has aggressively annexed frontage along the highway and other major thoroughfares over the last 20 years, often to the ire of neighboring communities such as Youngsville.

For Langlinais, such annexations simply amounted to good planning.

"We tend to do that better than anyone else," Langlinais said. "My most important priority is good paying jobs," he said.

Langlinais says development along U.S. Route 90 has already produced 5,000 to 7,000 such jobs during the last two decades.

To make way for even more growth, a project is currently under way to expand the highway to six lanes from Lafayette south to its junction with the new Ambassador Caffery Parkway extension.

And Langlinais is in negotiations with communities in Iberia and St. Martin parishes to push that widening even further south.

While annexing the land and adding the infrastructure is good, Langlinais doesn't believe it is enough — you have to actively recruit the right businesses.

As an example, he said he will be attending a conference this spring where he plans to heavily lobby Boss Pro Shop and a number of other businesses to locate along the new Ambassador Caffery Parkway extension.

"It is the best location for them, and I have something to sell," said Langlinais, who argues there are 600,000 potential customers within a 50-mile driving distance.

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