Local government is a combined city-parish system

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Baton Rouge, an industrial center and home of two state universities, is the second largest city in the state and one of the south's fastest growing.

Boasting a population of 246,493, Baton Rouge is second only to New Orleans in population. Because of annexations into the city limits and an influx of people into this capital city, the population has grown significantly in the last 10 years.

Of the approximately 391,975 people who make East Baton Rouge Parish their home, 368,571 live under a consolidated city-parish form of government, the Census bureau estimates. The remainder live in the towns of Zachary and Baker.

The 368,571 estimate, which is for the "federal revenue sharing population for the City of Baton Rouge," puts Baton Rouge in 9th place among the nation's 176 cities with 100,000 residents or more as of July 1, 1984.

The City of Baton Rouge and the Parish of East Baton Rouge (Louisiana's equivalent of a county) consolidated into the present city-parish form of government in 1968. Since consolidation, the local form of government has served as a model for other counties and cities, both nationally and internationally.

The local government is headquartered near the banks of the Mississippi River in the new Riverside Centoplex, a multi-building complex which houses the mayor's office, the council chambers, courtrooms and the registrar of voters office. A theater, arena and exhibition hall and a library complete the complex.

The city-parish has been wrestling with a $9 million shortfall in its $128.7 million 1985 general fund budget. The shortfall is largely attributable to the fact that sales taxes have shown no growth this year.

The budget primarily funds operations of the Department of Public Works and the police and fire departments.

Baton Rouge is the largest of three municipalities within the parish. The other two - Baker and Zachary - are in the northern section of the parish.

Pat Screen, an attorney, is serving the first year of his second term as mayor-president of East Baton Rouge Parish, the chief executive spot in local government.

Elected parishwide, the mayor-president appoints department heads who oversee the day-to-day operations of the government. He also has veto power over most legislation passed by the council.

Screen created a new position of chief administrative officer when he came into office. The post presently is held by Walter Monsour, an attorney and a Coors beer distributor.

As top aide to the mayor he serves as direct supervisor of department heads and administers many in-house programs.

Two years ago, voters approved a measure to consolidate what was formerly two governing boards - the city council and parish council - into one Metropolitan Council made up of 12 members who govern both the city and parish.

The 12 council members are Tom Ed McHugh, District 1; Melvin "Kip" Holden, District 2; David C. Braud, District 3; Doug Welborn, District 4; V.M. "Lank" Cersenti, District 5; Gary Bergeron, District 6; Pearl George, District 7; Lynda Imes, District 8; Mayor Pro Tem Michael Roubique, District 9; Gordon Curry, District 10; Ben Peabody, District 11; and Larry Bankston, District 12.

The Metropolitan Council holds regular meetings twice a month on the second and fourth Wednesday on the third floor of the Metropolitan building downtown. In addition, the councilmen meet with their respective committees on the odd Wednesdays of the month.

Most matters coming before the council are scheduled for a public hearing before they can be adopted. Members of the public are allowed to address the council on that item when they are before the panel.

Waste Management Division, is available twice a week on a rotational basis in all areas of the parish. Screen has said he hopes to bid out garbage collection to private contractors to save up to $4.5 million.

Trash pickup of large bulky items has been offered within the Baton Rouge city limits about once a week. However, the city's budget woes have forced the city-parish to eliminate trash collection for the remainder of the year.

Complaints of just about any nature, from abandoned vehicles to overgrown lots, are handled by the Citizens Service Office at 389-3090. That office will take action to relieve almost any public nuisance.

Complaints regarding public works, such as stopped-up sewers, streets potholes and drainage problems are handled by the Department of Public Works's Control Center. The center, which can be reached at 389-4603, is open 24 hours a day.

The registrar of voters office is located on the second floor of the Metropolitan Building. The registrar is Nathaniel Bankston.

Recreational activities are handled through the Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission which operates 111 facilities, including parks and a variety of other recreational centers.

BREC also sponsors organized sports leagues of baseball, softball, basketball and football at its parks. BREC offers dance, gymnastics, art, ceramics, karate, cake decorating and French lessons at its centers.

The city-parish's Animal Control Center (774-7700) will take care of picking up nuisance animals as well as operating programs to educate the public in local leash laws. All dogs in the parish must be vaccinated by a licensed veterinarian.

Baton Rouge has a strict leash law which outlaws loose dogs or cats from running at large. The animal control center is at the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport, Ryan Field.

Also at Ryan Field is the Mosquito and Rodent Control Center operated under a special tax approved by voters. Aid in fighting pests is available by calling 356-3298.

Low-income families may get help from the city-parish Division of Human Services (389-3304), an umbrella agency overseeing social programs such as Head Start, Childhood Learning Centers, health referral centers and housing assistance.

Beside city-parish offices, the Centoplex houses the courtrooms, the district attorney's office, the clerk of court, the coroner and the sheriff's civil offices.

The city's main library is located on Goodwood Boulevard near Independence Park.