

INTRODUCTION — THE COMMISSION’S CHARGE & OBJECTIVE

It was with the greatest honor and commitment to integrity that we have endeavored to serve the purpose for which the Lafayette Parish Council has commissioned this City-Parish Alignment Commission (CPAC). This document not only contains the answers to those questions as outlined in Parish Resolution No. PR-007-2021, it contains the essence of good will, honorable decorum, and excellent wholesomeness of the good people called Lafayette.

Our charge and objective were to identify possible solutions to issues that might seem to be impeding the smooth communication and collaboration of our existing government. We patiently and cohesively combed through the history of consolidation, as well as its various challenges. We sought out and heard the best of creditable testimony, who brought nearly 150 years of collective professional experience to the table. We vetted the testimony and attempted to weigh the costs of every creative idea presented. We considered what might be the legal, physical, functional, and financial costs of any proposed solution. With all reasonableness we looked at what might be the long and short-term ramifications of inaction, as well as the actionable items contained in this final report. Our hope is that you find this work to be a useful resource in whatever decisions that lie ahead of you.

Thank you to every presenter for so generously giving of yourself and time. You were gracious and invaluable to the process. Our special thanks to the Lafayette Consolidated Government (LCG) administration for granting us complete access to all of its resources. And, finally, thank you to the LCG Council Office staff, who has been indispensable in facilitating our work.

THE COMMISSION RESPONDS TO THE RESOLUTION QUESTIONS

1. As the Parish governing authority, how can the Lafayette Parish Council best fulfill its responsibility to protect Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government tax dollars?

The Commission believes that the Lafayette Parish Council would best fulfill its responsibility to protect Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government tax dollars used to fund the shared services of the City of Lafayette and the Parish of Lafayette by generally being good stewards of the funds, maximizing revenue streams (such as through the pursuit of block grants, pension savings, mutually beneficial investments that provide for greater leverage in securing state and federal funds, etc.), and utilizing existing resources to strengthen transparency (such as through LCG’s open checkbook tool). The Commission also recommends adopting strategies that include budgeting for LCG’s operations and capital improvements by fund, as recommended by Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Lorrie Toups; presenting the budget in a larger venue and providing for expanded outreach when publicizing the budget process, which would build upon existing approaches and/or would develop new approaches to television, radio, print, and social media advisories on the budget; and prioritizing which governmental services are most needed and desired by Lafayette Parish residents.

2. How can the Lafayette Parish Council, all of whose members have constituents in the City of Lafayette, best protect the interest of all of our Parish of Lafayette citizens?

The Commission believes that the Lafayette Parish Council would best protect the interest of all Lafayette Parish citizens by prioritizing communication, which would be accomplished by remaining engaged with Parish constituents, working with the City Council, and continuing to labor for the good of the entirety of Lafayette Parish. This would collectively amount to the Parish Council simply fulfilling its duty to the citizens of Lafayette Parish by opening and nurturing its lines of communications with citizens and focusing on effective communication within LCG.

3. How can the Lafayette Parish Council best determine whether Lafayette Consolidated Government has fulfilled the purposes for which the consolidation of the City of Lafayette and Parish of Lafayette was advocated in 1992 when it was voted on?

The Commission believes that the Lafayette Parish Council can best determine whether LCG has fulfilled the purposes of consolidation, as advocated for in 1992 by examining the successes of how LCG has been able to maximize revenue streams/opportunities and share costs as a greater force by being combined, which, arguably, has been achieved after 30 years; however, the Commission also recommends investigating how annexations have resulted and continue to result in the loss of critical revenue for Lafayette Parish.

4. How can the Lafayette Parish Council best evaluate the system of administrative cost allocations to determine whether there is significant deviation from the actual division of work between the City of Lafayette and the Parish of Lafayette?

The Commission believes that the Lafayette Parish Council can best evaluate the system of administrative cost allocations to determine whether there is significant deviation from the actual division of work between the City and the Parish based on services rendered in the previous year. The Commission values the adoption of an annual resolution by the Councils that approves allocation schedules ahead of the budget process, which would aid in the enhancement of tracking Parish (and City) funds. The media distribution and, in turn, the public would be especially notified of the proposed resolution so that interested members of the public could review the proposed allocation schedules and provide input, as desired. The Commission also emphasized LCG creating broader avenues for the public to track those funds within the budget that fall within an allocation formula, as well as for the public to be able to monitor related supporting documentation and final expenditures, such as public works projects, legal matters, etc.

5. Are Parish tax dollars being spent within the city limits of Lafayette?

The Commission recognizes that Parish tax dollars are, and should be, spent within the city limits of Lafayette. The City of Lafayette is part of the Parish of Lafayette. Roads, bridges, libraries, and other Parish assets all have locations within the Lafayette city limits and the Parish of Lafayette does, and should, support these services.

6. Is consolidation fair to all taxpayers of the Parish of Lafayette?

The Commission, overall, finds that consolidation has been mutually beneficial to both the City and the Parish. The implementation of consolidation in Lafayette Parish will always have challenges of working with other municipalities on expenditure of Parish millage funds, such as the drainage millage, roads and bridges millage, etc., recognizing that projects are based priority funding.

7. What are the likely consequences of deconsolidation?

The Commission believes that the likely consequences of deconsolidation include, but are not limited to, loss of revenue procured through the advantages of consolidation (such as grant opportunities); loss of established governmental efficiencies; increase in legal fees through the comparative process of separation; disruption of current structures will add enormous strains and setbacks on plans, projects, and progress; morale implications on the citizenry; and economic marketability that benefit the consolidated City and Parish would suffer. There is also concern that millage sources would have to be shared among the municipalities, salary expenses would increase by adding additional management, the lines of fire protection would be blurred, and growth opportunity may suffer due to many corporate entities perceiving the City and the Parish separately.

8. Would a repeal of the “Fix the Charter” amendments, and a return to a consolidated Lafayette City-Parish Council, better serve the interests of the people of the City of Lafayette and the Parish of Lafayette?

The Commission has mixed opinions on whether a repeal of the “Fix the Charter” amendments, and a return to a consolidated Lafayette City-Parish Council, would better serve the interests of the people of the City of Lafayette and the Parish of Lafayette. Notably, the Council members serving on the Commission believe that a separate City Council and Parish Council is fair, though it was emphasized that the Commission is not interested in deconsolidation. The Commission does not believe that a repeal of “Fix the Charter” is the solution and that adequate time needs to be allowed to build on strengthening the process for improvements to the current structure of government.

9. How can working relationships be improved between the Lafayette City Council, the Lafayette Parish Council, and the Lafayette Mayor-President and executive branch of Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government?

The Commission believes that working relationships can be improved between the Lafayette City Council, the Lafayette Parish Council, and the Lafayette Mayor-President and executive branch of Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government with patient and deliberate efforts to communicate with one another; by implementation of generating a budget document by fund and scheduling budget meetings accordingly; the Joint Council preparing either an ordinance or memorandum of understanding addressing the clear delineation of City issues versus Parish issues versus joint issues; adopting the cost allocation resolution; and sharing information and exploring options for enhancing communication between the Councils and the administration.

10. The Commissioners shall investigate and evaluate the findings and report of the Protect the City Committee.

The Commissioners’ findings and takeaways from the PTC Committee Report include the primary concerns of seeking functional consolidation, deconsolidation, legal counsel for the Lafayette City Council, an elected police chief for the City of Lafayette, and separate City of Lafayette mayor and Parish of Lafayette president positions. See the Commission’s bulleted summary of findings and recommendations below.

- Functional Consolidation
 - Given the testimony presented, and without further exploration, the Commission deems that functional consolidation would not work. The Commission feels that this approach would essentially amount to a version of deconsolidation and would engender dysfunction.
- Deconsolidation
 - The Commission does not recommend deconsolidation.
- Legal Counsel
 - The Commission recognizes that the Home Rule Charter provides for special legal counsel, but arbitration of any differences of opinions between LCG’s counsel and special counsel would result in cost increases.
- Elected Police Chief
 - Based on testimony presented, the Commission received advice that an elected police chief would result in more problems and would be better suited for smaller communities.
- Mayor of the City of Lafayette / President of Lafayette Parish
 - The Commission feels as though the combined position of Mayor-President should be preserved for cost savings and greater efficiency. Separating the position between a Mayor

of the City of Lafayette and a President of Lafayette Parish would essentially amount to a form of deconsolidation, which the Commission agrees is not the desired outcome. The Commission acknowledges that an elected mayor for the City of Lafayette is an important issue to certain demographics within the City who have signaled this desire to the Commission; however, there is not unanimous consensus among the Commission on this matter. The Commission has not seen or heard of evidence that representation is lacking with the combined Mayor-President position.

- Adoption of Annual Allocation Resolution
 - The Commission supports and recommends the annual adoption of a joint resolution between the Lafayette City Council and the Lafayette Parish Council on the allocation schedule decided on by the Finance Committee and the LCG administration following a thorough review of all allocations.
- Budget Reviews
 - The Commission recommends reviewing the budget by fund, as recommended by the CFO, as opposed to departmental budgeting as a means for transparency in accounting for the appropriation of funds.

FINAL FINDINGS

This Commission unanimously agrees **deconsolidation is not the answer at this time** for improving our current form of government. It affirms that consolidation has mutually benefitted both the City and the Parish of Lafayette. It has maximized revenue procured through the advantages of consolidation, has efficiently saved costs by streamlining government processes, and leveraged economic marketability resulting in growth for all.

We unanimously recommend the consideration of implementing of a **joint allocation resolution**, which would agree to allocation formulas prior to regularly scheduled budget reviews each year.

We unanimously recommend budget scheduling be presented **by fund**, rather than **by department**.

AN EXPRESSED DESIRE

It has been clearly vocalized that there is an underdetermined number of City of Lafayette residents who desire to have a greater influence over the electing process of Lafayette's mayor. A lack of democratic representation is the reason cited for its aspiration. While this Commission has failed to obtain any example, or instance, where the City of Lafayette has lacked representation throughout its consolidated history, this demographic expresses a desire to separate the office of the Lafayette Mayor from that of the Lafayette Parish President. It says, "The City of Lafayette needs and deserves this autonomy that is necessary to chart its own destiny, govern itself, and make decisions in the best interest of the city residents of Lafayette."

The majority of this Commission agrees this position to be a personal opinion to an approach to government, but does not carry merit in regards to the fair and effective functionality of our present form of consolidated government.

The minority of this Commission agrees that the City of Lafayette should have complete influence over the election process of its mayor.

A POSSIBLE CONSIDERATION

Should the time come that the population tables turn and the City of Lafayette no longer carries the majority of population within the Parish, a Charter Commission could be formed to explore equitable options allowing LCG to remain consolidated. One such consideration presented was that of requiring Mayor-President candidates to carry both the City and the Parish of Lafayette in order to win an election. The idea is taken from the same process that was utilized in the 1992 election creating our consolidated government. Independently, the City of Lafayette had to carry the vote, as well as the Parish of Lafayette as a whole, in order for us to become a consolidated government.

This Commission unanimously agrees any such decision to amend the Home Rule Charter must be thoroughly vetted and not driven by any impetuous effort absent of full transparency.