

# Our Views: Process needs more openness

Supporters of FutureBR, the city-parish's development plan, have long talked about the need for public engagement to make the plan a success. That goal isn't served, though, when a panel charged with implementing key parts of the plan rarely meets in public — and appears to be avoiding public meetings.

The implementation team, which consists of six heads of local governmental and civic associations, has met publicly only once, late last year. As a public body, the FutureBR Implementation Team, or FIT, must follow the rules of the Louisiana Open Meetings Law, which generally requires that gatherings of such public bodies be open to the public.

But Walter Monsour, of the East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority, whose agency is in charge of scheduling FIT meetings, said the team has conducted most of its business at “staff-level” meetings, avoiding quorums that would require public meetings.

The group met publicly for about 15 minutes in December and said its first order of business would be taking résumés and recommending to Mayor-President Kip Holden whom he should hire as assistant chief administrative officer assigned to the FIT team.

Those duties have since been assigned to John Price, who was hired as one of Holden's assistant chief administrative officers in January. His role as the city-parish's liaison to the FIT team apparently evolved after he was hired to perform other duties. Price's role as the liaison to the FIT team wasn't announced until this month.

The FIT panel received 196 résumés for the position but had no public meeting after its first, brief gathering to discuss the résumés. Monsour said none of the applicants who were reviewed or interviewed were the right fit for the job.

More frequent public meetings of the FIT team would allow the public a better view of how officials are implementing the city-parish's development plan.

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