

Statement

June 22, 2009



Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson
Statement: We Must Defeat Senate Bill 75

New Orleans, LA - June 22, 2009 - In a citywide election in November of 2008, New Orleans voters approved a major amendment to the City's Home Rule Charter. This amendment requires the City Planning Commission to draft a master plan for the future development of New Orleans; a plan that, when complete, the City's elected and appointed leaders will have to abide by under force of law.

This was a historic moment for New Orleans and a serious win for neighborhoods, small businesses, legitimate major developers, and good government advocates.

New Orleans residents have spent countless hours drafting plans that have ended up collecting dust in a forgotten room in City Hall. Meanwhile, New Orleans continues to suffer from an outdated, dysfunctional system of land use in which zoning decisions are often politicized, made with little or no citizen input, and favor a privileged few. This system leads to corner bars in neighborhoods where they don't belong, landfills dumped onto vacant land in New Orleans East, and major developers who wouldn't dare invest in a city where the rules can change tomorrow. The 2008 charter amendment, supported by the administration and six of seven councilmembers, was meant to change that. It promised a coherent, meaningful plan that would bring desperately-needed stability to our City.

Senate Bill 75 threatens to derail this. Senate Bill 75 would again politicize the planning process by requiring yet another vote of the people on the plan before it can acquire the force of law. This argument - that the people should vote on the plan itself - is all too familiar. A small group of residents, developers, and consultants spent tens of thousands of dollars on TV commercials and radio ads pushing this argument in an attempt to defeat the charter amendment in 2008 - they lost.

Now, Senate Bill 75 is taking this argument to the state. It is a thinly veiled attempt to usurp the will of the people, derail the master planning process, and revert New Orleans back to the old-school land use system that has stalled economic development here for decades.

No other city in the country puts a master plan - a document composed of more than a thousand of pages - to the vote of the people. This would be like putting a state budget to a statewide vote. People would likely pick out and vote against one line, and drafting the document would become highly political. More importantly, the results of a disapproving vote would be impossible to interpret. Which part of the master plan should we change to get a favorable vote: community health clinics, plans for improving transportation, or certain components of the land use plan? How many more rounds of public meetings, changes to the plan, and costly citywide votes would we have to undergo before our City finally gets a plan and the stability we need? And for how long would people be willing to come out to meetings for a plan that might again mean nothing? Senate Bill 75 would also violate the Home Rule Charter, which was instituted in the 1950s to allow the City to govern itself on issues like city planning without the state stepping in.

For all these reasons and more, we must defeat this bill. Mayor Ray Nagin, a majority of the City Council, the Bureau of Governmental Research, the Business Council, the Home Builders Association, the New Orleans Metropolitan Association of Realtors, Citizens for One Greater New Orleans, many state legislators, and a host of neighborhoods groups have publicly opposed it.

As the author of the 2008 charter amendment and as an elected official who worked vigorously for its passage, I have spent the past several weeks working against Senate Bill 75 in the Legislature. Unfortunately, the bill has already passed the full Senate and the House Municipal Affairs Committee. Defeating it on the House floor is our last chance. I will continue to fight it, and I need you to fight it, too. Please call or write your representative in the House and tell them to vote against Senate Bill 75.

This statement can also be found on nola.com, click [here](#) to view.

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New Orleans City Council

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of New Orleans city government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes, and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish.

The City Council is comprised of five districts and two councilmembers-at-large. Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow; Council Vice President and Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson; District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura; District "B" Councilmember Stacy S. Head; District "C" Councilmember James Carter; District "D" Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell; and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.