

New Orleans City Council

Councilmember-at-Large
Arnie Fielkow

Statement

June 24, 2009



Council President Arnie Fielkow Statement: New City Hall Buy May Be Wrong Priority, Wrong Time

New Orleans, LA - June 24, 2009 - The following is a statement issued today from New Orleans City Council President Arnie Fielkow regarding the proposed Chevron building purchase for a new City Hall:

"Much discussion over recent days has centered on whether or not the \$8 million purchase of Chevron Corp.'s office tower at 935 Gravier Street and two associated buildings, a complex known as Chevron Place, is beneficial to the City of New Orleans and its residents. I commend Mayor Nagin for wanting to upgrade City Hall, and present a better image for the seat of city government - objectives which I also share. However, I ultimately feel the prioritization, timing and proposed relocation site is not, at this time, in our citizens' best interest considering the City's existing needs.

"A City Hall relocation is a topic which merits continued study and planning, particularly regarding the

synergies which can be created with other projects planned throughout our downtown areas. It is my hope that such work would involve more public input, further consultation with business, civic and elected leaders, and be consistent with a 21st century image of New Orleans.

"I look forward to receiving the detailed information and documentation requested last week by the City Council and yesterday by the City Planning Commission, but my reservations at this time include the following:

· Prioritization

Given New Orleans' great needs in the recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina - and the ever present limitations of services and facilities that contribute to citizens' quality of life - I do not believe that using undedicated funding for the purchase of a new City Hall, and the additional ancillary costs, is in the best interest of the citizens of New Orleans.

The \$8-million purchase price, combined with currently undetermined build out, relocation, and other related costs, will necessitate the use of monies, i.e. the proposed \$3.8 million in undedicated bond funds, which could instead be used for more important areas to enhance the quality of life for our citizens. Great city needs such as the reopening and enhancement of playgrounds, police and fire stations, street repairs, etc., certainly should be top priority when competing with limited city funds.

While it is important for all of us in city government to multi-task, I cannot in good conscience support this proposed relocation of city government when these kinds of pressing needs remain unmet. This is not to say a modern City Hall is not needed, but as residents are forced to do every day in their own personal lives, we should prioritize and undertake projects in a timeframe consistent with those priorities.

· Further Planning and Timing

Given the above, I would like to see additional planning be conducted with respect to the objectives for a new city government complex, and how those objectives fit into an overall master plan for the revitalization of downtown New Orleans (including the proposed entertainment district around the Superdome). This will entail much more discussion with the public, as well as civic, business and elected leaders, so that the best site can be determined. A new "front door" for the future of New Orleans can in fact be achieved but I do not believe the current transaction has had the necessary level of input.

Further, I feel the current transaction to relocate City Hall is ill-timed bearing in mind the City is on the threshold of new leadership both in the executive and legislative branches of city government. I believe the new Mayor, City Councilmembers and the public at large will want, and should be able, to weigh in on such an important decision. In this vein, I would propose the creation of a six-month Blue Ribbon Panel consisting of the City's living former Mayors and Councilmembers, all of which have previously examined the topic, who can help counsel our future leaders on this important subject matter.

Finally, the timing of the current transaction is problematic as we are currently within the 2009 hurricane season.

· Proposed Site

Having recently toured the Chevron building, I am unconvinced that this location is the best fit for, and image of, the seat of New Orleans city government. I question whether the site's aesthetics best represent the image of city government and further question the logistics of operating a constituent-friendly

government in such a compact area. I would recommend that if and when a relocation is pursued the City look carefully at alternatives, including other city-owned buildings, which might present less costs and provide the 'wow' factor which would present a better image for New Orleans. Any such alternatives should be part of a comprehensive planning effort, which includes a full fiscal impact report, constituency access analysis, traffic impact study and a proposed re-usage of the existing City Hall site.

"I look forward to further engaging with the Administration on this important topic and partnering with civic, business and elected leaders in selecting a plan which will be in the best, long-term interest of New Orleans and its citizens."

Contact:

Jaime Guillet

Office of Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow

Ph: 504-658-1060

Cell: 504-957-2035

jlguillet@cityofno.com

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.