



Mayor-President Melvin "Kip" Holden
State of the City Address
January 6, 2016

Good afternoon. It's always a pleasure to come before you as we start a New Year and report on the state of our City and Parish.

Before I get started, I would like to recognize my wife, Lois...who has done a tremendous job as First Lady of Baton Rouge for the past 11 years, not only supporting me...but also supporting our community.

How do you build a great American city?

When I was first elected Mayor-President in 2004, I won with a pledge to Green Light Baton Rouge. I think everyone knew what I meant...I wanted to get things going at the pace a city like Baton Rouge deserved.

We convened about 100 citizens from all walks of life to a Green Light Citizens Council. We asked them to look at the services our city-parish provides...and think about how we could improve them.

We looked at ways the Mayor-President could provide leadership in areas where previous Mayors had not been involved.

We asked people to dream about the kind of community they would like to live in...

And after 100 days of listening and working...the result was our "Framework for Progress"...our blueprint.

We set out to improve quality of life for all of us in East Baton Rouge Parish...

And we went to war against crime...traffic congestion... and all the things that were holding us back.

Today, I am honored to be with you to deliver my final State of the City Address.

Like previous years, I want to take this opportunity to review the incredible progress we have made together...

But this year, we're not simply looking at the previous year....we're looking at 11 years.

As a reminder, our Green Light Committee addressed the following areas:

First, as always...public safety. Our police, fire departments, EMS, and Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness departments.

They considered quality of life issues...health, our physical environment, arts, culture and recreation.

We tackled traffic...how we could make a difference quickly...and also kick-start long term solutions.

We looked at our Public Works Department...which manages such a big part of City-Parish government.

We explored how the Mayor could support education initiatives...social services...and finances to keep our City-Parish strong.

We looked at how to better handle inter-governmental relations...
And we redefined the role the Mayor could play in economic development.

Let's take a look at how we've done....

Since 2005, violent crime in Baton Rouge has decreased by 21% and property crimes have decreased by over 28%.

Overall, crime in Baton Rouge has been trending downward since 2005.

We implemented the innovative BRAVE program...a partnership between the Mayor's Office, the Baton Rouge Police and District Attorney Hillar Moore, who helps provide daily oversight.

Since we started BRAVE, we have seen violent crimes decrease in the areas we targeted without displacing violent activity to other areas.

That was our goal.

With public safety our number one priority, our Baton Rouge Police department has maintained the highest standards of accreditation...

It received the Flagship Award for being a model police agency...and the Meritorious Award for excellence.

We secured the former Women's Hospital Campus and converted it into a Public Safety Complex...centrally located with room for growth.

We've expanded specialized divisions to include an Air Unit with a Police helicopter...a Mounted Patrol...a Domestic Violence Division...Elderly Crimes Unit...and this year we will have a new 24-hour Downtown precinct.

In 2014, we started a pilot program with body cameras which will be implemented department-wide this year.

And since 2005, we have completed 12 training academies that graduated 356 new officers, keeping our police force strong.

When I think of public safety, I think how we celebrated New Year's Eve again this year with Red Stick Revelry...

This was our third year since starting this great new event and we had over 20,000 people downtown to celebrate.

I watched little girls dancing with their Dads...and people of all ages and walks of life coming together to enjoy the music...the fireworks...and the nightlife.

And at the end of the night, the Baton Rouge Police did not report a single incident...and made no arrests downtown.

What other city in America could accomplish that?

It's something we can all be proud of...from a public safety standpoint and as a community.

Over in our Baton Rouge Fire Department...we are now building our eighth new fire station and refurbishing a ninth for a department that has maintained a Class 1 rating longer than any other fire department in America.

We've implemented new technology that reduces response times and purchased 9 new pumpers, 2 new ladders and other response vehicles totaling \$8 million dollars from grant funds and city-parish investment.

While budget cuts in some cities have resulted in pink slips for firefighters, we are working to keep our insurance rates low and our people and property safe.

Our Mayor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness is another area we can all be very proud of.

We are one of only a few local jurisdictions nationwide to hold the highest status by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program.

Our staff are some of the best trained emergency managers in the nation in the areas we see too often – hurricanes, floods, hazardous materials...

But we provide leadership for the region when any threat occurs.

When the ebola outbreak caused panic in America...our staff convened a Regional Ebola Tabletop Exercise that trained more than 300 regional emergency responders.

From our hospitals...to the chemical plants...to the River Bend Nuclear Station...our emergency management staff keeps us prepared and keeps us safe.

I have been working daily with them to monitor the Mississippi River stages so we can notify the public as needed and make informed decisions as a river city.

And while I am very confident in our levee system, we will watch closely until any threat of danger passes.

Because when we prepare for something...we don't just get ready...we get Red Stick Ready. It's our own brand and when you hear it...you know exactly what it means because no one does it better.

Last year, we completed the much-anticipated reorganization of our Department of Public Works.

Our Framework for Progress called out the need for better organization, more accountability, updated pay scales and greater efficiency.

It called for a separate Transportation Department to provide a cabinet-level voice on transportation planning based on sound engineering expertise.

Today we have six new department directors to speed decision-making, eliminate backlogs in areas of environmental services...buildings and grounds... transportation and drainage....fleet management, development...and maintenance.

I don't have to tell you the impact our Green Light Plan has had.

As of the fourth quarter of last year...\$699 million in committed funding and 35 completed projects...with three more under construction.

That means the Green Light Plan has helped reduce traffic congestion in 35 hot spots in our parish...with more to come.

As an added bonus...we were able to refinance some of the early bond money at more favorable rates...and we raised an additional \$40 million dollars for the program.

A quick update on our massive Sewer Rehab Program – We have a total of 110 projects in this program...68 are complete and 28 are under construction. Another 14 are in various stages of design. The entire sewer rehab program is scheduled to be completed in 2018.

To help diversify our economy, our Framework for Progress called for marketing Baton Rouge as a city for film, music and video production.

Today, we are one of the premier locations in the world for television and film production...competing with London, Atlanta, Los Angeles and New York.

I've met with the heads of studios to recruit blockbuster films to Baton Rouge from Universal...Sony...Fox... Paramount...Warner Brothers...and Lions Gate.

And it wasn't very long ago that we set our next goal to land a television series...now we have recruited four.

When I took office in 2005, we didn't even have a Baton Rouge Film Commission and we were not on the map for film production.

Today, we average more than \$170 million in direct spending per year by film productions in Baton Rouge.

And I am very proud to announce that this year, we expect to cross the \$1 billion dollar mark in direct spending by film productions into our local economy.

That is one billion dollars that we were not even chasing before 2005.

This past year, Baton Rouge was named the Number One Small City to live and work as a filmmaker by Moviemaker Magazine...and honors like that will help even more.

In 2014, we initiated the opening of a non-profit that has provided hundreds of local citizens with free training to work in the film industry...and their first jobs in the film industry.

We've built a billion-dollar industry...and we've built a workforce to support it.

The health of our community has been a major concern for me. Baton Rouge is the largest metro in the country without a local public health department...so we launched the Mayor's Healthy City Initiative to fill that space.

We have some serious challenges – above average obesity...diabetes and heart disease...and new HIV and AIDS cases...

And we are addressing each of them.

Our Healthy BR Initiative has earned national recognition for its work...Baton Rouge was one of 12 finalist communities in the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health honors.

In 2015, we won the American Hospital Association's prestigious NOVA Award...and became the first community in the country to have all acute care hospitals collaborate on a Community Health Needs Assessment.

We've brought mobile farmers markets and community gardens to areas where fresh produce is scarce...a Family Fit Day...and increased HIV testing.

To combat this illness, we now screen over 20,000 individuals a year.

To help put our youth on a path to success, we've increased the number of nutritious summer meals served to students to over 350,000.

We formed a Mayor's Youth Advisory Council that was awarded a grant from State Farm to create a healthy living campaign for youth in our city.

Our summer youth jobs program includes teaching more than 400 youth each summer to fight blight...build community gardens...create public art projects by working with professional artists.

This program won the Community Achievement Award from the Louisiana Municipal Association...and received more than 1,000 youth applicants last year...

And when you see the skills and community pride they are learning, you will wish that we had a spot for every one of them.

The list of grants we have been awarded is too lengthy to mention...but I'll highlight a few:

- The IBM Smarter Cities Challenge
- The Cities of Service Leadership grant, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies, which allowed us to hire the City's first Chief Service Officer.
- A U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER Grant of \$1.7 million dollars to plan for a modern streetcar system, or tram, that will connect downtown...Old South Baton Rouge...and LSU.

This will be so important for people moving between the State Capitol...the Water Campus...IBM... downtown...and LSU.

And it will spur redevelopment in Old South Baton Rouge...attracting businesses, jobs and housing to revitalize the Nicholson Drive corridor.

This is not a dream...it's something you will be riding on in the next five years. This project is on a fast track and we will hold our first public meeting to get your input later this month...

- We received a \$1.1 million dollar grant to design and build the North Boulevard Promenade...a green corridor of pedestrian and bicycle paths that link Town Square with our Downtown Greenway.

There is no question that revitalizing Downtown Baton Rouge was a priority for me...I know a healthy downtown fuels the rest of the parish.

\$790 million in downtown public investments have spurred an additional \$1 billion in private developments over the past ten years.

Over 300 residential units have been added since 2005 with another 300 units to be completed this year alone.

Our work downtown has won an incredible 34 international, national and state awards that recognize projects that symbolize our remarkable success.

One of our most exciting projects in progress is the 30-acre Water Campus, which strengthens our connection to LSU and positions Baton Rouge as a world leader in coastal science and research.

This project will also complete our Framework for Progress goal of re-purposing the old Municipal Dock with an iconic Water Campus headquarters building.

We knew we needed more downtown hotel rooms to attract the size of conventions and events our city could host and since 2005, we've cut the ribbon on the Hilton...Hotel Indigo...Hampton Inn & Suites...and a new Holiday Inn Express. In the works are the new Watermark Hotel...and Courtyard by Marriott.

We now have over 1,000 hotel rooms downtown to help attract large conferences...sports and entertainment events...and 1.5 million tourists each year.

Our Framework for Progress also called for increased use of technology for greater efficiency and transparency in government.

We've taken that goal beyond what anyone dreamed.

This year alone, we launched Open Data BR to put government data in the hands of the public...

Open Budget BR...which has completely transformed how we present our annual City-Parish budget to the public through easy-to-understand charts and tools that track our daily operations.

And we launched a state-of-the-art GIS Map Portal...

We're using social media to communicate with those we serve, with Baton Rouge Police becoming one of the nation's leading law enforcement agencies for using social media to engage the public.

We've improved our 3-1-1 call service...given citizens an app to provide easy feedback...

How are we doing?

Baton Rouge was just named a Top 10 Digital City in America by the Center for Digital Government...

Our Framework for Progress made specific recommendations for the Mayor's role in economic development for East Baton Rouge Parish...and it has been one of our greatest areas for success.

It called for us to bring employers together with education leaders...to improve infrastructure...and streamline government processes...

It called for an update of the Horizon Plan for land use and development...and we completed FUTURE-BR which set us on a better course for growth.

Our Framework for Progress called for growing small businesses and those owned by women, minorities, young professionals and start-up entrepreneurs.

It called on the Mayor-President to take a leadership role in economic development efforts...and believe me, I haven't slowed down since.

The result is one of the most successful economic development efforts in the State of Louisiana.

I personally serve as the Chief Marketing Officer at conferences...trade shows...and international business development meetings.

Today, we're at a record level of jobs in our parish.

I could tell you about the more than 7,000 jobs created...or the \$327 million in new payroll...or the \$1.1 billion in capital expenditures.

But I'll let the names speak for themselves:

EXXON MOBIL...IBM...EA SPORTS...COCA-COLA... BROWN AND ROOT...ORION
INSTRUMENTS...PreSonus
HONEYWELL...COMMUNITY COFFEE...POD PACK... STIXIS.

These are some of the companies that have expanded their operations here...choosing
Baton Rouge over other major markets.

Yesterday, we announced another 40 IT jobs coming to Baton Rouge with the news that
Blueline Associates will locate here...another win by our partnership with the Baton Rouge
Area Chamber. And the beat goes on...

You know I'm as competitive as the Tigers and Jags...and I like to win. But when I took office,
the sports rankings were the only ones we were listed in.

Since 2005...Baton Rouge has been named:

- One of the Best Cities for Business by Forbes Magazine
- Second Most Competitive City in North America by Site Selection Magazine
- A Top 10 Digital City
- A Top 10 Metro for New Projects
- One of Five Emerging Entrepreneurial Hubs
- A Best Bang for Your Buck City by Forbes
- MAJOR MARKET OF THE YEAR
- THE BEST MID-SIZED MARKET FOR NEW AND EXPANDED CORPORATE FACILITIES
- AND THE HEALTHIEST SMALL BUSINESS CLIMATE IN THE SOUTH

And along the way...we had a lot of fun, didn't we?

We brought back the Baton Rouge Blues Festival... created Live After Five...Sunday in the
Park...the Festival of Lights...the Bayou Country Superfest.

We put Baton Rouge on the map as a New Year's Eve destination city with our own 9-foot tall lighted Red Stick dropping at midnight to ring in the New Year.

We've welcomed everyone from bowlers to beauty queens...and we've had a blast doing it.

This week, I begin my final year as Mayor-President...
as excited about what we can accomplish in 2016 as I was in 2004.

The job hasn't always been easy...but we are resilient.

When we face our toughest challenges...our darkest hours...that's when we shine the brightest.

All I have to say is Katrina. Rita. Gustav. And you know exactly what I mean.

Together, we've learned everything from the Buddy System to prepare for emergencies...to the Two-Step...to get ready for the best country music festival anywhere.

It is my honor to announce for my final time that the State of our City and Parish is strong...in fact, it's awesome.

Meeting with you each year to report our achievements...has been a privilege I will never forget.

You honored me by electing me to serve three terms as your Mayor-President...a job I love...for a city and parish I love.

Together, we came together and laid out a Framework for Progress...and we achieved those goals and so many more.

I look forward to another year of progress for East Baton Rouge Parish...to a year of safety and celebration...a year of hope and optimism.

I look forward to working with you until the Red Stick drops at midnight again next New Year's Eve...to make East Baton Rouge Parish and this Great American City even better for the next generation.

Thank you all...and may God Bless each of you.