

# CITY HALL

## ***2025 Mayoral Candidate Q&A***

*Where Candidates Stand on Issues  
Facing the City of New Orleans*

*Primary Election, October 11, 2025*

**AUGUST 26, 2025**



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## INTRODUCTION

This fall, New Orleans voters will choose their mayor for the next four years. They will vote in the primary election on October 11. This will be followed by a November 15 runoff if no candidate receives more than 50% of the primary vote.

In polls and public forums, candidates and voters have voiced many concerns about the future of

City government and how it can improve quality of life and opportunity in New Orleans. The Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) has identified 10 such issues, on which it has a body of research, and developed survey questions for the mayoral candidates. The selected topics cover the City's budget, core services and infrastructure, as well as the City's work to promote affordable housing and economic development.

Each qualified candidate received the same set of questions, along with a summary of each topic based on BGR's research. **In this report, BGR presents the responses of the nine qualified mayoral candidates who responded to the survey and remain in the mayor's race as of the publication date.** BGR publishes their answers as they were submitted, with typographical errors corrected only as needed for clarity and readability. Candidates are presented alphabetically by last name, as they will appear on the ballot:

- **Joseph "Joe" Bikulege Jr.**
- **"Manny Chevrolet" Bruno**
- **Eileen Carter**
- **Royce Duplessis**
- **Frank Robert Janusa**
- **Helena Moreno**
- **Frank M. Scurlock**
- **Oliver Thomas**
- **Richard "Ricky" Twiggs**

BGR received a completed survey from mayoral candidate Arthur Hunter. However, it is not included in this report because he announced on August 7 that he ended his mayoral campaign. BGR did not receive survey responses from two other qualified mayoral candidates, Russell J. Butler and Renada Collins.

BGR prepared this report to help voters learn more about these important policy issues and inform their decisions on election day. Voters can [click here to visit BGR.org](https://www.bgr.org) to access all 2025 Candidate Q&A reports for the primary elections for New Orleans Mayor, City Council, and Orleans Parish Sheriff. BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization dedicated to informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources for the improvement of government in greater New Orleans. BGR is nonpartisan and does not endorse any candidates for public office.

The BGR Survey Insights summary is intended to help voters gain a quick overview of the candidates' comments on each policy issue. Voters should review the candidates' written responses after the summary for a fuller explanation of their views. Click the links below to go there.

- In the area of [City government performance](#), candidates named their top two departments that require the most reform. Most prioritize infrastructure and permitting as services most in need of improvement.
- On [City budget and financial management](#), most candidates support BGR's recommendation that the City develop and maintain a five-year financial plan to achieve a structurally balanced budget. Candidates discuss several strategies to improve the City's fiscal outlook like consolidating or eliminating redundant departments and programs, auditing contracts, adopting performance-based budgeting, and modernizing tax and fee collection and enforcement. Some candidates also agree the City should maintain at least 17% of its general fund budget as a financial reserve. However individual candidates call for minimum reserves ranging from as low as 10% to as high as 35%.
- Candidate responses do not yield a clear consensus on whether to increase funding for the New Orleans Police Department. Some candidates say they would increase funding conditionally, pending a full audit of the NOPD budget and positive performance markers, such as call response times and staffing levels. Beyond NOPD, many urge an expansion of mental-health services and youth programs to improve [public safety](#), and an increase in community policing for non-emergency matters.
- Most candidates are in favor of a cooperative agreement between the City and Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office to improve the [Orleans Parish jail](#), along the lines of what BGR recommends. A majority of candidates speak to improving transparency and joint planning between the City and OPSO with clear reporting on spending and jail conditions. Exiting federal oversight, which the jail has been under for more than half a century, is another major goal.
- On the state of the city's underfunded [street maintenance](#), most candidates favor bridging the \$36 million funding gap by establishing a dedicated street maintenance fund or revenue stream. Many

candidates also urge better coordination between infrastructure-focused entities, like the Sewerage and Water Board and Department of Public Works, with the goal of better planning and reducing unnecessary repair costs.

- Most candidates say [Sewerage and Water Board](#) reform is necessary, with many calling for enhanced oversight over funding requests and routine performance checks. Candidates also suggest improving the City Council's approach to S&WB funding requests by implementing a more transparent, independent process with greater communication between public officials and the local community.
- On the implementation of a citywide [stormwater fee](#), most candidates concur that drainage is underfunded and that issue should be addressed. Some candidates say the City should implement a stormwater fee only if it is tied to runoff volume, includes City Council oversight, applies to tax-exempt properties and improves drainage system performance. Other candidates oppose the fee or are in favor of funding drainage through other means.
- On [affordable housing](#), candidates propose various strategies to enhance the use of the City's Housing Trust Fund and otherwise improve housing affordability in New Orleans. Some policy suggestions include zoning reforms and neighborhood reinvestment strategies.
- On [economic development](#), candidates propose funding the revitalization of historically underserved communities, facilitating job creation, and investing in small businesses. Several candidates call for stronger oversight of the use of local tax subsidies and emphasize the need for long-term citywide benefits.
- Candidates offer a variety of ways to address the rising cost of [pensions](#) for the City's public employees, but there is no clear consensus. Suggestions include 401(k)-style or other alternative plans, legislative changes to police retention penalties, and potential buyouts to stabilize the pension system.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

BGR's [mission](#) is to provide independent research to support informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources. We recognize that each candidate enters the race with a vision for improving City of New Orleans (City) government and delivering more effective services to citizens. [BGR's 2019 report](#) analyzing the previous decade of the City's General

Fund budgets highlighted the lack of funding to address the vast scope of the City's needs. Therefore, every General Fund dollar that is not well spent represents a dollar's worth of high priority needs that will go unmet. The report urged the City to reevaluate current expenditures with an eye toward optimal deployment of existing resources to critical needs.

### On City government performance, BGR asked the candidates:

1. What two City services, programs or operations are most in need of improvement, and what strategies (financial, organizational, operational or otherwise) will you use to fix them? Please explain why.



**JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.**  
NOPD

Our police force is one of the best I have seen throughout my career and travel. Unfortunately, is underfunded and understaffed. Solutions to our crime problem will enable us to correct the forward movement of our city in many other areas.

For example, Commerce, attracting new businesses, both local and from outside our parish and state. Enforcement to assure existing businesses are safe and protected.

Beginning with creating a better working relationship with the existing superintendent and their support staff I will increase interaction and communication by assigning a liaison between the NOPD and my administration.

Strong rapport with the Police Community advisory Board to ensure our permanent sustainment of the consent decree.

The recruitment program, which has recently made positive changes, will be regularly reviewed and tweaked to ensure they have every available source to build our force. Review the hiring of civil servants in administrative positions to put more trained troops on the streets. I believe

this can be brought under the recruitment department as well so we can obtain the best people suited for the positions needed.

#### Safety and Permits

Initial team meeting to make sure the right people are in place and have the support they need to streamline and make the process more efficient for new and existing business to get things accomplished.

Audit the department for malfeasance to ensure the department when streamlining the process does not sacrifice safety or codes.

More authority to department heads to approve permitting when all proper procedures are followed and proven to be in order and meeting all requirements.



**"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

I think NAMI is the one of the most important programs that our city needs to help our citizens who struggle with mental illness issues. I would promise to get as much care for people and their families with 24 hour services and

housing.

We could use monies that certain city departments have sitting there like the sheriffs department to support this program.

The other is the DPW !

I have lived all over this country and have never seen traffic signs and signals in such horrible shape. This department needs a total make over and I promise to totally overhaul this department.



### EILEEN CARTER

Two of the most critical areas in need of improvement in New Orleans are (1) information and data sharing across city departments and (2) project management and execution of basic city services.

First, the lack of integrated data systems and transparent communication prevents effective governance. Departments operate in silos, resulting in inefficiencies, duplication, and wasted public dollars. To address this, I will launch a 90-Day “State of the City” process to evaluate all departments, budget, and efficiencies. This foundational audit will bring all stakeholders to the table to create a clear, data-driven roadmap forward. Importantly, it will also assess internal workplace conditions, operational processes, and resident satisfaction—ensuring reforms are grounded in both employee insight and community experience. These evaluations will lead to targeted efficiencies and provide residents with immediate improvements where possible.

As part of this strategy, I will also create an Office of Education—not to govern schools, but to coordinate efforts among agencies, nonprofits, and workforce development programs, improving alignment and outcomes citywide.

Second, the city must overhaul project management. Too often, core services like street repairs, permitting, and safety logistics are delayed, mismanaged, or over budget. I will establish a centralized team of professional project managers to oversee all departmental initiatives. This group will enforce timelines, monitor spending, and ensure seamless execution of city projects—maximizing every tax dollar.

I also support consolidating overlapping offices, such

as integrating Resilience and Sustainability under Public Works, allowing us to reinvest in our workforce and prioritize the city’s highest needs.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

Housing affordability is the defining challenge facing this city. If New Orleans is to remain a place defined by incredible culture, we must treat our people and their housing as a top priority. That means working closely with state, local, and federal partners to expand access to affordable, high-quality housing and bring down the cost of homeowners’ insurance.

Concurrently, we have to excel at basic city services: trash pickup, streetlight repair, and fixing potholes. We must build trust and ensure residents are getting what they pay for. That begins with a cultural shift in City Hall. For too long, services like permitting, procurement, and 311 have frustrated residents and slowed down businesses.

Instead of reacting, we need to recenter accountability in the fundamental services the city provides. If this is done right, residents will see regulations produce consistency rather than arbitrary control. This requires a leadership team that values responsiveness, transparency, and operational excellence. We must empower City workers to take pride in their work and solve problems, not only enforce procedures.

It’s not only about efficiency. It’s about fairness, opportunity, and good governance. Whether it’s a small business waiting for a permit or a family seeking safe, affordable housing, our residents deserve better.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

Street repairs handled by DPW are most in need of improvement followed by the need to upgrade SWB repairs and infrastructure.

DPW and SWB can’t seem to coordinate their activities as it may relate to a single street issue.



Issuing a new city bond offering is one financial solution. The other is to mandate coordination between DPW and SWB.



## HELENA MORENO

NOTE: For more, see my campaign platform at <https://helenamorenola.com/vision>.

I will bring city leadership back to basics, where the mayor and her team are present, responsive, and focused on results. I will be a 24/7 mayor who will set the vision AND focus on the details of implementation.

For example, I want NORD to do more, a lot more. To achieve this, I will reallocate its budget towards maintenance, equipment for children, and staff dedicated to delivering youth programming rather than administration.

I will also prioritize core services at Safety and Permits, as well as Code Enforcement. Reverse recent budget cuts, implement 'Fairness For Permitting,' and introduce a 'concierge service' for permitting. New technology-assisted customer service platforms can also help us meet ambitious new service goals, such as providing next-day inspections and responses to applicants within 72 hours.



## FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Public Safety and Public Health.

Bottom line is safety and living in a toxic free environment at all cost.

Every penny currently being spent will be reviewed and reevaluated.

We have good law enforcement officers. They need to be paid like our life depends on it and trained and given any item needed to take back our City from the thugs, homeless and criminals. If we have laws they are to be enforced including streets and excessive use of public space. Same with health from environment to trash to quality of life including air, water and nature at any cost.



## OLIVER THOMAS

We've grown the City's General Fund by hundreds of millions over the past decade, but the results don't match the investment. That's not a resource problem—it's a priority problem. As mayor, I'll fix that.

My top two priorities are public safety and infrastructure, but with a smarter, results-driven approach.

Public safety - Spending rose by over \$80 million between 2010 and 2019—more than any other area—yet we're still dealing with the same violence, slower response times, and low closure rates. That tells me we're spending more, but not getting more.

I'll shift the focus from just policing to prevention, intervention, and accountability—investing in mental health response teams, violence interruption, and data-driven programs that work. And I'll tie future spending to performance: if a program isn't reducing harm or improving safety, we'll audit it, fix it, or fund something that does.

Infrastructure - We're spending \$700 million+ a year, and our streets are still falling apart. Why? Because we're underfunding the basics. BGR showed that while the City needs \$30 to \$35 million a year for street maintenance, we've been spending less than \$5 million. That's costing us more down the road.

Under my administration, we'll redirect underperforming dollars into core infrastructure—roads, drainage, and green stormwater systems. We'll prioritize maintenance over costly emergency repairs and coordinate between departments to stop digging up the same streets twice. And we'll expand public dashboards so residents can track real progress in real time.

I'll also push for:

- A formal reserve policy (see #4)
- A five-year financial plan (see #3)
- And a strict "future burden test" to stop using one-time dollars to fund ongoing expenses.

We don't need more money to do better—we need more focus, more discipline, and a budget that reflects the priorities of the people.





## **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

Our city's current framework, roughly 80 city departments operating in silos, has created the perfect breeding ground for fraud, waste, and abuse. Departments

overlap, contracts are mismanaged, and the people are left with fewer services despite a ballooning \$1.8 billion budget. Our administration will consolidate existing departments into under 50 core departments, eliminating redundancy and enforcing a standardized leadership structure. Each new department will be led by a Commissioner and held to performance-based metrics visible through a public blockchain dashboard.

But structural change demands more than just internal reform. It demands the dissolution of the office

of mayor itself. New Orleans has been failed repeatedly by a centralized executive model that empowers special interests and shields dysfunction. We will transition to a City Council–Commissioner model, where leadership is distributed, transparent, and responsive to district needs not political donors. Service delivery must become community-centered. We will launch localized service teams and embed accountability at the neighborhood level. We will unify police oversight under one Public Safety Division and establish a new Office of Mental Health to meet residents where they are.

This is not a rebranding of bureaucracy it's a radical return of power to the people. By eliminating the mayor's office and transforming how services are structured and delivered, we aim to restore trust, reduce corruption, and build a government that serves the many, not the few.

## **2. Where do you see opportunities to redirect General Fund dollars to higher impact uses? Please be specific about the expenditures you would cut or reduce and what you would fund in their place.**



### **JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.**

The key to general funds is, to have a well-endowed general fund!

This money should not be used except in emergency situations to prop up departments that are already funded in the budget. There should be a formula in place that takes city revenue source totals and allows for a percentage to be placed in the general fund.

all budgeted programs and departments will have a full review.

Programs that are outdated or not working will be eliminated with their funding redirected to under funded programs, updating programs, and new programs that have been needed or deemed necessary will be heavily vetted before a new start-up is created.

Overlapping, redundant and underperforming programs will be reviewed, eliminated and those funds redirected to the general fund for use in needed areas and emergencies.

We are at a crisis point that it has become necessary to concentrate on basic city services and needs and ensure they are properly funded.



### **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

We have the money to impact all services, programs and organizations but we have too many crooks controlling the monies.



### **EILEEN CARTER**

The most impactful opportunity to redirect General Fund dollars lies in shifting spending from low-impact administrative overhead to essential services that strengthen community well-being. New Orleans currently allocates about one-third of its General Fund to criminal justice—while only 3.7% goes to health and just 2.3% to youth and preventive

services.

To rebalance priorities, I would reduce external administrative costs and limit reliance on consultants, redirecting funds to youth development, housing, early intervention, and health programs—while equipping our city workforce with the training and tools needed to deliver quality services. Rather than expanding discretionary overtime at NOPD, we can invest in violence prevention programs, crisis response teams, and job training—proven strategies that improve public safety while reducing long-term costs.

At the same time, departments like Safety & Permits and Code Enforcement must be strengthened, not weakened. Years of underinvestment have led to delays, inefficiencies, and frustration for residents and businesses. I support increasing funding to these departments—but with modernized workflows, digitization, and accountability measures to ensure that any additional dollars translate into faster service and better outcomes.

Additionally, consolidating overlapping offices—such as integrating the Office of Resilience and Sustainability under Public Works where functionally appropriate—can yield savings that should be redirected to affordable housing, homelessness response, or a city Maintenance Fund.

In summary, by cutting waste, empowering frontline departments, and redirecting funds to impactful programs, we can build a more efficient, responsive, and equitable New Orleans. And I’m always open to listen and work together.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

To make every dollar count, we must assess not only what we spend but also how and why. I will begin by completing a top-to-bottom review of departmental spending to identify expenditures

that do not directly support core City services. We can no longer afford business-as-usual in any area where resources are siphoned off for duplicative purposes, redundant management layers, outdated contracts, or activities that don’t deliver direct public value.

I see opportunities to redirect General Fund dollars

away from internal inefficiencies and toward frontline service delivery. I will assess why the Mayor’s Office Budget increased by 61.25% between 2024 and 2025 and whether any of the new “offices” created perform core functions that belong within a well-led department. I will weigh whether a 50.68% (\$5M) increase in Property Management’s budget maintains our facilities better or if it is sending your money out the door.

There are many ways we can do better. Safety & Permits expenditures increased from \$7M in 2018 to over \$11M in 2024. However, building permit revenue declined by \$2M, and the quality of service decreased further.

I will ensure operational integrity so we can make high-impact investments in housing affordability, economic development, infrastructure, youth, violence prevention, and maternal and child health.

We must move from a mindset of inertia to one of intentionality, where public dollars are steered toward impact.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

I will begin by saying that the City’s 2023 financial statements were not issued until July 2024. Furthermore, the 2024 statements have not been issued yet and a representative of the CPA firm responsible for its issuance asked for a 30 day extension a few weeks ago at a meeting in the City Council chambers.

In order to redirect general fund dollars, a candidate needs to have access to current financial data---something sorely lacking.

I am not going to shout “waste, fraud and abuse” but some outside audits of select areas of the city offices may well be warranted.



### HELENA MORENO

The mayor must set priorities and demand results from her team. Several departments are in crisis and require additional funds. Safety & Permits is a good example, its budget has been cut

in recent years and remains a basket case, which is causing serious harm to our economy and public safety. I want to stop cutting and start investing.

Another example is the city's Department of Economic Development. It is tiny, with fewer than two full-time staff members dedicated to this all-important task. We need to build up that department so we can create more jobs, help businesses, and attract new investment.

As for cutting expenditures, I will bring in the auditors and install experts throughout city hall to identify opportunities for savings. We will use a scalpel, not a battle ax, but it may be no less painful. I promise that for every new bright idea, program, or initiative, there must be an objective assessment of both the cost and the benefit. Everything must fit. The budget must be balanced, with recurring expenses paid for by recurring revenues. We cannot just print more money like they do in Washington, D.C.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Public safety is the only thing that matters at all cost.

As to budget we will review all 5000 plus city employees and every non emergency department or program to ensure it's needed, supported or terminated.



### OLIVER THOMAS

We need to review and rebalance public safety spending. BGR reports that public safety spending rose by nearly \$84 million between 2010-2019, the largest increase of any category.

Yet outcomes haven't matched that growth. I support a targeted audit of overtime, take-home vehicle policies, underused units, and non-emergency call responses to identify waste and inefficiencies across public safety agencies. We can redirect savings to civilian responder models, youth violence prevention, and fixing the police hiring pipeline, which will improve outcomes without relying on unchecked budget growth.

Second, we need to look at professional service contracts

and external vendors. Every year, the City spends tens of millions on contracts for technology, legal, and consulting with limited evaluation of performance. I'll require all large contracts to go through an annual value-for-dollar review, and we'll reduce or eliminate those that aren't delivering results. Savings can be redirected to upgrading IT infrastructure, which improves everything from permitting to payroll and makes city services more efficient.

Third, I'll consolidate and modernize administrative functions across departments—such as procurement, HR, fleet management, and communications—to cut duplication and redirect funds to front-line services. These shared services models have saved millions in other cities and would free up dollars for street maintenance, drainage infrastructure, and 311 response systems.

Lastly, I'll limit the use of General Fund dollars to plug shortfalls in agencies with separate funding streams—like the Sewerage & Water Board or the jail—unless there is a long-term, performance-based agreement in place. That would free up recurring funds for blight reduction, affordable housing initiatives, and neighborhood resiliency projects.



### RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

I see two key opportunities: first, expanding the General Fund without overburdening residents, and second, redirecting wasteful expenditures toward high-impact services.

To expand the fund, we must reverse our shrinking tax base. New Orleans lost over 100,000 residents in the last two decades many driven out by unaffordable housing, poor infrastructure, and lack of opportunity. We will eliminate property taxes for homeowners, replacing them with targeted levies on commercial short-term rentals, blighted landholders, out-of-state corporations, etc. This eases the burden on working residents while encouraging permanent population growth, which stabilizes revenue long-term.

On the expenditure side, we will cut deeply into administrative bloat by consolidating departments, eliminating overlapping functions and slashing redundant contracts. We will renegotiate or cancel low-return service



contracts, particularly in departments like sanitation, property management, and certain outsourced public safety initiatives; redirecting millions toward infrastructure repair, storm resilience, affordable housing, and public mental health services. We will also establish performance-based budgeting across all departments and launch a public-facing dashboard showing real-time expenditures, creating fiscal pressure for efficiency.

Instead of pouring money into failed systems, we will

invest in things that actually make a city work: walkable streets, equitable healthcare, crime reduction, and clean neighborhoods. Redirecting General Fund dollars toward housing stabilization, flood infrastructure, and mental health care isn't just a moral choice it's a smarter economic one. By rebuilding trust, attracting residents, and making every dollar work harder, we'll create a safer, more livable city without raising the cost of living.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

Strategic management of limited public resources will be key to improving the performance of City government. The City emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic in a stronger financial position thanks in large part to nearly \$400 million in federal relief funding. But the windfall is over. The City projects little growth in revenue as it faces looming new costs. To help policymakers navigate this new reality, BGR analyzed the City's financial management practices.

In [After the Windfall](#), BGR recommended that the City administration develop a five-year financial plan and review it annually with the City Council. Having this roadmap can put the City on track to address fiscal challenges and opportunities. The plan should move the City toward a structurally balanced budget. A structural balance is when recurring revenues equal or exceed the recurring expenditures necessary to sustain public services and properly maintain facilities and infrastructure. Currently, the City relies on one-time reserves to balance its budget, and it does not adequately fund maintenance. [Street maintenance](#) alone would need an estimated \$36 million increase in annual funding. Achieving structural balance is important for the City government's fiscal health, but also for

New Orleans' sustainability and quality of life.

BGR also recommended the City administration develop, and the council adopt by ordinance, a policy for the use and preservation of its General Fund reserves to ensure an adequate financial cushion. Given New Orleans' vulnerability to disasters, City officials should strongly consider a reserve level higher than the minimum of two months of General Fund expenses (about 17%, or \$158 million this year) recommended by government finance experts.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the City's reserves remained well below 17% and even turned negative in some years, signifying a deficit. The federal pandemic relief funding enabled the City to bolster its reserves, reaching a high of \$344 million, or 54% of General Fund expenses in 2022. But three years of spending from the reserves could again reduce them below the minimum recommended level by the end of this year. Maintaining adequate reserves is important because it helps avoid cuts to essential services and increases in taxes and fees during financial crises. A reduction in reserves also could hurt the City's credit rating, driving up taxpayer-funded borrowing costs for capital projects, such as street repairs.

### On the City budget and financial management, BGR asked the candidates:

**3.** Do you agree that the City should adopt and maintain a five-year financial plan that aims for a structurally balanced budget? Why or why not? Please describe any spending reductions or revenue-raising opportunities that you would consider to achieve a structurally balanced budget.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Yes, I agree. This should be a basic. Why is this not a mandatory practice?

You cannot allocate or spend what you don't have. It is even more difficult when you don't know what you have

or where it is all going! Relying on outside sources that will be more difficult to come by in future is not an answer.

Even more so, without demonstrating we can handle funds properly our opportunities will be greater reduced.

A balance budget needs to be achieved through diligence and detail review. Once it is structured it needs to be revisited regularly so it can be tweaked and amended to correct oversights or areas that were not properly funded.

Possible solutions:

Consolidation of overlapping or redundant programs/

departments.

Eliminate non-performing and outdated programs and agencies.

Rely on a strong working relationship with the City Council to revue allocated funds and areas of poor performance and those programs that are under-funded and are prevented from achieving their goals.

Ensure costs, fees and taxes are evenly distributed among the city so we all bear an equal share of the costs.

Revenues from taxes should be accessed as to determine what entities can be exempted from each levied tax that is collected.



### **“MANNY CHEVROLET” BRUNO**

Why should it take 5 years for a structured balanced budget! I will cut the fat and get rid of the crooks!



### **EILEEN CARTER**

I strongly support New Orleans adopting a five-year financial plan to achieve a structurally balanced budget—one where recurring revenues consistently cover recurring expenses.

This is critical given that the City currently relies heavily on one-time reserves, which stood at \$344 million in 2022 but are projected to drop below the recommended 17% of General Fund expenses by year-end, according to you. Without a sustainable plan, the City risks budget shortfalls or tax increases.

New Orleans faces urgent fiscal challenges, including an estimated \$36 million annual shortfall in street maintenance funding, contributing to deteriorating infrastructure and quality-of-life issues. Additionally, the pandemic revealed gaps in revenue stability, emphasizing the need for a multi-year plan that includes transparent annual reviews with City Council to maintain fiscal discipline.

To reach structural balance, I propose targeted spending

cuts focused on reducing administrative overhead and consultant dependence while prioritizing investment in workforce development to restore institutional knowledge and improve efficiency. Departments such as Safety & Permits and Code Enforcement, which have faced steep cuts and cause delays in permitting and code enforcement, require increased funding paired with modernized workflows and digital tools to enhance service delivery.

On the revenue side, fair fees for specific city services, improved tax collection efforts, and business incentives can broaden the tax base without overburdening residents.

To support redevelopment, I will launch a “Come Home” campaign, collaborating with stakeholders to reduce blight by expanding affordable housing through the Housing Trust Fund, prioritizing essential workers and those relocated. This comprehensive approach will build a resilient, transparent government that serves all New Orleanians. I remain open to listening and working collaboratively with our community.



### **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

Yes, I agree that the City of New Orleans has to operate with a longer-term time horizon and achieve a structurally balanced budget. Structural balance is not just an accounting principle; it's a best practice for stable, sustainable governance. Without it, every unplanned emergency or economic dip becomes a fiscal crisis.

I support the development of a multi-year financial roadmap, updated annually and paired with a formal reserve policy adopted by ordinance. This policy must set clear thresholds for the responsible use and replenishment of reserves, especially given our city's exposure to climate risks and economic shocks.

To achieve structural balance, we must shift from a reactive posture to a proactive one. For a city, budgeting only from year to year is like living paycheck to paycheck. When disaster strikes, we must have reserves to support our people. I will pursue spending reductions through operational efficiencies, audit legacy contracts, and identify administrative redundancies.



On the revenue side, I support efforts to modernize collection systems and ensure enforcement across all revenue streams, including short-term rentals and sales tax leakage. I will also explore targeted economic development strategies that increase the tax base without raising the tax burden on residents.

Sound financial planning is not about belt-tightening for its own sake. It's about safeguarding essential services and creating a resilient, high-functioning city. We must move beyond short-term fixes and commit to long-term fiscal responsibility.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

Yes--the City needs to adopt a 5 year plan. Successful businesses do this as a regular protocol.

One type of cost-cutting/spending reduction would be the refinancing of certain City debt obligations.



### HELENA MORENO

I will create a broad, 5-year financial plan that identifies major threats and opportunities over my first term. Overall, the city's budget needs to focus more on the future, not just the present

day or what the next 12 months might bring.

That said, we are still a long way from achieving a structurally balanced budget. We do not even do a good job of monitoring what is going out the door. I want to avoid situations like the recent one, where the CAO and CFO were at odds over whether a budget crisis even existed. I will address any mismanagement of the annual operating budgets, with an additional focus on capital projects, where hundreds of building projects across the city have been launched without the necessary funding to complete them.

Before we can go to the people to raise revenue, they need to have confidence that the money will be well spent. Otherwise, any effort will simply not pass. I want to start building confidence on day one, not just with words, but with action.

However, let me be clear: our infrastructure is deteriorating, and it will require additional funding to prevent further catastrophic failure. If and when we do go to the people for more funding for drainage, we will not play games. We will request exactly what is needed for a reasonable amount of time and ensure the language is ironclad, so the funding cannot be diverted.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

100 million time over YES.

Presuming all the trial lawyers advertising claims of large payouts from accidents occurring on public streets then the city should be entitled to a

healthy percentage to not only correct the streets but to improve them to take us from non maintained streets to the most modern and urban streets paid for by insurance company dollars.

If everyone wants a cut, the City should get there First.



### OLIVER THOMAS

Yes, I support a five-year financial plan—and as mayor, I'll make sure we have one in place within my first year. The days of budgeting year-to-year, hoping for windfalls, are over. We need

a roadmap to balance our budget, fund what matters, and protect the basics— clean streets, safe neighborhoods, and reliable services.

Right now, we're covering recurring costs with one-time dollars. That's like paying your rent with your savings—it doesn't last. We'll fix that by creating a real multi-year plan, reviewed annually with the City Council, so we can get ahead of shortfalls instead of reacting to them.

If our school board has a fund balance policy, City Hall can too. I'll work with the Council to pass an ordinance that sets a 15-20% reserve target—because in a city facing hurricanes and economic shocks, a bare-minimum cushion isn't enough.

We'll stop the waste. I'll launch a citywide audit, consolidate duplicative services, and cut underperforming

contracts. And on the revenue side, we'll modernize outdated fees, enforce short-term rental rules, and explore new tools to fund infrastructure—without burdening working families.

I'll also create a Mayor's Office of Ethics and Government Integrity to track spending and root out misuse. We'll publish a reserve report and launch a public dashboard so residents can follow every dollar.

We need fiscal discipline, not fiscal guesswork. I'll lead with transparency, accountability, and a long-term plan to make sure this city works—and lasts—for everyone.



#### **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

Yes, I support adopting a five-year financial plan aimed at structural balance, but we must start by understanding what our General Fund is made of and why it's vulnerable. Over half

of New Orleans's General Fund revenue depends on volatile sources like sales taxes and tourism-related activity. Roughly 40% of all tax revenue is linked to hospitality, which means pandemics, hurricanes, or global downturns can cripple our budget overnight. That's not sustainable. A structurally

balanced budget starts by stabilizing the foundation.

First, we'll reduce spending by consolidating departments, cutting redundant contracts, and enforcing performance-based budgeting. This frees up millions annually without cutting essential services. But beyond cuts, we must build resilience. That starts with diversifying revenue. We'll shift the burden away from working residents by eliminating property taxes for homeowners and instead raising revenue through commercial STR taxes, fees on vacant and speculative land, and fines on long-term blight.

Second, we'll create our own economic backbone. Our proposed Bitcoin Strategic Reserve Credit Union will generate long-term yield, fund education, and anchor community reinvestment. A city-owned, member-only institution, it shields us from state and federal dysfunction while building wealth for residents. We'll pair this with solar-powered microgrids, reducing utility costs and dependency on corporate monopolies. Financial health isn't just about reserve levels or credit ratings. It's about freedom. By reducing internal waste, diversifying our economy, and investing in financial sovereignty, we can make our General Fund stronger, smarter, and shockproof for the long road ahead.

## **4. What percentage of the General Fund budget should the City keep as a financial reserve, and why?**



#### **JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.**

Although I do not have enough insight as to this particular area, I believe the following, the general fund has always been a sticking point on how and where to use the funds. I believe it is currently and has historically been an

administrative problem and the responsibility of the elected mayor and their administration to ensure this is done.

So, I would have in place or adopt the following:

More definitive outline for conditions of use for the general fund.

Create a formula, amend the existing formula or enforce the guidelines in place for its use and funding from revenue

sources.

Prevent increasing of any tax source until we are showing fiscal responsibility for the general fund or any use of collected tax source.

Enforce the payment of taxes across all sources and assign penalties for those who abuse or do not pay them.

Create a better streamlined way of paying taxes and collecting them. Where appropriate, offer an incentive or better incentive to pay on time. Within this system create a means to identify non-payment of taxes to act before the situation becomes dire.

If we manage what we have, know what is due and collect in a timely fashion we can better fund and allocate to our general fund.



## **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

Well I knew how much the general fund was I could give you answer.



## **EILEEN CARTER**

I agree New Orleans should work toward maintaining a financial reserve of at least 25% of its General Fund budget, exceeding the 17% minimum recommended by government finance

experts. A stronger reserve is essential for a city with New Orleans' exposure to hurricanes, flooding, and other disasters. It ensures we can protect vital services and avoid reactive cuts during emergencies or economic downturns.

Historically, the City's reserves have fallen short. Before the pandemic, they were frequently below recommended levels and even negative in some years, signaling deep structural imbalances. We all know the infusion of nearly \$400 million in federal relief temporarily lifted reserves to 54% in 2022—but that windfall is now nearly depleted. Continued reliance on one-time funding, without structural reform, puts us at risk of future budget crises, service cuts, or tax increases – and nobody wants that.

A 25% reserve—roughly \$230 million based on current General Fund spending—would serve as a safeguard for critical areas like public safety, infrastructure maintenance, and health services. It would also protect our credit rating, reducing borrowing costs for essential capital projects like street repairs, drainage upgrades, and affordable housing—pressing needs regularly identified in local reporting.

Embedding this reserve target into a five-year financial plan, with clear guidelines for its use and replenishment, will strengthen our fiscal foundation. It sends a message of responsibility and readiness—ensuring New Orleans can weather future storms while maintaining essential services for its residents.



## **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

I believe the City should maintain a financial reserve of no less than 17% of General Fund expenditures (the GFOA recommended minimum), and I will challenge us to make it 20%. Our

administration will seek out best practices with a focus on exceeding, not just meeting, those standards.

New Orleans faces disproportionate risks from hurricanes, flooding, and other disasters. That reality should inform our fiscal planning. Maintaining a robust reserve helps the City preserve essential services in times of crisis without resorting to tax increases or deep service cuts. It also supports the City's credit rating, which directly affects the cost of borrowing. Managing our costs of capital means more money for transformational projects, infrastructure upgrades, and basic services. A financial reserve is a measure of discipline and forward-thinking governance. As Mayor, I will examine codifying a clear reserve policy by ordinance, with defined thresholds for both usage and replenishment. I'll also ensure that the use of one-time revenues is tied to one-time expenditures and not baked into recurring budgets.

In tandem, I will work to institutionalize five-year financial planning, updated annually and presented transparently to the public and the Council. I want my daughter to have a chance to live in a prosperous New Orleans. Building long-term fiscal resilience is an act of stewardship for future generations.



## **FRANK ROBERT JANUSA**

Something on the order of 20% would be reasonable. This level could cover some measure of cash flow shortfalls.



## **HELENA MORENO**

If New Orleans does not have a robust financial reserve, we risk everything. We cannot be counting pennies when the next hurricane or COVID hits. We need to have the cash on hand to get



everything done both before and after the storm, because FEMA is being cut to the bone. There may come a day when we shoulder 100% of the recovery costs, with just debris removal costing tens of millions of dollars.

Furthermore, our economy is heavily reliant on tourism, which can be disrupted at any time, as we saw after 9/11 and with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the future, there may not be any bailouts coming from Washington.

Yet, as everyone knows, it is hard to save money, especially when there is not enough coming in, the car keeps breaking down, and the kids need new clothes. New Orleans has a lot of expenses, yet we are a poor, shrinking city, and often literally spend our limited tax revenue as fast as we get it. Nonetheless, we have no choice. We need to strive for a reserve of around 17%, as recommended by BGR experts, but achieving this may be challenging as we try to put the city on a better path because change costs money.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Ten percent. It's biblical. If it's good enough for God, it's good enough for the City of New Orleans.



### OLIVER THOMAS

The City should maintain at least 15-20% of the General Fund budget in reserves, and I believe that should be codified by ordinance.

Here's why: National experts recommend a minimum of 17%, enough to cover two months of basic operations. But New Orleans isn't a typical city. We're vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding, and economic shocks that can hit with little warning. A stronger reserve gives us the flexibility to respond to disasters without slashing essential services or raising taxes in a crisis.

During the pandemic, federal relief helped us build our reserves up to 54%. But we've since drawn that down, and without a policy in place, we risk slipping back into instability. Setting a 15-20% floor—roughly \$180 million—would protect our credit rating, lower borrowing

costs, and give us a buffer to plan, not panic.

As mayor, I'll work with City Council to pass a formal reserve policy that includes how funds can be used, how they must be replenished, and how we'll publicly report on reserve levels every quarter. It's time for New Orleans to budget like the resilient city we aim to be.



### RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

Given New Orleans' unique vulnerabilities. Our heavy dependence on tourism, our exposure to hurricanes and flooding, and our history of economic shocks. We must maintain

a higher-than-average reserve. While national best practices recommend a minimum of 17% of General Fund expenses (two months of operations), I believe New Orleans should aim for 25–30%, with an emergency threshold of 35% during high-risk seasons or periods of economic instability. Unlike cities with diversified economies, we face compounding risks: a single storm can decimate revenue, delay services, and displace residents. And unlike cities with steady property tax bases, we rely heavily on sales and hotel taxes, which vanish during downturns. Maintaining a higher reserve is not fiscal conservatism, it's survival.

But it's not just about how much we save it's how we protect it. Our administration will advocate for a codified reserve policy that limits withdrawals to declared emergencies, infrastructure needs, or targeted population retention strategies. We also propose building a Bitcoin Strategic Reserve Credit Union, a city-backed institution that stores a portion of reserves in appreciating digital assets, offers yield-generating accounts, and provides community reinvestment tools.

In addition, we'll reduce volatility by cutting internal waste, expanding long-term residential tax contributions, and building solar microgrids to lower energy costs and reduce external shocks. In New Orleans, "rainy day" isn't a metaphor it's our lived reality. A 30% reserve target, protected by smart policy and innovation, is not excessive. It's the floor we stand on when the water, inevitably, rises.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

When New Orleans voters last elected their mayor and council four years ago, the city was reeling from a violent crime surge during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of sworn officers in the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) had fallen by nearly 20%. BGR hosted a Breakfast Briefing [speaker series on public safety](#) in spring 2022 that analyzed New Orleans' longstanding crime problem and presented both law enforcement and community-based approaches to addressing it.

The City implemented recruitment and retention bonuses for NOPD officers – covering the initial costs with a [substantial portion of its federal pandemic relief funds](#). It expanded its collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, including the Louisiana State Police, as the NOPD superintendent explained at a [December 2023 BGR Breakfast Briefing](#). The City also invested in several public safety initiatives besides

law enforcement, from mental health crisis response to violence prevention. Nonprofit organizations, businesses and others came together to form the NOLA Coalition in summer 2022 to invest in both NOPD and youth support services.

Crime has fallen significantly from its 2022 peak, and a recent public opinion [survey](#) found increasing satisfaction with NOPD and neighborhood safety. But public safety remains [a top concern for many residents](#). NOPD's officer strength has stopped its downward trend but [hasn't markedly improved](#). The department is the City's largest annual General Fund expenditure, accounting for about a fifth of the budget. BGR's recent report on the City's financial management highlighted [inaccurate budget projections for NOPD](#) in 2024. Overtime costs have been a key driver in tens of millions of dollars of unplanned expenditures.

### On public safety, BGR asked the candidates:

**5.** Would you seek an increase in funding for NOPD? Why or why not? If yes, please specify the increase level and what the additional funds would support. If no, please specify any changes to the department's current budget that you would seek.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Yes, to increased funding.

Access to the NOPD budget and requests would be necessary to review what shortfalls the NOPD has requested as to what they receive.

As a board member and officer of the COPS2, (now on a leave of absence), we have received requests for basics such as computers, printers, bicycles, and other basic needs for the department to do their jobs.

We have experienced AC failures, elevator failures in a brand-new facility that in less than one year were out of warranty. It then took over a year to get the repairs funded

and done for the facility. Many vehicles are in need of repair while new ones sat unassigned. We have funded special training courses for officers in tactical procedures and technical data recovery to name a few.

All signs that we are underfunding our NOPD. Our first responders deserve better.

Once again, a theme to my process, would be a very detailed and due diligence spent on the current budget, contracts to see where funds are spent, funds allocated and that we are efficiently using what is budgeted before we propose additional allocations or tax increases.



### **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

This is a tough one because if I say yes or no am screwed either way.



### **EILEEN CARTER**

I would not seek an increase in NOPD funding at this time. Before allocating additional dollars, we need a comprehensive 90-Day "State of the City" review to audit internal

practices, workplace conditions, data systems, and resident satisfaction across all departments—including NOPD. This diagnostic phase will allow us to streamline operations, reduce waste, and assess whether existing resources are being used efficiently, rather than continuing to throw more money at crime without accountability.

Currently, NOPD accounts for approximately 18% of the General Fund (~\$151 million), while public health and youth services receive only 3.7% and 2.3%, respectively. Despite the high investment, recruitment and retention remain major issues—leaving the department at risk of being considered "partially dissolved" under state pension law, which could cost the City over \$38 million in penalties over 15 years. Meanwhile, civilian hiring has moved slowly despite significant applicant interest.

Instead of increasing funding, we must optimize what we have. The 90-Day review will help identify inefficiencies and reallocate dollars toward performance-based reforms.

We must also strengthen EMS, Fire, NOLA Ready, and other emergency response operations that are chronically underfunded.

Growing up in New Orleans, many of us knew officers personally. Community policing was real—it was respected. We need to bring that spirit back through intentional, local recruitment and internal leadership development helping recruitment.

Let's be efficient first, and then evaluate if NOPD funding increases are truly necessary then move accordingly.



### **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

Public safety is a top priority for me. While I do not believe in blank checks, I do believe in smart investments that deliver results. My focus will be on strategic funding tied to performance

and accountability within the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD).

Rather than promising blanket NOPD budget increases, I commit to continuing the advances we have made in the constitutionality of our operations. We are in a sustainment period with the consent decree, and I will not allow NOPD to falter on its progress. I value those who protect and serve, and will look at ways to build administrative and non-sworn capacity to free up sworn officers for core policing functions.

I support continuing retention and recruitment incentives and modernization. Still, real-time data and updated projections must guide those investments to avoid the budgeting inconsistencies BGR flagged in its recent reports. I will implement multi-year forecasting for personnel and overtime spending to rein in runaway costs and ensure dollars are used efficiently.

Public safety is broader than policing. I will maintain support for complementary efforts such as mental health response teams and youth prevention services, which reduce long-term demand on police and foster community trust.

Effective public safety depends not just on how much we spend, but how wisely we do it.



### **FRANK ROBERT JANUSA**

NOPD needs increased funds. It needs the funds to recruit new officers. Furthermore, NOPD should consider offering "Return Bonuses" to retired officers as this would enhance service and coverage with experienced people.





## HELENA MORENO

The NOPD's budget has increased rapidly in recent years due to salary increases and rising costs. Furthermore, I am concerned that the NOPD's budget is not being managed or monitored. In

fact, city leadership was unaware until well into 2025 that NOPD spending in 2024 had resulted in a \$42 million deficit. That puts the NOPD on track to be tens of millions of dollars over budget in 2025.

First, regardless of its source, we need to plug that spending hole and fill the NOPD's deficit. Then, I would want to make targeted investments in recruitment and introduce easy-to-use virtual tools, deploying proven technology to revolutionize online non-emergency crime reporting, including Zoom-like video conference reporting options, as used in other jurisdictions nationwide. This will free up our limited uniformed officers.

I will also pursue the expansion of rapid emergency response teams composed of civilians, rather than relying solely on police. Already, we have civilians taking non-urgent crime reports. The goal is to provide a menu of options for all 9-1-1 calls, including the option of a uniformed police officer and/or trained civilians who can be dispatched to defuse a situation or offer limited services that can prevent violence or an expensive trip to the hospital in an ambulance or police car.



## FRANK M. SCURLOCK

NOPD should get whatever they need till crime is abated.

As to retention they need to have the best Benefit package to not only retain but to recruit as many as need to secure every single block.

But enforcement is only as good as the Sheriff and Criminal Justice system. With the recent release of prisoners we need a complete overhaul including triple check for any release.

If we are at War, we would not stop till we win. We are at War. We will WIN.



## OLIVER THOMAS

I would not seek a blanket increase in NOPD's budget without first fixing the structural and operational issues that are driving inefficiencies—especially around overtime and recruitment.

Public safety is a top priority, and we can't afford to waste dollars meant to protect our neighborhoods. Today, NOPD already receives nearly 20% of the General Fund, making it the City's single largest line item. But despite that investment, we've seen years of missed hiring targets, ballooning overtime, and questionable budget forecasting—issues BGR flagged clearly in its recent report.

Before increasing funding, my administration will:

Freeze NOPD's total General Fund allocation at current levels while conducting a full audit of spending, staffing deployment, and overtime usage.

Implement controls on overtime, including digital time-tracking and monthly reporting to City Council, to prevent overruns that have cost the City tens of millions.

-Shift civilian-appropriate duties—like traffic enforcement, mental health crisis response, and paperwork—from sworn officers to trained professionals, freeing up officers to focus on violent crime and investigations.

Establish performance metrics tied to any future funding increases—like call response times, case closure rates, and public satisfaction scores—so that funding aligns with impact.

If, after these reforms, it becomes clear that more targeted investment is needed, I will consider funding increases only for specific purposes, such as: streamlined, tech-enabled recruitment campaign; retention supports tied to accountability; or modernizing investigative tools.

In short: We need a smarter NOPD budget, not just a bigger one. I will prioritize safety and fiscal responsibility by demanding results before requesting more. We owe that discipline to our residents, our officers, and our future.



## RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

Rather than increasing NOPD's budget, I propose a restructuring of our public safety model that will fundamentally expand NOPD's capacity without draining more from the General

Fund. This begins with abolishing the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office and merging its functions into a newly formed Public Safety Department under direct city control.

The current sheriff's office operates with its own siloed budget, duplicating administrative costs and operating with minimal transparency or oversight. By eliminating that office, we redirect millions in operational funding and assets: jail staff, transportation units, and tech systems into a centralized model where NOPD leads enforcement and oversight. This consolidation allows us to bolster NOPD's infrastructure, civilian support staff, and long-term recruitment without raising taxes or cutting from other

departments.

I also propose eliminating overtime abuse by deploying predictive scheduling software and hiring more civilian specialists for desk and tech duties—freeing officers to remain in the field. We will prioritize investment in mental health crisis teams, local precincts, and neighborhood-based recruitment. We'll also create a city-run Public Safety Data Lab to replace unreliable forecasting and help prevent overspending.

This isn't just about money. It's about efficiency and safety. We don't need to "increase spending" to make our city safer. We need to spend smarter and eliminate bloated, outdated institutions that no longer serve the public interest. By investing in NOPD strategically and ending duplicative law enforcement bureaucracies, we can deliver real safety, and real accountability, to the people of New Orleans.

## 6. Beyond NOPD, what do you think are the top two areas where City resources can most effectively drive improvements in public safety? Why does the City's involvement in these areas have strong potential for improving outcomes?



### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

1. Addition of installing city wide crime cameras
2. Requesting and assisting citizens with enabling their camera systems with street views to log into the city crime camera system. (A proven and cost-efficient program)
3. Along with citizen and crime cameras, promoting and educating citizens with participating in NOPD crime investigations.
4. Harder sentencing for first time offenders, less opportunity for second time offenders with harder penalties and sentencing. Ensuring convicted persons of all crimes serve time and pay reparations.
5. A program in place that permits persons who harass, threaten or create problems for businesses are legally

estopped from being on or near set premises.

These areas will also help the D A office to aid with investigations and follow through with prosecuting by providing strong evidence for convictions.

Repercussions and consequences for all crimes will help reduce offenders, remove repeat offenders off the streets create a means for harsher penalties for continual repeat offenders through reduction or elimination of expungements.



### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

Street lights and hold parents accountable for juvenile crimes.



## EILEEN CARTER

Beyond NOPD, two of the most impactful areas where City resources can drive improvements in public safety are: (1) the City's Information Technology (IT) systems and (2) neighborhood-level engagement through 311 and community reporting tools.

First, the City's IT department is an underutilized asset in the public safety space. New Orleans has powerful digital tools already in place—such as those found at [nola.gov/apps](http://nola.gov/apps), which I helped create during my time working for the City. These platforms include crime mapping, emergency alerts, permitting data, and other resources that can improve both transparency and response times. Unfortunately, there has been minimal public outreach to promote these tools, leaving many residents unaware of their existence or potential. With proper investment in digital infrastructure and community training, these tools could serve as a first line of defense in public safety—empowering residents and enabling departments to operate more efficiently.

Second, we need to promote and expand the use of 311 as a proactive tool for safety and service. When residents walk their neighborhoods and use 311 to report blight, broken infrastructure, streetlight outages, or suspicious activity, they become active participants in improving safety. A well-resourced 311 system gives the City real-time data to identify “hot spots,” prioritize repairs, and prevent issues from escalating into emergencies.

By investing in technology and community engagement—not just enforcement—we can create a more connected, responsive, and preventative model of public safety that empowers residents and makes every neighborhood feel safer.



## ROYCE DUPLESSIS

Beyond the NOPD, I believe the City can make the most significant gains in public safety by investing in (1) mental and behavioral health response infrastructure, and (2) youth development and violence interruption

programs. We have seen how efforts like the Cure Violence program can make a real impact.

The City has taken important steps in recent years to pilot alternate response systems, but those efforts remain limited in scope. Expanding civilian-led crisis response teams, especially for non-violent mental health calls, frees up officers to focus on crime while reducing the risk of escalation. With stronger City coordination and stable funding streams, this model can become a cornerstone of our safety strategy.

At the same time, we must stop the cycle of violence before it begins. As a state lawmaker, I have championed mental health issues in schools because I understand what happens if we don't address our trauma. Targeted City investment in youth workforce training, community mentorship, recreational programs, and violence prevention can help address root causes and interrupt high-risk behavior before it escalates.

The City's involvement is essential because only the public sector can integrate these efforts across agencies, neighborhoods, and funding sources. I will work to build the capacity and partnerships needed for prevention and intervention.



## FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The public school system must be geared toward the presentation of the police force as members of the community—not as adversaries. NOPD needs to go out to the community and explain exactly what they do and why, especially to indicate that being a police officer is not just a job but a vocation—a call to service.



## HELENA MORENO

As mayor, I will fully implement a public safety plan that is not just about reducing crime; it is also about building a safer, healthier, more just, and more equitable New Orleans for everyone. By investing in our youth, enhancing police practices, and fostering community

collaboration, we can create meaningful change and ensure the well-being of our citizens.

Beyond NOPD, I will focus on crime prevention by transforming the New Orleans Recreation Development (NORD) into a vibrant hub that significantly increases opportunities and programming for our youth, not just in recreation but also in after-school enrichment. Studies indicate that youth engagement in these programs can reduce delinquency by up to 25%, especially when strong, well-organized mentors are involved.

I would also employ a comprehensive strategy to address problem areas in communities, based on the city's first chronic nuisance or padlock law that I wrote. This new tool helped enable the criminal justice system to address properties with many known violent or drug-related incidents. It has already closed several known havens for violence, sex trafficking, and drug dealing, including the demolition of the notorious London Lodge in Hollygrove.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Public Works that maintains the Streets as well as the Sewage and Water Board must be completely rebuilt from head to toe. We must face reality it's 300 years old and all broke!



### OLIVER THOMAS

Public safety isn't just about policing—it's about prevention, intervention, and connection. A smarter, community-centered approach to crime prevention means investing in our people, our youth, and mental health services while also rebuilding the social fabric that once made our neighborhoods strong.

We want to prevent violence before it happens. I am committed to expanding mental health and substance abuse services to address crises before they lead to harm. This includes launching a Crisis Response Unit staffed with mental health professionals to respond to non-violent crises like substance abuse and mental health emergencies, reducing unnecessary arrests and harm.

I will also launch a Youth Opportunity Task Force to streamline the connection of youth to year-round jobs and leadership development programs working closely with the school system and other city agencies and partners. These efforts include: expanding job training, summer jobs program, year-round Youth Job Corps opportunities, and paid internships. We will work with schools and community centers to keep them open late with out-of-school offerings for young people and teaching conflict resolution skills.

We must restore trust between law enforcement and the community, provide real opportunities for young people, and expand mental health services to address crises before they lead to harm. Thoughtful, low-cost solutions such as quality of life walks with NOPD in neighborhoods can make a difference. When neighbors know each other, they look out for one another, and we create a city where people are less likely to engage in violence, except in moments of extreme crisis.



### RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

Beyond NOPD, the two most critical areas where City resources can drive public safety improvements are: mental health and addiction care, and reform of the District Attorney's office.

First, New Orleans is facing a full-scale addiction and mental health crisis. We've criminalized illness, flooded our jails with people who need care, and failed to provide meaningful treatment or crisis response. The City must create a fully staffed Office of Mental Health that operates 24/7 mobile response units, outpatient clinics, and long-term rehabilitation programs. This shift reduces recidivism, eases the burden on law enforcement, and breaks cycles of trauma. Real safety begins with treating root causes; not just symptoms.

Second, we must address the failure of the District Attorney's office. Our current DA has refused to prosecute hundreds of violent offenses, including domestic abuse, gun violence, and sex crimes, leaving survivors without justice and offenders free to reoffend. This is a systemic failure. We will call on the State Legislature to remove the DA's office as an elected position and instead allow



the City Council to appoint a qualified, independent prosecutor, just as we do for other public offices. This reform is about professionalism over politics. We must ensure prosecution is focused on justice, not headlines.

The City has a moral and financial responsibility to invest

in systems that work. If we redirect resources into mental health and restore accountability to our prosecutorial system, we can transform public safety. Not through force, but through care, competence, and common sense.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

The Orleans Parish jail has been under federal oversight or investigation for more than 50 years, longer than any other local jail in the country. It has suffered from chronic problems, including violence, understaffing, and insufficient medical and mental health care. The May 16, 2025, escape of 10 men from custody heightened the public's concern about the jail's problems.

BGR's 2022 report, [Keys to the Jail](#), linked the jail's performance problems to the strained governance relationship between the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office and the City. Under Louisiana law, the Sheriff's Office operates the jail, while the City must pay most of its costs – 79% of its \$91.1 million total budget in 2025. This [structure](#) has blurred accountability for the jail's performance and impeded progress toward improving its performance and exiting federal oversight. BGR recommended the City and Sheriff's Office develop a multi-year agreement to:

- Establish an ongoing strategic planning process in which they collaborate on the budget, facilities, employee compensation and training, and other jail needs.
- Improve fiscal transparency and accountability, both

to ensure adequate City funding for the jail and careful tracking of how the Sheriff's Office uses the money.

- Strengthen the appointment process for the top jail administrator by defining the job's responsibilities and qualifications and by enabling City and public input on the candidates.
- Create an independent local entity to oversee jail performance to ensure ongoing monitoring of jail conditions and treatment of people in custody after federal court oversight ends.

In April 2025, voters renewed the Sheriff's property tax for the jail. BGR [supported](#) the renewal based on its analysis showing the tax provides essential funding for the jail that would otherwise have to come from the City. However, BGR recommended that the Sheriff's Office regularly report on tax expenditures and the office's progress toward improving jail compliance, performance and outcomes. Following the May 2025 escape and the risk of more finger-pointing between the City and Sheriff, BGR [re-emphasized the importance of the City and Sheriff's Office coming to a long-term agreement](#).

### On the Orleans Parish Jail, BGR asked the candidates:

**7.** Should there be a cooperative agreement between the City and the Sheriff's Office along the lines of what BGR recommends? If yes, please explain which components in the bullet point list above should be included in the agreement, plus any other priorities you would include. If not, please explain how you would work with the Sheriff to improve the jail's performance.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

The BGR recommendations are a strong start.

I do caution however the creation of an additional entity created for overseeing and monitoring the OPP operations. This creation adds to costs, expenses and lack of enforcement is usually a result.

These oversight committees usually take on political agendas and result in exposure but not any action.

There are structured and standard operating agreements between the city and OPP. The city has an obligatory responsibility to fund the jail for costs associated with housing inmates and criminals awaiting sentencing. Once sentenced the inmate becomes a responsibility of the state. A possible means to reduce the cost to the city for the

obligation of housing, care and correction officers would be to streamline and speed up sentencing of all inmates.

As with all areas of a city budget and where the city has obligations financial and management responsibilities there should be regular reviews and updates by each department and entity. The city should have tracking in place to ensure the updates are done and reviewed.

There should be a stronger rapport and effort between the city, NOPD and the OPP. This appears to be an ongoing problem dating back through numerous administrations. There should be existing means and ways of monitoring already within the city departments to do this without adding additional expense and costs.



### **“MANNY CHEVROLET” BRUNO**

No there should not be.

The Sheriff’s department has been a joke for longer than I can remember. There’s a reason that it’s been under a federal oversight it’s because it’s corrupt!



### **EILEEN CARTER**

Yes, I support a cooperative agreement between the City and the Sheriff’s Office, aligned with BGR’s recommendations. However, before creating new layers of oversight,

we must first ensure that the existing structures function as intended. According to the New Orleans City Charter (§ 4-1301), the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice Coordination (OCJC) is responsible for promoting interagency collaboration on all criminal justice matters, including jail operations. Under my administration, OCJC will function in full accordance with the Charter—with the authority, transparency, and coordination necessary to resolve many of the issues identified in BGR’s proposal.

If OCJC performs as designed, I do not believe a formal cooperative agreement will be necessary. But should the office lack the authority or support required to meet these goals, I am open to further discussions about formalizing roles through a multi-year agreement with the Sheriff’s Office. That agreement should include joint

strategic planning, transparent budgeting, oversight of staffing and training, and fiscal accountability.

With the Sheriff’s race underway, I believe early, intentional dialogue is key with whomever takes office. Collaboration on the front end prevents confusion on the back end. What matters most is improving the jail’s conditions, ensuring the safety and dignity of both those in custody and the professionals who serve them, and responsibly managing taxpayer dollars.



### **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

An agreement between the City and the Sheriff could be a solution, but I do not believe the Mayor’s default position should be encroaching on the duties of independently

elected officials. I will not pre-emptively tie the hands of a Sheriff. The people are voting on their next Sheriff this fall, and I will respect our voters’ decision.

The recent jailbreak highlighted fundamental problems, and, as Mayor, I will work with the Sheriff to shine a light on the safety of their physical assets and untangle the office’s financial strings. I am ready to work with the Sheriff on anything that will move us toward constitutional conditions at the jail and a clear exit from federal oversight.

Fiscal transparency is critical. As a legislator, I have consistently called for strong oversight of taxpayer dollars. The Sheriff’s Office should submit regular, publicly available reports detailing spending and progress on Consent Decree compliance.

The City funds many criminal justice agencies without a cooperative endeavor agreement. We should focus on collaboration, planning, and coordination across these entities to ensure funds are used effectively and efficiently.

Finally, I will continue to support better mental healthcare throughout New Orleans and in its jail. Too often, people experiencing personal crises end up in jail when what they really need is access to supportive services.

City government must do its part to ensure dignity, safety, and accountability across the board when it comes to law enforcement.



## FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The short answer is yes.

First, the Sheriff's office needs to install its budgetary and financial records into the BRASS system which most other city agencies use.

Second, consideration to the merger of NOPD and the Sheriff's Office must be discussed. This seems to work well in Jefferson Parish and should work well here.

Third, an independent oversight entity is a necessity.



## HELENA MORENO

The city pays for the prison, yet has no oversight over how that funding is spent. This disconnect has caused numerous problems over the years. BGR has been a leading

voice for reform at the jail, and their most recent specific recommendations are common-sense. Indeed, most people would be surprised that this level of cooperation is not ALREADY ongoing, or maybe NOTHING can surprise the people of New Orleans when we are talking about the jail.

As mayor, I will seek to establish ongoing strategic planning with the sheriff. I will demand fiscal transparency and insist that the new sheriff uses the city's accounting system called BRASS so we can see how the money allocated by the city is being spent. That said, I hope that the relationship between the next mayor and sheriff is a good one. We are on the same side. We want the same things for our community. We need each other, but the status quo appears broken, so things need to change.

By the time the next mayor takes office, the consent decree for the prison will have been in place for nearly 15 years. I aim to collaborate with the next sheriff to demonstrate to the court and the people of New Orleans that we can operate a secure, constitutional jail and establish local oversight, with ongoing monitoring of conditions following the conclusion of federal oversight.



## FRANK M. SCURLOCK

100% but that's just the beginning.

Sadly when both the Super Bowl and Mardi Gras were held this year the Federal Government responded. Why did they leave? Who let them? Let's get them back on the federal dollars within the Department of Defense.

Nothing matters with the flight of people moving out of Orleans Parish and it needs to Stop once and for all... Too many left, too many have been violated and too many are scared to live, work or play.

On earth the criminal justice system is all we have. In heaven God will be the Final word and is our only Hope and Prayer.



## OLIVER THOMAS

My administration will demand a clear, prioritized assessment of the jail's infrastructure needs, paired with regular public reporting, to promote accountability and rebuild trust. We

will no longer operate in silos. Instead, we will foster collaboration between City Hall, the Sheriff's Office, and the broader criminal justice system to create a coordinated strategy for facility upkeep and long-term sustainability.

There are immediate and necessary upgrades required to ensure the Orleans Justice Center is a secure, humane, and functional facility. As Mayor, I will work in partnership with the Sheriff's Office to ensure that critical repairs and maintenance are addressed in a timely and transparent manner.

Ultimately, our goal is to exit the federal consent decree, which continues to drain resources and limit operational flexibility. A well-maintained facility is essential not only for compliance but for protecting the safety and dignity of everyone inside, both staff and incarcerated individuals. We will lead with transparency, shared responsibility, and a focus on safety, justice, and fiscal responsibility.





## RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

While BGR's recommendation for a cooperative agreement reflects a reasonable interim measure, we believe the true path to accountability is to abolish the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office entirely and transition jail operations under a Public Safety Department within city government. For over 50 years, the Orleans Parish jail has been plagued by violence, neglect, and human rights violations all under the supposed watch of an "independent" Sheriff. The May 2025 escape wasn't an anomaly! It was the result of a governance structure that blurs accountability, enables incompetence, and leaves the City footing the bill without oversight. We currently fund nearly 80% of the jail's \$91.1 million budget but have virtually no say in how it's run.

My campaign and I reject that broken model.

Our plan would place jail operations, facilities, medical care, and training under one city-led structure, consolidating duplicative costs, ensuring full transparency via public dashboards, and removing politics from the equation. This eliminates the need for fragile "cooperation" between offices that have clashed for decades.

Until state law changes, we would support temporary accountability measures: fiscal reporting, public vetting of administrators, and independent oversight. But these are stopgaps. Real progress requires structural change. By ending the elected sheriff model and bringing jail operations into the City's fold, we will finally build a justice system rooted in safety, dignity, and accountability—not press releases, escapes, or political power plays.

Our path isn't just different. It's overdue.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

The City is making more than \$2 billion in federally funded repairs to streets and subsurface infrastructure damaged during Hurricane Katrina. However, the long-term benefits of this once-in-a-lifetime investment are threatened by the City's chronic underfunding of street maintenance. [As BGR reported in 2024](#), the Public Works department estimates

it would cost \$50 million a year to properly maintain the City's 1,500 miles of streets. The City spends about \$14 million, or \$36 million less than is needed. This is particularly problematic because preventive street maintenance tends to pay for itself over time. Public Works has estimated that every dollar spent on preventive maintenance [saves \\$4 to \\$5](#) on repair and reconstruction costs down the road.

### On the street maintenance, BGR asked the candidates:

#### 8. What would you do to address the City's underfunding of street maintenance? Please be specific on funding levels and how you would go about finding more revenue for streets.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Once again an ongoing problem for our city for years.

A good place to start is, "Why have all previous administrations failed in this concern?"

All departments and agencies concerned with the maintenance of our city streets should undergo a review. Where funds from various sources are concerned, they too should be reviewed and transparent on how they were spent. The city appears to have no ability to do major work and repairs themselves so all contracts should be scrutinized to maximize expenditures to doing the best work and receiving what was outlined in the contract for the bid price. Where identical repairs and improvements are necessary there should be a fast approval for previous contractors to do this work.

There should never be a premium paid by the city due to negligence, or preferred bidders.

A lot of city money and government grants and other sources of revenues have been discussed as available. Have they been spent? Are they not being used?

Where is the money going.

Our city has a 1.7-billion-dollar operating budget.

An 878-million-dollar revenue projection and a general fund that I can't get an exact figure on. An additional 905 million is sourced from grants and intergovernmental appropriations. The Unassigned Funds as of 2023 appears to be at 225 million. Of this total roughly 92 million has been dedicated to projects. One hundred million was set aside for future an emergency disaster reserve. The rest being available for other various emergencies or city shortfalls. Please don't quote me on these, I assembled this information from various sources and reports I researched online.

Somehow, we should be able to fund our most necessary needs such as infrastructure, crime, education and emergency relief needs from these revenue sources.



#### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

I have seen Broad street repaved 4 times in the last 5 years. Why!

The Public's Works Department is one of the most mismanaged.



## EILEEN CARTER

To address New Orleans' ongoing shortfall in street maintenance funding, I support increasing the annual investment to at least \$50 million—the amount the Department of Public Works (DPW) says is needed to properly maintain the city's 1,500 miles of streets. Preventive maintenance is not optional but essential. According to DPW, every \$1 spent now can save \$4–\$5 in future repairs.

Delaying maintenance worsens problems and increases costs.

To close the \$36 million gap, I would start with a thorough audit of infrastructure spending, reviewing consultant contracts, underperforming programs, and overlapping administrative costs to identify savings that can be redirected. I would also propose dedicating a fixed portion of General Fund revenues or targeted streams—such as franchise fees, parking fines, and hotel occupancy taxes—to establish a consistent maintenance fund, as local leaders have suggested.

Additionally, I support exploring bond measures dedicated to infrastructure improvements and increasing transparency with regular public reporting on maintenance spending to build trust and accountability. We would aggressively pursue federal and state grants focused on resilient infrastructure, especially for streets incorporating stormwater management. Closer coordination with the Sewerage & Water Board will help avoid duplication and maximize efficiency when street and utility work coincide.

Finally, I would implement a publicly reviewed five-year rolling maintenance plan tied to clear performance metrics and community priorities. This strategic approach will protect New Orleans' \$2 billion post-Katrina investment and ensure safer, more sustainable streets for generations to come.



## ROYCE DUPLESSIS

New Orleans' ability to sustain the benefits of our \$2 billion post-Katrina infrastructure investment depends on shifting from a reactive repair model to

a proactive street maintenance strategy. I am committed to closing the \$36 million annual funding gap identified by the Department of Public Works.

This will require hard prioritization and a commitment to structural balance. I support developing a dedicated revenue stream for street maintenance that insulates it from annual budget volatility. This could involve revisiting millages, redirecting a portion of recurring General Fund growth, or deploying targeted user fees, informed by equity and impact. We must instill confidence in our citizens that infrastructure projects are being correctly managed before asking them to pay more in tax dollars.

Solving the funding gap is also about better management. Our DPW will publish a transparent, data-driven street maintenance plan that the public can track. Projects should be sequenced with utility and drainage work to avoid costly duplication. 311 services should be back under City management to ensure residents can report and receive timely feedback on street issues.

Finally, we will evaluate opportunities to reduce long-term costs by investing in more resilient street materials and piloting maintenance contracts with stronger performance accountability.

We can't afford to treat infrastructure like a one-time project. Maintenance must become a core part of our planning and budgeting. Our roads are the arteries of opportunity for residents, workers, and businesses across this city.



## FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The Dept. of Public Works must work in tandem with the Sewerage and Water Board. The City needs to issue bonds to fund the gap.



## HELENA MORENO

Our bad streets are a serious problem. After generations of deferred maintenance, a huge backlog remains. Plus, New Orleans is sinking, and fresh

repairs never seem to last long as the Mississippi mud beneath shifts to break a new street.

Regardless, no one wants to live on a street filled with craters, and I have seen how outsourcing, disorganization, and poor quality control have led to street and infrastructure repairs being slow, expensive, and unreliable.

I will establish an annual budget specifically for street maintenance, allowing us to 'call in the cavalry' by in-sourcing capacity through the hiring of city staffers experienced in construction and project management. These staff will be responsible for recruiting and training work crews equipped for tasks such as paving, addressing potholes, and performing light repairs, as well as other visible street-side maintenance.

Regarding additional revenue for streets, the answer remains the same as I shared above. The people of New Orleans will not approve funding unless they are confident that the money will be well spent and not stolen or wasted. That said, I would support issuing additional city bonds to raise more funding for street repairs, but that would likely be done under existing authorities, which could result in millions of dollars in financing for streets.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Access a fee on all lawsuits and judgments that occur on public streets.

After that if needed road sponsorships if needed with naming rights and also consider other methods of green transportation like bikes, foot, scooters as opposed to just vehicles.

A fee should be charged to any candidate seeking any office to place signs to keep unneeded clutter.

Big Rigs should be accessed a fee to use residential roads to encourage shop local and walk to not only purchase but get healthy.



### OLIVER THOMAS

We're at risk of squandering the \$2B federal post-Katrina investment if we continue to underfund long-term maintenance. Street maintenance a top priority with a clear strategy to close the \$36M annual maintenance gap and operational reforms to ensure residents see and feel the difference.

Here's my plan:

1. Launch a 90-Day Pothole Fix Guarantee - We'll implement a citywide "Pothole Killer" initiative to repair all reported potholes within 90 days, starting with main corridors and bus routes. This sets a new standard for visible, measurable progress.
2. Coordinate Smarter Construction- We'll enforce a "Dig Once" policy to align street work between DPW, SWB, Entergy, and the Corps of Engineers, so we stop tearing up streets we just fixed. I'll also fully staff DPW, enforce contractor performance clauses, and upgrade the Public Works Dashboard with real-time response scores.
3. Close the \$36M Maintenance Gap - To fund the additional needed funds for proper maintenance, I will:
  - Dedicate a portion of Fair Share funds: As BGR's report shows, DPW receives \$5.7M annually from the "Fair Share" deal. I'll work to renegotiate or expand this agreement, prioritizing at least \$10-15M more annually for recurring maintenance.
  - Reallocate existing capital funds: We'll rebalance the capital budget to increase the share of funding directed to maintenance and resurfacing, not just new construction.
  - Create a dedicated Street Maintenance Fund: We'll work with City Council to pass legislation creating a dedicated fund with recurring revenue from vehicle fines, right-of-way permit fees, and a restructured franchise utility fee, which other cities use to support road infrastructure.
  - Pursue state infrastructure dollars in collaboration with our legislative delegation to aggressively seek matching funds through Louisiana's new infrastructure programs and federal IIJA



**dollars, ensuring we bring in external funding to extend the life of every local dollar spent.**

4. Use Data to Drive Spending - I'll align spending with performance metrics and make street conditions part of our annual performance scorecard.



**RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

We cannot let a \$2 billion federal investment erode beneath our feet due to short-sighted budgeting. Addressing our \$36 million annual street maintenance shortfall is not optional.

This is a matter of fiscal responsibility and public trust. Every \$1 spent on preventive maintenance saves up to \$5 in future reconstruction. That's not a cost. It's a return on investment. To close the funding gap, we will consolidate the Department of Public Works with the Sewerage & Water Board, ending decades of inefficiency, redundancy, and miscommunication between the agencies that manage our surface and subsurface infrastructure. This alone will produce millions in administrative savings and operational

synergy.

Next, we'll create a dedicated street maintenance fund sourced from three targeted revenue streams:

1. A progressive commercial vacancy tax on blighted properties in high-traffic corridors,
2. Sales of city property that is sitting abandoned, blighted, or underused, and
3. A share of excess revenue from our proposed Bitcoin Strategic Reserve Credit Union, where digital asset yields will be reinvested into core infrastructure.

Our broader structural reforms, including department consolidation and a blockchain-based public budget dashboard, will allow us to redirect funds previously lost to waste, fraud, or inefficiency. We'll also explore programs that businesses can partner with the city to co-fund minor block-level improvements for reasonable tax deductions, increasing civic participation while reducing costs. Streets are not a luxury. They are lifelines. We will treat them as such by funding them sustainably, transparently, and with long-term foresight.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

The Sewerage & Water Board is a state-created utility over which the mayor and City Council have substantial influence. The mayor serves as president of the utility's board of directors, which is responsible for its operations and finances. The City Council has a seat on the board and controls the utility's water and sewer rates and drainage property taxes.

One key task for the next mayor and council is supporting better Sewerage & Water Board performance. While the utility is implementing a wide-ranging strategic plan, long-term success will depend on [improving the Sewerage & Water Board's governance structure](#). This means the laws and policies that shape the powers, roles and responsibilities of the utility and those involved in its operations.

A core problem is that the Sewerage & Water Board must operate New Orleans' water, sewer and drainage systems, but the City Council controls the fees and taxes that support them. Over the years, this tension between operational responsibility and funding control has allowed politics to influence funding decisions. This has resulted in underfunding, contributing to today's deteriorated infrastructure and shifting costs to current and future ratepayers.

BGR suggests either strengthening the Sewerage & Water Board as a stand-alone utility that operates separately from City government or replacing it with a municipal utility that functions as part of City government. BGR's 2023 report, [Waterworks in Progress](#), details the potential benefits of each option over the status quo. But each option would present new complications that require further study. The next mayor should initiate that study and coordinate these efforts with the City Council and the Sewerage & Water Board, as well as seek public input.

In the near term, the City Council can improve its process for considering Sewerage & Water Board funding requests. As BGR outlined in its 2023 [letter](#), the council should (1) objectively evaluate funding proposals, (2) regularly assess the utility's performance, (3) track outcomes against desired goals, and (4) review strategic and financial plans and reports. These efforts would build on the council's important work to expand its oversight of the utility, set up processes with State legislative support to help resolve customer billing problems, and help fund important infrastructure, such as a new electrical power complex to improve drainage pumping.

### On the Sewerage & Water Board Governance, BGR asked the candidates:

#### 9. What changes to management, operations, or governance of the Sewerage & Water Board would you support, and why?



##### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Once again, an area that has been failed by administration after administration.

Before we start another potential failed attempt, we must ask ourselves, "Why has every administration failed?" I believe we have to start from scratch. What is preventing this?

We have been repairing the same pumps for years and

never have had all pumps up and running when needed. They are all working, until we need them. That means, They are not working.

Every bit of our city's success is determined by the ability to supply water and other utilities to the citizens of this parish. We fail in almost every aspect.

We need a one-point supervision and decision-making entity. I have experience in the water treatment and potable water field. All previous studies that have been

contracted should be reviewed. Do they provide the same results or suggestions? Was there action taken?

We will need to bring in a proven credible, dedicated person to oversee the operations. He will report to a reduced board to streamline decision making appointed by the mayor who wants to resolve this issue.

Talking and reviewing this issue is over. Let's fix it.



### **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

I would not let the Mayor be on the board to begin with and this has been an issue for the last 50 years and no one has had an answer. I would break all now and start all over again.



### **EILEEN CARTER**

I fully support initiating a comprehensive review of the Sewerage & Water Board's management, operations, and governance as part of my proposed 90-Day State of the

City review. This review would carefully examine both options outlined by BGR: strengthening the Board as an independent utility or restructuring it as a municipal utility within City government. Each approach offers potential benefits, but also introduces challenges that demand thorough study before any decisions are made.

My priority would be to bring all key stakeholders—City Council, the Sewerage & Water Board, state officials, experts, and the public—into an open, transparent dialogue. This collaborative process would ensure diverse perspectives are considered and foster shared ownership of outcomes. We must weigh what path best serves residents' needs for reliable water, drainage, and wastewater services while promoting financial stability, operational efficiency, and accountability.

In the near term, I support enhancing City Council's oversight by improving how funding requests are evaluated, implementing regular performance assessments, and ensuring tracking of results against strategic goals. Clear reporting and transparency must be a foundation of this process. Addressing customer billing issues and funding

critical infrastructure improvements—like the new electrical power complex for drainage pumping—are also key priorities.

Ultimately, this structured and inclusive approach will help us arrive at real, actionable solutions to improve the Sewerage & Water Board's effectiveness and reliability, which are essential for the health, safety, and resilience of New Orleans residents.



### **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

We need to operate as proactive caretakers of a 300-year-old city that still has infrastructure that goes way farther back than it should. In the recent past, there have been at least six major

initiatives to alter the governance of the Sewerage and Water Board this century alone. (2002–2003 Privatization Charter Amendment; 2012–2014 state legislative nomination process revisions; 2018 Charter Amendment Restoring Council Seat; 2019 Task Force & Structural Review; 2023 "Waterworks in Progress" Report & State Reform Push; 2024–2025 Legislative Panel Intervention)

Trying the same thing over again and expecting different results is some people's definition of madness, but trying different things without giving them a chance to work is not saner.

The Sewerage & Water Board is one of the most critical institutions for our city's health, sustainability, and economic future. As mayor and grounded in my experience legislating complex intergovernmental issues, I would pursue improvements in both its near-term accountability and long-term governance.

My highest near-term priority for accountability will not apply only to SWB, but to all city services. I will revive the "STAT" programs, which previously provided a platform for managers and the public to identify and discuss the barriers that departments like SWB face in delivering their services, ultimately leading to the development of real solutions. These programs have yielded critical insights in the past for the Mayors to tell the difference between broken organizations and faulty systems; they were also a venue for recognizing the creativity and hard work of our people.



## FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The SWB should be a stand-alone entity and it should have its members elected by the citizens. The term of office should be limited to 2 years on the board. Terms should be staggered.

One aggravation that residents have indicated is the constant stupidity of water bills being issued in amount that are incomprehensible. SWB customer service needs to scan the bills before they are mailed and weed out the junk bills.



## HELENA MORENO

**Auditing:** I will conduct rolling, comprehensive public audits to assess the extent of SWB's financial waste, how to fix it, and determine the required funding for SWB, taking into account the significant needs that necessitate a stormwater management fee.

**Experts to help reform:** Bring in a team of third-party experts to help reform the SWB from top to bottom.

**Improve communication and transparency:** The lack of proper communication and transparency has significantly hindered the SWB, even potentially causing it to miss out on necessary state funding. My office will ensure that SWB bolsters dialogue with elected officials, the community, and media to increase trust for the agency, ultimately giving it a better shot to receive the resources it needs.

**Pursuing regional water management:** New Orleans must work with our neighbors on significant regional water issues like saltwater intrusion. Furthermore, SWB spans the river with multiple water treatment plants, which could produce much more clean water, especially if a portion of the leaks are fixed.

**Workforce development:** I will enhance the Civil Service so that good work at the SWB is rewarded. Outdated and ineffective staff management methods should be replaced with a transparent, non-political process that fosters a merit-based chain of command.



## FRANK M. SCURLOCK

I agree 100%. Not only that but a five member independent board review every thing from top to bottom to restart our most needed city services.



## OLIVER THOMAS

As mayor, I will pursue a three-part plan focused on governance reform, operational modernization, and infrastructure investment:

1. Fix the Governance Structure
  - Within the first 100 days, I will convene a formal task force—composed of City Council members, SWB leadership, state legislators, infrastructure experts, and ratepayer representatives—to evaluate the two governance models outlined by BGR: strengthening SWB as a stand-alone utility or transitioning to a municipal utility under City control.
  - We will develop a legislative roadmap by the end of year one, outlining necessary state and local policy changes to align operational responsibility with fiscal authority. This will include identifying where state law hinders transparency or efficiency.
  - I will also champion a City Council process reform ordinance that institutionalizes performance reviews and strategic plan assessments for all SWB funding requests.
2. Modernize Operations and Customer Service
  - I will direct the SWB to issue a 90-day action plan to address billing accuracy, including: 1) Deploying updated meter-reading technology; 2) Auditing and clearing backlog billing disputes; and 3) Publishing transparent data on error rates and resolution timelines.
  - We will establish a customer advocacy office within SWB to investigate recurring complaints and ensure residents are not overcharged or ignored.
3. Invest in Long-Term Water Infrastructure
  - Work with local, state, and federal partners to fund: 1)



A Water Quality Master Plan that prioritizes updates to aging water treatment plants; and 2) A Stormwater Management Overhaul targeting flood-prone neighborhoods with green infrastructure, underground retention, and improved pump redundancy.

- Integrate climate resilience into all capital planning, ensuring new drainage and water investments are aligned with our city's long-term survival—not just Band-Aid fixes after every flood.



### **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

I support merging the Sewerage & Water Board (S&WB) into the City's Department of Public Works, forming a unified municipal utility accountable directly to the people. The current

setup—where S&WB operates our infrastructure but the City Council controls the funding—has enabled decades of dysfunction, finger-pointing, and political gridlock while our pipes burst, streets flood, and neighborhoods suffer. By consolidating S&WB into a single Department of Infrastructure and Public Works, we eliminate redundant

bureaucracy, align capital planning, and give residents one accountable body to maintain streets, drainage, sewer, and water systems. But this merger must also be accompanied by serious reinvestment in our internal workforce.

Today, Public Works has only one electrician and one engineer for the entire city. We're almost entirely dependent on expensive private contractors leading to inflated costs, delays, and poor oversight. We will rebuild our internal capacity by hiring skilled tradespeople, training local talent, and prioritizing public jobs over private profits. And while our workers go underpaid, the current S&WB executive director receives a salary that is \$100,000 higher than their predecessor a year ago despite continued service failures and billing crises. That's not just wasteful. It's offensive to the people footing the bill.

Our approach merges governance, rebuilds internal strength, and restores public trust. We'll also implement public dashboards to track spending and performance in real time, ensuring transparency and accountability. New Orleans doesn't need more siloed agencies. We need a unified infrastructure strategy that puts people, not politics or contractors, first. That's what real reform looks like.

## **10. What would you suggest to improve the City Council's approach to reviewing funding requests from the Sewerage & Water Board for rates and taxes?**



### **JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.**

As I previous said, after years of failure we either don't know what's wrong or we can't afford to fix it. We have to look at the obvious and not so obvious possible causes for failure after

failure.

But to address the question, what are the funds being requested for and how well have you used or managed previous allocated funds. In an area that has been so problematic we have to first find out what is wrong then create a program or approach to fix it.



### **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

Cry Havoc and let Slip...



### **EILEEN CARTER**

To strengthen the City Council's approach to reviewing Sewerage & Water Board (S&WB) funding requests, I support adopting a transparent and

structured process as recommended by local experts. This includes requiring formal evaluations of funding proposals, regular performance reviews, and aligning outcomes with strategic goals. Enhancing public trust means increasing transparency through regular public hearings on billing, infrastructure needs, and rate increases, while actively incorporating input from residents via neighborhood forums and advisory panels. To address persistent billing issues, I support the use of independent auditors to monitor the smart meter rollout and resolve disputes fairly. Finally, conversations about rates and governance, closing longstanding accountability gaps must happen. Together, we can create reforms that will help ensure that S&WB's financial decisions are responsible, equitable, and responsive to the people they serve—while improving performance and protecting critical infrastructure across New Orleans.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

Improving how the City Council reviews S&WB funding requests is essential to ensuring transparent governance, equitable utility rates, and a high-performing infrastructure

system. I am looking forward to working with the new Executive Director, Randy Hayman, who, at the time this survey was sent, had not yet started in this role.

It's important to remember that the City Council already has statutory authority over the approval of water and sewer rates and drainage property tax millages for the SWB. This gives the Council both the power and the responsibility to evaluate rate and tax requests. The Council cannot direct SWB's day-to-day operations or make personnel decisions.

To better inform the City Council's evaluation of funding requests, I will use my appointing authority and position as mayor to incorporate more objective and transparent review procedures, request strategic and financial documentation, and track performance metrics.

In a city accustomed to retaliatory sound-bites tossed between an administration and the Council, it may be hard to imagine the future we will create. By my nature, I am a coalition builder, and I will bring like-minded

collaborators on my team. Together, we will work with the Council to develop the appropriate level of joint budget and performance review. In other jurisdictions, this ensures continuity, and I know we can reduce last-minute decisions that undermine confidence in both bodies. Rate setting should be data-informed, timely, and shielded from political short-termism.

We must align investment with results in a way that is accessible and credible to New Orleanians.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The Council needs to interface with the SWB on a quarterly basis and review the SWB budget procedures.



### HELENA MORENO

BGR has provided several recommendations about improving this process in the context of rolling forward millages for SWB. It makes sense to incorporate these discussions in the

formal budgeting process during years when millage rates need to be considered. These are critical decisions, and the city council needs to move forward transparently.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

The water is free from the River and Lake and our broken system charges for expenses for lack of maintenance or modernization. A fast track approach is needed and long overdue.

It's not billing that's the problem. It's the waste and mismanagement.

Time for a do over...



## OLIVER THOMAS

I believe the City Council needs a stronger, more transparent, and more disciplined approach when it comes to reviewing funding requests from the Sewerage & Water Board.

Right now, the process is too political and reactive. Rate increases and millage renewals come up with little public explanation, no independent review, and no clear connection to performance. That's not how you build trust or fix a system that's been broken for decades.

As mayor, I would push for a formal, citywide policy that lays out exactly how we evaluate these funding requests—what data is required, what performance benchmarks must be met, and how the public is involved in that process. If SWB is asking residents to pay more, they need to show the receipts: what's working, what's not, and how these dollars will make a difference.

I'd also push for independent reviews—outside experts who can double-check the numbers and make sure we're not just rubber-stamping assumptions that don't hold up. Every dollar we ask for from residents needs to be tied to measurable improvements—fewer flooding events, faster repairs, better billing, and real drainage results.

We also need to make this process clear to the public. When these funding proposals come forward, they should be explained in plain language—with public briefings, easy-to-understand summaries, and real answers to residents' questions.

And we've got to align this with a bigger vision—because you can't fix water without fixing streets, and you can't fix drainage if every agency is working in a silo. That's why I'll make sure this process lines up other initiatives and goals.

We can't keep asking people to pay more while delivering less. I'm going to fight for a system that's honest, efficient, and works—for everybody in this city.



## RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

The best way to improve the City Council's approach to reviewing Sewerage & Water Board (S&WB) funding requests is to merge the S&WB into the Department of Public Works, eliminating the current governance split

that forces the Council to approve rates and taxes without direct operational control or unified oversight. Right now, the Council is asked to fund a system it doesn't fully manage, based on reports it doesn't directly produce, from an agency that often operates behind closed doors. That dynamic is not oversight, it's dysfunction.

By consolidating the S&WB into a centralized Department of Infrastructure and Public Works, the Council will be reviewing funding within a clear, city-led chain of accountability. There will be one director, one budget, and one strategic plan. This makes rate and tax decisions more transparent and aligned with broader city infrastructure goals; street maintenance, drainage, and emergency response. To complement this, we will implement a public-facing dashboard showing infrastructure project timelines, spending, and performance outcomes. No more random rate hikes just open data and measurable results.

Finally, the Council must end its rubber-stamp approach. Any future funding consideration must be tied to internal performance audits, not contractor proposals. The current \$100,000 salary bump for the S&WB director—despite billing crises and flooding—shows how broken this process is. Council oversight should be real, measurable, and built on a structure that actually works. That begins by unifying our infrastructure under one roof.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

In 2027, one of New Orleans' three drainage property taxes will expire unless it is renewed by voters. It provides \$22 million a year, or nearly a quarter of drainage system revenue. Even with the tax, the system faces substantial unmet funding needs, for everything from cleaning catch basins to fixing pipes to upgrading pump stations. And [experts have recommended](#) supplementing traditional drainage with "green infrastructure," or natural rainfall retention projects that can lighten the load on pipes and pumps and reduce ground subsidence.

To meet these funding needs, the Sewerage & Water Board, the City, and others, including BGR, have suggested creating a stormwater fee. As discussed in a [2017 BGR report](#),

this type of user fee charges a property owner based on an estimate of stormwater runoff that the system collects from the property and discharges into local waterways. Generally, a fee has a couple of advantages over a tax. It applies to both taxable and tax-exempt property, spreading out the cost burden. Also, it is tied to a property's runoff, rather than the property's value, which improves fairness.

Sewerage & Water Board and City officials have not yet made a stormwater fee proposal to the public. As a first step, BGR urges them to review the funding needs of the entire drainage system. BGR also recommends careful planning, administration, and oversight to ensure a fair fee structure, effective use of the new revenue, and public accountability.

### On stormwater fees, BGR asked the candidates:

**11.** Do you favor pursuing a citywide stormwater fee? If yes, please explain what the fee proposal should include to ensure effectiveness, fairness and accountability. If you do not favor a stormwater fee, please explain how you would address the drainage system's financial needs.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Is it completely necessary to create another tax or fee for our citizens? How have we come to this point with this issue? Too many advisory boards, committees and chiefs.

I suggest reviewing the problem, addressing the costs and needs and see if the money is there but not being applied efficiently. Before you can solve a problem, you must first know what the issue is.



#### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

I do not favor a fee because that just means more taxes and that means more angry people and that means more road rage and more crime and murder and drug use.

Get rid of Mardi Gras beads and that should help the drainage.



#### EILEEN CARTER

At this time, I cannot definitively say whether I support a citywide stormwater fee, as I believe this is a decision that must be made with full input from residents, business owners, and key stakeholders. The financial burdens on our residents are already significant, and any new fee—however well-intentioned—must be evaluated through a lens of fairness, equity, and impact. I am committed to listening to all sides, weighing the pros and cons, and pursuing the best collective course forward.

That said, I recognize that our drainage system is underfunded and in need of sustainable revenue. The idea



of a stormwater fee, as outlined by BGR and others, has merit in that it charges property owners based on the runoff their property generates, not on property value. This can be more equitable and, importantly, can apply to tax-exempt properties that currently don't contribute to drainage funding, such as nonprofits and government buildings.

If a stormwater fee is formally proposed, I would insist on a transparent, community-driven process. This includes a full systemwide assessment of drainage funding needs, clear data on how revenue would be used, and a fair structure that protects low-income residents. Oversight mechanisms must be built in, including public reporting and performance benchmarks, to ensure accountability and trust.

Our drainage infrastructure is critical to protecting lives, homes, and economic activity. I am open to solutions—including a well-designed fee—but we must get it right, with community at the center of the conversation.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

Yes, I support pursuing a citywide stormwater fee as part of a broader, equitable strategy to strengthen our drainage system and protect residents from flooding and subsidence. Our current infrastructure is underfunded and aging, and relying solely on existing taxes, especially one set to expire in 2027, is fiscally unsustainable. We need a new model that is both fair and resilient.

A well-structured stormwater fee can do exactly that. But it must be implemented with care, transparency, and meaningful public engagement. The City must first conduct a comprehensive audit of drainage system funding needs, including both traditional gray infrastructure and green infrastructure solutions. Then, any proposed fee must be clearly tied to runoff volume, not property value, to ensure fairness and better reflect actual system usage.

Such a fee must apply to all properties that contribute to stormwater runoff while providing affordability protections for low-income residents and should reward property owners who install permeable surfaces or retention systems.

Public trust will hinge on transparency and accountability. I would support legislation requiring annual public reporting on how stormwater fee revenue is collected, allocated, and what projects it funds. Additionally, a public-facing dashboard and regular audits should be part of the governance structure.

In short, if done right, a stormwater fee can deliver long-term value, shift costs equitably, and improve quality of life in every neighborhood. I am committed to ensuring the process is participatory, technically sound, and grounded in fairness.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The short answer is yes because it tracks stormwater runoff (in effect, usage). At the same time, since a lot of tax-exempt property owners (churches, charities, etc.) face budget constraints so their rate would need to be lowered.



### HELENA MORENO

The SWB has significant needs that will require a stormwater management fee. However, it must be done correctly, or voters will never approve it. That means those who have been paying into the system shouldn't be burdened further, and those who have been tax-exempt should start contributing. Additionally, the funds should be deposited into a special account controlled by the City Council. It is doubtful that the public would vote to approve this new funding unless it has City Council oversight and approval.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Why should residents be charged for something that nature can handle.

We have no control over storms other than prayer.

As roads are redone so should drains but both need to be maintained to be effective.

Funding for drainage would be bundled with costs of street repairs and replacement.



## OLIVER THOMAS

Yes, I support creating a citywide stormwater fee—but only if it's fair, transparent, and actually fixes flooding. Right now, our drainage system is underfunded, our pipes are aging, and we're at risk of losing \$22 million a year if voters don't renew the drainage tax. A well-designed stormwater fee gives us a real solution—one that charges based on runoff, not property value, and makes tax-exempt properties pay their share.

Here's what I'd demand in the proposal:

- **Fairness:** Big parking lots and roof-tops pay more. Homeowners who install green infrastructure get credits.
- **Transparency:** A public dashboard that tracks every dollar and every project.
- **Accountability:** Independent oversight and clear performance targets.
- **Community Voice:** Public forums in every district before anything goes to a vote.

This isn't about raising taxes—it's about building a smarter, stronger city that doesn't flood every time it rains. Let's stop patching and start planning.



## RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

I do not support a blanket stormwater fee on residents. Instead, I propose creating a Stormwater Resilience Trust. This will be a legally binding agreement between the City and high-impact sectors such as the sports industry, hospital systems, universities, and major commercial landholders. These institutions sit on vast impervious surfaces that generate significant runoff and directly burden our drainage systems, yet many are tax-exempt or under-contribute to infrastructure upkeep.

Rather than impose a stormwater tax, we will negotiate contribution agreements tied to each institution's footprint and runoff impact. Funds from this trust would be earmarked exclusively for drainage infrastructure:

cleaning catch basins, upgrading pumps, implementing green infrastructure, and reducing ground subsidence. Participation can be incentivized through public recognition, zoning flexibility, or credit programs for implementing green technologies on their properties. The trust will be governed transparently, with annual reporting, public dashboards, and an oversight board that includes community voices. This structure provides accountability while avoiding litigation over taxation of exempt entities.

Additionally, with the merger the Sewerage & Water Board into the Department of Public Works, ending decades of governance confusion and allowing for coordinated planning and spending across all infrastructure systems. This model shifts the burden away from everyday residents while demanding fair contributions from institutions that benefit most from stable infrastructure. It's not just a funding strategy—it's a partnership in resilience, rooted in fairness, transparency, and shared responsibility for the future of New Orleans.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

In November 2024, voters amended the City charter to require an annual budget dedication equal to at least 2% of the City's General Fund budget to the Housing Trust Fund, starting in 2026. The City will use the trust fund to preserve and expand affordable housing for low- to moderate-income residents. BGR's [report](#) on the proposition identified acute problems in housing affordability in the city and the need for increased housing investment. However, BGR took a position against the proposed charter amendment citing the budget inflexibility of the charter-based dedication.

The City has tapped two public agencies, Finance New Orleans and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, to

administer the Housing Trust Fund. In addition, the City Council formed the Housing Trust Fund Advisory Committee to advise the council on appropriations from the fund. In December 2024, BGR wrote a [letter](#) to the mayor and City Council recommending ways to ensure effective administration and use of Housing Trust Fund dollars. These recommendations include establishing clear metrics and criteria for examining program performance and expanded accountability measures, such as independent auditing of trust fund revenue. BGR also highlighted the need for other initiatives outside the trust fund to increase affordable housing, such as zoning reforms and tax incentives. As discussed in a previous section, the City should have a long-term financial plan that balances funding for the Housing Trust Fund with other needs.

### On affordable housing, BGR asked the candidates:

#### 12. How can Housing Trust Fund dollars be used most effectively in New Orleans?



##### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

First, sounds like more departments and increased overhead. Layers of bureaucracy that eat up funds and get nothing done. Better fiscal responsibility is the start to solving many issues and

problems this city is experiencing.

The Housing Trust Fund dollars can be used most effectively by spending them on affordable housing and low-income housing, not administration fees and salaries for multiple agencies in redundant efforts that our city should have had a department capable of handling the issue. but since we can't handle it in house let's create or "tap" one agency and monitor them and the use of funds to solve the problem.



##### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

By making sure the city has not put crooks in charge of the trust fund dollars.



##### EILEEN CARTER

Housing Trust Fund dollars must be used strategically to address New Orleans' deep housing inequities, and my approach—outlined on [EileenCarterMayor.com](#)—focuses on

restoring community through affordability, access, and equity. We must shift from reactive to proactive policies that support longtime residents, essential workers, and families displaced by disinvestment and gentrification.

First, Housing Trust Fund dollars should prioritize deeply affordable housing for residents earning below 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). This includes renters, fixed-

income seniors, and workers in tourism, education, and healthcare—those who keep our city running. Essential workers should receive priority access to new units, especially near job hubs and transit lines.

Second, we must use these funds to support rehabilitation as much as new construction. By restoring blighted properties and legacy homes, we can preserve neighborhood character and reduce displacement. Many families already own or rent properties that could be livable with modest investment. Trust Fund dollars should be used to help low-income homeowners with critical repairs and code compliance, preventing loss of generational wealth.

Third, I propose a “Come Home” campaign to use Housing Trust Fund dollars as part of a larger redevelopment push—inviting former residents to return and reinvest in their communities. Partnering with land banks and community development corporations, we can turn vacant lots and abandoned houses into homes for families, not speculation.

With transparency, local hiring, and resident input, Housing Trust Fund dollars can help build a more inclusive New Orleans—one rooted in justice, dignity, and stability for all.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

I must begin by thanking Councilmember Harris for her stalwart leadership on this essential investment. Managed with transparency, discipline, and purpose, the Housing Trust Fund presents a powerful opportunity to expand and preserve affordable housing in New Orleans. I actively supported the 2% charter amendment because I believe housing is not just a market commodity but a basic foundation for stable communities, economic mobility, and public health.

To ensure these dollars are used effectively, the City must adopt clear performance metrics, eligibility criteria, and evaluation tools that prioritize impact and equity. We must track not only how many units are funded, but who benefits, where the investments occur, and whether housing remains affordable long-term.

I also support working hand-in-hand with the partners that developed the Housing Ecosystem Plan, the state, and the Louisiana Housing Corporation to make sure our city can

leverage Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). Note that the annual allocation of LIHTC to New Orleans has decreased from supporting 238 units on average under Mayor Landrieu to only 90 units on average under Cantrell.

I will collaborate with state and federal leadership. I will not stop working across aisles when the well-being of the people I represent is at stake. New Orleans is plenty entertaining without additional drama. So, I will cooperate with whoever I need to bring LIHTC back to our City to multiply the impact of this Housing Trust Fund.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

First, the HTF needs to have clear guidelines. Second, it needs an audit.

After watching the meetings of the BZA and the various real estate related committees, it becomes clear to me that they are a fairly entrenched group with a bent against progress.



### HELENA MORENO

We need to build more affordable housing, which is why I supported, and the voters approved millions in city funds being dedicated to the Housing Trust Fund. This can be a game-changer if leveraged correctly through a united citywide effort working through a consolidated Economic Development Corporation that can own, lease, and develop large-scale affordable housing using existing public property. At the same time, a Community Land Trust model can consolidate vacant or dilapidated properties into a single entity. Then, it turns around to offer grants to first-time homebuyers, with a particular focus on those engaged in service (e.g., teachers, nurses, first responders).



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

First, there should be an opportunity for Public Private joint venture to improve Housing in general.

There are many federal grants and programs that exist and we should work



with the Urban League which has favorable ties to New Orleans from Washington.

The City also has tremendous assets that could be utilized for public housing at minimal cost.

To a homeless. Any roof is better than none.



### OLIVER THOMAS

Affordable housing shouldn't be a dream—it should be a basic promise this city keeps. I supported the Housing Trust Fund because too many of our residents—teachers, hospitality workers, first responders—can't afford to live in the neighborhoods they serve. Voters made it clear: housing is a priority. Now it's on us to make sure that 2% of the General Fund isn't just spent, but spent wisely.

We've got to lead with transparency, performance, and results. As mayor, I'll make sure every HTF dollar supports developments that are actually affordable, in the neighborhoods where people want to live, with long-term affordability protections. We'll establish clear criteria for who gets funded: projects that serve families earning below 60% of AMI, include accessibility features, are located near transit and schools, and align with neighborhood plans. Not scattershot spending or political deals.

I'll also require independent audits of the fund and regular public reporting, so residents can track what's being built, where, and for whom. I'll also strengthen the role of the Housing Trust Fund Advisory Committee—not just to give feedback, but to help shape priorities year-round. They'll have real teeth under my administration.

At the same time, I know housing can't be solved with money alone. We need zoning reforms to allow for more affordable units, tax incentives to support small landlords, and faster permitting for affordable housing developers. We'll coordinate with Finance New Orleans and NORA to make sure the Trust Fund is one part of a broader housing strategy—not a silo.

And yes, we'll do all this while balancing the budget. We can support affordable housing and still meet our other obligations—if we plan smart, cut waste, and use data to guide decisions.



### RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

Housing Trust Fund dollars must be used not just effectively—but boldly and strategically—to address the scale of New Orleans' housing crisis. We face rising rents, stagnant wages, and widespread displacement. The Trust

Fund should not become another slow-moving account that trickles out aid. It must be a catalyst for transformation, guided by clear priorities and radical transparency.

First, we must prioritize land acquisition and public land activation. With tens of thousands of vacant and adjudicated properties—many city-owned—we should use Trust dollars to convert these into permanently affordable housing, prioritizing community land trusts, co-ops, and nonprofit developers over speculators. This immediately increases housing stock while reversing blight.

Second, Trust dollars should be tied to strict affordability guarantees—units must remain affordable for the long term, not just a few years. Developers receiving funds must meet clear affordability thresholds and face penalties for noncompliance.

Third, we must tie funding to zoning reform. Inclusionary zoning, mixed-use flexibility, and density bonuses must accompany Trust Fund investment so we can build smarter, not just more.

My campaign also supports BGR's call for independent audits and performance metrics, but we'd go further: we will publish all disbursements and outcomes on a public dashboard and prohibit funding to any developer who contributes to active political campaigns. Affordability is not just about units. It's about justice. The Housing Trust Fund must be a tool to empower neighborhoods, not reward insiders. We'll make sure it serves the people—not the politically connected few.

## 13. What other initiatives besides Housing Trust Fund investments would you support to address housing affordability issues in New Orleans?



### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

Let's review all the tax breaks and deals that were made for incoming businesses that had provisos for providing and creating affordable housing. Have they been honored?

If not, why not? Who let them off the hook?

Let's start there to address the shortage. If there was failure to comply then look to rescinding the tax breaks and perks.

Offer a penalty buyout of what should have been spent and allocate that to building affordable housing and low-income homes for resolving the shortage.

This is just one initiative. Hold people accountable.

One other possibility is to create a pool of contractors that can show means and ability to build solid, quality homes. Use these contractors and offer a fair profit that will give them an initiative to build these types of homes. This can be a job creator as well and tie it in with an apprentice program for learning a trade that will provide long term jobs for them outside the service industry.



### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

Tighter enforcement of air b and b operators.



### EILEEN CARTER

Addressing housing affordability in New Orleans requires more than Housing Trust Fund investments—it calls for a multipronged strategy grounded in smart policy, community-driven development, and long-term equity.

First, I support Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning, or

the Smart Housing Mix Ordinance, which requires new multifamily rental developments to reserve 5–10% of units for residents earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income in high-opportunity neighborhoods. These affordability guarantees years, and developers receive incentives such as density bonuses or reduced parking requirements.

Second, we must expand Community Land Trusts (CLTs), which allow collective land ownership to secure long-term affordability in neighborhoods like Treme and Central City—preserving legacy communities amid rising property values.

Third, I would strengthen owner-occupied rehabilitation programs. These programs help low-income homeowners remain in their homes safely while preventing blight and displacement.

Fourth, expand workforce support through initiatives like the Teacher Homeownership Incentive Program, which provides down payment assistance to educators and other essential staff—helping retain critical talent.

Fifth, I would partner with local partners to advance our 10-year affordable housing plan, including infill development, fair tax assessments, and native workforce housing.

Finally, I support following the rules on short-term rental books and redirecting STR revenue into affordable housing initiatives—an approach championed by the Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center.

This holistic approach builds housing stability, preserves community identity, and keeps New Orleans livable for all.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

While the Housing Trust Fund represents a critical commitment to affordable housing, addressing our city's deep-rooted affordability crisis demands a broader, more systemic strategy.

I support targeted zoning reforms that promote mixed-

use and higher-density development in transit-accessible areas. These changes must be paired with neighborhood engagement and effective, responsive code enforcement to ensure positive growth.

We will explore expanding the use of incentive tools, like tax abatements and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreements, to encourage the development of affordable and workforce housing in high-opportunity areas. But these agreements must include enforceable affordability covenants and public transparency.

Programs like LIHTC and state and federal Historic Tax Credits are powerful assets for housing development that retain our neighborhoods' character. We must also invest in stabilization and preservation, particularly in naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH).

We will promote solutions for long-term affordability, particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods.

Unaffordability is not a werewolf that a single silver bullet can take down. We have to use all of these strategies and create new ones guided by reliable data, community input, and coordinated interagency efforts.

I am running to make sure New Orleans is a place where all residents can live with dignity and stability.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

Finding a funding source that would reduce real estate taxes would be a nice option. There are homeowners who attempt to apply for the "age 65 property tax freeze" at the Assessor's

Office only to find out that they were not eligible. Further, the application is not retroactive. The Assessor's Office needs to do a better public outreach.

Perhaps the elderly can be given a break on the SWB water bills. The annual interest rate on overdue water bills is in excess of 125%--more than usurious!

I do not think that the City can solve the insurance crisis as this is a regional phenomenon.



### HELENA MORENO

Besides the Housing Trust Fund, I would also establish a NEW city Department of Insurance Justice dedicated to making insurance more affordable for residents. The new department would provide expert

advice on saving money on insurance, offer subsidies for fortified roofs, and explore other means to build resilience and lower premiums.

I would also consider additional zoning changes to facilitate the building of affordable housing in the city center. I supported a 2021 change that allowed fourplexes in certain areas. I also supported the effort to enable residential development above retail.

As I have said, fixing safety and permits would also allow for more housing to be built faster. I also want to simplify the zoning code to streamline overly complex land use rules that prevent or at least slow down development.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Calling upon the nonprofit churches and foundations to StepUp and hold them accountable to maintain their non profit status. Currently there is no accountability while the flock and

taxpayers are fleeced or they would gladly show the results like the New Orleans Mission which we are blessed to have in the City. They do an amazing service.



### OLIVER THOMAS

I will prioritizing housing stabilization for working families. My administration will build and preserve 10,000 housing units over the next eight years to support working families.

Leverage public land to execute on the housing stabilization plan. Specific tactics include leveraging public land to execute the housing stabilization plan, restoration of soft-second mortgages, and dedicated revenue to sustain housing funding in the long term.

My administration will establish specific measures of

success to increase affordable housing and homeownership, tracking progress towards increase in homeownership rates, particularly among first-time buyers and essential workers, including teachers, first responders, and hospitality workers. We will monitor the number of affordable housing units built or preserved, tracking our 10,000-unit goal. And we will track reduction in housing cost burden, ensuring families aren't spending an unsustainable portion of income on rent or mortgages.



### **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

Beyond Housing Trust Fund investments, we must tackle the structural forces driving unaffordability in New Orleans. Right now, over 60% of city property is tax-exempt, leaving

working and middle-class residents to shoulder the tax burden alone. That's unacceptable. We must shift toward a sales tax model targeting luxury and tourism sectors, and refocus property taxes on large commercial and institutional owners. These entities can reduce their burden by contributing directly to public initiatives like affordable

housing, green infrastructure, and workforce development.

We also propose publicly taking over Entergy New Orleans, turning it into a community-owned utility that cuts out corporate profiteering. This allows us to freeze rates, reinvest in our neighborhoods, and support housing stability. We'll expand solar-powered microgrids and battery bank facilities, reducing grid strain and monthly bills, and explore hydropower generation through our levees and canals to build long-term resilience. To protect residents from displacement, we will create a Universal Basic Home Insurance Program funded jointly by the city and state to provide storm, fire, and flood coverage, especially for vulnerable homeowners.

But none of this matters if our people can't build real equity. The true measure of affordability is ownership. We will launch rent-to-own programs, enforce vacancy penalties on speculative properties, and fund a city repair corps to preserve generational homes and help renters become owners. This isn't just a housing plan it's a freedom plan. Our vision is a New Orleans where families don't just survive here; they own here, stay here, and thrive here.



### Background Provided to All Candidates

The City and other economic development entities should take a rigorous approach to reviewing private development projects seeking tax subsidies. Developers and public officials often view these subsidies as free money. But the tax breaks represent an allocation of future resources and should be evaluated with a rigor worthy of a long-term investment. BGR's reports on [payments in lieu of taxes](#) (PILOT) and [tax increment financing](#) (TIF) emphasize several criteria:

- The project advances priorities specified in the City's economic development strategic plan.
- Independent analyses demonstrate the market will not produce a desirable outcome for the project site, therefore making a public subsidy necessary.
- The subsidy provides only the minimum needed for the project to proceed. In addition, the subsidy should not

compensate for basic financial weaknesses in a developer or a transaction (e.g., inadequate equity investment) or a lack of demand for a service or product.

- Effective subsidies produce a significant positive ratio of benefits to costs, as supported by a rigorous cost-benefit analysis.
- Subsidies should not create unfair impacts on local competitors or the surrounding neighborhood.

The City is not the sole entity with authority to abate local taxes in New Orleans to promote economic development. Others include the New Orleans Industrial Development Board and special economic development districts. This potentially makes it more difficult to implement a unified subsidy strategy, especially if the entities do not share the same economic development priorities.

### On economic development, BGR asked the candidates:

**14.** What do you think New Orleans should emphasize in a strategic plan for economic development, and what would you do to ensure cohesive support from business, community and regional stakeholders necessary to achieve the plan's goals?



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

We have eroded our tax base. There have been many deals cut to try to build commerce that result in profits moved out of state and very little contribution to the local economy. The people who have cut these deals are either poor negotiators, afraid to say no, or have taken contributions or payouts for project approvals.

If a company has looked to set up shop in a city, they have already deemed it profitable. They are now negotiating additional profitability, which is fine, but we have to negotiate tougher.

Show existing businesses that new opportunities will share the same taxes and costs that they do, and you will

gain their support. People will understand start-up costs and some breaks but why not offer these same incentives to existing small and local businesses for their growth?

the city should be in the government business, not supporting failing attempts to look like we are getting something done.

The city should work with surrounding parishes to work in concert to bring in business and opportunities. We all benefit, even when local parishes win.

Brag about our strengths. We have a great convention destination, sports venues, (Superbowl, Sugar Bowl, Zurich Classic). Festivals that celebrate culture and our city, JazzFest, French Quarter Festival, Essence Festival of Culture. Oh yes, Mardi Gras. These are some of the majors. All these events surrounded by a destination of great cuisine

and museums, zoos and aquariums and other attractions. Let's concentrate on what we do best! Let's not forget who we are and what made us great! Create an atmosphere that will attract other industries. That will help support and show that we are bringing people to experience our small local businesses.



### **"MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO**

Follow the money.



### **EILEEN CARTER**

New Orleans' economic development plan must center equitable, neighborhood-level growth, prioritizing small businesses, climate- resilient infrastructure, workforce opportunity, and housing stability—values echoed across local organizations and directly aligned with my platform's call for transparency, smart governance, and community investment.

Key priorities should include:

Neighborhood revitalization and small business support—particularly in historically underserved communities like New Orleans East, the Lower 9th Ward, and Algiers. My vision includes streamlining permitting processes, improving broadband and infrastructure access, and empowering local entrepreneurs through technical assistance and access to capital.

Inclusive job creation must also be at the forefront. We should invest in training pipelines connected to high-growth sectors such as green energy, construction, biotech, maritime logistics, and digital media. My administration would strengthen partnerships between workforce training providers, high schools, and local employers ensuring residents are ready for tomorrow's opportunities.

Affordable housing must go hand-in-hand with economic growth. I support accelerating the use of city-owned vacant properties, advancing infill development,

and increasing access to homeownership through down payment assistance and cooperative housing models.

To align all stakeholders—City departments, the Industrial Development Board (IDB), and economic development districts—I suggest establishing an "Economic Development Council" to review incentives and manage a transparent dashboard for public accountability.

Finally, public engagement matters. My administration will build trust by involving neighborhood associations, small business owners, local organizations, and regional voices in every phase of strategy and implementation—ensuring that economic growth serves the people of New Orleans first.



### **ROYCE DUPLESSIS**

New Orleans needs a forward-looking economic development strategy rooted in inclusive growth, fiscal responsibility, and regional competitiveness. Our strategic plan must prioritize investments that create long-term, equitable prosperity, particularly through workforce development, small business expansion, and infrastructure that supports job-generating industries like advanced manufacturing, port logistics, biosciences, and film. I will prioritize:

- High-road employment opportunities that pay living wages, provide quality benefits, and offer career advancement to those with or without a four-year postsecondary degree.
- -Affordable commercial space and capital access for local entrepreneurs and legacy businesses.
- Public infrastructure upgrades, especially in transportation and digital connectivity.
- Incentives that reward real results, tied to job creation, local hiring, and community benefit metrics.

I look forward to bringing together public agencies, neighborhood leaders, workforce organizations, and regional partners to align priorities and coordinate subsidies. We want to cultivate transparency and accountability in collaboration with entities like the

Industrial Development Board and special taxing districts. We should all be on the same page with our evaluation criteria, cost-benefit analysis standards, and reporting requirements.

We must reject subsidy-as-default and instead elevate performance-based investments that close market gaps, address disparities, and foster resilience. Our administration would bring both a legal eye to enforce rigor and an equity lens to ensure our economic future includes everyone. Strategic growth is about attracting projects that deliver measurable public value.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The City needs to engage regional businesses by personal contact from its economic agencies. Simply put, they must fan out over the USA and tell the NOLA story. We have the 3 Rs in our

area--river, rail and road and these assets must be made to appeal to the titans of industry.

We can't rely on tourism forever.

A recent trip to Baton Rouge was an eye-opener seeing all the construction going on and the overwhelming business activity.



### HELENA MORENO

New Orleans should emphasize creating a unified vision to achieve prosperity for all. Not just opportunity for some. That means creating broad pathways to prosperity, whether

through workforce training that ends with a job or promoting Job1 and creating workforce hubs, while expanding early opportunities for teen internships and summer jobs, and cultivating, supporting, and empowering local companies and DBEs to bid on city contracts, especially as the prime.

Yet, any strategic plan must focus on getting city hall back to basics when it comes to economic development. That means making it easier to do business with the city. To achieve this, I will revamp safety, permits, and licensing, while strengthening the economic development office to

provide white-glove support for businesses, prioritizing struggling locals and new investors, and ensuring city incentives are consistent, objective, and fair.

To ensure cohesive support, we need plans made in collaboration with our partners, including business, community, and regional stakeholders like GNO, Inc. Through it all, I will ensure support by being a reliable partner, an authentic listener, and a fair deal maker. Knowing that economic development is a team sport, I will also be the city's chief advocate and ambassador, always trying to facilitate, link, and leverage relationships to drive job creation here, in addition to supporting the growth of key industries like the cultural economy, healthcare, and bioscience: logistics, transportation and trade, film and tourism. For more, visit [helenamorenola.com/vision](http://helenamorenola.com/vision)



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Excellent question. First New Orleans will only be open for business when City Hall gets out of the Way. Next crime and public safety and quality of life is required to expect any local, national

or international investment in our City by offering amazing incentives to not only visit and play but stay and Work. Our community needs a solid year round economy and we have the opportunity to create jobs that benefit the City residents. Incent as needed.



### OLIVER THOMAS

A strong economy means everyone thrives. Too often in New Orleans, working people are still struggling to get ahead. That has to change. We must grow our economy from the ground

up, neighborhood by neighborhood, supporting small businesses, creating access to high-wage jobs, and ensuring residents benefit from new development. My priorities include:

- Supporting Small and Minority-owned Businesses including expansion of grants, loans, and city contracts to historically excluded entrepreneurs. We will also expand access to and host more frequent briefings on

upcoming projects, walking interested parties through bidding requirements to promote fairness and transparency in contracting. In partnership with our state and federal partners, develop a Small Business Recovery Fund to help businesses continue to recover from the pandemic and natural disasters.

- Expanding Access to Capital & Economic Mobility by engaging with local banks and credit unions to provide low-interest loans for small businesses and first-time homebuyers. We will also launch an Economic Mobility Task Force to remove barriers to homeownership, improve credit access, and expand workforce training. And we will expand our roof fortification grant program to help homeowners protect their properties from storms, specifically in New Orleans East and other high impacted areas, reducing long-term insurance costs.
- Investing in New Orleans East & Underdeveloped Communities by continuing to prioritize investments in New Orleans East, ensuring access to grocery stores, healthcare, diverse retail options, and economic opportunities. And we will provide incentives to redevelop vacant and underutilized properties, creating job opportunities and economic stability in neighborhoods that need them most.



### **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

New Orleans must shift from extractive, short-term subsidy deals to a people-centered economic development strategy rooted in equity, sustainability, and long-term stability. Our strategic

plan will prioritize local wealth-building, resilient infrastructure, and community ownership over speculative development that drains future tax revenue.

First, we'll end the practice of handing out tax subsidies like free money. Any proposed subsidy, whether through PILOT, TIF, or IDB incentives, must undergo a rigorous and independent cost-benefit analysis that weighs not only projected profits, but also displacement risks, job quality, and long-term community impact. No subsidy should move forward unless it meets clear criteria:

1. Fills a demonstrable market gap,
2. Produces a measurable public benefit, and
3. Includes binding community reinvestment commitments.

We'll require all entities with taxing authority such as IDB, development districts, the City to adopt a shared subsidy framework, including unified evaluation metrics, mandatory public hearings, and a transparency dashboard that allows residents to track commitments and outcomes in real time.

Our plan will center small businesses, worker cooperatives, green jobs, and legacy entrepreneurs; not just big developers. To bring stakeholders together, we'll establish a People's Economic Council that includes residents, small business owners, labor unions, and neighborhood leaders, ensuring that every community has a voice in shaping development priorities. We don't need more luxury condos we need grocery stores, healthcare clinics, and stormproof housing. Our strategy will attract investment, but only the kind that builds community power and generational wealth, not extractive profit.



## 15. What, if any, changes would you pursue to how local tax subsidies for economic development are used and administered in New Orleans?



### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

We are a tourism destination that wants to be everything else. We lose our identity to gamble on becoming something else. But we have infrastructure in place that will support other industries. We offer

We need to concentrate on our medical corridor, where infrastructure is in place and available to numerous medical industries and research opportunities with our local universities.

Can we reclaim our title as Hollywood South?

These are a few opportunities that we are poised to take advantage of at very low cost or expense to the city.

What will the state and other resources provide to help grow these industries and assist in the incentives for them to move here. Our growth and success benefit our state and local parishes not just New Orleans.



### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

See above answer.



### EILEEN CARTER

To improve the use and administration of local tax subsidies for economic development in New Orleans, I would pursue several key reforms for discussion.

First, I would prioritize greater transparency and accountability. Every tax subsidy—whether a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF)—should be fully disclosed with clear reporting on expected

and actual benefits, costs, and impacts on the community. An accessible online dashboard would allow residents and stakeholders to track subsidies in real time, ensuring public oversight of how taxpayer resources are used.

Second, I would establish a rigorous, standardized evaluation process for all subsidy requests. This would require independent market analyses to prove that projects cannot proceed without public support, limit subsidies to the minimum necessary, and include thorough cost-benefit analyses that demonstrate significant positive returns for the city and its neighborhoods. Subsidies should never compensate for developer weaknesses or lack of demand.

Third, I would strengthen community engagement and equity by requiring meaningful input from affected neighborhoods before subsidies are approved. Projects should show how they will avoid negative effects on local businesses and residents, particularly in underserved areas, and aim to foster inclusive growth.

Finally, to overcome fragmented oversight, I would work to coordinate subsidy policies across the City. Forming a unified economic development council could align strategies and ensure subsidies advance New Orleans' long-term economic and equity goals.

These reforms would make tax subsidies more responsible, equitable, and effective tools for sustainable growth.



### ROYCE DUPLESSIS

I support a more disciplined, transparent, and performance-based approach to economic development subsidies in New Orleans. Tax abatements like PILOTs and TIFs must

be treated as long-term public investments, not giveaways. I authored the legislation that brought the River District PILOT to the Council for public scrutiny because I believe residents deserve transparency and a voice in these

decisions.

Moving forward, I would tie all subsidies to clearly defined community benefits and measurable outcomes, such as local hiring, neighborhood reinvestment, and inclusive growth. These tools should only be used when there's a demonstrated gap and a strong return on investment.

We also need to reestablish serious economic development leadership within City Hall. That means investing in the Office of Economic Development, setting clear priorities, and ensuring predictability in permitting and timelines. Businesses need to know that New Orleans is safe, clean, and functional and that we'll meet them with fairness, not red tape or pay-to-play politics.

Our administration will champion projects that create real jobs and lasting value, particularly in sectors such as port logistics and advanced manufacturing, while ensuring economic growth reaches every corner of the city.



### FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The local subsidies need to be monitored with proper oversight to avoid favoritism.



### HELENA MORENO

Emerging and small businesses don't benefit enough from local tax subsidies and incentives, such as Payment In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT) and Restoration Tax Abatements (RTA). There continues to be a perception that politically connected groups receive preferential treatment with vague, subjective criteria and an award process shrouded in obscurity.

BGR has provided several excellent recommendations on this subject that I support, including using a transparent, consistent subsidy approval process run by experts using an objective scoring system. I also support restricting subsidies awarded by external entities such as the Industrial Development Board (IDB) to projects supported by the city's office of economic development and the city council, which

should have a strong voice in any decision to allocate future tax revenue.

Working with a diverse array of stakeholders, I have already led the effort to establish a consistent level of expectations for RTAs and will be moving forward with legislation to revamp the process. As mayor, I will conduct additional reviews and recommend changes to ensure that incentives/subsidies are provided consistently, objectively, and fairly distributed.



### FRANK M. SCURLOCK

Give anyone willing to invest new dollars in job creation and economic prosperity a chance to call New Orleans home



### OLIVER THOMAS

It's essential to closely manage and partner with those receiving economic development tax subsidies. My team will create a citywide comprehensive development plan to provide clarity and predictability for businesses and neighborhoods, instead of negotiating development deals project by project. We will develop district-specific development plans in partnership with neighborhoods, council districts, and businesses like the New Orleans East Renaissance plan. In addition, we will establish clear, measurable accountability markers for all city tax breaks and business incentives to ensure public dollars deliver real benefits. And, to promote transparency, we will implement a digital dashboard tracking economic incentives, ensuring visibility on where taxpayer money is going.



### RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS

First, I would mandate that all subsidy proposals undergo independent cost-benefit analysis, with strict criteria: the project must fill a genuine market gap, produce measurable community benefits, and require only the minimum subsidy needed to proceed. No more blank checks for undercapitalized

developers or projects that don't meet public demand.

Second, I would centralize oversight of all local subsidy-granting bodies under a unified, transparent framework. This would include public hearings, a centralized application portal, and a publicly accessible dashboard tracking all active subsidies, project progress, and benefit compliance.

Third, I would ban subsidies for projects that displace communities, gentrify neighborhoods, or harm local small businesses. Subsidies must support projects that align with

community needs: grocery stores, healthcare clinics, storm-resilient housing, and green infrastructure.

Finally, I would tie all subsidies to binding community reinvestment agreements including local hiring requirements, living wages, and infrastructure contributions. Subsidies are not free money they are investments of public trust. I'll make sure they deliver real returns to the people who need them most.

### Background Provided to All Candidates

BGR has documented the sharply rising costs of pensions for public employees in a series of reports. The City's total annual pension contributions have increased nearly 50% from [\\$78 million in 2010](#) to more than \$110 million this year. BGR's [research](#) linked the problem to several factors, including benefits that far exceed national norms, past underfunding by the City, poor investment decisions, and overly optimistic assumptions about investment returns.

The City adopted a series of pension reforms during the last decade. These included increasing funding for pensions and lowering benefits for newly hired employees aside from police officers. However, the City has already reversed some of these reforms, and the rest are at risk.

Starting in 2018, the City reduced pension benefits to match national norms for new hires in the New Orleans Municipal Employees' Retirement System (NOMERS),

which includes all City employees except police and firefighters. But the City [reversed many of the reforms in 2020](#) with almost no public discussion or justification.

Another set of reforms for the New Orleans Fire Fighters' pension fund are part of a landmark 2016 legal settlement. The settlement includes higher annual contributions from the City and lower benefits for new firefighters. Voters also approved a 2.5-mill tax to help fund the settlement, which has made limited progress on improving the pension fund's financial health. BGR found in 2024 that the ratio of the fund's assets to its liabilities is just 11.5%. The recommended goal is 100%, and anything less than 70% is cause for serious concern. Despite the fund's continued poor health, firefighters and pension system officials have stated their [desire to undo the reforms](#). Meanwhile, the City's current annual contribution of \$45 million would need to increase by [\\$23 million](#) to put the fund on track to be fully funded, according to the fund's annual actuarial report.

### On pensions, BGR asked the candidates:

**16.** How should the City address the substantial costs of pensions while ensuring its total compensation packages for current and new employees are competitive? Please be specific about the changes you would pursue.



#### JOSEPH "JOE" BIKULEGE JR.

This is an area we have struggled in. We have underfunded and provided for pension programs.

We promise what we don't have and kicked this problem down the road to future administrations.

We owe these funds and as some lawsuits have decided we have to pay.

We have built a system we cannot support or sustain.

Pensions are an area that we will definitely need assistance in handling and managing. They are complicated and require people and input from companies and firms

that excel in these areas.

I would pursue conversations and discussions with other cities that we compare to in size and economic status that have success in this area. This may not help with our owed funds solution but will help us to create new packages for the future new employees that are fair, competitive and sustainable.



#### "MANNY CHEVROLET" BRUNO

Very carefully.





## EILEEN CARTER

To effectively address New Orleans' rising pension costs while maintaining competitive compensation, the City must implement a balanced and transparent strategy informed by expert

advice.

First, the City should recommit to pension reforms that align benefits with national standards for all new hires, including police and firefighters. Previous rollbacks of reforms must be halted, and future changes should be made only after thorough public consultation to ensure transparency and community trust.

Second, the City needs a clear, long-term funding plan to steadily increase pension contributions, particularly for the Fire Fighters' pension fund, which is critically underfunded at 11.5%. Incremental contribution increases guided by actuarial data will help close this gap without causing abrupt budget strains.

Third, pension fund investment strategies require revision. Adopting realistic return assumptions and diversifying assets can reduce risk, addressing past issues of over-optimism and poor investment choices highlighted by BGR. Strengthening independent oversight will enhance accountability in pension management.

Fourth, complementary approaches should be explored, such as phased benefit adjustments for future hires and introducing alternative retirement plans like defined contribution options to lower long-term liabilities while preserving retirement security.

Finally, to keep compensation attractive, the City should enhance non-pension benefits like professional development, flexible work arrangements, and wellness initiatives, ensuring fiscal responsibility on pension costs.

This comprehensive approach balances fiscal sustainability with the need to recruit and retain skilled public employees essential for New Orleans' continued growth and resilience.



## ROYCE DUPLESSIS

New Orleans must take a thoughtful and transparent approach to managing long-term pension obligations with a focus that protects the retirement security of our public employees while ensuring fiscal responsibility

and competitive compensation. Our goal must be to honor commitments, promote predictability, and build a sustainable path forward.

For the New Orleans Municipal Employees' Retirement System, we should revisit the tiered approach adopted in 2018 for new hires. That policy brought our system closer to national norms and helped improve financial stability. Any future changes would be handled carefully, with broad stakeholder input, actuarial analysis, and public transparency.

When it comes to the Fire Fighters' Pension Fund, we must continue honoring the 2016 settlement. We would approach any proposed changes with caution and only consider adjustments if supported by credible, independent analysis and negotiated in good faith.

To inform these decisions, we may need a comprehensive independent review of our pension systems that models different scenarios and provides a clear picture of our options. Our city must be proactive and prepare responsibly for the future.

We can and must continue to offer fair, competitive compensation. But we should also look at modern tools like pay equity reviews, better recruitment strategies, and non-monetary benefits to support and retain our public workforce while preserving long-term financial health. This is about building trust, not breaking it.



## FRANK ROBERT JANUSA

The City to move away from a traditional pension system and move toward something like a 401(k) type plan.

Pension investments need more oversight. The poor investments of the past are shameful.



## HELENA MORENO

Already, the city is spending tens of millions of dollars annually just on retirement benefits for former employees. We must fulfill our commitments and, at the same time,

strengthen the fiscal health of these pensions so they are there for the next generation. Each pension fund is different, but in the long term, nearly all will require additional resources to compensate for the surge in costs that has widened the gap between the money available for pensions and what retirees will need.

More specifically, we should not roll back reforms made to the Fire Fighters Pension Fund. Those changes make the fund more stable, ensuring it will be there for its members.

We also need to urgently address what is happening with the Municipal Police Employees Retirement System (MPERS), which is levying huge fines against New Orleans due to an obscure law passed in 2018 that creates a standard where fines kick in if more than 50 officers depart over a one-year period, which disproportionately penalizes large departments. NOPD has likely literally never lost fewer than 50 police officers in a year due to the well-known high attrition rate of police departments. An intergovernmental or legislative fix is needed for fairness's sake.



## FRANK M. SCURLOCK

What a nightmare and why the whole city needs to be restructured.

Buyouts should be offered in hopes the debt can be balanced but the endgame is to create an economy while

facing a declining population base by lack of trust in City Hall.

It's broke. Let's fix it together. We should and can work for favorable settlements by working together not against.



## OLIVER THOMAS

The BGR report underscores what many New Orleanians already feel in their bones—our city's financial foundation is strained, and the growing cost of pensions is one of the clearest

warning signs.

I believe deeply in honoring the service of our public employees—especially our firefighters, who put their lives on the line for this city. But leadership requires facing hard truths. Right now, we are paying more into our pension systems than ever before—over \$110 million annually—and still falling behind. That's not sustainable.

The 2016 firefighter pension settlement was a major compromise: the City agreed to contribute more, and in return, future benefits were brought closer to national norms. That agreement was backed by voters, who approved a new 2.5-mill property tax to support it. Today, just eight years later, the fund is still only 11.5% funded—the worst in the country—and some want to roll back those hard-won reforms. That's financially risky and a breach of public trust.

As mayor, I will not support reversing pension reforms without hard data, full transparency, and City Council involvement. Any proposed change must undergo rigorous fiscal analysis, independent review, and public input. We cannot jeopardize our ability to deliver basic services—like fixing potholes, cleaning streets, and keeping our neighborhoods safe—by making decisions that ignore financial reality.

At the same time, we need to ensure our public servants are paid fairly and have retirement security. That means we need to do the real work: conduct independent staffing and compensation studies, fix hiring pipelines, and modernize our HR systems.

This isn't about austerity—it's about accountability. I'm committed to building a city that works for everyone, and that starts with getting our financial house in order. Pension stability isn't just a budget issue—it's a trust issue. And I intend to lead with both eyes open.



## **RICHARD "RICKY" TWIGGS**

New Orleans has the opportunity to build the most progressive and sustainable public pension system in the United States—one that balances worker dignity with long-term fiscal

health.

Other cities like San Diego and Atlanta have adopted hybrid pension models, combining modest defined benefits with 401(k)-style contributions to control long-term liability. Austin ties contributions to strict actuarial performance. But these systems still operate behind closed doors, with little transparency or innovation. We can do better. I would reinstate the 2018 NOMERS reforms, which responsibly aligned new hire benefits with national norms. Reversing them in 2020, without public input, was fiscally reckless.

Next, we'll implement a New Orleans Hybrid Equity Model that includes:

1. A modest, guaranteed pension

2. An employee-owned retirement savings plan with City matching and optional contributions from our Bitcoin Strategic Reserve Credit Union
3. Green and local infrastructure investment options
4. Real-time public dashboards tracking fund health, investments, and returns

For underfunded systems like the Fire Fighters' pension, we'll pursue shared governance, independent audits, and performance-based contributions with transparency and discipline. Legal obligations will be honored, but future increases must be tied to reform and measurable outcomes.

Our Strategic Reserve Credit Union, backed by digital assets and community deposits, can help generate long-term investment yield for pensions without burdening taxpayers. We will also embed pension planning in a 10-year fiscal blueprint, aligning it with housing, energy, and infrastructure goals. This isn't about cutting benefits it's about reimagining retirement security to serve both workers and the city they protect.