Questions for a New Parish President

Candidates’ Views on Important Issues Facing Parish Government

OCTOBER 12, 2019 ELECTION
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The Bureau of Governmental Research 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 the New Orleans metropolitan area.

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# Table of Contents

- **Introduction to the Candidate Q&A Election Series**  .... 1

- **Parish Government Finances: General Fund**  
  1. What course of action would you recommend to position the General Fund to keep up with rising costs?  
  2. Do you intend to make any changes in the capital planning process to improve accountability for departments with surplus funds? Please explain your answer.  
  3. What other opportunities do you see for improving Jefferson Parish Government’s assortment of dedicated taxes based on the BGR framework?

- **Parish Government Finances: Dedicated Taxes**  .... 4
  2. Do you intend to make any changes in the capital planning process to improve accountability for departments with surplus funds? Please explain your answer.

- **Parish Government Finances: Infrastructure**  .... 7
  4. What do you see as the Parish’s major unfunded infrastructure needs and how would you address them?
  5. Do you see opportunities for the Parish government to introduce new processes or modes of execution to more efficiently and effectively rebuild and maintain its infrastructure? Please explain your answer.

- **Effective Government**  .... 10
  6. Please give three examples of how Jefferson Parish government should improve its use of existing public resources to achieve more effective Parish government.

- **Contracting: Service Contracting**  .... 11
  7. Do you agree or disagree with BGR’s recommendation that the Parish President, rather than the Parish Council, should have the authority to approve service contracts? Please explain your position.
  8. If service contracting authority remains with the Parish Council, what changes, if any, should the Council make to the Parish’s contracting processes?

- **Contracting: East Jefferson General Hospital**  .... 14
  9. How satisfied are you with the level of transparency and accountability the current negotiation process provides? Are there any improvements you would suggest? Please explain your answer.

- **Inspector General**  .... 16
  10. Would you change the Parish Administration’s process for reviewing and responding to Inspector General recommendations? Please explain your answer.
  11. Do you intend to take steps to promote a culture of ethical performance in Jefferson Parish government? If so, what are they?

- **Public Transit**  .... 19
  12. What changes, if any, should Jefferson Transit explore to improve its own operations and services?
  13. What ideas should Jefferson Transit pursue to improve regional transit connectivity or service with New Orleans Regional Transit Authority or other parishes?

- **Economic Development**  .... 22
  14. Do you agree with the principles for economic development tax subsidies identified by BGR? If there are points with which you disagree, please state what they are and explain the approach you would take.
  15. Do you think the Parish has granted unnecessary subsidies? If so, how would you prevent them in the future?

- **Quality of Life**  .... 25
  16. Please discuss your top priorities for improving the quality of life for parish residents and how you would achieve them.
This fall, voters will select the leadership of Jefferson Parish government (Parish) for the next four years. They will choose a new parish president and council in the October 12 primary election followed by the November 16 runoff.

As voters weigh their decisions, they should ask how the candidates will confront the challenges the Parish faces today. Some of the most important ones include: managing the Parish’s General Fund budget amid extensive tax dedications; investing in essential infrastructure; improving Parish contracting; sustaining East Jefferson General Hospital; and ensuring ethical government. Parish leaders also will guide future delivery of services that help Jefferson Parish attract and retain residents and businesses. These include public transit, economic development and other aspects of the quality of life in Jefferson Parish.

Voters should further ask how the candidates will operate Parish government efficiently and effectively. Voters should require the candidates to propose specific ideas for how they would make Parish government work better for the citizens it serves.

To assist voters in this endeavor, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) prepared its Candidate Q&A Election Series to frame a dialogue for the 2019 Parish government elections. BGR developed the questions from its body of research. It distributed a set of 16 questions to all candidates for the offices of Parish President and Parish Council. The questionnaires included a summary of each topic based on BGR’s research. BGR asked the candidates to submit their answers in writing. BGR mailed the questionnaires to the candidates on August 14 and followed up to encourage responses.

This report presents the responses of the candidates for parish president. BGR has published the responses of council candidates in a separate report. Both reports are available on BGR’s website, www.bgr.org.

Each report provides topic summaries, the questions each candidate received, and candidate responses. For each question, BGR presents the candidates’ answers in the order in which the candidates will appear on the October 12 ballot. BGR publishes the answers as they were submitted, with two exceptions. First, BGR corrected non-substantive, typographical errors where necessary for readability. Second, BGR excerpted responses that significantly exceeded the 200-word limit stated in our questionnaire. In choosing what to excerpt, BGR used its best efforts to preserve the substance of the candidate’s answer to the question. Any deletion is marked by an ellipsis (“…”); if no ellipsis appears, then the answer is the candidate’s entire response. Candidates were aware of the 200-word limit and the consequence of exceeding it.

BGR did not reject any candidate’s submission. Two of the three candidates for parish president responded:

• Cynthia Lee Sheng
• John Young

The other candidate, Lee Bonnecarrere, did not respond.

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GENERAL FUND

In its 2004 report, Jefferson Parish’s Fiscal Outlook, BGR expressed concern about excessive dedication of Jefferson Parish’s tax revenue to specific purposes. BGR recommended that Jefferson Parish Government (Parish) either release dedications or increase its General Fund millage to enhance fiscal flexibility as needs change. Unfortunately, the issues highlighted in that report persist. In Jefferson Parish’s 2019 budget, approximately 84% of Parish tax revenue is dedicated, leaving only 16% for the General Fund.

Today, the Parish’s General Fund faces significant financial constraints. It is the Parish’s primary funding source for certain costs mandated by the State of Louisiana (State). These include funding for the Jefferson Parish District Attorney’s Office, the parish’s courts and the parish jail. Collectively, State-mandated costs account for 41% of the General Fund’s $98 million budget in 2019. On top of this, the General Fund pays for Parish departments that do not have a dedicated source of revenue, such as code enforcement, planning and emergency management.

Sales and property taxes provide nearly half of General Fund revenue, and these have grown only slightly during the past five years. The Parish’s 2019 budget indicates that it has become more difficult each year to maintain the targeted 14% reserve for the General Fund.

In reviewing the Parish’s past requests for voter renewal of dedicated taxes, BGR has repeatedly noted the risk that Jefferson Parish will be unable to fall back on its General Fund if a millage for a specific service fails. Increasing the size of the General Fund would enhance the Parish’s ability to address emerging or unforeseen needs. And because public resources are finite, it is important that public bodies have sufficient capacity to redeploy them efficiently and effectively to maximize the benefits for the community as a whole.

The Tax Re-Dedication Advisory Committee earlier this year found that the Jefferson Parish Council (Parish Council) has bypassed one avenue for raising General Fund revenue. While it has “rolled back” the General Fund’s constitutionally-authorized property tax after each parish-wide property reassessment – as required by Louisiana’s constitution to keep tax collections revenue neutral – the council has not exercised its constitutional authority to restore the rate to the pre-assessment level to capture the benefit of tax base growth. Without “rolling forward,” the General Fund tax of 4 mills is now 1.31 mills, causing the General Fund to forego $8.6 million a year.

The constitution’s roll-forward provision creates a “use it or lose it” situation for taxing authorities. If a millage is not rolled forward before the next reassessment, that millage rate becomes the new maximum rate. Thus, Jefferson Parish’s current maximum on the General Fund tax is 1.35 mills, leaving little room for the council to increase the tax on its own. By contrast, the committee found that most governments “roll forward” their constitutional millage after reassessment, keeping it at or near the allowed maximum. The committee recommended that the Parish Council seek voter approval to increase this tax, or authorize a new property tax to help offset the State-mandated costs. BGR has not taken a position on which approach is preferable, or if another alternative should be considered. However, it has urged policymakers considering a “roll forward” to take into account the community’s overall priorities and the community’s ability to shoulder an increased tax burden.
### I. What course of action would you recommend to position the General Fund to keep up with rising costs?

| **Cynthia Lee Sheng** | Pursuant to the Parish Charter, the Council as the governing authority of the Parish has the sole authority to set millage rates. As Parish President I am committed to reduce costs through consolidation of services, outsourcing where possible, and eliminating inefficiencies each of which combined with collaboration with our municipalities to achieve better economies of scale will ensure a sustainable General Fund. I will work with the Council to ensure that all millages are successfully renewed through timely education of the public in advance of any referendum, avoiding another millage failure, which might expose the General Fund. |
| **John Young** | I oppose any and all new taxes. In dealing with rising costs, I will again, as I did when I served previously as Parish President, scrub the budget to identify and cut waste, use zero-base budgeting that requires departments to justify their performances, and work to streamline government to create cost efficiency. I will examine all avenues with a view to prudently redirecting revenue. I will work with our legislative delegation to fight the imposition upon the Parish of unfunded state mandates. I will work to rededicate Council Discretionary Funds to the General Fund, to strengthen public safety and critical infrastructure and make appropriations more transparent. |
DEDICATED TAXES

Dedicating taxes to specific purposes, rather than to general purposes, is a common approach in Louisiana. From this perspective, the Parish’s heavily dedicated budget is not unusual. But tax dedications can distort a government’s budget picture and constrain future budget allocations. This occurs because dedicated tax revenue is unavailable when elected officials annually allocate public resources among competing needs and respond to new ones. For this reason, when BGR analyzes ballot propositions to impose or renew dedicated taxes, it uses a three-part analytical framework to evaluate the proposition:

1. **Is the tax necessary?** The government asking voters to impose or renew a tax bears a burden of proof that (1) there is a clear, high-priority need for the dedicated revenue, (2) it sought efficiencies in current spending, and (3) the proposition is the best way to meet the need.

2. **Is the tax appropriately sized to the need?** The size of any dedicated tax should be aligned with the identified needs. A misalignment between a tax’s size and the recipient’s revenue needs can lead to inefficiencies. If the tax is too low, it might not generate sufficient revenue to provide necessary public goods or services. If the tax is too high, the entity may receive more revenue than its needs to fulfill the tax’s dedicated purpose.

3. **Will the tax revenue be well spent?** Tax dedications limit elected officials’ discretion to redeploy tax revenues to address new circumstances. This can lead to allocations of tax revenues that are not aligned with the community’s most pressing needs. Tax dedications may also reduce taxpayers’ tolerance for future millage requests despite the merits of the proposition. To minimize these risks, a dedicated tax proposal should offer voters (1) a clear plan for directing tax proceeds to high-priority needs, (2) assurance of appropriate financial stewardship and accountability for taxpayer dollars, and (3) evidence that demonstrates the potential for effective outcomes.

The Tax Re-Dedication Advisory Committee’s recent report to the Parish Council found that several Parish departments with dedicated taxes have substantial fund balances but no formal capital plans for spending that money. The committee found that their capital needs “seemed to be just lists of projects put together with estimated cost.” If these departments do not pursue these projects, surplus funds may persist. The committee called for a more formal capital planning process for these departments. It provided an example of a systematic approach that identifies major capital purchases, the year of purchase and estimated cost, and a schedule of reserve amounts for those items. Formal capital plans could also allow the Parish to clarify its financial reporting of departments’ fund balances, showing officials and the public what reserve amount is set aside for future capital projects and what remains available for other uses.
2. **Do you intend to make any changes in the capital planning process to improve accountability for departments with surplus funds? Please explain your answer.**

| **Cynthia Lee Sheng** | Among the key lessons I learned from the Tax Millage Re-dedication Advisory Committee that I formed is the importance of long-term capital outlook. Because those needs are currently being met on an ad hoc basis, as Parish President I will adopt a formal policy requiring all departments to have a long-term capital budget. |
| **John Young** | It is unwise policy to allow parish departments who benefit from dedicated taxes to sit on surplus funds without offering detailed, concrete, transparent capital plans for expenditures. I support BGR’s framework that calls for a more formal capital planning process. Departments should identify major capital purchases, the year of purchase and estimated cost, and a schedule of reserve amounts for those items. |
3. **What other opportunities do you see for improving Jefferson Parish Government’s assortment of dedicated taxes based on the BGR framework?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cynthia Lee Sheng</strong></th>
<th>As Parish President, I will consider every opportunity to consolidate services where appropriate in order to maximize resources and opportunities to leverage dedicated dollars.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>John Young</strong></td>
<td>BGR’s framework calling for formal capital plans will allow the Parish to clarify its financial reporting of department fund balances, show officials and the public what reserve amount has been set aside for future capital projects and what remains available for other uses. This process will require fiscal discipline which, as Parish President, I will bring to the capital planning process.</td>
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INFRASTRUUTURE

Public infrastructure is a prerequisite for a robust economy and a high quality of life. Functional roads, bridges, water, sewer and drainage systems can help attract businesses and residents; their absence likewise can have a significant detrimental effect. The Parish currently has several dedicated taxes that fund the development, maintenance, and improvement of Jefferson Parish infrastructure. BGR has examined tax renewals for parish infrastructure in multiple On the Ballot reports in recent years. These have included the 2013 renewal of taxes for water and sewer systems, the 2016 renewal of a Parish sales tax for road, sewerage and drainage projects, and a 2018 property tax renewal for drainage.

Despite voter renewal of those tax dedications, some Parish departments informed the Tax Re-Dedication Advisory Committee that they will likely require additional funding to meet long-term infrastructure needs. For example, the Water Department estimated it would need $60 million in capital funding beyond what its existing revenues and reserves can bear to pay for the replacement of the aging East Bank water treatment plants, which were built between 1931 and 1958.

The East Bank water treatment plants on Jefferson Highway.
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<th>What do you see as the Parish’s major unfunded infrastructure needs and how would you address them?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cynthia Lee Sheng</strong></td>
<td>Water, sewerage and drainage consistently present the biggest challenge to our infrastructure needs. As Parish President I will continue partnerships with the Regional Planning Commission, the Corps of Engineers (SELA) and others to leverage available Parish dollars and maximize delivery of Parish services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>John Young</strong></td>
<td>Addressing infrastructure needs such as replacing water treatment plants, which were built between 1931 and 1958, is estimated to cost $60 million more than existing Water Department revenues. Delay in improving water, sewage and drainage places public health and safety at risk while driving up the costs of required changes. I propose bonding out these critical infrastructure projects now to provide needed revenues. That will avoid the expense of delay and the necessity of new taxes. I emphasize: I oppose any and all new taxes.</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Do you see opportunities for the Parish government to introduce new processes or modes of execution to more efficiently and effectively rebuild and maintain its infrastructure? Please explain your answer.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cynthia Lee Sheng</strong></td>
<td>We need to explore ways to better manage and live with stormwater runoff. We must transform our region into the place where the rest of the world comes for its green infrastructure technology. Development and deployment of these technologies will help us to better manage water thereby minimizing subsidence, which detrimentally affects our entire infrastructure.</td>
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<td><strong>John Young</strong></td>
<td>The change in the Parish Administration is an opportunity to bring fiscal discipline to the capital budget planning process. I see bonding, not taxing, as Jefferson’s solution to rebuilding and maintaining its infrastructure. Strong Parish finances are essential to maintaining a good bond rating and low interest rates. I note that even my opponent, Cynthia Lee Sheng, is on record as praising my management of Parish finances while I served previously as Parish President. I will again bring prudent and firm financial management to these finances.</td>
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EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT

The mission of the Bureau of Governmental Research is to provide independent research to support informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources. BGR recognizes that each candidate enters the race with a vision for improving the Parish government and delivering more effective and efficient services to citizens.

6. Please give three examples of how Jefferson Parish government should improve its use of existing public resources to achieve more effective Parish government.

Cynthia Lee Sheng

As Parish President I would utilize the following basic techniques to improve Parish Government.

a. Complete an inventory of existing resources within the Parish identifying duplication of services as well as underutilized assets. This effort would include communication and coordination with the leadership of the municipal governments within Jefferson. I believe that with more efficient utilization of existing resources we can achieve higher levels of service.

b. Explore opportunities for partnerships on an intergovernmental basis and with qualified non-profits. This would include initiatives like the most recent effort to provide transit service across parish lines allowing workers in Orleans to ride to their workplace in Jefferson (at Ochsner) without having to ‘transfer’ from one bus to another. This is an initiative that I championed as an at-large Councilperson. It works well for all concerned and it demonstrates the kind of regional effort that I would bring to the job as Parish President.

c. Improve coordination between departments: All too often our departments function within their own ‘silos’ and without the input or knowledge from a sister department, which is engaged in work that directly or indirectly affects a project or a neighborhood. Regular communication between departments is essential and it is clearly the responsibility of the Parish President.

John Young

(1) Cut waste without putting public safety at risk or sacrificing critical services.
(2) Redirect Council Discretionary Funds to the General Fund for more transparent appropriations, to strengthen and improve public safety, infrastructure and improve public health, especially our air and water quality.
(3) Through the Office of the Inspector General, look for innovation and efficiency that reduce overhead and costs.
SERVICES CONTRACTING

In 2012, BGR published *Private Services in the Public Interest: Reforming Jefferson Parish’s Unusual Approach to Service Contracting*, recommending several changes to Jefferson Parish’s service contracting processes. The report found that Jefferson Parish’s processes were unusual in that they gave the Parish Council unfettered authority in contractor selection. In most other jurisdictions with an elected chief executive like a parish president, the executive branch is responsible for the contracting process from beginning to end. In those cases where the legislative branch has any role, it is typically limited to a final ratification of contracts valued above a certain dollar amount. Further, while some proponents of council control viewed it as a necessary check on the administration, the council’s overly broad selection criteria did not provide appropriate controls or safeguards.

BGR recommended that parish voters shift responsibility for service contracting from the Parish Council to the executive branch to better align responsibilities and powers. But regardless of who controls the contracts, BGR called for reining in the broad discretion of elected officials. It recommended that the Parish Council or the Parish President select the proposal that scores the highest in a rigorous evaluation, or terminate the procurement.

The Parish Council did not pursue the recommendation to transfer contracting authority to the executive branch, but instead made certain reforms to one contracting process, the Request for Proposals (RFP) process for nonprofessional services, in 2014. These reforms improved the RFP process, although they did not go as far as BGR recommended. Notably, the council maintains the ability to select the proposal of its preference, as long as that proposal received a cumulative score within 10% of the highest scoring proposer. Further, the council retains its discretion to select professional service contractors through a separate contracting process; the only limitation is that the contractor is deemed qualified by the evaluation committee.
7. Do you agree or disagree with BGR’s recommendation that the Parish President, rather than the Parish Council, should have the authority to approve service contracts? Please explain your position.

**Cynthia Lee Sheng**  
The Home Rule Charter for Jefferson Parish calls for a formal periodic evaluation every ten years. Extensions or limitations on the authority of the Parish President are set out in the Charter. A change in that authority should, in my opinion, be made with a change to the Charter and, thus a vote of the people. I support any effort to include a review of the Parish President’s authority in any such Charter review.

**John Young**  
Yes. The Jefferson Performing Arts Center is a good example of why we need a “good of the parish” approach to contracting. It’s a good example that illustrates this need. What began as a $26.5 million district project cost the Parish nearly $55 million to complete. We have to do better than that and we can.
8. **If service contracting authority remains with the Parish Council, what changes, if any, should the Council make to the Parish’s contracting processes?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cynthia Lee Sheng</th>
<th>In my observation the most important aspect of effectiveness in contract administration is frequent and forthright communication between the Council and the Parish President. The Council needs to receive comprehensive and detailed information from the Parish President and the relevant department head regarding any proposed contractor. As Parish President I will make it a priority to communicate regularly with members of the Council and to build a consensus regarding contract requirements and qualifications. I do think it is important to note that, in the interest of disclosure, each contractor selected by the Council is required to submit a sworn affidavit which details the name of any Council member to whom he has contributed and the amount of any and all such contribution. That information is available to all pursuant to Louisiana’s Public Records Act.</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Young</td>
<td>When I was Parish President before, I invited BGR to examine the Parish’s contracting process. I supported BGR’s proposed contracting reforms then and still do. If elected, I will again seek BGR recommendations to improve this process, to ensure that it is fair-minded, accountable, and transparent.</td>
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EAST JEFFERSON GENERAL HOSPITAL

The Parish Council governs two hospital service districts, one on the East Bank and the other on the West Bank. The East Bank district owns East Jefferson General Hospital, while the West Bank district owns West Jefferson Medical Center.

State law authorizes each district to lease their hospitals to private operators, subject to council approval. In 2015, the Parish Council approved a long-term lease with LCMC Health, a New Orleans-based, nonprofit health system, to operate West Jefferson’s hospital and clinics and invest in capital improvements. The lease agreement wrapped up a difficult three-year selection and negotiation process that underscored the Parish Council’s problems with selecting contractors, as BGR noted in a 2013 report.

Meanwhile, the East Bank district unsuccessfully pursued a private operator for several years as its financial condition deteriorated. Then, in June 2019, its board of directors announced that it had begun negotiations with LCMC Health regarding an undetermined “strategic affiliation.” It further stated that the process would take several months and that both sides have entered into a confidentiality agreement.

Following this release, the current Parish President wrote to the Parish Council to raise concern about the confidential negotiations. The president stated they will likely place the administration and council “in the awkward position of being asked to ratify potential deal points without ever having the ability to discuss negotiations or points of interest.” He called on the Parish Council to become more actively involved in the negotiations and protect the public’s interest in the hospital by retaining a qualified advisor to represent the Parish in the negotiations, including any lease proposal which would require council approval. The hospital’s board responded that it has provided information to Parish Council members about the negotiations and the possible affiliation with LCMC Health and would make the same available to the president, but did not comment on his request for a Parish advisor. On July 24, the Parish Council authorized a request for proposals for a financial advisor to provide a “fairness opinion” of the potential affiliation transaction.
9. How satisfied are you with the level of transparency and accountability the current negotiation process provides? Are there any improvements you would suggest? Please explain your answer.

| **Cynthia Lee Sheng** | The Parish President is represented on the Board of East General Hospital through an appointee named by him/her. Accordingly, through that nominee, the Parish President receives regular communication regarding the status of negotiations of any proposed lease agreement. Accordingly, in my view the Parish President is adequately advised on issues regarding any lease. Over the past ten years the healthcare industry has been transformed through complex rules requiring partnerships in order to achieve economies of scale to remain competitive. Private hospitals recognized this and have consolidated thereby presenting challenges for stand-alone hospitals such as ours. I support seeking specialized outside expertise to ensure that whatever affiliation is presented is properly evaluated to obtain the best outcome for the future of our hospital. |
| **John Young** | I am not satisfied. It is a mess. Example: East Jefferson General Hospital Emergency Room at Veterans and Clearview – an avoidable boondoggle that will never be completed – has already cost $8 million in lease costs and capital improvements. Millions more are at risk as a result of costly litigation that has arisen out of this problem. The current negotiation process is a scandal. It is not transparent. There is no accountability. Let’s bear in mind: East Jefferson General Hospital is a public hospital. It is drowning in debt. Wasteful spending is bleeding out millions of dollars. As President of Jefferson Parish, I will insist on transparency and accountability in the negotiations. That includes allowing the news media, BGR, and other stakeholders full access to what is unfolding. The citizens of Jefferson Parish are entitled to responsible and accountable government. |
In 2011, Jefferson Parish voters created the Office of the Inspector General and an Ethics and Compliance Commission to appoint and oversee the Inspector General. The commission also administers Parish ethics laws and may issue advisory opinions and develop rules for the interpretation and enforcement of those laws. The commission’s scope extends to Jefferson Parish employees, officials and others who receive public funds, perform Parish governmental functions, do business with the Parish, or are in a position to influence the conduct of Parish employees or officials. BGR supported the creation of these bodies, citing the effectiveness of other city and county inspectors general and ethics commissions.

The effectiveness of a local inspector general’s office depends on several factors. To ensure its independence, the office must have sufficient funding from a source that cannot be reduced or withheld by the individuals and entities that fall under the inspector general’s purview. It must have, among other things, broad investigatory powers and access to records and individuals, as well as independence in operational decision making. Jefferson Parish voters, when they created the office of inspector general, endowed it with broad powers. They also approved a dedicated tax to support the office.

Since then, disagreements have emerged between the office and the Parish administration and council regarding corrective actions in response to inspector general reports. In the office’s 2018 annual report, the Inspector General stated that the Parish rarely submits a corrective action plan detailing specific actions, responsible staff, time frames for completion and methods of measuring outcomes. Further, the Inspector General noted the Parish Council does not respond collectively to recommendations.

Currently, Parish law does not set forth any requirements for the Parish administration or council relative to corrective actions. The Jefferson Parish Charter is silent on the matter. The Parish’s Code of Ordinances only establishes a process for the inspector general to submit findings to the affected person or entity before publication and incorporate any explanation or rebuttal in the final report or recommendation. Nationally recommended practices for inspectors general acknowledge that ultimate success depends on whether necessary corrective actions are taken. However, they do not prescribe a process for planning and executing those actions. Therefore, it is up to the appropriate officials to decide whether and how to act on inspector general recommendations, and the inspector general to monitor their response.
## 10. Would you change the Parish Administration’s process for reviewing and responding to Inspector General recommendations? Please explain your answer.

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cynthia Lee Sheng</strong></td>
<td>As Parish President I will continue my practice of full transparency and cooperation with the Inspector General and will require all departments under my authority to fully cooperate with the Inspector General in any investigation. I will implement a policy of responding to any draft reports conducted on departments or matters under Parish President authority and commit to continue to work with the Inspector General and the Council to implement corrective action plans where required.</td>
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<td><strong>John Young</strong></td>
<td>No. As Parish President, I provided leadership to create the Office of the Inspector General – an office created without new taxes. The Inspector General’s (IG) role is to investigate and make recommendations. It is the responsibility of the Parish President and Council to review the IG’s recommendations and to take appropriate actions. Ultimately, it is up to the citizens to hold the Inspector General, President, and Council accountable.</td>
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II. **Do you intend to take steps to promote a culture of ethical performance in Jefferson Parish government? If so, what are they?**

**Cynthia Lee Sheng**

I believe that transparency, accountability, and professional and personal ethics are paramount to being a good public servant and steward of the public’s money. As a district council member I drafted and sponsored legislation mandating financial disclosure for all non-classified employees. As Parish President I will ensure that all employees receive proper and regularly updated training regarding ethics and workplace culture in order to maintain the integrity of services and a professional environment for workers and constituents of the Parish.

**John Young**

As Parish President before, I ensured that the values of trust and integrity guided Parish employees’ professional interactions, governed the way they treated others, and inspired a dedication to superior public service, high ethical standards and indisputable integrity.

I restructured the organization of Parish government departments to strengthen efficiency and accountability with a greater emphasis upon the protection and lawful use of public assets and resources. I required unclassified employees to make their public job their sole employment to ensure that taxpayers got the best bang for their buck.

I held my staff accountable for their actions by requiring each to take the constitutional oath of office to obey the law, and to annually complete ethics training by the state ethics board. I designated the Parish Attorney as the liaison to the Louisiana Ethics Administration to ensure this goal was achieved.

I cancelled parish government-issued credit cards for all employees, including my own; limited the travel of Parish employees, and prohibited all international travel. I revised administrative processes to ensure compliance with the public records law and provided citizens with convenient access to public records.

I ensured a strong culture of ethical performance before. Will do so again if elected as Parish President.
PUBLIC TRANSIT

In 2017, BGR supported tax renewals for the maintenance of public transit services in Jefferson Parish in its On the Ballot report series. However, BGR’s support came with recommendations to improve Jefferson Transit. Specifically, BGR noted inefficiencies in certain routes. For example, fares for the Gretna route covered just 4% of the $172,000 cost of operating the route during the first six months of 2017. In 2020, the Regional Planning Commission expects to publish a report that will offer suggestions to improve public transit operations. Addressing the costly inefficiencies of Jefferson Transit, whether according to the Commission’s report or otherwise, will be a key responsibility of the incoming administration.

BGR also noted that the lack of connectivity with RTA is a persistent problem for riders. Since then, Jefferson Transit and RTA have announced the revival of “Regional Ride” passes. Now a permanent addition to Jefferson Transit’s fare options, the $6 pass allows residents of Jefferson and Orleans parishes unlimited rides on both systems for 24 hours. This development has made travelling in the Greater New Orleans region both cheaper and more convenient for users of public transit. In addition, the RTA has extended one of its bus lines to bring transit riders to Ochsner Medical Center on Jefferson Highway. And the RTA and Jefferson Transit have created a joint call center for information on bus schedules for both systems. Still, there may be more opportunities to improve transit between the parishes.
12. **What changes, if any, should Jefferson Transit explore to improve its own operations and services?**

| **Cynthia Lee Sheng** | In August 2018, I met with New Orleans Councilwoman Helena Moreno to initiate discussions regarding working together to better our region. Despite having been told by others that regional cooperation could not be achieved due to longstanding isolationist attitudes, particularly with respect to transit, we committed that day to take action. Recognizing that Jefferson Parish residents and Orleans residents who rely on public transit can only reach a fraction of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less, Jefferson and Orleans adopted mirror resolutions later that month supporting an integrated regional transportation strategy for both parishes. Shortly thereafter, as a direct result of these efforts, on August 28 the RTA unanimously approved a motion authorizing the extension of the #39 Tulane line from its current terminus at Mistletoe Street and S. Claiborne to provide 24 hour service to Causeway Boulevard on Jefferson Highway and to the Ochsner medical facilities.

As Parish President I will continue to work with our regional partners such as the Regional Planning Commission, GNO, Inc., and local governments to develop ways to improve route efficiencies and cut costs including the integration and implementation of ride-share opportunities. Regionalization of our transit systems will be a priority for me because it is essential to our growth to ensure that we provide affordable and efficient services allowing our workforce to timely reach available employment opportunities. |

| **John Young** | We need to foster efficiencies to save costs. Let’s look to alternative sources of energy such as solar and LNG in order to improve cost efficiency and reduce pollutants that endanger air quality. Let’s review existing routes and schedules to ensure they are serving passengers in a commonsense manner. |
### 13. What ideas should Jefferson Transit pursue to improve regional transit connectivity or service with New Orleans Regional Transit Authority or other parishes?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cynthia Lee Sheng</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>As Parish President I will continue to support the Regional Planning Commission through its New Links Regional Transit Plan, which is the implementation component that takes the bold ideas of the JET Strategic Plan and the RTA Strategic Mobility Plan and moves them closer to reality. Promotion and support of New Links is essential to moving toward a goal of regionalized transit to provide a more affordable, efficient and service oriented rider experience.</td>
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<th><strong>John Young</strong></th>
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<td>As a former Chairman of the Regional Planning Commission and having previously convened the only joint meeting of the Jefferson Parish Council and New Orleans City Council (Post-Katrina), I have a record of promoting regional cooperation. I know how to effectively engage Jefferson’s neighbors to improve transit for all of our citizens. Moving forward, we need to stay ahead of the curve in identifying and implementing global innovations that will improve mass transit for the entire Jefferson/Orleans region.</td>
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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BGR’s research on economic development best practices indicates that government entities should take a rigorous approach to reviewing their potential involvement in private development projects. In multiple reports over the years, including a 2008 report on tax increment financing in Jefferson Parish, BGR developed a set of principles to guide that evaluation. Essentially, it is not enough for a project to show it will enhance tax revenues or create jobs. A public entity should consider a tax subsidy only if it can demonstrate that the subsidy is strategic, necessary, efficient, effective and fair:

• **Strategic:** The project receiving the subsidy advances the priorities set forth in Jefferson Parish’s economic development strategic plan.

• **Necessary:** Independent market studies and financial analysis demonstrate that the market will not produce a desirable outcome for the site, therefore making a public subsidy necessary.

• **Efficient:** Subsidies should provide only the minimum needed for the project to proceed. In addition, they 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 should produce a significant positive ratio of benefits to costs, as supported by a rigorous cost-benefit analysis.

• **Fair:** Subsidies should not create unfair impacts on local competitors or the surrounding neighborhood.

BGR suggests that these principles can provide a strong foundation for considering economic development subsidy requests that Jefferson Parish officials may receive from developers or businesses.

Site of the future expansion of the F. Christiana food distribution facility on River Road in Marrero. In 2018, the Jefferson Parish Council approved a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) incentive agreement between JEDCO and the facility’s owner, U.S. Foods, Inc., for the project.
14. **Do you agree with the principles for economic development tax subsidies identified by BGR? If there are points with which you disagree, please state what they are and explain the approach you would take.**

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>In general I agree with the principles set out in Part V of your questionnaire regarding the use of economic incentives. As Parish President I intend to re-energize the Jefferson Parish Economic Incentive Evaluation Committee, a JEDCO committee, for the express purpose of evaluating economic development subsidies. In prior administrations that committee was more active. Such evaluations are very effective tools and my plan is to utilize that JEDCO group for that purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee Sheng</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>I agree with the economic development tax subsidies principles that BGR has identified. A public entity should consider a tax subsidy only if it can demonstrate that the subsidy is strategically prudent, necessary, efficient, effective and fair-minded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young</td>
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15. Do you think the Parish has granted unnecessary subsidies? If so, how would you prevent them in the future?

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<th>Candidate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cynthia Lee Sheng</td>
<td>While I am aware that some subsidies seem to be more effective than others I cannot characterize any specific subsidy as ‘unnecessary’. In my view subsidies should be analyzed on a relative scale and should be evaluated based on agreed upon criteria. That criteria should be developed by our go-to professionals at JEDCO, with assistance as needed from other specialists, and should continue to be vetted in public at a Council meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Young</td>
<td>I did not grant unnecessary subsidies as Parish President because I applied BGR’s economic development tax subsidies principles. I will adopt this approach again if elected Parish President.</td>
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QUALITY OF LIFE

As a large, established suburban parish, Jefferson has its challenges. Its population and household income growth have stagnated for several years.\(^4\) While Jefferson remains a large hub for employment in the region, it faces greater competition from job growth in Orleans, St. Tammany and upriver parishes.\(^4\) Jefferson’s housing stock is aging and has not kept pace with changing demographics, including smaller household sizes and a senior population that is growing faster than the region’s.\(^4\) Some neighborhoods have struggled with blight and deterioration, which has led Parish and municipal governments to step up enforcement efforts. In addition, Parish officials have confronted complaints from residents on various topics, such as air quality issues attributed to the Parish landfill. These are some of the key issues that will define the broader context for the next administration and council and influence their initiatives while in office.
16. Please discuss your top priorities for improving the quality of life for parish residents and how you would achieve them.

Cynthia Lee Sheng

In 2015, I initiated and funded an agreement with JEDCO to hire a national planner and convened a blue-ribbon Housing Stock Enhancement Committee to develop the Jefferson Parish Housing Stock Enhancement Strategic Plan to address the Parish’s aging housing stock as an initial step to aiding in the reversal of recent population trends. JEDCO published the Plan in January 2017.

Because of its age, strategic location, and robustness, Terrytown was identified a prime candidate for a neighborhood revitalization pilot program, and JEDCO, the HBA New Orleans Education League (NOEL) and JP Finance Authority have started the process of implementing the Plan through construction of a model home.

As Parish President, I will continue to concentrate on these programs to transform our housing stock to attract millennials and provide for our senior population. I will streamline the permitting process and real estate development procedures to further enhance quality of life through enhanced walkability, mixed use and community spaces.

In Summer 2018, problems at the landfill caused by an inefficient leachate and gas collection system were first brought to my attention through constituent complaints. I will allocate all available resources to enable industry leaders recently hired to fix and modernize the landfill.

John Young

1. Promoting public safety to protect our families from crime, flooding, and toxic pollutants by making law enforcement, drainage, and flood protection a budget priority and promoting smart growth initiatives for new jobs that won’t pose a threat to public health.
2. Providing proven effective and efficient administration of Parish resources with emphasis on transparency and accountability.
3. Revitalizing critical infrastructure by bonding priority projects and promoting green infrastructure.
4. Revitalizing aging housing stock by better utilizing the Jefferson Parish Finance Authority to promote low-interest home loans to qualified applicants and freezing property assessments for 5 years on improvements made by new purchasers.
5. Work with state and federal legislative delegations to fund the battle to fight coastal erosion.
ENDNOTES


3. Ibid., p. 22. The average annual growth rate for General Fund tax revenue was 1.8% from 2014 to 2019.


9. For an in-depth discussion of the roll-back, roll-forward process, see BGR, Rolling Forward: The Complete Picture, November 2010, p. 3.


17. Ibid., p. 7.

18. Ibid., pp. 8-9.


20. Ibid., Sec. 2-929.


23. In fiscal year 2017, the most recent available, the hospital’s net position decreased by $25.4 million, following a decline of $13 million the previous year. East Jefferson General Hospital, Financial Report for the year ended December 31, 2018, p. 13. In October 2018, hospital’s bond rating was downgraded for the sixth time since 2013. Moody’s Investors Service, Inc., East Jefferson General Hospital, L.A.”


26. Ibid.


29. Jefferson Parish Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article VI, Division 2.3. Jefferson’s ethics commission is composed of five members appointed by the Parish President and approved by the Parish Council.

30. BGR, On the Ballot: Local and State Propositions, October and November 2014.

31. Ibid., p. 5.

32. Association of Inspectors General, Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, May 2014, pp. 5-6.


34. Jefferson Parish Code of Ordinances, Sec. 2-155.10 (9).

35. Association of Inspectors General, Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General, May 2014, pp. 32 and 42.


For other perspectives on the parish’s economy, see BGR’s December 2016 Breakfast Briefing, "Economic Trend Lines for a Changing Jefferson Parish.”

Ibid.
