

GUEST COLUMN

For the Sunday, December 26, 2010 Edition

From: Mayor James E. "Jamie" Mayo

2011: A New Year of Opportunity

The Monroe City Council and I hope you had a Merry Christmas and wish you a Happy New Year! I want to thank the City Council, my department heads and all city employees for their outstanding service in 2010. In 2011, my administration will continue on our six major focus areas (Economic Development, Marketing Monroe, Public Safety, Housing & Growth, Partnerships in Education, and Beautification). In addition, listed below is a brief capsule of a dozen of the major projects on our agenda for 2011.

1. **NEW JOBS:** Utilizing our economic development funds and pooled resources, our team will continue working with public and private partners at the local, regional, state and federal level to bring new good paying jobs to Monroe and our region.
2. **BUDGET MANAGEMENT:** We will remain fiscally conservative and creative to stay under budget with looming unfunded mandated increases to fire and police pensions, and flat sales tax revenues.
3. **NEW POLICE CHIEF:** After the nine applicants take the chief's exam on January 6, I will interview eligible candidates and select a new chief this spring. I am looking for someone who can be strong in the administrative, law enforcement, and community relations functions of the office. In addition, I want our new police chief to help us become nationally accredited.
4. **CITY OPERATIONAL ENHANCEMENTS:** Our business plan template, for each department, provided part of the infrastructure used to help us achieve our current fiscal condition (the best surplus in city history). We must continue evolving our team approach and business model to better analyze and respond to departmental strengths and weaknesses. This helps us continue to find best practices that maximize our quality of service, improve internal controls, and build a lasting foundation for growth and development.

5. **INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS:** We will continue right-of-way acquisitions, planning, or begin construction on the following projects: U.S. 165 Business Connector (Zoo Entrance); I-20 North & South Service Roads; I-20/Garrett Road Interchange; Tower-Armand; Kansas Lane Connector; and neighborhood sidewalk projects.
6. **SOUTHSIDE PROJECT:** The City Council and I have appropriated economic development funds; and, we will work with Southside Economic Development District members to work on a signature project south of Interstate 20.
7. **HOMELAND SECURITY ENHANCEMENTS:** We will continue working with officials in the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness for renovations at city community centers. This will help provide the necessary amenities for thousands of local citizens who visit daily; and, as the community centers serve as evacuation shelters for south Louisiana evacuees in the event of future natural disasters.
8. **DISTRICT MEETINGS:** For the second consecutive year, all of the members of the Monroe City Council and I will have at least two meetings in each city council district. This is a great opportunity for residents to receive updates on city projects, and express ideas, concerns or issues with their elected representatives.
9. **BUS SHELTERS:** We will protect our patrons from the elements with plans to begin installation of at least one dozen new bus shelters around the City of Monroe.
10. **DOWNTOWN RIVERMARKET:** Over 100 vendors have signed up to participate in this new open-air RiverMarket, which will quickly become a "hot spot" destination in downtown Monroe. Construction will begin in 2011.
11. **COMMUNITY AFFAIRS ENHANCEMENTS:** Plans are in the works for new air conditioning, ball field improvements, civic center improvements, and the return of the train at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo.

12.ARENA FEASIBILITY STUDY: We will engage in the formal process of studying the feasibility of constructing a new civic center arena. In order to meet the demand for more top-level entertainment, we must build an arena that seats 10,000 to 12,000 patrons. We will examine all possibilities, partnerships and locations for this endeavor.

From this abbreviated list of new projects, you can see that our team will be busy in the coming year. Together, we are stronger. Monroe is one city, with one future!