

2018 LEGISLATIVE RECAP



The 2018 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature recently concluded and, as many in the public are aware, BREC was the target of several bills and resolutions – many of which were focused on continuing public discourse regarding the future of the Baton Rouge Zoo, even after our BREC Commission voted unanimously to keep the Zoo at its current location. Each bill or resolution that was filed during the most recent regular legislative session required considerable time spent among legislators for discussion, with several of these instruments carrying ramifications potentially impacting BREC operations.

SB470 BY SENATOR REGINA BARROW

Intent:

The bill would have changed the make-up of the BREC Commission to include appointees from a disproportionate representation of East Baton Rouge Parish residents, including the State Senator, State Representative and Metro Councilmember who represent the North Baton Rouge area where the Baton Rouge Zoo is located while eliminating the appointee from the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board.

Result:

The bill failed to gain traction prior to going to a vote of the full State Senate and was instead turned into a study of the responsibilities of the BREC Commission.

HB481 BY REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA CARPENTER

Intent:

The bill sought to place limitations on the BREC Commission's ability to acquire, lease, develop, operate and manage any property or facility for the purpose of maintaining a collection of wild animals in any location other than the current location of the Baton Rouge Zoo – a clear attempt to codify the Baton Rouge Zoo's current location into state law despite the BREC Commission's recent vote to keep the Zoo in its current location and develop robust master plans regarding its future development.

Result:

Lacking the support of a majority of the house committee in which the bill was filed, it was subsequently turned into a resolution to create a task force to study issues related to the operation, management, funding and location of the Baton Rouge Zoo.

HR59 BY REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA CARPENTER

Intent:

This resolution requests that the Louisiana Legislative Auditor conduct an in-depth audit to examine the economy, efficiency, usefulness and effectiveness of all BREC studies and contracts entered into since 2013, as well as the progress and need for future funding for the completion of current and proposed projects.

Result:

The resolution passed as an “urge and request” measure, as opposed to a directive toward BREC or the Legislative Auditor. This legislative action comes despite BREC’s legislative testimony certifying the agency already pays for an annual external audit that is sent to the Legislative Auditor and posted on its (and BREC’s) website, representing clear duplication in the use of taxpayer funds and a potential charge to East Baton Rouge Parish residents for the estimated \$264,000 cost of the audit, pending further direction and guidance from the Legislative Auditor. We are very transparent at BREC and would welcome a performance audit outside and in addition to what we are currently doing, but it is truly a waste of taxpayers’ money. Our first strategic priority is to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and this additional \$264,000 could be used to help fund the reimagination of the Zoo and Greenwood Community Park.

HB86 BY REPRESENTATIVE TED JAMES

Intent:

The bill provides an ethics exception to allow governing authority members and employees of BREC, as well as their immediate family members, to rent a facility provided that the transaction is conducted without preference and in the same manner and subject to the same fee as the conditions applicable to the general public.

Result:

The bill passed and was sent to the Governor for signature.

A LOOK AHEAD

It is unfortunate that an issue that was settled months ago regarding the location of the Baton Rouge Zoo resulted in numerous efforts to involve the Louisiana Legislature in the management of a local agency and the unnecessary and wasteful use of their time, as well as taxpayer dollars on all levels. BREC appreciates the diligence and common sense of the Louisiana Legislature in supporting the reduction or distillation of the originally filed legislative instruments that would have carried a clearly adverse impact on BREC operations and the sustainability of BREC facilities.

While we recognize resolutions do not have the same force of law, BREC plans to cooperate with the task forces, studies and other efforts to the extent it is required to do so by law as we move forward in our efforts to create a new, modern Zoo and continue building and maintaining exemplary parks and special facilities for the greater Baton Rouge region.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE TIMELINE TO REIMAGINE
THE ZOO AND GREENWOOD COMMUNITY PARK VISIT:**

[BREC.ORG/REIMAGINEGREENWOOD](https://www.brec.org/reimaginegreenwood)

