

An Open Letter to the Citizens of the St. George Fire Protection District

Until now, the St. George Fire Protection District has taken no position on, and we have refrained from making any public statements regarding the effort to incorporate the City of St. George. We have officially remained silent despite a blatant political effort to destabilize the leadership of the Department by removing a majority of the District's Board of Commissioners, as though this would have some impact on the incorporation effort. We thank the members of the Metropolitan Council who blocked that action.

So long as none of the actions attempted or taken by the city-parish administration in their attempts to prevent the incorporation effort presented any threat to the Fire Protection District's ability to protect its citizens' lives and property, silence and neutrality were the appropriate posture to maintain.

With the annexation of the COSTCO and Celtic Studio properties into the City of Baton Rouge and the current attempt to annex some Our Lady of the Lake Property, the Baton Rouge General Medical Center - Bluebonnet and a portion of the Mall of Louisiana, it is obvious the administration has backed off its long-standing pledge to not seek or allow annexation by the City of Baton Rouge that would harm the citizens of the St. George Fire Protection District.

What is the impact of the proposed annexations on the St. George budget? We don't know because there is no telling where it stops. The impact may be \$150,000 to \$300,000 next week, \$450,000 next month, and beyond. Some of our friends in the business community tell us they have been approached to annex their property to create links to Siegen Lane and other areas where the city of Baton Rouge wants to go tax mining.

For over forty years we have been steadily growing to keep up with the growth around us and for all that time we have received nothing from the city or the parish except a pledge to not unnecessarily encroach upon our tax base, until now.

In its effort to strangle the proposed new city, the administration is not hesitating to inflict permanent damage to the District's ability to provide the level of fire and emergency services our citizens deserve. Whether the new city of St. George ever exists, or not the damage caused to the Department by the haphazard annexation of what the administration views as potential revenue sources for the proposed new city will not gain one new penny of revenue for Baton Rouge, but strips away our property tax income.

Our pledge to you, the homeowner and business owner, is that we will do everything possible to not allow this to compromise your safety. We will also attempt to continue responding when needed inside the City of Baton Rouge, like we do almost every day. However, if cuts have to be made, our Citizens' safety will take priority. Of this, you can be certain.

Regardless of the outcome of the incorporation effort or the degree to which the administration is willing to leverage public safety out of sheer political fear of a vote of the people, the St. George Fire Protection District will continue to exist and will continue to perform our mission of protecting life and property when called upon.

As public servants we will continue serving the public exactly as we have throughout our history: in a professional, courteous and caring manner.

Gerard C. Tarleton, Fire Chief