



STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

Dawn Hebert stands on the neutral ground on Lake Forest Boulevard in New Orleans East on Friday. Behind her is the vacant field where Lake Forest Plaza was once located. For a time the mall was the largest shopping center in the state of Louisiana.

A ‘PEOPLE-CENTRIC’ PLAN FOR N.O. EAST

Study will lay groundwork for improvements

BY DESIREE STENNETT
Staff writer

With the city expected to hand him \$1 million to begin work this November, architect Ray Manning is gearing up his team to craft what officials are calling the New Orleans East Renaissance Plan.

Championed by District E council member Oliver Thomas, the study — which will catalog every land parcel, evaluate city infrastructure, analyze past studies focused on New Orleans East development and gather input from the community — will begin this fall and take about nine months to complete.

Though work has not yet begun, Manning’s business partner, David Dixon, has begun to hype the possibilities in recent interviews, including the build-out of “people-centric,” not “auto-centric,” footprints in key corridors, such as Lake Forest Boulevard.

If it’s embraced by residents, business owners and others, the endeavor could help to usher in a new era of the East, said Manning, who has long worked on plans

for smaller developments in New Orleans East dating back before Hurricane Katrina.

The East stands to become “a more attractive place for people to consider to live — and that’s middle class, and the working class, as well as those who are looking for affordable housing opportunities — that’s No. 1,” Manning said. “Two, the image of a crime-ridden community would be erased and three, by redeveloping some of the areas in New Orleans East, we could increase sales tax revenue for the city of New Orleans.”

Thomas, who is running for mayor, said he hopes the plan will create the sort of revitalization the Lower Garden District saw when he worked on a similar proposal there when he was a District B council member. The plan, embraced by everyone from property owners on St. Charles Avenue to church leaders on Carondelet Street, helped lure the retailers, restaurateurs and other business owners that frequent the area today, he said.

“Have people forgotten



STAFF PHOTO BY SOPHIA GERMER

Architect Oel Scott says the New Orleans City Council voted down changes to zoning that would have allowed his project to fill undeveloped land and to help create the density needed for walkable areas.

that from Jackson Avenue to Lee Circle, it was dive bars and vagrants?” he said. “We increased property values, we did the enterprise zones and incentives of St.

Charles Avenue, where we have fine dining and restaurants now,” he said. “I’m expecting the same thing for

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Grand Isle oysters find a place at the table

Seafood farming operation set to double in size

BY JOSIE ABUGOV
Staff writer

Five months after Jefferson Parish officials launched an effort to support the oyster industry on Grand Isle, the seafood farming operation on the barrier island is set to double in size, and cage-grown Louisiana oysters are starting to gain traction in restaurants across the South.

The Grand Isle Port Commission will be opening a second zone for oyster farming at the end of the year, which will increase the area dedicated to the industry from 13 acres to 27 acres, the Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission said Thursday. Some of the farmers currently leasing the existing acreage will have more water for their businesses, while some new farmers will join the cohort.

The expansion is a sign that the environmentally adapted method of rearing oysters is gaining regional traction, according to farmers and those in the food industry.

The farm-grown oysters, known as “Grand Isle Jewels,” were offered Thursday at restaurants in New Orleans and Jefferson Parish as part of OysterNight, an event started by the nonprofit Chefs Brigade to showcase the Gulf Coast oyster industry.

Both traditional wild oysters and specialty farmed oysters were available from 70 restaurants participating in the daylong event.

“I’d say it’s even exceeded where we thought this would go,” said Jerry Bologna, the president of JEDCO, which spearheaded the “jewel” branding. The new farming grounds already have a waiting list, he said.

All of the oyster shells from OysterNight will be repurposed through the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana’s oyster shell recycling program, returned to the water to build reefs that help protect against erosion. In February, an earlier version of the culinary event yielded around seven tons of oyster shells from 50 restaurants.

“This is a great way to talk about what can be done that’s useful,” said Kimberly Davis Reyher, the executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. “Everybody likes oysters. Everybody likes oyster reefs protecting us from hurricanes.”

Wild oysters harvested from the seabed still make up the vast majority produced in Louisiana waters, but the specialty farmed products have gained popularity around New Orleans at local restaurants, food pop-ups and at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Compared to wild oysters, cage-grown oysters tend to be smaller and more uniformly shaped. The cages can be moved around, which can protect the oysters from predators and natural disasters.

Oysters also provide environmental benefits, such as cleaning pollutants from the water.

Grand Isle boasted a thriving wild oyster industry for more than a century, but by the 1990s, a changing seafloor habitat and poor economics led to decline. In 2021, Hurricane Ida scoured the last remaining oyster habitat around the island. Since then, Jefferson Parish has sought to help restore the industry through the “jewel” rebrand and state funding.

A \$250,000 contribution from the Jefferson Parish council and Louisiana Sea Grant, the state program of a federal coastal network, will be used to help fund an oyster processing facility on Grand Isle.

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Two candidates face off in testy race for Slidell mayor

Well-known candidates clash on police pay, mall sale

BY BOB WARREN
Staff writer

Twice since 2002, Slidell voters have sent a police chief to the Mayor’s Office.

Police Chief Randy Fandal hopes to become the third, joining Ben Morris and Freddy Drennan as chiefs who later were elected mayor.

Bill Borchert thinks Slidell residents have had enough.

“I think the public is tired of that now,” said Borchert, a longtime Slidell City Council member who became mayor in January when Greg Cromer resigned from the office.

“That’s Bill’s wish, obviously,” Fandal said.

Slidell voters will cast the deciding vote Oct. 11, when Borchert and Fandal meet in a special election for the remainder of Cromer’s term, which ends June 30, 2026. Early voting begins Sept. 27.

The two veteran politicians — both Republicans with notable track records — began campaigning even before Cromer left office to take a job with Gov. Jeff



Landry’s administration, raising money and putting out their messages.

The candidates had healthy war chests available as of Sept. 1, the latest finance reports show. Borchert had spent almost \$62,000 and has around \$86,000. Fandal has spent nearly \$88,000 and has just over \$68,000.

That money will come in handy as the candidates try to reach voters who might not be aware there’s a mayoral race on a small ballot that will have to compete with fall

festivals, hunting season and an LSU football game in Baton Rouge.

The candidates share campaign planks of improving drainage, fixing streets, building up recreation offerings and cutting government costs.

But the campaigns have grown increasingly testy in recent months, clashing on items ranging from police pay to a high-profile drainage project to the potential sale of the nearly empty North Shore Square Mall.

Because Fandal is police chief, Borchert has framed the race as pitting his business experience against Fandal’s law-enforcement experience.

“Randy is a one-issue guy,” Borchert, 61, said in a recent interview. “I know what it’s like to open a business, create jobs, make payroll.”

Fandal, 65, bristles at that claim. He said he’ll change the culture at City Hall like he did at the Police Department.

“I feel like Slidell needs a change,” he said. “Slidell doesn’t just need a mayor. Slidell needs a voice for the eastern side of the parish.”

Borchert has touted several economic development initiatives he’s involved in, including the potential

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Shooter gets 50-year sentence

UNO student paralyzed after 2022 robbery

BY MISSY WILKINSON
Staff writer

The man who shot and paralyzed a University of New Orleans student in a 2022 armed robbery was sentenced to 50 years in state prison on Friday, Orleans Parish Criminal District Court records show.

Cruz Matute, 18, was convicted by a jury of aggravated assault with a firearm and attempted armed robbery in July. He

and co-defendant Tata Say had “gone out hunting” for “prey” in the wee hours on Aug. 21, 2022, the victim’s mother told The Times-Picayune in a 2023 interview.

In the 6400 block of Paris Avenue, they happened across UNO naval engineering student Noah Hansard as he took his nightly lakefront walk, robbing him of his phone at gunpoint, according to the NOPD.

When Hansard tried to fight back with a knife, Matute shot him and fled with Say in a vehicle.

“I was told by NOPD it was an execution-style shooting, and it is a miracle

he lived,” Elisabeth Hansard, Noah’s mother, said in 2023.

Say was arrested in July 2023 on counts of attempted first-degree murder and armed robbery. He was acquitted in July. Matute, who was 16 at the time of the shooting and had faced attempted second-degree murder and armed robbery counts, was convicted of the lesser charges.

Elisabeth and Noah Hansard testified before Criminal District Court Judge Simone Levine on Friday, who sentenced Matute to 50 years at hard labor.

Cyberattack disrupts court cases

BY MISSY WILKINSON
Staff writer

A cyberattack on the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office is still disrupting the Orleans Parish Civil District Court’s ability to handle some pleadings, and there is no timeline yet on a resolution, a court spokesperson said Friday evening.

The civil system has been down since Sept. 4, leaving the court unable to confirm whether defendants have been properly served, Public Information Officer Walt Pierce said in a news release.

But as of Saturday morning, Docket Master, an online repository of Orleans Parish

Criminal District Court records, was back online.

“We recognize that there may be additional limitations or impacts that arise as we navigate this situation, and we are awaiting further clarification from the Sheriff’s Office regarding a timeline for resolution,” the release said.

Sheriff Susan Hutson said Monday that her department is working with cybersecurity partners “around the clock” to address the breach, which disrupted bail processing and shut down the public’s access to case records in Orleans Parish Criminal District Court and continues to affect the civil system.

A ransomware group called Qilin has claimed responsibility for the cyber-attack, saying it stole more than 840 gigabytes of data from OPSO. Qilin has already leaked several OPSO financial and administrative records online, though they don’t appear to include sensitive personal data.

Judges said they’ve developed a plan to keep cases moving, but urged attorneys and litigants to double-check service with OPSO before hearings or trials.

The Sheriff’s Office can be reached at (504) 289-4074 or in Room 403 of the Civil Courts building at 421 Loyola Avenue.

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New Orleans East — to build off the assets.”

Dawn Hebert, president of the East New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Commission, which represents dozens of neighborhood groups in the East, said she is looking forward to the study’s recommendations.

It could be the first step, she said, toward finally getting the improvements long-time area residents have hoped for.

“Right after Katrina, many master plan meetings were held, and we all discussed what we envisioned our communities to look like,” Hebert said. “Unfortunately, none of that materialized. I’m hoping that this renaissance plan ... is something the city is serious about, and that the community input will be listened to and adhered to.”

Chronic disinvestment

Dixon, an architect and urban planner who helped shape the city’s post Katrina master plan and is working with Manning on the latest one, said the East represents the city’s “greatest opportunity.”

The area east of the Industrial Canal has struggled with chronic disinvestment since the mid-1980s, due to the oil bust, White flight and other issues that were only exacerbated by Katrina in 2005.

The East has attracted some development since then: A Walmart, a Winn-Dixie, and a massive Goodwill store provide retail and grocery options, while mom-and-pop restaurants, small businesses and beauty supply stores also dot the landscape. But the collection of neighborhoods has not lured retail at the same rate as other areas of the city.

If this plan is done right and widely embraced, Dixon said, it could use swaths of undeveloped and underutilized land to bring about massive change, while protecting the areas the East’s residents love.

The East could embrace walkability, instead of just catering to drivers, he said. “To achieve that, instead of a mall, (it could) have housing over shops. Lake Forest could literally be transformed into the walkable heart of New Orleans East as a community. ... And none of this is at the expense of folks who live there or want to come back.”

A bevy of urban planning experts have touted the benefits of walkable neighborhoods, which include higher property values for homes and increased customer bases for businesses. Chicago’s Bronzeville, a historically Black neighborhood that struggled with decades of disinvestment, is undergoing a renaissance driven in part by a focus on mixed-use developments, the Brookings Institute explored in 2018.

Brookings pointed to two major mixed-use developments, an arts and recreation facility and new grocery options that have been transformational in Bronzeville.

“As these major developments serve growing demand for housing and affordable retail, smaller-scale place-making efforts are helping to support local entrepreneurship, create inviting streetscapes, and enhance public spaces,” the Brookings report stated.

Dixon said U.S. Census trends suggest that in the

next 20 years, most of the net new households to the city will be households without kids. He said mixed-use developments, like the one he’s floating for Lake Forest, tend to be attractive to those people. Those communities could also bring new entrepreneurs and artists back to the East, he said.

Developers speak out

Not everyone is enthused about another study of the area. Kimberly Burbank, a longtime banker turned developer, said there should be fewer studies and more action.

Burbank has built several homes in the East, and now wants to build a larger mixed-use housing development on Deer Park Boulevard, featuring homes and retail. But she said “dysfunctional” city procedures and power struggles between political officials, neighborhood association groups and builders have made it hard to get her project off the ground.

The City Council in March rejected changes to local land-use rules that would have made her project possible, citing a lack of community support for her proposal. Later, the state Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism rejected her application for a state cultural district in the area of her development and near Lake Forest Boulevard, also for lack of resident support, she said.

“I live here, and I’m not a well-to-do developer. I’m an emerging developer,” she said. “Well-to-do developers are not going to deal with this. ... You send the message to Wall Street, and you send a message to locals that says ‘I’m difficult to do business with.’”

Oel Scott, who owns the architecture firm Scottmoore, said his plan to build 10 luxury townhomes off Read Boulevard got a death blow in December when the council voted down changes to city zoning that would have allowed his project. He said those sorts of condos could have filled empty, undeveloped land and helped create the density needed for the kind of walkable areas Dixon envisions.

But “this is not a defeat story,” he said, reflecting on the year he spent trying to overcome the city process and win the favor of residents. “What we brought was a solution. Every solution we bring to the table will not work.”

Hebert, the neighborhood coalition president, agreed that the city’s process for approving developments can burden developers. She also acknowledged that longtime residents are particularly wary of multifamily projects, especially when they remember the buildout of apartments like The Willows. Once a place for new residents to rent while they saved for a home, that complex now sits in disrepair.

But she said she and others in the coalition are not inherently against change. They just want a voice in creating it.

“I always tell my organization and anyone who comes to our meetings that power is in numbers,” Hebert said. “We really need to be involved in what’s happening in the East, because we all came back after Katrina. We invested in our homes. We all envisioned what we wanted this community to look like.

“And we’re still striving for that, and it hasn’t happened yet.”

OYSTER

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“We’ll be able to pull up to the dock, hook them up to a pressure washer, wash them, bag them, tag them, put them in your cooler and go from there,” said farmer Nathan Herring while shucking oysters at Deanie’s Seafood in Metairie, one of the restaurants participating in the citywide event.

The nascent Grand Isle industry is also seeing growth on the distribution side. Three months ago, Inland Foods, a distributor, began collaborating with the farmers who run Little Moon Oysters in Grand Isle. The company brings seafood, meats and other products to buyers across the Southeast.

“We’re going to be a vessel to help them grow across the country,” said Justin Jones, general manager at Inland, which is based in Atlanta.

August Mchugh, one of the two Little Moon employees, said the founder of the oyster operation is directly selling their products to restaurants in Houston and Austin.



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY SOPHIA GERMER

Nathan Herring, of Bright Side Oyster Co., sifts oysters at his nursery in Grand Isle on May 16. The oyster business is set to double in size.

SLIDELL

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STAFF FILE PHOTO BY MATTHEW DOBBINS

Slidell Police Chief Randy Fandal and Mayor Bill Borchert greet each other during their race’s first political forum on July 23 in the Slidell Municipal Auditorium.

sale of the mall to the city. He had pushed for a sale, steering the city through a process during which he had signed a letter of intent with the mall’s owner.

The City Council, through its North Shore Square Economic Development District, even agreed to a sales tax increase for the stores in the area around the mall to finance the purchase. Borchert said Slidell officials have heard from constituents for years that they wanted to mall site revitalized.

“Sometimes bold steps are necessary,” Borchert said. “You do things for the right reason, not the political reason.”

Fandal said he agrees that revitalizing the mall site is a hugely important issue. But he and a number of other city residents urged officials to slow the process down, complaining it was moving without the public’s input.

“It wasn’t transparent,” Fandel said. “The rush caused the situation we’re in today.”

Fandal was referring to a news release from the city on Sept. 16 saying it had only recently discovered that the mall’s owner, Morguard, had already entered into a purchase agreement for two of the stores with someone else. The city has since said it is no longer looking to purchase the entire mall site.

Bayou project controversy

Fandal’s campaign, meanwhile, has also raised questions about property Borchert purchased along Bayou Patassat, where the city, at Borchert’s urging, has sought millions in federal money for a drainage project that would also create walkways along the widened bayou.

Borchert has said he purchased the land, a parcel on Sixth Street and a larger piece of land on Sgt. Alfred Drive, because he worried that if anyone else did it could become an obstruction to what he sees as an impor-

tant drainage and economic development project.

He said he doesn’t have any plans for the land, and that part of it would be underwater if the bayou widening happens.

But Fandal says Borchert’s votes on items tied to that project are a “conflict of interest of our Home Rule Charter” because the project will impact property that he owns. “He knows better,” Fandal said.

Borchert disagrees. He said he has only cast votes on parts of the project that don’t impact his property.

“It’s a non-story for everybody but the other side,” Borchert said, adding that he hasn’t hidden anything and that that his votes were not improper.

Ultimately, Borchert said, the project will not only help solve a chronic drainage problem, but will also be a nice addition to draw people to the city.

Meet the candidates

Borchert, who has an engineering degree from Louisiana Tech University, said he has worked a number of jobs and run several businesses. He said he sees holding elected office as an extension of the joy of public service he discovered after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when he turned a large garage building he owned into a dorm to house volunteers helping the city recover.

A few years after, that he won a district council seat, then went on to win an at-

large seat, most recently when he was reelected in 2022. The city’s charter says the at-large council member with the highest vote total in the most recent election takes over as mayor if the mayor resigns.

Borchert became mayor in January and says he’s treated it as a full-time job, pushing long-stalled projects like the completion of the Tammany Trace into the heart of Slidell. During his time as mayor, the city has pushed code enforcement improvements and started drainage projects, he said.

Borchert said his strength is his vision for the city, something he said his opponent lacks.

“I see how things aren’t and how they can be,” he said. “I know how to make things happen.”

Fandal, who said the pros-

pect of running for office crystallized in 2011 as he hiked the entire Appalachian Trail — “took me six months and two days” — following his retirement from the Louisiana State Police, where he had held several leadership positions over a couple of decades.

He won the chief’s office in 2016 and was reelected in 2018 and 2022.

Fandal said he has run large operations with millions of dollars at stake over the course of his law enforcement career.

He said Slidell residents don’t trust the city government. The Police Department gained their trust under his leadership, he said, and he’ll do the same for government. He points to a Police Department tax referendum last year that swapped two property taxes for a sales tax that will bring in more money to raise police pay and build a new headquarters.

“I set goals when I ran for chief, and I’ve met them all,” he said.

LOTTERY
FRIDAY, SEPT. 19, 2025
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PICK 4: 8-4-2-9
PICK 5: 4-3-1-4-3
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