

2018 Regular Session

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 148

BY REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER

A RESOLUTION

To create the Task Force on Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge Policies to study issues related to the operation, management, funding, and location of the Baton Rouge Zoo and to provide for a written report of findings and recommendations to the House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs not later than December 31, 2018.

WHEREAS, the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC) was created by Act No. 246 of the 1946 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature; and

WHEREAS, BREC is responsible for the maintenance, management, and control of all parks, playgrounds, play fields, or other property, including the Baton Rouge Zoo, permanently devoted to recreational purposes located within East Baton Rouge Parish; and

WHEREAS, in 1965, aided by the urging of television personality William "Buckskin Bill" Black, Baton Rouge taxpayers passed a local property tax that provided more than three-quarters of a million dollars for the construction of the Baton Rouge Zoo and matching funds were obtained from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation; and

WHEREAS, construction of the zoo began in 1966 and the zoo first opened on Easter Sunday, 1970, to residents of East Baton Rouge Parish who fully embraced the concept of the new zoo and the sense of ownership it instilled in the community; and

WHEREAS, over the next forty years, the zoo became a year-round family attraction and vital economic driver in north Baton Rouge with more than a quarter million annual visitors of all ages and backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, over the last several years, although BREC receives millions of dollars in funding annually from local property taxes, the facilities at the Baton Rouge Zoo have

fallen into disrepair, the number of visitors has declined significantly, and the zoo recently lost its accreditation; and

WHEREAS, BREC contends that the zoo cannot survive at its current location and has made a recent push to move the zoo to the Baton Rouge fairgrounds in the southern part of the parish, arguing that a state-of-the-art zoo can be developed at that location which will result in an additional one hundred twenty-five thousand annual visitors; and

WHEREAS, the Baton Rouge fairgrounds, which are comprised of one hundred thirty-three acres, were inundated with significant floodwaters during the August 2016 flood and are susceptible to future flooding, which poses a potential threat to all animals that would be housed at that location; and

WHEREAS, the zoo currently sits on only a tiny portion of the sprawling six hundred acres of Greenwood Park which provides ample room for the expansion of zoo facilities on property that did not flood during the August 2016 flood.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby create the Task Force on Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge Policies to study issues related to the operation, management, funding, and location of the Baton Rouge Zoo and to provide for a written report of findings and recommendations to the House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs not later than December 31, 2018.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force shall be composed of the following members:

- (1) The state representative for House District No. 63.
- (2) The state representative for House District No. 29.
- (3) The mayor-president of the city of Baton Rouge and parish of East Baton Rouge or his designee.
- (4) The mayor of the city of Baker or his designee.
- (5) The mayor of the city of Central or his designee.
- (6) The mayor of the city of Zachary or his designee.
- (7) The member of the governing authority of the city of Baton Rouge and parish of East Baton Rouge who represents Council District No. 2.

(8) A member of the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge designated by the superintendent of the commission.

(9) A practicing veterinarian designated by the state representative for House District No. 63.

(10) A representative of Keep the Baton Rouge Zoo at Greenwood Park designated by the state representative for House District No. 63.

(11 ) A member of the governing board of the Baton Rouge North Economic Development District designated by the governing board.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the state legislators serving on the task force shall call its first meeting, at which the members shall elect a chairman and take other organizational actions as they deem appropriate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force may request administrative support from any state or local entity.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES