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Mid-City Neighborhood Organization Board Votes “No Support” for BioDistrict New Orleans (GNOBEDD)

New Orleans, LA, April 12, 2011- On Monday, April 4, the board of the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO) approved its first official position on the New Orleans BioDistrict. The position, in short, states that the board of the neighborhood organization does not support the BioDistrict as currently formulated.

The decision came after a months-long evaluation of the BioDistrict by a citizen working group empanelled by MCNO. The group was coordinated by Lili LeGardeur, a zone captain and board member of MCNO and a resident of one of the areas encompassed by the BioDistrict.

"Although MCNO supports economic development, that development must come with the input of and consideration for the residents and businesses that have worked so hard to rebuild Mid-City, post Katrina," says MCNO President Jennifer Farwell. "It also must not come at the expense of our historic neighborhood or the quality of life everyone deserves. We are open to dialogue with BioDistrict leaders if they will work with us to achieve the goal of safeguarding our citizens and the historic character of Mid-City."

BioDistrict New Orleans, formerly known as GNOBEDD, is a state-empowered economic development agency with taxing and bonding authority. Created by the state legislature in 2005, it covers an area bounded by Carrollton Ave., Iberville St., Loyola Avenue and Earhart Blvd. The large segment between Carrollton, Iberville, Broad St. and the Pontchartrain Expressway falls within MCNO's boundaries.

One of the MCNO working group's chief concerns was a lack of definition of the BioDistrict's powers, especially as they relate to local planning, zoning and code enforcement agencies and ordinances. Attorneys working with MCNO expressed the opinion that the BioDistrict, under various scenarios, would have the ability to expropriate private property for economic development.

The recent clearance of the site of the new Veterans Administration Hospital, which lies just outside of MCNO's boundaries, helped spur the decision. Working group members were also disturbed by recent statements on the BioDistrict's website suggesting that its recently-completed master plan has popular support in the neighborhoods that fall within its boundaries.

"The BioDistrict does not speak for Mid-City or its citizens," says LeGardeur. "We have expressed concern to State Senator Karen Carter Peterson that the outreach conducted to date has been incomplete and insufficient. Mid-Citizens have not been given the necessary information to understand what the BioDistrict is, let alone to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding any proposed planning efforts."

In laying out its position of “no support”, the MCNO board listed the following concerns:

- * We do not want to lose existing one-and two-unit housing stock in the district.
- * We do not want to jeopardize the architectural fabric of Mid-City.
- * We do not want zoning and street grid decisions to be determined by a state entity outside of local control.



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* We do not have a clear statement from the BioDistrict on the specific effects they would have on homeowners and property owners in the district.

* We lack reliable assurance that the BioDistrict, alone or in partnership with the state, will not expropriate property in the BioDistrict.

The board's statement underscores its support for new industry and jobs, including efforts to build a bio-sciences industry, in New Orleans. The board also urged that any development planning take into consideration the city's historic medical district downtown, which has been gutted and abandoned by the move from downtown to Lower Mid-City of the LSU and VA hospitals and the closure of Charity Hospital.

Finally, the statement rejects the notion that the neighborhood's future should be in the hands of a board of unelected political appointees whose focus is on the promotion of industry, insisting instead on local control and accountability through elected local officials and established city agencies.

"It is simply not clear at this point what benefit, if any, inclusion in the BioDistrict will afford residents of Mid-City," said LeGardeur. "If we were convinced that the BioDistrict would be a force for the preservation and revitalization of the existing historic neighborhoods within its footprint – as well as for economic development – that would be different."

About Mid-City: Mid-City, a neighborhood of 6500 households, stretches from Tulane Avenue to Orleans Avenue and from City Park Avenue to Broad Street. It is one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in New Orleans (25% population increase from July 2009 to July 2010) and has been recognized as one of the most historically and architecturally intact and diverse neighborhoods in the entire Southeast.

About MCNO: Founded in 1975, the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization is a civic group active in the Mid-City neighborhood of New Orleans. The organization strives to advocate for the wide array of issues that affect its citizens' quality of life. In pursuit of this goal, MCNO has been an active voice in the rebuilding of Mid-City following the levee failures that flooded the area in August 2005.

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