

May 17, 2011

Representative Jared Brossett
District 97
6306 Elysian Fields Ave.
New Orleans, LA. 70122
brossettj@legis.state.la.us

Dear Representative Brossett,

Redistricting seems to have made you the representative of a large portion of Mid-City. On behalf of the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO), which advocates for quality of life issues from City Park Avenue to S. Rocheblave St. and from the Pontchartrain Expressway to Orleans Ave and Canal St., we welcome you.

We're writing you as our incoming representative and as a member of the House Municipal, Parish and Government Affairs Committee, which will hear House Bill 576 on Thursday, May 19. HB 576 concerns BioDistrict New Orleans, which overlays an enormous portion of Mid-City. We request that you reject the bill unless it is amended as follows:

1. Change the boundaries (outlined in Section 9039.62): the BioDistrict should be redrawn to include Tulane Ave. but exclude the residential neighborhoods of Mid-City from S. Rocheblave St. to Carrollton Ave.
2. Exclude provision (outlined in Section 9039.68) that BioDistrict employees will be given civil service status and included in the State retirement system. The BioDistrict is not an essential state office, and this provision is an insult to taxpayers in a year of draconian budget cuts.
3. Improve the public notice requirement for hearings to annex additional properties to the BioDistrict (section 9039.68) by requiring said notice to be published in the newspaper of record for the municipality or parish where the property to be annexed is located.
4. Include a provision whereby neighborhoods included in the BioDistrict can opt out by popular vote of its residents.

The BioDistrict (previously Greater New Orleans BioEconomic Development District or GNOBEDD) imposes a state entity between residents of certain parts of New Orleans and their local government, without giving voters of those areas a chance to approve or reject this change. The BioDistrict's powers are broadly defined and its duties to residents are nowhere entailed in the legislation. The stated purpose of the BioDistrict is to advance the development of businesses. Homeowners in residential areas that fall within the BioDistrict are rightfully alarmed by the sway this entity has been given over their residential neighborhoods.



The bottom line is that people residing in the parts of Mid-City that fall within the BioDistrict do not know what it can or will do to their neighborhoods, and they are given no way to control this state entity, which is run entirely by appointees rather than by elected officials. We appeal to you, our elected representative, to address this problem by amending HB 576 as requested.

The legislation already includes a mechanism that will allow neighborhoods to petition to be included in the BioDistrict, should they so wish. Should the residents of Mid-City determine, after further study and clearer commitments by the BioDistrict, that it is to their advantage to annex the residential neighborhoods to the BioDistrict, they will petition to be included in the BioDistrict.

Right now, Mid-City's residential neighborhoods have been included in this district by legislative fiat; and that is wrong.

A representative of MCNO will be at Thursday's hearing to speak further on this matter.

I attach a press release issued last month by MCNO on the BioDistrict.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this issue in advance of Thursday's hearing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lili LeGardeur', is written over a horizontal line.

Lili LeGardeur
Coordinator, MCNO BioDistrict Working Group and
Secretary, MCNO
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(504) 481-6264



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lili LeGardeur, coordinator, MCNO BioDistrict Working Group
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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.

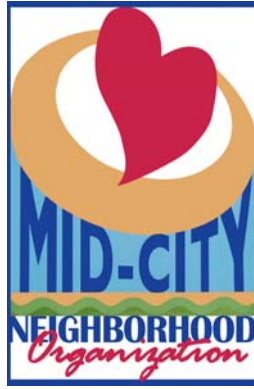
One of the MCNO working group's chief concerns was a lack of definition of the BioDistrict's powers, especially as they relate to local planning, zoning and code enforcement agencies and ordinances. Attorneys working with MCNO expressed the opinion that the BioDistrict, under various scenarios, would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