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Business Report

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The Godfather of Growth

CHARLES LANDRY is on a relentless mission to build a better Baton Rouge.

INSIDE

- The restaurant groups dominating the Capital Region
- Where Blue Cross goes from here
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The Godfather

CHARLES LANDRY IS ON A RELENTLESS MISSION

of

TO BUILD A BETTER BATON ROUGE.

Growth

BY SAM BARNES





CHARLES LANDRY Snapshot

Birthplace: Crowley, 1953

Education:
Bachelor's Degree, LSU (1975);
Juris Doctorate, LSU (1977)

Profession: Partner,
Fishman Haygood, Baton Rouge

Side Gig: Pro-bono co-Editor of *The
Foreign Investor's Guide to the Legal
Aspects of Doing Business in Louisiana*

“
I’ve been in Baton Rouge since 1971, and there’s never been a time that we’ve been as well positioned to have a generational change in the quality of life for all citizens.”

CHARLES LANDRY, partner,
Fishman Haygood

”



At precisely 3:44 each morning, Charles Landry rises out of bed to begin his daily ritual of reading five newspapers on his iPad.

Though 70, he has little time for sleep—he’s too busy pursuing his grand vision for Baton Rouge and trying to find workable solutions to complex problems.

His list of accolades and victories, both as a real estate attorney at Fishman Haygood and as a prominent developer and community visionary, reads more like the combined resumes of a dozen people than a single man.

Landry is described by those who know him as iconic, passionate, driven and relentless, earning him such monikers as “The Godfather of Growth” and even “PowerPoint King.” “The creativity of developing or organizing a structure for a complex transaction ... that is what I want to do until I put my pen down

for the last time and my head hits the desk,” he says.

Since the Lafayette native’s entrance on the Baton Rouge scene in the 1970s, he has become a virtual tour de force in many of the major real estate developments across the city and region—either as the legal counsel crafting legal documents for complex issues, an investor/developer, or in a pro bono capacity advancing an important cause.

Landry sees himself as essentially having three jobs. “My first job is to serve my clients as a conventional lawyer providing legal advice. The second is with my financial partner, John Engquist, as a developer doing the day-to-day work for the Rouzan, Americana and Materra developments. My third job is giving back to the community.”

He has played notable roles in the advancement of Traditional Neighborhood Developments, or TNDs, throughout Louisiana, and assisted his longtime friend,

now-retired architect Steve Oubre, with drafting CCRs (codes, covenants and restrictions) for Louisiana’s first TND at The Village at River Ranch in Lafayette. He also played a prominent role in the revitalization of downtown Baton Rouge, and is, by many accounts, the undisputed “go to” local aficionado in the creation and execution of public-private partnerships.

“I think he must work 22 hours a day,” Oubre says. “I was always one of these early risers, and Charles would call me at 4:15 and start asking me questions. If the phone rang at that time, it inevitably was Charles Landry.”

Oubre became friends with Landry as a teenager in Lafayette, then reconnected with him in the 1990s while planning River Ranch.

Landry was instrumental in drafting the legal documents that helped move the development forward. “Since we have the Napoleonic code in Louisiana, the boilerplate

covenants from other states just didn’t work,” Oubre says. “River Ranch required 139 variances just for the first filing, and Charles was able to finesse these documents in a brilliant way.”

His connections “also went a long way toward getting things done. I wouldn’t have been able to do much of what I’ve done without him.”

Since then, they’ve worked together on various other projects, including Rouzan and Americana, where Oubre served as the town architect. “He’s relentless. He never stops thinking about the projects he’s working on. It becomes overwhelming sometimes; if you don’t have those same attributes, you can get burned out. Once he puts his mind to it, whatever he’s working on is going to happen. Everything does.”

Landry is a self-described “deal junkie” who loves to see a building or project through to completion,

Planning, planning, planning

Three major projects are poised to transform the entertainment and sports landscape in Baton Rouge. Here's where they stand.

The new LSU arena

Plans to develop a new \$400 million arena on LSU's campus are moving forward as expected, according to attorney Charles Landry, who has been hired to work with the university on the project. The arena would host sporting events for LSU as well as entertainment and music events for the Capital Region.

A pool of six potential developers has now been narrowed down to a single finalist. The Tiger Athletic Foundation is currently in the process of evaluating a proposal from that finalist. Landry declined to disclose the name of the developer in question.

At press time, officials were working to set up a meeting with the developer to discuss how to proceed with the project.

A lengthy negotiation process to iron out details related to amenities, size and location would follow that meeting. TAF would then make a land use recommendation to the LSU Board of Supervisors. If the board signs off on TAF's proposal, LSU would lease the land to TAF, which would then sublease the land to the developer. The developer would then be able to move forward with the project. TAF is still optimistic that the arena will be operational in about four years' time.

While officials previously suggested that construction of the arena would be fully funded by the developer in exchange for ownership and revenue from events unrelated to LSU, a new sales tax in a recently established economic development district surrounding the university now seems likely to contribute to the project. Additional public funds may be requested from the Metro Council at a later date.

The repositioning of the River Center

To facilitate the development of a new LSU arena, the Raising Cane's River Center has entered into a noncompete agreement that will restrict its ability to host most entertainment and music events once the arena is constructed. In light of those restrictions, officials have outlined a plan to reposition the River Center as a convention center and construct a complementary headquarters hotel. Baton Rouge is one of the largest cities in the country to lack a full-fledged convention center, Landry says.

As with the LSU arena project, the River Center's repositioning is still in a preliminary planning phase, though Mayor Sharon Weston Broome in June suggested an ambitious nine-month timeline for soliciting proposals from developers and signing contracts. Also in June, the Metro Council unanimously approved a measure to assemble an oversight committee for the project. That committee met for the first time in August. It is worth noting that some downtown business owners have expressed concern over whether the River Center's repositioning would hurt their bottom lines.

The Memorial Park redevelopment

The Memorial Park complex is set to undergo a major face-lift. The 44-acre site is currently home to Goldsby Baseball Field and Memorial Stadium, both of which will be subject to significant renovations. A new 110,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art sports and recreation facility also seems to be in the cards. Other proposed additions include ancillary entertainment venues, commercial and retail developments and walking trails. The complex's reimagining could also serve to attract minor league baseball and soccer squads to Baton Rouge.

Roy Alston, executive director of Texas-based Five Points Community Capital, has been tapped as the project's master developer. Subdevelopers will eventually be contracted to work on the individual components of the project.

Landry, who serves as lead counsel for the redevelopment, says details related to project funding and timeline are still up in the air and a long way from being set in stone. Partners on the project include BREC and Project Play, a national public policy initiative aimed at growing youth participation in sports.

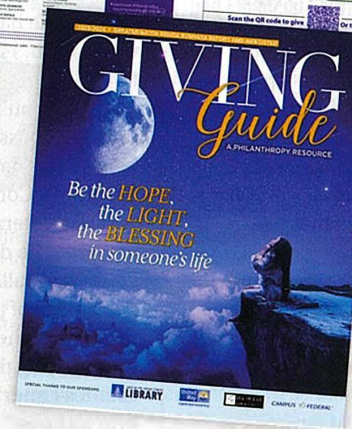
—Dillon Lowe

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“
When you’ve got a piece of property you want to develop, there’s just no one better at getting the entitlements than Charles Landry. I don’t know if he’s ever lost one.
”

JOHN ENGQUIST, right, with Charles Landry at Rouzan, one of three developments in which the two are partners.



COLLIN RICHELIE

so it was only natural that he would eventually become a developer himself. John Engquist, CEO and chair of H&E Rentals, first met Landry after investing in a piece of property that would later become the Americana Zachary development.

“We wanted to develop a TND there, and when it comes to that type of work, he’s the best,” Engquist says. “Over time, I ended up taking that development over and he became more involved and ended up working the day-to-day development side.”

Today, they’re also partners in the Rouzan and Materra developments, as well as friends. “We have similar personalities, so we work well together,” Engquist says. “Charles is a very driven guy. He’s

very passionate about what he does, and he certainly gives everything he has to whatever he’s working on. I have a lot of respect for that.

“When you’re in the development business, there’s a new challenge every day,” he adds. “There are always Corps issues, wetlands issues, etcetera to deal with. When you’re in the development business you’ll see it all. And when you’ve got a piece of property you want to develop, there’s just no one better at getting the entitlements than Charles Landry. I don’t know if he’s ever lost one.”

BREAKING A FEW EGGS

John Spain, senior adviser with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, doubts the transformation of

downtown Baton Rouge—which began with the construction of the Shaw Center in the early 2000s—would have even happened absent Landry’s help as BRAF’s legal counsel.

“That was a difficult public-private partnership, when that was still a relatively new concept, and Charles was instrumental in finding remedies. He played a critical role in getting the Shaw Center built.”

Since then, Landry has paved the legal pathway for other impactful projects such as the Louisiana Technology Park, the restoration of the Capitol House Hotel, and the IBM Building.

“He’s a force in all the best ways,” Spain insists. “Complex issues need force, leadership and vision, and you get that in Charles. He inspires

others to work with him to get things done.”

The self-coined “string of pearls” is Landry’s current passion. It references a collection of proposed projects that principally include a new \$400 million LSU arena on the university’s campus; an overhaul of the Raising Cane’s River Center in downtown Baton Rouge, which city-parish officials hope to convert into a convention space with a new hotel; and the Memorial Sports Complex renovations in north Baton Rouge, which could include the creation of a 110,000-square-foot sports and recreation facility to host minor league soccer and baseball teams. (See “*Planning, Planning, Planning*,” page 21)

The arena plan took a significant step forward on March 13 when



Major Community Projects

- Shaw Center for the Arts
- Bon Marché redevelopment
- Water Campus
- Louisiana State Office Buildings – Downtown



- IBM Center Building/525 Apartments
- Baton Rouge Community College
- New LSU arena
- New LSU Research District
- Memorial Park
- Capital House Hotel
- Mall of Louisiana



- Knock Knock Children's Museum

the Metro Council passed an ordinance to support the project under the controversial condition that the River Center restrict its live music and entertainment events to 3,500 attendees for the next 30 years.

"I've been in Baton Rouge since 1971, and there's never been a time that we've been as well positioned to have a generational change in the quality of life for all citizens," Landry says. "All of these projects could be independently accomplished without the need of one of the other ones—but we have the opportunity to pull them all together at the same time."

In a unique arrangement, Landry is the legal counsel for all three projects, representing the Tiger Athletic Foundation, the LSU Foundation, the city of Baton

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Agent
Steven Brooksher Insurance
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Steven, a proud Baton Rouge native, is an accomplished graduate of Catholic High School of Baton Rouge, Tulane University, and Louisiana State University. As a devoted husband and father of four, Steven's life is deeply intertwined with the Baton Rouge community. His passion for helping others was ignited during his time in ministry at St. Aloysius and through leading numerous service missions across the United States and Honduras. Our mission is to provide exceptional insurance service to meet the unique needs of our customers. Recognized consistently by State Farm as one of the top-performing teams nationwide, we specialize in comprehensive coverage for home, life, auto, and business/commercial insurance. Steven and his team are committed to delivering personalized service and expert advice to ensure you and your loved ones are well-protected.



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Charles Landry at Fishman Haygood in 2017. He is described by those who know him as iconic, passionate, driven and relentless, earning him such monikers as "The Godfather of Growth" and even "PowerPoint King."

Rouge and Roy Alston of Five Points Community Capital, a firm that provides financing for community developments. "But my real role is in the structure, coordination and integration of these projects," Landry says. "That's the whole concept of the string of pearls."

"If you look at a pearl in isolation it has little value. If you can string them together, where they're tied through transportation, access and programming ... then the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. You could have festivals that span all three venues, for example."

"But I'm just a cog in the wheel. I'm here to pull all these pieces together at a conceptual level, then those people whose job it is to implement these projects will need to move them forward."

Some detractors of the proposed plan, however, say the financial risks of the unique arrangement are too high. Metro Council member

Chauna Banks, whose District 2 covers north Baton Rouge, feels the sheer power of LSU—and even Charles Landry, himself—likely propelled the initiative forward.

"LSU is an icon, Charles Landry is an icon, and even the mayor said she was for it," Banks says. "Independently, they're all good ideas. The Memorial Stadium redevelopment is a good idea, the River Center with a hotel anchor as a convention center is a good idea, as well as the arena ... but I don't know of anywhere else where someone would literally limit themselves to ensure that another entity maximizes their ability."

"The River Center and LSU are two totally separate entities that are miles away, and one has nothing to do with the other."

Deputy Parish Attorney Courtney Humphrey seemed to agree in a February letter to the Metro Council. "The proposed

30-year time period restriction seems excessive and has the potential to devastate the city-parish's economic development and other hopeful growth initiatives," Humphrey said in the letter. "Even without any data, we believe such a restriction could negatively impact the city-parish, financially."

The public-private partnership, or P3 arrangement, needed to construct the LSU arena could also prove problematic should it lead to a lack of transparency, says Steven Procopio, president of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana. PAR is a nonpartisan good government watchdog organization focusing on research and best practices.

A P3 is a long-term agreement between a government and private sector partner to finance, build and manage a public service facility or system. As such, the government typically retains ownership of the

facility while the private partner does most of the work, including construction, maintenance and management.

"Every partnership is different and they're certainly not all terrible in regard to transparency," Procopio says. "However, there's an opportunity for the process to be misused (to the benefit of the private sector partner). The other downside is when the public feels like they don't know what's going on, you're more likely to get pushback."

Participating members of the P3 should ensure that the public remains aware of what they're doing, Procopio says. "When you try new stuff, you can get off the beaten path and there's risk in that, because you must invent what you're doing as you go along."

District 10 Metro Council member Carolyn Coleman, a proponent of the ordinance, says any criticism for a lack of transparency is

Technology

- Formed the Louisiana Research Park



- Formed the Louisiana Technology Center
- Led in the creation and funding of the Data Center at Bon Carré

Economic Development – Pro bono assistance

- LSU Economic Development District
- Southern University Economic Development District
- River Center Economic Development District
- Florida Corridor Economic Development District
- Plank Road Economic Development District

DON KADAIK

unwarranted. “These are public meetings, and anyone is welcome to attend,” Coleman says. “We are going to include the community every step of the way so that they can have input and know everything about everything.”

Coleman describes Landry as a “truth teller,” even if it means “breaking a few eggs along the way.”

“Sometimes he might come across as a little hard, but I’ve been accused of that myself. He always tells the truth openly and sometimes people don’t want to hear the truth.”

‘BLOCK AND TACKLE’

Scott Woodward, director of athletics at LSU, refers to Landry as the “quarterback in this whole process. His ability to what we refer to in football as ‘block and tackle’ is uncanny. It’s beyond the pale.”

That will be critical as the various entities navigate the myriad

legal and funding challenges of a complex public-private partnership. Nevertheless, Woodard says, the 50-year-old Pete Maravich Assembly Center is in desperate need of repurposing, and there is an opportunity to create a multifaceted facility “that the community and state can be proud of.

“Obviously, like every other state agency and athletic program across the country we’re resource limited. We had to get real creative in what we wanted to do, and the obvious template was the Moody Center in Austin (funded in a similar fashion, primarily through a large donation to the University of Texas).

“And with his work on private-public partnerships, it became obvious that Charles was the person to do this.”

Coleman, whose district incorporates all three projects, says pursuing the projects simultaneously is imperative to their individual



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success. She's a member of the mayor's Raising Cane's River Center Oversight Committee, which held its first meeting Aug. 13 to map out the next steps. The committee plans to present its recommendations to the council.

"These projects are going to feed off each other," Colemans says. "If you're coming to the arena, you've got to have a place to stay. They'll be working hand in hand with each other. It's not a competitive thing. We've got to grow Baton Rouge."

Rhoman Hardy, CEO of HardLine Consulting in Baton Rouge and an LSU Foundation board member, says it will take a creative approach if Baton Rouge is going to grow.

"It's critical that we have major developments that will attract people to stay here and move here," Hardy says. "I think you must work more across public-private partnerships and different public entities to be able to accomplish things in a town of this size."

"That's what is so valuable about Charles. He's one of the few people that can pull stakeholders from a lot of different places to pull off things

that are material enough to allow the city to move ... such as LSU and Memorial Stadium. And he's willing, I think courageously, some people might say for other reasons, to put himself out there."

As for Landry, he hopes people will see the big picture. "People think that it would be a loss for downtown because the arena's going to LSU, but you get far more visitors and heads in beds for a weeklong convention than you do for a concert," he says.

"We only had six or seven concerts scheduled in the River Center for all of 2024. What if we had 25 conventions for a week and hundreds of people coming into town that don't just fill the beds downtown, but every hotel bed throughout the parish."

"That's exciting, and you can't do that without repositioning the River Center, expanding the convention space and building a quality headquarters hotel."

BRINGING EVERYONE HOME

Landry, however, says a leadership void in the private sector

threatens his grand vision for Baton Rouge. A formal mentoring program is needed, he says, whereby "elder statesmen" in the community regularly spend time mentoring the city's next generation of leaders. Landry, himself, was mentored as a young man by John Barton Sr., one of the founders of BRAE, among others.

"Sadly, I don't think we have enough mentors to help new leadership in Baton Rouge, and right now that's what we need," he says. "We need a new cohort of young leaders to get involved in these wonderful projects and make them happen. Until now, we haven't had much to work with. Now, we have plenty."

Landry says that will be essential if Baton Rouge and the state hope to reverse a disturbing decline in population. "I have three sets of grandchildren in three different time zones and that's a big motivation for me. We need to show those folks who were born here that they need to come home. That's what inspires me every day to do what I do." ■

ALL THE CLIENTS: In a unique arrangement some have questioned, Charles Landry is the legal counsel for all three projects he has dubbed the "string of pearls," representing the Tiger Athletic Foundation, the LSU Foundation, the city of Baton Rouge and Roy Alston of Five Points Capital, a firm that provides financing for community developments.



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- LSU Real Estate and Facility Foundation – founding board member
- LSU Research Foundation
- Assisted with the creation of the Baton Rouge Community College Campus on Florida

Planning

- Formed and chaired the Zoning Advisory Committee to the Planning Commission – 15 years

Museums

- Helped with the formation of the Knock Knock Children's Museum and development of museum

Redevelopment – Pro Bono

- Assisted with numerous projects in disadvantaged areas

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