

## State of The Parish

**I am very proud of the accomplishments of St. Tammany Parish government over the past four years. While I am the presenter of this information tonight, these accomplishments have been made possible because of the teamwork of the Parish Council and the Administration working together.**

**In August of 2005, we were dealt the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States, damaging 49,000 homes, with over 15,000 damaged by flood waters.**

(see Katrina Flood Inundation Map)

Since the storm, Parish government has pushed towards two equally important goals:

- To assist our citizens in restoring their lives and community; and also
- To continue building excellence in all facets of our community life.

In 2007, it is the goal of this administration to complete Katrina recovery efforts. It is time to restore our neighborhoods. We must assist those citizens still in need with finding partners to help them rebuild their homes. We are ready, as a community, for a more normal life.

Given that goal, I will first give you a brief overview of where we stand in our recovery efforts. I will then focus on the highlights of our plan of work for 2007.

At its height, FEMA had over 10,000 FEMA trailers placed in St. Tammany Parish. Over 3,000 have been removed and yesterday, working in partnership with the Parish's mayors, we announced a plan to phase out the need for the remaining 7,000 trailers. It is time to restore our neighborhoods. (see FEMA Trailer Placement Map)

Our citizens need better long term housing than a 25 foot trailer can provide. It is our intention to assist citizens in need to partner with state and FEMA programs available so that they can return to permanent housing. Everyone who is still in need of a temporary home will be permitted to continue to use a trailer. We are simply issuing permits for those still in need and expediting the removal of those trailers that are no longer needed. Let me say again, everyone who needs a trailer for a home, will be able to keep it.

Working with the National Resource Conservation Service and FEMA, most of our main drainage ways are clear. The NRCS has underway, or has completed, over \$32 million dollars in waterway cleaning. They have agreed to spend an additional \$28 million dollars cleaning additional waterways.  
(see NRCS Waterways Map)

We are cleaning 2.7 million linear feet of drainage ditches across St. Tammany. Flow is being restored to the Pearl River. We are clearing our roads, bayous, and canals. To date, we have removed 6.6 million cubic yards of debris from our roads.

From our waterways we have cleaned:

- 52,400 cubic yards of debris
- 426 refrigerators or other white goods
- 28 vehicles
- 143 vessels

This number will continue to climb as waterways' cleaning continues.

This work will continue. We will clean more ditches, cut down 1200 dead trees in the rights of way, and increase work with every available program to aid our citizens. (see Ditch Cleaning Underway)

Through December 31, 2006, we have spent \$164,289,218.01 on Katrina recovery. We have been reimbursed \$156,753,782.50 by FEMA.

I want to publicly thank our Finance department team for their hard work and initiative over the past 18 months. The Finance department wrote a computer program to pre-audit our recovery expenses that has been praised across the state. That program put St. Tammany on the fast track to receive FEMA reimbursements from the State of Louisiana, shortening the amount of time that we had to finance these millions of dollars. That's why we have been reimbursed for 90% of our expenses to date. We will continue to seek grants for every dollar eligible for reimbursement.

We learned lessons from Katrina and we have used those lessons to improve our readiness and response capabilities for both natural and man-made disasters. We always pre-bid all essential functions, such as debris pick up and emergency medical assistance, so that systems are in place pre-storm at a reasonable price to tax payers. We have re-defined essential services in the private sector to include pharmacies, gas stations, banks and grocery stores. We have included churches in our recovery planning. We continue to improve our communications capabilities, from internal radio systems to public broadcast.

In 2007, we will begin restoring the Towers Building in Slidell and return parish offices to the site in 2008. With the assistance of the Rotary Clubs and other non-profits in the community, we hope to erect a memorial for the service of all of our Katrina first responders, from law enforcement to firefighters, from public works crews to the thousands of volunteers from across the world who have come to our aid. We have much to be thankful for.

During the storm, the St. Tammany Parish School Board provided outstanding service to the people of St. Tammany through their partnership with the American Red Cross. Together, they provided safe shelters across St. Tammany. I am proud to partner with the School Board in the area of public safety. We have an outstanding school system that provides an excellent education for our children and is responsive to community needs.

Public Safety is the cornerstone of the quality of life in St. Tammany. We continue to work with law enforcement and the justice system. We will build two additional court rooms in the St. Tammany Parish justice center this year.

We have re-opened public health facilities in the Slidell area and are completing renovations of the Emergency Operations Center War Room to expand its operational capabilities to accommodate more resource agencies, including the new 9-1-1 center.

I'd like to take a minute and review our growth over the past seven years so that you can better judge our plans for 2007. And yes, despite some reports to the

contrary, St. Tammany Parish has grown. Population estimates are important because, often, the funding for government programs is based upon population estimates. From fire departments to medical care, inaccurate population figures can cost St. Tammany Parish funding. I will continue to fight for every dollar available for our citizens.

Our Planning Department averaged 42 public hearings, 389 administrative reviews and averaged 130 code enforcement cases each month during 2006.

According to the 2000 census, St. Tammany Parish had a population of 191,628. Since that time, we have issued 15,471 permits for new single family construction, and 2,827 mobile home permits, shown in purple on this map. (see Parish Growth - Residential New Construction)

This map shows the 3559 businesses started in St. Tammany since 2000. (see Parish Growth - New Vendors)

In 2006, we completed 24 miles of road paving through the capital program. An additional 31.6 miles are in progress to be completed in 2007. In addition, we overlaid 17.3 miles of road in 2006, have 14.1 miles in progress to be completed in 2007. We plan to contract for an additional 15 miles in 2007.

Paving parish roads, however, will not fix the problems on our main roads. All numbered roads in the parish, such as Highways 190, 21 or 11 are state roads. We are working with the state to make the needed major improvements on these roads to ease traffic congestion.

In partnership with the State of Louisiana, St. Tammany Parish is using part of our \$50 million bond funds to improve these state roads that are vital to our transportation infrastructure. The state will reimburse the parish for this work in the year that the particular project was scheduled for state implementation. This allows us to get the road improvements we need today and will allow us to use the reimbursement from the state for future road projects. (see Major Road Projects)

We will begin construction this month on the widening of Highway 22. This \$3 million dollar project will provide 2 westbound lanes, 1 eastbound lane and a center turn lane.

The Highway 1077/Interstate 12 interchange will start construction March 1st of this year. This \$1.3 million dollar project will add new signals, build dual off-ramps, and extend left turns lanes on Highway 1077. Major improvements to the 1077/ Highway 1085 intersection are also planned for 2007.

Design will be completed on April 1st, for a \$7 million dollar widening of Highway 21 north of I-12 to about 1000 feet north of Highway 1085. The new capacity road will be four lanes with a median.

Design will be completed by June 1st for interchange improvements at Interstate 12 and US Highway 11. This \$3 million dollar project will put additional lanes on Highway 11 and make dual off and on ramps.

Design will be completed by July 1st for a new 4 lane service road connecting Fremaux Avenue to Old Spanish Trail. This is a \$10 million dollar project.

A full list of bond road projects and capital roads is available on our website, [www.stpgov.org](http://www.stpgov.org). (see 2007 Bond Road Projects and 2007 Capital Improvement Program)

Equally important to road infrastructure is our drainage infrastructure.

Since 2000, we have mapped our major drainage basins so that we could better understand the flow of water through St. Tammany. With that knowledge, we have a better understanding of the impact of new growth and can better regulate new development. We continue to expand our knowledge base by mapping smaller sub-regions, such as the Tchefuncte Basin Watershed model that will be complete this June. This model will estimate the 100 year flood plain. (see Major Drainage Projects)

We also adopted a no-net fill ordinance designed to off-set some of the changes in natural drainage paths by development. We have built storm water retention ponds across St. Tammany Parish to keep our drainage systems from over flowing.

Major drainage projects for 2007 include:

\$1.5 million dollars in improvements to the Haas Road Regional Detention pond that protects the eastern part of the parish that drains into the French Branch. Pumps will be added to this pond as well as continued site work.

Construction has already begun on the \$2 million dollar Highway 22 drainage improvements project. Ditch and culvert installation and major outfall improvements will improve roadside drainage.

This summer, we will begin construction on Bayou Castine and Little Bayou Castine improvements including a new retention pond. A similar project on the Black River basin is scheduled to begin this fall.

We will also be acquiring land to create regional detention facilities for the Bayou Liberty and Bayou Chinchuba basins. We will be working with the Army Corps of Engineers preparing recommendations for improved drainage along the W-14 canal in the greater Slidell area.

One of our highest priorities this year is to work with the Corps of Engineers to develop and build hurricane protection at the Rigolets. Surge protection at the Rigolets will provide valuable protection not only to St. Tammany, but also to our neighboring parishes along Lake Pontchartrain. This can be accomplished while preserving the delicate lake environment.

A full list of drainage projects is available at [www.stpgov.org](http://www.stpgov.org). (see 2007 Drainage Projects)

We cannot take the quality of our lives here for granted. We must preserve our environment. St. Tammany Parish government is taking major steps preserve our ecology:

First, we are developing regional wastewater treatment facilities to keep our bayous, rivers and lakes clean. Two major facilities should be constructed within the next few years.

We are applying to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality's State Revolving Loan fund for a \$48 million dollar East Tchefuncte Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. This plant will be built in partnership with the City of Mandeville.

We are also applying for a \$109 million dollar East Slidell Wastewater Management Area regional treatment facility. (see East Slidell Regional Wastewater Treatment)

These regional treatment facilities will consolidate and expand the wastewater treatment infrastructure in the Parish thereby creating additional capacity to relieve post-Katrina growth.

In the west alone, future environmental impacts will be mitigated by consolidating nine (9) existing Wastewater Treatment Plants into one (1) regional site. Similar impacts are being built into the east facility.

The parish will also create wastewater capacity by compelling post-Katrina residential construction to connect to a central wastewater treatment system.

The East Tchefuncte project will utilize and expand Mandeville's existing wetland assimilation treatment process to aid in recovery of the Dendinger Tract, a 1,200 acre wetland preserve. The discharge from the East Slidell Wastewater Treatment plant will be routed to the Fritchie Marsh. Both projects will aid in the recovery of our wetlands through the introduction of fresh water and nutrients. Restoration of our wetlands will help reduce any future storm surge effects on our sewer and water systems as well as reducing inland flooding. St. Tammany Parish lost over seven square miles of wetlands to Katrina. (see East Tchefuncte Regional Wastewater Treatment)

We also need to keep our streets cleaner. Our litter abatement program picked up 108,000 pounds of litter in 2006 while cleaning 411 miles of roads.

St. Tammany Parish has programs in place to clean up litter in our parish from road-side pick up by community service workers to adopt-a-road programs. These programs will not stop the litter problem. The only way to keep our community clean is for people to stop littering. If you witness littering, call your Justice of the Peace. Please work with your neighbors, schools and community groups to raise the education level of all citizens about litter prevention. We must stop creating litter so we don't have to pick it up.

The department of environmental services issued 2,133 on-site wastewater permits in 2006, requiring 190 new systems to be installed to replace systems that did not meet basic operating standards. This on-site inspection program is designed to keep untreated waste from entering our bayous, rivers and lakes from faulty septic systems.

We have made tremendous progress improving our infrastructure since our new government was established in 2000. We continue improving our environment. We have taken over 125 acres of land out of commerce and preserved it for public purposes. Parish government has worked hard to increase the value of every dollar

that citizens entrust to us for the public good. We are making tremendous strides in infrastructure improvement. We also have goals to meet in our other areas of responsibility.

Since 2000, we have made significant improvements in the area of fiscal accountability. We restructured our finance department and brought about these tremendous accomplishments:

- Received the Bureau of Governmental Research Excellence in Government award,
- Created the parish's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report and received three Certificates of Excellence for these reports,
- Improved our bond rating from A to A+ to AA- and maintained that rating in the wake of Katrina, and
- Received the first 'clean' audit in St. Tammany Parish history.

I am proud of the work of the department of finance, and of all parish departments, who work diligently to build St. Tammany Parish.

I am proud of the steps we have taken to open parish government. Our council, planning and zoning meetings are broadcast live, without edit, on Cable Channel 10. We hope to have them available on the internet within a year. We are striving to make parish government accessible to every citizen. We have made significant progress since 2000.

We have implemented the strongest drainage regulations in the State. We have initiated a traffic impact analysis to measure the effects of growth on traffic.

We are now undertaking the largest re-structuring of our zoning regulations in twenty years. The purpose of the massive project is to translate the recommendations of New Directions 2025 into a zoning code that will guide land use and development across St. Tammany. After this new code is adopted, we will begin the public meeting process to gather citizen input on applying the new zoning codes to their communities. We are revising our development approval processes. We are implementing our economic development incentive ordinances.

Infrastructure is necessary to support our way of life in Saint Tammany Parish, but we don't live in this great parish because of our roads or drainage basins. We are here because of this is a great place to raise a family, because of the beauty of our surroundings, and quality of life we enjoy.

In 2007, we will also open a new Animal Services facility on Highway 36 near Highway 434. This facility has been paid for with the milage approved by our citizens. Located in the geographic center of the parish, this new facility will improve the care available for homeless animals in St. Tammany. There are still too many animals without homes in St. Tammany Parish. I encourage you to spay and neuter your pets. If you want to adopt a pet, please come to our animal services shelter, or to the Humane Society in Covington or the Animal Shelter in Slidell.

One of the shining lights of 2006 was the opening of the Kids Konnection playground at the Tammany Trace Trailhead on Koop Drive. This playground provides a place for all children, with or without handicaps, to play together. Fund raising was led by a dedicated group of parents who dared to dream more than others thought was practical. They made their dream come true.

The Tammany Trace continues to expand. The Cities of Covington and Abita Springs are building trailheads. I continue to work with the City of Slidell to bring the Trace into Olde Towne Slidell at Heritage Park. The Lacombe Trailhead and swing bridge should be complete in 2007.

In 2007, a working partnership of the Junior League, the St. Tammany Arts Commission, the Tammany Trace Foundation, and St. Tammany Parish Government will break ground for a new children's museum at the Trace Trailhead at Koop Drive. A master site plan for the trailhead will eventually include a small museum and concert hall.

In the coming two years, we will see major structural changes in our parish. Massive improvements will begin on our transportation and drainage infrastructure. Wastewater treatment infrastructure is also on the way. We will maintain public safety and continue to improve the arts and recreation facilities that make us a community.

I want to personally thank the all the members of the Parish Council for their spirit of cooperation. I want to thank parish government employees for their hard work and for staying with parish government after the storm. We have a great team.

I also want to thank the citizens of St. Tammany for their ideas and input. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve you and to work with you building excellence every single day.