



## Activist says Ascension school growth 'critical'

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**GONZALES** - Ascension Parish needs an "adequate public facilities ordinance" that would tie residential development with the capacity of the school system to handle new students, a community activist told a parish committee Monday night.

Otherwise, Jonette Buatt said, school overcrowding will "kill the goose that laid the golden egg."

"This is a critical issue. The school system is what's drawn a lot of people here," said Buatt, a Prairieville resident and a member of Citizens United for Responsible and Intelligent Growth.

The group, CURIG, which is read courage, has been pressing for the ordinance in response to growth that added 900 new students to the school system this year -- before Hurricane Katrina added more than 2,000 extra.

Buatt made her presentation before the parish Strategic Planning Committee, a council subcommittee that handles long-term concepts and makes recommendations to the full council. The members mostly listened Monday.

Should the Parish Council pursue such an ordinance, it would be one of several other measures under development and aimed at addressing the parish's rapid population growth -- up 49.7 percent since 1990, according to census estimates.

The proposed measures include a transportation impact fee, tightened land-use planning and a new subdivision ordinance.

Buatt said that, based on her research, similar public facilities' ordinances have been adopted in other parts of the nation and all basically require "concurrent growth" so schools meet residential demand.

For subdivisions built in areas where schools are already past or would be put past a

desired level of service, developers would be required to mitigate the situation with school improvements, would have to cut back on development size or could have their projects denied under such an ordinance, Buatt said.

Councilman Todd Lambert said he had concerns that the ordinance would "slow down growth," but Buatt had a different view.

"An adequate public facilities ordinance will not stop growth unless somebody just decided they don't want to play by the rules," she said.

Level of service, Buatt said, has been defined in other ordinances at greater than 100 percent of school capacity.

She also called for the Ascension Parish School Board to have a seat on the parish Planning and Zoning Commission and for the School Board and Parish Council to cooperate.

"I hope what I'm not hearing is 'I was elected to the council, not the School Board. That's a School Board issue.' Y'all, this is not School Board issue; it's a community issue," Buatt said.

Discussion of the ordinance was placed on next month's committee agenda.

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