BAYTOWN VOTES

Your Baytown Chamber of Commerce asked District 4, 5 & 6 their views on prepared questions & here are their responses. These are the 4 responses we received - with extended deadlines.

1. **What is your vision for Baytown's Future?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

Baytown has a potential that no other city in our area has. We are at the mouth of the largest port in the US. We are off an interstate that runs from Florida to California. Baytown can be known for logistics, industrial, and medical. I believe we need to tap into the huge potential of Medical in the city. I have focused on bringing more opportunities for major hospitals to come to the area.

JARAMARI GILBERT- DISTRICT 4

My vision is for Baytown to become a city where economic opportunity, quality neighborhoods, strong infrastructure, and community pride grow together.
I believe Baytown has tremendous potential. Our location, industrial presence, workforce, small businesses, and growing population give us opportunities that many communities would welcome. But growth alone does not define success. Success is when families want to raise their children here, businesses want to invest here, and residents are proud of the community they call home.
As someone who grew up in Baytown, left to pursue opportunities, and chose to return to build businesses and raise my family, I want future generations to see Baytown as a place where they can build successful lives without feeling they must leave to find opportunity. That means investing in roads, drainage, public safety, parks, attractive neighborhoods, and a business environment that encourages responsible investment.
I envision a Baytown that is financially responsible, economically competitive, and connected to its residents. Most importantly, I want us to move forward with a shared sense of purpose, where residents, businesses, and local government are working toward the same future.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

My vision is to see multi-million dollar homes along the waterfront of Baytown from the San Jacinto river to Cedar Bayou. I would also like to see businesses that will benefit the residents, businesses like Top-Golf, Dave and Buster's, Chuck E Cheese.

MIKE LESTER - DISTRICT 6

I envision Baytown as an evolving city where residents feel safe as they come to live, work, play and raise their families.A city with wonderful parks, respected Police and Fire / EMS Departments, well maintained streets / infrastructure and quality city services. A growing economy with a vibrant retail, commercial and industrial mix of new and established businesses to serve our citizens.

BAYTOWN VOTES

2. **The State is putting more and more restrictions on location government. HOw should we be ddressing this issue on the local level?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

We must work with our state representatives addressing our concerns on how this affects the citizens they represent. Restrictions are not a one size fit at all. The closest elected official has the greatest impact on you. They deal with the same issues in Baytown you do. We must be in the ear and speak up at the state level about our concerns.

JARAMARI GILBERT- DISTRICT 4

I believe in local government because decisions affecting our neighborhoods are often best understood by the people who live and work in those communities. At the same time, we must recognize that cities operate within the authority granted by the State of Texas.
Our response should be proactive rather than reactive.
First, we need stronger relationships with our state representatives and senators. City leadership should consistently communicate how state legislation affects Baytown's ability to provide essential services, manage growth, and respond to local needs.
Second, we must improve long term planning so that changing state regulations do not constantly put us in a position of reacting at the last minute.
Third, we should strengthen partnerships with our Chamber of Commerce, neighboring municipalities, regional organizations, and business community. When local governments and employers communicate shared concerns, legislators receive a clearer picture of how statewide policies affect local communities.
I believe we can respect state authority while still advocating firmly for Baytown's needs. Our responsibility is to work within the law, protect essential services, and make sure Baytown has a meaningful voice in decisions affecting our future.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

The city should comply with state laws while maintaining the interest of our citizens.

MIKE LESTER - DISTRICT 6

We must continue to engage our State Representatives at every opportunity, not just when they are in session. We need to encourage them to become strong supportive partners in City wide events and activities to make them feel that they are part of our community.

BAYTOWN VOTES

3. **With the major growth in our area, we are experiencing a number of issues in the area of transportation. We have recently approved several projects that do not have the infrastructure needed to handle the traffic generated in support of these projects. What do you believe our city should be doing to resolved these issues?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

The city is working to improve the traffic by working with the state and county to get funding to widen Garth Road and Cedar Bayou Lynchburg. We are talking with our state representatives on the issues with State Highway 146.
We must look ahead at these issues we are going to see with growth. Luckily the city was ahead on San Jacinto Boulevard. We must also get better information for the residence on our bond elections for road projects. Many people did not know the Garth Expansion on the bond was for half of the project cost and we had matching grant funds for the other half.A 92-million-dollar project was going to cost the city 46-million-dollars.

JARAMARI GILBERT- DISTRICT 4

We have to stop treating transportation infrastructure as something we address only after development creates congestion.
When major developments are proposed, we should evaluate their traffic impacts, road capacity, drainage needs, emergency access, and surrounding infrastructure before making long term commitments.
I support requiring appropriate traffic impact studies for significant developments and using those findings to determine what improvements are needed, when they must be completed, and how costs should be shared.
Developers should contribute fairly to infrastructure needs created by their projects, within the limits of state law. Existing taxpayers should not automatically bear the entire cost of accommodating new private development.
We also need stronger coordination with TxDOT, Harris County, Chambers County, and regional transportation agencies. Many of the roads affecting Baytown's traffic patterns involve multiple jurisdictions, so effective solutions require partnerships.
Finally, we need a publicly understandable transportation improvement plan that identifies priority projects, funding sources, and realistic timelines.
Growth is an opportunity, but only when our infrastructure can support it. I want Baytown to become a city that plans ahead of development instead of constantly trying to catch up.

BAYTOWN VOTES

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continued

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

Baytown should be in discussions with Texas Department of Transportation (TXDoT) to decrease the toll amounts from Fred Hartman Bridge to I-10. This would significantly reduce the traffic on TX-146, North Main, Sjolander, and Garth. The big trucks are damaging our streets and causing traffic delays. Another issue is the traffic lights, primarily on Garth Road. Many are not synced. Several of the yellow flashing left turn lights are non-functioning. There are also major streets with no turn lanes, notably Sjolander north at I-10 East.

MIKE LESTER - DISTRICT 6

Without identifying specific projects and the related issues the traffic resolutions are a challenge. In general, transportation and other significant utility concerns are addressed as part of the project review and initial planning.With long term planning in place, some projects may be approved to move forward knowing that heavy infrastructure is in-line to be available as the projects are completed.

4. **With the many businesses wanting to invest in our area (retail, commercial, logistics, etc.), what are your thoughts on enhancing growth wile controlling the mixture with residential communities? Are you for or against incentives for business development?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

It is a competition to bring business to Baytown; cities compete with one another for those businesses. With that said we must be strategic. Do we need to give incentives to a strip center development on Garth? No, we must work to fill the vacant ones we have.
We must work with businesses that fulfill the wants and needs our citizens are requesting. There must be a positive gain for the city in tax growth, job growth and overall fit to Baytown.

BAYTOWN VOTES

4. **With the many businesses wanting to invest in our area (retail, commercial, logistics, etc.), what are your thoughts on enhancing growth wile controlling the mixture with residential communities? Are you for or against incentives for business development?**

continued

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I absolutely support business growth, and I support carefully structured economic development incentives when they produce measurable value for Baytown.
As a small business owner, I understand how important investment, predictable regulations, and a supportive business environment are to economic success.
However, not every development belongs in every location. Industrial facilities, logistics centers, retail businesses, and residential neighborhoods have different infrastructure and operational needs.
We should use thoughtful land use planning, appropriate buffers, transportation studies, anddevelopment standards to reduce conflicts involving truck traffic, noise, drainage, and neighborhood compatibility.
When it comes to incentives, my position is straightforward: public investment should produce a measurable public return.
Before offering incentives, I would want to understand the projected jobs, wages, tax revenue, infrastructure costs, and long term financial benefits. I also support performance requirements so that businesses receiving incentives are accountable for delivering what was promised.
I want Baytown to be known as a city that welcomes investment while protecting the residents who already call it home.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

There is a place for all of these types of businesses, I-10, TX-146 and The Grand Parkway. The city of Baytown has room in Chambers County for growth. The taxes in Chambers county are less than in Harris County. This alone is an incentive for business development. Any incentive given needs to be returned to the city as a gift for existing park improvement or infrastructure needs. I would be FOR an incentive for a Family fun center such as a Chuck E Cheese type of business, or other family fun centers where the residents can actually enjoy the use of it.

BAYTOWN VOTES

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continued

MIKE LESTER - DISTRICT 6

Utilizing both the Future Land Use Plan and the Unified Land Development Code as guides for both business and residential development we strive to insure their mutual compatibility. We must also remember that these documents are 'living' documents and subject to change as the City grows and develops. The City has and must continue to make available a variety of incentives for both business and residential development with the level of those incentives based on the viable economic and quality of life improvements return for the City.

5. **What would be your strategy on how to bring a higher level and higher quality of residential development to the Baytown area?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

We need to work with our home developers on PUD agreements in the ETJ where we have input on the communities they bring.

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

Quality residential development begins with creating a community where people want to live.
Developers look at market demand, schools, transportation, public safety, amenities, infrastructure, and the overall appearance of a community. If we want to attract higher quality housing, we must strengthen the environment surrounding that housing.
I would focus on improving infrastructure, encouraging well planned neighborhoods, maintaining development standards, and ensuring that new residential projects contribute positively to the character of Baytown.
We should also encourage a healthy range of housing options, including quality starter homes, move up homes, townhomes, and well managed multifamily developments. Different stages of life require different housing opportunities.
I believe Baytown should be a place where young professionals can purchase their first home, growing families can move into larger homes, and longtime residents can comfortably remain in the community.

BAYTOWN VOTES

5. **What would be your strategy on how to bring a higher level and higher quality of residential development to the Baytown area?**

continued

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

continued

We should work with developers who share that long term vision rather than focusing solely on the number of rooftops being built.
Quality development is not simply about the price of a home. It is about the quality of the neighborhood and the community surrounding it.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

The city needs to act as a home owners association. Most subdivisions with an HOA are better, but the City of Baytown allows activities that negate the HOA. Therefore most HOA's are not able to enforce the rules that once made their subdivisions desirable. A clean, safe, well maintained city is what residents are wanting. It will be hard to have a quality residential area if we continue to build neighborhoods without enforcing restrictions and apartments. If the city is safe and clean it will attract builders for high end homes. With a name like Baytown and being surrounded by water we should have more homes along the waters edge. Baytown should make an effort to open up the area to more waterfront properties.

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

As the City continues to grow economically the desire for higher quality residential development also increases.We must continue to positively market the City as a destination for families to live, work and play. We must also strive to envision the proper use of our waterways and bay front properties to achieve the desired development.

BAYTOWN VOTES

6. **What should we be doing to bring more shopping opportunities into our community?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I believe Baytown has an opportunity to become a stronger retail destination for our residents and surrounding communities.
We should begin by understanding what residents are leaving Baytown to purchase. Whether it is
clothing, dining, entertainment, specialty retail, or family activities, every dollar spent outside our community represents an opportunity to strengthen our local economy.
I would encourage the city and its economic development partners to use retail market analysis to identify unmet demand and actively recruit businesses that match the needs and purchasing power of our community.
We also need to make sure our commercial corridors are attractive, accessible, and supported by adequate infrastructure. Retailers consider traffic patterns, nearby residential development, property conditions, and the overall customer experience when deciding where to locate.
At the same time, I want to ensure that locally owned businesses are part of this conversation. National retailers can attract additional shoppers, but our local entrepreneurs help give Baytown its identity.
I want residents to have more reasons to shop, dine, and spend their weekends right here in Baytown.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

We first need to lower our crime rate and clean up Garth Road. With the new shopping area coming we are only moving several of the businesses from just a few blocks down the road to the new area. This will create vacant buildings which will soon be filled with more discount stores and used tire shops. Baytown needs to be selective of what businesses are allowed north of Baker Road. There are still areas within the city that can utilized for retail. TX-146 is a prime example of open areas for shopping opportunities.

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

The basic response to this issue is laid out in questions #4 and #5. We must continue to engage the retail industry at their annual conference with targeted meetings to present the City's positive image and economic viability.

BAYTOWN VOTES

7. **What would be your list of major issues facing our community now and in the future?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

1)Storm Water
2)Water / Sewer
3)Streets / Sidewalks
4)Manpower for public safety

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I believe Baytown's greatest challenge is making sure our growth does not outpace our ability to serve the people who live here.
Our most pressing issues include infrastructure capacity, transportation congestion, drainage, public safety, financial sustainability, neighborhood quality, economic diversification, and maintaining public trust.
These challenges are connected. New development creates economic opportunity, but it also creates additional demands on roads, utilities, emergency services, and city operations. If we do not plan carefully, the cost of growth can begin to outweigh its benefits.
Financial sustainability is particularly important. We cannot continue adding long term obligations without understanding how we will maintain and operate them in the future. We must distinguish essential needs from discretionary wants and ensure that public investments produce lasting value.
I also believe community engagement must be part of the solution. Residents should understand the challenges we face, the options available, and the reasons behind major decisions.
Baytown has the opportunity to build something special, but that requires honest conversations and disciplined planning today. I want us to make decisions that future generations will appreciate rather than inherit as unresolved problems.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

Traffic, Texas Department of Transportation needs to reduce the rate on the Grand Parkway to allow access to I-10 from the Fred Hartman bridge. Baytown is a bottleneck for one of the largest ports on the Gulf Coast.

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

The City 'recently' celebrated its 75th year as a combined city and we must recognize that a major portion of our underground infrastructure has reached or even out lived its projected reliable use. The City currently spends a significant portion of the budget striving to maintain current inventory of water, sewer and storm water pipes, as well as, the surface infrastructure (streets) throughout the city. In addition to all of this, we will soon be addressing the Sanitary Sewer Overflow litigation and additional annual expenditures for the next 15 to 20 years.

8. **What is your position on State mandated revenue caps for cities, including tax rate caps?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

It needs adjustments. The current system is having city prioritize the needs of the city, but at 3.5% increase we can not keep up with inflation when there is a major inflation.

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I understand why the State has placed limits on how quickly local governments can increase property tax revenue. Families and businesses need protection from unpredictable increases in their tax burden, particularly when property values are rising.
However, I also recognize that cities face increasing costs for public safety, infrastructure, equipment, personnel, and essential services.
Under Texas law, the voter approval tax rate for most cities generally allows a 3.5% increase in maintenance and operations property tax revenue from existing properties, with separate calculations for debt and other statutory adjustments. Exceeding that threshold generally requires voter approval.

Texas Comptroller
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My position is that fiscal responsibility should begin locally, regardless of what limits the State imposes.
Before asking taxpayers for additional revenue, we should examine spending, identify inefficiencies, evaluate programs, and ensure that existing resources are being used effectively.
At the same time, we must be honest when state restrictions create challenges for providing essential services. That is where long term financial planning, economic development, and responsible diversification of city revenues become especially important.
I believe residents deserve both responsible taxation and reliable city services. Our job is to balance those responsibilities, communicate the tradeoffs, and make sure taxpayers have a meaningful voice in major financial decisions.

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

I think the city should be able to tighten their budget in many areas to avoid raising taxes over the limit the state has mandated. On the other hand I feel if the state is tying our hands with tax increases they should be providing assistance with infrastructure needs as long as we can show evidence the city is doing it's due diligence to reduce spending.

8. **What is your position on State mandated revenue caps for cities, including tax rate caps?** continued

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

The State provides very little revenue to cities and is so removed from local issues that while those types of mandates may seem appropriate on paper, they can have significant negative repercussions at the local level. Citizens of a city are best equipped to understand their local needs and demands for higher levels of quality services and have the direct ability to control those issues by voting for or against specific general obligation bonds.

9. **We continue to hear concerns about the appearance of our community for overgrowth on sidewalks and medians, medians not maintained, and dead trees in the medians. With money tight, how would you propose to make our community appear more presentable?**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

We need to look to contracting some of these items to cut costs on overhead and maintenance.

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I believe maintaining the appearance of our city is one of the most visible ways local government demonstrates pride and accountability.
Residents notice when medians are overgrown, sidewalks are neglected, trees are dead, and public spaces are not maintained. These may seem like small issues compared to major infrastructure projects, but they affect how people experience Baytown every day.
My approach would begin with evaluating our current maintenance operations. We need to understand how resources are being allocated, whether maintenance schedules are effective, and where efficiencies can be achieved.
I would support establishing clear maintenance standards and a prioritized schedule for major corridors, neighborhood entrances, sidewalks, medians, and public spaces.
We should also explore partnerships with local businesses, civic organizations, neighborhood associations, and volunteer groups through programs such as Adopt a Median or community beautification initiatives.
However, volunteer participation should supplement city responsibilities, not replace them.
I would also encourage practical landscaping choices that reduce long term maintenance costs, including appropriate native plants, durable materials, and vegetation that requires less water and upkeep.
We do not have to spend recklessly to maintain a presentable city. We need consistent expectations, accountability, and a willingness to make everyday maintenance a priority.
A clean and well maintained Baytown sends a message that we respect our residents, welcome investment, and take pride in our community.

BAYTOWN VOTES

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continued

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

At this point the city is unable to maintain all of the ROW's as well as the schools and parks. We have hundreds of local businesses that are lawn care professionals. We should contract their services and only award those contracts to business owners that live in Baytown. The property owners should also be held accountable for maintaining the property in front of their businesses. Another issue is that the City of Baytown is critical of writing up businesses for tall grass and various infractions of lawn care while at the same time not taking care of the responsibilities of the city properties.

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

City owned medians should be maintained on a regular basis with the removal of dead trees and plants and a movement towards aesthetically pleasing xeriscaping to eventually reduce the required maintenance.

10. **Our Community seems to have a “low self-esteem” issue. With the growth in our community, how would you propose to rebuild our “self-esteem”? We can’t continue to allow the negatives to make decision for us. Streets and roads have to be repaired, cleanlinessa nd maintenance has to be done and facilities need to be built.**

JAMES FRANCO - DISTRICT 4

We have to be more transparent, we must inform the public on how we are working on priorities. Inform them of the positives that are happening.We as a council need to focus on the city and not personal social goals.

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

I believe Baytown has far more to be proud of than we sometimes give ourselves credit for. I grew up here, graduated from Robert E. Lee High School, had the opportunity to compete in Division I and professional athletics, and ultimately chose to return home to open businesses and raise my family.
I made that decision because I believe in Baytown.

BAYTOWN VOTES

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continued

JAMARI GILBERT - DISTRICT 4

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But I also understand why some residents are frustrated. It is difficult to feel optimistic about your city's future when you drive on roads that need repairs, see neglected public spaces, experience traffic congestion, or feel that your concerns are not being heard.
I do not believe we rebuild community pride through slogans or marketing campaigns alone. We rebuild it by giving residents visible reasons to believe in their city.
That starts with doing the basics consistently. Repairing streets, maintaining public spaces, addressing drainage, improving infrastructure, supporting public safety, and ensuring that major investments reflect community priorities.
We should also do a better job of celebrating the people and organizations already making Baytown better. Our small businesses, educators, first responders, industrial workforce, volunteers, and community organizations contribute to this city's identity every day.
I want Baytown to become a place where residents see progress in their own neighborhoods, where businesses feel confident investing, and where families are excited about the future.
We also have to reconnect City Hall with the community. People are more likely to take pride in the direction of their city when they believe they have a voice in shaping it.
I have served on committees and boards, and I have also experienced what it feels like to participate without knowing whether your concerns truly influenced the outcome. That experience has shaped my understanding of leadership.
Baytown already has hardworking people, successful businesses, strong institutions, and enormous potential. We do not need to manufacture a new identity. We need to invest in the community we have, address the problems residents see every day, and create a future that reflects what Baytown can become.
I want Baytown to be a city people are proud to say they are from, proud to invest in, and proud to call home.

BAYTOWN VOTES

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continued

KELLY LAIRD - DISTRICT 5

Personally when I drive through any city and start seeing used tire shops, Vape/smoke shops, Tattoo parlors, and buildings painted in wild colors I start to wonder if I should be in this area. If I continue down the street dodging potholes and standing water, I wonder why anyone would want to live here. If I also cannot see the store or business I am looking for due to overgrown trees and weeds I get frustrated. This is why we have a low self-esteem. Yes, we have nature trails and city parks, but are they safe?

Baytown needs to fix neighborhood streets, enforce landscaping guidelines in areas that are frequented by shoppers and travelers passing by, and limit the number of similar businesses that do not benefit the city as a whole. With the new shopping area, considering several businesses are only moving from one location on Garth to the new shopping center, it will open up large buildings that could be used for family oriented businesses instead of a building that the city or school district will eventually purchase for unneeded office space. Safety is also a major concern. I feel we need more police presence within the city.

MIKE LESTER- DISTRICT 6

The first step in dealing with this issue is to acknowledge that the ‘negative comments’ within our community are at times overly critical of normal setbacks and or deficiencies within our city and seldom if ever offer positive or constructive alternatives. The path forward is to practice patience and celebrate the small positive actions/efforts of the city, allowing the major achievements time to mature and prosper.