

# Land donated for Midcity, downtown BR redevelopment



Advocate file photo -- A building along Government Street in Baton Rouge's Mid City area bordering downtown is among 10 other buildings that are on a 6-acre site being donated by Entergy Gulf States Louisiana to the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority. The agency plans to use the site for a mixed-use development, keeping some buildings and demolishing others.

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**BY TIMOTHY BOONE**

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Entergy has agreed to donate a 6-acre site at 1509 Government St. for a mixed-use development that backers say will be a catalyst for redevelopment in Mid City and downtown Baton Rouge.

The land has a variety of potential uses, including loft-style apartments, affordable housing, retail, warehouses and as a station for a future passenger rail service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Plans are to have green space on the site that will promote walking and biking.

“The Entergy site provides a monumental catalytic opportunity to address blight, transportation, housing, commercial, environmental, educational and community needs all along the Government Street corridor in a well-planned and comprehensive manner,” said Walter Monsour, chief executive officer of the [East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority](#).

The donation by Entergy Gulf States Louisiana was approved at a special meeting of the

RDA board of commissioners Thursday.

In addition to the site donation, the board approved the RDA to access grant funding in an amount up to \$200,000 from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality for remediation purposes. While the land has gotten a clean bill of health from the Louisiana Department of Environmental quality, the buildings on the site need to have asbestos, mold and lead paint removed, said James Andermann, a project manager with the RDA. The plan is to have a contractor on-site handling the remediation by the summer. The amount of time it will take to do the remediation will be determined when a contract is signed in the spring.

The land has been appraised at \$1.75 million, Andermann said. There are 11 buildings on the site, including two multi-story brick buildings that are on Government Street, and take up 50,000 square feet. Some of the buildings will be rehabilitated and some will be demolished.

The project had been in the works since the RDA first approached Entergy in spring 2010 about donating the land. The electric company abandoned the site in fall 2011 when it moved into a new facility on Pecue Lane.

“Donating and accepting a donation ain’t easy,” Monsour said.

While the remediation is going on, the RDA will try to get grant funds to do the necessary demolitions and put green space on the site, Monsour said.

“My ultimate goal is to very quickly put together a development plan for that area and begin discussions with private developers to assess their appetite for coming in and doing the commercial and retail and even possibly the residential pieces we want to put in,” he said.

The RDA will work on redeveloping the Entergy site while it works on the larger [Ardendale](#) development.

Sheila Pounders, Entergy director of customer service, said the property’s history dates to the 1800s and that it was the former home of the city’s first electric railway service.

It housed the Baton Rouge Electric Co. in the early 1900s, which later became part of Gulf States Utilities, then Entergy.

“We’re happy to witness the next evolution as this property becomes part of the Mid City Warehouse/Design District, and stays a major part of the area for years to come,” Pounders said. While Entergy could have sold the property for a good amount of money, Pounders said donating the land was the right thing to do.

“Part of our mission is giving back to the communities we serve,” she said. “It was just perfect timing and the perfect situation.”

The Entergy project fits in with a variety of activities going on in Mid City and downtown, Monsour said. They range from the redevelopment and expansion of Baton Rouge Magnet High School and [The Elysian](#), a 100-unit mixed income development on Spanish Town Road to the new [IBM service center](#) currently under construction downtown and the recently announced [Water Campus](#) that will be built on the old municipal docks.

“We identified a number of properties we thought were key to things happening in Mid City and the Entergy site was one of them,” said Sam Sanders, executive director of the Mid City Redevelopment Alliance. “This can really be a game changer for Government Street.”

Donna Esnard, who works in lighting sales for Cajun Electric & Lighting, said she was pleased to hear that the Entergy property would be redeveloped.

Her business is across Government Street. Esnard said she was concerned about the condition of the site.

Esnard said she would like to see a mixed-use project go up on the site, with housing for professionals who work in downtown Baton Rouge, retail and restaurants.

“I’m excited now that something is happening with this,” she said.