



CITY OF KENNER

MAYOR'S OFFICE

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Travelers Interested in Commercial Development on the Lakefront in Kenner and Looking for a Break from the Crowds of a New Orleans Vacation, According to Tourism Study

When it's built, people will come.

More than 1,000 business and leisure travelers, many who have visited the New Orleans area in the past, said that a boardwalk-type development overseeing Lake Pontchartrain would make them seriously consider including a day trip in their New Orleans vacation and perhaps even include an overnight stay in Kenner.

That is just one of the results of a tourism study by a Virginia market research company, Mandala Research LLC, that was unveiled Friday morning before members of Mayor Michael Yenni's Economic Development Committee.

The study will be forwarded to city consultants who are in the process of putting together a presentation to state officials for the economic development of the lakefront area in Laketown. The state owns the land but has asked Kenner to take the lead in proposing a commercial development plan.

"The (tourism study) tells us that what is being planned today at the Lakefront will pay off as future enticements to travelers coming to the area," said Violet Peters, president and CEO of the Jefferson Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Feedback from the study, which also included interviews with city residents, also points to the importance of the Pontchartrain Center in attracting visitors to the city. Officials with Mandala Research, LLC said the center could earn more bookings with more individual breakout rooms – smaller meeting areas.

"We now know if we have the opportunity to expand or renovate the Pontchartrain Center (to add breakout rooms) that will give us a larger playing field of who we can go after," Peters said.

Yenni said that is a particularly exciting result from the study because the city recently renegotiated a five-year contract with Pontchartrain Center operator SMG that is purely results-oriented. The more SMG can lower the deficit at the center, the more money SMG earns. Kenner wins in that scenario because the subsidy it pays for the center is reduced.

Kenner officials and Economic Development Committee members said the results of the tourism study show that Kenner already has many of the ingredients visitors are looking for – including seafood restaurants, great shopping and an attractive historical district.

"These are the things people want to do and you already have them, so we just need to make sure people know that," said Ginny Binder, Director of Research for Mandala.

Travelers, particularly those who have been to New Orleans recently, said they are looking for a location with some of the same attractions as New Orleans without the crowds.

Councilman Kent Denapolis said getting a list of some of the “buttons” Kenner officials can press to attract travelers to spend some of their New Orleans stay in Kenner is crucial. One of the buttons, or themes of any future marketing effort, is to highlight Kenner as a separate entity within the New Orleans area. While many people in the tourism study had visited New Orleans, few realized they had also been in Kenner. “We know that we have to make sure people know Kenner exists,” Councilwoman Maria DeFrancesch said.

Councilman Keith Reynaud said it was rewarding to hear that travelers are interested in a commercial development on the waterfront. “Laketown is a canvass and we know exactly the direction to go by using this study and other feedback.”

Peters said the study provides plenty of ammunition the convention and visitors bureau can use immediately – such as highlighting the shopping, cuisine and music events in Kenner, as well as lower hotel prices, no crowds and no parking hassles - to attract tourists. “This gives us a good outline of what our marketing program should be,” she said.

Mayor Yenni said there were no surprises in the study, which means Kenner officials are on the right track. “This tells us people will want to visit a commercial development in Laketown and consider a historic district a fascinating option when they take a trip. With a city budget that relies heavily on sales tax revenue, it’s important to know that we are heading in the right direction in our effort to make Kenner a destination location.”

The results of the study can be found on the City’s website, www.kenner.la.us, under the Kenner 2030 subpage (DIRECT LINK:<http://www.kenner.la.us/2/EDC%20Presentation%205-10-13.pdf>).

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