Review the budget - $20 million allocated “public works” for 2025-2026 – public works includes drainage, streets, sidewalks, public grass, cleaning, traffic signals and signs, etc.

Proposal:

The “Manchac-Ward” Watershed Resilience Initiative

Objective: to modernize drainage infrastructure in high-risk zones of St. George to mitigate flooding from Bayou Manchac and Ward Creek

Problem: St. George has incorporated in order to gain more local control over how tax dollars are invested, including in infrastructure projects. Broadly, Baton Rouge has a maintenance problem when it comes to drainage systems. St. George now has the opportunity to invest city money to improve St. George drainage systems. 75% of East Baton Rouge Parish’s water drains into the St. George area via Ward Creek (see map) and the Bayou Manchac basin.

MAP WARD CREEK:

https://maps.google.com/?cid=14494319342205535819&g_mp=Cidnb29nbGUubWFwcy5wbGFjZXMudjEuUGxhY2VzLlNlYXJjaFRleHQ

MAP BAYOU MANCHAC:

https://maps.google.com/?cid=15623624328840911577&g_mp=Cidnb29nbGUubWFwcy5wbGFjZXMudjEuUGxhY2VzLlNlYXJjaFRleHQ

MAP ST. GEORGE:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1Bo9hQazRedlzCI9iFWhY93MBbcl9dKVR&ll=30.389509339950646%2C-91.01816999999998&z=12

Proposed Solution:

1. Apply for grant money via FEMA programs to try to increase the budget for the project. (see pg. 24 of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program and Policy Guide for a summary of the types of grants available).
    a. Could be possible to invest $5 million of St. George Budget money to unlock $15 million in matching state/federal funds – for $20 million total to spend. But this would rely on receiving the grant, which is competitive. If we did not receive the grant, we would need to amend the scope of the project to spend less money and possibly extend over several years of budgets – e.g. spend $5 million per year over the course of 3-4 years to accomplish the project below.
2. Assuming the Grant is awarded:

- Invest $12 million (of the possible $20 million) in targeted dredging and culvert replacement in the Bayou Manchac basin (see map).
- Invest $4.5 million in routine maintenance (clearing catch basins, debris removal, canal mowing, etc.)
- Invest $1.5 million into engineering and modeling to help with future zoning so that we do not build in ways that increases flood risk
- Invest $2 million into a fund for flash flood response and quick fix repairs as needed

3. Create a tax credit for developers who include retention ponds or permeable pavement, which would reduce flooding risks in new developments – tax credits would mean these developers would pay less taxes if they meet the requirements.
4. If the grant is not awarded, we would pivot to invest $5 million from the current budget in a much smaller program: $3 million into the dredging (we would limit the scope to just a few neighborhoods to start with and then expand the scope year-by-year); $1 million in maintenance, and $1 million in engineering and modeling; we would skip the emergency fund for now

Real World Example of a Possible Plan: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbjFL4JJV8U

Some possible things to consider:

The order of the work and which neighborhoods might benefit first – since it would likely take years to complete a large project like this for the entire basin – should more money be spent on the wealthiest neighborhoods who are spending more in taxes or lower income neighborhoods where there might be a higher flood risk?

The partnership and financial responsibility between St. George and Baton Rouge – especially since a lot of the water is draining in St. George but coming from other places in the parish – are other places responsible in part for costs?

This is a large portion of the budget – would it be worth it?

Some things to consider in a debate:

1. The Capital Investment Debate

Focus: *Is spending so much on a single basin restoration the best use of funds?*

Pro (The "Regional Resilience" Argument)	Con (The "Equity & Spreading the Wealth" Argument)
High Impact: Ward Creek is the primary drainage "highway." Fixing the bottleneck protects the most residents per dollar spent.	**Geographic Bias:** Residents in northern St. George or higher elevations may feel their tax dollars are only benefiting those near the southern basins.
Leveraging Funds: Using $5M as a match to get $15M in federal grants turns a local project into a massive regional solution.	**Maintenance Neglect:** Heavy focus on a "mega-project" might divert funds from fixing "neighborhood-level" issues like clogged local drains.

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2. The Infrastructure Choice (PVC vs. Galvanized)

Focus: *Should the city prioritize modernizing older neighborhoods or building new capacity?*

- **Pro (The Modernization Argument):** Replacing old galvanized pipes with PVC is a permanent fix. Galvanized pipes corrode and narrow over time, making even "clean" drains inefficient. It's a "do it once, do it right" approach.
- **Con (The Cost-Benefit Argument):** Digging up streets to replace pipes is incredibly expensive and disruptive. Opponents might argue that high-pressure cleaning (jetting) existing pipes is a faster, cheaper way to use the $4M budget to cover more miles of road.

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3. The "Green" Infrastructure Mandate

Focus: *Mandating retention ponds and permeable pavement for developers.*

- **Pro (The Sustainability Argument):** This shifts the fiscal burden of drainage from the taxpayer to the developer. It addresses the "root cause" of urban social problems: rapid development without accounting for environmental impact.
- **Con (The Economic Growth Argument):** High "impact fees" or strict green mandates might drive developers to build just outside the St. George city limits. This could lead to a "hollowed-out" tax base where people live in St. George but all new businesses go elsewhere.

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4. The Inter-governmental "Claims-Making"

Focus: *Should St. George pay for water coming from Baton Rouge?*

- **Pro (The Sovereignty Argument):** As a new city, St. George must take ownership of its own destiny. Waiting for East Baton Rouge Parish to fix the drainage has failed for decades; self-funding is the only way to ensure safety.
- **Con (The Accountability Argument):** If 75% of the water is coming from outside city limits, paying 100% of the bill is "taxation without representation." Students might argue for a legal challenge or a regional drainage district where costs are shared proportionally by the water's origin.

Sociological Considerations:

1. **Environmental Justice:** Are we protecting the homes of the "claims-makers" (the vocal incorporated citizens) while neglecting the runoff impacts on lower-income areas further down the Bayou?
2. **The Social Construction of "Crisis":** Is a $20M budget enough to solve a "problem" that was a primary justification for the city's creation, or was the flood risk "upsold" to win the incorporation vote?

Transparency: I used Google Gemini to help me craft this scenario – some parts are copied directly from Gemini's suggestions and in other places I have added some additional content of my own

Class Outline:

12-12:10pm:

Professor will Present the General Proposal (this document) – first 10 min. of the meeting – in a real world city council situation, proposals are often presented at one meeting and then there is another meeting scheduled for public comments – which could lead to revisions of the proposal and multiple cycles…but we do not have that kind of space

12:10-12:50pm:

Public comments: students can line up on the left/right side of the room to offer comments in favor or against the proposal – "against" could simply mean you want something revised – as in you want drainage but not the current proposal. I will produce a sign up sheet. **Each speaker**

should speak for about 2 minutes and should consider their key claim(s) and the grounds and warrants for those claims. You will receive a speaking credit for participating.

12:50-1pm:

City Council will discuss (in front of the class) and ask questions related to the public comments. The main question is whether they could pass the proposal as is and move forward with next steps (applying for the grant, beginning to plan) OR if they determine specific revisions to the proposal (e.g. decide against applying for the grant and adjust the investment numbers accordingly) before voting to pass or fail it – if adjustments are made, the city council would need to vote on the adjustments themselves AND THEN hold an additional vote to pass or fail the adjusted proposal.

1-1:20pm:

Voting. Like last time, the room as a whole (non-city council) will count as their own single vote. Each city council member will have a vote. The mayor votes in case of a tie to break the tie.