



THE ACADIANA ADVOCATE

THEACADIANAADVOCATE.COM | WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026 \$2.00

Funds sought for downtown plan

Project would focus on reshaping development district

BY STEPHEN MARCANTEL
Staff writer

An ordinance being introduced to the council on Tuesday asks the city to set aside funds for a comprehensive Downtown-Urban Core Redevelopment Plan.

The plan would be handled through the Downtown Development Authority and the cost would be about a million dollars,

said CEO Kevin Blanchard. Council members Kenneth Boudreaux and Thomas Hooks are introducing an ordinance that would provide \$500,000 for the plan, with the bulk of the funding coming from the Downtown capital budget. The remainder of the funding would come through downtown's taxing district, with \$50,000 coming from the development agency.

The redevelopment plan pri-

oritizes several things: putting underutilized spaces back into commerce, parking, parks in the downtown area, and transportation and mobility. The goal is to help upgrade properties downtown and create new developments that have long been hindered by infrastructure bottlenecks, such as sewage capacity.

"We would start putting the plan together and then go out to some of

these individual private sites and say this is what we would be able to do on the public side to get a project moving on this lot," Blanchard said.

The plan will look at around a dozen sites, some of which include underused parking lots, Blanchard said, and figure out why these sites have yet to be developed. The plan will also look at where in the downtown area parking is needed or not, and how to better use existing

parking facilities.

Another focus is on expanding Festival International's footprint downtown. The free festival brings hundreds of thousands to the downtown area, and the need for extra stage space is growing. Lastly, it will look at how to better connect downtown with nearby hotspots, such as the University of Louisiana at Lafayette campus and the Oil Center.

The ordinance was scheduled to be introduced Tuesday and could be considered for adoption at a future council meeting.

FOR THE LOVE OF READING

Evangeline Elementary offers book vending machine as reward



STAFF PHOTOS BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

Fifth grader and Student of the Year Isabella Solis smiles after purchasing a book during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new book vending machine at Evangeline Elementary on Tuesday.

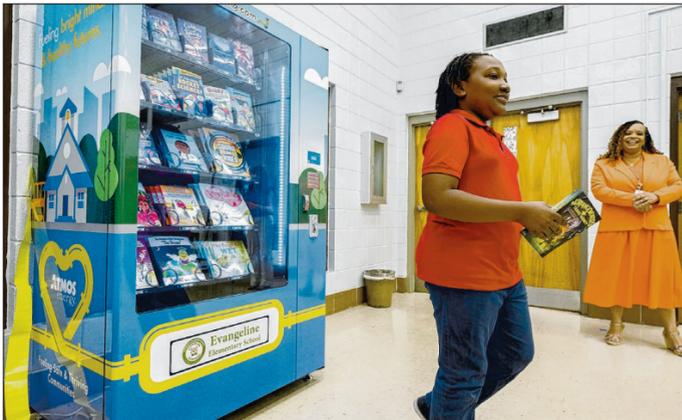
BY ASHLEY WHITE
Staff writer

Students at Evangeline Elementary will have a new way to get new books.

The school unveiled a book vending machine Tuesday morning in its library. Students will earn a token that they can redeem for a book of their choice after completing certain goals, such as reading a certain amount of words or books or reaching an accelerated reading goal.

"I think it's really nice we have a book vending machine because it helps students read more," said Isabella Solis, a fifth grader and the school's Student of the Year. "Outside of the school walls, we can read at home, in the car or wherever we're at."

The books students select from the vending machine can be used to fill their home libraries. Isabella, whose favorite books are the "I Survived" series, selected "We Have a Dream," a book about Indigenous people and people of color protecting the environment.



Fifth grader Jemarick Adams walks away after purchasing a book from the book vending machine at Evangeline Elementary on Tuesday.

Million-word reader and fifth grader Mila George, whose favorite book is "The Last Olympian" by Rick Riordan, selected "Gossamer" by Lois Lowry. Jemarick Adams, another million-word reader and fifth grader whose favorite book is "Darkness of Dragons" from Tui T. Sutherland's

"Wings of Fire" series, picked the first in the "Strangeworlds Travel Agency" series by L.D. Lapinski.

Principal Felise Williams said it was exciting to watch students who love to read use the book vending

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2026 LEGISLATURE

Bill to let Legislature remove judges evolves

Governor, DAs no longer involved in process

BY MEGHAN FRIEDMANN
Staff writer

The Louisiana Legislature could have the power to remove judges under a bill that has made it through the first stage of the legislative process — but the governor would not be able to initiate that removal process, as had been originally proposed.

State Sen. Jay Morris, R-West Monroe, who has long called for greater oversight of judges, presented his Senate Bill 123 to the Judiciary C Committee on Tuesday, when he also significantly amended the proposal.

In its latest form, SB123 would put a constitutional amendment on the ballot next year which, if approved by voters, would enable the Legislature to remove judges for "malfeasance, gross misconduct, or incompetence committed while in office." Successfully removing a judge would require a majority vote of the House and a two-thirds vote from the Senate; the judge also would receive a trial in the Senate.

The bill no longer applies to district attorneys, who had been subject to Morris' original proposal.



Morris

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Legislation targets harassment of athletes by bettors

BY ALYSE PFEIL
Staff writer

As sports betting grows in popularity, some athletes say they are getting threats and harassment from bettors who lose their wagers — and some Louisiana lawmakers want the state to intervene.

"Athletes across college and professional sports are increasingly facing harassment and threats from individuals with betting interests, especially as legal sports wagering expands nationwide," said state Sen. Mike Reese, R-Leesville, during a meeting at the State Capitol on Tuesday.

Reese is sponsoring Senate Bill 325, which would allow the Louisiana Gaming Control Board to ban harassment and violence toward athletes

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WEATHER

HIGH 83
LOW 61

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Business **10C**

Classified **4B**

Comics-Puzzles **7C-9C**

Commentary **3B**

Deaths **4B**

Living **5C**

Nation-World **2A**

Opinion **2B**

Sports **1C**

101STYEAR, NO. 268

ACA Wednesday

