



PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAM

NEW DIRECTIONS: COMMUNITY | CONNECTIVITY | COORDINATION

Slidell, Louisiana
Final Report
October 2009



American Planning Association
Making Great Communities Happen

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Ryan Scherzinger | Outreach Associate

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W. Paul Farmer, FAICP | Executive Director & CEO
Charlotte McCaskill | Chief Operating Officer

Slidell PAT Members

Rollin Stanley, AICP
Heather Deutsch, AICP
Jason Beske, AICP
Jeffrey Soule, FAICP | APA Staff

APA Offices

Washington, D.C. - National Headquarters

1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone 202.872.0611

Chicago Office

122 S. Michigan Avenue
Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60603
Telephone 312.431.9100

APA Community Assistance Program

Please visit:
www.planning.org/communityassistance/

Slidell PAT Project Webpage

Please visit:
www.planning.org/communityassistance/teams/slidell

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the invitation of Mayor Ben Morris, the American Planning Association (APA) sent a three-member volunteer team of planners to Slidell, Louisiana to focus on five issues:

- Improving Old Town;
- Commenting on the design guidelines for the Fremaux Avenue Corridor and Old Towne Preservation District
- Connecting the community through recreation
- Identifying economic development tools; and
- Providing guidance on the zoning rewrite.

During the short three-day visit, the team benefitted from the assistance of the City and civic groups, led by Mayor Morris. Originally the team's focus was an overall view of the downtown area and the potential for a connected bicycle pathway system. Ms. Deutsch developed a sketch plan for the bike system while Mr. Beske identified the downtown nodes. Mr. Stanley provided details on redevelopment strategies as well as overall themes for connecting the pieces.

The team developed an in-depth assessment of the challenges and opportunities of the corridors and nodes, reflected in the detailed graphics for each, as well as strategies for successful economic development strategy.

This report can form the basis for community discussion on developing detailed plans to direct new coordinated development that works to improve the physical character of the community. In the longer term, the report can guide specific strategies for investing in capital programs and business attraction.

Slidell faces challenges beyond recovery. The city must be more than a stop along an interstate highway trip. Being so close to New Orleans means the traveler leaving that City is well past Slidell before stopping for a meal or the evening. The "big brother" relationship with New Orleans means Slidell must grow its own activity.

BACKGROUND

The APA volunteer team spent three days in Slidell meeting with various community members including civic staff, business people, and residents. While short, the time spent enabled some initial ideas to emerge.

- Preparation of graphics and assessments of the major districts in the center of Slidell. Connecting these areas will form the basis for a long-term, successful strategy to attract investment and create a sustainable community core.
- Summary of the basics for a successful zoning code rewrite.
- Ideas on using various economic development tools to create a coordinated, sustainable investment strategy.

This document is intended to stimulate discussion of how to create a more inviting physical environment that leads to greater activity throughout the day and evening. The implementation section and action checklist, at the end of this report, highlight many ideas that can help.

What We Saw

The team members were unanimous in their praise for the people of Slidell in pulling the community together. The potential for strategic investments to spark new activity leading to incremental growth is clear. The hurricane damage and the current economic situation cannot take away the bones –the solid building blocks that exist in the community. The investment in Heritage Park, a beautiful, understated space, used throughout the day by the community, is an excellent example.

Building Blocks for Reinvestment

- Dedicated community
- Businesses that stayed
- Historic buildings
- Strategic properties to anchor public and private investment
- Access - highway and water
- Water access

What We Did

In a short visit the Team got the lay of the land by meeting with people and visiting as much of the City as possible. Keeping the scope of the visit focused helped avoid tackling too much in too little time. This report's ideas are meant to help kick start some strategic investment and provide direction of a broader nature that could help Slidell stand out among its peers in the region.

Ideas for the Future

- Design direction to help grow Old Towne and ideas for general improvement of the public spaces throughout the community
- Ideas for better greenway connections taking advantage of existing infrastructure and natural features
- Economic development strategies with on the ground recommendations for focus areas where strategic investment is critical
- Detail on how to progress with a successful zoning "discovery" and rewrite

You Are The Experts

While the Team was viewed as experts from afar, the real experts are the people who live and work in the community. The folks who help deliver services, run businesses, provide governance, and choose to live and or work in Slidell. The APA Planning Assistance Team can provide ideas that have worked elsewhere and might be adaptable to your community.

Sometimes fresh eyes can help identify possibilities that have been overlooked or unrealized for lack of funding. The Team hopes these suggestions, with their limited focus on specific projects, will help the people of Slidell realize the potential of the assets we considered. Ultimately, you know best whether these ideas can help.

THEMES

View this report as an ideas discussion, based on three themes: community, connectivity, and coordination.

Community

Slidell has a strong focus on the Interstate highway. There is no doubt the value this brings for access and potentially bringing in new investment. Other cities have had a similar focus, yet failed to attract the star business or developer. The cornerstone for creating new businesses and jobs often starts with the local community, identifying the sectors of the local economy that may be lacking and working out how to build that sector.

Given the current economic climate and the regional economy, Slidell will have to “grow its own” in order to start building a stronger economy. Then when times improve, the foundation of local businesses and services will help attract larger employers. This approach can also help to redirect perceptions of a community.

The Team heard from several people about the number of vehicles that pass by every day on the Interstate. Looking at a community approach to changing how those people think as they pass by is an important objective. What partnerships can be created in local services; can local businesses be supported locally; how can a coordinated approach be developed to build on the connections and community strengths, to become more self sustaining and at the same time, a destination for people beyond the City boundaries?

Community Building

The people of Slidell have a strong commitment to the City. Identifying local priorities, such as sectors of the economy that are lacking, can create new opportunities for investment that serve the local population. Building the local market leads to new opportunities.

Connectivity

While the Team had a narrow focus, it is important to ensure that what evolves from the recommendations builds on Slidell’s assets and creates the connections to the rest of the community and the region. Diversity in these connections also helps to soften the impacts of economic fluctuations beyond local control.

Connections to the Wider Community

- Creating visual, physical, and social reasons for people to visit
- Creating gateways and corridors that connect strategic areas like Old Towne to the water, other attractions, and access roads
- Providing attractive, inviting spaces along important routes through Old Towne
- Building sustainable infrastructure to both improve and adapt to the environment
- Creating development strategies that don’t compete with other areas of the community but build links to a wider customer network, broadening the market for local services and goods

Traffic Entries

There are six significant points of entry into the center area. The three on the interstate define first impressions of the community and could be the same interstate exit any place in the country. From the point of “first impression,” the exits at Fremaux Avenue and Gause Boulevard are the most important. The treatments discussed for those points of entry apply equally to the exit at Old Spanish Trail, although improvements at that exit should be phased after the other two are improved.

Nodes & Corridors



Nodes and Corridors

Slidell's center has excellent connections to the rest of the city, the area, the region, and beyond. This connectivity is an asset but it can be a liability if the corridors are not enhanced in a way that encourages people to stop rather than simply move through the downtown area.

Coordination

Successful rebuilding and investment strategies require a coordinated approach of assessing the assets and matching people and funding sources to build on them. An inventory of the City's assets, mapped against programs can be a useful tool in closing financing gaps for a key project.

Funding sources include non-profit organizations that target specific subjects, from education and health to small business creation. Knowing and understanding the available grants can help implement a variety of community-serving programs.

A good place to start is a comprehensive community improvement plan outlining what investments in both physical and social infrastructure the City wants to make. These investments are then mapped against potential funding sources.

Community Improvement Plan (CIP)

A CIP should identify not only physical improvements such as the new City Hall, it should include programs and services as well. Programs to reduce child obesity, for example, or health advice for prenatal care, create a healthier community and are programs for which grants are available.

A CIVIC VISION

There are obvious “bones” that stand out in Slidell. These community assets form the basis for the Team’s recommendations. The links between each element are strong and the Team believes that if properly designed and implemented, they can successfully jump start a strong identity for the center area and the corridors that lead people to it.

Civic Bones:

- Recognizable downtown districts
- National employers
- Grid street pattern
- Historic buildings
- Heritage park
- Open space
- People
- Access

Creating a civic vision for strategic areas of the City will help direct efforts. The Team proposes that the community develop a vision based on developing the five districts and connecting them to each other and the rest of the community. Focusing on simple goals can bring about quick results and set the groundwork for further development as funding becomes available.

Goals for a Civic Vision:

- Reinforce the districts
- Reinforce the corridors
- Reinforce the entries
- Create a strategic plan

Each goal is a piece of the implementation puzzle, building on each other to achieve a vision of great public spaces to enhance the opportunities for exciting shops, eateries, living spaces, and recreation.

Working with the Tulane team, an idea evolved that could create the hub from which to construct the energy and infrastructure for a vibrant, sustainable center core. This concept starts at Heritage Park and would see the building of a major east-west axis of well designed public streets linking into the districts and corridors discussed below. These pivotal corridors would build on the investment in Heritage Park, and create paths into the heart of the city, that are critical to bringing people in and out of the area.

Heritage Park Hub



Heritage Park as the Hub

Heritage Park should form the focal point from which the corridors fan out, moving through the five districts and leading to the interstate highway. As the central hub, the park programming becomes critical to attracting people into the districts. Improved corridors will create reasons for people to stop and experience the core of Slidell. The park is the building block, and as more people come to see what is going on, more and more business activity will evolve.

Reinforce the Districts

There are five districts in the heart of Slidell. Developing them as activity centers, linked by strong welcoming corridors can create a distinct visual and physical character that can be the focus of strategic funding opportunities.

Five Downtown Districts

- Arts and Entertainment District
- Antique Row
- Heritage Park
- Civic Campus
- Preservation District

The five districts overlap and they can be linked to create a network of activity, with regular movement of people and commerce between them. Building a relationship of services between the districts creates an economy more resistant to economic fluctuations where the different uses and activities create a broader market for all. The districts can be linked through enhanced public spaces to create the connecting paths that draw people into and between the districts. For example, when an event ends at the Park, if there are inviting pathways into the historic area where new businesses have opened offering a reason for people to stay longer, then a family may make the decision to walk there to eat or shop.

Residential Uses

Residential uses downtown could help each of the five districts. People living downtown can drive a demand for services and goods.

But the real value of having people living downtown may be perception. When people live in an area they are on the street throughout the day and evening. Their windows overlook the sidewalks, public spaces, rear alleys, and laneways. They increase the informal security and make both residents and visitors feel safer. Residents create a neighborhood complete with a social network and they are vigilant about any activity that creates a problem, like nuisance bars. They can also be a thorn in the side of city government, but a good thorn.

Slidell's residents and visitors would feel safer if they were sitting at a sidewalk café with others out for an evening stroll. As businesses cultivate regular customers the word would spread about local businesses, attracting patrons from a larger market.

The districts in the heart of Slidell offer real potential to create more than one reason for spending time or investing in the area.

Downtown Districts

The five downtown districts can be connected through uses generating activity that enlivens downtown. The proposed civic campus can bring new employees into the area who will patronize local businesses. Visitors to Heritage Park can be encouraged to stay after or come before a performance, eating at restaurants. A variety of uses will create reasons to stay downtown, increasing the opportunities for sustainable commercial activity.



Downtown Housing

To attract new people to downtown, it is important to offer new housing choices. A fact shown around the country is that to attract younger people in prime wage earning years, it is important to offer something other than single family housing downtown. Good old buildings that offer conversion potential into loft spaces, big rooms with high ceilings and lots of windows, are a must. Slidell has a few buildings that could be matched up with various tax credit programs to offer unique spaces that would help keep graduates in the City and attract others.

Arts & Entertainment District

Many towns and cities follow the arts and entertainment economic development path. While it is a theme that can work, it can be hard to compete with other places. New Orleans is an international draw that no other community in the region can compete with, so Slidell should rely on local people and patrons. Bars are frequently the first business into a weak business area of any community. The key is to work with the business owners to ensure a diversity of establishments.

Entertainment District

The buildings and scale of the entertainment district are well suited to a lively street environment. The key is to make sure other uses are located there to keep the area vibrant throughout the day.

Programming

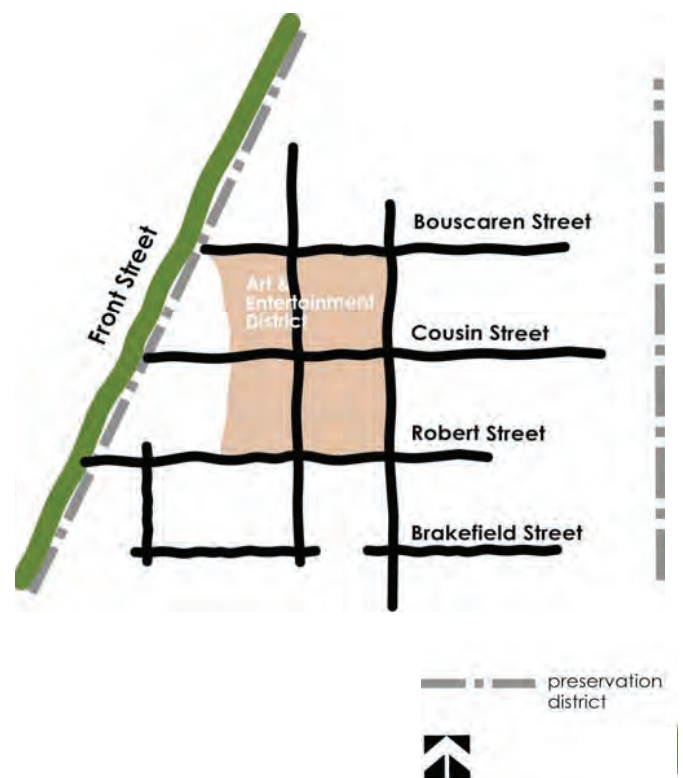
The value of programming to establish a district character cannot be overstated. Festivals and events that become annual rituals build a constant pool of patrons can help businesses in slow times. An arts and entertainment theme is a great focal point to generate lots of annual events that build over time. A “first Friday” event, where all the arts shops and studios open up with refreshments to attract visitors who walk from business to business is a great start.

The City owns the streets and streets offer a great opportunity to regulate the nature and operation of the events. In combination with Heritage Park, the streets can be a venue to complement active events in the park with more passive uses of restaurants and street festivals in the arts and entertainment district.

Bars

Southeastern University’s July 2008 Old Town Revitalization Survey identified bars as one of the main problems with the area; people thought there were too many. This is a common problem. However, bars, if properly spaced, with a variety of styles, can create demand for other businesses.

- Encourage a brew pub, which attracts a different type of patron than a “regular” bar
- Require food service
- 15 Montgomery County Planning Department
- Review liquor license and zoning requirements including hours of operation to minimize impacts, outside music prohibition beyond late hours, size of entertainment area relative to seating for food service, and in extreme cases, distance between bars (not a likely requirement in the near future)



- Regularly review the need to limit the number of liquor licenses in Old Town
- Through licensing, encourage a variety of places to mix bars with restaurants
- Limit or prevent after hours clubs next to family or intimate style dining

Coordinating liquor license rules, zoning regulations, and business assistance programs can help create different places that offer a range of activity throughout the day. The survey indicated that the bars people identified as problems are those that spill patrons onto the street late in the evening. They conflict with surrounding neighborhoods and might conflict with establishing a residential market in Old Town. It may sound surprising, but some conflict can be a good thing. Complaints by neighbors and new downtown residents usually lead to more effective regulation and even the relocation of the more frequent annoyance businesses.

Combining bars with other activities, such as restaurants, can help. Co-op artist and artisan stores, programming street festivals and other small, local shops can attract more than just bar patrons. The report addresses encouraging business variety through loans in the implementation section.

Antique Row

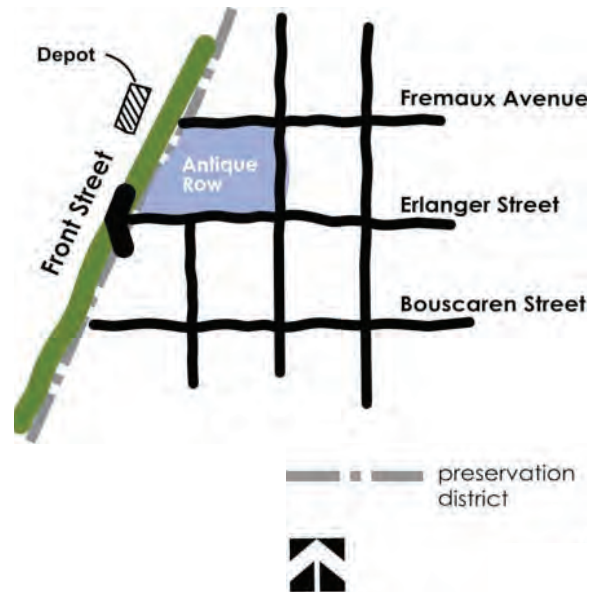
Small but with lots of character, the antique district could offer an alternative to the pricier New Orleans shops. Antiques shops should be mixed with complementary uses, such as repair studios, artisan workshops, and cafes. In the short term, operating hours are usually restricted to 10 am to 5 pm, but as the area grows, hours can be expanded.

The core of an antique district already exists—wonderful buildings and dedicated merchants in a tough competition with New Orleans. Giving this district an edge, something different than big city offerings, is critical to its success. Growing the reasons to come to the antique district through pedestrian friendly streetscapes, programming, and marketing will build on the existing core.

Heritage Park

Heritage Park is a great public space. Not only is it an asset to the community, but it is rapidly creating its own district. Throughout the day, different users frequent the space for different reasons. Programming the space enhances the district, especially creating annual events that bring regular patrons into the area.

If it is connected to other districts, Heritage Park can become a catalyst and create sustained activity. The park's recreational users could visit Old Town to meet friends, event patrons could dine downtown, the kind of simple, yet cumulative uses that generate vibrancy.



Heritage Park is a real anchor for the City throughout the day.

Civic Campus

A city hall creates activity. Employees eat lunch, buy local services, and meet after work. Developing a civic campus should frame the streets, bringing the buildings up to the sidewalk focused on one central public gathering space. Parking should not dominate the street view and inviting public sidewalks leading to nearby districts will get people out and using local businesses.

Civic buildings create new activities that benefit from being close to the processes of government. Lunch counters, lawyers, copy shops, and yes, bail bonds businesses, are all common. These businesses all help during the day to create activity, yet it is important to create a reason for some of the people associated with these activities to stay past 5 pm.

Preservation District

The unique building character of Old Town is an asset. There are gaps in the streetscape, but also a lot of buildings that can be re-used for a variety of activities including housing. Real opportunity exists when combined with funding sources like historic tax credits to create a mixed-use neighborhood.

Getting the preservation district on the national register for historic places should be a priority.

The community should place the district on the National Register of Historic Places so that federal tax credits are available. To make this happen, the following steps should be taken.

- Work with Tulane University to undertake the complex process of defining, documenting, and applying for National Register designation
- Educate local property owners of the value of designation in securing federal and State funds to renovate their buildings
- Consider local programs such as tax abatement for restored properties.

The fabric of historic buildings in the downtown can easily be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places.

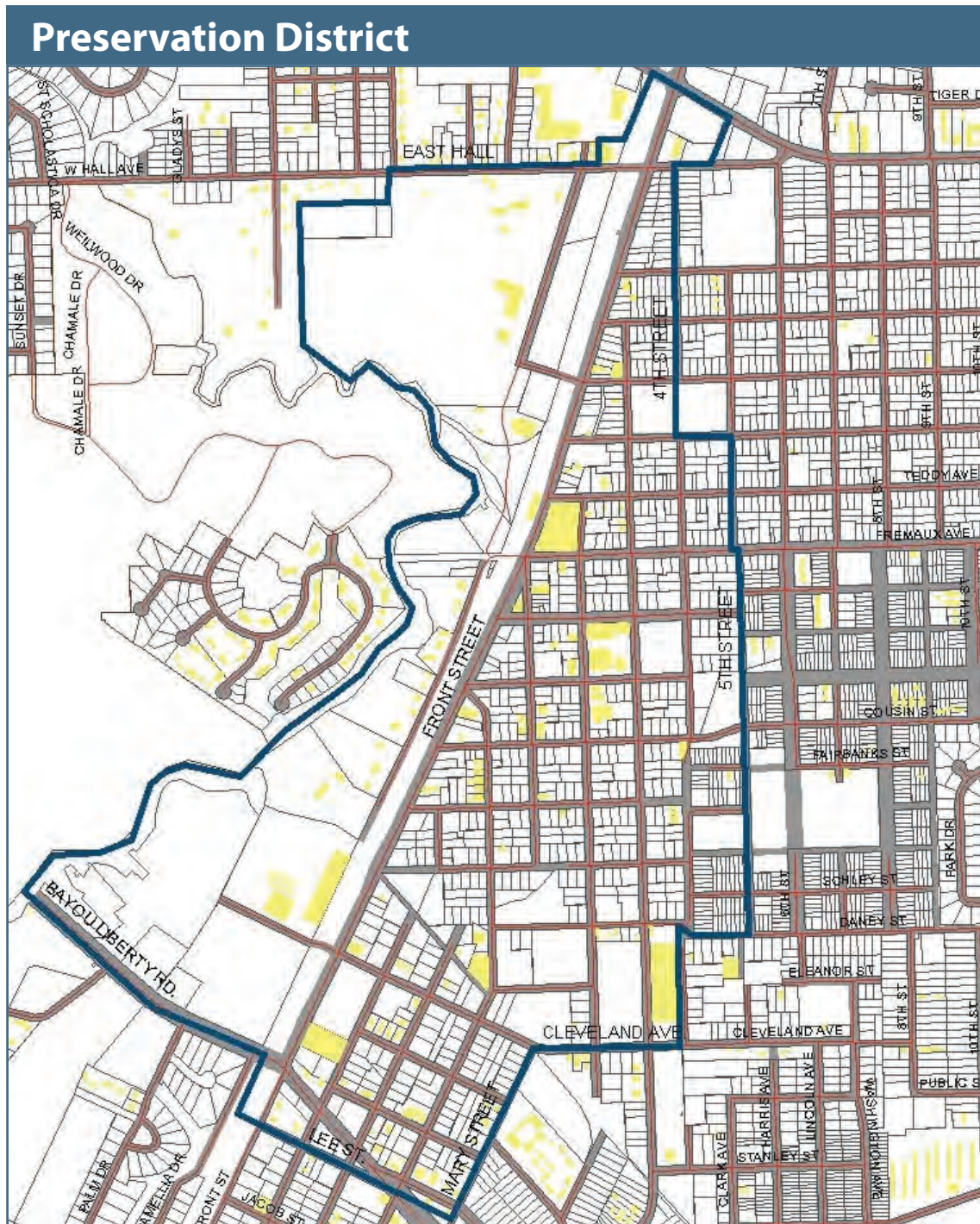
The potential of historic district designation cannot be undersold. It is the key to many successful neighborhood revitalization strategies around the country. The obstacle is often property owners' reluctance to designate, believing it will restrict them from attracting the "silver bullet" tenant or buyer. In fact, it is the opposite. Designation attracts tax credits, meaning financial assistance for restoring a property.

More often than not the experience has been that historic designation tax credits provide the but for test—meaning where a restoration project may not make financial sense, if 25 percent or more of the costs can offset State and Federal taxes, a project might move forward. It is important to remember that federal historic tax credits are for income producing projects. If they are used for residential conversions, the units must be income producing for five years, meaning rental units. Many State programs do not have the same requirement for income producing. Ultimately, it is important to create a mix of ownership and rental units to



enhance neighborhood stability.

There are lots of historic properties in the core of Slidell that might redevelop if federal and state tax credits were available.

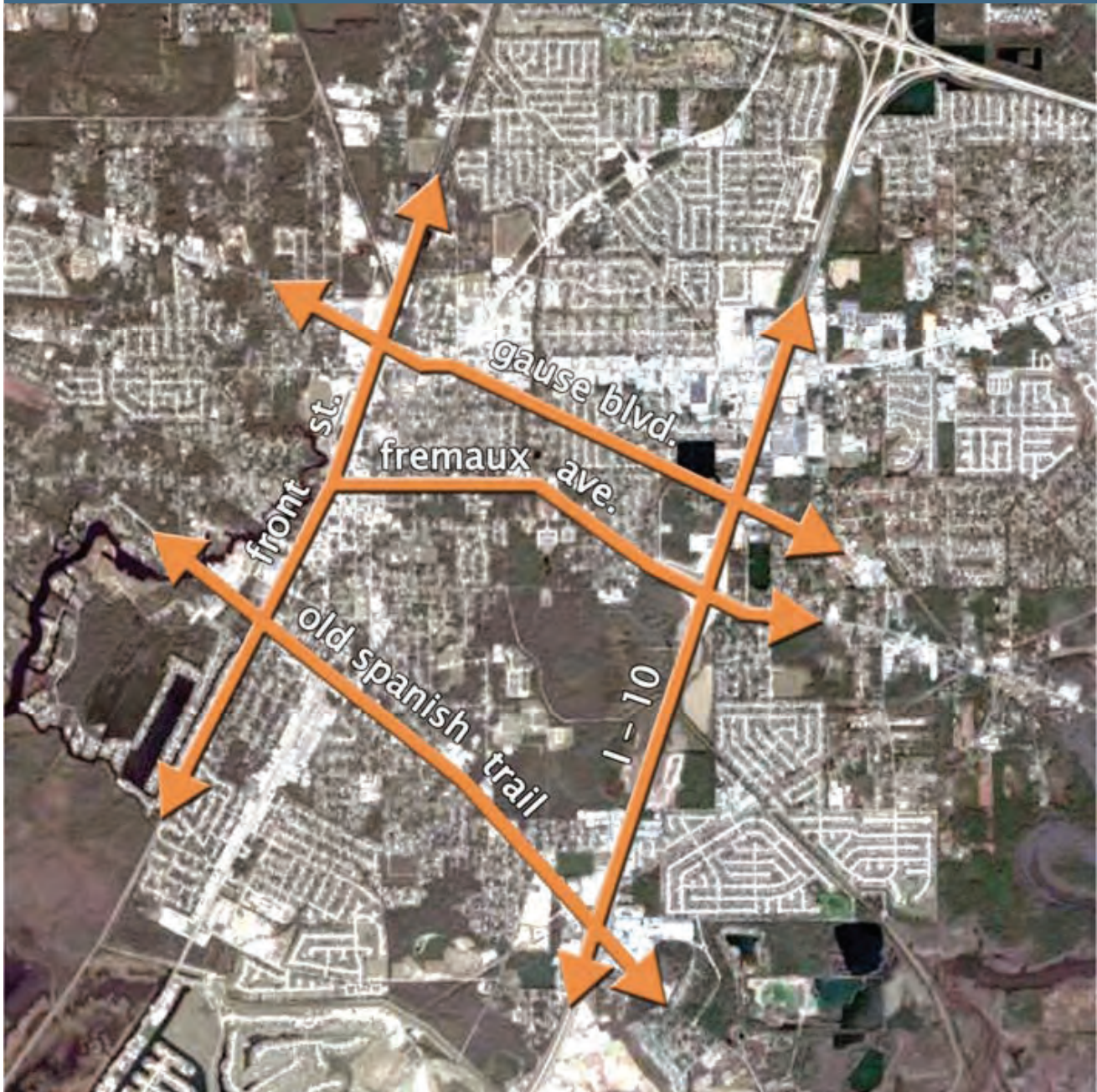


Preservation District outlined in blue.

Reinforce the Corridors

Slidell looks no different than hundreds of other places across the country when you drive in. Wide access roads fronted with national chains, stand alone retail outlets, or struggling strip malls, surrounded by parking. These corridors are the front door for people coming to Slidell.

Corridors



The corridors leading into downtown Slidell have the potential to carry a lot of people into the core area. However, the amenities are few and the pedestrian areas are not friendly to encouraging people to get out of their vehicles. In fact, they are the reverse of the shopping mall design, which only succeeds if people are out of their cars and walking among the retail and service activities.

The “same old, same old” character of these corridors does not offer anything unique. Few outsiders bother to enter and discover the wonderful neighborhoods, houses with direct water access, the historic downtown, or recreational opportunities.

Slidell is in good company with cities both big and small suffering from the same image problem. Suggestions below can help the City redefine these entry points, creating grand corridors that sell a positive and progressive image of the community.

Corridor Types

There are several corridors in Slidell. The focus of this report is on the roadways, with some discussion on potential bike trails.

Types of Corridors:

- Street grid
- Highway access
- Water access
- Recreation
- Rail
- Pedestrian
- Utility
- Drainage
- Views to important buildings or site



Drainage systems can be designed to be both functional and act as recreation corridors. This drainage canal is part of the design of a shopping area combined with a pedestrian path, turning a negative into a functional community asset.



Example of how a retail corridor can be transformed

This series of photos shows how a barren retail corridor can physically evolve into an attractive area where people would feel comfortable. Obviously a market has to exist, but many of the tools mentioned later concerning economic development can help get this vision started.

Source: National Resources Defense Council

Corridor Analysis

The main road corridors in downtown are the subject of several graphic pages that follow. This exercise is intended to highlight the challenges the current design and functions of the corridors present, and then highlight improvements that could occur to upgrade these streets. Some examples of how the improvements could impact the corridor are shown. Over time, public and private investment can lead to a coordinated investment strategy for improving the corridors.

These graphic sheets provide a framework for closer analysis. Having detailed street views and guidelines developed would help everyone work to a common objective. The design guidelines provided by Tulane for one corridor is a start. Working with the business owners and the community through a charrette process for each corridor is the next step.

Characteristics of Enhanced Corridors

- Greenscaping, i.e., lots of plants and trees to mitigate impacts
- Safe Routes for pedestrians and cyclists
- Signage consistency
- Parking to the rear or side
- Buildings pulled to the edge of the sidewalk
- Connections to the adjacent neighborhoods

Challenges

In reviewing the corridors it was apparent there are some consistent characteristics to all of them.

Purpose

None of the four main corridors, Gause, Front, Fremaux, or Old Spanish Trail offer the kind of relaxed street character where someone is encouraged to drive along, see a shop, then stop and park along the curb. Three of them are basically routes to and from the interstate. These streets lack any amenities to encourage pedestrians from the surrounding neighborhoods to walk to a business.

While there is not enough of a market to turn each of these corridors into a bustling pedestrian street, certainly one or two can begin to evolve in that direction. These corridors could be ranked in importance of changing the character of the street from an autocentric, drive from point A to point B street, into an inviting street where pedestrians, motorists and cyclists share the same right of way. From the most important to the least likely, the streets would line up as follows:

- Front Street
- Gause Boulevard
- Fremaux Avenue
- Old Spanish Trail



Landscaped medians are a real plus to making unsightly traffic corridors more visually appealing. They can be done in minimum width and should be planted with sustainable plantings. Trees need to be trimmed high to allow for vehicles to pass. This street in a medium sized city is used by approximately 45,000 cars per day.



Good Examples

Some of the core area streets have good examples of street treatments that help bring a pedestrian scale to the sidewalk.

Division

Of all the streets, Gause Boulevard is the biggest barrier, psychologically and physically dividing the center area. This is a function of a lot of things—width, the amount of traffic, no critical mass of retail activity that consistently attracts patrons, and lack of amenities. In addition, the movement from north to south across Gause is limited to only five points.

Access

Cross streets are lacking on Gause Boulevard, limiting north-south movement for vehicles and pedestrians. At the main intersections like Robert Boulevard and Rue Verand, this important node lacks any defining buildings at any of the four corners.

Disconnect

The activity along these corridors is varied, and this is a positive and a negative. On the up side, many of the uses are destinations, meaning people go there for a specific activity then leave. The down side is that it does not generate lingering or window shopping. Nobody leaves the car parked then walks along the street to another business.

Some thought is needed to think about creating a critical mass of like or symbiotic activity. For example, successful retail strips intermix shops with restaurants. That way more people are attracted to the area and in the evening there is more variety in activity.



Not all the corridors will have vibrant retail and street activity. However, there are strategic intersections that should, over time, develop into neighborhood oriented activity that draws people from shorter distances. The Front Street-Old Spanish Trail intersection is a good example of a major node at the south end of the core area that could capture a market share for specific activities and enhance this part of town.

Width and Speed

Many cities are actually reducing the number of lanes or narrowing the width of the paved surfaces in an effort to reduce speeds, encourage retail and street activity, and make for better pedestrian spaces. In most instances, the traffic impacts are either negligible or non-existent. Slidell has lots of wide busy roads, and perhaps a stimulus application could consider making them narrower and more pedestrian friendly.

The long blocks and numerous curb cuts do not help either. The frontages are broken up by the number of access points resulting in increased opportunities for conflicts and less incentive for real street activity. Unless some of these corridors are outfitted to encourage vehicles to slow, the economic activity will always be limited to being auto related. The cars move so quickly, nobody can read a sign unless it is almost billboard sized.



It is not just the roadway pavement width that adds to the expanse of asphalt, it is the size of the surface parking lots that adjoin the roads as well. This portion of Gause, east of the tracks, is a good example.

Why Go There?

It would seem nobody walks along any of these streets to enjoy the activity and character they have to offer. Hopefully Gause Boulevard and Front Street could evolve to that point at some time in the future.

Opportunities

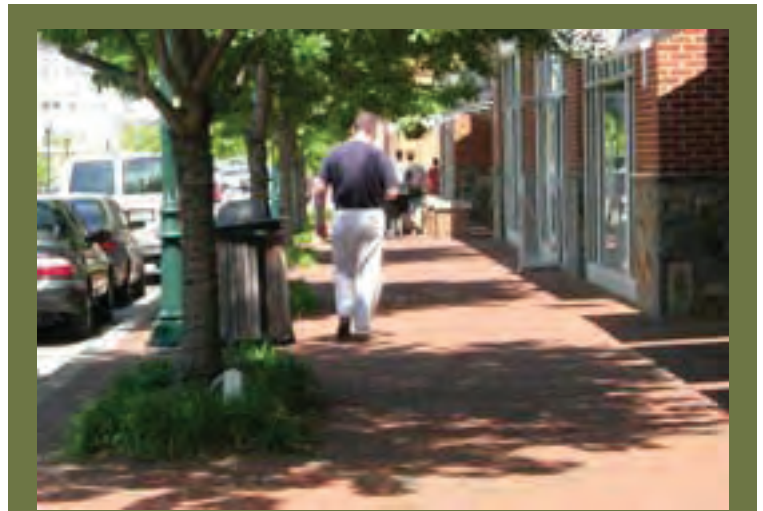
Continuity

There is an opportunity to create some continuity along the corridors on several fronts:

- Pedestrian infrastructure improvements over the length of the street—continuous sidewalk, consistent lighting, cycle path
- Built form—bringing buildings up to the edge of the sidewalk to better frame the space and create a town feel not unlike Old Town
- Signage rules that encourage lower signs of moderate size and style that begins to develop a character for the street—creative use of neon could be a real plus in creating an attraction
- Spacing of intersecting streets—consider reducing the number of intersecting streets in the future to minimize opportunities for conflict and to create a better retail environment. This would mean access roads that parallel the corridor, linking every second block.

Diversity

It is important to strategically “evolve” some of the corridors to create a better blend of uses so the pockets of inactivity after work hours does not leave holes in street activity, detracting from a secure feeling. Corridors should be viewed as the interior of a shopping mall. Uses are diverse, so that pedestrian traffic is created throughout the day with plenty of different reasons to visit.



Sustainable Sidewalks

Streets framed with inviting sidewalks with furniture, trees, and rain gardens can soften the hard traffic focus on a street.



Retail Diversity

Mixing different types of retail helps keep a sidewalk more active throughout the day.

Staging

The corridors are long and require a lot of investment over a long period of time, both civic and private, to achieve a unified vision. So it is important to get “bang for the buck” in strategic locations to create a buzz and encourage private land owners to buy into the vision.

Public infrastructure improvements like sidewalk widening, bike lanes, lighting, and tree planting will have to be prioritized as part of the comprehensive community improvement plan discussed later.

Built-in Market

Employment activities may provide a “close by” market for the retail activity. Can better connections across the corridors encourage more north-south movement during lunch or after work? Major employers like the hospital on Gause Boulevard need better connections to the corridor and the surrounding neighborhood to encourage employees and visitors to leave the building and visit local businesses.

Area Assets

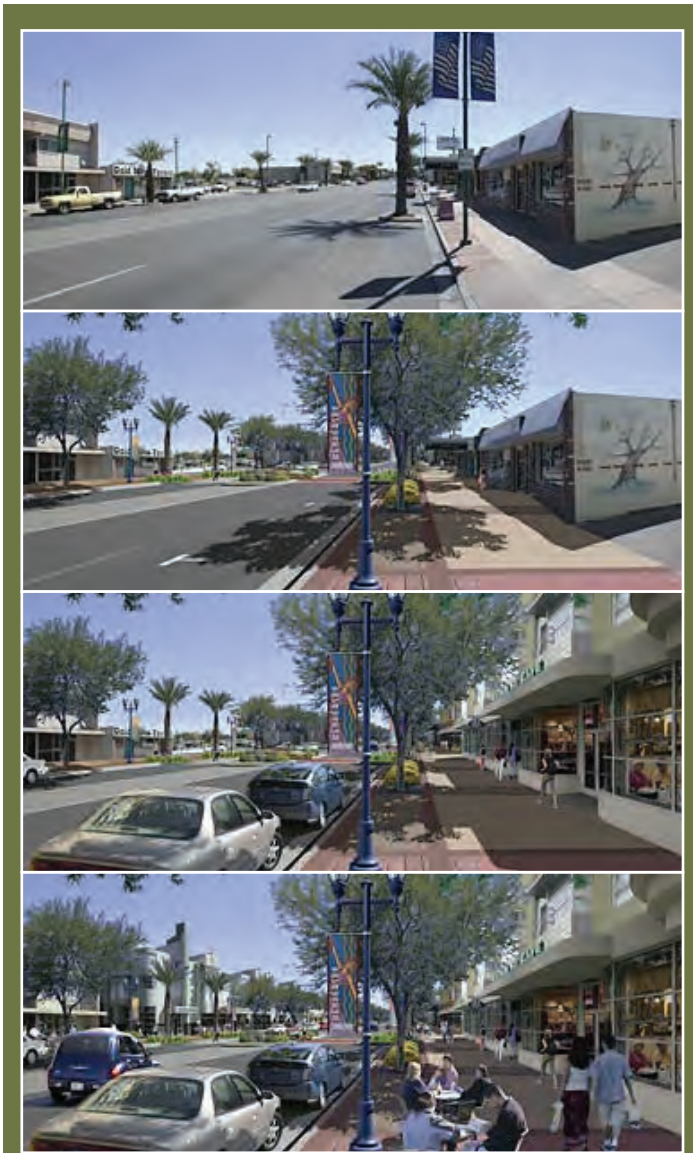
Assets like Old Town and Heritage Park should be leveraged to create links to retail on nearby corridors.

Traffic Speed

This may seem contrary to popular belief, but actually slowing traffic speeds is a real asset to creating a better retail environment. People in cars traveling over 30 mph cannot read signs unless they are huge. Slowing traffic provides better business opportunities, with people more likely to read signs and stop to shop. The more successful shopping streets are those with slower speeds.

Node Building

There are large chunks of land where redevelopment could create a new character for the street. This will take time. Investment by national chains like the drug stores at the Front Street intersection means that these uses have a minimum of a 15-year lifespan. The shopping mall is the best opportunity with the interstate highway area the second, to create a real asset of mixed uses that introduce a range of new activities into the area. Granted all this depends on the market, however, lots of programs are available to create a diverse, real urban character with great highway access that offers an alternative to higher prices in New Orleans.



Staging Infrastructure

This series of illustrations shows how a drab street could evolve while retaining existing buildings. First, sidewalks are widened by narrowing the paved road surface. Trees are added along with lighting and street furniture. Just these improvements would still be a big improvement. Later phases show added retailing to increase street activity.

Node Development

Identifying specific nodes where there is the potential to create a small critical mass of activity is a real possibility for Slidell. This example (below) shows a large surface parking lot that could grow into a small mixed-use development where the existing stores are retained, while the parking lot is developed.



Greenway Connections

The rail corridor provides a great opportunity to connect into the wider greenway. Success of the greenways can be enhanced by linking bike routes along the corridors into the bike trail routes.

Street Improvements

An example (on right) of how simple street improvements could transform a small commercial street not unlike some in Slidell, where cobbles, trees, lighting and restricted vehicle access result in a pedestrian friendly street.



New Greenway Trails and Sidewalks

There are plenty of opportunities to extend the greenways and bikeways systems in the City. The rail corridor and waterways are the most obvious and often the simplest ones to implement, although railways can be difficult.

Pedestrian and Cyclist Improvements

A consistent theme in the corridor analysis is the need to enhance the pedestrian and cycling environment. Right now the streets are almost exclusively designed for automobiles.

Many cities mandate specific sidewalk widths or bike lanes depending on the street classification. This is probably impractical for Slidell. The key is to identify streets where the potential exists for people to walk, either to work, shopping or recreation and the same for bicycles. A sudden boom in people walking or cycling is not expected, yet identifying and improving certain streets for people and bikes is a real community asset.

The Team did note a real need to connect the cul-de-sacs with each other. Concern was expressed about possibly needing to acquire property to do this. However, certain connections along obvious routes to schools or businesses would be a real plus.



Crosswalks

There is a real need to improve the pedestrian environment at major intersections. There is little to make crossing these places on foot or bike safe. Many even lack sidewalks or pedestrian markings. A big intersection with properly marked (painted) crosswalks and signaling runs about \$4,000 each. On a tight budget, intersection improvements should be strategic and should certainly be part of any resurfacing project. Federal funds would help make improvements for pedestrian safety especially because of concerns about accessibility at these intersections for people with disabilities.

A good place to start the improvement of pedestrian facilities is to engage university students to undertake a pedestrian safety audit of the main roads and intersections and make recommendations on how to meet safe design and ADA requirements.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires a minimum three-foot wide sidewalk to allow for persons using wheelchairs. A wider sidewalk is desirable. The sidewalks are also required to have curb ramps at the corners to allow people to easily move across an intersection.

Proper markings do not have to be elaborate, but they do have to be functional. Having sounds to assist persons with visual disabilities navigate an intersection is also important.

As streets are resurfaced or improved, sidewalks should always be an important consideration, where the level of pedestrian traffic warrants this. Generally sidewalks should have enough room for street amenities like trees and furniture where needed, lighting and in some instances space for outdoor seating or landscaping. Where possible, if there is a curb median, keeping plantings native is important to absorbing rain water.



The Front Street and Fremaux Avenue intersection lacks crosswalks at an important link from the park into Old Town.



Cover of a "Pedestrian Safety Audit" conducted in Montgomery County, MD (2007).



Enhanced Pedestrian Crosswalks

An immediate need is to improve the pedestrian crosswalk markings at major intersections. This is a must to minimize the conflicts between cars and people.



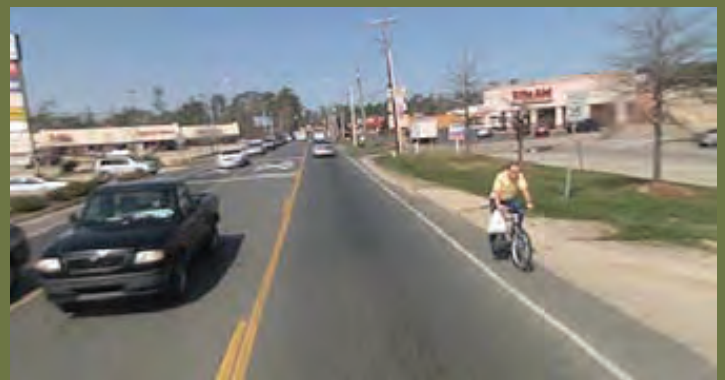
Sidewalk Amenities

Sidewalk widths will vary depending on the level of pedestrian activity. For small business areas like the antique district, avoiding the wide sidewalk standards that would be applied today keeps the charm of the district. In other areas where there may be evening entertainment, wider sidewalks for outdoor seating could be important. The design of any sidewalk should allow for trees and easy access for persons with disabilities. In the immediate future, as street improvements occur, looking at the level of current and future pedestrian activity will help determine the sidewalk design.

Bicycle Lanes

As with sidewalks, the Team is not advocating new bike lanes on every street. However, it is important to identify routes that may develop such as from residential neighborhoods to the trails or the downtown districts. As noted in the Gause Boulevard corridor analysis, there are few opportunities for cyclists to safely move from north to south across that street.

For those streets with higher vehicle traffic or where cars are moving faster—Gause/Front/Fremaux/Old Spanish Trail—any bike route would be best be as a separate bike lane with some form of separation from cars. On less busy streets, simply marking the bike lane is a big improvement. While having separate bike lanes is always a plus, this is probably unrealistic for the current level of bike use in Slidell. The map below highlights a potential route that is well connected to the downtown and to the residential neighborhoods with links in all directions.



Cycling as an Afterthought

This lonely cyclist is navigating Gause just west of the tracks. A wide expanse of asphalt offers little protection or identification for cyclists.



Bike Lanes

Any bike lane should be a minimum of five feet wide for one-way traffic. Where there is heavy bike use on a trail, it is not uncommon to have a separate lane for bikes to separate them from the walking trail.

Trails

Slidell's canals and bayous offer a unique opportunity to expand the trail system. As the trails' popularity increases, connecting them to on street bike lanes or through the connections suggested above from one cul-de-sac to another, will enhance their use.

Trails should be at least eight feet wide, wider if possible, up to 14 feet. While an asphalt surface helps people in wheelchairs or with strollers, that material is also impervious, something trails should avoid if possible. There are crushed stone materials that compact very hard, are pervious, and function well for wheelchairs. One alternative is to use asphalt where the trail moves through a neighborhood then use compacted materials where users are primarily running or riding a bike.

Where a trail crosses a busy roadway, pedestrian/cyclist-activated signals are a must. But they are not cheap. If possible, trail crossings should be directed to an existing signalized intersection.

Safety and Maintenance

It is important to remember that the perception of safety is a prime motivator for someone considering using a trail. If there are places where the vegetation is close to the trail hampering visibility, people may feel unsafe. Trail maintenance is an important factor in creating a trail. Cutting back fast growing vegetation is an ongoing expense. If the money and programming does not exist to maintain a trail, then the trail should not be built.

Trail design should, where possible, provide the user with long sightlines. Someone running alone should have a clear view to all sides of the trail for 20 to 30 feet. Closer in to the built up areas where use can be expected to be higher and more frequent on work days, opportunities for overlook are important.

This point is often a challenge given that people backing onto a trail do not want people to be able to see into their homes, but overlook is critical to increasing the perception and reality of a safe trail.

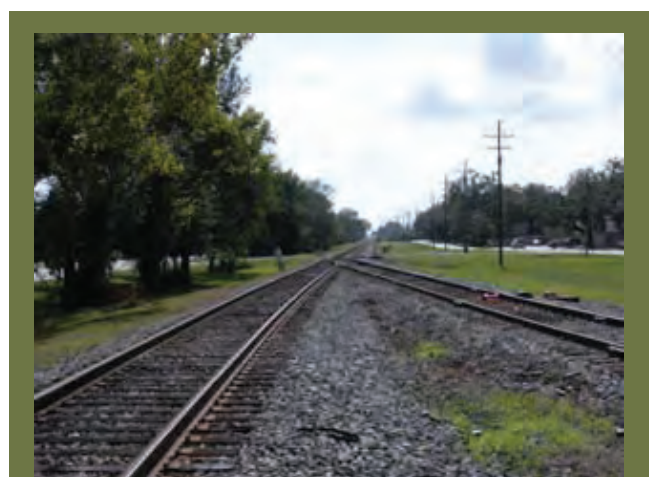
Trails: Next Steps

Any future trail expansion should start with a detailed route assessment that includes public discussion about the alignment.

Trail Design

Expanding the trail system requires a lot of detailed work and the need to bring in experts on landscaping, safety and even legal advice where property needs to be acquired.

- GIS mapping overlays of routing and property ownership
- Public open houses on the proposed alignment
- Consideration of costs for property access, construction, maintenance
- Possible partnerships with local businesses and non-profits for ongoing maintenance
- Detailed design assessment, drawings to determine elevations, drainage plans to ensure the trail meets ADA requirements



Rails and Trails

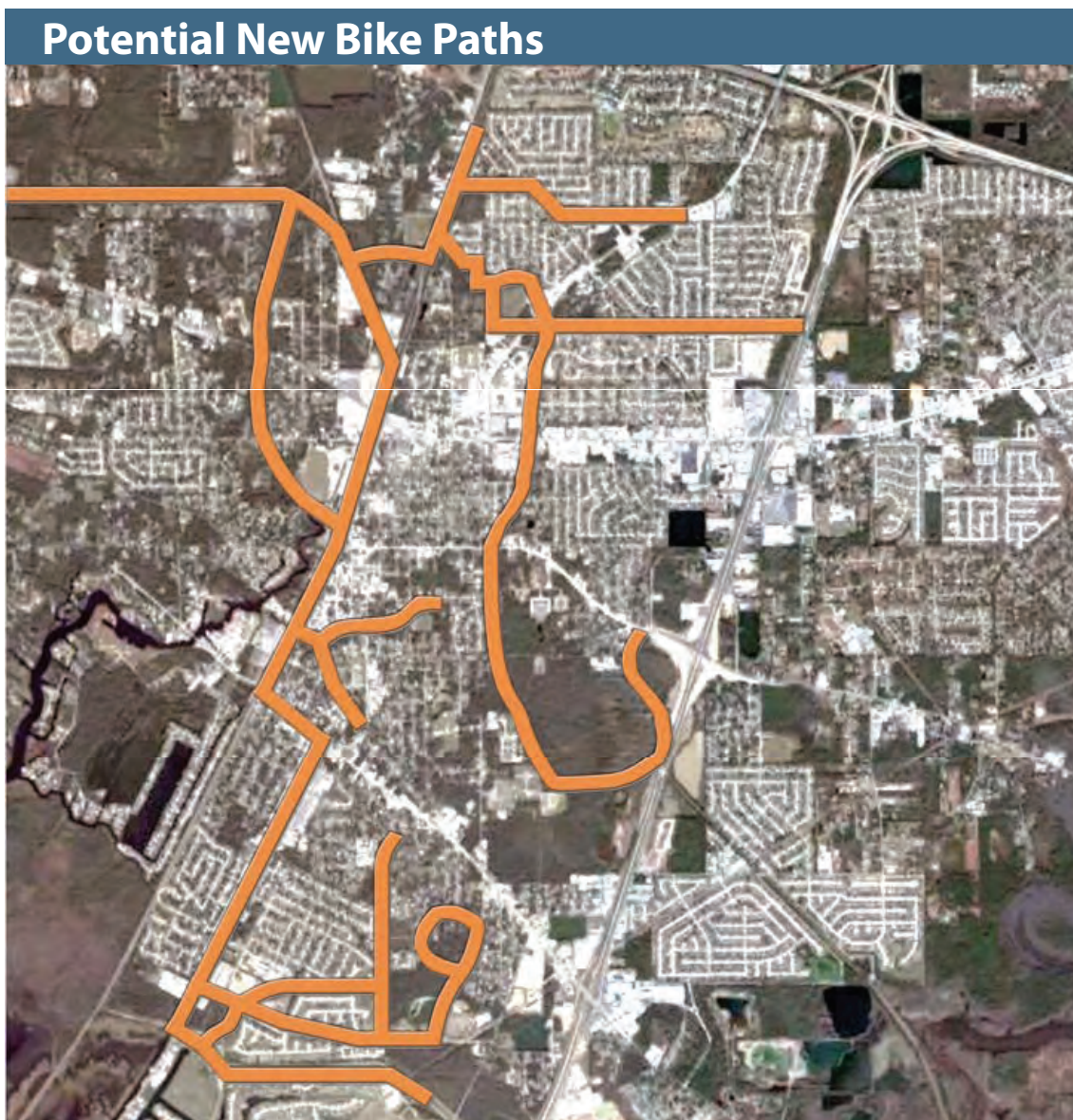
The rail corridor would make a good north-south link for pedestrians and cyclists.

Corridor Summary

Lots can be done to enhance the corridors. Any business plan to attract retailers and businesses must be done in the context of all the retail areas. Enhancing Gause Boulevard or infilling along Front Street should not come at the expense of success for Old Town. This is a long term strategy. Not all the retail areas will be vibrant shopping nodes and the City must be strategic in creating incentives or infrastructure to enhance existing businesses or attract new ones.

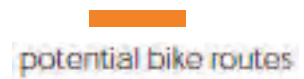
An analysis of each of the corridors is provided on the following graphics. The specific challenges of each and their opportunities are highlighted. These are general observations, and detailed thinking would require more study of the specifics of each. However, these pages should form a sound starting position.

There are several options for creating new bike paths using the rail corridor, the waterways and parks. This map highlights some possible future bike paths to build on the successful investment the City has already made on the existing bike paths, with more than just recreational cycling.

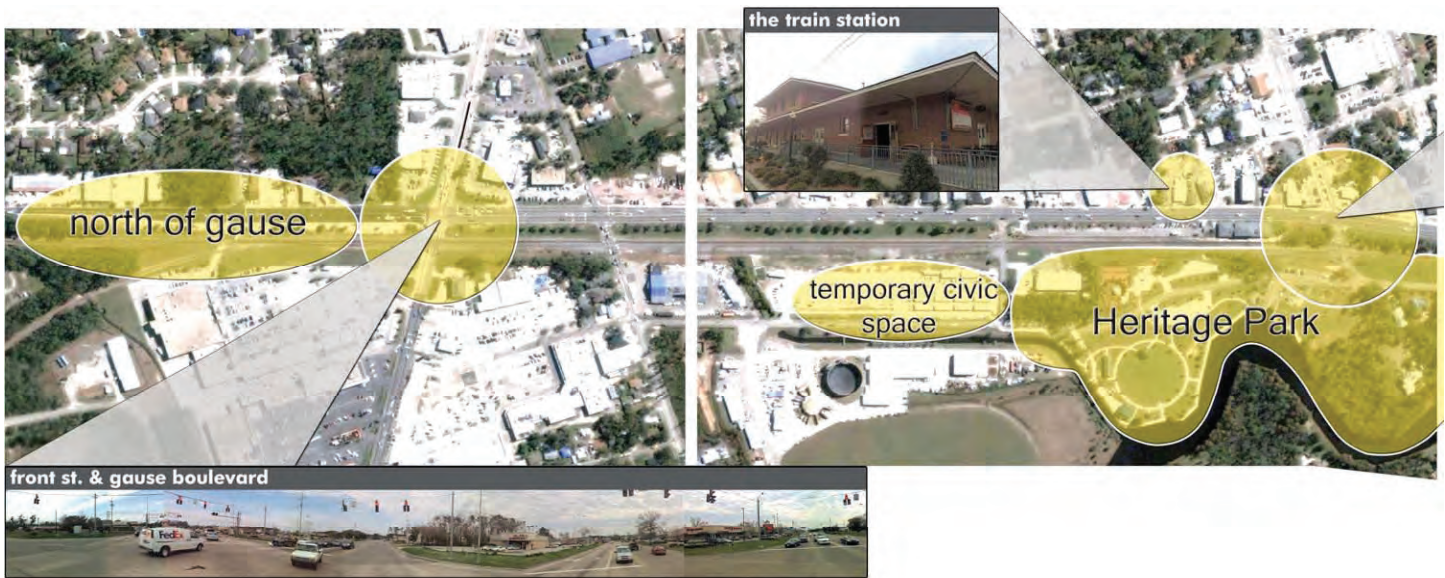


New Bike Paths

The opportunity for new greenways is a real positive for the community. The existing routes have proven popular, and greenways and bikeways are an important marketing tool for attracting new residents and employers looking for active lifestyles.



Front Street



North of Gause Boulevard

- Lack of consistency in building location, signage, separation of curb cuts
- With so many other locations for development, this area will lack amenities for some time
- No sidewalks, especially at Lafayette
- Lack of shade to fill in the open spaces
- The shopping center and businesses on Front Street do not offer any visual quality to the street

Front Street and Gause Boulevard Intersection

- Underutilized land that could shift to a higher and best use at some point
- Way too much happening with the traffic and rail crossing, presenting a challenge to improving the intersection for pedestrians and cyclists
- Recent development of the pharmacy means another opportunity has passed to improve the corner's amenity
- Parking lots anchor the corner instead of storefronts
- Nothing to announce the importance of this intersection, and its role as the entry to Heritage Park

Temporary Civic Space

- How long will the trailers be located here?
- The site is cutoff from Front Street by the train tracks, the west side is blocked from the large green space to the west
- The site lacks connections into Old Town

Heritage Park District

- Lack of connections in all directions—people have to drive
- Train tracks are a barrier to the park
- Ability to expand the park

Challenges



Front Street and Fremaux Avenue

- Arguably the most important intersection, yet lacking character and definition
- Fails to build on the investment in Heritage Park and the rail station
- Building on the northeast corner needs to open up its windows to enhance the sidewalks
- Gas stations are not great pedestrian activities and the sidewalk in front of the station has been incorporated into the station parking
- No pedestrian amenities or any signage linking to Old Town

Front Street and Old Spanish Trail

- East-west connection to the south of town brings traffic to events
- Not a lot of activity at this end of the Front Street corridor
- Acknowledge the character of the intersection to channel south end traffic

Front Street



North of Gause Boulevard

- Plenty of space for continuing the bike and pedestrian path along the west side
- Proximity to the shopping mall on the other side of the tracks
- Lafayette intersection can improve the connection to residential to the east and should be made for pedestrians by adding sidewalks
- More trees needed, keeping in mind the sensitivity of the railway to grown tree branches—this is a good way to make the area more appealing at a minimal cost
- Any redevelopment of the shopping mall on the west side of tracks must not turn its back on this part of Front Street. It will not help to have the back loading areas of stores facing east.

Front and Gause Intersection

- With so much potential for improved use and design, this area will have to proceed in stages
- It is key to ensure that any phased development meets overall objectives, so when complete, it looks and functions uniformly
- As land redevelops, design guidelines should help incrementally improve the intersection, beginning with pushing parking behind buildings and moving curb cuts away from the intersection
- Improve the intersection over time, as land redevelops and in the short term make design improvements to create a better space for cyclists, pedestrians, and cars
- Integrate the recommended north-south bike trail through the intersection allowing cyclists to move east-west from the trail
- Create a design theme, possibly with university students through a competition to enhance the intersection. The competition results should create civic identity through art and lighting that improves this vast intersection, helps make motorists more aware of other users, and ties the intersection to Heritage Park and the potential trail

Temporary Civic Space

- An important site close to Heritage Park and Old Town that presents many opportunities after the civic functions move from trailers to a new location
- Important to plan ahead so that the site develops appropriately, rather than simply becoming a parking lot for events
- There are two southern direct access routes to connect this space to Heritage Park; both should be developed for pedestrians and cyclists
- Trees are critical to the future of this site, to help achieve a linear park space centered on Heritage Park
- Short term improvements could include the display of large artifacts from the past like old rail cars, engines, and other displays that reflect the Slidell's industries, such as Textron, which would bring people from the park

- Long term this site offers an excellent opportunity to blend into the “seed” planted by the Heritage Park. It could be combined into a “sports central” location if the large open space to the west could be developed into playing fields, a natural combination with the park
- The canal on the western edge also offers educational opportunities for outdoor classroom activities; consider a “river walk” where permanent exhibits can be displayed
- Any future parking on this site as part of a park/sports field development should be minimized and be permeable
- Front Street’s wide shoulders offer lots of overflow parking space

Heritage Park District

- Well used throughout the day and has great civic recognition
- Proximity of the train station could offer more services
- Water
- Expansion to the north and south, and integration with the open space just to the north offers potential for a sports and activity focus
- Outdoor education
- Could be the hub of a recreation trail heading in all directions
- Front Street has a row of historic buildings opposite the train station that can become a focal point of activity through business loans, façade grants, and street improvements to bring in active uses that build on the park activity

Opportunities



Front Street and Fremaux Avenue

- Fremaux is a wide street that can easily include bicycle lanes
- Building on the northeast corner has “punch out” sections in the wall that can become additional window space that creates a better pedestrian environment
- Improved signage for the park and Old Town
- An improved intersection and a north-south pedestrian trail would bring walkers and cyclists interested in moving east into the downtown
 - Pavement markings for pedestrians
 - Bicycle lane on Fremaux
 - Pedestrian signals

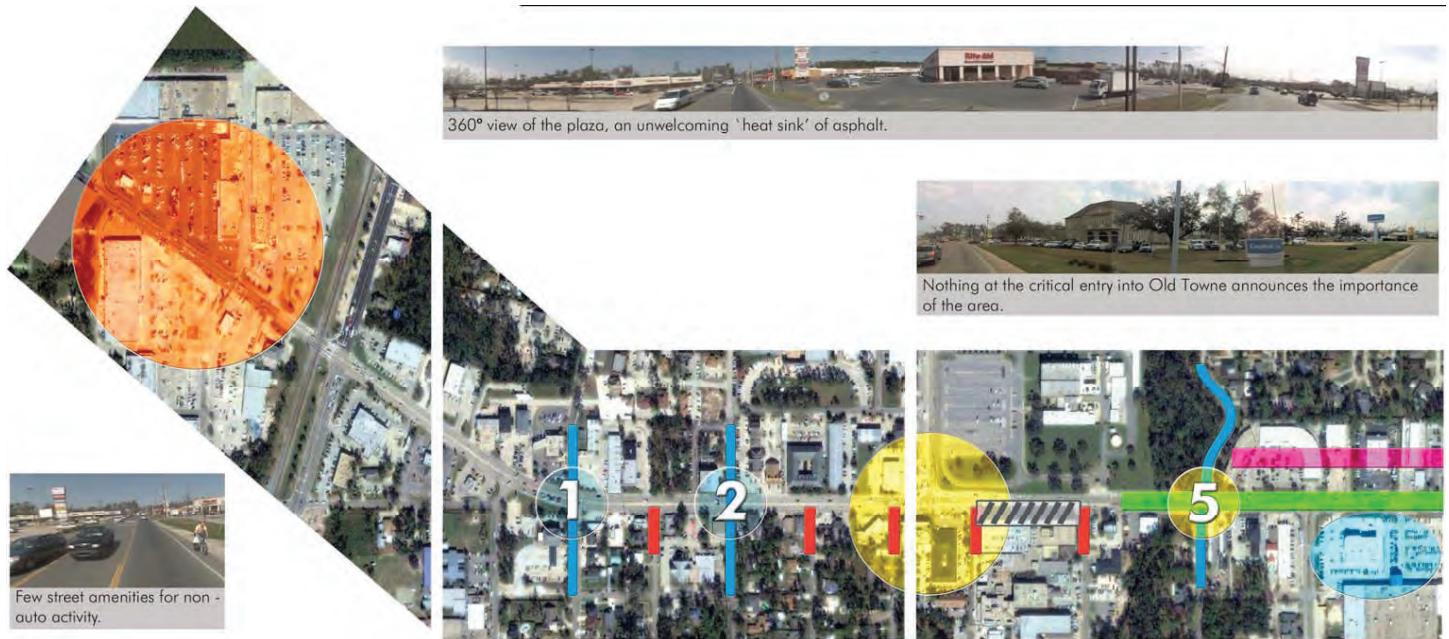
Front Street and Old Spanish Trail

- Create an alternate entry to the park and Old Town enhanced with signage for this purpose
- Plant trees at the intersection to create “more” there, especially on the west side

Employment Sector

- Build on the industrial uses—expand onto vacant parcels and encourage Old Spanish Trail as an alternative to Fremaux and Gause for connecting to the interstate
- Development should minimize impacts on water quality and trees
- Bike trail should continue the full length of Front Street along the train tracks

Gause Boulevard



Retail Plaza

Mall has no redeeming qualities—too many entry points, buildings set back too far.

General observations:

- Too many driveways and curb cuts
- Blocks are too long on the north side
- Traffic speeds are too high
- Few cross streets
- No continuity
- Little connection between the employment centers and the retail opportunities
- No opportunity for cyclists or pedestrians

Entry to Old Town

- Only five intersections create north-south movement
- Traffic moves very fast, limiting retail activity

Employment Sector

Too many entry points, and none creating through movement north to south

Non-T intersection

Hospital frontage

- Close to street edge is good
- Too many curb cuts
- Nothing at grade but parking


Streets do not form intersections creating issues for north-south movement

Long blank building walls like the ones with parking at the front, limit the potential for street character

Challenges



Very long block with no connections to the north 

Median green is underutilized 

No consistency in the street frontage or signage, making the corridor look as it currently functions—a through corridor for cars

A lot of space dedicated to parking no opportunity for people to walk

Gateway Sector

The Mall's interstate access is greatly underused; it's unattractive offering no reason for anyone to stop and visit the City

Route I-10 entry

- A non-destination with no indication of what the community is or has to offer
- The continuity is a negative—the same “nothing” at all four edges
- “Where am I”—could be any highway interchange in America
- Lots of underused land
- Vehicle-centered—no options for other uses

Gause Boulevard



New Market Sector

- A long term project, 15 or more years, with the goal of creating a different kind of intersection, not so “spaced apart” that acts as a gateway to Front Street.
- A real opportunity that must wait for the right opportunity. The site is too important to be wasted on a project that doesn’t fully use it, on both sides of the street.
- Needs a mixed-use project:
 - Housing
 - Affordable units
 - Retail
 - Pulled to the street, with a minimum height of 3 to 4 floors
 - Links to any green corridor along the rail line
 - Parking inside the site

Service Sector

- Terrific, unusually shaped block that could be the entry to Old Town.
- Smaller, service oriented area needing redevelopment.
- Tricky stretch with fragmented ownership and a range of building styles, but offering links to Old Town; could benefit from more consistent building forms

Employment Sector

- As businesses expand, there is land available to pull an addition closer to the street.
- The green corridor provides a natural break and could be used for a bikeway/pedestrian path linking the freeway corridor to Gause and beyond
- Increase opportunities for hospital employees and visitors to engage local businesses
- A fully redesigned street could benefit from a service lane, allowing through traffic to move faster, bringing buildings closer to the street, and allowing for curb parking—always a big benefit for retail.
- Surface parking lots allow for old buildings to be replaced while businesses stay in operation, with the added bonus of bringing buildings up to the sidewalk

Opportunities



The width of the street lends itself to a landscaped median more developed than the small existing one. Consistent lighting and street treatment would improve the street atmosphere quickly, leaving larger improvements for later. These improvements could be part of a "stimulus" application for improving accessibility by rebuilding the street. (source-nrdc.org)



The interstate entry is a large empty void before reaching the gas stations. This is a difficult concept to alter but simple improvements can help. First, define the edges with sidewalks and even bicycle lanes. Landscaping could help, trees are always good and a median would help channel cross traffic using the many entries and exits, making the space safer. Eventually, some buildings may begin to fill in the void. (source-nrdc.org)



- A difficult landscape to redevelop because of the fragmented ownership. Efforts should be made to reduce the number of curb cuts
- Median improvements really improve the landscape for a small investment
- Any traffic corridor of this scale needs trees, trees, and more trees to hide the clutter. A bike lane shows a positive image

Gateway Sector

A wide right-of-way that is an asset for redeveloping the adjacent sites

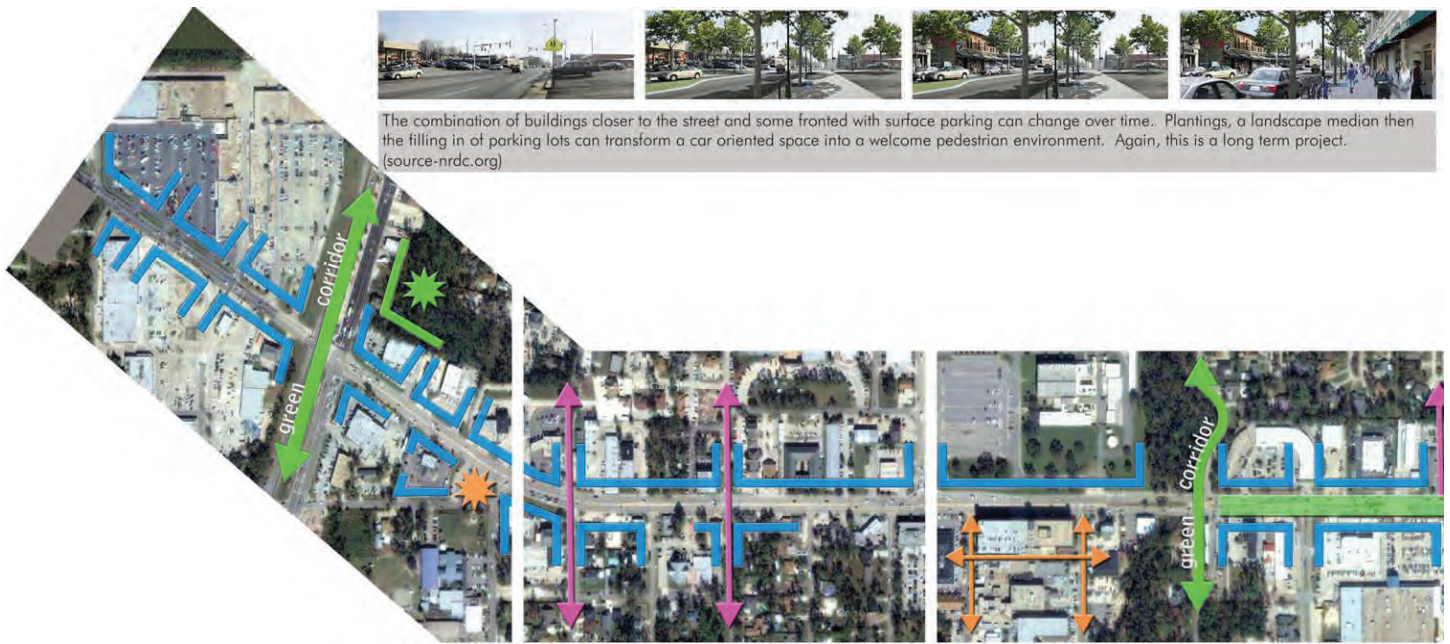
- Eventually a great place to build activities for people who use the interstate
- Mixed uses for commuters; other shops in a more urban form
- Some manufacturing, preferably on the west side of the interstate

Quick fix would be to plant the medians with natural landscape to help this interchange "standard."

General Observations

- Reduce curb cuts
- Establish consistent development guidelines
- Stage CIP improvements
- Make greater links to the surrounding area
- Insist on consistent signage
- Enhance connectivity under the interstate and eventually make it the less dominant physical image of the entry
- Improve in phases and require coordination with highway authorities
- Provide a different gateway for Slidell, a place where people want to stop and enter the City, providing opportunities for existing and new businesses

Gause Boulevard



Retain this green area; it's too much space to fill for retail and clearing this would delay rebuilding of existing space



Visual termination for westbound traffic; an important feature to design correctly

General

- Any street improvements should include vegetated drainage channels where possible
- There is a lot of space here to consolidate, blending some of the smaller lots into bigger parcels to for continuity
- This is a long term project and will take time
- Corridor needs a unifying feature like a consistent sidewalks and lighting

Anchor the few existing streets

- Move parking away from the comers to enhance the pedestrian environment
- Encourage people to walk south into Old Town

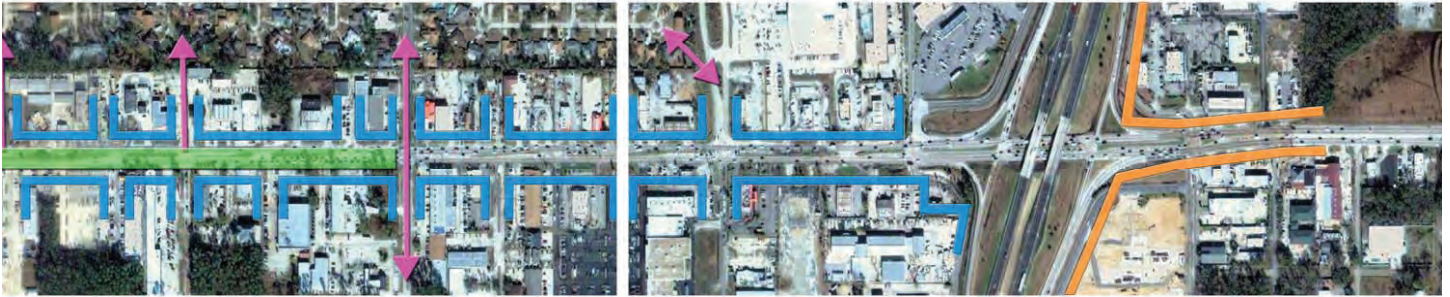
Lots of room to expand closer to the street.

Improve the connections beside the hospital and through the site; current street frontage makes it difficult to design improvements.

Redevelopment Guidelines



A barren street, without trees or buildings close to the edge of the right of way is uninviting & does not generate any side activity, only drive through traffic. Much of Gause Blvd. & the other corridors are like this. By adding trees & a sidewalk makes a significant transformation that can act as an interim improvement, especially if the buildings are not pulled up to the street. Over time, as properties redevelop they can then move forward to the new sidewalk. This is a logical scenario for Gause. (source-nrdc.org)



Explore potential to create at least pedestrian access from Gause to the streets to the north

Enhance the green median

Access should be consolidated as far as possible from the interstate access

Opportunity for future retail and hotel space as market returns. Success depends on not competing with the development south at the next interchange

- East side of the interstate should be phased for improvements after the west gateway
- New businesses are needed to the west to serve the bulk of the traffic

Old Spanish Trail

General

- Old Spanish Trail is the primary entry from the interstate across the south side; it is less intense than Gause, but offers more vacant land for short term improvements should there be a market. From auto dealerships to office uses, the corridor has less of a “fast food” nature and can be enhanced as a small business area on strategic sites
- As strip malls redevelop, new ideas for Slidell, such as placing the parking to the side or rear are important to changing the landscape
- Opportunities for land assembly should be investigated to determine if parcels can be assembled that will attract new investment, with easy highway access
- To help attract new investment, public investment in “visual infrastructure” could help, such as landscaping the medians, improved signage, sidewalks, and cross street markings direct workers into Old Town for lunch
- There are a lot of employment activities that need services



Front Street and Old Spanish Trail (A)

- Alternate entry to Heritage Park and Old Town, should be enhanced with signage for this purpose
- Plant trees at the intersection to create “more” there, especially on the west side

Sgt. Alfred Drive Intersection (B)

- The office building is a landmark with some architectural character
- The wide open spaces offer potential for landscaping and removing the hardscape—trees especially can help this intersection and are a good short term solution
- Lots of space for future development which is longer term, to fill in the empty spots
- Offers the potential to create an office node should the demand arise in the future, relieving some of the traffic pressures from Gause

Bosworth Street intersection (C)

- Use signage and landscaping to improve this intersection
- Create activity at this location to generate street traffic; incentivizing development on the southwest corner would help stabilize the corner

Highway Intersection (D)

- Reducing the curb cuts over time would be a big improvement
- Creating some sort of landscaping plan to soften the landscape on both sides of the highway would make people feel more welcome, like they were entering a distinct place

- Install signage, with a consistent design throughout the community, identifying important civic areas like Old Town and Heritage Park
- Invest in a lighting plan that, combined with signage, helps mark the entry
- Working with the businesses in improving their property to achieve a more consistent signage and landscaping, should be a long-term priority, requiring some form of guidelines

Bosworth Street Intersection (C)

- An example of where a large land owner can make easy improvements to help the appearance of this corridor—the auto dealership on the corner could help depending on the current state of the auto industry
- None of the corners of this intersection add to the appearance of the area

Highway Intersection (D)

- Way too many curb cuts impact safety, travel time, and the area’s appearance
- As a gateway this intersection needs improvement
- Nothing differentiates this intersection from any other in the country, where gas stations dominate highway exits



A large intersection with lots of vacant space like Bosworth Street and Old Spanish Trail can evolve through improvements beginning with street treatments and ending with a new building closer to the street. Slidell has a lot of pavement that is not necessary for the amount of traffic. Narrowing of streets will help start a transformation into more inviting spaces.



Major intersections can be improved over time by simple street treatments, curbside parking, and street trees, and eventually, buildings that create a more inviting character as people leave the highway.

Natural Spaces

- The natural areas should be preserved and where possible and included in the trails system as it expands

Fremaux Avenue



Infill townhouses can be a great way to increase population density on a small site behind the properties fronting the street. The building form can also be one storey in the case of seniors buildings or like this shown where the units are apartments served by elevators.



On larger sites where large floorplate retailing occurs, the interior streets can look like this development in Atlanta. A main street type feel, yet this development has a Target, Bed Bath & Beyond and Home Depot mixed in with other retailers, yet the interior streets are walkable, have curbside parking and the larger surface lots are tucked behind the buildings. The buildings have two or three floors to add scale and mixed uses. Seniors housing above the larger retail floorplates is a good combination as that use requires big floors as well.

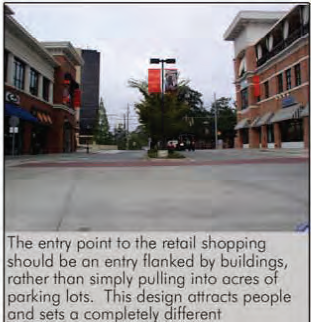
Opportunities



An example where infill development has occurred behind a large retail shopping facility. The development is higher density in a condo format attractive to young professionals as well as senior citizens looking to escape yard work.



Street treatment on large retail sites is an important factor in creating a different type of retailing that is very different from the large surface parking lots like those at the Front / Gause intersection. Curbside parking provides a neighborhood feel with storefronts on the sidewalk providing lots of interaction and making people feel safer at any time of day.



The entry point to the retail shopping should be an entry flanked by buildings, rather than simply pulling into acres of parking lots. This design attracts people and sets a completely different

Reinforce the Entries

There are six major entry points into and within the Slidell's core. Three are on the interstate and the other three are on Front Street. The interstate entries leave something to be desired as do most around the country. Nothing from a design standpoint is very welcoming and there is no connecting element that invites anyone to stop or feel a sense of community.

The challenges and opportunities for each of the intersections are discussed on the analysis pages and are similar to those listed for the corridors discussion. Generally, it is important to have a program that works to improve all of these intersections to convey a better sense of design to encourage something other than automobile traffic.

Create A Strategic Plan

A coordinated strategy for investing public and private capital, building infrastructure and local job creation, as well as implementing the design ideas discussed, is a necessity for a successful revitalization program. This program should begin with an effective Community Improvement Plan, discussed in the implementation section.

Concentration

Strategic funding assistance can help create a concentration that might take longer to happen. A big mall would not have a lot of customers if 50 percent of the stores in the mall were vacant. They work because there is a concentration of activity and as people walk along the halls there is always something to see and do.

It is important to ensure that resources are focused to the point where a synergy begins to evolve. If three or four businesses get established next to each other an activity node begins to develop that might become a destination. If those same three businesses were scattered over three blocks, their chance of success are less.

There are lots of examples where cities choose to address too many areas at once, rather than concentrating efforts on a few areas, building success, then moving to another location. Block grant dollars for a retail façade loan program have more impact when focused in one area for a couple of years. The program should be coordinated with other programs to help get several businesses established which creates a synergy and economies of scale where they might even share services. Otherwise the impact of the funding is watered down and more likely to fail. Strategic investment is a tough political decision.



Improving the I-10 Entries

This illustration shows how a good planting program could vastly improve the interstate entries. Just planting trees helps to “close” the space so that residents, who already know the gas stations are there, experience something much better than what exists and travelers will feel more welcome when stopping.

Concentration and Diversity

Identifying important retailing nodes and concentrating resources in those areas boosts the chances for success. Encouraging retail diversity within the nodes broadens the market for the goods and services and lengthens the activity for longer periods during the day and evening.

Diversity

Malls around the country are failing. One of the reasons is their focus on factory shopping. They offer one product—retailing, for fixed hours during the day. Diversity is the key to avoiding negative downturns when one sector goes bust.

How do we apply this thinking to the Old Town? Attract a variety of activities. Don't create just restaurants in one block. They are not busy at 11:00 am so there is no street activity. Mix restaurants in with retail stores, offices, and government uses. So when pedestrians come to Old Town, there would always be something happening along the street edge. When the restaurants are closed, the retail stores and offices are busy. When the shops are closed in the evening, the restaurants are active.

A Strong Economic Development Focus

A successful economic development approach for the City should focus on five areas:

- Identify assets and weaknesses
- Prioritized infrastructure investment to focus incentives
- Business retention and enhancement
- Vendor recruitment
- Workforce enhancement

Creating the plans for revitalized districts and corridors with signature public spaces will only be successful when people have a destination to visit, things to do and see when they get there, and when residents and businesses feel the area is a place to live and invest. Identifying all opportunities, both public and private, will show a coordinated strategy for attracting multiple funding sources.

IMPLEMENTATION

A varied implementation approach using regulatory powers, planning efforts, and economic development tools will enable the City to direct its strengths and focus results. Taking stock of all the resources that can be coordinated to achieve specific objectives is just as important as what businesses are available in the community.

The community's success is ultimately based on how well individual actions work together to bring about positive change. Undertaking a comprehensive community assessment will generate ideas and identify links that, when coordinated, can make a difference.

Regulatory

Regulation is only as good as its implementation. Assessing the regulatory rules and processes is necessary to ensure the outcome the community wants is achievable.

Action

- Is the master plan reflecting the goals of the community for economic development, physical character, and social needs?
- A thorough review of the zoning code, a zoning discovery, is necessary prior to rewriting to understand the issues and what direction is needed, including what physical form the commercial corridors should be
- Design guidelines fill in the blanks left by the zoning code
- Is there a current and relevant community improvement plan ?

The regulatory framework should consist of several components. The key is to make sure they are working together rather than against each other. Do not over regulate. Set a framework, then move forward.

Regulatory Elements

- A City master plan
- Sector plans (small master plans or corridor studies) dealing with land use, infrastructure, and funding
- Zoning
- Design guidelines (similar to those prepared by Tulane)
- Development processes
- Sign controls
- Housing occupancy standards

Taking Stock

An inventory of the City's assets and weaknesses, both physical and programmed, is an important first step. This inventory would include existing businesses and the services they provide.

Inventory—First Steps

- Gather a small group of people--residents, community leaders, and business representatives
- Provide them with aerial photographs and a set of markers
- The charge is to identify key points in the community—services, businesses, land, activities, opportunities, landscapes—that could be
- Enhanced to create activity (ex: airport and proposed civic building)
- Match the ideas up against funding opportunities and prioritize to pursue both short and long term
- Engage the community

The inventory should include infrastructure's age and a schedule for upgrading it. This analysis will help with

development of the Community Improvement Plan described later.

Projections

Business location information can be used along with retail expenditure profiles available through provider companies. The State ES 202 data (business employment information), is useful in seeing what businesses exist. This information combined with retail expenditure projections will help identify gaps in the marketplace and the potential market for new businesses. This information is very helpful when approaching prospective new employers.

Business Inventory

Identifying existing businesses, where people shop, and how far they have to go is a good start to identifying gaps in the retail and service sectors. These market gaps may be an opportunity for new investment. Start with the State ES 202 employment data (some States are reluctant to hand out this information). This is a good way to locate businesses and match them against local business license data.

This information can be combined with consumer expenditure profiles, market demand information for specific products and services, and the area's demographics. The information is generally supplied on an increasing radius from a site. The market area size varies depending on the service or activity. Data suppliers exist that can provide this information.

Community Improvement Plan

A Community Improvement Plan is the first step in a coordinated investment strategy for creating the kind of public infrastructure that can attract and retain businesses and residents. People gain confidence when the public investment in infrastructure is visible and improves quality of life. The most visible example of this in Slidell is Heritage Park.

Funding is an important piece to factor in. Can the projects identified in the CIP be implemented based on tax revenues?

Community Improvement Plan—First Steps

- Identify needed public infrastructure projects, both short and long term
- Rank the projects by need and by multiplier effect—improvements that have the most potential to create new investment or opportunities
- Create a phasing strategy matched to funding sources
- Move forward on each priority, linking funding requests to a coordinated plan

Partnerships

Partnerships help achieve more than the local government can do itself. Non-profits and private investors can be a real asset when mapping out common goals. Research into the interests of specific foundations can help match a recreational opportunity, for example to a foundation's mandate. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is interested in children's health. A new recreational trail may interest them.

City-owned land can be leveraged into a partnership with an investor to create new business opportunities.

Potential Partnerships

- Government
- Foundations
- Local businesses
- Universities
- Hospitals

Economic Development

The first step in attracting investment is to establish a solid investment strategy for public infrastructure. This discussion is not just about roads. It is about a consistent water supply, good schools, programming parks and open spaces, cultural celebration, and recreational opportunities just to mention a few.

Don't Forget The Small Stuff

Too many places think of development in isolation, and fail. The big picture success is made of many small pieces—the quality of the schools and parks system, recreation opportunities, and small business help such as façade loans and help with applications. An economic development strategy should be a comprehensive community assessment—its services, and how they can be improved.

This is not rocket science. A simple, comprehensive strategy involving physical and social strategies can get a leg up on getting funding.

Annexation

The Team heard some mention of possible annexation. The City must answer a question. Will the acquired property result in a net gain to the municipal revenue stream? If land is annexed for development, does it water down of the potential of land within the existing boundaries for redevelopment?

For example, the Team learned that Slidell lacks sufficient industrial land. However, the City also has no comprehensive plan for industrial uses as a guide for assessment. City leaders should take stock of the land available for redevelopment.

Mapping Out A Land Investment Strategy

Creating a GIS map of available land is the first step to a comprehensive assessment of a community's private and public land resources. An assessment should include:

- Municipally-owned or other government land that may be available
- Large land holdings under single ownership
- Vacant land
- Underutilized land
- Land under other government ownership that may become available
- Where is the competition and what are the chances
- What is the current and past trends of absorption for development?
- Is there a mechanism set up for land banking?

The challenge is often not to gain more land through annexation, but to consolidate larger land parcels within existing municipal boundaries that can then be packaged to attract investment. This includes land for industrial as well as residential development.

In any scenario, it is important to begin with a game plan that establishes objectives, includes all types of development, and maps sources of land, priority areas, and funding. Once the City has determined its priorities, assessed the available resources, and realistically considered the funding sources, a will picture emerge of whether or not annexation is a net positive.

Concentrating resources to build small successes that can then begin to grow on their own energy is often the best road to success, meaning sustainability.

Mapping Out A Strategy

Three keys to a successful strategy for attracting government resources include the following themes.

- Business retention and attraction
- Leveraging municipal resources in partnership with local private interests
- Programming for social goals such as housing for the elderly and the disadvantaged, job training, and affordable housing
- Matching public investment to strategic goals

A number of programs and strategies are outlined below. These ideas do not stand alone, but should be combined into a strategic pattern that follows a focused plan reflecting the cities master plan, zoning, CIP, and economic development plan. These are all pieces to the puzzle.

Economic Development

Slidell can use any number of business development programs and incentives—federal, State, and local—to help retain and attract new business. There are keys to successful incentive programs.

Find Your Niche

There are many opportunities out there and everyone is chasing them. Wind power for example. Manufacturing large wind mills for the south coast could be something to explore.

Make A List

A meeting of all the major employers should occur. Each attendee should provide at least five names of companies they deal with in other parts of the country or the world. Make a list of all the names, then decide which should be contacted to speak with about bringing new jobs to Slidell.

Remember The Folks Who Are Already There

Do not neglect the folks who are already there. Far too often cities focus on new business attraction, seeing this as the cure to all their ills. Yet it is the existing businesses that have put their money on the line, provided local jobs, and stuck through the bad times. A successful business strategy must start with helping the existing businesses remain competitive.

Be Patient

Everyone is probably chasing the same dog. How many towns are out there thinking they will be the next biotech hub? Providing incentives does not necessarily mean people will invest. It takes time.

Create A Comprehensive Strategy

It isn't enough to use tax increment financing. Most often one tool is not enough. For example, if a historic district is created downtown then combine historic tax credits with a façade loan program, HUD low income housing grants, a tax increment financing program, and a new market tax credit allocation. Combined, these incentives often meet the "but for" test, to make a project financially viable.

Keys To A Successful Economic Development Strategy

Do not reinvent the wheel. Do an internet search to find a community that has created a good economic strategy. Try to find a similar sized community. See how they have identified a niche market based on their assets such as location, climate, and demographics. Remember, look outside the box here. The smallest factor can, when combined with others, add up to a significant asset.

Inventory Your Assets

Look at what Slidell has or does not have and determine how these factors can be turned into a marketing tool. The City's assets include:

- *Location* – proximity to New Orleans, rail, airport, interstate highway, universities, water
- *People* – the population stayed through tough times and are vested in the community, and they are a stable, consistent labor market
- *Costs* – land is affordable and available
- *Services* – everything is here: recreation, proximity to a metro area, a diverse economy
- *Amenities* – recreation and culture that along with jobs, will appeal to a work force
- *Major players* in the corporate marketplace

SoFa - Branding, Go Funky

Brand downtown as the South of Fremaux area. It's catchy and young people and creative businesses would be attracted to it.

International Connections

Textron's international connections can help bring new employment to the community. This company is listed in the New Orleans business journal, highlighting the importance of the company to the region.

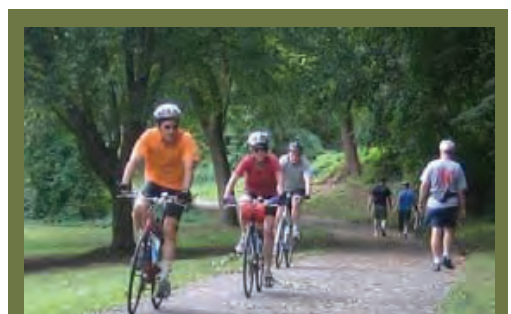
The economic development strategy for Slidell should be based on simple principles:

- Strategic investment in critical projects that can create a centre of energy that will attract private investment.
- Partnerships with the community, businesses, faith-based institutions, and foundations. There are several examples around the country where a church has worked with the city and HUD to sponsor Senior Housing projects. Most often non-profits can deliver the services better than the government and the City's role should be to facilitate this.
- Land acquisition – use new market tax credits, for example, to establish a fund to acquire strategic properties to be used as an asset for specific projects that can help turn an area around
- Social programs – a successful economic development strategy should have a social programming component. What can specific projects do to enhance the quality of life? Make sure any program includes recreation, possibly cultural programs, or even affordable day care to allow more flexibility in the work force.

An example of a project that embodies all of the above elements would be the hotel in Old Town. It would involve:

- Land acquisition
- Tax credits
- Façade program (if the building is to be retained)
- A mix of housing including seniors as well as some low income housing would attract federal funding if the area is HUD eligible, especially grants for seniors housing

The downtown hotel would be a good candidate for a coordinate investment strategy to help turn this site into a catalyst for new momentum downtown.



Trails As Economic Development

Companies expect to have recreational opportunities as an asset for employees. An example of social programming as part of a community economic development strategy.

Another development strategy would be to turn one of Old Town's larger historic buildings into a business or research incubator for a university based in New Orleans, for example. It could include the following programs.

- Historic tax credits
- New market tax credits
- Business tax credits
- Employment incentives for creating jobs
- Foundation grants to encourage specific business or industry

Tools

The following discussion will begin with the programs easiest to implement and cover a range of common programs, but not all, including brownfield programs.

Tax Benefit Programs

Real Estate Tax Abatement

A program where residents or businesses are provided an incentive to redevelop or upgrade real estate. The property tax paid to the City is held at the pre-developed assessed value for a period of time after completion of the upgrade, usually five to ten years. Sometimes the period is extended at a reduced rate of abatement, say 50 percent or at a declining rate, say 100 percent for the first two years, dropping to 50 percent thereafter to expiry.

The applicant must show extraordinary costs, obstacles to development, etc., to warrant the abatement. Abatement should not be offered where a project may otherwise occur.

Historic Tax Credits

The historic tax credit programs may be offered at both the State and federal level. They are discussed elsewhere in this report and should be a priority for the City. Many cities and towns add a local historic tax incentive.

Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing (TIF) is simple in concept, but requires a great deal of administrative work to properly track the taxes. TIFs capture the "increment" in taxes in a specific area or for a single site, generated by property improvements. For example, in a TIF district developed for a part of Old Town any existing tax revenue generated in that area would continue to flow to the City's general revenue fund. However, if an existing business made property improvements, hired more staff, and was selling more products after the TIF district was enacted, this increment would be captured by the TIF.

Different states allow for different taxes to be captured. For example, in Missouri a city can assess a retail sales tax which is then included in the TIF revenue. Also, any local income tax might be captured as well. TIF money is used to leverage capital borrowing for projects within the TIF district, such as infrastructure improvements and transit, to help redevelop the area.

The big financial power of a TIF is that it can be used to borrow against the future tax revenue stream expected from specific projects that may occur within the TIF area. It requires considerable effort to determine likely projects, as well as projecting when improvements will occur and the likely increased tax revenues.

Proper records of the taxes and assessments are necessary for tracking the revenue stream. It is also important to note that most TIFs have a start and end date, often 23 to 25 years. Most states start the clock when the first project using a TIF is started, meaning others need to follow quickly. An alternative is single site TIFs rather than area or district TIFs.

Enterprise Zone

The City could establish its own enterprise zone to attract development to a targeted area. This zone would allow for tax abatements in that area. A local program might be combined with similar programs at the State and federal level.

Loan Programs

Small Business Loans

A small business loan is done through a partnership with a business owner, their bank, and a Certified Development Company (CDC). Common uses for these loans are real estate acquisition, capital equipment, and building construction. The loan terms are between 10 and 20 years to provide stability and often have an upper limit as well as some projections on job creation. The purpose of the CDC is to administer the program on behalf of the City, not unlike a TIF commission.

There are a number of variations on this theme including smaller revolving loan funds at lesser amounts.

Other Loan Programs

There are endless examples across the country of cities and towns offering their own loan programs including:

- New job tax credits - real and personal property tax credits for business creating a minimum number of jobs.
- Economic development fund - assistance to employers for specific businesses or industries often used to attract technology jobs.
- Micro-enterprise fund - an emerging trend to provide small amounts of capital on short terms to very small businesses

Think Small

A recent Wall Street Journal article highlighted success New Orleans' success attracting small-scale entrepreneurs to the City with tax incentives such as the six percent wage rebate on payroll. Clusters of small businesses are opening, bringing economic creativity and energy.

Finance Programs

New Market Tax Credits

NMTCs started in 2002. As a tax credit program, not free money, it must generate revenue. NMTCs should be viewed as "but for" program, meaning the business would not locate and hire 10 employees without some extra financial push to help purchase machinery.

The program goals have changed but the its primary focus is to create jobs in HUD-eligible areas. The program has become extremely popular and competition for tax credit allocations has increased considerably. Cities, banks, non-profits all apply and they usually use consultants to pull it off.

The program awards federal tax credits for a seven year period with a cumulative value of 39 percent (five percent - year one through three; six percent thereafter). Eighty-five percent of the private investment leveraged by the tax credit must stay invested during that period.

There are two ways obtain an NMTC allocation.

Your Own Application

First, the hard way. Make your own application. This is a time-consuming process. Your first effort can be expected to take several months and require the help of a consultant with a proven track record in NMTC applications. You will also require coordination with the federal legislators representing the district, whose

support is a must.

With numerous steps, the application is not easy. It includes forming a Community Development Enterprise (CDE) through which the tax credits flow.

The applications are usually submitted in February. They are judged by panel members from around the country who use standard measures to score an application. Evaluators are looking for tax credit projects that can create jobs and help turn around distressed areas. For example, a good project is neighborhood-based retail combined with a housing project that has an affordable housing component.

NMTC strategies

Successful applications look at multiple themes that tie together to form a strategic program.

- Job creation – not just temporary jobs but permanent jobs
- Local businesses – strengthening and creating new ones
- Land acquisition to create sites that can be marketed to attract new investment. One of the hardest things to do in a built up area is to assemble land; NMTC can help with this
- Tie your program into social goals like community health, education, housing, recreation, day care, and adult care

The application is the easy part. When an allocation is awarded, the accounting begins. Strict accounting practices must be followed as the CDE must keep records of how the allocations are loaned and repaid. If a CDE is awarded funds, they have to be pushed out the door in a set time period. Again, most groups getting these allocations use accounting professionals.

On the plus side, a CDE can pay itself up to 15 percent of the allocation for administrative fees.

What is Needed for a Good Application?

1. Community Development Enterprise (CDE)

Do you have a CDE to put forth as the entity for the tax credits to flow through, along board members with resumes that show have experience in these sorts of programs. For example, local bankers, developers, economic development people as well as social housing or community groups that highlight a balanced approach. Not having a CDE does not disqualify you from submitting an application, although it certainly doesn't help.

You want a board with a proven track record of successful community development.

Slidell could work over the next four months to register as a CDE or find one to partner with who has this history. Possible projects should be identified for the application. Any successful efforts the City has been involved in to create economic development especially any public/private investments should be cited—business loans, land acquisition, housing construction, etc.

2. History

The applicant has to display a history of providing financial assistance. The CDE that the NMTC would flow through lists the programs used in the past to promote economic activity. For example, in St. Louis the development corporation had a long history of loans, grants, bonding, and partnerships with the private sector using land for development.

3. Projects

Do you have any projects lined up to show as possible activities to invest in? This should not be a problem

given the hurricane damage. However, a coordinated approach to using the allocations with partners ready to invest is imperative.

This is important. While the projects you might list on the application are not necessarily the ones the tax credits would flow to, they have to be representative of the investment strategy you are advocating. For example, using land for public/private partnership or a business seeking a loan.

4. Support

It would be important to do the back room work to generate political support for elected folks at the federal level.

The second option is to simply draw on the funds already allocated to an existing CDE. This option avoids all the headaches of administration. Find a group who has an allocation like Bank of America, US Bank, the National Trust for Historic Places, then match up projects with these lenders. You can get the same results without the headaches of administration, although you do not get the 15 percent administration fee. Remember, these groups have to push their tax credit allocations out the door before they can apply for more.

In the first round it may be wise to adopt the second option. Find some worthwhile projects then see if they can be marketed. This would help provide some history as well as achieve the same results. Focus on the downtown, for example and identify several projects including some that generate revenue to pay back the tax credit funds.

Some Possible NMTC Projects

- The new civic block
- Façade and business loans to established and new businesses
- Acquire that old hotel
- Streetscape improvements
- Perhaps a small boutique hotel downtown
- Affordable housing
- The airport and developing its land to create a regional hub
- A business/research incubator

Civic District

The civic district project might be part of an nmtd application. neighborhood stabilization program
The federal government recently announced a \$1.93 billion allocation for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program in HUD-eligible areas. This is a competitive process where successful groups receive a minimum of \$5 million. Though the current round of applications has passed, the program should be monitored for next year.

Like the NMTC program, specific projects are the cornerstone to the application. The money must be out the door in three years, again showing the focus on immediate results. There are a number of activities that could present a credible application. It could be an asset to create partnerships between non-profit and for profit groups, both of which bring unique skills to an application.

Possible HUD Application – Neighborhood Stabilization Program

- Acquiring property for a land bank
- Demolition of blighted structures
- Redeveloped of vacant and demolished properties
- Acquiring foreclosed properties

Other Services

Business Improvement District

Most communities have at least one Business Improvement District—an identified area where taxes levied to fund area infrastructure and marketing. However, not all communities are effective in administering a BID program. Strong organization is necessary to get broader buy in.

Far too often BIDs focus on decorative street lights and banners and branding efforts. However, a focused effort on business retention and attraction, combined with the City and other organizations is far more effective.

For example, the Old Town district should be organized to plan, implement, and promote designation for a federal historic district. The first step is for this group is to engage the help of Tulane students.

Effective Business Improvement District Programs

An effective BID program requires a strong focus—what is the purpose of the BID, what programs and services are necessary to meet that purpose, where are the revenue streams, and what resources can be leveraged to improve the area.

Incubators

Many cities have created incubators—city-owned space and uses to attract emerging industries through reduced rents and shared services. Once a business becomes more self-sufficient, it is then helped to relocate in market rate space while a new venture occupies incubator space.

This approach is most often used for technology or biotech businesses. Matching incubator space up with off-site campus facilities of a major university is usually the way to go.

Counseling

The City could coordinate local banks, colleges and universities, and businesses to provide counseling to local and potential businesses. This is also a good strategy for creating a unified front for attracting investment from outside the region. The existing businesses and schools have the statewide and national contacts. These networks can provide access to markets that might not otherwise be realized.

This effort should include specialized programs for helping disadvantaged/ minority and women-owned businesses to succeed in the community.

Site Selection

The City should have an online interactive registry of available land, buildings, and businesses that anyone can access. This inventory should be on the City's webpage and be linked to as many real estate sites as possible. A partnership in developing this inventory should be formed with the local commercial/industrial real estate body.

City staff should be dedicated to respond to inquiries and update the system with GIS information as well as photographs.

Training

A local relevant labor force is a huge asset to attracting investment. The schools, colleges, and universities should partner with local business leaders to understand where the job market is headed and what training is needed to fill these positions. Retaining a larger segment of the graduates in the City, as well as attracting those that moved away for university, should be a priority.

This partnership needs to be flexible and able to respond to any immediate needs such as a quick turnaround for a new business or responding to a closure and the need to retrain employees left without work.

Implementation of Economic Programs

There are a number of ways to implement the economic programs outlined above. Some are done by the City, while others require consultants to undertake the more complex approaches, such as bonding and perhaps an NMTC application. Organizing the City structure to help serve this effort, would be a good start. Given the size of the staff, partnering with the local community, businesses, and residents is critical.

Any successful economic program has a strong social and green component. The first step then, is to engage the broader community.

Possible “Themes” for Working Groups

Creating a small task force for each of the following areas would help divide up the workload into manageable pieces.

- Neighborhoods
- Commercial development
- Real estate, including a possible land bank
- Special projects

A quick look at some possible entities that might be required or considered, are outlined below.

Tax Increment Financing Commission

If you want to use a TIF, an oversight commission is needed to assess projects and their long term impact on general revenues. Ultimately, the commission's decisions are subject to Council oversight. However, the TIF's day to day operation needs to be delegated.

Land Authority

The current operation of the airport should be combined with any future land acquisitions by the City. A board can oversee a land bank, the selection of properties, their management and disposition as well as be involved in the long term visioning of what should be acquired or used for partnerships in development.

This authority could also take title to delinquent properties and combine them into the land bank. Keep in mind that management responsibilities come with ownership, and this group needs to be set up to ensure the acquired properties are maintained, like cutting the grass, which can be costly if many properties are managed. In some cities, this bill comes to several hundred thousand dollars.

Redevelopment Authority

It is important to oversee any potential tax incentives and possible eminent domain acquisitions. A redevelopment authority can provide a comprehensive overview that should implement a grander vision outlined in a master plan for the City.

Applications for real estate tax abatement; tax exempt revenue bonds, eminent domain efforts, and redevelopment in accordance with State and federal programs, would run through this authority, subject to Council oversight.

Low interest business loans for existing and new efforts should run through this group.

Revenue Authority

Issuing bonds for development opportunities requires seed money to provide financing. Providing financing

at below market rates for bigger development projects that could involve private/public partnerships can often make the difference in whether or not a project goes ahead. This is a tricky business and the City must be diligent that it is not overextended.

This type of authority can be advantageous however, expert advice is necessary.

Enterprise Zone Commission

If there are enterprise funds available at either the State or federal level, this authority would oversee these programs including the tax abatement recommendation as well as contributing to the discussion on the specifics of the deals, such as guaranteeing local employment minimums. A redevelopment authority might also serve this function rather than setting up another entity.

Zoning

During the visit, there was some discussion concerning the zoning rewrite. Since the visit, the team has undertaken the beginnings of a detailed review of the zoning ordinance in Montgomery County. The goals of the effort are relevant to the Slidell exercise and could help advance the zoning program.

The goals of the review should be simple.

- **Simplify and streamline the standards and processes**

Zoning should be easy to understand and implement. The rewrite should use clear terms and diagrams to explain complex ideas. The permitting process should be reviewed to streamline redundancies without sacrificing quality buildings. Slidell must have a permitting process that allows for quick response to rebuilding situations as well as one that recognizes nonconformities. After disaster situations, people must be able to rebuild.

- **Match land use to development patterns**

A clear understanding of what type of development is occurring in Slidell is necessary to ensure the new zoning rules work to facilitate this development. With an emphasis on employment, the industrial and retail sector should be a primary focus. Highway commercial is another. The little things like signage, must establish consistent rules to help implement the vision of a more appealing character, rather than the uncoordinated development that has occurred in the past.

- **Rationalize development standards**

Zoning standards should maintain the relationship between buildings and the spaces around them. This may sound lofty, however for Slidell to offer a quality environment, it needs to consider how buildings create the space that people interact with. The pharmacies at the Front Street and Gause Boulevard intersection do nothing to enhance Slidell's image. It is time to think about these matters in the zoning ordinance.



Buildings define how people think about the community

The Front Street-Gause Boulevard intersection is not a space people describe as well designed. The pharmacy simply plunked down the same store that exists in thousands of other locations around the country. Slidell deserves more. The City should expect buildings that create space and convey an image of quality. The zoning rewrite can help with this.

Embrace Technology

Slidell has a good base in GIS technology. The GIS data set needs to be enhanced so that as much of the new zoning code as possible is interactive online.

Look to the Future

Consider the amounts of land zoned for each use—residential, industrial, commercial, institutional, and recreational. Where is this land located? Is there enough of each zoning category to meet the expectation of the community in terms of future needs? If Slidell is working to attract more industrial users, is there enough zoned land to accommodate those uses?

Rationalize

Less is better. Fewer zones mean less regulations and easier administration, without sacrificing quality. Take an inventory of the uses in each zone, including the differences in the development standards from one residential zone to the next and look at whether or not these differences are necessary, or could be better displayed in a table with fewer zones.

Regulate what is important.

Consult

The rewrite effort should include an advisory panel of people who are interested in seeing a better regulatory system. This means engaging new people, not just the same ones who have always been involved. New ideas are needed to push the zoning in a new direction.

ACTION CHECKLIST

There are myriad implementation mechanisms. The following list, while long, does not list every option.

1. Implementation – Making it Work

A Strategic Master Plan

- Create a short strategic master plan, possibly both sides of a poster, that lays out the basics
 - Where investment is needed
 - Major capital improvements
 - Timing and implementation
 - Priorities for land acquisition
 - Employment areas

Preservation Districts

- Build on the Preserve America momentum
- Main Streets designation—combine with Preserve America to maximize the promotional value and funding historic districts can bring
- Old Town first
 - Survey to determine boundaries that could qualify—Teddy Avenue is outside of the current boundaries
 - Recordation
- New Districts
 - What other areas are eligible, focus on areas of need strategic/block grant eligible, build layers
 - Use Tulane preservation program to conduct the survey and assessment
 - Use tax credit infrastructure in New Orleans to help process tax credits
 - Conduct tax credit workshops with local businesses to help market the plan
 - Focus on a showcase project, such as the brick “factory” type program in Old Town
- Tax credits
 - Federal
 - Expanded in New Orleans to 25 percent
 - State credits
 - Has the city thought of any property tax base incentive
 - Need to work with local finance and building community to create the tax credit culture using the National Trust offices in New Orleans as a resource center
 - State economic development department has a tax abatement program

Housing Condition

- Occupation ordinance requiring review annual or when a housing unit changes tenants or ownership, helps keep tabs on property conditions allowing for early identification of issues

Economic Development

Business Improvement District (BID)

- The past failure to organize should not prevent another, more coordinated effort packaged with other recommendations

Economic Development Corporation

- Property acquisition—use bonds to acquire property
 - This could be a pilot project to show how the City, through an economic development corporation, can successfully coordinate resources for a catalyst project
 - Public partnership to develop through request for proposals process

- This strategy could also be used at the airport
- Façade improvement
- Business loan/grant program
- Organize block grant/HUD objectives

New Market Tax Credits

- HUD eligible areas—combine with other programs like historic tax credits
- Block grant eligible areas
- Are CDBG funds leveraged? Is the delivery infrastructure (nonprofits) in place to partner with and flow the tax credits?

Tax Abatement Program

- Establish a tax abatement program to replace the one the parish took away
- Go zone (go zone.com)

State Legislation

- Improve the relationship with the State DOT
- Incentive—cost sharing for amenities and maintenance agreements for things like sidewalks
- CIP for improvements agreed upon with the State

Branding

- Branding downtown – SoFa – south of Fremaux area

2. Design Guidelines—Settling A Vision

- **Vision for the City to Grow**
 - Entries
 - Connections between the natural and built environments
 - Standards and guidelines to guide development to the larger goal of creating a quality public environment
- **Corridors—General**
 - Phased improvements
 - > Streetscape first—trees, sustainable plantings and furniture
 - > Installing medians
 - > Narrowing pavement, adding wider sidewalks, and bike lanes
 - > Attracting new uses, helping existing ones
 - > Consistent signage and design standards
- **Nodes—Main Intersections**
 - Prioritize and implement improvements to encourage retail and pedestrian activity
 - Link to the surrounding neighborhoods
 - Improve intersection design through marking, signals, traffic calming
 - Infill the parking lots and gaps
 - Build on the train station and Heritage Park
- **Gateways**
 - Same as corridor approach
 - Funding limits means prioritizing, starting with Gause and I-10
 - Work on signage improvements, especially billboards
- **Residential Streets**
 - Use low impact design, bio swales, and natural vegetation to help with rain water
- **Waterways**
 - Enhance the waterways through an interconnected trail system

- **Connections**
 - Enhance links from Heritage Park to the train station and Old Town
- **Pedestrian/cyclist safety**
 - Traffic calming on all corridors
 - Pedestrian activated cross walks
 - Bike lanes on major corridors
- **Signage**
 - Address as part of code rewrite
 - Need to make the place look better
 - Restrict signage on businesses—Walgreens has six signs
- **Park Enhancements**
 - General—features to attract people
 - Heritage Park as an example on “not over doing it”
 - Park hierarchy
 - > Griffith Park should not draw from the Heritage Park; does it need to get any bigger to serve its users?
 - > Interface of park edges
 - Fold into the CIP plan
- **Park Maintenance**
 - Identify partnerships to offset costs (with 34 parks and seven staff persons, there is a need to improve service)
 - Foundations
 - Park to green space—strategic closure to leave fallow
 - > Strategic assessment of needs
 - > Active vs. passive
- **Landscape Ordinance**
 - Set standards for new development including native plantings, water absorption
- **Urban Forestry Program**
 - Tree ordinance (see Mandeville)

3. Bike and Pedestrian Trails—Connectivity

- **Standards Overview: Bicycle and Pedestrian Routes, Trails**
- **Bike Trails**
 - Connect the parks
 - Minimize vehicle conflicts (the Trace currently crosses the street twice)
 - Markings for major corridors
- **Waterways**
 - Greater utilization of the drainage waterways for active use
 - Enhancement—uses should open to the waterways where possible
 - Construction and maintenance costs
 - > Combine federal flood funds to help improve the drainage waterways while providing public access
 - > Transportation enhancement
 - > Stimulus funding
 - > Prioritize the areas for improvement and enhancement
- **Node Connection**
 - Heritage Park into Old Town

- Continue the waterway trail to Tammany Trace
- New City Hall to Griffith Park
- **State Transportation Enhancement Funding**
 - CEMAQ
 - Recreational Trails

4. Community Improvement Plan

- Needs to be done in coordination with growth expectations and ongoing maintenance
- Work with Feds and the State to prioritize funding initiatives
- Public buildings, civic building, art centre
- Parking strategy for Old Town
- Include property acquisition priorities identified in the economic development plan

5. Zoning Ordinance

- Prepare a detailed zoning discovery
- Create a zoning advisory panel of citizens and persons working with the code
- Set a realistic time schedule for completion with milestones
- Set aside some funds for outside help, at least for review of drafting
- Engage Tulane to help model the proposals
- Create and maintain a detailed GIS data set

PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAM

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Final Report
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Making Great Communities Happen