

## Chapter Four Concept Plan

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The Concept Plan, as its name implies, presents several conceptual ideas and proposals for future direction, refinement and implementation of the Horizon Plan. The Concept Plan provides the framework for each five-year update of the Horizon Plan. The focus of this update is to provide information to the community regarding urban design tools.

The Concept Plan addresses five main components in design: Land Use; “Growth Centers”, Urban Design Districts and Urban Design Overlay Districts; Transportation; and Environment. Planners determined these five areas of emphasis were important for East Baton Rouge Parish and more attention and work was necessary in relation to these subjects when considering redevelopment and new development projects.

An analysis of each of the five areas of the Concept Plan has led to a number of ideas and proposals regarding growth and development in the City-Parish. Proposals include amendments to the “2010 Land Use Plan,” revisions to the Major Street Plan, the revision and delineation of Horizon Plan Growth Centers, the development of Urban Design Districts and Urban Design Overlay Districts, and the development of ordinances that protect the environment. The Concept Plan is intended to establish design principles for optimal development projects in East Baton Rouge Parish.

The following elements are crucial in developing a Concept Plan for East Baton Rouge Parish.

### **Land Use**

The City-Parish Planning Commission recognizes the importance of land use planning as a way to engage the public in the planning process and to develop a strategic, long-term plan for properties in the City-Parish. By working with members of the public, the Planning Commission staff received valuable input on the design of neighborhoods from individuals who reside, conduct business in, and seek entertainment in those areas.

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The land use categories used by the Planning Commission are intended to guide the planning process. The planning staff works with the public to develop design requirements to enhance the aesthetics of existing and new land uses.

The most recent planning activities have taken place in designated Growth Centers, Urban Design Districts and Urban Design Overlay Districts.

## Growth Centers

One aspect of the Ten-Year Update of the Horizon Plan has been a review of the “Growth Centers” as defined on the “2010 Land Use Plan.” As a result of the review, the Growth Centers have been revised and updated.

Growth Centers are areas of concentrated, higher intensity uses such as shopping, services, offices, public facilities, medium and high density residential development, cultural, entertainment and recreational activities. The “2010 Land Use Plan” denotes Growth Centers as “Regional” or “Community” with dashed lines outlining the areas.

The boundaries of several Growth Centers were moved or expanded to better reflect current development trends. Planners also changed the Horizon Land Use designation of parcels from Commercial/Office to the redefined land use categories adopted by the Metropolitan Council Resolution Number 37746, on April 16, 1998. The determinations were made based on existing land use, existing zoning, parcel boundaries and adjacent land uses.

As with the other elements of the Horizon Plan, the Growth Center proposals received staff recommendation and were taken to the Subarea/Neighborhood meetings for public review. The Growth Centers were adopted on a Planning District basis with the Land Use and Major Street Plan amendments taken to the Planning Commission and Metropolitan Council Hearings.

The following are the adopted definitions for Growth Centers:

**Regional Growth Centers** include regional shopping centers, institutions, high density office and residential complexes, medical centers and other major activities serving the entire Parish.

**Community Growth Centers** include community shopping centers, medium to high density office and residential complexes, public and recreational facilities and similar activities serving community areas.

The following list of Growth Centers were amended during the Update Process.

## Regional

Interstate 10 and Siegen Lane  
 Interstate 12 and O’Neal Lane  
 Downtown Baton Rouge  
 Florida Boulevard, Government Street and Acadian Thruway (MidCity)  
 Airline Highway and Florida Boulevard  
 Hooper Road, Joor Road and Sullivan Road

**Community**

Highland Road, Burbank Drive and Lee Drive  
 Jefferson Highway, Old Hammond Highway and Interstate 12  
 Coursey Boulevard and Jones Creek Road  
 Airline Highway and Old Hammond Highway  
 Florida Boulevard and Sherwood Forest Boulevard  
 Florida Boulevard, Old Hammond Highway and Choctaw Drive  
 Greenwell Springs Road, Sullivan Road and Frenchtown Road  
 Airline Highway and Greenwell Street

The Advance Planning Division maintains the boundaries of the Growth Centers on the “2010 Land Use Plan” in the Planning Commission Office.

Techniques for managing the Growth Centers will be developed in future years. Potential methods for guiding their growth and development include performance standards, urban design guidelines and growth management techniques.

**Transportation**

Planning for transportation needs is typically one of the most daunting and pressing issues for many cities. The pace and magnitude of growth and development necessitates that a comprehensive, yet flexible, transportation plan be developed, implemented and updated to ensure that communities maintain a safe and efficient transportation network.

Since 1950, Baton Rouge has relied upon the Major Street Plan as the means for identifying and providing for the future transportation needs of the City-Parish. The Major Street Plan identifies new roads and streets as well as improvements such as street widening or repaving on the existing transportation network. Also, the Major Street Plan helps to direct growth and development within the City-Parish by the programming of major transportation routes and prioritizing projects for future funding and construction. The Major Street Plan is a critical component to the long-range planning process.

North Mall Drive was added to the Major Street Plan in early 2007. North Mall Drive is bounded by Interstate 10 on the north, Pecue Lane on the east, the Kansas City Southern Rail Road Tracks on the south and Siegen Lane on the west. The North Mall Drive amendment was accepted based on its compliance with Objective T2.2: Transportation systems improvements

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should be provided for a changing region while protecting established neighborhoods and the natural environment. North Mall Drive connects Siegen Lane with Pecue Land and is located in Growth Center 5 and Planning District 16.

In 2002, the City-Parish presented the public with a proposition to extend the One-Half Cent Sales and Use Tax for Street and Road Improvements through the year 2030. Seventy percent (70%) of the tax collected will be appropriated to street and road improvements. In April of 2006, the City-Parish successfully issued \$125 million of Sales Tax Revenue Bonds to fund the Green Light Program. The Green Light Plan Program is an extensive plan for the expansion and improvement of roadways throughout the parish. The plan proposes 35 projects and includes the addition of extra lanes, extension of existing roads and connections.

East Baton Rouge Parish is also funding the development of an Implementation Plan for a traffic loop around the City of Baton Rouge to relieve traffic congestion in our growing region. From May 2007 - May 2008, a planning process will assist in determining the location, financing, and models for construction. The process will be managed by the Loop Executive Committee, which consists of the Parish Presidents of Ascension, East Baton Rouge, Iberville, Livingston, and West Baton Rouge Parishes. Components of the Implementation Plan will be: location; assessment of traffic and revenue potentials; develop financing plan; develop phasing plan for construction; public outreach and community involvement.

## **Environment**

Environmental planning is an important aspect in growth and development in East Baton Rouge Parish. Over the last five years there has been increased emphasis on environmental planning techniques throughout the City-Parish in order to mitigate the effects of development on the environment.

### **Baton Rouge Brownfields Program**

In 2000, the City-Parish received a \$200,000 grant from the EPA for a Brownfields Pilot Program. Designed as a program to operate within the framework of the Horizon Plan, the Brownfields Pilot was the foundational step for the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program (BRBP). A brownfield is defined by the EPA as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant." This leads to development outside of urban areas in pristine "greenfields". The goal of the brownfields program is to encourage revitalization and reutilization of urban brownfields. The brownfields program encourages Smart Growth, infill Development, and environmental planning, all important concepts of the Horizon Plan. Since the overall growth scenario established by the Horizon Plan is infill and redevelopment and since the Program targets abandoned properties predominantly found within the urban core, the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program is a powerful tool to be used for the implementation of the Horizon Plan. The program supports development into areas which may be hindered by environmental concerns and provide the mechanism to return properties back into commerce.

The goal of the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program is to foster the redevelopment of brownfields in Baton Rouge, thereby generating a positive force for the redevelopment of blighted property. Currently the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program is involved with several active sites. EPA funding has allowed for the identification of any environmental concerns associated with eligible sites and is the first step in the redevelopment and reuse of otherwise derelict properties. While this funding is available to eligible sites throughout the parish, priority will be given to sites in the Old South Baton Rouge area to support the revitalization efforts of the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority's HOPE VI Office. Properties that were affected by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, as well as properties with redevelopment plans that address the new housing and business needs of the expanded Baton Rouge population will also be given preference.

Since its inception the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program has established a site inventory of 155 specific properties, has been awarded more than \$1.3 million in assessment and cleanup funding, has conducted more than 51 assessments for 36 different sites and has leveraged almost \$24 million in redevelopment funding.

The Program is also developing an Environmental Land Use Controls Tracking Program in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), East Baton Rouge Parish Clerk of Court and City-Parish Department of Public Works. Environmental Land Use Controls are formal land use restrictions developed under the regulatory oversight of LDEQ and recorded with the property records. This program will allow City-Parish staff to identify these restrictions when reviewing applications, thereby protecting the public and the environment.

### **Wetlands Protection**

Recognizing the importance of wetlands and other ecosystems, the Planning Commission works to ensure that sensitive areas are identified and considered in land use planning and future development scenarios. In order to achieve this goal, a wetlands program was established. In 1999, the City-Parish Planning Commission received funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to implement the program. A Steering Committee comprised of environmental professionals was then established to guide the process.

The Planning Commission has organized an educational outreach program to promote an understanding of wetlands and environmental values. Designed to reach a diverse audience, the outreach campaign uses a variety of events and information channels to make learning about the environment not only fun and interesting, but also challenging and constructive. Planning Commission sponsored events, to date, have included:

**American Planning Association Mobile Workshop** In August 2007, delegates from across the United States attended a full day workshop at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center and ended at Alligator Bayou and Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge.

**Developers' Roundtable** In May 2007, the development community met to discuss the benefits and impediments to sustainable development practices. Facilitator Dr. Rod Emmer, Baton Rouge's FEMA representative, asked developers, engineers and real estate professionals for their comments about site design practices recommended to minimize the impact of development in and around wetlands.

**Wetlands Education Booth at Earth Day** Each year in April, the Planning Commission participates in Earth Day celebrations with interactive stations that offer opportunities to learn about wetlands. Information on Wetlands, Brownfields, other environmental issues and how planning can address these issues to protect environmentally sensitive areas and revitalize neighborhoods is presented. Enviroscape models were used to demonstrate the flow of stormwater and the effects of pollutants in stormwater runoff.

**Urban Watershed Protection Workshops** Three workshops were held in March 2002, October 2005, and March 2006. Participants discussed the importance of preserving urban wetlands to ensure water quality. These workshops provided information on tools and techniques for wetlands protection, model development principals and the impact of urbanization on water quality.

**Best Management Practices Workshops** A series of four workshops on Stormwater Best Management Practices was held for both the development and design professionals practicing in both the public and private sectors. These meetings were held in March, May, July, and August 2007. These workshops covered State and Federal stormwater requirements, water quality issues, and the design, construction and maintenance of stormwater best management practices. Speakers from across the nation representing local, state and federal government; design and development professionals; planners; and policy makers. *March 2007, May 2007, July 2007, August 2007*

**Annual Planning Commissioner Workshops** Each year, workshops are held for the Planning Commissioners covering a variety of topics that relate to wetlands and environmental preservation.

To demonstrate that a balance between development and environmental conservation can be achieved, the Planning Commission, in partnership with the Baton Rouge Recreation and Parks Commission (BREC), completed the Wetlands Restoration and Nonprofit Source Project at Burbank Park in 2000. This project restored a wetlands area adjacent to a soccer field and the site provides potential as an ecological laboratory.

The site now serves as a wetlands habitat for native species and wildlife. The site has also been observed filtering stormwater runoff from the adjacent playing fields. The project shows how restoration of the original hydrological structures on a previously drained site can bring a wetlands system back to life. After reconstruction of the topography and return of the water, native wetland trees and vegetation were planted. A retention pond receives runoff from the soccer fields, parking lots and roadways. The pond feeds the wetlands, which act as a buffer between the developed area and downstream water systems such as Bayou Fountain and Bayou

Manchac. Impacts from fertilizers, pesticides and sediments are reduced and on-site water storage and habitat values are increased.

In 2004, the Planning Commission received over \$500,000 from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality as part of a cooperative agreement titled “Mitigating Nonpoint Source Pollution in Urban Watersheds with Spatial Modeling, Best Management Practices for Wetlands, And Community Outreach”. This agreement allowed the Planning Commission to continue working with Louisiana State University on the identification and characterization of wetlands in East Baton Rouge Parish. This work resulted in the delineation of watersheds, sinks and sources for the entire parish. By its completion in 2007, a number of resources had been produced through this grant. Aside from sponsoring a series of stormwater best management practices workshops; two videos on the importance of best management practices were produced and distributed; two publications on the selection, design, construction and maintenance of best management practices were developed; and an educational poster were produced for the public, planning community, engineering fields, and developer networks.

### **Urban Design Districts and Urban Design Overlay Districts**

Urban Design Districts (UDD) and Urban Design Overlay Districts (UDOD) are neighborhood and community guidelines meant to strengthen community character by providing clearly defined design standards for new development.

Urban Design Districts provide area zoning guidelines in clearly defined areas. A design district may include Community and Regional Growth Centers, major transportation corridors, and other unique community areas as defined in the Horizon Plan. A UDD is the product of a citizen-based initiative and reflects the aesthetic and land use priorities of a committee. The Planning Commission staff assists community associations in their development of a strategic urban design plan for revitalizing and protecting the quality of life in East Baton Rouge communities.

A UDD also regulates permitted land uses within the district. The district regulations are utilized when property is in transition of use, usually from residential to commercial, and each property owner must apply to the Planning Commission to rezone their property to the UDD.

Urban Design Overlay Districts impose additional requirements to existing land use and zoning relative to greenspace, landscape, and architectural features without changing the current zoning of a property. A UDOD is best utilized in areas with a mix of land uses in order to provide consistency in development for the district.

### **Existing Urban Design District and Urban Design Overlay Districts**

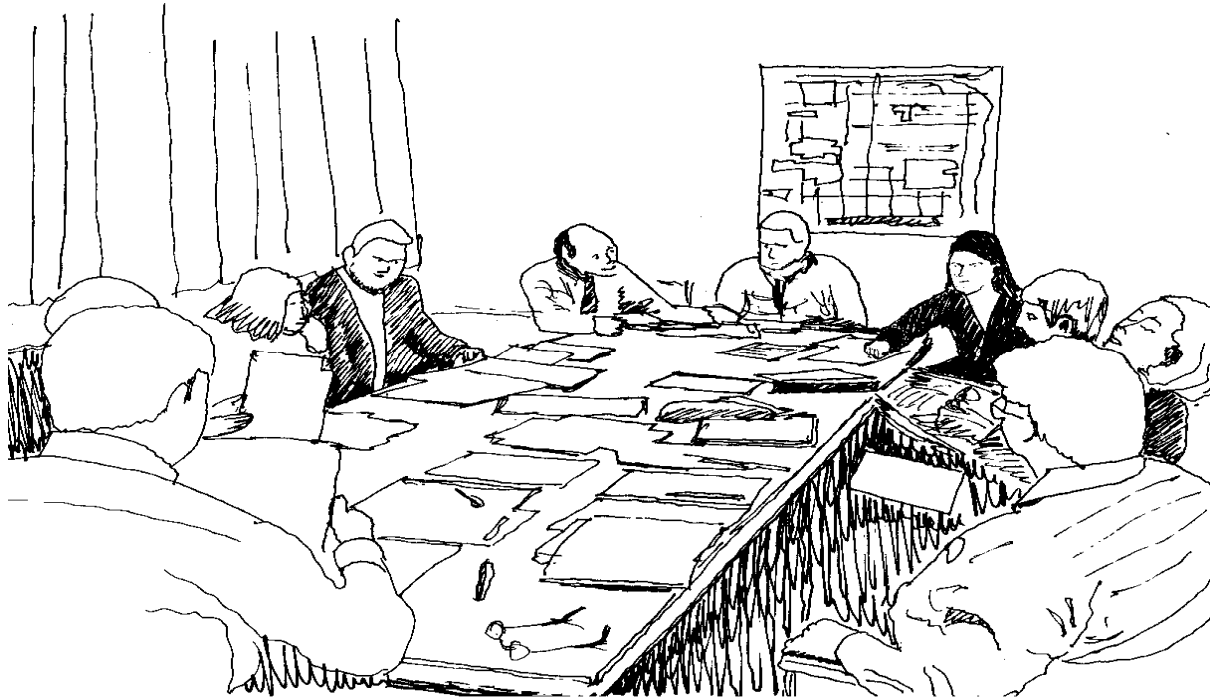
Oak Villas Boulevard Design Overlay District;  
 Bluebonnet Boulevard Urban Design Overlay District;  
 Old Town Redevelopment Overlay District; and  
 Government Street Urban Design Overlay District.

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Bluebonnet Urban Design District;  
Highland Road Urban Design District; and  
Oak Villa Boulevard Urban Design District.

The purpose of these Urban Design and Urban Design Overlay Districts is to preserve the integrity of these neighborhoods facing development or redevelopment as well as to create design guidelines to mitigate or the impact of new land uses.



Each district contains a purpose statement, a statement of district boundaries, a definition of permitted uses, and guidelines related to a number of concerns related to landscaping, parking and signage, just to name a few. These priorities are developed by citizen-led committees. Using the Planning Commission “Urban Design Handbook” and Horizon Plan as guides, these district committees review elements of urban design and how they make write design guidelines for their communities.

These districts were created because of concerns regarding development raised by residents, business owners, and council members in these neighborhoods. These districts are the physical embodiment of the goals and priorities set forth in the Horizon Plan. An Urban Design Committee may include representatives from a variety of groups and organizations. These organizations may include area civic or neighborhood associations; business organizations; real estate and development community; design professionals; engineering associations; and five (5) Metropolitan Council members.

The Planning Commission and representatives of the Department of Public Works are invited to participate and the Metropolitan Council member appoints a committee chair. Some of the

elements of urban design may include signage; lighting; parking; landscaping; service areas; fencing; building materials; building articulation; and pedestrian and bicycle amenities.



Design elements are written with the long term plans for East Baton Rouge as included in the Horizon Plan and Horizon Plan Updates. The implementation of these Urban Design and Urban Design Overlay Districts are the implementation tools used by the community to carry out the Horizon Plan's vision for a great community.

