

Environmental Planning

Preservation of the natural environment is essential for community health and well-being. It is important that growth and development do not exhaust essential resources. Environmental planners assess the impact of land development on the biophysical environment and recommend policies to conserve the natural bases of life such as air, water, land, energy and minerals. They incorporate the functions, values, and productivity of natural systems into a comprehensive definition of what constitutes a good quality of life. They guide the decision making process to assure that the fulfillment of present needs does not jeopardize the lives of future generations. This kind of growth is called sustainable development.

Horizon Plan and Environmental Planning

The **Horizon Plan** adopted by the Metropolitan Council in 1992 as the comprehensive land use and development plan for East Baton Rouge Parish, includes seven different areas of emphasis called "elements." Two elements, the Conservation and Environmental Resources Element and the Recreation and Open Space Element specifically address environmental issues. However, all seven elements contain goals that in some measure call for protection, preservation, and conservation of environmental and natural resources.

The Horizon Plan's **Conservation and Environmental Resources Element** is designed to promote sustainable development through responsible and accountable land use practices, including strategies



to reverse and mitigate man's adverse effect on the environment.

The **Recreation and Open Space Element** utilizes a direct approach by identifying and maintaining open areas in their natural state for the benefit of the public.

The **Land Use Element** promotes best environmental practices through the "2010 Land Use Plan" and other land development regulations embodied in the Unified Development Code.

The **Transportation Element** addresses energy and air quality issues by considering forms of transportation other than the private automobile.

The **Wastewater, Solid Waste and Drainage Element** encompasses programs related to water quality, recycling, and flood plain management.

The **Housing Element** must complement the goals outlined in the Conservation and Environmental Resources Element by including recreation and open space as quality of life requirements in housing developments.

The **Public Buildings, Public Services and Health and Human Services Element** encourages construction of buildings which reflect architectural excellence, low maintenance and energy conservation. Another objective is to enable persons to have healthy and satisfying lives in a comfortable and safe natural environment.



Role of the Planning Commission

Efforts are underway to improve the quality of life for the citizens in East Baton Rouge Parish by maintaining or improving the environmental and economic health of our community. These efforts focus on conservation of land, brownfields and wetlands.

The Conservation of Land

As part of the Horizon Plan 5-year Update completed in 1997, a new land use plan was developed which included a refinement of the Potential Conservation Areas Plan. "Potential Conservation Areas" were revised to create linkages along the major river corridors throughout the Parish, and to reflect existing development and subdivisions. Also, a new land use category, Residential Estate/Agriculture (RE/A) was adopted to further emphasize the importance of environmentally sensitive areas.

The traditional tools for comprehensive plan implementation include the development of a land use plan and land development regulations. The Planning Commission has used these tools to refine the land use plan, create new land use categories, and develop new zoning districts and subdivision regulations.

In 1999, several revisions were made to the Unified Development Code (UDC) which modified the Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations and created regulations for a Small Scale Planned Unit Development (SPUD). These developments provide for flexibility in development and require a percentage of common open space. The PUD regulations encourage the protection of environmentally sensitive areas while allowing development to occur.

Also the subdivision regulations were amended to include the concept of cluster development. Cluster subdivisions provide flexible development options in areas constrained by physical limitations. Similar to a Planned Unit Development cluster subdivisions are designed to maintain the same density of development on a parcel of land while preserving an environmentally sensitive area.

Brownfields

Since the initial Pilot Grant in 2000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Baton Rouge Brownfields Program

has established a site inventory of over 155 specific properties, more than \$1.3 million in assessment and cleanup funding, and conducted more than 50 assessments for 36 different sites. The program has helped encourage infill development by putting derelict properties back to use.

Wetlands

The City-Parish Planning Commission established a wetlands program in 1999 with two initial projects; the Wetlands Restoration project and Wetlands Identification and Characterization.

The Wetlands Restoration project demonstrated how the original hydrological structures on a previously drained site can bring a wetlands system back to life. Additionally, impacts from fertilizers, pesticides, and sediments were reduced and on-site water storage and habitat values were increased.

The Wetlands Identification and Characterization project used existing data from aerial photos, soil maps, and wetlands inventories. From this information, three sites were selected as probable wetlands and then indexed according to a number of characteristics including hydrological and biotic functional capacities. This data is now used in our Geographic Information System (GIS) database and can be used in conjunction with existing and future land use data.

The Planning Commission actively seeks opportunities to educate the public about issues like environmental planning. Publications such as these are part of a greater effort to involve City-Parish citizens in creating a better Baton Rouge.

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