

SUPPLEMENT 1
THE FERRY REVITALIZATION PLAN
(Town of West Baton Rouge Subdivision)
City of Port Allen, Louisiana
Parish of West Baton Rouge

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Prepared for the
City of Port Allen
Derek A. Lewis, Mayor
as part of
The Port Allen Annexation Plan

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S.1.0 Town of West Baton Rouge Subdivision—The Ferry

During the 1990's, the economy of Port Allen began to show signs of decline and deterioration. An effort to identify causes of this sluggishness was addressed by elected officials. An early initiative focused on downtown revitalization. As a result, the Port Allen Downtown Revitalization Plan was prepared in 2002 by way of a public involvement process focusing on the eastern half of the city where a concentration of distressed residential and commercial areas was located. A recommendation of the report was to form a taskforce of volunteers to address the issues surrounding the economic and residential decline and to make recommendations for improvements to the area. The task force was created by the city administration and consisted of elected officials, neighborhood residents, property owners, and planners were formed.

After several months as a task force, agreed to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The group—the Port Allen Community Development Corporation (CDC)—was tasked with weighing and implementing improvement ideas for the downtown area of the city. The first area of attention was focused on The Ferry, originally a subdivision of approximately one hundred 25- to 30-foot wide lots know as the Town of West Baton Rouge subdivision. It was developed in the early 1900s and is today an aging residential neighborhood between North Jefferson Avenue and the levee immediately north of Court Street. The CDC has targeted the area for its first concentrated revitalization effort.

While the Ferry is within the City limits and not impacted by the annexation plan *per se*, the revitalization can and is being used as a demonstration ground for several of the annexation plan's goals as well as the goals of the initial downtown revitalization plan. These goals include several Smart Growth principles including but not limited to urban revitalization, walkable neighborhoods, mixed use areas, diversification of market and affordable housing, grid street layouts, traffic reduction, and neighborhood recreation space. The application of these practices to an existing area of the city dovetails with proposed plans for the annexed areas and the city as a whole.

The locale earned its name from the ferry that for decades carried passengers across the river to and from Baton Rouge. Because of its proximity to the Mississippi River and relatively heavy vehicular traffic, this area of town was once a thriving, bustling neighborhood and commercial corridor. Over time, the neighborhood was visually removed from the river by the construction of the levee, and ferry service was discontinued when the I-10 bridge was opened in 1968. The area has since slipped into decline.

This plan, presented as a supplement to the Port Allen Annexation Plan, seeks to identify the means to revitalize the Ferry by implementing definitive steps in that revitalization effort.

The first step is the application of a zoning overlay district which will provide a template for future development. The second is the rehabilitation and new improvements to infrastructure the Ferry. Construction components are presented in four phases. The elements of the zoning overlay district and rehabilitation phases are, as noted, firmly grounded in Smart Growth principles and have been successfully applied in areas such as the Spanish Town district in Baton Rouge. The approach is also described in the *Louisiana Speaks: Planning Toolkit* and the *Louisiana Speaks: Pattern Book* as prepared for the Louisiana Recovery Authority and the LRA Support Foundation, 2006..

S.1.1 Zoning Overlay District

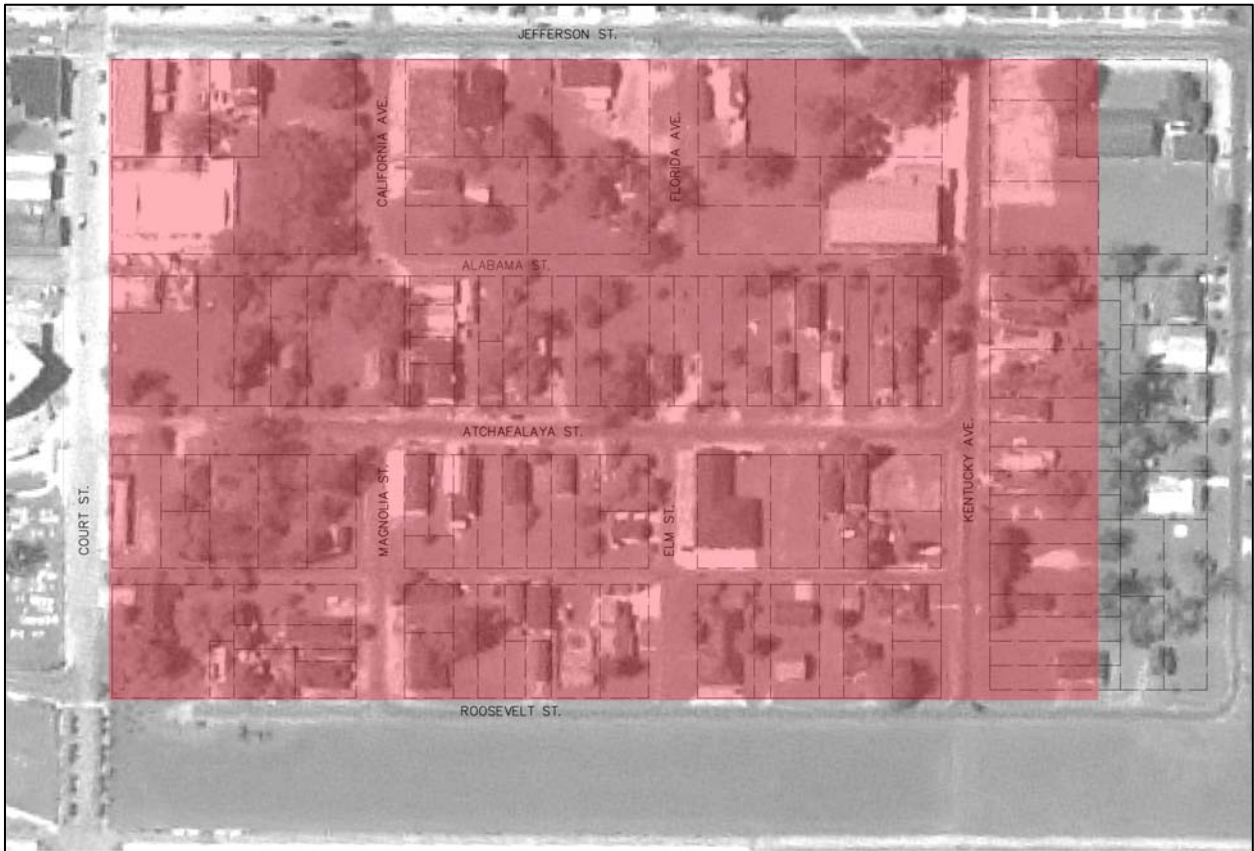
The purpose of this plan feature is to guide redevelopment activity in the Port Allen Ferry toward a desired goal. That goal, which, in concept, was reached as the result of numerous public meetings in the preparation of the City's Downtown Revitalization Plan (2002) and since then detailed by the Port Allen Community Development Corporation, is comprehensive yet fundamentally basic. The citizens of Port Allen, and in particular the residents and property owners of the Ferry, desire that the subdivision remain basically a single-family residential neighborhood tucked away off the main thoroughfares yet linked to the community as a vibrant, uplifting sector of the community.

By way of the design and planning process covering several months during 2006, the board of the CDC, which includes residents and property owners of the Ferry as well as others interested in upgrades to not only the Ferry but the city as a whole, reviewed a wide range of revitalization options. While single-family residential is the dominant land use proposed, diversification of property value, mixed-uses, upgrades to utilities, and the addition of public recreation space was encouraged. Linking the revitalization effort visually and aesthetically to the new City Hall, levee top project, and Court Street improvements was considered vital.

This overlay district is to occur within a designated downtown area and allows certain design-oriented flexibility within its boundaries. It also imposes certain restrictions that are not part of the existing zoning ordinance while leaving other elements of the existing underlying zoning in place. For example, the zoning overlay district suggests smaller front yard setbacks and recommends acceptable architectural styles and construction materials while maintaining the overall density allowed by the underlying zoning.

The area designated for the proposed overlay district coincides with the Ferry boundary described previously. The area is illustrated in Exhibit S.1-1.

Exhibit S.1-1: Proposed Overlay District



An overriding objective of the zoning overlay district in the Ferry area is to create a neighborhood that is both socially and visually close-knit, unified, and aesthetically pleasing. The overlay district will accomplish this objective in a variety of ways. For example, the zoning overlay district will allow development on existing narrow lots—typically 30 feet wide—which are indigenous to the subdivision. Current zoning regulations proscribe new development or significant remodeling of structures on such properties because they are smaller than the area requirements of the existing residential zoning classification. However, the lots in the Ferry and many of the structures that occupy these lots were established long before the current zoning ordinance was in place. This situation, in effect, discourages current home owners or developers from building new structures or remodeling blighted ones because of non-conformance issues with existing zoning requirements. By allowing new development, redevelopment, refurbishment, and significant remodeling of such properties and structures under the guidelines of the zoning overlay district, the Ferry can and will be revitalized as a unified, compact neighborhood comparable to Spanish Town or Beauregard Town in Baton Rouge (see photo examples in Exhibit S.1-2). Allowing development on such narrow lots, however, will not preclude residents from building on combined lots.

Building setbacks and street frontage are also important elements to the zoning overlay district being proposed. The setback currently required in residential areas is 20 feet from the street right-of-way. Such spacious setback requirements in urban areas contradict Smart Growth principles and, in many instances, contribute to sprawl. These principles encourage closer social interaction and a tighter sense of community within neighborhoods by offering smaller, more intimate spaces. The smaller front yard setback will allow houses with front porches located no more than 10 feet from the street right-of-way with a five-foot wide sidewalk between the porch and the street. New homes and streetscapes designed and utilized in this manner also offer benefits to auto parking. The concept is conducive to social interaction as it eliminates the obstacle of automobiles parked in the front yard and provides a unified, pleasant aesthetic for the Ferry's streetscape.

By providing residential vehicular access to rear-loaded garages or carports via an alleyway along the back lot lines, additional parking space can be made available. The rear loading will also allow for efficient utilization of the long narrow lots common to the Ferry.

Exhibit S.1-2: Spanish Town



The revitalization zoning overlay district should also contain requirements and limitations on architectural elements and structures within the district. This function offers another vital element in the creation of a unified neighborhood aesthetic. These elements will include the following:

- Height limits allowing two- to three-story buildings—Structures could be raised to allow parking underneath, and, in strategic locations, allow over the levee views overlooking the river to the Baton Rouge skyline.

- Front porches—Porches should be a requirement for all residential structures developed, redeveloped, or significantly remodeled in the district. This requirement, in conjunction with the proposed 10-foot front yard setbacks and sidewalks, will encourage social interaction and a strong sense of community. Programs like Neighborhood Watch will benefit by creating and maintaining a safe, close-knit community.
- Architectural elements—Building styles should be limited to certain regional styles and construction materials. These styles are illustrated in the *Louisiana Speaks: Pattern Book*, and typical examples are shown in Exhibit S.1-3. These guidelines will also apply to architectural elements such as fences. Examples include wood picket fences limited in height to between three and four feet high in the front. Short, open wrought iron fences with decorative finials would also be allowed. Tall, solid-panel fences would not be allowed in the front yards, and chain link fences would not be allowed at all.


The style of light standards currently in use on the levee-top improvements and along Court Street shall be continued throughout the Ferry overlay district as shown below. The use of the same style light standard will aid in unifying the area, providing an aesthetically pleasing, readily identifiable element to the neighborhood, and enhancing safety.

Hardscape and landscape elements should be blended in style, color, and allowable construction materials. These elements should include both public and private signage, brickwork, and pavers used at crosswalks as well as a selected array of planting materials for all public plantings and street trees. A minimum amount of plant materials will be required for each particular use based on intensity. The landscaping requirements should apply to all public and commercial areas and will be highly encouraged in privately-held residential properties. The planting and maintenance of street trees and shrubs will be required in public rights-of-way and other public areas such as parks

Transportation and circulation concerns will also be addressed in the zoning overlay district. Sidewalks and crosswalks will be required. Crosswalks should be uniform in design and construction materials, utilizing alternative paving options rather than painted striping to provide another readily identifiable characteristic to the Ferry. Sidewalks shall be constructed along both sides of every street right-of-way where practical to provide residents with a walkable neighborhood and to discourage needless automobile trips. These sidewalks should be a minimum of five feet wide and separated from the street by a minimum of two foot wide strip of turf where possible. Sidewalks and crosswalks are intended to enhance safety and present a pleasant and friendly image.



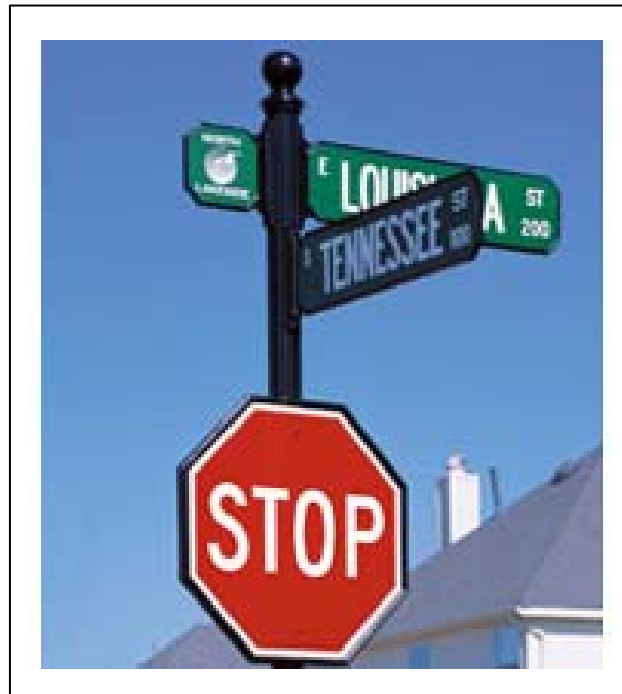
Exhibit S.1-3: Louisiana Architectural Styles

 <p>LOUISIANA VERNACULAR</p>	 <p>Abbeville</p>
 <p>LOUISIANA VICTORIAN</p>	 <p>Abbeville</p>
 <p>LOUISIANA CLASSICAL</p>	 <p>Crowley</p>
 <p>LOUISIANA ARTS & CRAFTS</p>	 <p>Baton Rouge</p>

Parking, even though accounted for in design references, is an element of the overlay district that must be designed for visitor accommodations. Allowances should be made for visitors. Restrictions should be placed on the amount of parking allowed for commercial land uses based on use of a particular business. Strict landscaping requirements will be placed on parking areas, vehicular use areas, and street frontages for commercially developed properties.

Restrictions on signage, both public and private, are vitally important in the creation and maintenance of a unified neighborhood design. A selection of acceptable styles, sizes, color, and construction

materials will be provided for signage. It is recommended that sign styles for commercial businesses be limited to monument, wall, canopy, and projecting signs with height restrictions. The type and size of the sign shall be a function of a business' available retail floor space and the length of its street frontage. A style for public signage should be uniform and consistent with the architectural style in use near city hall. An example of such signage is shown here.



While land use within the Ferry overlay district is to remain largely residential, a mix of varying land uses is encouraged. Such a mix will encourage a walkable neighborhood by providing residents with office space, places to buy groceries and other necessities, and recreational spaces. An example of such mixed uses might include a two- or three-story building with commercial use on the first floor, office space on the second floor, and residential space on the third floor. Uses allowed in the district should be single-family residential, multi-family residential, light commercial, office, and recreational. Recreational space is vital to the health and well-being of a community and to that end, a park should be created and maintained within the Ferry district. One possibility is a linear park connecting the Ferry residents to the levee and city hall complex in furtherance of the town center concept as illustrated in Exhibit S.1-4.

Exhibit S.1-4: Linear Park Concept Connecting Ferry and Levee Top Projects



S.1.2 Revitalization Requirements

A key element in the revitalization of the Port Allen Ferry is the rehabilitation and improvement of the infrastructure therein. This rehabilitation and improvement effort is imperative since the zoning overlay district alone cannot succeed in revitalizing the Ferry. The rehabilitation effort will be the catalyst—what can be done initially—to illustrate that the revitalization effort is serious, that it will succeed, and that it has the support of elected officials—city and state. People are often eager to lend their support when they actually see something happening. Four elements of infrastructure improvements follow.

S.1.2.1 Implementation of Subsurface Drainage

One of the primary elements of revitalizing the Ferry is replacing the existing open-ditch drainage with a new subsurface curb-and-gutter drainage system. A proposed preliminary layout of this system is shown in Exhibit S.1-5. It ties into the existing subsurface drainage system on Court Street and Jefferson Avenue. The installation of such a system will not only improve

drainage and eliminate unsightly water-laden ditches, but it will also provide space for sidewalks.

Exhibit S.1-5: Subsurface Drainage



S.1.2.2 Reconstruct Streets, Alleys, and Provide Sidewalks

Following the implementation of subsurface drainage improvements, streets in the Port Allen Ferry will be reconstructed with curb and guttered streets, zoning overlay district requires rear-loaded vehicular access via alleys. What is currently designated as Washington Street and the unpaved right-of-way known as Alabama Street will be converted into residential vehicular access. Alabama Street is currently unpaved. However, during the initial roadway improvement phase, a paved alleyway will be constructed within the dedicated right-of-way. This feature will restore the original alternating “road, alley, road, alley” design of the Ferry. The rear loaded lots and roadway frontage are noted in two exhibits, S.1-7 and S.1-8, presented in Section S1.2.4.

Also as noted, five- foot wide sidewalks are to be constructed throughout the Ferry where space allows. Sidewalks are considered necessary for the creation of pedestrian connectivity, a walkable neighborhood, promoting social and commercial interaction, enhancing safety, and preventing unnecessary automobile trips. For these reasons, sidewalks are an important aspect of Smart Growth principles.

S.1.2.3 Connect Dead-End Streets

Another important part of the Smart Growth initiative is that of promoting vehicular connectivity by use of a secondary traffic grid. This grid is proposed by connecting minor streets, in this case by connecting California Avenue and Florida Avenue through to Atchafalaya Street. Currently, both avenues dead end at the unpaved Alabama Street right-of-way. Property will have to be acquired to provide a 60 foot right-of-way. These extensions will connect to Atchafalaya Street and cross over to become Magnolia Street and Elm Street, respectively. While the option exists to maintain the current street names for the extensions, a decision might also be made to name the length of the entire streets to either California Avenue and Florida Avenue or Magnolia Street and Elm Street. The purposed connections are shown below.

Exhibit S.1-8: Street Connections



S.1.2.4 Widen Atchafalaya Street

Atchafalaya Street can be widened to provide an aesthetically pleasing and functional boulevard. It can also serve as the primary entrance and focal point of the Ferry. If implemented, the new Atchafalaya Boulevard would be relatively narrow, keeping in scale with the surrounding neighborhood with a planted median and space for parking (see Exhibit S.1-7). The vision for this treatment is that Atchafalaya Boulevard would become a recognizable, readily identifiable characteristic of the Ferry with the new municipal complex building at its terminal axis to the south. With street trees, other plantings, and sidewalks combined with the

aforementioned lighting and amenities required by the zoning overlay, Atchafalaya Boulevard would become an attractive, practical enhancement to the downtown area and the city as a whole.

An alternate boulevard layout is shown in Exhibit S.1-8. In this case, the existing street would be widened on its west side, requiring the acquisition of up to 33 feet of property from the front yards along that side. While seemingly ambitious, this plan need not be implemented immediately. As an option, the City could choose to widen Atchafalaya into the proposed boulevard for the one block then narrowing as part of a phased plan to build out the entire improvement. On the other hand, the City may also choose to widen Atchafalaya for a block and not continue the boulevard treatment at all. However, detail design decisions that these alternatives offer are premature at this time.

Exhibit S.1-7: Boulevard Example 1

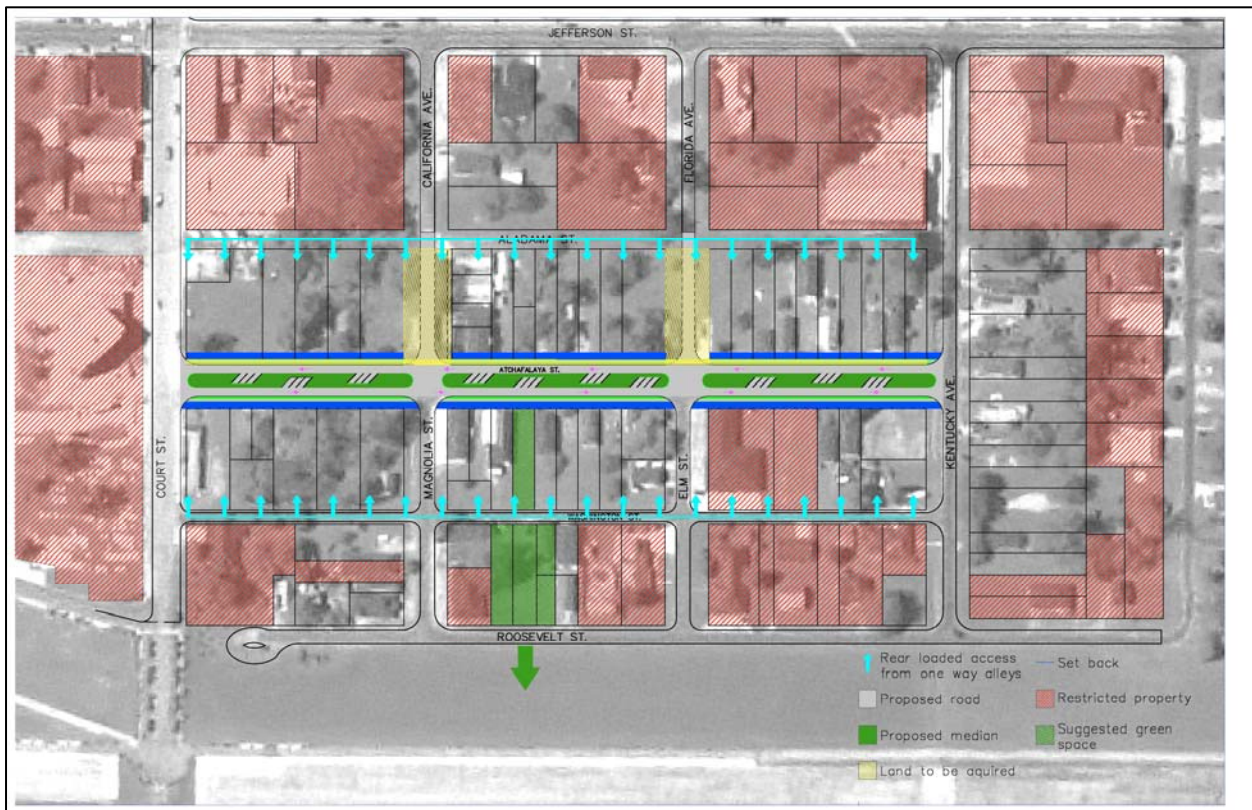


Exhibit S.1-8: Boulevard Example 2



S.1.3 Estimated Implementation Costs

Relative order of magnitude costs directly attributable to the area's revitalization and infrastructure improvements have been developed to estimate the investment required. The estimate is provided in multiple phases as noted.

Phase I—Swale and ditch cleaning, street repair/overlay, signage, and landscaping (approx. \$500,000).

Phase II—Acquiring right-of-way and connecting dead end streets (approx. \$500,000).

Phase III—Installation of all subsurface drainage, curb and gutter streets, and sidewalks (approx. \$1-4M range depending on options and phasing). Other less costly opportunities are also worthy of consideration and phasing as detailed design decisions become pertinent.

Phase IV—Acquisition of rights-of-way and developing Atchafalaya Street into a boulevard (approx. \$1,000,000).

These preliminary estimates are based on the best information currently available. Final estimate should be provided by a professional engineer based on topological survey data, engineering calculations, plans, and specifications.

S.1.4 Summary

The recommendations made regarding the revitalization of the Port Allen Ferry are based on sound Smart Growth principles, many of which have been put into practice across the U. S. accomplishing the desired effect. Local examples can be noted in areas such as the aforementioned Spanish Town and Beauregard Town areas of Baton Rouge. The rehabilitation steps and zoning overlay district as outlined and proposed could prove to be a welcomed asset to the City of Port Allen and could help the Ferry area realize its potential as a desirable and unique riverside community in the Louisiana capital region.