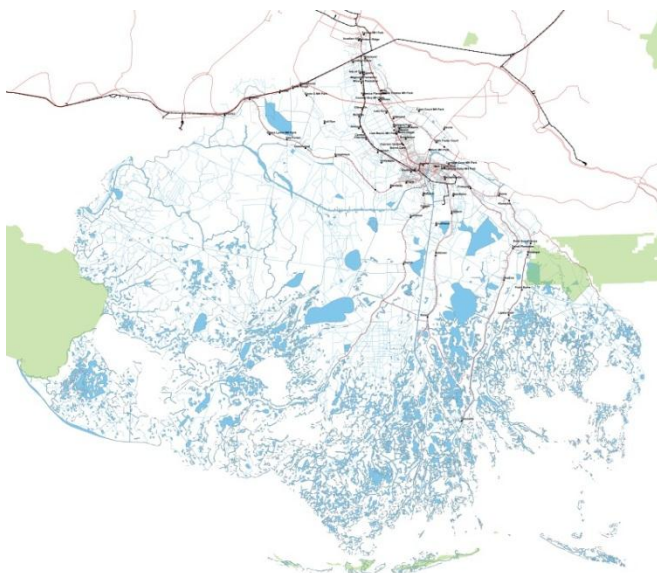


## CHAPTER 6 ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY DESIGN

### INTRODUCTION

Terrebonne Parish is blessed with an abundance of natural resources and riches, so much so that its residents tend to take these for granted. These natural resources, however, are many of the factors that tend to define the parish and its people and, as such, could be better used to their advantage both culturally and economically. These elements define the character of our community. But community character also is shaped by other factors such as how a community developed historically, its landscape, history and people, and by what the community's residents do for a living. All of these, along with our natural resources and riches, can be combined into what could be called the community's Essential Design, and exploited for economic gain and enjoyment. This can be done while preserving them for future generations to use and enjoy. As has been stated in another comprehensive plan, "Community character is the sum of all the assets and attributes that make a community unique and establish a sense of place for its residents."





This section of the Comprehensive Plan Update will define those unique elements, assets, and attributes of the parish which can be exploited culturally to create a sense of place, and economically to bring others into the parish to enjoy these assets. In addition, this section will offer specific recommendations or strategies to achieve these ends. From a formatting perspective, this section will articulate goals, objectives, and elaborate on strategies which, if undertaken, will lead ultimately to achievement of the goal. This section also uses pictures and illustrations to graphically present these concepts.

**Goal 1 | Preserve the Natural Environment**

**Objective: Protect and Enhance Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

This element seeks to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment and its quality, which together are vitally important to the community character of Terrebonne Parish, public health, ecological sustainability, and resiliency.

**Strategy: Educate the public on the value of sensitive areas**

An environmentally sensitive area is defined herein as an area which contains natural features

including, but not limited to, lakes, streams, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, sensitive ecosystems, threatened species, native forests, etc. that are protected by government regulations or contribute significantly to the cultural heritage, character, and economy of Terrebonne Parish. Educating the public about the long-term importance of environmentally sensitive areas is of high priority. The responsibility to protect and preserve the natural environment is the responsibility of governing agencies and users alike. The protection of the natural environment is ultimately dependent upon the public's understanding and support for such protection.





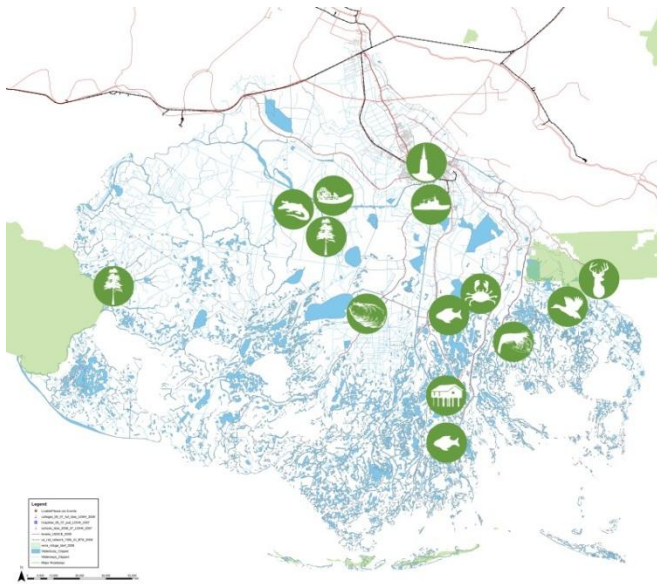
Recommended educational methods the Parish (possibly in conjunction with the School Board) should use are:

- Develop a brochure or pamphlet that contains multiple pieces of educational information that could be distributed by visitor's centers, rental units, hotels, restaurants, fishing, hunting, and recreation retailers;
- Develop and incorporate sensitive areas information into boating, fishing, and hunting classes that may already be occurring;
- Work with business owners to educate consumers on sensitive areas issues - for example, educate bait shops and fishermen about invasive species that may be used as bait;
- Work with navigational chart producers such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Ocean Service (NOS) to include information about sensitive areas on charts;
- Create an "Adopt a Sensitive Area" Program;
- Work with local schools and school boards in the region, not just in Terrebonne Parish, to establish and support clubs and elective courses that focus on environmental education through field trips and outings;
- Work with and support Girl Scout and Boy Scout Councils, garden clubs, and birding clubs to emphasize learning about the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary.
- Work with and support the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program to recruit volunteers for BTNEP replanting and other events.



The natural environment of Terrebonne Parish is one of its strong economic selling points and should be easily accessible to residents and tourists alike. Creating this accessibility via interpretation of the Terrebonne Parish natural environment is another method of educating the public on the value of natural and sensitive areas. One of the main goals of environmental interpretation is to help humans understand the natural world. This helps them to form a positive, sustainable relationship with their environment. The Parish should create various interpretive programs and features throughout, whether in the form of a simple, informative kiosk or nature walk, or something more complex such as the creation of community based programs including recycling and cleanup days.





**Strategy: Prohibit at-grade development within sensitive areas**

The purpose of designating environmentally sensitive areas is to preserve significant environmental features from encroachment by development or damage from pollution. Environmentally sensitive areas perform a variety of important environmental functions including storm water drainage, flood water storage, pollutant entrapment, and the provision of wildlife habitat. In South Louisiana, wetland sensitive areas also serve to protect inhabitants from storm surges during tropical storms and hurricanes. They can also provide desirable green space to enhance urban aesthetics throughout the Parish. Sensitive areas should be chosen that will act as an overlay to work in coordination with other zoning and development guidelines and procedures. Included in the Code of Ordinances for the Parish should be regulations prohibiting at grade development within these zones as well as regulations for appropriate land uses and activities along the critical edges of these zones.

**Strategy: Require buffers along commercial, industrial, and dense residential development adjacent to sensitive areas**

In addition to prohibiting at grade development within the actual sensitive areas, the Parish should require buffers along commercial, industrial, and dense residential development adjacent to the identified sensitive areas. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “setbacks or buffer zones adjacent to surface water bodies, such as rivers, estuaries, or wetlands, provide a transition between upland development and water bodies and are commonly used to protect coastal vegetation and wildlife corridors, reduce exposure to flood hazards, and protect surface waters by reducing and cleansing urban runoff” (Mantell et al., 1990). Such buffer zones are commonly referred to as riparian buffers in many ordinances of this type.

There are several factors for delineating setbacks and buffer zones. These vary with location and environment and include seasonal water levels, the nature and extent of wetlands and floodplains, the steepness of adjacent topography, the type of riparian vegetation, and wildlife values. The EPA further recommends “Minimum widths for buffers should be 50 feet for low-order headwater streams with expansion to as much as 200 feet or more for larger streams. In coastal areas, a 100-foot minimum buffer of natural vegetation landward from the mean high tide line helps to remove or reduce sediment, nutrients, and toxic substances entering surface waters” (MWCOG, 1991). Such buffers also help to maintain floodplains closer to a natural state.

**Strategy: Maintain natural hydrology**

In order to protect biological diversity within the waterways of Terrebonne Parish, a physical attribute that sets the Parish apart, it is crucial



that human-induced hydrologic alteration to natural ecosystems is limited. Ecological research by scientists supports the fact that healthy aquatic and riparian ecosystems depend upon maintaining some semblance of natural hydrologic regimes. This means that healthy ecosystems depend upon the quantity and quality of the water that flows through them.

As the Parish moves forward, watershed based policies, decisions, and incentives should be managed by a Parish Watershed Coordinator with the authority to achieve collaboration among all entities. This Coordinator would work with the Planning Commission to develop a watershed map and prioritize the reduction of impacts and alterations to the Parish hydrology. Methods to prioritize should include:

- Re-naturalizing bayous, streams, rivers, and creeks that have been channelized, straightened, or concrete lined;
- Offering expedited approvals and permits to developers in exchange for implementing watershed protection beyond those required;
- Day-lighting any drainage channels that have been piped and covered; and
- Instituting more penalties for violation activities that pollute these water bodies.

**Strategy: Protect and enhance wildlife habitat and open space**

It is no surprise that one of Terrebonne Parish's most precious resources is its native wildlife species and their habitats. Not only does wildlife enhance quality of life, but it is highly valued for the contribution it makes to the economy, tourism, recreation, hunting, fishing, and in some cases, survival. For these reasons, protection, management, and enhancement of wildlife habitats are critical to the overall goal of

protecting the natural environment.

Wildlife protection also makes good business sense for homeowners and developers. Housing developments that include natural greenways, wildlife corridors, stream corridors, wetlands, and open space in their plans will benefit from buyers who are willing to pay for those amenities. The majority of the Parish is rural, so opportunities to address habitat are more possible because of already existing, abundant wildlife habitat, large open spaces, and less development.



Actions to address habitat protection and enhancement within the Parish should include:

- Developing a habitat inventory;
- Establishing an active public education program that includes methods of ensuring property owner participation;
- Ensuring intergovernmental coordination; and
- Establishing public/private partnerships with major landowners.

Specific methods to protect and enhance wildlife habitat should include the establishment of wildlife corridors which are a contiguous greenbelt of native vegetation, averaging 200 feet wide that connect larger habitat areas. Wildlife corridors could be developed in coordination with





the construction of utility corridors, providing a natural corridor within which utilities and easements are located, as opposed to a swath of land devoid of natural features, which is the traditional method. Other provisions could include creating overlay districts that protect physical characteristics of the land such as trees and vegetative cover, enforcing buffer zones from sensitive habitat areas (previously mentioned), requiring open space preservation, and establishing a conservation easement program with sustainable funding sources.

**Strategy: Increase tree canopy coverage**

A loss of tree canopy cover is evident not only in numbers of trees, but through the reduction in the many benefits trees provide. A healthy tree canopy reduces the urban heat island effect, reduces heating/cooling costs, lowers air temperatures, reduces air pollution, reduces water pollution, increases property values, provides wildlife habitat, and provides aesthetic and community benefits such as improved quality of life.

To protect, recover, and sustain the tree canopy, Terrebonne Parish should establish and formally adopt a proactive Urban Forestry Management Plan. This plan could be created and managed by the Terrebonne Parish Tree Board, with the intention to provide strategies, goals, policies, and standards that protect and enhance tree canopy within the Parish. Contents could include:

- For new development, require a homeowner to plant and maintain certain native trees before they receive a Certificate of Occupancy;
- Prevent forest loss during development by adopting or amending site development regulations and zoning (e.g., forest conservation regulations, open space

design, clearing restrictions);

- Maintain existing forest canopy by adopting regulations that restrict tree removal;
- Encourage reforestation of private land by developing education, stewardship and incentive programs; and
- Continuing the Tree Board's existing efforts to plant more trees in the Parish

An excellent starting point is the partnership between Bayou Land Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D) and the Lafourche-Terrebonne Soil and Water Conservation District that provided Terrebonne and Lafourche Parish residents with Native Trees.

These trees were available on a 1 per household basis at the North Terrebonne Library, on Saturday March 3, 2012. The Tree Board should build upon this partnership.

**Objective: Improve and Protect Water Quality**

It should be a mission in any Parish to improve and protect its water quality. Terrebonne Parish, as an MS4 permit holder, is required under the Clean Water Act to prevent non-point source pollution of water bodies in the Parish. Protecting Terrebonne Parish's rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater quality keeps these waters safe for a multitude of beneficial uses such as drinking water, fish habitat, recreation and irrigation. This is accomplished by developing and implementing water quality standards and storm water management plans, regulating sewerage treatment systems and industrial dischargers, collecting and evaluating water quality data, providing grants and technical assistance to reduce non-point pollution sources, and providing loans to communities, or assisting communities in the rural areas of the Parish to secure grants to build treatment facilities. These last activities, however, would be under the auspices of



Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government since outside of the City of Houma, there are no other incorporated communities in the Parish.



**Strategy: Prevent water quality impairment**

As previously mentioned, a Parish Watershed Coordinator is recommended to develop a comprehensive watershed-based Storm Water Management Plan that will address the spectrum of water quality problems within the Parish. Such a systematic approach, building upon related ordinances and codes already in effect in Terrebonne, should recognize interrelationships among problems and the need for the parties responsible for each water quality problem to share in its solution. Responsible groups include the public at large, a segment of the population, individuals, or a particular industry or group of industries.

One action that should be taken on the Parish level to prevent water quality impairment and create sustainable water management is to promote watershed restoration and educate people about their watershed through public service announcements, special events like clean up days and storm drain marking, and educational presentations to classrooms, special interest groups, homeowners, contractors, developers, etc.

Another action that can be taken on the Parish level is to create property owner and developer incentives. These could include:

- Offering property tax credits for storm water Best Management Practices (BMP) implementation in existing developments;
- Creating a low or zero interest loan program for storm water BMP improvements in existing developments;
- Creating a local grant program for storm water management BMPs; and
- Requiring the use of storm water BMPs to retain all runoff on site in all new developments.



**Strategy: Prevent sanitary sewer overflows and leaks**

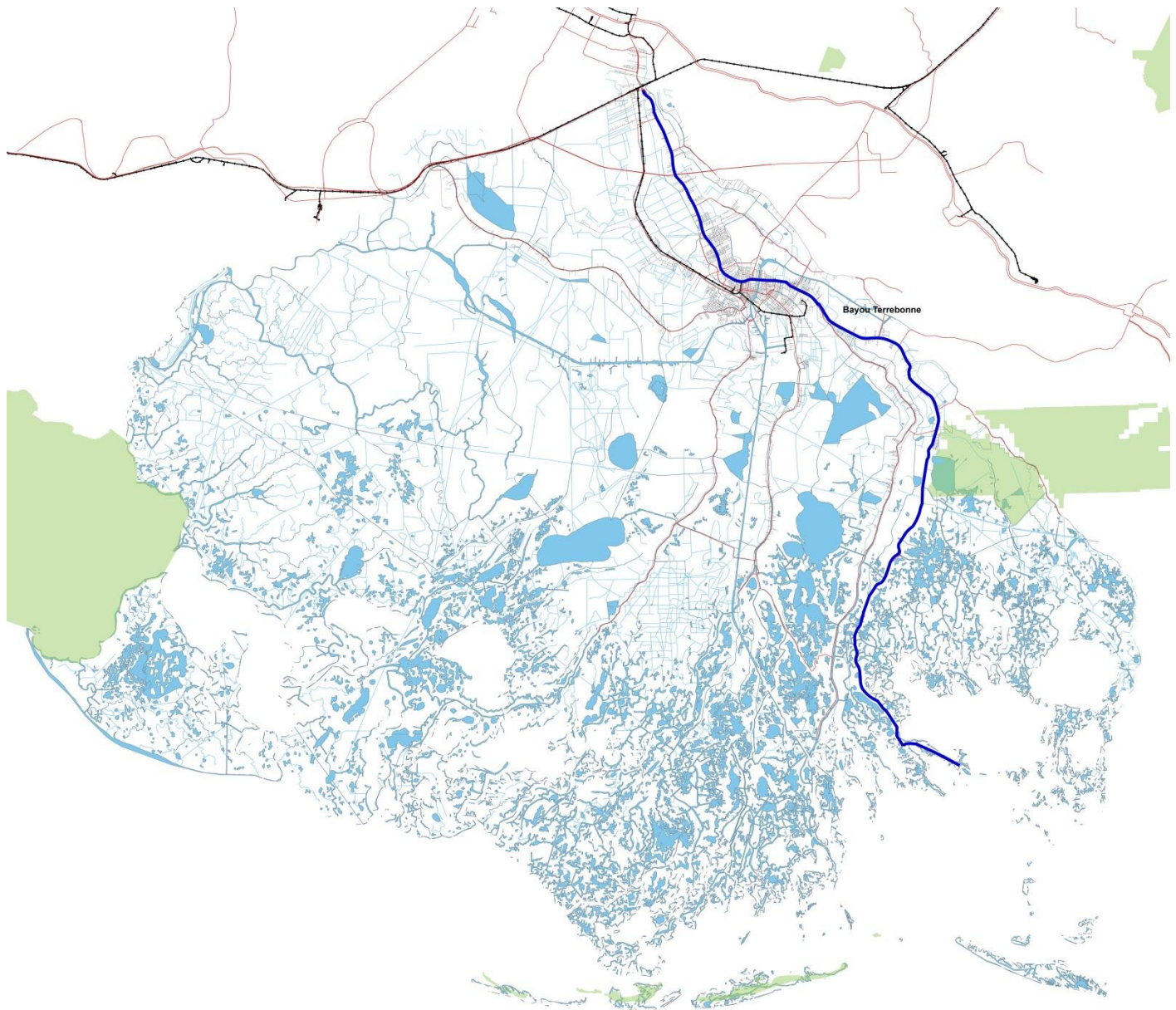
According to the Upper Bayou Terrebonne Watershed Protection Plan (LA-120301), one of the main problems with using conventional septic tank soil absorption systems in Louisiana is that 87 percent of the soil associations in Louisiana are considered inadequate for conventional septic tank systems as determined from the Soil Limitation Ratings for Sanitary Facilities (LDOTD, 1981). Another major component to the pollution caused by septic tank systems is inadequate

enforcement of the State Sanitary Code and lack of control with monitoring the maintenance of existing septic tank systems. Packaged individual sanitary sewer systems, often installed at single family residences in rural areas, do not depend upon a soil septic process. However, these tend to degrade over time and are often not maintained properly. As a result, these also leak into the groundwater and end up in water bodies, contributing to their overall condition of impairment.





## BAYOU TERREBONNE



Bayou Terrebonne has proven to be receiving sewage from leaking systems through groundwater movement. This activity must be stopped and the resulting pollution must be remediated. The Bayou is a significant attraction and resource for Terrebonne Parish and must be protected and enhanced, not polluted. Solutions are not easy to develop or implement. Under the direction of the Watershed Coordinator, it is recommended that a plan be developed to systematically identify and enforce repair of all individual sanitary sewer packaged plants. All septic tank systems still in use must be replaced with packaged systems or connected to the municipal system where available. Specific areas along the Bayou at which the greatest quantity of polluted groundwater seeps into the water body should be identified. It is further recommended that the concept of establishing a vertical clay wall at these locations be investigated and implemented if practicable. Other measures of preventing seepage into the Bayou should also be explored.

To prevent sewage from leaking and leaching into waterways, it is very critical that post-installation maintenance and inspections of any and all systems occur. Many homeowners and business owners probably are not aware of this necessity. The Parish should create an educational program that informs and trains system owners on proper maintenance, in addition to offering loan and grant programs that would aid in the replacement of failing systems. Furthermore, if possible, the Parish should not allow additional individual sewer treatment package plants when connections to the Parish system are at all practicable.

### **Strategy: Filter storm water runoff flowing into the Bayou**

In further efforts to filter storm water runoff, the Parish should require that storm water from new and redeveloped impervious areas, such as roofs, parking lots and roads, be managed onsite where it originates. Storm water created on private property should be managed on private property and storm water created on public property should be managed on public property.

The Parish should establish storm water management criteria and require that these criteria be met as part of development permit submittals. Criteria could include mandatory use of vegetated surface facilities, such as bioswales, bio-retention cells, storm water planters and basins,. If total onsite detention is not feasible due to poorly infiltrating soils, required setbacks, or other site constraints, flow control and pollution reduction requirements still apply. Once flow control and pollution reduction requirements have been met, overflows may be discharged offsite to a ditch, drainage way, or public drainage when available.

### **Goal 2 | Strengthen Parish Identity and Brand**

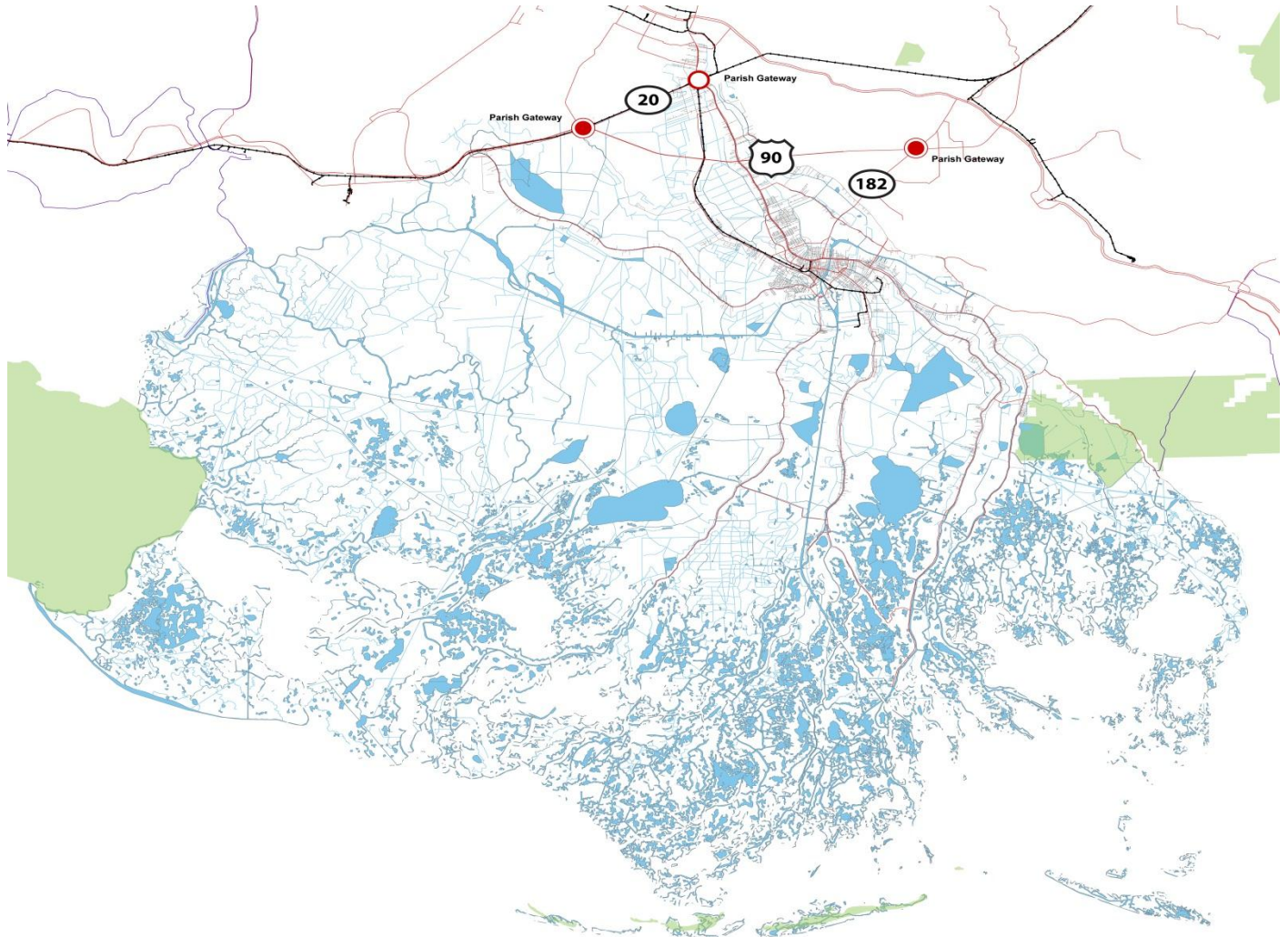
#### **Objective: Create identity gateways into the Parish**

While Terrebonne Parish does have a strong and unique sense of identity within itself, it is barely visible to outsiders. Recommendations below will serve to make the Parish and its communities more recognizable and memorable to visitors. These come as physical recommendations to supplement The Terrebonne Parish Brand Initiative, currently being created by The Graham Group, which will create a visual identity with a logo and a verbal identity with a tagline.





### POTENTIAL GATEWAY LOCATIONS







**Strategy: Create identity signage along major highways**

Using logos and language from the Brand Initiative, the Parish should create unique signage that will identify entry to the Parish while also attracting and directing visitors. These custom signs should be strategically located at Terrebonne Parish's "front door," specific Parish entry points, and custom designed so that they stand out from normal state directional signs.

These signs could be designed as combination signs that include the identity of the neighboring communities. This approach would minimize costs while providing valuable tourist exposure for both entities. In addition to working with communities in the Parish, the local government will need prior approval from Louisiana DOTD as these signs will be placed in highway rights-of-way. The Planning Commission can assist the Parish in obtaining this approval. Below is an example of an entry sign that utilizes materials from local fishing and shipbuilding industries, oyster shells and Cor-ten steel.

**Strategy: Create identity projects at communities and landmarks**

Parish communities and landmarks can also make memorable statements about themselves, while announcing to travelers arrival at their destination. Imaginative landmark projects can become destination icons in their own right by strongly presenting their local spirit and sense of identity.

Obviously the size or scale of these markers can matter, as it will affect the capacity for visibility and impact, but there are many innovative ways for the Parish and its communities to create a gateway or landmark. One example is a significant public work of art such as a sculpture or series of sculptures that authentically capture visitors' imaginations. It is recommended that Terrebonne Parish host a design competition for artists and designers with the prize being the exposure of their art as branding for the Parish, as well as cash. Some art and design creations should relate to the cultural heritage of the Houmas Indian tribe, sugar cane farming, oyster harvesting, trapping, and other unique cultural elements of Terrebonne Parish.





**Strategy: Create identity by planting trees**

Trees give an area a special ambience, they beautify and differentiate neighborhoods, and provide needed ecological and economic benefits such as shade, energy conservation, improved air quality, increased property values, tourism, and reduced storm water runoff, in addition to a particular spiritual dimension. Trees and tree planting are a means of building local identity. When volunteers gather to plant trees, it turns strangers into a community.

Terrebonne Parish and its communities can brand themselves by adopting native tree palettes and planting them en masse in key areas. This will create a distinct vegetative language and identity

that is repeated throughout the Parish and unique to the landscape of Terrebonne.

It is important that the right trees be planted in the right place and in the right way. It is recommended that the Terrebonne Parish Tree Board continue and expand its efforts to create substantial community forests throughout the Parish.

**Objective: Protect historical assets**

According to the National Register of Historic Places, there are 17 properties and districts listed on the National Register within the Parish. While the Registry provides some protection of these buildings and districts, it is important that the Parish adequately addresses the care and upkeep of them, and provides more substantial protection. Responsible parties should ensure that the grounds are being maintained and improved with simple landscaping, designated use areas, and signage, all in keeping with the historic designation of each place.

Of further importance, and noted by the Terrebonne Economic Development Authority (TEDA), is the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program for Income-Producing Properties.

The program fosters private sector rehabilitation of historic buildings and promotes economic revitalization and also provides a strong alternative to government ownership and management of such historic properties. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives are available for buildings that are National Historic Landmarks, are listed in the National Register, and that contribute to National Register Historic Districts and certain state or local historic districts. Properties must be income-producing and must be rehabilitated according to standards set by the



Secretary of the Interior as administered by the State Historic Preservation Officer. More information can be found at the National Park Service Technical Preservation Services website: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/>

These assets can then be proactively promoted to the visiting public, establishing additional attractions that would encourage tourists and other visitors to linger longer in the Parish.

**Objective: Feature cultural assets**

One way Terrebonne Parish can reap the economic benefits of tourism is to share its heritage and culture with visitors. The National Trust's definition of cultural heritage tourism is "traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural and natural attractions."

Terrebonne Parish contains a variety of cultural attractions, as shown below.

**TERREBONNE'S CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS**

Historic Downtown Houma,

Terrebonne Waterlife Museum,

Terrebonne Rural Life Museum,

Kenny Hill Sculpture Garden and Nicholls State University Art Studio,

Highway 58, where fishermen clean their fish and sell them fresh off of the boat,

Cecil Lapeyrouse Grocery in Chauvin,

The Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON)

Rental camps down in Cocodrie.

It is recommended that the Parish create a Cultural Heritage Tourism Program to develop,

market, and manage cultural attractions within the Parish. A guide for this can be found in the Atchafalaya Trace Commission's *Heritage Area Management Plan* for the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. Terrebonne Parish is one of the thirteen original parishes included in the legislation creating the Atchafalaya Heritage Area and was included in the federal legislation which created the national heritage area in 2006. Cultural heritage tourism "practitioners" can come from a variety of fields: tourism, historic preservation, the arts, humanities, museums, economic development, Main Street programs, heritage areas, and many other fields. Practitioners can include non-profit organizations, government entities, federal agencies and coalitions formed to bring these and other partners together. Houma Area Convention and Visitors Bureau should take the lead in this initiative.



A helpful resource for information on the steps to creating a Cultural Heritage Tourism Program can be found at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism Program website: <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/aboutUs.htm>. More information about the Atchafalaya National Heritage Areas can be found at: <http://www.atchafalaya.org>.





### Goal 3 | Enhance Recreational Opportunities

**Objective: Provide more recreational opportunities throughout the Parish, particularly in rural areas**

A popular vehicle for rural economic development is recreation, as it is an economic driver that can transform a lagging rural community into a thriving community by attracting diverse groups of people, creating jobs, and offering opportunities for healthful benefits. To facilitate recreational opportunities in rural areas, indeed throughout the entire parish, parish staff should be assisted by a citizen board or committee of volunteers formed to help identify and prioritize recreational projects. At present staff meets with various enthusiast groups to discuss recreation projects of interest, but a citizen board could help to prioritize all such projects for available funding based on sensible criteria.

**Strategy: Provide accessibility to existing recreational opportunities**

Terrebonne Parish is a wealth of recreational opportunity as it is. One way of providing more recreational opportunities in rural areas is to simply provide access. Where appropriate, it is recommended that the Parish provide boat launches as access points to the water and boardwalks for viewing and fishing. This will give visitors a range of vantage points from which to enjoy the abundance of natural resources Terrebonne Parish has to offer.

**Strategy: Create a plan for additional recreational trails and skateboard parks**

Such a strategy would capitalize on the abundant natural beauty and outdoor assets in the Parish by developing and promoting recreational bike, pedestrian, and paddle trails, as well as

skateboard parks to address the needs of residents. An expanded recreational trails system incorporating these modes would also attract visitors and create economic development opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

Skateboard parks should be centrally located in the parish to take advantage of higher residential densities. Nevertheless, these parks can be located along designated trails to facilitate greater access by cyclists and pedestrian.

**Strategy: Encourage landowners to sign up for the USDA Conservation Reserve Program**

The United States Department of Agriculture, through its Farm Service Agency, offers a recreation opportunity for rural areas under the 41<sup>st</sup> Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The USDA Conservation Reserve Program is a voluntary conservation program available to agricultural producers to assist them in enhancing environmentally sensitive lands. Producers enrolled in the CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers such as native grasses or trees to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

In return, USDA's Farm Service Agency provides property owner participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance for 10 to 15 years. The CRP not only helps achieve conservation goals, but assists private landowners and producers as they voluntarily protect their most environmentally sensitive lands. The USDA hosts a four-week CRP general sign-up every year. This year it began March 12 and ended on April 6, 2012.

**Strategy: Explore the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program**

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP) expands existing



efforts or develops new initiatives to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch and forest land to voluntarily provide public access for the enjoyment of wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting and fishing, in exchange for financial incentives or other assistance under programs implemented by state or tribal governments. VPA-HIP is a competitive grants program that is only available to state and tribal governments. Funding may be used to expand existing public access programs, create new public access programs or provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled lands.

**Objective: Develop ecotourism opportunities**

Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. One of the goals of ecotourism is to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. Furthermore, ecotourism ensures direct financial support to local people where tourism activities are being generated and enjoyed, and teaches travelers to respect local cultures. Terrebonne Parish has a great deal to offer in this respect.

**Strategy: Create sustainable fishing tours**

Bordered by the Gulf of Mexico and hundreds of miles of swamps and wetlands, Terrebonne Parish offers world class Gulf Coast fishing. One opportunity for ecotourism is to offer sustainable fishing tours. The idea behind this is that fishermen market the use of sustainable fishing techniques, some of which include practicing carbon-conscious fishing, using lead free tackle, not throwing back invasive species, picking up other's trash, not being a litter bug, and composting parts of the fish not used after cleaning. They then sell their fish to local hotels

whose guests are encouraged to participate in the purchase and consumption of a locally produced product.

The environmentally conscious visitor's desire for sustainable seafood options and willingness to contribute to the local economy is then served through the direct sale of responsibly caught fish and seafood between fishermen and local establishments. Local markets between fishers and tourism operators also eliminate lengthy chains of custody (i.e., "middlemen") that result in fewer earnings for the fishermen.

Also part of sustainable fishing tourism, visitors could take day trips along the coast, have meals served on board fishing boats, and observe the fishing operations. This would allow participants the chance to learn first-hand the secrets and traditions of Terrebonne Parish fishing life. At the end of the day, if it is not possible to cook on board, the crew could organize on-land dinners made from the fresh fish caught during the day in the company of the tourists.

**Strategy: Promote "Voluntourism"**

Essentially, "voluntourism" is vacation travel which includes volunteering for a charitable cause. Volunteer vacations participants are diverse but typically share a desire to "do something good" while also experiencing new places and challenges in locales they might not otherwise visit. There are also other types of "voluntourism" that engage people with scientific research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment.

Well-managed spurts of volunteer help can be extremely productive for many types of projects that need a lot of willing hands. Of particular interest to Terrebonne Parish is the type of "voluntourism" that involves clean-up and



rebuilding after three storms in 2005, two storms in 2008, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. The combination of these impacts has prompted a sense of urgency throughout the Parish to become a resourceful and self-sufficient community. The rebuilding will go on for years, and a continuous stream of fresh recruits through "voluntourism" can help keep the momentum going. Terrebonne Parish should create guidelines for "voluntourism" hosting, as well as a communications strategy that markets the Parish and its people as a community that welcomes and has the capacity to host "voluntourists."

**Objective: Share facilities between communities and schools**

School facilities are valuable community assets and can be used for multiple purposes. Not only can they educate our youth, but when the buildings and grounds are not in use, they can provide access for others to recreational, civic, and public space. Shared use can result in significant benefits such as greater community involvement in school activities and children's learning, stronger social networks between schools and communities, financial savings as a result of sharing the operating and maintenance costs of large facilities, and improved school security and reduced vandalism as a result of the increased use of school premises outside of school hours. The following component discusses ways Terrebonne Parish can achieve this.

**Strategy: Identify opportunities for schools as community facilities**

To start, Terrebonne Parish should identify opportunities for local schools and community partners to work together and share the use of school facilities. Examples of these opportunities could include:

- Using school premises for community halls and meeting spaces;
- Opening school facilities for use as community recreation facilities;
- Sharing sports facilities;
- Sharing libraries or resource centers;
- Sharing performing arts spaces

**Strategy: Develop innovative partnerships between schools and communities**

When considering partnerships for the community use of school facilities, the Terrebonne Parish School Board and potential community partners should ensure that the sharing of school facilities will meet an identified need in the local community, offer benefits to both the school and the community, make the most of school and community resources, and strengthen relationships and social networks between schools and communities.

The Terrebonne Parish School Board could initially partner with the Parish Council, as the Council can play a range of roles in developing the community, including advocating for the needs of its communities, securing resources and providing funding, encouraging civic participation, and facilitating community development. Other partnership opportunities could include the Houma Regional Arts Council, the Department of Coastal Restoration and Preservation, the TPCG Recreation Department, the various Recreation Districts in the Parish, Bayou Land Resource Conservation and Development Council, local age-group sports leagues, and local nonprofit organizations.

Once partnerships are established between the School Board and community organizations, the sharing of facilities can be formalized and standard agreements, such as cooperative endeavor agreements and memoranda of





understanding, can be developed and finalized between all parties.

**Objective: Expand planned pedestrian and bicycle trail system**

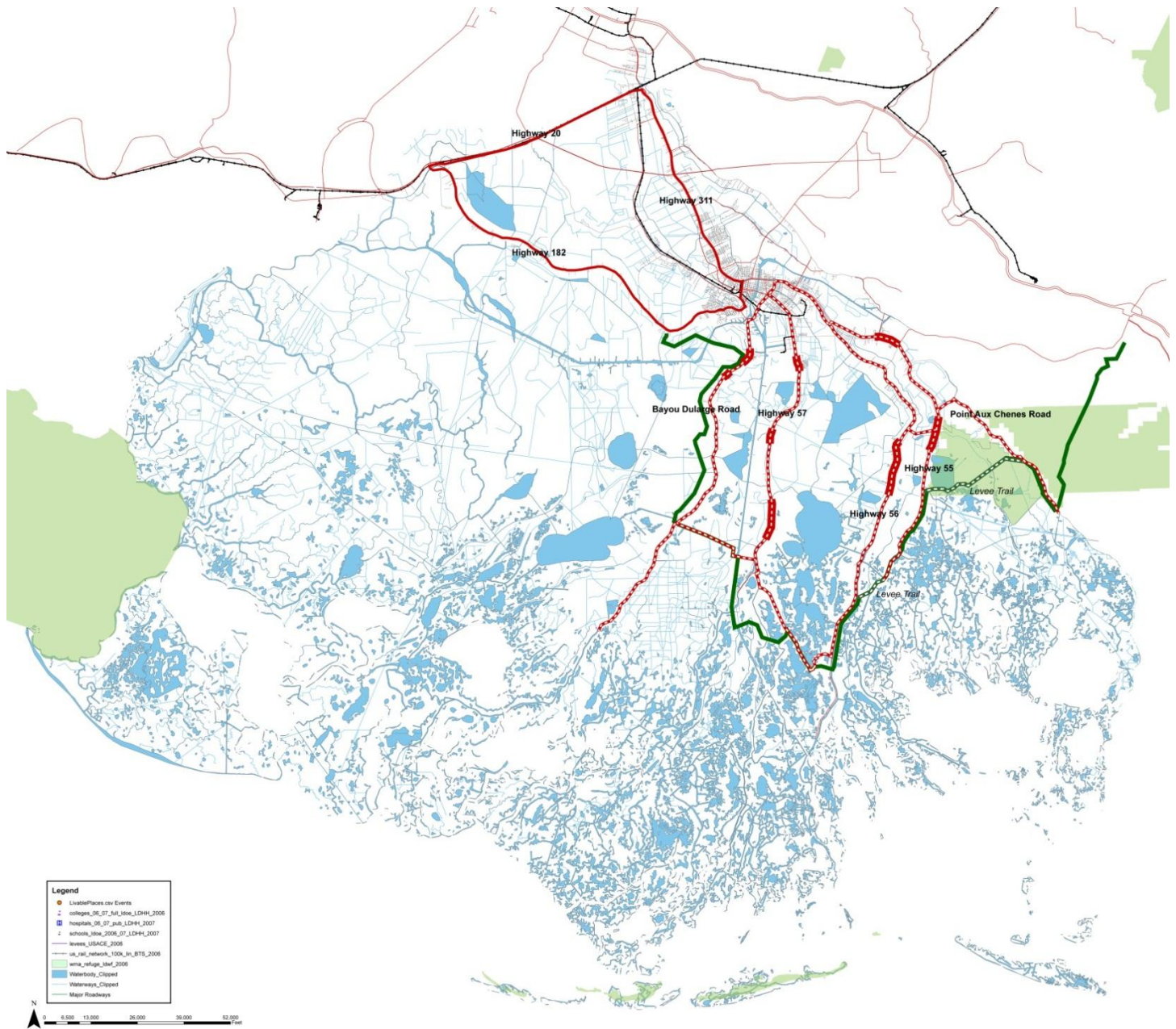
Another way to enhance recreational opportunities within the Parish is to expand upon the already existing Houma to Thibodaux Loop Trail and other segments of the growing bike trail system in the Parish. Details and maps of this trail can be found at <http://www.bikelouisiana.com/content/houma-thibodaux-loop>.

A potential bicycle trail system and exercise circuit expansion is shown in the following map. This expansion could follow Bayou Dularge Road to the west, centrally located Highway 57 and Highway 56, and Highway 55 and Point Aux Chenes Road to the east. This would be a universally accessible network of bike and pedestrian trails that could be paved, or of an aggregate surface, and even boardwalks in some key areas.

An similar strategy, previously mentioned, also builds upon the existing bike trail system, but calls for paddle trails in appropriate bayou locations throughout the parish, particularly in the more rural areas.



## EXPANDED BIKE TRAIL AND EXERCISE CIRCUIT



#### Goal 4 | Implement a “Complete Streets” Policy

##### Objective: Develop a vision for how and why each community wants to complete its streets

Complete Streets is a national movement that includes the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), state departments of transportation (DOTs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), cities, parishes, nonprofits, and others. In July, 2010, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development adopted a Complete Streets policy. The new policy aims to “create a comprehensive, integrated, connected transportation network for Louisiana that balances access, mobility, health and safety needs of motorists, transit users, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities, which includes users of wheelchairs and mobility aides.” All projects using state or federal funding will be subject to the policy, with five defined exceptions. A copy of this policy can be found at this link: <http://www.completestreets.org/webdocs/policy/cs-la-dotpolicy.pdf>.

Now that a Complete Streets policy has been adopted at the State level, the natural progression is that a Complete Streets policy be adopted at the Parish level. The first step in doing so is developing a vision for how and why each community within Terrebonne Parish wants to complete its streets. The individual character and pattern of development in each community affects the appropriateness of a Complete Streets policy. For example, all rural roads should not necessarily be designed with specific bicycle and pedestrian travel paths. One of the main tenets of Complete Streets is creating a connected network of travel paths for bicycle and pedestrian movement, so all streets need not comply if it is inappropriate due to its character.

A major component of any Complete Street is

provision of safe, well-marked crosswalks and ADA compliant walkways and intersections. It is important to remember that the State of Louisiana Complete Streets policy specifically addresses providing for users of wheelchairs and mobility aides. As our population continues to age, both nationally and at the parish level, this becomes even more critical to facilitate mobility by all.

The vision and policy is intended to make Terrebonne Parish communities walkable and bikable. In addition to providing travel paths and marked crosswalks, shade should be provided, particularly along walkways. In more urban areas, such as downtown Houma, shade would be provided by street trees, entrance canopies, and overhanging balconies. In other areas of the parish, shade would be provided by trees.

##### Strategy: Create a Complete Streets Advisory Council

To begin working on a Complete Streets vision, Terrebonne Parish should create a Complete Streets Advisory Council. Council members should represent groups such as the Department of Public Works, the Planning Commission, the Planning and Zoning Department, Terrebonne Economic Development Authority, road and transit agencies, walking, biking, and environmental organizations, and senior citizen and disabled persons groups. The role of the Complete Streets Council should be to develop a vision statement and sample policy language for the Planning Commission, as well as to provide education and advice to the Planning Commission and municipalities within the Parish. All Council meetings should be open to the general public. From a practical standpoint, the Planning Commission could structure a subcommittee to review and provide advice on Complete Streets matters, similar to the subcommittee formed by





the Planning Commission to review parish subdivision regulations. Its make up could be established based on the membership suggested above.

**Strategy: Collect public input on a Complete Streets vision**

A Complete Streets vision should be based on public input. To gather this input, The Complete Streets Advisory Council or subcommittee should hold community events and workshops that educate residents on Complete Streets and allow participants to provide the improvements they wish to see. Other collection methods could be through email and online surveys, easy to use web-based survey tools such as SurveyMonkey®, and a Terrebonne Parish Complete Streets webpage or Facebook page that allows visitors to provide input. In addition, the TPCG website could also host such a citizen survey, as it has done so successfully in the past.

Once public input is received over a window of time, the Advisory Council/subcommittee can create the Terrebonne Parish Complete Streets vision statement that sets a vision of streets that are safe for travel by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities.

**Objective: Require integration of Complete Streets into all new construction projects**

An appropriate Complete Streets policy for Terrebonne Parish is to require the integration of Complete Streets design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way, into all new construction.

Any time the Parish embarks on new roadway construction, provisions for all users should be integrated into the project development process.

**Strategy: Adopt a Complete Streets policy within the Parish connected with the State policy.**

Terrebonne Parish can adopt a Complete Streets policy that is modeled after the State policy previously mentioned. A good example of a strong Complete Streets policy was unanimously adopted by the New Orleans City Council last year. They are the first in the State with an official policy. The policy states:

*“The Council of the City of New Orleans shall establish and implement a Complete Streets program by requiring that all planning, designing, funding, construction, operation, and maintenance of the City’s transportation network to accommodate and encourage travel for all users, including bicyclists, children, persons with disabilities, motorists, movers of commercial goods, pedestrians, users of public transportation, and seniors in a balanced, responsible, and equitable manner consistent with, and supportive of, the surrounding community. “*

**Strategy: Train the Department of Public Works on Complete Streets**

The Parish should train pertinent staff on the content of the Complete Streets principles and best practices for implementing the policy.

**Objective: Apply Complete Streets into all retrofit projects or reconstruction**

In addition to new construction, a policy should also be written that requires Complete Streets design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way, into all retrofit, reconstruction, restriping, resurfacing, and other major repair projects.

One way to do this is to piggyback on pre-existing



projects. For example, if a road is undergoing a resurfacing project, the road could be restriped to add a bicycle lane at the same time. This has proven to be a cost-effective way to implement Complete Streets components.

Another example is to implement new or wider sidewalks concurrent with a drainage or sanitary sewer project where the road is being excavated for the project.

**Objective: Monitor implementation of Complete Streets Policy**

To ensure the Complete Streets vision is being fully implemented through the policy, progress should be monitored. Where lack of progress is evident, additional staff training or modifications to the policy might be warranted. Where progress is being made, specific efforts might be focused on a small segment that would complete a meaningful portion of the bicycle and pedestrian network.

**Strategy: Track all roadway projects in the parish**

Roadway projects, both new and repair or renovation, should be tracked from inception to evaluate compliance with the new Complete Streets policy. The original Complete Streets Advisory Council or subcommittee could be kept intact to perform this function, with the intent of making sure the policy is optimally applied to all projects.

**SUMMARY**

Obviously, Terrebonne Parish is blessed with an abundance of cultural and environmental assets which make the parish not only interesting, but beautiful as well. This chapter offers several recommendations designed to allow Terrebonne to use its abundant assets to its economic

advantage by making the parish more visible and attractive and by spurring eco-tourism.

