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#### Letter from the President and CEO



On behalf of the Build Baton Rouge staff and Board of Directors, it is with great pride that I present the Imagine Plank Road Plan for Equitable Development. The Plan culminates an almost two-year effort to envision a viable, transit-oriented, and equity-driven revitalization of our city's most blighted and disinvested commercial corridor. It is an ambitious vision to address the racial and spatial stratification that has undermined prosperity and progress in North Baton Rouge. It is in keeping with Mayor Broome's charge to create innovative and actionable plans to bring resources and development to North Baton Rouge. Most importantly, it reflects the collective vision of the hundreds of community members who poured into this process to outline a bold vision for the future.

Build Baton Rouge and a host of partners have worked hard to deliver this vision. We began our focus on the Plank Road Corridor early in 2018 by convening the Capital Area Transit System, the City-Parish Department of Transportation and Drainage, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, and other partners to develop a plan for bus rapid transit along the Corridor. We then received the Metropolitan Council's approval to transfer over 85 vacant and adjudicated properties in the Corridor to our land bank. Next, we raised over \$225,000 in financial and inkind support to fund a comprehensive master plan to address land, economic, and community development along the Corridor. We received thirteen responses from all over the country to our request for proposals for a master planning team, an affirmation of the tremendous potential Plank Road holds. We selected an experienced team led by Asakura Robinson and allocated almost \$50,000 of our budget to advancing a robust community engagement program led by Build Baton Rouge staff. Through that process we hired small businesses and contractors from North Baton Rouge, held interactive cultural events to engage community residents, and listened to a diverse spectrum of knowledge experts and culture-bearers on how they imagine a future Plank Road.

Our goal has always included an emphasis on implementation, and the Plan includes policy proposals, programs, and real estate developments that are already underway. We know these proposals and developments are possible because of our well-established track record of community-led urban revitalization. Over the course of the past decade, we have led planning and redevelopment efforts that have resulted in Baton Rouge successes like Electric Depot and Ardendale, which now includes a \$30 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Choice Neighborhoods grant. We look forward to leveraging the tools of community engagement, public finance, land banking, and public-private partnerships to realize tangible and transformative change for the Plank Road Corridor.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this effort and believe in Baton Rouge. Congratulations to the Build Baton Rouge staff and all who labored to bring forth this vision. We look forward to working with you all to continue building the Plank Road we've all imagined and deserve.

Respectfully,

Christopher J. Tyson President and CEO Build Baton Rouge

#### Letter from the Mayor-President





The Plank Road Corridor Master Plan represents my vision for revitalizing our disinvested communities, addressing issues of economic development, neighborhood stabilization and community uplift in an area that was once a thriving part of our region. This initiative is a major step towards returning this historic neighborhood to its former glory. I want to thank Build Baton Rouge for its tireless efforts to jumpstart investment here. At the beginning of my administration, I made reestablishing this organization a top priority so it could serve its intended purpose as the redevelopment authority for the City-Parish. Through their efforts, they produced a master plan with an intelligent approach, leveraging tax incentives and private partnerships for maximum effect.

A community can only be great when every neighborhood is prosperous. National experts outline that a focused approach for redevelopment in a given area is the most effective approach, as opposed to spreading resources too thin. This master plan will create a community where young people will want to live and invest for the future. It also has safeguards in place to protect existing residents, ensuring the integrity of the neighborhood remains intact. The rich history of the Plank Road Corridor needs to be preserved and enhanced to promote a prosperous community for all. I am so proud of what the future holds for this area, and for our entire City-Parish.

Sincerely,

Sharon Weston Broome Mayor-President City of Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish

"The Plank Road Corridor is a thriving, socially diverse and walkable network of neighborhoods anchored by good transit, strong local businesses, quality housing, and resilient infrastructure."

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Studio Zewde WHLC Architecture Emergent Method HNTB

## Introduction

Imagine Plank Road: Plan for Equitable Development is an initiative of Build Baton Rouge (BBR), whose mission is to bring people and resources together to promote equitable investment, innovative development, and thriving communities across all of Baton Rouge.

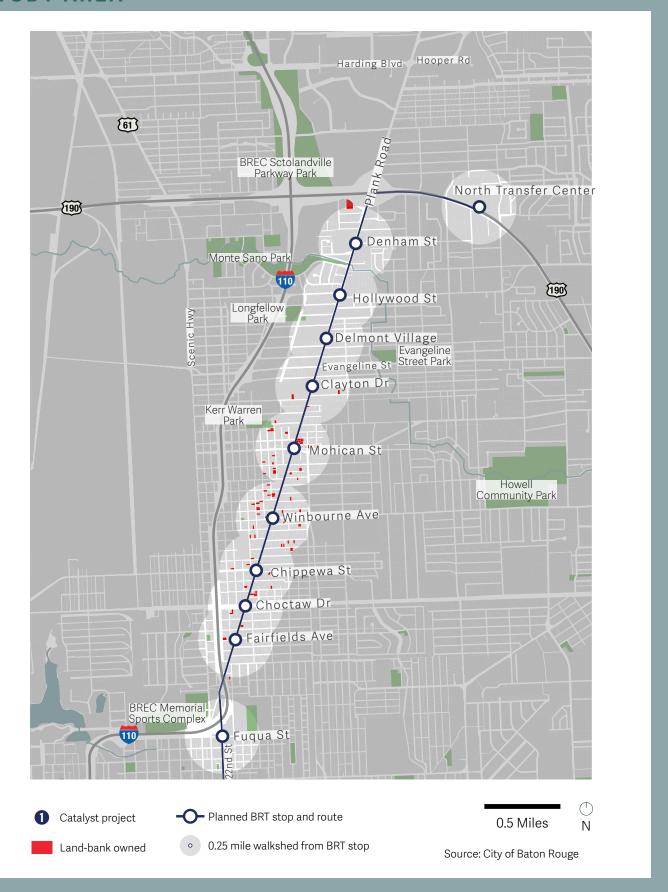
This planning effort is part of a larger, coordinated focus on Plank Road, consisting of planning to introduce bus rapid transit (BRT) service connecting North Baton Rouge to Downtown and LSU, and the land banking of adjudicated and blighted parcels to support catalytic development projects. These efforts represent an unprecedented level of investment targeting some of Baton Rouge's most disinvested neighborhoods.

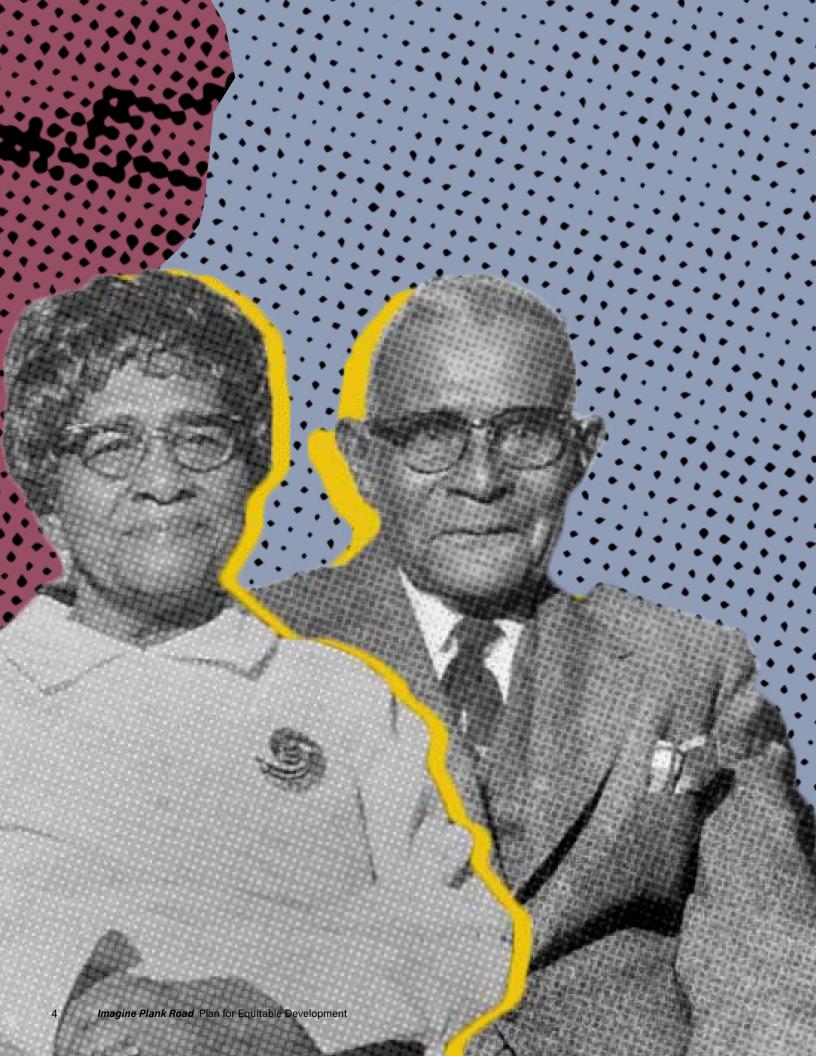
The Plan is the culmination of several months of intense engagement of people of all ages and backgrounds who hold a stake in the Plank Road Corridor. It contains findings from analysis of deep-seated socioeconomic and physical challenges, and of greater significance, the community's unique strengths and assets: a strong sense of civic pride, cultural identity, and entrepreneurial spirit. It lays out a broad-based and inclusive vision for the Corridor.

Finally, the Plan offers a roadmap to address land, economic and community development that equitably responds to the needs of the adjacent neighborhoods and the broader Baton Rouge metropolitan area. This framework serves as a guide to public entities, businesses, residents, property owners, foundations, and nonprofit organizations to work together to build healthy, prosperous and resilient neighborhoods in North Baton Rouge.

Right: The Plan Study Area extends 4.3 miles along Plank Road, from its origin at 22nd Street to the intersection with Harding Boulevard/Hooper Road, within the City of Baton Rouge in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.

#### STUDY AREA





## Planning Context

1917 Mary and James Bradford started Camphor Memorial Methodist Church in Scotlandville

## **History of Plank Road**

The history of Plank Road and Baton Rouge can be divided into four phases: Settlement by First Nations, Cotton and Cane, Baton Rouge's rise as the Petrochemical Capitol, and White Flight and Disinvestment.

## 1) 8000 BC to 1709 - Settlement by First Nations

Current-day Southern University near the Plank Road Corridor was the site of the dividing line between the Houma Tribe and the Bayougoula Indian Tribe territories. The dividing line was marked by a red cypress stick, which influenced the name Baton Rouge.

#### 2) 1709 to 1865 - Cotton and Cane

In 1709, the first enslaved Africans were brought to Louisiana. Their forced labor was employed to transform the region by removing the old growth forests and installing cotton and sugar cane plantations in the 18th and 19th centuries. As cotton and cane were extremely cyclical industries, Baton Rouge plantation owners concentrated on volume business in the peak periods. To accomplish this goal, plantation owners endeavored to construct a road to connect Baton Rouge to a train depot north of the city in Clinton, Louisiana. This led to the construction of Plank Road, named for its early construction of wooden planks.

## 3) 1865 to 1965 - Petrochemical Capitol

With the end of the Civil War, the formerly enslaved began to migrate to Baton Rouge in large numbers from the surrounding areas. Between the years of 1860 and 1880, the Black population of Baton Rouge expanded from 33% to 60% of the population. A number of Black churches, businesses, and institutions begin to make a presence, which would become important locations for community building and Civil Rights Movement organizing over the ensuing years. Because of segregation, these populations were largely concentrated in an area immediately south of downtown, known today as the Old South neighborhood. Northeast of downtown, Plank Road remained a route to northern plantations.

In 1880, St. Isadore Church moved from downtown Baton Rouge to a site at the corner of Plank and present day St. Gerard Street. The church community became recognized as a separate Catholic Parish in 1908 and later built its current sanctuary on Plank Road in 1961. The congregation largely consisted of parishioners from the rural areas to the north, but the area around the new church was set for dramatic changes when the doors opened in 1908.

In 1909, Standard Oil, the forerunner to ExxonMobil, converted a 225-acre cotton plantation north of downtown Baton Rouge and on the banks of the Mississippi River into what was billed as "the largest oil refinery in the world." In January 1919, The Lamp – Standard Oil's nationally circulated trade publication- wrote glowingly about the refinery as a replacement to the area's cotton fields and primitive slave economy. It declared the refinery "an agent of Post-Reconstruction reconciliation" uniting northern expertise and southern natural resources.

Plank Road existed east of Standard Oil's plant and, due to its well-established route from downtown to the rural areas north of the city, it naturally became a destination for new development to support the rapidly growing city. By the second decade of the 1900s, neighborhoods rapidly began to form around the Plank Road Corridor, These neighborhoods were mostly settled by White working-class plant workers. The Forest Park, Fairfields, Delmont Place, Istrouma and Highland Estates neighborhoods were created in this period of rapid industrial expansion. In 1921, Istrouma High School moved to a site just west of Plank Road on Erie Street. In 1951 it relocated to its current location on Winbourne to the east of Plank Road. Istrouma High School was known as the North Baton Rouge neighborhood school for the White sons and daughters of blue collar plant workers.



Standard Oil refinery, 1914

Source: EBR Parish library Digital Archive

During this same period, in 1914, Southern University relocated from New Orleans to Scotlandville, Louisiana, then a small community immediately north of Baton Rouge and the new Standard Oil plant. Southern University faculty and staff quickly populated Scotlandville and the University sponsored the area's first professional offices and financial institutions. In segregated Baton Rouge, Black settlement was limited to Scotlandville, Old South, and the Eden Park area. These areas grew into hubs for Black cultural development in the early decades of the twentieth century. As a consequence of Jim Crow segregation, Plank Road evolved as a White working-class community.

In 1926, Louisiana State University relocated from downtown to its present campus south of the Old South neighborhood. The move and the University's expansion reflected the city's rapid growth. Baton Rouge's population grew more than 340% between 1940 and 1956. During this period Plank Road grew into a modern commercial corridor with commercial establishments lining the road and residential development on the adjoining side streets. Early residential development mostly consisted of shotgun and cottagestyle homes on piers with modest yards setback from narrow, curbless asphalt side streets. This created relatively dense land use patterns that still exist today.

With the rapid population growth of the 1940s and 1950s, modern-day Baton Rouge began taking shape. Downtown grew into a bustling business and retail center, but commercial development was also occurring on Plank Road which, by mid-century, had developed past Airline Highway as the first period of intra-parish suburbanization unfolded. Plank became a destination for shopping and entertainment. In 1942, the Regina Theater opened at the corner of Plank and Seneca Street, In 1947, the Rex Theater opened at the corner of Plank and Shelley Street. As Baton Rouge's low-density urban form spread, developers planned for car-oriented strip-mall shopping centers. Following the 1953 opening of the Westmoreland Shopping Center at the corner of Government Street and Acadian Thruway, the Delmont Village Shopping Center opened at the corner of Plank and Lorraine Street in 1955. With stores like J.C. Penny's and a Piccadilly's restaurant, Delmont Village solidified Plank Road's status as one of the city's premier shopping destinations.

As these urban developments unfolded, Baton Rouge also witnessed the growth of a vocal, persistent, and well-organized civil rights movement. In 1949, Black city leaders protesting segregation at City Park established a branch of the United Negro Recreation Association and built a pool for the Black community at what later became Brooks Park. That spirit of protest fueled the 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, which was the first organized bus boycott of the Civil Rights Era and the forerunner to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Following the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education, which outlawed racial segregation in schools, a case challenging ongoing segregation in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System was filed in 1956. Unbeknownst to the plaintiffs and Baton Rougeans of the day, the case would come to define the next half century of social and urban development in the City, impacting every facet of life and ultimately transforming Plank Road.



The 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott

## 4) 1965 to Present - White Flight and Disinvestment

The passage of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 led to the creation of over 41,000 miles of highways and marked a new chapter in the nation's urban development. The legislation provided up to 90% of funding for highway construction and left many critical decisions up to local officials. Coming just two years after the Supreme Court's strike down of Jim Crow segregation, local officials in cities nationwide used the highway program to capture Black neighborhoods for highway construction and accelerate the flight of White urban residents to new suburban locations where local control could be deployed to resist racial integration. Baton Rouge was no different. More than four hundred houses were torn down to make way for the elevated highway through the Old South neighborhood.

The northern route of Baton Rouge's interstate system began downtown with an independent freeway known as the Baton Rouge Expressway that opened in 1957. The first section extended roughly one mile between Spanish Town Road and Plank Road. This initial segment underscored the prominence of Plank Road and the priority for moving travelers between the corridor and downtown. Baton Rouge was also growing on Plank Road's northern end. Neighborhoods like Southern Heights and Glen Oaks developing for working- and middle-class homeowners who frequented nearby Plank Road for shopping and entertainment - and for good reason. The city's first Krispy Kreme opened at Plank and Hollywood Street in 1960 and Tony's Seafood opened next to Delmont Shopping Center in 1972. Both remain iconic foodie destinations.

As the city's interstate construction continued throughout the 1960s, other changes were underway. In 1963, thirteen Black students desegregated Baton Rouge High School, initiating school integration in the city and the growth of private schools. The school system resisted full implementation of Brown until 1981 when a federal court ordered immediate integration through forced busing. In the first years of forced busing, over 7000 White students left the public-school system.

Forced busing coincided with continued sprawl along the recently completed I-10 and I-12 interstate exchanges. Over the 1980s and 1990s, the neighborhood around Plank Road saw sweeping demographic changes as an initial wave of White flight was followed by middle class flight to the new neighborhoods in growing South Baton Rouge. The social understandings of the city's spatial character began to change. What was known as "North Baton Rouge" changed from the areas on the northern edges of Plank Road to encompass everything north of Florida Boulevard – areas that used to be known as Mid-City. These areas were growing Blacker and poorer at the close of the twentieth century, and "North Baton Rouge" became a shorthand for the spatial dimensions of Black poverty and marginalization in the city.

Baton Rouge settled its desegregation lawsuit in 2003, making it one of the longest school desegregation battles in the country. By then, significant flight and blight had transformed Plank Road. Infrastructure decay and abandonment marred a streetscape that was once a thriving commercial corridor. While it remains a frequently traveled north-south route for automobile transport and has the city's second highest transit ridership, its neglected buildings and forgotten neighborhoods underscore the need for revitalization and equitable redevelopment.

#### **Historical Timeline**

1861-1865 Civil War and the 1862 Battle of Baton Rouge

8000 BC Houma and Bayou Goula tribes settle the Istrouma Bluff



1699 Pierre Le Moyne D'Iberville establishes a

French settlement in Baton Rouge

1762-1810 Spanish rule



1810-1812 Local settlers overthrow Spanish

8000 BC to 1709 AD





Enslaved people arrive in Baton Rouge

U.S. abolishes slavery and grant black men voting rights

1820s Levee system develops along Mississippi River

Baton Rouge becomes state capitol

Plank Road construction by enslaved people begins

1930s Scotlandville grows an active business district

1953 Baton Rouge Bus **Boycott** 

Over 6,000 adjudicated properties in Baton Rouge







1860s-1870s

Black churches emerge in large numbers in Baton Rouge

#### 1909-1920s

Standard Heights, Garden City, Delmont Place, and Northdale neighborhoods develop along Plank Rd.

Harding Field serves as training base during WWII

#### 1947

Formation of consolidated metropolitan government

#### 1940-1956

Baton Rouge population booms by 340% Court mandates forced busing system in Baton Rouge

#### 1974

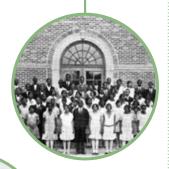
Approximately 224 minority owned businesses exist in Scotlandville area

74% of all white students in Baton Rouge are outside of its public school system

#### 1865-1965 Petrochemical Capitol

## 1965-Present

#### 1865-1900 Free black people relocate to Baton Rouge in large numbers



1958 I-10 extends into East

#### 1960

Southern University students protest segregation through

Judge orders schools, white flight

Baton Rouge

sit-ins in Baton Rouge

desegregation of begins



School district adopts racial quotas for magnet schools in Baton Rouge

Baker and Zachary break off from school system

Central splits from school system

#### 1914 Southern University moves to

Scotlandville

Gus Young establishes 1st Ward Voters' League

Baton Rouge

#### 1960s-1970s

Highway construction continues; schools, parks and commercial activity emerges







Exxon refinery

explosion leads to

creation of greenbelt

## Recent and Concurrent Planning

The Plank Road Master Plan offers detailed strategies that build upon a strong policy and planning foundation set by previous planning efforts and complement ongoing capital planning efforts.

In 2011, the City of Baton Rouge and Parish of East Baton Rouge adopted FUTUREBR, the comprehensive master plan which provides vision and guidance for infrastructure and community growth. It outlines the overall strategy for improvement of transportation, community design, housing, environmental concerns and conservation, parks and recreation, public services, infrastructure, economic development and land use. The vision plan works in tandem with the Unified Development Code which establishes the regulatory standards for new development.



Steering Committee 2

FUTUREBR projected 48,000 new households and 135,000 jobs would be added in East Baton Rouge Parish between 2005-2030, which would necessitate development or approximately 12,500 acres of land being filled in or redeveloped in the parish. As an established corridor with significant land redevelopment and infill opportunities, Plank Road offers opportunities for reinvestment in industry, housing and commercial real estate.

FUTUREBR calls for a shift in how land use. transportation and decisions are made in the Baton Rouge region and identifies the need for new investment in transit, walking and biking infrastructure, especially in previously disinvested areas such as Plank Road, FUTUREBR identifies the Plank Road area south of Hollywood Street as an Urban/Walkable Character District where buildings should be oriented with frontages towards the street and with wide sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, trees between the sidewalk and street, and screened surface parking lots. North of Hollywood Street, the Corridor is designated Suburban. The Planning Commission staff has also been implementing incremental updates to the Unified Development Code to alian with the FUTUREBR vision, to raise the bar on development standards, and to simplify the development process.

In December 2018, Baton Rouge voters approved the MOVEBR sales tax dedication, which is projected to raise \$912 million over the next 30 years for a series of infrastructure projects throughout the Parish. Investments along Plank Road include \$15 million for synchronizing traffic signals, sidewalks, transit facilities and other improvements to the Corridor between North 22nd Street and Harding Boulevard.

FUTUREBR envisions the Plank Road Corridor as a signature high-capacity transitoriented neighborhood served by frequent and reliable bus-rapid transit (BRT) services connecting employment centers and spurring opportunities for the development of catalyst projects within targeted redevelopment areas.

The Capital Area Transit System (CATS) has targeted the Plank Road Corridor for transit upgrades that include new transit infrastructure, zero emissions electric buses, and more frequent and efficient service levels. The improved route will feature stops at Winbourne, Delmont Village, Denham and will end at a new terminal located near the LSU Baton Rouge Urgent Care Clinic on Airline Highway.

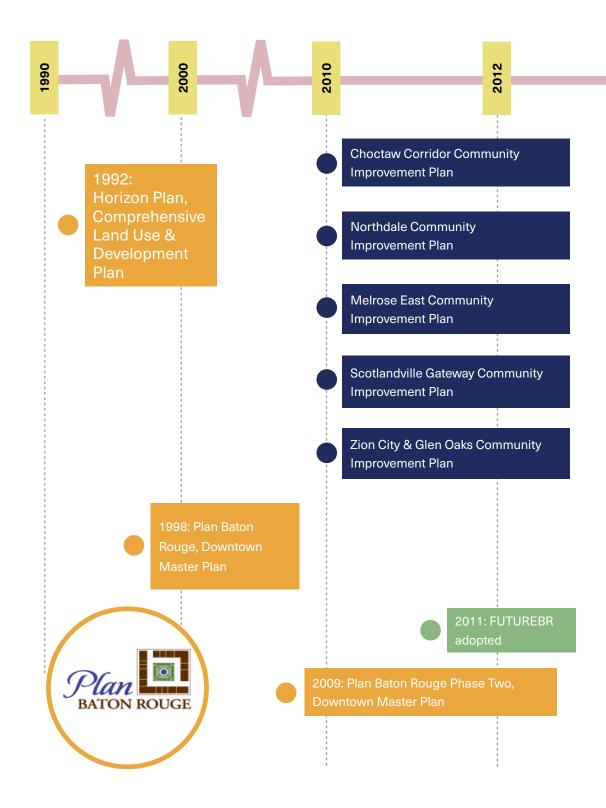
In other efforts to improve mobility and accessibility, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and the Parish's Recreation and Parks Commission (BREC) are developing the EBR Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Plan - a master plan for the expansion of the pedestrian and bicycle network across the parish. It will include BREC's Capital Area Pathways Project, which is a planned and funded offroadway trail set to break ground in early 2020 connecting BREC's Memorial Stadium to Scotlandville Parkway.

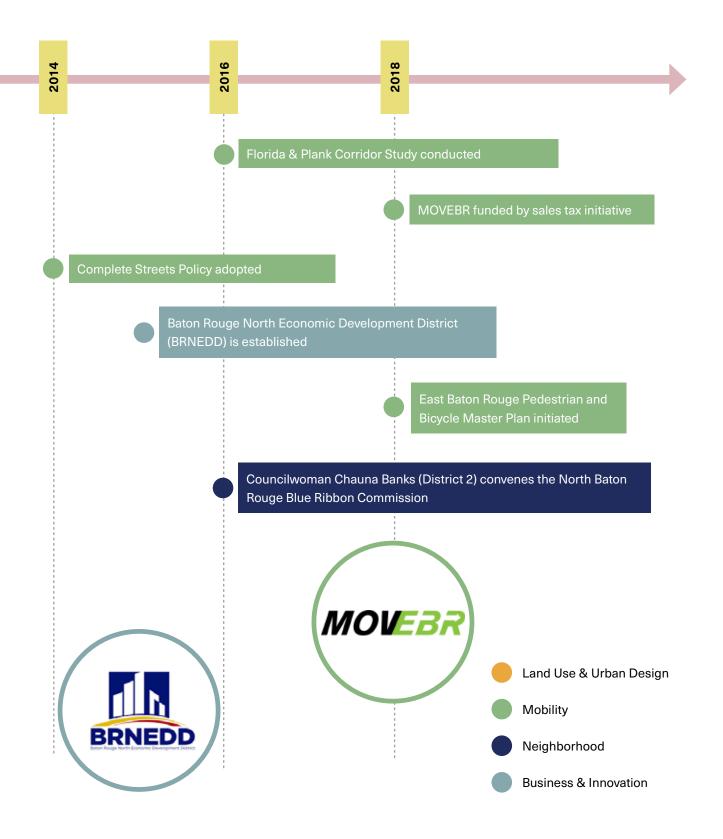
In 2011, BBR developed resident-driven Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) for five districts within East Baton Rouge Parish, including the Choctaw Corridor, Northdale, Melrose East, Scotlandville Gateway, and Zion City & Glen Oaks. The CIP plans delivered action-oriented strategies that identify opportunities for reinvestment in these community and provide a foundation for the planning efforts currently underway.



Steering Committee 2

### **Recent and Concurrent Planning Timeline**





# WOST-PEOPLE

I#ImaginePlankRoad...

NWI AYAWA STUDIO

WWW.AYAWA

#StreetFestival

#BuildBatonRouge

MIDED MI





## **Vision statement:**

"The Plank Road Corridor is a thriving, socially diverse and walkable network of neighborhoods anchored by good transit, strong local businesses, quality housing, and resilient infrastructure"



Inclusive and meaningful public participation has been essential to the development of this Plan's vision and priorities. Throughout the planning process, BBR has informed and educated Corridor residents and businesses of the planning process and collected their ideas, hopes and concerns through numerous methods. These included:

- A visioning survey prompting respondents to share their favorite memory of Plank Road, their favorite place, and what they imagine Plank Road should have in the future.
- Several fun and engaging events, including a trolley tour of the Corridor called "Walk the Plank" (March 2019); a food truck "roundup" featuring local food vendors, entertainment and community conversations (April 2019); and a street festival held in conjunction with a Corridor clean-up organized by the Walls Project (July 2019).
- A community roundtable held in conjunction with an information session for the Roof Reset program (June 2019).
- BBR's team of trained community ambassadors - people who live and work in the Corridor - spread the word of input opportunities through in-person engagement.
- Two mailings to Corridor businesses.

Along the way, BBR and consultant staff met individually with dozens of Corridor stakeholders, from the nonprofit, philanthropic, transportation, recreation, education, planning, public health, economic development, real estate, and housing sectors.

BBR also convened a Steering Committee comprised of nonprofit and public agency partners several times throughout the course of the process to advise BBR staff and consultants on development of the Plan's strategies and specific recommendations.

Through compilation of the ideas, aspirations and memories collected, several priorities emerged:

## Attracting and growing Black business

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of lifting up Black-owned small businesses and building and reinvesting wealth within the local economy. Many referenced wanting Plank Road to become a "Black Wall Street" - a reference to the segregation-era self-sustaining, localized Black economies that were often the targets of racist violence.

"In the future, I imagine Plank Road is better with sidewalks easy transit access and keeping the communities interests #1 priority"

input from community engagement

## Tackling blight, vacancy and maintenance of public and private property

Stakeholders expressed a desire for more attractive places and for properties and developments in the area to be held to the same standards as in other parts of the city - particularly for rental and abandoned properties. Many observed that neighborhood streets lack sidewalks and crosswalks to connect to businesses along Plank Road. Business owners and promoters of development shared that blight, vacant properties, and crime harm the perception of the Plank Road Corridor and other North Baton Rouge neighborhoods.

## Introducing more quality shopping options

Residents said they frequent the Delmont Village Shopping Center for retail and services, and cited Tony's Seafood and Krispy Kreme as major attractions, but they also voiced interest in more quality retail. Specifically, people stated an interest in full-service restaurants, clothing stores, coffee shops, food courts, sports bars, antique stores, and a grocery store with fresh food options.

"In the future, I imagine Plank Road has a clean shopping plaza, walking routes to exercise, and an area for mental health/ art therapy"

input from community engagement

## Providing attractive, accessible places to gather and recreate

Stakeholders would like to have more places for social interaction and recreation, along with more arts- and youth-focused spaces. Specifically, residents would like to see improved park areas, bike trails, splash pads for kids, soccer and basketball courts, teen "makerspaces" and recreation areas, music venues, gyms and health centers, learning centers, and banquet halls. Many public comments focused on providing spaces for children. Stakeholders generally favored the idea of more frequent bus services and improving transit facilities.

#### Preserving community culture

Corridor residents expressed the importance of preserving the history and authenticity of the various neighborhoods, as each has distinctive character along with people from different cultural backgrounds. Comments regarding character typically fell into two categories: securing safe, affordable housing for residents and strengthening institutions. Stakeholders expressed the desire to attract higher-income, Black households without displacing current households, as many have shown concern for gentrification. Residents also want more quality housing options with affordability that is maintained long term. Southern University students expressed a desire for more housing options near campus, while other stakeholders suggested expanding opportunities for senior housing.



Food Truck Roundup

"In the future, I imagine Plank Road has transformed the area for youth and families. Community gardening for kids to develop entrepreneurship."

input from community engagement



Street Festival

#### THE MEANING OF "BLIGHT"

In East Baton Rouge Parish, blight comes in many forms: overgrown lawns, piles of tires and trash, and collapsed roofs. But the word "blight" itself also comes in different forms with different meanings depending on who you ask. Louisiana law defines "blighted property" as "premises ... which are vacant, uninhabitable, and hazardous and because of their physical condition, are considered hazardous to persons or property ..., and have been declared to be a public nuisance by a court." Colloquially though, "blight" encompasses not only those relatively few properties that are ever declared "blighted" by a court, but all distressed property.

Confusing the matter further is the distinction between property that is physically blighted and property that is tax delinquent and then adjudicated to the state. While blight and tax adjudication are often associated with one another, not all owners of blighted property fall behind on their taxes and not all properties that are tax adjudicated have fallen into physical disrepair. While there are over 6,000 tax adjudicated properties in East Baton Rouge Parish, the fact that there is not perfect overlap between blight and adjudication makes it difficult to pinpoint the total number of blighted properties with any amount of certainty.

Addressing blight has been a struggle in Baton Rouge for a few reasons. First, ordinance violations have not been systematically enforced, relying instead on the City-Parish responding to individual complaints as they come in, which allows many blighted properties to simply slip through the cracks. Second, fines that are assessed to blighted properties are added to the property tax bill, instead of being separately enforced as individual liens. This is an efficient way to process fines, but it relies on the property tax system to function correctly, which for years has had problems properly notifying tax delinquent owners.

Act 384 of the 2019 Louisiana Legislature should clarify the requisite procedures for future tax sales. However, there remains a backlog of decades of properties that have questionably valid tax sales, making the properties risky to redevelop and without an identifiable owner to hold accountable. These properties require more individualized attention to find solutions for returning them to commerce. Current measures to mitigate blight are happening on a case by case basis as blight is reported and as solutions can be found. Systematic enforcement of State and local laws already in place, and the resources required to do so, would drastically improve the speed and scale at which East Baton Rouge Parish can address blight.

The issues with addressing blight highlight the need for a centralized process that considers the full range of factors that impact distressed property, from systematic code enforcement to tax delinquency to absentee ownership. In municipalities across the country, redevelopment authorities and land banks coordinate the resources necessary to return vacant and neglected properties back to commerce. Build Baton Rouge, as the redevelopment authority of East Baton Rouge and given its ability to land bank adjudicated property, is uniquely positioned to fulfill this role in Baton Rouge.





# Framework for Equitable Development

## The Framework

The wide socioeconomic disparities which exist on the Plank Road Corridor today require planners, policymakers, and implementers to take into account the impact of well-intentioned projects in the area. While over the course of the past four decades the Plank Road Corridor has been marked by intentional disinvestment sparked by White flight and de facto segregation, that is not the only narrative worth centering. The Corridor has also witnessed the remarkable resiliency of the residents, businesses, and community institutions during that same period. Imagine Plank Road cannot be achieved without first acknowledging the vibrant culture and institutions which exist on the Corridor today, while also reckoning with the history and continued reality of de facto segregation and its consequences in the Parish.

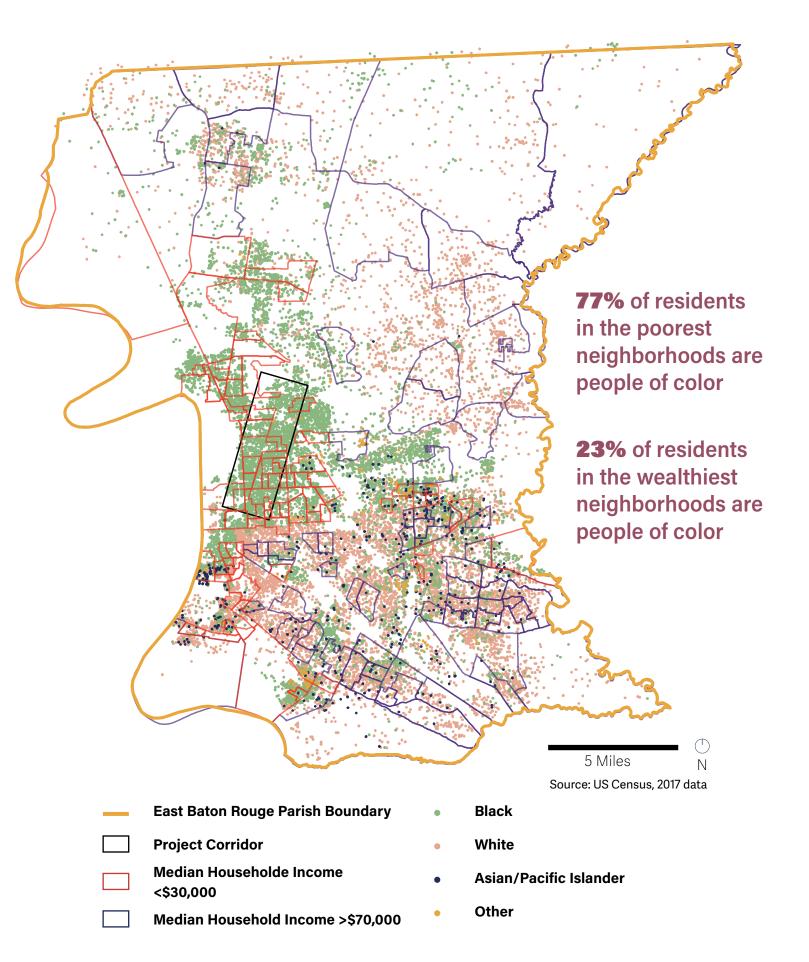
The Plan is meant to guide decisionmakers as they consider strategies to revitalize the Corridor in accord with equitable development principles. The framework seeks to answer the question, "Given past injustices and existing assets, what benchmarks must be met?"

#### **Assets along Plank Road**

An account of assets was vital to the process of forming this Framework. They not only provide an avenue for community formation and mobilization, they can be leveraged to ensure that future projects reflect the desires and needs of the existing communities. The institutions, organizations, and other factors mentioned in this section and throughout this report are not meant to represent an exhaustive account of assets, but instead provide an overall sense of what the communities along the Corridor value, what they want to see more of, and what future projects can build upon.

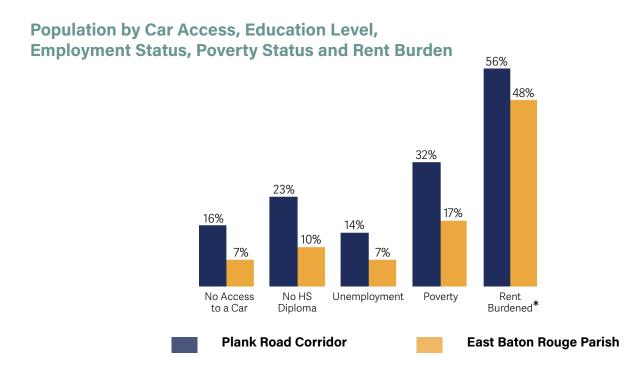
Residents fondly speak of neighborhood institutions, such as the various churches, the houses in which they grew up, and commercial establishments like Tony's Seafood. The area is also known for juke joints and is a hub of entrepreneurial activities, many of them seen in the locally owned auto-related businesses and salons.

Another strength is the active and engaged network of individuals, businesses, nonprofit organizations and public and private institutions and government agencies along the Corridor. These partners will help BBR define reinvestment that fuels economic opportunities that are rooted in local culture and place, and that enhance the quality of life for everyone in the Corridor's neighborhoods. Diligent partnership with these organizations represents perhaps the greatest opportunity available to BBR to achieve sustained impact in the Corridor.



#### **Households by Income**





Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; income categories based on Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Income Limits

\*Rental households spending more than 30% of income on housing

## Benchmarks for Equitable Development

Guiding values identified by Build Baton Rouge, stakeholder and community input, and the Plan's Vision Statement shaped the five Benchmarks for Equitable Development to gauge the impact of the Plan's recommended projects, policies, and programs described in the section "Recommended Strategies for Equitable Development." Each proposed strategy fulfills one or more of the following Benchmarks:

- Benchmark 1: Strengthen Plank Road's role as a place for cultural expression for Black communities in East Baton Rouge
- Benchmark 2: Improve the ability of North Baton Rouge residents to participate in commerce and the job market
- Benchmark 3: Protect and grow community wealth, especially as Plank Road sees economic investment from both public and private entities
- Benchmark 4: Connect more people to opportunities through enhanced transportation options
- Benchmark 5: Advances community health, safety and resilience

The following sections will provide an overview of current conditions as they relate to each Benchmark, set up specific guidelines on how best to both address existing problems and leverage assets, and suggest potential projects which meet those guidelines.

## GUIDING VALUES FOR THE PLANK ROAD EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Values identified by stakeholders in the planning process:

- Equity
- Culture
- Health
- Empowerment

#### **Build Baton Rouge Key Values:**

- Accountability
- Equity
- Community Collaboration
- Innovation
- Inclusion
- Service

## **Equity Benchmark 1**



Strengthen Plank Road's role as a place for **cultural expression** for Black communities

"Preserve the authenticity of Plank Road neighborhoods."

- input from community engagement

The neighborhoods of the Plank Road Corridor are predominantly Black: the most recent U.S. Census data reports that 96% of Corridor residents reported their race as Black. Consequently, they have faced levels of disinvestment and marginalization that have historically challenged, and continue to challenge, Black communities around the country. Therefore, it is important to uplift and celebrate the cultural heritage of the existing community. As previously mentioned, Plank Road area neighborhoods have a variety of cultural institutions and community hubs, including churches, locally-owned businesses, and juke joints. However, this proud history is not reflected in the existing public realm.

The legacy of North Baton Rouge represents a significant existing asset of the Plank Road Corridor that is currently under-leveraged. Investments in the physical infrastructure of the public right of way as well as the development of adjacent private properties represent opportunities to express and, thus, leverage this asset towards the development of the Corridor in such a way that honors and celebrates the longstanding community.



Food Truck Roundup

#### **Assets On and Around Plank Road**



## Metrics for projects, programs, and policies seeking to meet the Benchmark:

- The project, program, or policy engages local stakeholders in the proposed outcomes
- The project, program, or policy provides enhancements to lighting and streetscape elements
- The project, program, or policy offers culturally relevant, high-quality programming
- The project, program, or policy provides opportunities to include public art at the site
- The project's façade provides transparency to view both internal and external activities (i.e. "eyes on the street")
- The project's new building reflects the existing urban character and pattern of development in adjacent blocks
- The project's restored building maintains the historical fabric or enhances the cultural identity of the Corridor

#### **Examples of strategies which meet this Benchmark:**

**Cultural design standards for the public realm:** A uniquely Plank Road aesthetic experience can be enhanced through a suite of paving, planting, site furnishings, wayfinding signage, and street signage standards specific to Plank Road's public realm.

Cultural design guidelines for private development: A set of guidelines, qualities, and goals can be communicated for new private development taking place on adjacent properties. A community-based Cultural Design and Public Art Review Board may be established to review and advise the Planning Commission on whether new private development satisfies the goals set forth in the Cultural Design Guidelines.

**Plank Road public art plan:** A public art plan can further serve to express the stories and qualities of North Baton Rouge by setting forth a long-term vision of public art's presence on the Corridor and guiding future public art investments and activities.

**Projects to enhance existing buildings:** Projects that respect the existing context to restore, maintain, and enhance unique architecture and design can enhance the existing building stock and encourage context-sensitive development in the future.

## **Equity Benchmark 2**



Empower North Baton Rouge residents to participate in **commerce and jobs** 



# "Improve the environment to attract small businesses."

- input from community engagemen

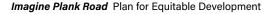
### Attracting Small Businesses to the Corridor

Throughout the engagement process, residents and other attendees of public meetings expressed a strong desire to have Black-owned small businesses in the area and to have them offer jobs for residents. Small businesses are vital to a thriving Plank Road, as they create jobs, reinvest in the local community, and stabilize underserved and underinvested populations.

Locally-owned businesses recirculate their revenue at higher rates than chain stores,¹ and 48% of every dollar spent at a local business is recirculated locally, compared to less than 14% of every dollar spent at chain stores. Black-owned businesses in particular are a stabilizing force in underserved and underinvested communities. The vast majority of Black-owned businesses are in Black communities, providing them with the goods and services that would otherwise not be accessible while hiring people living in the area.²

In order to attract additional Black-owned businesses, the Plank Road Corridor must be an attractive business environment with a strong customer base. In order to facilitate the growth of such businesses, they may also need support, through access to things such as capital, business networking groups, and business management training—resources which are often limited or out of reach for many Black business owners.

<sup>1</sup> Ambia, "The Multiplier Effect of Local Independent Businesses," https://www.amiba.net/resources/multiplier-effect/#ixzz3hDgAy0z0 2 VEDC, "Investing in the Success of African-American-Owned Small Businesses: Recommendations for Increasing Access to Capital," October 2015, https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/news/document/vedc-investing-in-success-of-aaosb.pdf



## LOWERING PARKING REQUIREMENTS TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT

Providing enough parking - without overbuilding it - can be a challenging calculation in redevelopment projects. While it's important for developments to attract customers and residents traveling by car, parking can quickly consume scarce land and add to construction costs. The lack of on-street parking on Plank Road and many of its cross-streets adds additional pressure to developers of Corridor properties.

The minimum parking requirement (MPR) for commercial uses is 1 off-street parking space for between 250 and 330 square feet of gross floor area depending on whether the parcel is designated "urban/walkable" or "suburban."<sup>3</sup>

Several factors suggest that these requirements may not only be unnecessary in the Plank Road Corridor, but actually hinder redevelopment. MPRs are crafted to satisfy the peak demand for parking, which creates ample parking and encouraging users to drive rather than walk or take transit. 16% of Corridor households do not have access to a car, and the anticipated BRT installment has the potential to shift the Corridor towards pedestrian- and transit-oriented uses. Finally, the small size of commercialzoned properties parcels on Plank Road limit the amount of land available for surface parking, and structured parking is extremely expensive.

To accelerate reinvestment in the Corridor, the City-Parish should consider permitting more aggressive reductions in areas that struggle to attract private investment and which offer reliable and frequent transit service, such as the Plank Road Corridor. (See "Establish a Plank Road Overlay District," p. 98).

In recognition of the burden that parking requirements can have on development, the City-Parish offers numerous reductions for providing the minimum number of required parking spaces, such as through proximity to transit, tree preservation, on-street parking availability, and Planning Director discretion. These reductions are offered Parish-wide, however, and do not take into account the high level of transit service BRT will bring to the Plank Road Corridor, nor its high population of car-free households.

<sup>3</sup> City of Baton Rouge Planning Commission, Unified Developmen Code Chapter 17 Parking and Lodging, Section 17.4.1 Minimum Motor Vehicle Parking, https://www.brla.gov/DocumentCenter/ View/2259/Chapter-17---Parking-and-Loading-PDF

## **Improving Access to Jobs and Other Opportunities**

One resources out of reach for many residents in the area is Internet access. According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 40% of residents in the Plank Road Corridor study area do not have an Internet subscription or a cellular data plan.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, it is estimated that just 22.6% of adult residents in the area made a personal purchase using the Internet.<sup>5</sup>

The digital divide in East Baton Rouge Parish—and its acute manifestation in the Plank Road Corridor study area—should be addressed as an equity issue, as it not only affects residents' ability to purchase goods and services, but it also hinders their access to vital resources such as online education and training, job search boards, and assistance programs.

Corridor residents are 2.3 times as likely to not have a high school diploma, and residents are twice as likely to be unemployed and therefore earn incomes significantly lower than the average Parish household.<sup>7</sup> In order to address this gap, future strategies must tackle the education-occupation mismatch for both youth and adults.

## Metrics for projects, programs, and policies seeking to meet the Benchmark:

- The project, program, or policy increases living-wage job opportunities for Corridor residents
- The project, program, or policy supports local business by providing access to capital, small business training, or coaching
- The project, program, or policy enhances access to broadband internet service
- The project, program, or policy increases access to workforce development and educational opportunities, such as financial literacy training
- The project, program, or policy expands the retail, food, service, or programmatic offerings for local residents
- The project, program, or policy engages under-represented communities

Research has also shown that the digital divide exacerbates education inequality, as "[u]nderserved students with access to only one electronic device in their home — oftentimes only a cell phone — may face challenges that don't exist for their peers in terms of completing schoolwork."

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, "S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions."

<sup>5</sup> Esri Business Analyst, ""Electronics and Internet Market Potential," data from 2018.

<sup>6</sup> ACT, "Digital Divide Compounds U.S. Education Equity Problem, First-of-Its-Kind Survey Reveals," Sept 6, 2018, Accessed 7/14/2019, https://equityinlearning.act.org/press-releases/digitaldivide-compounds-u-s-education-equity-problem-first-of-itskindsurvey-reveals/

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

#### **Examples of strategies which meet this Benchmark:**

## Increase funding and capacity for programs available to local

entrepreneurs: Programs that enhance access to capital, business networking groups, and business management training could support existing businesses and attract additional entrepreneurs.

Provide microloans: Financial entities, such as banks, credit unions and CDFIs may provide microloans to businesses for startup funding, as well as grants for facade and signage improvements.

Provide affordable commercial space for business owners: Limited access to capital and affordable space on the Corridor can be addressed by providing space for business owners at a low cost.

### Offer incentives for high quality businesses to move to Plank Road: The

City may offer incentives such as waived fees and tax abatements, or low-interest financing to businesses that offer the types of goods and services the communities along the Corridor may want or need.

#### Require businesses pursuing incentives

to hire locally: Business assistance incentives can encourage or require participants to prioritize hiring from within the neighborhoods of Plank Road and North Baton Rouge generally. This ensures that wealth circulates within the neighborhoods and helps deliver the stabilizing effects of accessible, quality employment.

#### Reduce parking requirements:

See page 36.

## Facilitate the establishment of a business alliance along the Corridor:

An organized group could work on business attraction and retention, networking, workforce development, and other initiatives to strengthen the Corridor.

## Increasing availability of equipment, infrastructure, and programming that allows residents to access the

**internet:** Greater access to online resources is crucial for ensuring residents' access to workforce development, job, and educational opportunities. This can take the form of enhanced equipment at libraries and other public buildings and spaces.

Relocate Employ BR: Although it hosts an impressive array of services, during public engagement processes, residents expressed hesitation with visiting Employ BR for two reasons: residents did not know the purpose of the building, which has a fence around it and does not have an inviting appearance; and it shares a building with the Baton Rouge Police Department. In order to enhance the physical and social accessibility of the building, the City may want to reconsider its location and design within the Corridor.

#### **BUSINESS SUPPORT AND COMMERCIAL REGROWTH** IN DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE

Downtown Albuquerque, New Mexico was experiencing economic disinvestment due to sprawl and developments focused in the suburbs. However, in recent years the area has become a case study on how to bring back economic and cultural activities along with support for underrepresented entrepreneurs.

The Rail Yards Market in Albuquerque is a successful example of an affordably leased market that "opened in 2014, saw more than 150,000 visitors in its first year, and served more than 100 vendors, many of whom have no other retail outlet."8 The historic Blacksmith Shop has been repurposed for a "community-organized Grower's Market, established in 2014 by volunteers and neighborhood residents, celebrating all things local and at the heart of New Mexican culture."9 The Rail Yards Market is a community organization operating under "the fiscal sponsorship of a Barelas Community Coalition, a certified 501(c)(3)."10 The market provides vendors affordable space while uplifting local arts and culture, providing a

community gathering space, nurturing entrepreneurs, and promoting tourism.

The Street Food Institute is a non-profit that came about as a result of a partnership between the Simon Charitable Foundation, Central NM Community College, and a local high school. They work with students, entrepreneurs, and existing food truck operators to train them in owning and operating a cafe, food truck, and catering businesses with on-the-job learning opportunities.<sup>11</sup> They also do advocacy work to expand areas where food trucks may operate, working to create a successful ecosystem of food entrepreneurship in New Mexico.

The City of Albuquerque and local foundations have funded the Calle Cuarta Marketplace, "a future retail food, arts, and culture business incubator that will offer affordable space and technical support to aspiring local entrepreneurs, including some already selling at the nearby Rail Yards Market, training on Street Food Institute trucks, or using the Mixing Bowl, a commercial kitchen nearby."12

The three initiatives work together to make Albuquerque a destination for a unique culinary and cultural experience, while at the same time creating communal spaces for cultural expression and supporting and developing entrepreneurs in the area.

<sup>8</sup> BALLE, "Downtown, Hometown: Relationships Revitalize Albuquerque," accessed 8/2/2019, https://bealocalist.org/success-stories/

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.11 Street Food Institute, accessed 8/2/2019, https://streetfoodinstitute.org/

<sup>12</sup> BALLE, "Downtown, Hometown: Relationships Revitalize Albuquerque," accessed 8/2/2019, https://bealocalist.org/success-

## EXISTING INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS AND JOB SEEKERS:

#### Small business programs

- LaunchBR Business Academy (MetroMorphosis)
- Louisiana Small Business Development Center (Southern University)
- Louisiana Economic Development
- FDIC Money Smart for Small Business education program (BancorpSouth)
- EmployBR
- East Baton Rouge Public Library: Small Business Services and Career Center
- The Way to Work, HOPE Ministries

#### Job access programs

- Employ BR
- Programs at the Delmont Gardens branch of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library
- Makers & Creators Initiative (CEO Mind Foundation)
- Rosenwald Adult Learning Center
- United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers Union 317
- ExxonMobil Aquaponics Lab (Brookstown Middle School)
- Youth Workforce Experience (City of Baton Rouge / East Baton Rouge Parish)
- Continuing Education and Workforce Solutions program (Baton Rouge Community College)
- The Futures Fund (The Walls Project, Southern University Baton Rouge Community College)



Food Truck Roundup

"In the future, I imagine Plank Road has more Black-owned businesses for all people to support"

- input from community engagement



Food Truck Roundup

## **Equity Benchmark 3**



Protect and grow **community wealth**, especially as Plank Road receives public and private investments





- input from community engagement

As the area sees greater investment from both public and private entities, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that existing community wealth and assets are protected, and that investments are leveraged to create additional value for residents. Too often, greater public investment in a previously disinvested area is accompanied by private investments into amenities and housing that is inaccessible for existing residents, while leading to higher rents and the displacement of longtime community members. Even today, residents in communities around the Corridor struggle with housing affordability, as 56% of Corridor households pay more than 30% of their income on housing.13

Homeownership offers many benefits for both individuals and their community. It not only helps protect residents from displacement,<sup>14</sup> it can also build strong communities by encouraging investment in neighborhoods and establishing equity for homeowners. It also offers homeowners increased savings and purchasing power, the ability to borrow against the equity of the home, and the opportunity to refinance at lower interest rates.<sup>15</sup> Homeownership rates in the area are low relative to the rest of the parish: an estimated 46% of Corridor residences are owner-occupied, compared to 57% in East Baton Rouge Parish.<sup>16</sup>

U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community
 Survey 5-Year Estimates, "B25106: Tenure by housing costs as a percentage of household income in the past 12 months."
 How Housing Matters, "How Does Gentrification Affect

<sup>14</sup> How Housing Matters, "How Does Gentrification Affect Homeowners and Renters Differently?," 9/26/2018, https://howhousingmatters.org/articles/gentrification-affect-homeowners-renters-differently/

<sup>15</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Paths to Homeownership for Low-Income and Minority Households", Accessed 7/15/2019, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/fall12/highlight1.html

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1. Esri forecasts for 2019 and 2024. Housing Profile.

However, homeownership isn't a guraranteed safeguard against displacement. Public and private investments can cause taxable property assessments to rise, potentialy making the area unaffordable to current homeowners.

Meanwhile, housing conditions for renters in East Baton Rouge Parish are challenging. HUD data shows that half of renters have at least one of four housing problems: "Incomplete kitchen facilities, incomplete plumbing facilities, more than one person per room, or a housing cost burden greater than 30% of income."<sup>17</sup>

BBR currently controls 85 adjudicated properties in the Corridor—several of which front directly on Plank Road—yet hundreds of additional adjudicated properties are scattered throughout the Corridor. These properties could allow for the development of the commercial and residential uses that the public has expressed a desire to see in the Corridor, and other uses that contribute to the prosperity of the Corridor's neighborhoods. The development of these properties will also generate property tax revenue and could reduce maintenance and code enforcement costs for the City-Parish.

# Metrics for projects, programs, and policies seeking to meet the Benchmark:

- The project, program, or policy offers new homeownership opportunities for local residents
- The project, program, or policy provides an opportunity to leverage existing homeowner programs and tools to ensure access for low-tomoderate income families
- The project, program, or policy offers or requires affordable mixed income rental properties that are accessible by transit



Street Festival

<sup>17</sup> HUD, "Consolidated Planning/CHAS Data," released 8/5/2019, data for the 2012-2016 period. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html

#### **Examples of strategies which meet this Benchmark:**

Expand home repair for low-income, elderly, and disabled homeowners by incorporating a loan repayment or forgiveness program: Loan repayment or forgiveness programs can help mitigate costs for residents paying out of pocket for repairs.

Assist homebuyers by increasing funding for or establishing new programs: Funding can go towards programs that provide homebuyer training or down payment and closing cost assistance programs.

Design and implement repair programs for small landlords that include affordability requirements: This strategy can ensure that quality cost-appropriate rental housing is preserved in the area.

#### Create a community land trust (CLT):

Such an organization would provide longterm affordable homeownership and other community benefits.

#### Establish a side lot program for the

**Corridor:** Side lot programs allow home and business owners to purchase vacant lots adjacent to their property to return those properties to productive use and tax rolls.

## Provide community-based and community-led development training for new small-scale local developers:

A training program can help to protect and grow community wealth by providing a deeper understanding of the real estate, redevelopment, and financing process. The accredited Creating Neighborhood Developers program through the College of Business at Southern University can provide community-based development training on real estate, redevelopment, and financing. They can work with BBR to identify future local developers who can help to protect and grow community wealth.

Capture and reinvest the increased property values that result from nearby public investments: Local governments in Louisiana frequently use tax increment financing (TIF) to fund investments in infrastructure and facilities that provide a public benefit.

#### Protect homeowners from

**displacement:** Providing home repair, loan payment or forgiveness, and weatherization programs, and freezing assessment values for senior citizens and disabled veterans, can help low-income homeowners control costs that can lead to displacement.

## Continue to help finance affordable housing and mixed-use development

along the Corridor: East Baton Rouge officials should continue to seek New Market Tax Credits and Low-income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) to help finance affordable housing, along with retail and mixed-use development for the Corridor. The use of public financing tools to increase the supply of appropriately priced housing should not only be in higher income communities, but also should be used to invest in areas where families with lower incomes have deep roots and ties, and allow those families to remain and take advantage of other public investments into Plank Road.<sup>18</sup>

## Increase monitoring and assistance to ensure housing code compliance:

Housing conditions in the neighborhoods around Plank Road vary, but many point to substandard housing conditions. The City should take steps to provide resources to renters as well as landlords to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities of both parties and provide resources that assist with bringing the property up to code.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Establish a Neighborhood Improvement**

**District (NID):** A NID can provide a mechanism for residents to implement strategies for neighborhood improvement without municipal approval or funding.

"In the future, I imagine Plank Road has a bus transit/ pedestrian corridor with produce markets, parks and museums"

- input from community engagement

<sup>18</sup> Louisiana's 2019 Qualified Action Plan, which provides the selection criteria for LIHTC projects, provides 10 points for projects located in a census tract in which the median household is 100% of the parish median income and 12 points for projects located in a census tract with a median household income that is 120% and above the parish median income.

<sup>19</sup> This should be balanced against over-enforcement of code, which can lead to increased rents due to required property improvements.

# EXISTING INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS SUPPORTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPERS, HOMEOWNERS, AND RENTERS IN THE CORRIDOR

#### Community developer programs

Creating Neighborhood Developers (Southern University)

#### Home preservation programs

- Rapid Roofing Reset Program (Build Baton Rouge)
- FIXUP! Home Repair (Mid City Redevelopment Alliance, MCRA)
- Tool lending (MCRA)

#### Homeownership programs

- Down payment assistance and closing cost program (Louisiana Housing Corporation)
- Home Ownership Center (MCRA)
- Foreclosure Counseling (MCRA)

#### Renter housing programs

- Landlord 101 seminar (East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority, EBRPHA)
- Inspection Standards Seminar (EBRPHA)

## **Equity Benchmark 4**



Connect more people to opportunity through enhanced transportation options



"Provide access to transportation for employees."

- input from community engagement

16% of households on the Plank Road Corridor do not own a car, much higher than the 7% for the parish as a whole.<sup>20</sup> This makes ADA-compliant sidewalks, safe crossings, and public amenities critical for getting around. However, current walking and bicycling conditions on Plank Road are unsafe or uncomfortable.

Sidewalks on many blocks and streets are in poor condition or missing altogether. At just 6' to 10', the distance between existing curb lines and property lines does not provide significant public space for businesses to use. Crosswalks are not striped at any intersection along the entirety of the 4.3 miles stretch of Plank Road within the Study Area. Bus stops frequently lack amenities such as shade, seating, and informational displays. Crashes are common on Plank Road. Between 2010 and 2017, 59 traffic crashes involving pedestrians and 17 crashes involving bicyclists were reported.

All transit riders (and motorists) are pedestrians at some point during their journeys, and bicycling can offer the opportunity to extend the range of car-free households - the so-called "first and last mile" of transit trips. Providing safe and comfortable pedestrian and bike networks that connect to the BRT stops is therefore critical to the overall success of transit-oriented redevelopment of the Corridor.

<sup>20 2013-2017</sup> American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, B25044 Tenure by vehicles available

#### **WHAT IS BRT?**

Bus rapid transit is a high-quality and cost-effective bus service that offers fast, frequent and reliable service to jobs, services, and amenities.

Many BRT systems offer the same benefits as rail systems, such as specialized, branded vehicles, level boarding platforms, traffic signal priorities, and attractive, well-lit stations that allow off-board fare payment and provide real-time arrival information.

The proposed Plank-Nicholson BRT will create convenient connections from Plank Road neighborhoods to Mid-City, the proposed passenger rail station, downtown, the Water Campus, Old South Baton Rouge, and the LSU campus.

## Metrics for projects, programs, and policies seeking to meet the Benchmark:

- The project, program, or policy complies with the City-Parish's Complete Streets Policy
- The project, program, or policy improves pedestrian, bicycling and transit accessibility
- The project, program, or policy incorporates or requires quality pedestrian infrastructure such as wide sidewalks, high-visibility crosswalks, limited curb cuts, pedestrian refuge islands, pedestrian countdown signals, ADA-compliant curb ramps, street trees, and/or pedestrian lighting
- The project, program, or policy offers or requires transit-oriented development
- The project, program, or policy follows the recommendations in the East Baton Rouge Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Plan
- The project, program, or policy improves transit amenities along the Corridor by installing clear signage, landing pads, shelters, seating and lighting
- The project, program, or policy benefits from the input of City of Baton Rouge Department of Transportation and Drainage, LA Department of Transportation and Development, CATS or other public agencies

#### **Examples of strategies which meet this Benchmark:**

Prioritize the mobility of BRT within the public right-of-way: Frequent, fast and reliable service will rely, however, on the ability for BRT vehicles to operate at a higher average speed than traditional city bus service. Fewer stops, traffic signal prioritization, locating stops on the far-side of intersections, providing off-board fare payment options, and dedicated transit lanes could reduce travel times.

Build and/or enhance pedestrian infrastructure: Quality pedestrian infrastructure includes wide sidewalks, high-visibility crosswalks, pedestrian refuge islands, pedestrian countdown signals, street trees, and pedestrian lighting.

Build and/or enhance biking infrastructure: Build comfortable bicycle facilities on key transportation routes serving the Corridor, and locate bicycle parking at destinations on Plank Road.

#### Encourage accessible transitoriented development (TOD): A

form-based overlay district within key commercial nodes can require new development to meet basic design standards governing setback distances, landscaping, pedestrian access, and parking area to encourage TOD.

Calm vehicular traffic: Modifications to roadway geometry and enforcement can reduce vehicular speeds to enhance public safety.

### Improve stops for non-BRT bus routes that serve the Corridor: The

City-Parish and CATS can coordinate to install clear signage, landing pads, shelters, seating and lighting.

## Extend the span and frequency of service on routes serving the Plank

Road Corridor: Those routes include the 10 Scenic Highway/Southern University; the 20 North Acadiana Throughway; the 21 Fairfield Ave/Cortana; and the 22 Winbourne Ave/Walmart. CATS should pilot a demand-response shuttle service (microtransit) from bus rapid transit stops to surrounding neighborhoods and destinations and conduct a comprehensive operations analysis to identify operational inefficiencies to address and measures to optimize transit mobility within existing constraints.

## Re-connect the street grid interrupted by Interstate 110 at the origin of Plank Road, creating a signature gateway to the Corridor:

Critical to moving forward with the potential of reconnecting Plank Road with the downtown core is a detailed, comprehensive engineering analysis of the feasibility of capping and/or re-aligning I-110. Understanding the structural, environmental, and mobility implications and advantages of a range of scenarios is a necessary step towards envisioning this critical segment of the city. This effort would require leadership by DOTD.

## **Equity Benchmark 5**



Advance community health, safety, and resilience



"We need parks, green spaces, and farmers markets."

- input from community engagement

Urban resilience, both environmental and socioeconomic, requires looking at the city holistically, and realistically determining the capacity of its individuals, neighborhoods, institutions, and businesses to survive, adapt and grow in the face of chronic stresses and acute shocks. Disasters such as flooding can reverse many development gains and force thousands of residents into poverty in the course of one catastrophic event. In places like Baton Rouge, the stratification of wealth and vulnerability to flooding impose costs on neighborhoods like Plank Road.

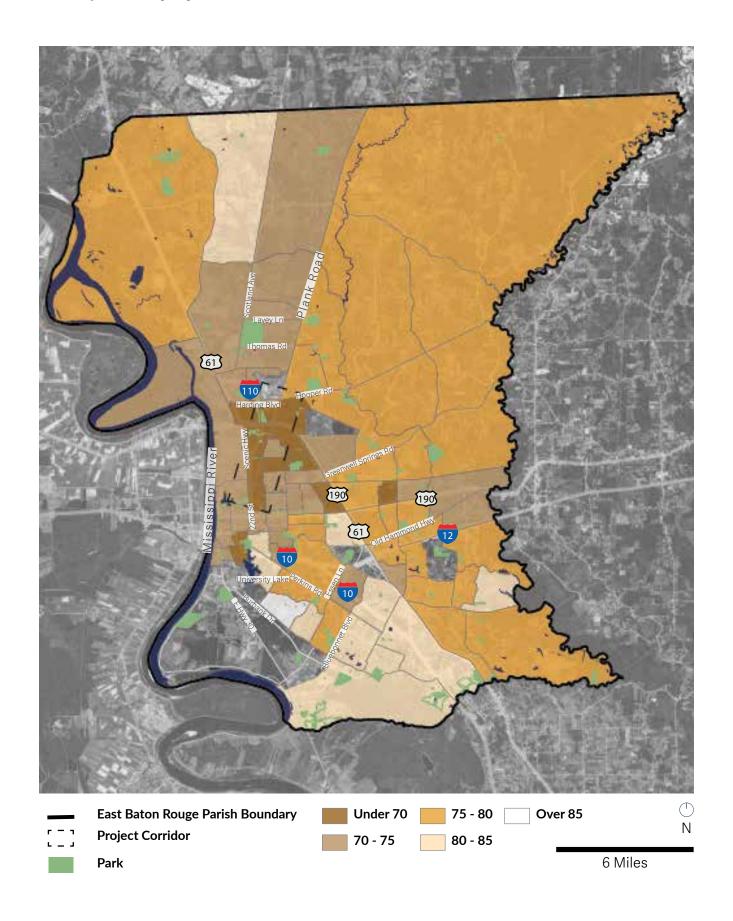
For instance, the socioeconomic disparities between Corridor communities and the broader population can impact life expectancy. The map on the followinng page shows how life expectancy varies among residents of different East Baton Rouge Parish neighborhoods. The average estimated life expectancy in most census tracts in the Corridor is below 70 years. In many Parish tracts, however, the estimate exceeds 75 years, and in some cases, 85 years.



A Grow Baton Rouge mobile market bring fresh foods to residents in the city's food deserts.



#### **Life Expectancy by Census Tract**



Residents and visitors of North Baton Rouge currently enjoy a number of BREC facilities along the Plank Road Corridor, among them Evangeline Street Park, Kerr Warren Park, and Longfellow Park.

However, a number of portions of the Plank Road Corridor are considered "park poor," using the Trust for Public Land's parameter of a 10-minute walking distance to a park.

Additionally, through the process of community engagement, a number of residents have expressed the need for a wider range of programs, facilities, and age-appropriate activities, particularly for young children and seniors.

Residents frequently cited the issue of poor maintenance of the public realm along Plank Road during the planning process, and desire to see not only investment but also enhanced maintenance in the future Plank Road.

In addition to disparate health outcomes, the entirety of the Corridor is vulnerable to flooding. It is designated by FEMA as an area with a 0.2% chance of flooding annually (or 500-year storm elevation). A large portion of the study area is within the area with a 1% chance of flooding annually (or 100-year storm elevation). These more vulnerable areas are adjacent to creeks, bayous, and channels that drain to the Mississippi and Amite Rivers.

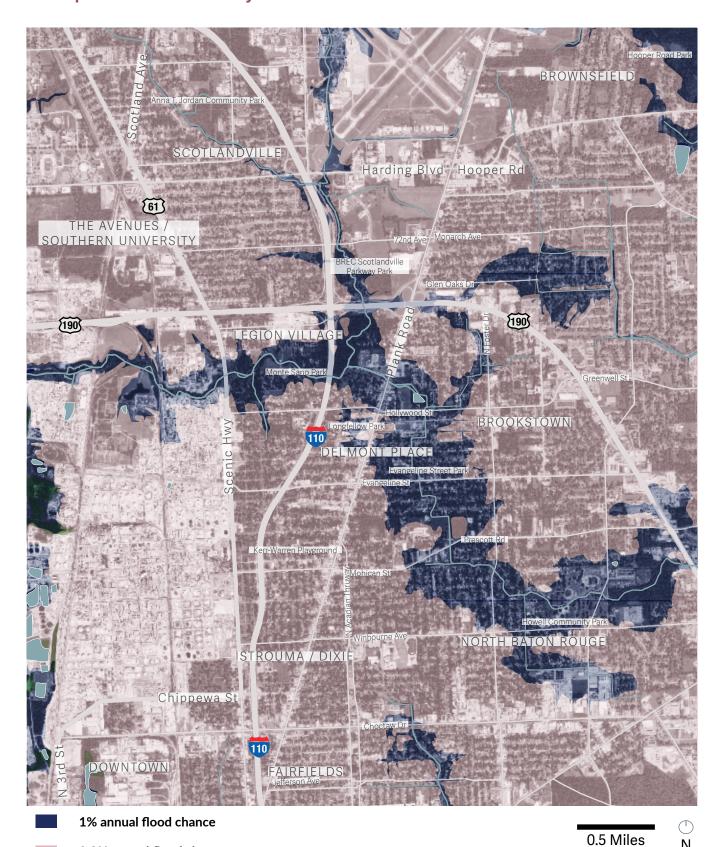
In response to the August 2016 floods, which impacted the eastern portion of the Corridor, the City-Parish began development of the Parish Stormwater Master Plan to guide capital investments in stormwater management infrastructure.

There is a distinct lack of tree cover and street tree planting along the Plank Road Corridor and along Interstate 110 and Highway 190. Lack of tree cover combined with a high percentage of impervious paving leaves Plank Road with a bleak aesthetic and, more importantly, a susceptibility to flooding and drainage issues.

Plank Road could benefit from the expansion of permeable surfaces that allow for infiltration and trees and plants that take up water and release it through evapotranspiration, easing the burden on the City's stormwater system.

Environmentally contaminated properties brownfields - also hinder redevelopment and pose a public health hazard. Since receiving an EPA award of funding to launch the Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot program, City-Parish has successfully placed over 50 brownfield properties back into commerce.

#### Floodplains and Waterways



56

0.2% annual flood chance

waterways, ponds & lakes

## Metrics for projects, programs, and policies seeking to meet the Benchmark:

- The project, program, or policy integrates resilience measures and mitigates future flooding
- The project, program, or policy includes a plan and funding for future maintenance
- The project, program, or policy expands the network of green and open spaces
- The project, program, or policy remediates a brownfield site
- The project, program, or policy reflects the highest standards of local building codes
- The project, program or policy expands the offerings for recreation, active transportation and high quality programming
- The project, program or policy improves health outcomes

#### **Examples of strategies which meet this Benchmark:**

Develop a public space plan to provide quality programming, improve existing spaces and the network of green and open spaces, and promote healthy lifestyles: The public space plan could focus specifically on BREC and related stakeholders to grow the network of parks open spaces and proactively maintain them.

**Installation of green infrastructure:** The City can incentivize the installation of green infrastructure in future developments while increasing such infrastructure in the public realm in order to reduce the risk of flooding.





## Projects, Policies, and Programs

How can community partners, the public sector, and the private sector come together to shape a vision for reinvestment in Plank Road to create a more inclusive future?

Successful and equitable reinvestment in the Plank Road Corridor will rely on the strategic application of a range of funding and implementation tools, from entirely public to entirely private financing and execution.

The strategy to bring about equitable prosperity on the Corridor may be in the form of public-private partnerships to construct new or rehabilitate existing buildings with new uses (a project), the funding of business, training, housing, or social assistance that provides necessary resources for area residents and workers (a program), or local policies to bring about desired outcomes.

In soft-market areas such as Plank Road, an engaged and high-capacity public sector is critical to create the public infrastructure and conditions that attract private investment in commercial uses and property. This includes public right-of-way investments in streets, traffic controls, public transit and parking, street lights, water, sewer and drainage systems.

Beyond routine maintenance and rehabilitation of critical infrastructure, it is important to consider new and innovative ways for these elements to respond to present-day challenges and needs. The planned BRT service is an example.



Redevelopment authorities across the country have successfully utilized land-banked property and financing tools to attract private developers to meet such goals. Unlike publicly-subsidized private developments, public entities share in the risk as well as the reward of public/private partnership projects, given that public agencies maintain ownership of developed land. Partnerships are often formalized through a cooperative endeavor agreement.

Publicly-subsidized private development, unlike public/private partnership development, usually consists of private sector developers layering public financial incentives into projects that secure traditional financing from private sources, such as banks and investment funds, but which require bridge financing to make them financially feasible.

As public-private partnerships and private developments create the built environment and provide amenities, stakeholders including individuals, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and public and private institutions will have the opportunity to supplement the infrastructure with supportive programming that provides a high quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors.

These programs may range from providing resources for people looking for employment, bringing activities for youth in the area, to connecting local business owners to financing. Financing sources for these projects can vary, but BBR can support impactful programming by providing resources such as funding and real estate.

City-Parish government, BBR, and the Planning Commission have several tools to create conditions that will support the equitable development strategies discussed herein. These policies may be codified or may be guidelines which are highly encouraged for actors in the area to follow.

The following sections will outline projects, programs, and policies for equitable development along the Plank Road Corridor. The strategies suggested can cross multiple lines — they can have project, program, and policy components while also meeting multiple Benchmarks at the same time.

For clarity, each strategy will indicate the Benchmark or Benchmarks which are being met.

#### **Icon Key**



Cultural Expression

## Equity Benchmark 1 Strengthen Plank Road's role as a place for cultural expression for Black

communities



Commerce & Jobs

#### Equity Benchmark 2

Empower North Baton Rouge residents to participate in commerce and jobs



Community Wealth

#### **Equity Benchmark 3**

Protect and grow community wealth, especially as Plank Road receives public and private investments



Transportation Options

#### **Equity Benchmark 4**

Connect more people to opportunity through enhanced transportation options



Health & Safety

## Benchmark 5: ance community health

Advance community health, safety and resilience

## Build Bus Rapid Transit

The development of a convenient BRT service connecting the Plank Road Corridor to Mid City, downtown, and the LSU campus is central to this Plan's strategy for equitable redevelopment of the Corridor. The proposed Plank-Nicholson Corridor will create convenient connections from Plank Road neighborhoods to Mid City, the proposed passenger rail station, downtown, the Water Campus, Old South Baton Rouge, and the LSU campus. Safety enhancements such as sidewalk widening and improved crossings are expected to reduce traffic crashes by 500 over a 20-year period, while improved service will increase daily ridership by 39%, from 800 riders on Route 41 Plank Road to over 1,100.

As of this report's publication, the City-Parish and CATS are awaiting a decision from the USDOT to award a requested \$15 million Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant. Meanwhile, local officials have dedicated \$17.5 million in local funding to support the project, including \$9 million from MOVEBR sales tax proceeds, \$4 million in federal surface transportation funding and \$3.5 million in federal transit funds. CATS operating funds will provide the estimated \$1.5 million in operating expenses.

In the future, I image Plank Road has rapid transit (that) can accommodate "walkers" for the elderly. Cultural amenities incorporated (art "in" bus, music on platforms), kiosks for school for more information on (job) training"

- input from community engagemen



Commerce &



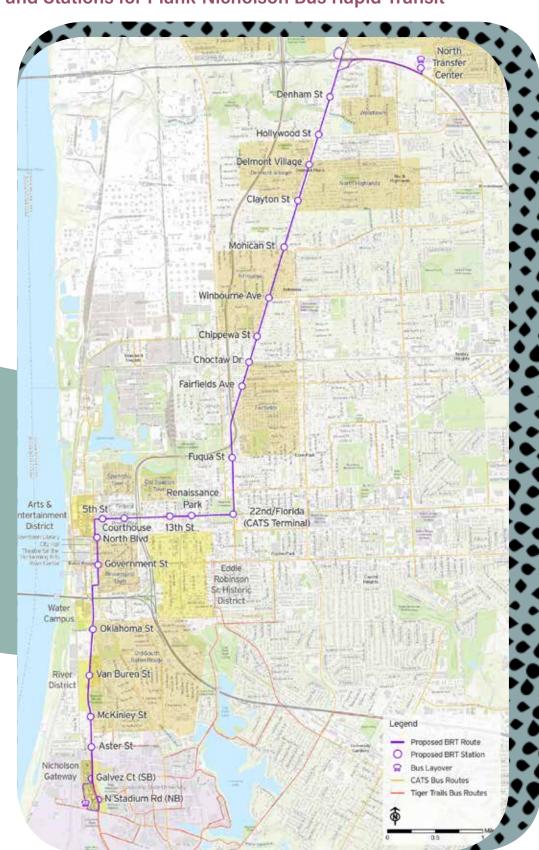
Health & Safety



Transportation Options

BRT will drastically improve the experience of riding transit to and from the Plank Road Corridor, make walking along and across Plank Road safer, and incentivize development of new, transitoriented housing and commerce.

#### Planned Alignment and Stations for Plank-Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit



The City-Parish and CATS application for federal BUILD grant funds for the planned Plank-Nicholson BRT service identifies 10 stations within the Plank Road Corridor, from Fairfields Avenue to the proposed North Transfer Center on Airline Highway.

Credit: 2019 BUILD Grant Application

The City-Parish and CATS aim to begin operations by the start of 2023. To achieve this goal, immediate next steps include:

- Completion of National Environmental Policy Act documentation by early 2020
- Completion of preliminary engineering by third quarter of 2020
- Completion of final design and approvals by second quarter 2021
- Beginning construction by third quarter of 2021

Should BUILD grant funds not be awarded this year, the City-Parish and CATS would have three options:

- Apply for the next cycle of BUILD grants, maintaining the project scope yet delaying full implementation by one year
- Identify a separate source of funding for the \$15 million gap
- Proceed with the project by reducing the project scope

Under the first option, local officials should closely consider feedback provided by USDOT to weigh the likelihood of receiving a more favorable evaluation in the next grant application cycle.

The second option could potentially require years of efforts to appropriate adequate resources from alternative local and regional funding sources. The third option could impact the extent of improvements on Plank Road. Below are potential ways to move forward with the BRT project at a smaller scale, and to postpone certain project enhancements:

- Reduce project components that are not critical to the operation of bus rapid transit service, such as reconstruction of all sidewalks along the Corridor.
- Phasing or reduction of transit station amenities
- Deferral of construction of the proposed North Transfer Center, or constructing the center outside of the project with another source of funds

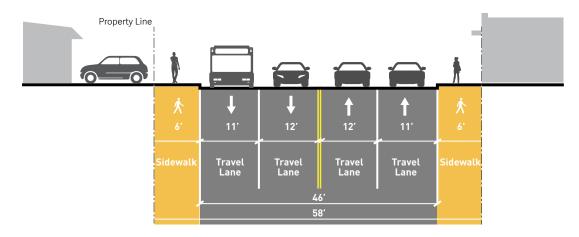
While not currently proposed, dedicated transit lanes are a common application of bus rapid transit systems and could potentially improve travel times. Regardless of the three options followed, the City-Parish should continually evaluate BRT trip speed and ontime performance in relationship to traffic delay for personal vehicles and consider introducing dedicated right-of-way in the future.



Proposed BRT station design. Source: Plank-Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit 2019 BUILD Grant Application

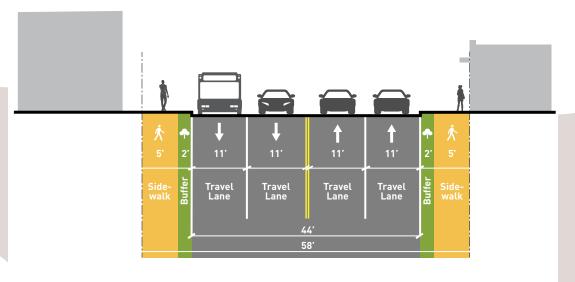
## Plank Road Street Section: Existing, Moderate, and Recommended Allocations of Right-of-Way

#### Plank Road at Weller Avenue: Existing

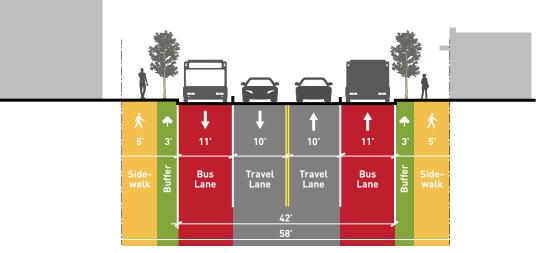


#### Plank Road at Weller Avenue: Moderate Enhancement

A typical existing street section (top), south of Evangeline Street, allocates four travel lanes over 46' of roadway width, allowing just 6' of sidewalk width on either side of Plank Road. The City-Parish and CATS have proposed a moderate reallocation of space (middle), allowing for 1'-wider sidewalks and 11'-wide mixed traffic lanes. Imagine Plank Road recommends 10'wide inside travel lanes and bus-dedicated, 11'- wide outside lanes. This section would permit wider vegetation buffers to separate motorized traffic from the limited the width of Plank Road sidewalks, and may allow for improved landscaping.



#### Plank Road at Weller Avenue: Recommended Enhancement



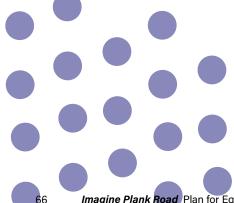
## Catalytic Projects

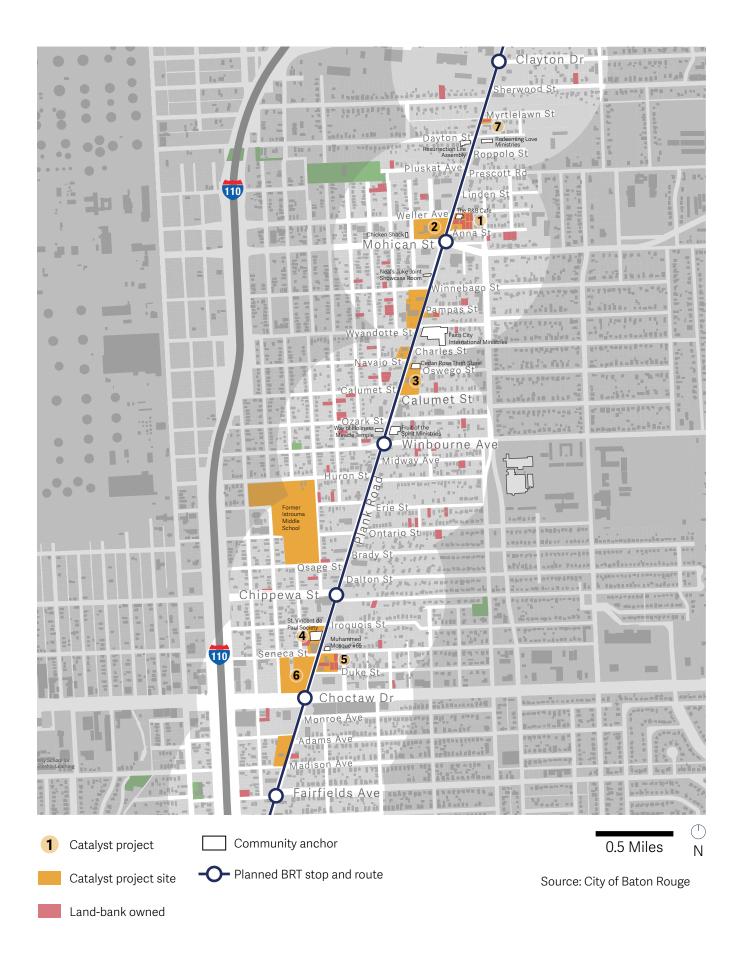
The Plan proposes seven catalytic, transitoriented development projects to anchor the corridor's reinvestment. These projects seek to combine creative funding sources, innovative partnerships, and land-banked properties to demonstrate public-sector leadership in reinvesting in the Plank Road Corridor.

Each project meets numerous Equity Benchmarks, whether through providing high-quality, mixed-income housing, public space, small business development opportunities, or needed retail offerings.

#### **Catalytic Projects**

- 1 Food Hub
- Civic Center 2
- Build Baton Rouge Office, 3 Childhood Learning, and Housing
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul
  - **Transit Oriented Development** 6
  - 7 Plank Road EcoPark





### Site 1: Food Hub









Commerce & Jobs



Health & Safety



Transportation Options

This project will provide business and job opportunities for local residents, housing, and fresh foods and services within easy access of rapid transit.

Located one block from the intersection with Mohican Street, the Plank Road Food Hub is envisioned as a mixed-use site with a grocery, pharmacy, residential units, and space for local food entrepreneurs. Build Baton Rouge currently owns the majority of the proposed site, making it a prime development opportunity.

A 10,000 square foot grocery store is proposed to anchor the site. A recent analysis found that the site could generate up to \$3.8 million in annual sales by its third year.

The project also envisions a locally-owned pharmacy that would complement the grocery store and help keep money in the local economy. The project also includes sixteen 1- and 2-bedroom mixed-income rental apartments.

A third use of the site would be a food incubator space with commercial kitchen that could host start-up culinary businesses, such as mobile food vendors who lack the capital to invest in leasing their own commercial space. Workforce-training programming funded by local philanthropies and economic development grants could also occur at this site, as well as vending space for temporary markets for local food growers to reach customers.

The proposed design includes new construction of a three-story structure fronting Plank Road beside the restoration of a currently vacant, historic storefront structure at the corner of Weller Avenue—the 1930 Roppoloville building.

A pedestrian alley between the two buildings would link the sidewalk to the parking lot in the rear of the lot. This small, publicly accessible open space would be adjacent to an existing CATS bus stop and could also accommodate the planned Mohican Street BRT stop, making the retail easily accessible to transit riders.





## Site 2: Civic Center





Cultural Expression



Options

This project will offer new space for local community institutions and programs within easy access of rapid transit. A signature transit-oriented civic center is proposed for the site across the street from the Food Hub. Currently a vacant lot and parking lot, this site would provide 22,000 sqf of multiuse space that could accommodate government or public university functions, such as offices, social services, conference facilities, classrooms, or a public library.

A generously-scaled, upper-level terrace provides the Civic Center an expansive amenity for event use and flexible community gathering space fronting Plank Road. Two stories of up to 38 residential units could line the rear of the block, with parking located in a central, screened parking court serving both buildings. Along with the Food Hub site, these multifamily units will expand the area's housing stock. This site strategy of street-lined buildings provides a more defined urban development pattern, to enhance the streetscape character along Plank Road.

Consistent with the Food Hub, the Plank Road Civic Center would be oriented toward pedestrians and transit riders on Plank Road, with parking driveways located on side streets. The transit plaza integrates bike racks, rain gardens, permeable paving, and specialty night lighting to create a welcoming public space amenity. Construction of the two sites opposite from each other, served by BRT service, with incorporation of public art, attractive landscaping, and ample seating and shade would instill a strong sense of place and return human activity and commercial vitality to this largely vacant block of Plank Road.





# Site 3: Build Baton Rouge Office, Childhood Learning, and Housing





Community Wealth

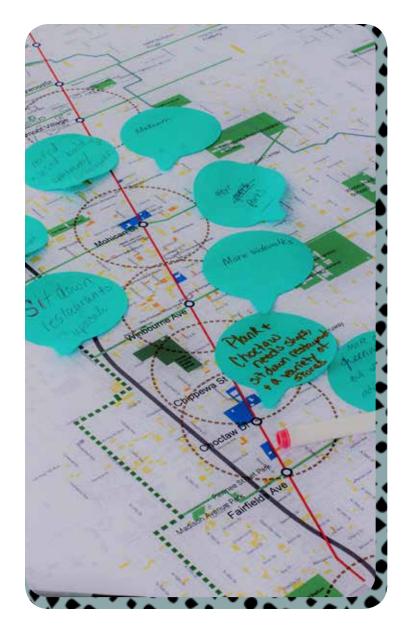


Transportation Options

This project will offer new housing and critical childhood learning services with easy access to rapid transit. Farther south, Build Baton Rouge has acquired the properties fronting Plank Road on the block of Plank Road from Oswego Street to Calumet Street, two blocks distance from the planned BRT station at Winbourne Avenue. These include a vacant lot and a one-story commercial building lacking historic features. A newly constructed, mixed-use development at this site would fill a significant gap in the Corridor.

Proposed uses for site are office space for Build Baton Rouge, which would be located on the ground floor alongside a location for a YWCA early childhood learning center. Mixed-income housing would occupy the second story of this development.

The design of the structure prioritizes pedestrian accessibility by orienting the front of the building toward Plank Road, with parking located at the rear and accessed from side streets. Its two-story height enhances the street scape with verticality and views of the street from residences located above. This along with the filling of vacant lots will enhance safety and the sense of place.



# Sites 4 and 5: Essential Human Services





Wealth



This project will offer rehabilitated space for vulnerable residents to access critical housing and social services.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a nonprofit social services organization dedicated to aiding people in need of essential services, currently owns and operates a thrift store, student uniform program, and a men's shelter on several parcels facing Plank Road between Iroquois Street and Duke Street. The organization is one of many whose work should be strengthened and reinforced by public and private reinvestment in the Plank Road Corridor. The buildings would benefit from rehabilitation or reconstruction and improved streetscape treatments, and are adjacent to vacant properties.

Several properties adjacent to the Society's property are held in Build Baton Rouge's land bank. A public/private partnership between the two organizations would leverage BBR's financial resources and redevelopment expertise to strengthen the capacity and reach of the Society, as well as improve the appearance of these two blocks of Plank Road, located just one block from the prominent intersection with Choctaw Drive.

New construction is proposed on the block east of Plank Road currently housing the men's shelter. This would be a two-story structure with expanded emergency, short-term housing on the second floor and potentially a dining facility or other commercial space on the ground floor, with parking located at the rear.

Renovation of the existing thrift store building on the west of Plank Road would restore the historic, mid-century design of the structure. Improvements to the vacant lot to the south of this structure, which housed a building until it burned down in recent years, could make it an attractive open space for Society programming and informal use.



# Site 6: Transit-Oriented Development





Commerce & Jobs



Transportation Options

Mixed-use development at this site would provide opportunities for growing businesses, jobs and new housing, within easy access of rapid transit.

The block bounded by Plank Road, Choctaw Drive, Seneca Street and Osceola Street is almost entirely comprised of vacant land, aside from a single residential lot. As a highly-visible site with access to two major thoroughfares located closer to Mid-City and downtown than most of the Corridor, this block holds enormous potential for large-scale redevelopment.

BBR lacks control of the site and so rather than prescribing a specific development, this Plan offers a vision that is consistent with the community's priorities and developments proposed in previous sites. A two-to-four story structure fronting the two thoroughfares would reinforce the definition of a walkable. transit-oriented development on Plank Road. Special consideration should be given to the treatment of the intersection. A small open space here would provide a gathering place for building users and transit riders. The site is large enough to attract a destination retailer on the ground floor, with entrances facing Plank Road and Choctaw as well as parking located at the rear of the block.

# Site 7: Plank Road Pocket Park/EcoPark

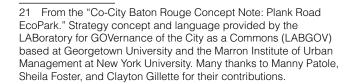
Flooding is increasingly a concern in Baton Rouge, including the Plank Road area, posing both ecological and socioeconomic risks to the community. Additionally, access to green space for Plank Road Corridor residents is limited and few opportunities exist for recreation and activity for all age groups. Public spaces and ecological infrastructure along the Plank Road Corridor will be crucial in improving community health outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

Build Baton Rouge can seize on the current opportunity provided by public awareness of these risks to create resilient infrastructure in a way that is economically and socially inclusive.

Moreover, the availability of vacant land in this Corridor makes the area susceptible to low-tech solutions that utilize natural urban features to provide the community with environmental benefits. For Plank Road, the Plank Road "EcoPark" (PREP) concept will combine two needs: community green space and climate mitigation into one.

The benefits of an EcoPark include but are not limited to:

- Improved Public Realm and Sense of Place
- Mitigating Climate Change
- Increasing Biodiversity
- Stormwater Management
- Combating Urban Heat Island Effect
- Improve Health Outcomes
- Reduced cost to public and private sectors: costs of water treatment, flood damage





Cultural Expression



Health & Safety

This project addresses Benchmark 1 to strengthen Plank Road's role as a place for cultural expression by incorporating community-based designs which represent the cultural and historical context of the communities surrounding the EcoPark.



Courtesy of Coastal Sustainability Studio, team members Tanvi Shah and Zahra Fattahi.

Additionally, mitigating flooding, increasing park access, and improving health outcomes fulfills Benchmark 5's focus on advancing community health, safety, and resilience.

Climate mitigation and adaptation efforts become more effective when done through proactive and holistic planning approaches in partnership with residents and communities. The project will leverage community members and advocates at the early stages for a community-led design process. The group will steer the project with the needs of the community first and foremost.

Subsequently, we anticipate collaboration with local stakeholders such as ExxonMobil, BREC, LSU, BR Audubon Society, Baton Rouge Green, and Southern's Urban Forestry Program to develop a pocket park that provides activity and green space, sensory gardens and urban drainage for the Plank Road community.

Plank Road residents take pride in the many assets and amenities within the area. At the same time, as an area that has seen significant disinvestment as a result of White flight, the City-Parish has an opportunity to signal its commitment to spur more quality development in North Baton Rouge by being explicit and intentional in the way it operates and maintains assets along the Plank Road Corridor.



Courtesy of Coastal Sustainability Studio, team members Tanvi Shah and Zahra Fattahi.

Towards this end, the City-Parish should implement a "proactive care" strategy for PREP as one of the first visible projects with a robust community engagement process. This means proactive maintenance through regular cleanups and consistent lighting, as well as necessary upgrades to the EcoPark. It should be noted that the proactive strategy should not be used to implement punitive code enforcement strategies against residents and business owners. Instead, code enforcement in the area should connect homeowners to resources to maintain their properties.



# THE CO-CITY/BBR PARTNERSHIP

Build Baton Rouge has partnered with the Co-City Project, an effort of the LABoratory for GOVernance of the City as a Commons (LABGOV) based at Georgetown University and the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University to apply the Co-City Model in support of a multi-stakeholder approach to community engagement for the agency's redevelopment efforts, including the development of PREP. The goal of the Co-City Model is to foster social innovation in urban services provision, spur collaborative economies as a driver of local economic development, and promote inclusive urban regeneration.

The Co-City/BBR partnership will involve the creation, modeling, and testing of novel neighborhood governance, financing, and participatory institutions that provide residents with long-term stakes in economic revitalization. The effort will promote community building while engaging a wide set of stakeholders who will pursue projects together with end users to overcome social inequalities and enhance the participation of underrepresented social groups. By focusing on neighborhood scale governance innovation, such as a Neighborhood Improvement District or a Community Infrastructure Trust, the Co-City methodology ensures that the project outcome focuses on residents, the various stakeholders, and their needs and interests in economic regeneration.

# Site 8 : Pop-up retail space





In this project, cultural design standards specify unique site furnishings, planting, paving, and signage to accompany the upgrades to sidewalks and crosswalks along Plank Road, as seen in the rendering. In the private realm, cultural design guidelines help shape the creative adaptive reuse of existing buildings like automobile repair shops, forming new anchors of history, culture, and gathering similar to the site shown in the rendering. And finally, the public art plan offers opportunities to tell the story of Plank Road in 2 and 3 dimensions, as the mural and building façade in the rendering exemplify.

While residents would like to see more Blackowned small businesses on Plank Road, the infrastructure to support entrepreneurs in the area is sparse. It is difficult for small businesses and retailers to find affordable spaces, despite some of the empty buildings seen along the Corridor. A potential remedy would be to convert an underutilized structure into a pop-up retail space to test and feature some of the most promising enterprises.

Plank Road has many auto-oriented businesses, a testament to local entrepreneurship and its response to a shift towards auto dominance and demand for accompanying services.

But as Plank Road receives significant resources to build BRT and moves toward transit-oriented development, sites centered around cars have the potential to become centered around people. What if Plank Road became a Corridor where people walked and biked from place to place or from BRT stop to shop to stop? By providing an alternative paradigm in a Corridor where 16% of households do not have access to a car, BRT provides an opportunity to reorient Plank Road towards a human-centered and human-scaled string of developments with amenities geared towards the local communities residing along the Corridor.

The rendering shows an example of a development that supports such a vision. The building, which currently provides window tinting and a carwash service, is transformed into a pop-up retail space and community gathering place. The space could accommodate local entrepreneurs and students in manufacturing and textile courses interested in utilizing their skills to start a business. As a hub of entrepreneurial activity, it can be the distribution point for upcoming trainings and workshops for small business owners, or even host workshops and networking opportunities. The site can host a food truck, provide residents a place to hang out before hopping on the BRT at a stop a block or two away.

As part of Plank Road's transition towards a transit-oriented Corridor, the front parking lot is now used for human-centered activities rather than to store automobiles, and the remaining space is filled with verdant green infrastructure to reduce the risk of flooding. On weekends, the former parking lot becomes a marketplace for locally produced and created crafts, food, and other goods and services.

The project can implement very intentional strategies to provide spaces for cultural expression by applying cultural design guidelines that showcase Plank Road's legacy as a hub for Black residents. These design guidelines would recommend specific elements that developers should take into consideration and could be applied across the Corridor.

# PROGRAMS FOR SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

In addition to providing spaces for small businesses, the City of Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish can provide funding for programs that encourage the development of microenterprises through funding from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The City-Parish receives funds from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, "a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs."

One of the categories of activities eligible for CDBG funding is microenterprise assistance. HUD defines microenterprises as "commercial enterprise that has five or fewer employees, one or more of whom owns the enterprise.<sup>23"</sup> As the administrator of East Baton Rouge Parish CDBG entitlement funds, Build Baton Rouge can provide an array of services to small businesses.

Activities eligible for CDBG funding include:

- Financial support such as grants, loans, and loan guarantees for small business establishment, stabilization, and expansion
- Technical assistance, advice, and business services
- General support such as childcare, transportation, counseling, and peer support groups
- Efforts to bring commercial structures up to code of improve their facades
- Job training, such as skill building classes for employees or potential employees

<sup>22</sup> HUD.GOV, "Community Development Block Grant Program - CDBG," accessed 10/1/2019, https://www.hud.gov/program\_offices/comm\_planning/communitydevelopment/programs
23 HUD, "Basically CDBG for Entitlements, Chapter 8: Economic Development & Section 108," 2017, accessed 10/1/2019, https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Basically-CDBG-Chapter-8-Section-108.pdf





Cultural Expression

The site could host events like a concert in the structure or in the front area, while the building itself has the potential to provide space for murals.



Options

The site shows improved walking conditions for residents, with enhanced crosswalks and curb ramp.



Jobs

The intent of the project is to provide pop-up retail spaces for local entrepreneurs who may otherwise not have a space to sell their goods. By providing such a space, the project provides both opportunities for more local commerce and job access.



Health & Safety

**Green infrastructure** at the development is filled with water-loving plants that will absorb rain water and reduce the risk of flooding.

#### **Auto-oriented land uses on Plank Road**







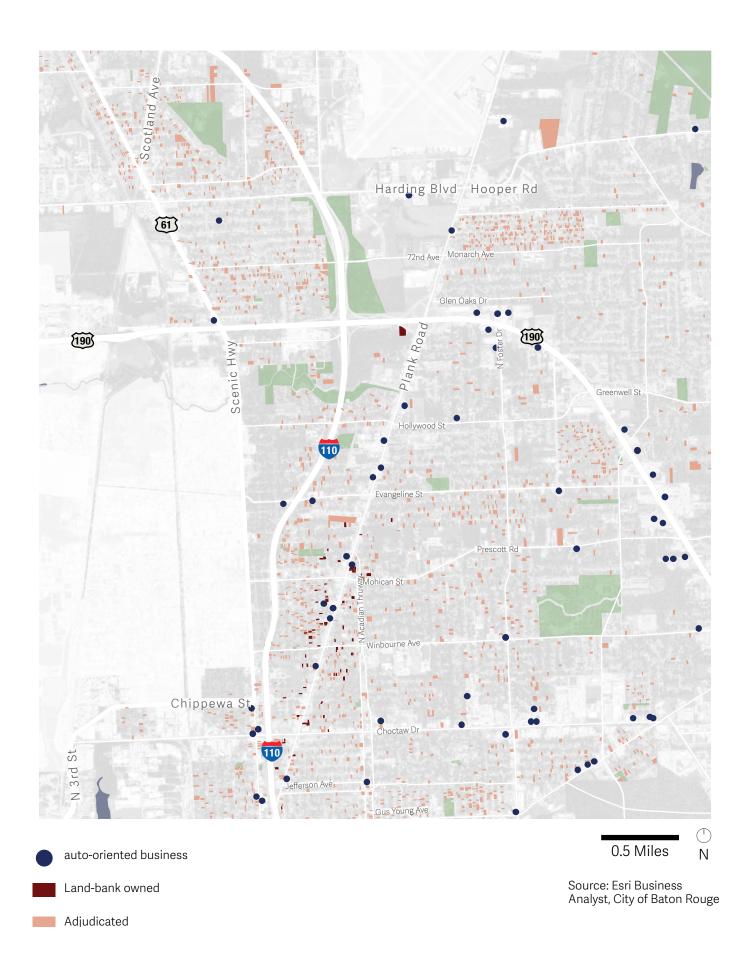












#### **CASE STUDY: AFRICATOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES**

The Africatown Community Land Trust (ACLT)—a grassroots, neighborhood-based organization in the Central Area of Seattle, Washington—has been developing its cultural design guidelines over the last several years. Much like the Plank Road Corridor, Africatown's rich legacy as a hub for Black residents and businesses is one of its strongest assets. In view of this, the ACLT has been developing a set of cultural design guidelines to shape developments in the neighborhood and influence political bodies towards leveraging the incredible value of its culture in the shaping of both its public and private realms.

A review of the Africatown case study offer the following key takeaways relevant to the Plank Road Corridor:

#### A Multi-Dimensional Process

Building off the work of Black designers and design scholars such as Dr. Sharon Sutton, Jack Travis, and Donald King, the Africatown Community Land Trust kicked off the process of developing cultural design guidelines with a review of existing literature and precedents on the topic of Black cultural design nationally. Doing so gave the organization a framework for the language and scope of the endeavor. Subsequently, the process moved on to engage the community in a number of "design ciphers" to present the national Black cultural design references and elicit input from residents on ways they perceive local culture to be manifested in the neighborhood. A team of designers then interpolated the community's inputs with an extensive review of the history of the cultural and architectural history of the neighborhood, ultimately arriving at the multi-dimensional data needed to translate Africatown Cultural Design Guidelines. Community members remained involved as the design guidelines were developed, such that they felt the guidelines were reflective of their visions and retained a sense of ownership over the document.

#### Cultural Specificity

Africatown's cultural design guidelines sought to set baseline expectations for private developers and public capital projects to translate Africatown's heritage into physical design with greater specificity. Whereas urban design guidelines are developed in many cities across the country, Africatown's goal was to move beyond building massing, as to drill down to the specifics of materiality, site furnishings, tree species, porch articulation, and beyond. Much like in Africatown, specificity is key in the amplification of the unique qualities—materials, patterns, and narratives—of the historic Plank Road Corridor and position it to become a unique destination in Baton Rouge.

#### A Range of Scales

The Africatown Design Guidelines sought to bring a wide range of people into the process of developing Africatown, with the inclusion of cultural design guidelines for all scales of developments. For example, the guidelines included references to single-family homeowners who sought to make home improvements in order to offer a reference for how to do so in a way that contributes to the vision of Africatown. At the same moment, the guidelines were also a resource to private multi-family and commercial developers who were considering projects in Africatown. For many of these developers who may have had no experience working in a historically Black community, a clear expectation was communicated.

The Influence and Application of Africatown's Cultural Design Guidelines takes place through a number of simultaneously operating bodies:

#### CADG

A self-organized coalition of neighborhood groups partnered with the City on developing the Central Area Neighborhood Design Guidelines, formally adopted by the Seattle City Council in 2018.

#### CA-DRB

The City of Seattle's public design review entity—
the Design Review Board (DRB)—holds seats for
neighborhood residents as well as professional planners and designers to review proposed
design projects. Africatown CLT developed their design guidelines to effectively influence
the DRB body in their ongoing reviews of proposed projects in the neighborhood. In
2018, the DRB established a Central Area sub-district, where Africatown's guidelines are
expressly referenced in the review of design proposals to the board.

#### CA-LURC

Neighborhood residents established the Central Area Land Use Review Committee (CA-LURC). While having no formal designation as a public entity, the CA-LURC is a forum for residents to learn, discuss, and review design proposals in the neighborhood and it represents one venue where Africatown Design Guidelines are referenced in the context of development. While not holding any formal design-making power, the body votes to "approve" or "reject" design developments in the community, in addition to making recommendations to developers and architects.

## **Programs & Policies**

## Community Land Trust/ Land Bank

Communities can use community land trusts (CLTs) and land banks (LBs) to access, maintain, increase, and sustain affordable housing for residents. CLTs are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land and long-term housing affordability.

The idea of a CLT and LB working together stems from LBs tending to have a "disposition" problem while CLTs typically face "acquisition" challenges.

CLTs sometimes have limited capacity to acquire property given high land costs and/or lack of clear titles to vacant land and parcels. A core challenge for LBs is the expense of holding and maintaining parcels of land for long periods of time while struggling to find the right redevelopment opportunity that will put the land back into productive use. This is particularly the case in economically distressed areas that have yet to attract development.



This strategy builds community wealth by providing residents the opportunity to access affordable home-ownership and build equity, while preserving long-term affordability for future generations.

#### **CLTs and Ownership**

A traditional CLT structures ownership in several distinctive ways:24

- Land is treated as a common heritage, not as an individual possession. Title to
  multiple parcels is held by a single nonprofit owner that manages these lands on
  behalf of a particular community, present and future.
- Land is removed permanently from the market, never resold by the nonprofit owner. Land is put to use, however, by leasing out individual parcels for the construction of housing, the production of food, the development of commercial enterprises, or the promotion of other activities that support individual livelihood or community life.
- All structural improvements are owned separately from the land, with title to these buildings held by individual homeowners, business owners, housing cooperatives, or the owners of any other buildings located on leased land.
- A ground lease lasting many years gives the owners of these structural improvements the exclusive use of the land beneath their buildings, securing their individual interests while protecting the interests of the larger community.

<sup>24</sup> Text from this section on CLTs was taken from John Emmeus Davis' article, Ownership: In Land we Trust, in the 2011 Community Land Trust Technical Manual



#### A cooperative LB/CLT structure

Allowing CLTs and LBs to work together can address these challenges because the CLT may acquire market-priced land from the LB, and the LB has a trusted redevelopment partner dedicated to long-term community improvement. This partnership can be a powerful development intervention in both highly developed and economically distressed urban areas.

BBR has a land bank incorporated in its enabling statute, giving it the authority to acquire tax sale, adjudicated, and foreclosed properties and convert them into productive use. It may also clear its properties of contaminants and debris, obtain clear title, and prepare the properties for redevelopment. BBR is responsible for maintenance, costs, appraisals, surveys, title abstracts, and all legal work associated with the properties in their LB. Partnering BBR's authority with the structure of a CLT can provide complementary solutions to issues of affordable housing and vacancy throughout the Plank Road Corridor.

BBR's nonprofit organization could function as the CLT entity. In this case, BBR's LB would transfer or sell land to the CLT for commercial or residential redevelopment. From there, the CLT would maintain ownership of the land but enter into leases with interested buyers for the use of residential or commercial structures or activities on that land.

The owner has a 99-year ground lease for the structure itself, which includes a modest monthly fee or no fee at all. The ground lease contains restrictions on the use and resale of all buildings, granting the CLT the right to determine how these buildings or other land uses are operated, owned, improved, and conveyed. The ground lease also contains a resale formula, allowing the owner to profit on the sale of the structure. When the owner decides to sell the property, the increased equity, if any, is shared between the current owner and the CLT, keeping the property affordable for future low- to moderate-income buyers.

## Potential funding sources for the LB and CLT partnership include:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: Federal funding that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs, such as affordable housing and economic development.<sup>25</sup> The Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) offers CDBGs and uses federal and state funds to advance the development of affordable housing for low and moderate income families.<sup>26</sup>
- CDBG-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR)
   Program: Federal funding that provides flexible grants to help cities, counties, and states recover from Presidentially declared disasters, especially in low-income areas.<sup>27</sup> Louisiana's Office of

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Community Development Block Grant Program". Accessed 10/01/2019, https://www.hud.gov/program\_offices/comm\_planning/communitydevelopment/programs.

<sup>26</sup> Louisiana Housing Corporation. "LHC's Commitment". Accessed 09/27/2019, https://www.lhc.la.gov/purpose-and-history.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Community Development Block Grant DIsaster Recovery Program". Accessed 10/01/2019, https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-dr/.

# Community Land Bank & Trust Hybrid

#### Land Banks (LBs)

- Public or quasi-public entities
- Acquire, maintain, and hold vacant, abandoned, and tax delinquent properties
- Prepare properties for redevelopment

#### LB Land Disposition Challenges:

- Finding the right developer/type of development
- Attracting developers/ development to economically distressed areas

#### **Community Land Trusts (CLTs)**

- Non-profit, community-based organizations
- · Ensure community stewardship of land
- Lease structures for affordable residential or commercial use
- · Provide permanent affordability by:
  - » building a resale formula in to ground lease
  - » sharing increased equity between current owner and CLT

#### CLT Land Acquisition Challenges:

- · High land costs
- · Lack of clear titles to vacant land

#### The solution: LB & CLT Hybrid!



This is more affordable because the LB can provide the CLT with land at an affordable price while cutting maintenance costs for the LB

#### Land:

- Donated or sold to CLT from the LB
- Owned by CLT

#### Structure:

- Built/developed by CLT or partner
- Owned by individual
- Resold to another qualified buyer at an affordable price

#### Ground Lease:

- Homeowner leases land from CLT
- Typically a 99-year lease at a modest monthly fee

Community Development - Disaster Recovery Unit (OCD-DRU) is dedicated to helping Louisiana's residents recover from hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike, Isaac and the Great Floods of 2016.<sup>28</sup>

- HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME): Federal funding that state and local governments use to exclusively create affordable housing for low-income households.<sup>29</sup>
- Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs): Local and national CDFIs provide low-interest financing for community development projects in distressed neighborhoods.
- BBR -- redevelopment authority for East Baton Rouge Parish with statutory powers to operate a land bank and work to clear title to tax sale and adjudicated properties.
- Mid City Redevelopment Alliance (MCRA): Not-for-profit organization that offers several programs that encourage homeownership and preservation.<sup>30</sup>
- Co-City Baton Rouge: Partnership between Co-City and BBR working on the proposed proposed Plank Road Community Land Bank and Trust.
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF): Used by state and local governments to pay for land, infrastructure improvements, planning expenses, and building rehabilitation/demolition throughout the improvement district.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Louisiana Division of Administration. "Louisiana Office of Community Development". Accessed 09/27/2019, https://www.doa.la.gov/Pages/ocd-dru/Index.aspx.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "HOME Investment Partnerships Program". Accessed 10/01/2019, https://www.hud.gov/program\_offices/comm\_planning/affordablehousing/programs/home/

<sup>30</sup> Mid City Redevelopment Alliance, Inc. "About MCRA". Accessed 09/27/2019, https://www.midcityredevelopment.org/.

<sup>31</sup> Good Jobs First. "Tax-Increment Financing", Accessed 10/01/2019, https://www.goodjobsfirst.org/accountable-development/tax-increment-financing.

#### CASE STUDY: Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (MWCLT) (Richmond, VA):<sup>32</sup>

- The first combined CLT/LB in the nation; legislation enacted in 2015.
- Focuses on creating affordable housing, but also manages properties that provide community amenities such as community gardens, orchards, green space and mini-parks.
- Receives properties from the City of Richmond through a "direct sale" process that localities use to transfer property that has gone through tax foreclosure.

Uses a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that describes the roles and obligations of the City and MWCLT. The MOA calls for the adoption of an annual plan by MWCLT that must be provided to the City by July 1 of each year. The MOA also calls for the creation of a nine member Citizen's Advisory Panel that will review and make recommendations to MWCLT on the disposition of all property provided by the City.

# Key Lessons from LB and CLT Partnerships —The Pittsburgh Neighborhood (Atlanta, GA):<sup>33</sup>

- Availability of and quick access to a portfolio of multiple vacant properties will help to "fast forward" residential and commercial development.
- Multiple streams of funding (public, private, philanthropic) streamline LB/ CLT collaborative efforts and help to finance redevelopment, reduce barriers to development, cultivate a communitydriven planning process, and attract new funders.

<sup>32</sup> Maggie Walker Community Land Trust. Accessed 10/01/2019, https://maggiewalkerclt.org/richmonds-cltland-bank-first-in-the-nation/.

<sup>33</sup> Elke Davidson. "Growing Partnerships Between Atlanta's Land Bank Authority, Community Land Trusts and Community Development Corporations. Accessed 10/01/2019, https://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/report-davidson.pdf.

## **Programs & Policies**

# Establish a Plank Road Overlay District

Most properties fronting Plank Road are classified as C-2 Commercial, which permits a wide range of development types - including automobile-oriented - by right. Creating a continuous, pedestrianand transit-oriented commercial corridor therefore requires design guidance beyond that provided by current land use regulations in the Plank Road Corridor.

Overlay districts are efficient zoning tools to guide new development and redevelopment that meets a community's vision. They apply additional standards over established zoning districts to properties within their boundaries. Like established zoning districts, uses contained in overlay zones are legally justified for regulation "as contributing to the health, safety, and welfare" of the community. However, when establishing a new overlay district, it is important to balance design goals with development viability.

This Plan recommends that the City-Parish Planning Commission consider the following provisions, at a minimum, in the development of a Plank Road Overlay District ordinance, which follow the Planning Commission's standard overlay district format:

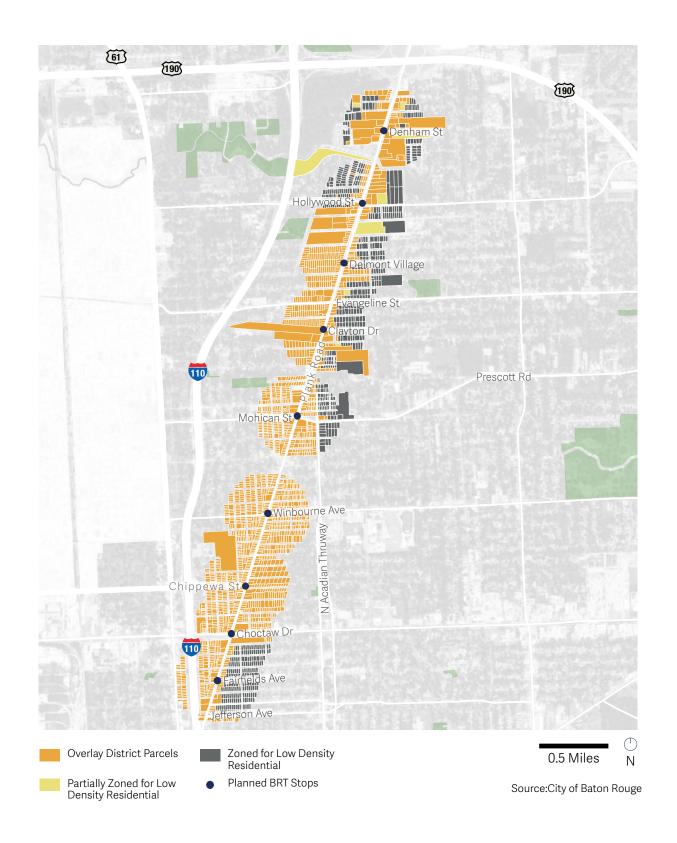
#### A. Purpose

The purpose of the Plank Road Overlay District is to strengthen the physical and economic character of Plank Road by encouraging walkable, transit-oriented, urban development within the area shown in the map at right, generally described as including lots fronting on Plank Road from 22nd Street to Airline Highway.



The overlay district would ensure that new development contributes to the vision of a transitand pedestrian-oriented built environment, that fosters a sense of place, reinforces neighborhood identities, and promotes an active street life.

# PROPOSED BOUNDARIES OF PLANK ROAD OVERLAY DISTRICT



#### **B.** Applicability

The provisions of this section shall apply to all development meeting the criteria established in Section 10.3.1, Enforcement and Review, of the City-Parish's Unified Developmment Code, as well as any expansion, reconstruction, or exterior renovation which requires the issuance of a building permit and involves 40% or more of an existing building or structure. An exterior renovation, expansion or reconstruction shall be calculated based upon the gross square footage under the roof.

#### C. Standards

#### 1. Building Placement

a) Primary Frontage:

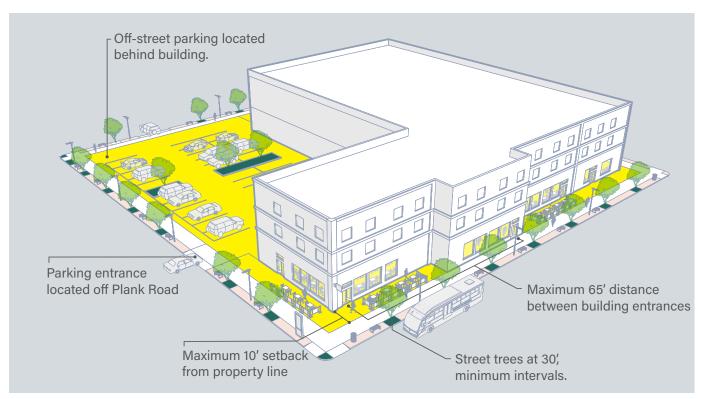
Buildings shall be located on the primary street frontage, as determined by the Planning Director, according to one of the standards identified below.

- i) Buildings shall be no more than 10' from the property line except if a courtyard with seating is provided. he courtyard area shall include the use of plant materials in at least 5% of its area to better define the space and soften its appearance from the street.
- ii) When site constraints preclude strict compliance with this requirement, the building line shall be no more than one foot behind the line created by that constraint.

#### 2. Building Design

#### a) Primary frontage

- i) To provide visual connection between activities inside and outside the building, 40% of the building façade between two and ten feet in height, as measured from the adjacent sidewalk, shall be made of windows or doors that are transparent, the bottom of which may not be more than four feet above the adjacent sidewalk. Windows shall not be mirrored or have glass tinted darker than 40% in order to meet this requirement.
- ii) Entrances must be placed no more than 65' apart. Buildings on lots with 130' of street frontage must have at least two entrances.
- b) All Other Building Frontages All other street-facing facades, other than those facing an alley, shall comply with either of the standards listed below
  - i) 30% of the building façade between two and ten feet in height shall be made of windows or doors that are transparent, the bottom of which may not be more than four feet above the adjacent sidewalk. Windows shall not be mirrored or have glass tinted darker than 40% in order to meet this requirement.



Above: Select provisions of a potential Plank Road Overlay District (for illustration purposes only)

ii) Have at least five of the following elements incorporated into the street-facing facade: (1) Masonry (except for flat, non-decorative concrete block); (2) Concrete or masonry plinth at the base of the wall; (3) Belt courses of a different texture and color; (4) Projecting cornice; (5) Decorative tile work; (6) Medallions; (7) Opaque or translucent glass; (8) Artwork or wall graphics; (9) Lighting fixtures; (10) Green walls; or, (11) Architectural elements not listed above, if approved by the Planning Director.

#### 3. Building Orientation

a) Buildings shall have their primary entrance oriented toward the primary street as determined by the Planning Director. The primary entrance shall be readily apparent as a prominent architectural component and visible from the street.

#### 4. Site Parking

- a) All off-street surface parking shall be located to the side or rear of the primary building. Parking areas shall comprise no more than 30% of the street frontage of the lot or tract and, on corner lots, may not be located at the corner.
- b) Minimum Parking Requirements i) A 50% waiver for off-street parking requirements may be provided for parcels within 800 feet of any transit stop.
  - ii) All affordable housing dwelling units within the Overlay District should be exempted from minimum parking requirements. "Affordable" should be defined as committed for a minimum 20-year term as affordable, through covenants or restrictions, to households with incomes at 60% or less of the area median income for a family where housing costs (rents, mortgages, utilities and condo,

homeowners or other association fees) do not exceed 30% of a family's income as verified on an annual basis.

#### 5. Pedestrian Ways

Where a sidewalk(s), multi-use path(s), or public transportation stop exists on the perimeter of a lot, a designated pedestrian access way shall connect the sidewalk, path or transportation stop to the primary entrance of the building. Pedestrian paths to buildings through parking lots shall be a minimum of five feet wide and clearly marked with paint, paving material, or other physical identification.

#### 6. Site Screening

Mechanical equipment and dumpsters shall be screened from view of all street frontages and adjacent properties with materials the same or a complimentary color and/or style as the building. If located on the roof, mechanical equipment shall be screened from view of these areas at ground level using the same color and/or a style compatible with the building façade.

#### 7. Site Signs

- a) Only the following types of signage shall be allowed: Awning signs, canopy signs, marquee signs, projecting signs, suspended signs, and wall signs.
- b) No billboards are allowed.

#### 8. Site Lighting

- a) Lighting shall be building-mounted at a maximum height of 12 feet with the exception of poles/structures in parking areas, plazas and public spaces. Pole-mounted lights shall be below 15 feet for non-directional lighting and 30 feet for directional lighting. All pedestrian access points shall be provided with building-mounted lighting and shall be visible from off-site. Architectural details on buildings may be up-lit in order to highlight these elements.
- b) Pedestrian lighting (free-standing or wall-mounted) shall be provided at one light for every 75 feet of street frontage or per an approved Pedestrian Lighting Plan.

# Establish a Plank Road Cultural District

The Louisiana Cultural Districts Program promotes culture-based community revitalization through a variety of tax incentives eligible within designated Cultural Districts. Within such districts, property rehabilitations are eligible for historic tax credits and tax abatements. Sales of original artwork within Cultural Districts are exempted from local sales tax. Downtown Baton Rouge and Mid City have already earned designation as Cultural Districts. The City-Parish may apply to the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development annually by the April 1 deadline.

The State Commercial Tax Credit program is currently set to expire December 31, 2021, and so longer-term access to this program will depend on renewal by state legislators.







Above: A Cultural District could incentivize redevelopment of these properties by providing tax credits and abatements.



Cultural District incentives would contribute to cultural expressions by encouraging the restoration of distressed, historic structures and the sale of original artwork.

# Small business assistance through CDBG funding

THIS STRATEGY ADDRESSES:

Commerce & Jobs

As mentioned in "Pop-Up Retail Spaces," BBR can provide funding for programs that encourage the development of microenterprises through the CDBG program, administered by HUD.

One of the eligible activities for CDBG funding is "Grants, loans, loan guarantees and other forms of financial support, for the establishment, stabilization, and expansion of microenterprises," in addition to activities that are "designed to bring commercial structures up to code or improve their facades."<sup>34</sup>

A program funded by CDBG that provides financial assistance for establishment, stabilization, expansion, and facade improvements would add a crucial set of resources for current and future Black business owners on Plank Road.

An example of such a micro-loan program is in Pittsburgh, where the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) of the city provides loans ranging from \$5,000 to \$30,000 for "working capital, equipment, inventory, and leasehold improvements."

The Program is part of the URA's strategy to "promote opportunities for those groups who have not had ready access to business financing...including minority- and womanowned businesses," and is funded "in part through the City of Pittsburgh, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) sources."<sup>35</sup>





Illustrative example of potential facade enhancement to a traditional Plank Road commercial storefront.

<sup>34</sup> HUD, "Basically CDBG for Entitlements, Chapter 8: Economic Development & Section 108," 2017, accessed 10/1/2019, https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Basically-CDBG-Chapter-8-Section-108.pdf

<sup>35</sup> Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, "Program Guidelines," Accessed 8/1/2019.

#### Mircoloan Program

Below is an example structure for a small business assistance program:<sup>36</sup>

**Funding:** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant and other sources of City-Parish funds

#### **Eligible businesses:**

- The project must be located on the Plank Road Corridor, south of Harding Boulevard/ Hooper Road and north of Bellvale Street.
- Businesses must be registered with the City-Parish.
- The small business must have five or fewer employees, one or more of whom owns the enterprise.
- Eligible businesses include, but are not limited to, retail businesses, service enterprises, small batch manufacturing firms, makers, and advanced technology concerns.
- Ineligible businesses include banks, savings and loan associations, nonindependently owned gas stations, multilevel marketing enterprises, used car lots, bars, beer distributors, non-profit organizations, check cashing outlets, and furniture and appliance rental shops. Must meet CDBG regulations.
- Must not be delinquent or in default on federal, state, or local taxes or any existing private or publicly financed loan and will be required to sign an affidavit to that effect.

#### **Eligible use of funds:**

- Acquisition, delivery, and installation of machinery and equipment directly related to the operation of the business.
- Capital for new sales growth, including accounts receivable and inventory.
- Leasehold improvements, such as facade renovations.
- Working capital for new sales growth. This will primarily include accounts receivable and inventory.

#### **Micro-Loan Parameters:**

- \$5,000 to \$30,000; maximum is \$30,000 or 90% of the total project costs, whichever is less.
- Minimum contribution requirement by the applicant of at least 10% of the total project, of which no less than 5% is a cash equity investment.
- Loans are secured with a pledge of assets, including lien positions on land, buildings, business assets, equipment, inventory, personal residence, and/or personal guarantees.
- The interest rate shall not exceed 2.0% per year and shall be fixed for the term of the loan.

#### Fees:

- \$150 application fee, with \$50 due at the time of application submission. \$100 due upon approval and return of signed Commitment Letter. All non-refundable. The application fee counts towards the applicant's equity requirement.
- 2% of the total loan is due at the time of loan closing.
- All filing fees will be the responsibility of the applicant.

<sup>36</sup> Modeled on the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh's Micro-Enterprise Loan Program.

# Loan repayment and forgiveness

One way to expand existing home repair and buyer programs throughout the Plank Road Corridor is to incorporate a loan repayment or forgiveness program.

Loan repayment or forgiveness programs can help mitigate costs for residents paying out of pocket for repairs. It could also mitigate costs for low- and moderate-income families interested in becoming first time home buyers. THIS STRATEGY ADDRESSES:

Community
Wealth

An example of criteria for a Home Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) with loan repayment includes:<sup>37</sup>

- For moderate income eligible households: Payment on loans is deferred for the first five years. Monthly principal-only payments begin in the sixth year of the loan, amortized over a 40-year period.
- For very low-income and low income eligible households: Loans will have no monthly payments.
- When all loans become payable: Regardless of household income, the entire loan amount becomes immediately due and payable if the borrower transfers the property, the property is refinanced (unless the refinance meets certain conditions), or the property ceases to be the borrower's primary residence.

<sup>37</sup> DC Department of Housing and Community Development. "Home Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) – Eligibility, How to Apply and Program Details". Accessed 7/18/2019, https://dhcd.dc.gov/page/hpap-eligibility-how-apply-and-program-details.

# Neighborhood improvement district (NID)

A neighborhood improvement district (NID) serves as the residential equivalent of a Business Improvement District (BID). Both are geographically bounded communities where businesses or property owners in the area pay dues that are used to provide public goods and amenities over and above what a municipality can or is willing to provide. These public goods and services include street maintenance, safety and security, construction/capital improvements, operation and maintenance of public green space, and marketing. Like a BID, a NID is composed of all property owners in the area - not just commercial property owners - and a governing board that makes decisions about how the area will be improved and how it will be financed.38

A NID within the Plank Road Corridor could be governed by residents elected by those within the NID's boundaries. The governing board could determine what amenities not provided by the municipality are of highest value and would provide the additional services.



A NID in the Plank Road Corridor would also transcend the provision of only aesthetic amenities. It could, for example, also subsidize productive and value-enhancing community amenities and sponsor healthy food events, additional security, and the creation of community gardens or cooperative food stores that specialize in healthy food alternatives. Alternatively, a NID could subsidize or otherwise work to attract desired businesses that might otherwise be reluctant to locate in the Plank Road area.

While NIDs have been developed in relatively high-income neighborhoods, they are unknown in low-income communities, in large part because their projects are typically funded through payments from residents. One issue that must be addressed in deploying a NID in the Plank Road Corridor is the basis for funding.

<sup>38</sup> Strategy concept and language provided by the LABoratory for GOVernance of the City as a Commons (LABGOV) based at Georgetown University and the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University. Many thanks to Manny Patole, Sheila Foster, and Clayton Gillette for their contributions.

Because NIDs, like BIDs, are typically funded by members' dues, the model has to be adapted to lower income communities. To put in place a Plank Road NID requires novel financing mechanisms, such as a combination of member dues, TIF financing and philanthropic and corporate support. Some level of member dues might be appropriate, because a significant literature demonstrates that goods and services that are provided by people who have some financial stake in their production are likely to be of higher quality than goods and services that are provided without investment by the recipients.

A NID creates a possibility for residents in a neighborhood to create and finance those improvements that have the highest value to them without the need for approval or funding from the municipality. They provide an opportunity for civic participation and empower communities that frequently have limited voice in determining the level of services they prefer. The officials of NIDs are typically elected by residents who reside within its boundaries. Residents may have equal votes or may have voting power allocated on some alternative basis such as square footage occupied.

# Tax Increment Financing

The State's Cooperative Economic Development laws allows local public entities to use tax increment financing (TIF) to fund investments in infrastructure and facilities that provide a public benefit.<sup>39</sup>

TIF works by freezing the tax base (either ad valorem (property), sales and use, or both) within a designated district and dedicating the incremental increase in tax revenue to a fund that supports projects within the TIF district. TIFs do not increase sales or property tax rates within the TIF district. The local government entity may borrow against future fund revenues to finance public projects, or to spend revenue as it is generated on services. TIF district structures may specify how revenue may be used and the lifespan of the district.

Louisiana permits several different types of TIF structures, for undedicated property, sales and hotel occupancy taxes.

#### **Ad valorem (Property) Taxes**

Louisiana law allows ad valorem tax increments to either guarantee the financing of development projects or provide direct financing.<sup>40</sup> Property values in the Plank Road Corridor are among the lowest in East Baton Rouge Parish. Increases in values will result in higher taxable assessments, which would generate additional property tax revenue.

However, property tax TIFs come with several drawbacks.

<sup>39</sup> La. R.S. 33:9022 (2002).

<sup>40</sup> La. R.S. 33:9038.33.

First, only undedicated, incremental tax revenue may be collected for the district fund without a vote. Undedicated East Baton Rouge property taxes are limited to a 3.32 mill "Parish Tax" that generated \$14.2 million in 2018 and a 6.03 mill "City of Baton Rouge General Fund" tax that generated \$12.3 million. Therefore, a large district would need to be drawn to generate enough revenue to fund projects and programs of any significance.

Second, revenue depends on the increase in value of property within the district, and this increase could burden homeowners with limited income. As such, issuance of revenue bonds funded by TIF proceeds requires a vote of approval by the majority of residents within an established district.

#### Sales and Use Taxes

Similar to property TIF, sales TIF captures the incremental gains in sales and use tax revenue from a designated district. This revenue may fund revenue bonds or other direct, economic development purposes, including public infrastructure. Again, only undedicated, incremental sales tax is eligible to accrue to a sales tax district fund. 2% of East Baton Rouge Parish's local sales tax is undedicated.

In the last two decades, several TIF districts have been created for the purpose of supporting new hotel construction, including the Holiday Inn Express, Hotel Indigo, Hampton Inn and Suites, Capital Hilton Hotel, Courtyard Marriott and Renaissance Hotel, to achieve a goal of 1,000 hotel rooms in downtown. However, these TIFs have served to subsidize and reimburse individual developers and businesses. A Plank Road Corridor TIF could rather fund public services and facilities.

#### **Establishing a Plank Road TIF District**

BBR's statute gives it authority to establish economic development districts simply through a cooperative endeavor agreement with the City-Parish. BBR-driven projects that anticipate generating significant sales tax revenue on parcels that are currently out of commerce - such as the Food Hub concept including a grocery store - are good candidates for introducing TIF to Plank Road.



# Keeping the Promise

Build Baton Rouge is committed to turning ideas into reality. If implemented successfully, the strategies detailed in this report will contribute significantly to achieving the community's vision for a healthy, prosperous, and resilient Plank Road Corridor.

This promise rests not just on the actions and the capacities of Build Baton Rouge, but also many of its government, nonprofit and business partners who participated in the planning process.

The Implementation Matrix that follows organizes all of the Plan's recommended projects, policies and programs in one place. Each strategy references at least one Equity Benchmark and includes recommended actions and responsible actors, supportive partners, and phasing through 2025.

The table at right summarizes potential funding sources eligible for recommended strategies and is organized by administering entity and applicable uses.

### **PROGRAMS & INCENTIVES**

			COMMERCIAL & COMMUNITY					
	SINGLE- FAMILY	MULTI-FAMILY	NMO	RENT	NEW	REHAB	NEW	REHAB
LA Housing Corporation								
CDBG - Community Development Block Grant							3	3
CHDO - Community Housing Development Organization								
CHAAP - CHDO Annual Awards Program								
HOME PROGRAM - Home Rental Housing Program								
HOUSING TRUST FUND								
LIHTC - Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program							3	3
MULTIFAMILY REVENUE BONDS							3	3
NEIGHBORHOOD LANDLORD RENTAL PROGRAM								
NOAH - Nonprofit Open Cycle Affordable Housing Program								
PIGGYBACK PROGRAM							3	3
WAP - Weatherization Assistance Program								
Louisiana Economic Development								
OPPORTUNITY ZONES	1		1					
RTA PROGRAM - Restoration Tax Abatement								
ENTERPRISE ZONE TAX CREDIT								
LA Office of Cultural Development / Division of	Hist	oric	Pres	ervat	ion			
FEDERAL HISTORIC REHABILITATION TAX CREDIT PROGRAM								
STATE COMMERCIAL TAX CREDIT PROGRAM								
Federal Program								
NMTC - New Market Tax Credit Program			2					

- 1. IRS regulations to clarify
- 2. Only if mixed-use
- 3. To be functionally related to residential development

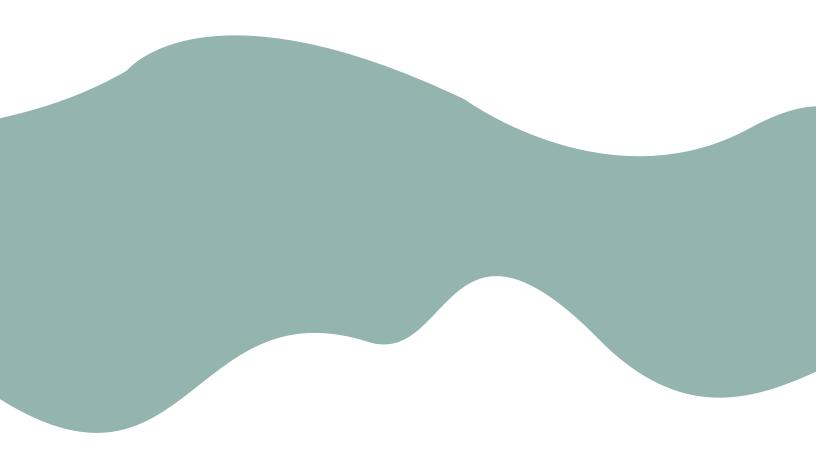
Strategy	Strategy Type	Equity Benchmarks	Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Lead Org.	Partner Orgs.	
			Complete NEPA documentation								BBR; Mayor's Office; CRPC;	
Build the Bus	Duelle et	Transportation	Complete preliminary engineering							0.470		
Rapid Transit project	Project	Options	Complete final design and approvals/permitting							CATS	DOTD; Transportation	
			Construction  Begin Operation								& Drainage	
Ensure street projects adhere to Complete Streets Policies	Policy	Transportation Options	Ensure that multimodal elements are included in all site/project designs							Dept. of Transpo. & Drainage; DOTD	Planning Commission	
			Acquire all site properties							-	Healthy	
		Commerce and Jobs;	Form agreements with identified tenants								BR; Baton Rouge Area	
Build the Plank Road Food Hub	Project	Community Wealth; Transportation Options	Secure CDBG and private financing							BBR	Foundation; Planning Commission; Department of Development	
			Complete design and approvals/permitting									
			Construction								Development	
Build the Plank Road Civic Center	Project	Cultural Expression; Transportation Options	Complete site acquisition; Secure first right of refusal to purchase property; Consult with institutional partners, including universities and local and state government agencies, to program space							BBR	Mayor's Office; Planning Commission; Department of Development	
			Complete design and approvals/permitting								Development	
Develop the Build Baton Rouge office/		Community	Construction  Secure financing; Acquire all site properties  Form agreements with identified tenants									
childhood learning, and	Project	Project	Wealth	Complete design and approvals/permitting							BBR	YWCA
mixed-income housing and renovate the Cedar Rose		Options	Construction									

Strategy	Strategy Type	Equity Benchmarks	Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Lead Org.	Partner Orgs.	
Develop the St.		Cultural	Secure funding. Form agreement with Society of St. Vincent de Paul								Society of St. Vincent de Paul	
Vincent de Paul Social Services	Project	Expression; Community Wealth	Complete design and approvals/permitting							BBR	Baton Rouge; Planning Commission;	
center		Woultin	Construction								Department of Development	
Facilitate development			Encourage adoption of Plank Road Overlay District							BBR	Planning Commission	
of a transit- oriented development at Choctaw and Plank	Project	Commerce & Jobs; Transportation Options	Formulate incentive package to encourage desirable commercial residential uses, including TIF financing							Mayor's Office; BRAC	BBR; Planning Commission; Department of Development	
Promote development of a pilot "Eco	Project	Cultural Expression; Health & Safety	Continue community design process by engaging residents in visioning for uses of landbanked property at Myrtlelawn Street							BBR	Co-City, BREC, LSU, BR Audubon Society, Bator Rouge Green	
park" in the Corridor		nealth & Salety	Develop schematic design and construction documents  Construction								and Southern's Urban Forestry Program	
Create Cultural		Cultural	Conduct extensive review of the history of the cultural and architectural history of the neighborhood; Elicit input from residents on ways they perceive local culture to be manifested in the neighborhood								Planning Commission; Arts Council of Greater	
Design Guidelines	Policy Ci	Cultural Expression	Develop specific cultural design guidelines for all scales of developments							BBR	Baton Rouge; Southern University; LSU Landscape Architecture	
			Implement guidelines through establishment of design review forum for residents to learn, discuss, and review design proposals in the neighborhood									

Strategy	Strategy Type	Equity Benchmarks	Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Lead Org.	Partner Orgs.		
			Determine feasibility of a hybrid LB/CLT for Plank Road based on existing state laws and enabling legislation.										
Establish a		Community	Form CLT governing body								Co-City; Mid City		
Community Land Trust	Program	Wealth  Determine the ground lease terms and resale formula, permitted use of land, and opportunities for homeowner and financial literacy training for residents.					BBR	Redevelopment Alliance					
Provide design guidance for public and private	Policy	Transportation Options; Health	Adopt a Plank Road Overlay District by formalize standards recommended in the Plan and incorporate into existing ordinance							Planning Commission	BBR		
redevelopment projects		& Safety	Establish green infrastructure standards for redevelopment projects							Dept. of Dev.			
Establish the Plank Road Corridor as a State- recognized Cultural District	Program	Cultural Expression; Community Wealth	Submit an application to the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development by April 1, 2020							Mayor's Office; Parish Council	BBR, Planning Commission; BR Historic Preservation Commission, LA Office of Cultural Development		

Strategy	Strategy Type	Equity Benchmarks	Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Lead Org.	Partner Orgs.	
			Establish, fund and operate a business microloan program							BBR		
			Support financing of affordable or pop-up retail spaces							BBR		
Invest in small		Cultural Expression;	Offer incentives for quality employers and retailers to move to Plank Road							BBR	CDFIs; BRAC; Mayor's Office, BRNEDD; LED;	
business development programs	Program	Health & Safety; Commerce & Jobs; Transportation	Facilitate the establishment of a business alliance or Main Street organization							BBR	EBR Workforce Development Board; LA Main	
F 3		Options	Re-establish facade program previously administered by BBR, identify funding from local sponsors such as banks							BBR	Street Program	
			Deploy EmployBR resources at multiple locations on the Corridor							Employ BR		
				Invest in loan repayment and forgiveness program								
Restore			Establish a Neighborhood Improvement District								City-Parish Finance Department	
blighted property and return vacant land and buildings to commerce	Program	Community Wealth; Health & Safety	Establish side lot program: Identify inventory of parcels in land bank potentially available as adjacent lots next to existing homeowners and transfer the property at low- or no-cost to an adjacent owner							BBR; Dept. of Dev.		
			Pair code enforcement in targeted areas with assistance programs								Parish Attorney's Office	
Establish Tax Increment Financing	Policy	Community Wealth	Establish TIF financing for Food Hub project and others anticipating significant sales tax revenue							Mayor's Office; Parish Council	BBR	

Strategy	Strategy Type	Equity Benchmarks	Actions	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Lead Org.	Partner Orgs.
Implement the East Baton Rouge Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan projects	Project	Transportation Options; Health & Safety	Identify funding and partnerships between agencies to leverage incremental implementation of project segments							Dept. of Transpo. & Drainage; DOTD	Planning Commission; BREC; Health partners
Incorporate public art into public-right- of-way projects and private development	Program	Cultural Expression	Develop a Plank Road Public Art Plan  Identify opportunities to incorporate art elements within redevelopment projects or site design							BBR	Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge; Walls Project
Reduce the Digital Divide	Program	Community Wealth; Jobs & Commerce	Identify grant opportunities to expand digital service and training							EBR Library; Employ BR	BBR
Expand existing home repair programs	Program	Community Wealth	Identify opportunities to expand offerings and secure funding for homeowner training programs, home repair programs, home financing programs, Rapid Roofing Reset Program, etc.							BBR	MCRA,/LHC/ CAFA
Establish small landlord repair program	Program	Community Wealth	Continue to seek NMTC, support small landlord lending and training programs							BBR	East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority, Southern University's College of Business
		Transportation	Conduct feasibility study for capping and/or re- aligning I-110 near DOTD headquarters							DOTD	Mayor's Office; Transportation & Drainage; BBR
Enhance Plank Road Gateway connections	Project	Options; Health & Safety; Cultural Expression	Identify opportunities to facilitate connections between Plank Road and improved Memorial Stadium area developments							BBR	DOTD; BREC
			Participate in conceptual design of I-110 redesign							BBR	DOTD; BREC



#### **IMAGINE PLANK ROAD**

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