

It was no surprise to those who attended the initial community meetings that the *number one* area of concern was related to the development pattern and ongoing economic fortune of the “Fat City” area. As previously identified within the community concerns section, this area was the focus of most comments and suggested as the number one priority area for the planning team to concentrate their efforts to effect positive change.



However, “Fat City” is but a small portion of the total project area.

The project team worked with the community to determine if the same items undermining the viability of “Fat City” were found elsewhere in the Metairie CBD. This led to several discussions on the future of the entire Metairie CBD area which were used to identify overall issue areas and collective visions for the CBD’s future.



Through this visioning process, it was discovered that many of the negative elements at-work in this one area could be found in varying degrees in other locations throughout the Metairie CBD project area. Correcting these perceived and actual negative elements across the entire project area, in an incremental fashion, was identified as the greatest single need to ensuring that all of the Parish, and the CBD project area, would benefit.

In addition, the area contained many positives or opportunities worth exploring. These included:

1. Location in reference to the population bases in Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Tammany Parishes;
2. Availability of office space for expansion of businesses;
3. Strong regional retail center;
4. Existing core of high-density development pattern that would allow for more mixed-use development opportunities not found elsewhere in Jefferson Parish.



The Vision for the Future

The vision for the future of the Metairie CBD project area is one based on the fundamental concept that area's suburban nature presents opportunities, which if harnessed, can allow the area to develop as a complementary core, hence a center of development in the region.

In some ways, this has already happened in the Metairie CBD. Looking at the combined skyline of Orleans and Jefferson Parish is evidence of the core creation phenomenon borne from the expansive local growth of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

The area, while recognized and identified as a Central Business District, is not the primary office core center in the region. Rather, it is one of several suburban centers that has grown up and is growing outside of the confines of Downtown New Orleans to serve the area's population.

Table 9 provides an overview of the vision statements collected from community meeting participants at the initial Brainstorming Sessions. The project team used these statements, along with areas of community concern, and explicit suggestions on items, which may be working well in other communities, as guides in developing the future land use and transportation plan.

Table 9 - Vision Statements

Future Metairie CBD Project Area

Community Responses			
<p>"It is 20 years in the future. You are looking through a window over the Metairie CBD. What do you think you are going to see?"</p>	<p><i>An area which has numerous medium/high rise office buildings (3+ stories), less apartment or residential character.</i></p>	<p>Land Use /Activities</p>	
	<p><i>An area which has a balance between business and residential where people live and work in the same area - walking environment.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has undergone a conversion to more office space and condominiums, additional restaurants, and possibly special CBD zoning.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has more business and office buildings - more of the same types of development that exist.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has a town center/pedestrian friendly development generated by lack of major transportation improvements - blend of home/office.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area in more apartments may be for assisted living arrangements and the community may be more involved. Slow change may occur in some areas.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has improved mass transit.</i></p>		<p>Trans</p>
	<p><i>An area which requires adequate parking lots - regionally placed to reduce parking problems.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area identified as a livable community with greenspaces and links between residences and other uses.</i></p>		<p>Livability</p>
	<p><i>An area which has sensitively developed as related to the Lakefront.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has beautified - especially Veterans Boulevard.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has a pedestrian environment that encourages walking between business and residential (family) areas.</i></p>		
	<p><i>An area which has a better aesthetic feel - through linear parks, hiding overhead power lines, softened streetscape.</i></p>		<p>Economic Development</p>
	<p><i>An area which has employed effective implementation elements to support development (incentives, education, enterprise zones).</i></p>		
<p><i>An area which has continued to hold office development and retail uses, with some additional high-rise in the northern end of the area.</i></p>			
<p><i>An area in which not much has changed since few businesses are involved.</i></p>			



Major Issues

Working through the comments coming from the Brainstorming Sessions, the project team identified the major issues resonating through the sessions. Confirmation of these issues was made at the focus group meetings where they were presented for review and comment. Refinements to these issue statements took place following the Focus Group session to incorporate comments received from the community.

Land Use Issue #1

Address incompatibilities between residential, commercial and industrial land uses and activities in the project area.

Review of the land use at a function and structure level revealed poor transition between residential, commercial, and/or industrial land uses and activities in the project area. From a planning perspective, the goal is to allow for transitions to occur, but to minimize their impacts through restriction on uses and/or design modifications between sites.

Land Use Issue #2

Create a more livable community by addressing aesthetics, code enforcement, image and open space needs.

The Metairie CBD provides challenges to its residents. Sidewalks are sometimes clogged with parked vehicles. Crossing a main street or catching a bus requires a significant amount of dexterity. There are no parks for the children to play in. The current mix of business and residential in some areas brings problems associated with litter, noise and crime. Even though the Metairie CBD contains many stately and striking structures and is turning around many large development sites, its immediate image in the minds of residents and property owners alike is one of blight, crime, and little opportunity.

Land Use Issue #3

Identify and provide incentives for redevelopment that overcome challenges faced due to current market conditions and lack of vacant land.

Location, location, location. These three words are the Metairie CBD's strength. Sitting at the main gateway to West St. Tammany Parish and oriented to the Interstate 10 corridor, the CBD's reach extends far and wide. Its central location within the regional population center has accounted for its development as the regional retail hub. It is this asset that has driven up property values, prices and rents. These costs are viewed as a major impediment that prevents certain types of new development that is perceived as a potential catalyst for rebuilding the Metairie CBD.

Transportation Issue #1

Transportation system connections failed to keep pace with the needs generated by the developed environment.

That you cannot get from "Point A to Point B" in the Metairie CBD without a car was expressed time and again in the public meetings. A combination of factors were cited as reasons including safety concerns for pedestrian movements due to the number of large profile, high volume major streets which divide the area, poorly marked pedestrian crossings, and limited transit alternatives.

Transportation Issue #2

Parking supply is not always compatible with demand generated by some activity sites.

Once you get where you want to go, there may not be a parking space waiting for you. In some ways, this could be viewed as an asset if your goal is to move auto drivers into transit. However, if your business depends on parking to accommodate employees and clients, lack of adequate supplies may require looking elsewhere.



Goals

During the Focus Group sessions, the project team collected comments and action-oriented statements made by the community in order to define the goals for the project. It is the intent of these statements to define those elements, which the Plan needs to contain in order to address the issues raised by the community.

Goal #1

Provide an identity and sense of community

The Metairie CBD is typical of most suburban centers. It is part business, part retail, part residential, and part industrial. Enhancing this mixed-use environment through planning provides the opportunity for the area to create its own unique image, scale, and sense of community.

Goal #2

Establish an environment, friendly to infill and redevelopment

With the exception of 22 acres, the Metairie CBD is fully developed. The plan's success in creating the community envisioned by residents and business owners will require that measures to encourage filling in the remaining vacant parcels and redevelopment be incorporated as part of the area's overall economic development strategy.

Goal #3

Utilize the plan to guide investments in needed infrastructure

Like most of New Orleans, the Metairie CBD is captive to many of the environmental constraints and considerations that rule over development on the Southshore of Lake Pontchartrain. Problems with drainage, high groundwater table, and subsidence are common. New developments in the area must be coordinated with investments in upgrading

infrastructure so that problems with flooding and other currently experienced in the area will not be exacerbated.

Goal#4

Embrace the plan as a "guide" and not as a "regulation"

Land Use plans, in themselves, do not carry the force of law. The intent of this plan is to be a guide for future development, with Zoning Ordinances, Building Codes and Subdivision Regulations based on this guide providing the authority to enforce the plan.

Goal #5

Ensure the plan can be implemented

The Metairie CBD has been the subject of multiple studies. Most have not been implemented. One of the questions asked by the community, project steering committee, Jefferson Parish and the Regional Planning Commission is to insure that this Plan includes an indicator of what is required to implement its recommendations.

Goal#6

Define those individuals and groups who have roles in the implementation process

To support the request of all involved to have a plan, that can be implemented, it is critical that the implementation process identify those actors and additional steps required to transition its recommendations from paper to reality.

Goal #7

Establish a periodic review process for the plan and its recommendations

All plans need to be reviewed on a regular basis. Rather than being a static document, it needs to be a living resource, which is routinely, examined and updated based on changes in the community and region.

