

Neighborhood Rebuilding

Jesse Kanson-Benav
Jonathan Cherry
Nathan Lemphers

Goals

Our first goal for this area of East Biloxi is to help **rebuild** the community that existed pre-Katrina. It is paramount that very few homes be disrupted by the proposed interventions. We do not intend to destroy a community in order to build a new one. Rather our aim is to be **respectful** of the people who have lived and continue to live in this community as it is being rebuilt.

Our second goal is to **reconnect** this neighborhood with the broader community. Isolated geographically, economically and culturally from other neighborhoods in the city, effort has been made to use street revitalizations along with a network of parks and open spaces bike paths to help integrate this neighborhood back into the city. **Maintaining** and **celebrating** its unique character is critical in community acceptance.

Our third and last goal is to **restore** and **enhance** Auguste Bayou. Neglected for years this undervalued asset holds immense promise for helping **lessen the damage** from small to medium sized storms. In doing so restoration can also create important wildlife **habitat** and be woven into the larger East Biloxi open space network.

Program and Implementation

Undergirding our implementation strategy is desire to offer viable, cost-effective and community strengthening options. Far from being finalized plan, these interventions are offered as a suite of possibilities.

Auguste Bayou. The private land surrounding Auguste Bayou, highlighted in the site plan, could be either turned into a conservation easement, sold to a land trust or purchased by the city. Once restored, the bayou could become a community asset instead of a liability. Future uses include: bird watching, walking, fishing and environmental education. Possible restoration projects include:

- Decommission a segment of Bayview Avenue to vehicular traffic.
- Break up the existing shoreline, creating islands both at the mouth of the bayou and further inland. These islands will be created from displaced earth from the shoreline and former road. They will not only enhance the remediating function of the bayou (by increasing edge area) but also create additional wildlife habitat.

- Dredge and extend the reach of the bayou along its historic course in East Biloxi.
- Remove invasive plant species and replace with native species.
- Artificial nesting poles and rookeries could be erected for several bird species, including egrets and herons.
- Create paths will skirt the edge of the restored bayou, maximizing safety for path users and minimizing disturbance to wildlife.

Penny Avenue and New Street realignment. Future planning efforts should pay close attention to the natural topography of East Biloxi. We propose a realignment of Penny Avenue, New Street, and Strangi Avenue north of Division Street, and locating new development on higher ground. This arrangement preserves a cluster of homes that survived Katrina, while reducing potential damage from future flooding. To the west of this proposed realignment, a storm water sewer can be daylighted, restoring an important section of Auguste Bayou. This will increase the capacity of the storm water system and provide recreational amenities to the local community and visitors. Development along this new one-way crescent could be bundled and sold in four or five unit clusters. Each cluster can have a variety of forms depending upon the needs of the homeowners or developers. As all homes in this area must be 12-15ft above ground because of FEMA regulations, attention must be paid to how such height will be incorporated into the development and how residents will access their homes. By clustering development, expenses like elevated sidewalks or even elevators could be effectively cost-shared among homeowners. Conservation easements in the back of lots abutting the bayou can create an effective buffer between development and the ecologically sensitive bayou.

This new crescent, along with many other streets in East Biloxi, could be better used to manage stormwater. By narrowing streets or reducing them to one-way, introducing swales, permeable pavers, or eliminating curbs, on-site rainfall management could reduce the strain on existing stormwater infrastructure.

Central Park. The recreation paths that come from Back Bay and through the restored Auguste Bayou then travel through a proposed central park that extends along low-lying land from Division Street south to Howard Avenue. In the lowest areas along the park, which require elevation of up to 15 feet above ground level, we propose a limited amount of duplex, townhouse, and fourplex residential development on vacant flood-prone lots. In addition, several small lots have been identified along natural drainage courses that extent east and west from the park. These lots could be preserved from future development to create new pedestrian and bicycle linkages, along with space for natural storm water collection. Like along the new crescent, the buried stormwater sewer will be daylighted until the rail crossing, creating a focus for the existing park. Amenities along

this park will include picnic grounds, a tot lot, and two soccer/football fields.

While a central park was advocated in the Living Cities plan for East Biloxi, the Living Cities plan recommends a much larger area of redevelopment and open space. In the entire "Redevelopment Area" identified in the Living Cities plan, our proposal would require relocation of only XX existing houses to accommodate the park, green spaces, circulation paths, and new development.

Rail Crossing at Park. The rail line which transects East Biloxi serves as a substantial barrier against north-south movement. Several options exist for enhancing access and providing a continuous open space network connecting the Back Bay to the ocean:

- **Pedestrian underpass** below the rail line. While the cost is minimal, safety and flooding hazards may exist with this option.
- **Level crossing.** With a fence and lights this option serves as a viable way for pedestrians to safely cross the tracks.
- **Bridge.** This stronger and more costly intervention offers the possibility to create a unique and useful way to safely cross the rail tracks. A bridge could potentially build upon the water tower located directly south of the tracks and use the structure's height to create an observation deck. From this deck one could see across the entire peninsula from the Back Bay to the Gulf Coast. This amenity could help draw tourists and residents from both the north and the south through the linear park and safely over the tracks.

Division and Oak Street - Discussion are currently underway among residents and business owners about the revitalization of the Oak Street corridor as an international commercial district. With this development Oak Street will become an important destination for East Biloxi residents and visitors. However, the presence of a large, gated industrial area along the south side of Division Street creates a disconnect from the neighborhood to the east. With the strong demand for housing in East Biloxi, the land upon which the industrial park sits is ideal for new residential development and is among the highest elevation in the vicinity. Extending Collier Street south into the industrial land will create new street frontage atop this high ridge, where new housing will be least susceptible to flooding. If developed as town-homes with four or five units, this project can add new housing stock to the neighborhood with density and scale that slightly increase but don't overwhelm the nearby neighborhood. Parking can be integrated into the space created by the elevated building.

Centering the new housing along the middle of this large block also creates the opportunity to take a more intensive approach to stormwater management along the Crawford Street edge of the block. Here the steeper slope intensifies the impact of stormwater runoff from high elevations into the nearby bayou. By leaving this side of the block undeveloped it increases the amount of permeable service

into which stormwater can infiltrate and reduce total runoff. The City of Biloxi could consider implementing a Planned Unit Development district for this area, giving unit density bonuses to developers who are willing to integrate infiltration trenches, detention ponds or rain gardens into their sites. In addition, the parcels along Crawford Street should be considered as the site for a new community garden. Public access could be ensured by donating the land to a conservation land trust, and maintenance responsibilities can be managed by residents who have garden plots.

The vitality of the new Oak Street commercial district can be continued into the neighborhood through mixed-use or residential-only buildings along Division Street. As narrow structures that minimize the building footprints, these units would represent a different residential type than the town-homes.

The present configuration of Division Street with a wide right of way is more appropriate for an arterial route than a mixed-use district. Sidewalks are currently extremely narrow, with inconveniently placed utility poles that create obstacles. To enhance the pedestrian experience along Division, the road width can be narrowed by extending the sidewalk to six feet and adding a four-foot bike path on both sides. This reduces the roadway to 36-feet, enough to accommodate traffic in two lanes with parking on both sides. Adding the bike path as an extension of the sidewalk will encourage more bicycle use as new riders will not have to confront the dangers of biking alongside vehicular traffic.

The blocks north of Division Street bounded by Crawford Street, Back Bay Boulevard, and Oak Street represent a similar opportunity to develop housing along higher elevations. The parcels along Back Bay Boulevard can be developed as a mixed-use corridor to provide commercial services to guests of the proposed adjacent casino development. Built to four or five stories, these new buildings can also provide new rental housing for residents and casino workers.

While retaining the existing housing along Crawford Street and Collier Street, new town-home developments can be developed on vacant parcels, in heights that present a transition in scale from the abutting single-story residential. In the center of this block is a long, narrow parcel owned by the City of Biloxi. Because the current configuration of streets and the homes that survived or were rebuilt since Hurricane Katrina, this block cannot be significantly reconfigured to make sure new housing is built on the highest elevations near the center of the block. Instead, a long, narrow parcel in the center of the block that is owned by the City of Biloxi should be utilized for a vegetated swale or infiltration ditch that can protect the downhill structures from stormwater as it runs down to the Bayou.