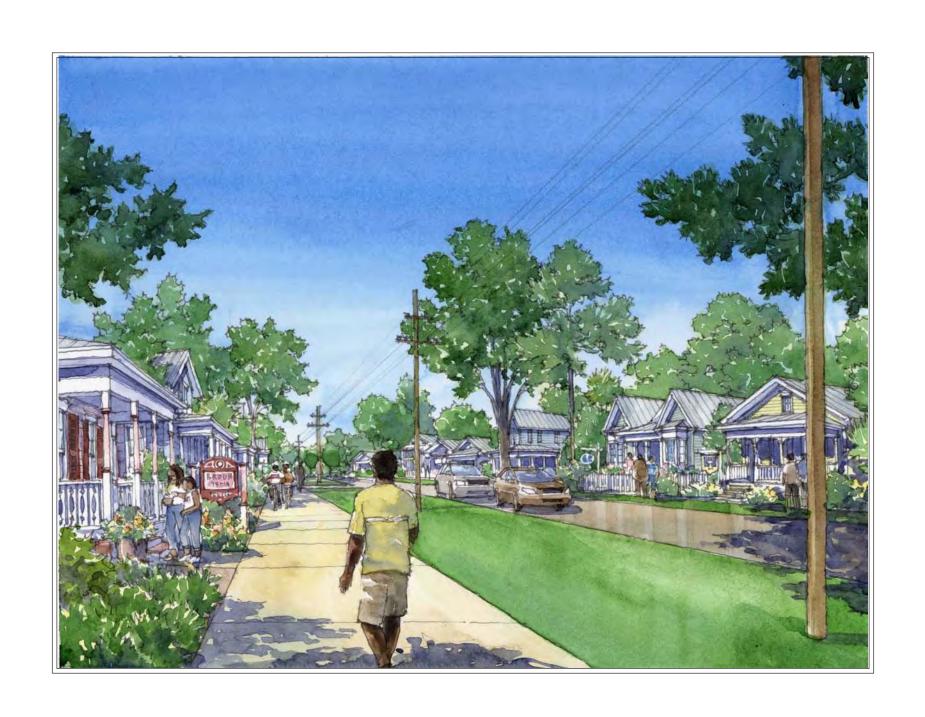
# WEST 30sNEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION PLAN COVINGTON, LOUISIANA

PREPARED FOR THE:

NORTHSHORE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

REVISED: OCTOBER 15, 2010





### **Contents**

					_	Page	
PLAN SUMMARY .			•			i	Commercial Development Principles
							Key Development Opportunities
I. INTRODUCTION							
Project Overview						1	Designing for Public Safety
Project Approach .						2	V. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PLAN
J 11							Overview
II. BACKGROUND FII	NDIN	GS					Social Strategies
History						6	Economic Strategies
Existing Sub-Areas .						8	Housing Strategies
Vacant Parcels						9	Tiousing offacegies
Street Types & Condition						10	VI. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY
Community Facilities .						14	Organization
Community Parks .						15	Public Policies
Existing Zoning						16	Costs
Socio-Economic Condition						17	Funding
Community Survey: Key						18	Priorities
Services & Programs .				•		19	Quick Victory Project
Summary of Public In Public Opinion Survey Key Planning Principles . IV. THE PHYSICAL PL		•		· ·	· ·	20 21 22	APPENDICES Appendix A: Socio-Economic & Housing Assessment Appendix B: Public Opinion Survey Results Appendix C: Massing Diagrams
Plan Overview .	,			•		23	Appendix D: Funding Sources
Columbia Street .				•	•	24	Appendix D. Funding Sources
Columbia & Tyler .						25	
Justice Center Area .				•		26	
Tyler Street						30	
Harrison Curriculum Cen	ter					31	
27th & Tyler Area .						32	
27th Avenue				•		35	
Mixed Use Neighborhoo						36	
Industrial Areas & Contr		Corrido	ors	•	•	38	
Downtown						40	
Land Use Plan .						42	
Transportation						44	
Utilities & Infrastructure						45	
Greenway & Parks .						46	
Housing				·	ē	47	
		•	-	-	-		

### Acknowledgements

**Committee Members** 

Councilman Lee Alexius Cindy Harlan Reverend Katherine Amedie Jesse Hartley

Randy Aultmann Michael Hunley Nahketah Bagby Mark Johnson

Lucinda Keller

Mary Ann Baham

Councilman Trey Blackall

Trey Blackall Dick Knight
Hattie Brown Greg Longino
Andrew Bullard Horace Martin
Sherlette Burkhalter Jimmy McKee

Reverend Mallory Callahan Mallery Mele

Mallory Callahan Mallery Mele

Tim Carpenter
Rob Mingo
Robert Celestine
Sheila Page
Scott Chotin
Leslie Patton
Maureen Clary
Bernard Penn
Vera Clay
Mary Regan
Edgar Cretin
Jessie Richardson
Melvin Crocket
Jan Robert

Betty Cronin Kenneth Robertson
Councilwoman Frances Dunn Glynn Robinson

Frances Dunn
Ioana Garrett
Tammie Groover
Carmeletta Guy
Glynn Robinson
Dartanian Sanders
Jeff St. Romain
Wayne Thompson

Neighborhood Survey Team

Sheila Page - Chair - YSB

Lee Alexius

Nahketah Bagby

Mary Baham

Bonnie Champagne

Frances Dunn

Ioana Denise Garrett

Johnnie Golden

Tammie Groover

Vera Clay

Maureen Clary

Diane Davis

Beatrice D. Penn

Dartanian Sanders

Ella Selmon

**Meeting Locations** 

Collins Boulevard Baptist Church

Doughty Chapel Church Faith Bible Church

Talui Dible Church

Greater Starlight Baptist Church

**Printing** 

Lonnie Tucker

Sequita Walker

Mayor

Reverend

Reverend

**Candace Watkins** 

Nathan Young, III

Annie Smith

Lillie Tillison

Sequita Walker

Marilyn Wenzel

**Sharlet Winston** 

Marilyn Wentzel

Alfred Young

Mele Printing

**Headquarters Building** 

Rob Mingo

**Architectural Services** 

MSH Architects. LLC

**Website Services** 

Michael Hunley

# PLAN SUMMARY

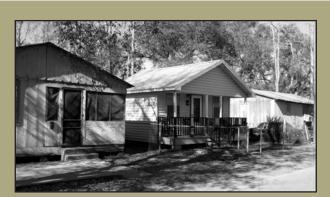


#### **Project Overview**

This planning project and resulting plan document are intended to revitalize Covington's West 30s Neighborhood. The study area, as illustrated in the map at right, consists of two distinct areas. The "primary" study area is the core residential area (outlined in green), while the "secondary" study area (outlined in blue) is peripheral and includes downtown to the south, the area east of North Collins Blvd., and the northerly section adjacent to Hwy. 190. The planning phase utilized an intensive public participatory process that empowered area residents and ensured community buy-in. The plan's implementation will requires several years of focused dedication. Although a variety of individuals and entities are key stakeholders in the project, the following groups are the primary sponsors who have worked with the community and project consultants: Northshore Community Foundation, Friends of the West 30s, and the City of Covington. The Northshore Community Foundation, based in Covington but serving the entire "Northshore" region, funded this project.

"As go the cities, so go the suburbs. You can't run from the problems of urban areas."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

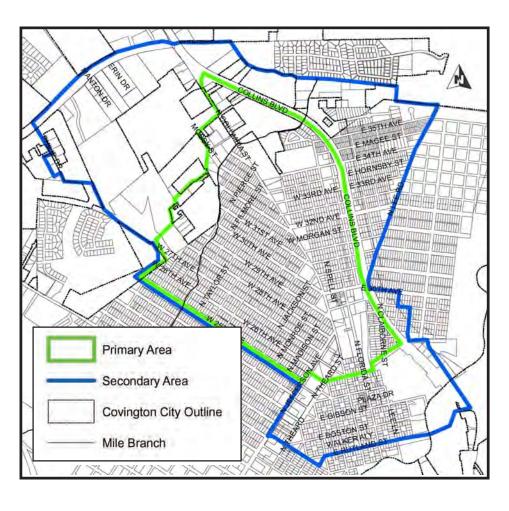


There are numerous economic, social and physical challenges facing the West 30s Neighborhood, but one of the most fundamental is substandard housing.

### Plan Focus

This plan ad-

dresses both physical and socio-economic issues. While the plan is sequenced to begin with the physical planning issues because that approach makes the overall plan easier to understand, the social and economic issues are the most important ones.



### **Project Approach**

The project approach included an extensive degree of public input at each key step. The following seven-step process was used to carry out this planning project:

Task 1.0: Community Organizing & Leadership Development

Task 2.0: Research & Analysis

Task 3.0: Visioning & Public Relations Campaign

Task 4.0: Charrette & Concept Plan

Task 5.0 Draft Plan Preparation

Task 6.0: Presentation & Revisions

Task 7.0: Implementation & "Quick Victory" Project



The public
workshop of the
five-day charrette
was the most
dynamic step of the
process. Citizens
were "deputized"
as planners to
develop their own
plans for the
neighborhood.

#### **Socio-Economic Strategy**

#### **Social Strategies**

- Community Wellness Center relocate it to the West 30s' core and improve it
- Create a Community Center and recreational facilties near 27th and Tyler
- Expand the existing Community Gardens program throughout the West 30s
- Improve activities for youths, including a new Boys & Girls Club facility
- Enhance transportation services for West 30s residents

#### **Economic Strategies**

- Replace the existing industrial uses near 27th and Tyler with an Artisan Industrial Village. Crafts might include metal working, foods, wood working, etc.
- A Health Business Incubator should be created as part of the Wellness Center
- Establish a Contractors Corridor along Collins Blvd. and Ronald Regan Hwy.

#### **Housing Strategies**

- Prioritize the rehabilitation of older housing and require compatible infill houses
- Designate one or more Neighborhood Investment Districts which utilize a "carrots" (financial incentives) and "sticks" (regulatory enforcement) approach
- Other strategies include a Rental Housing Maintenance Cooperative, weatherization and energy conservation, and diversification of the housing mix

# PLAN SUMMARY





This rendering illustrates the future build-out of the Justice Center Area in accordance with this plan (#2 at right). Most development on the east (left) side of Columbia is existing, while most on the west side is new infill development, including the plaza fronting Columbia.



Identified in the Concept Plan map at far right as Office Transitional (#4), this rendering depicts a build-out scenario for 27th Avenue looking southeast from Van Buren Street. While a residential character would be retained, small scale commercial uses would be permitted.

#### **Implementation Strategy**

- *Organization* A Community Development Corporation (CDC) should be established to partner with the City, Parish and numerous relevant entities
- Zoning Adopt new zoning consistent with this plan, as well as design overlay districts for key corridors and a residential conservation overlay district
- Building Codes Establish a Code Compliance dept. for improved compliance
- Funding A variety of potential sources exist for implementation, including numerous federal sources for public sector initiatives
- *Priorities* Recommendations are categorized as near term (yrs. 1-3), mid term (yrs. 4-6), and long term (yrs. 7-10), but creation of a CDC is a top priority
- *Quick Victory Projects* In addition to a CDC, potential projects include: a gazebo/picnic shelter at Atkins Park, new community gardens, gateway treatments, a demonstration new infill house project, and bicycle police officers

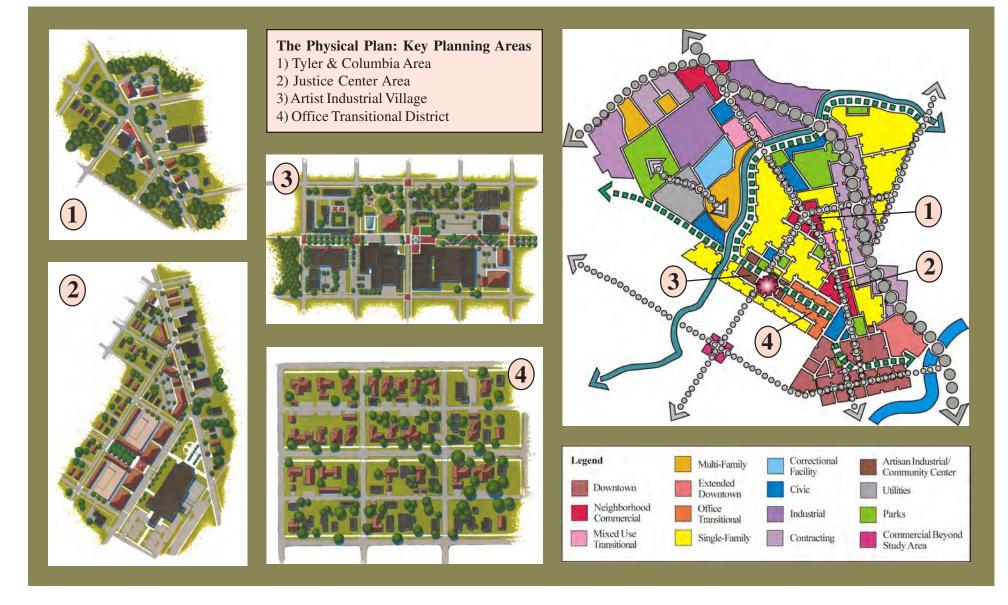
#### How Will This Plan Help West 30s Residents?

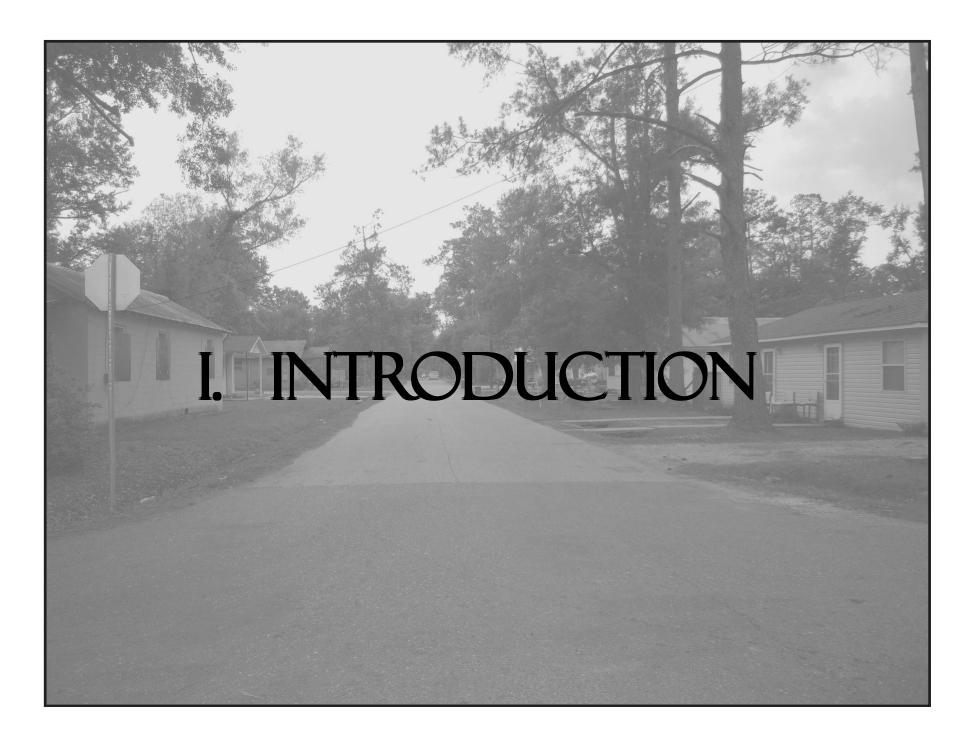
If implemented successfully over time, the plan will achieve the following:

- A safer neighborhood with less crime and a more positive image
- Improved housing conditions and a greater variety of housing types
- An enhanced public realm, including streetscapes, greenways and parks
- Expanded job opportunities, education/training, health services, and activities for all West 30s citizens, particularly children, teens and seniors

### What Can West 30s Residents Do to Help?

- Read and understand the plan document, and attend relevant meetings
- Join any organizations that are part of the West 30s revitalization efforts
- Participate in the West 30s neighborhood crime watch program
- Even if you rent, enhance your property (landscaping, house painting, etc.)
- Utilize existing and new programs for education, training and social activities







# SECTION CONTENTS

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

### PROJECT APPROACH

- TASK 1.0: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- TASK 2.0: RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
- TASK 3.0: VISIONING & PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN
- TASK 4.0: CHARRETTE & CONCEPT PLAN
- TASK 5.0: DRAFT PLAN PREPARATION
- TASK 6.0: PRESENTATION & REVISIONS
- TASK 7.0: IMPLEMENTATION & "QUICK VICTORY" PROJECT



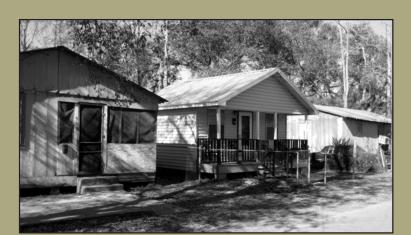
### **Project Overview**

This planning project and resulting plan document are intended to revitalize the area known as the "West 30s Neighborhood," located in the northwest portion of Covington. The study area, as illustrated in the map at right, consists of two distinct areas. The "primary" study area is the core residential area (outlined in green), while the "secondary" study area (outlined in blue) is peripheral and includes downtown to the south, the area east of North Collins Blvd., and the northerly section adjacent to Hwy. 190. The project's initial planning phase lasted approximately one year and utilized an intensive public participatory process that empowered area residents and ensured community buy-in. The plan's implementation will requires several years of focused dedication. Although a variety of individuals and entities are key stakeholders in the project, the following groups are the primary sponsors who have worked with the community and project consultants:

- Northshore Community Foundation
- Friends of the West 30s
- City of Covington

The Northshore Community Foundation, based in Covington but serving the entire "Northshore" region, has funded this project. "As go the cities, so go the suburbs. You can't run from the problems of urban areas."

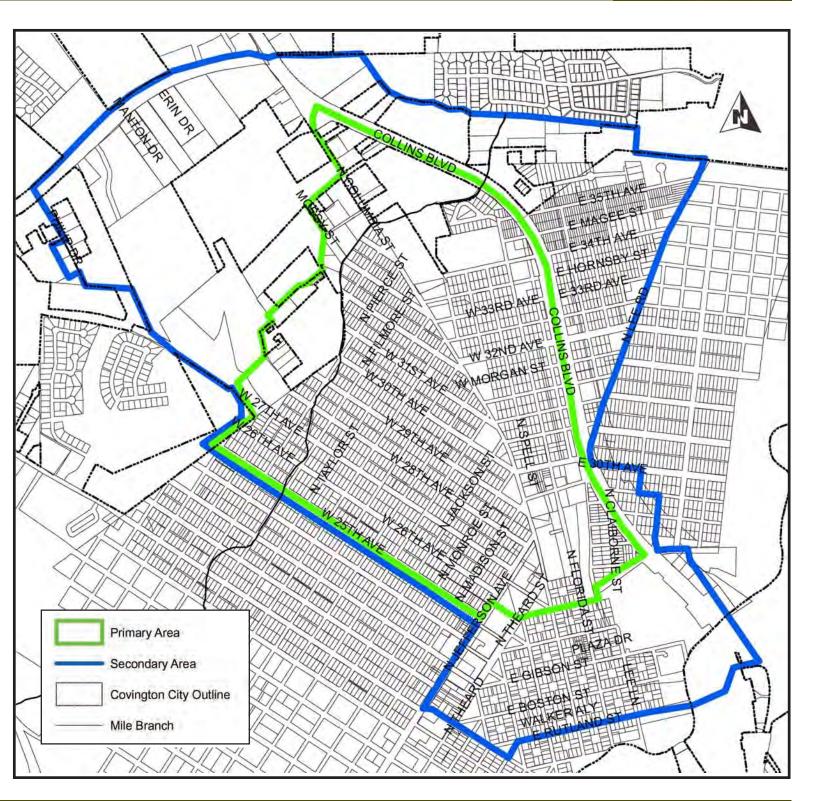
- Stakeholder Meeting Participant



There are numerous economic, social and physical challenges facing the West 30s Neighborhood, but one of the most fundamental is substandard housing. It is a key objective of this plan to enhance the condition of existing housing, and to provide higher quality new housing in a variety of types.

#### **Plan Focus**

This plan has two key areas of focus. Geographically, the main focus is on the "primary" study area, which consists of the core residential area. With regard to issues, the greatest focus is on social and economic issues, which are paramount. Nevertheless, to best convey the many ideas contained within this complex plan, the document has been necessarily sequenced to begin with the physical planning issues.





### **Project Approach**

The following seven (7) step process was used to carry out this planning process:

#### Task 1.0: Community Organizing & Leadership Development

#### Task 1.1 Community Organizing Strategy

Key members of the Project Team and the Project Steering Committee had conversations regarding the process already under way for identifying potential leaders within the neighborhood. Based upon those conversations, the Project Team drafted a written summary strategy to assist the Project Steering Committee in continuing that effort.

#### Task 1.2 Small Area / Sector Meetings

These meetings occurred the day before the Task 1.3 Leadership Development Training within area churches. They were designed to be informal and to give participants a strong comfort level with the process and the consultant team representatives.

#### Task 1.3 Leadership Development Training

Once the strategy for community organizing was determined and scheduled, two key members of the Project Team led a leadership development training workshop with neighborhood participants. The intent of this sub-task was to train and motivate residents of the neighborhood to be actively engaged in the subsequent planning process and to help recruit their neighbors as participants. It included a "crash course" in how local government works, including planning and implementation policies. Prior to this three (3) day trip for the Project Team, a Leadership Training Program - including a PowerPoint presentation and "hard copy" handout materials - was created by the Project Team. It is noteworthy that the turnout for this training was much lower than anticipated and the workshop had to be adapted to better fit the participants' interests and needs.

#### Task 2.0: Research & Analysis

This critical task served as the research and diagnostic phase on which the balance of the work relied. The Project Team performed the sub-tasks described

below over a two (2) day trip to Covington, as well as through work conducted prior to and following this trip:

#### Task 2.1 Review of Background Information & Existing Plans

Prior to making the initial trip to Covington, the Project Team gathered and review key information to gain insights into the project's context. Such information included existing land uses, zoning and development regulations, previous plans and studies, economic and demographic data, real estate market information, base map data, aerial photo maps, and historic resources.

#### Task 2.2 Kick-Off Meeting & Study Area Tour

This meeting with local representatives, including the Project Steering Committee, fine-tuned the project details and allowed the Project Team to gain additional insights from the local representatives. The study area tour was led by local representatives, with additional follow-up work by the Project Team as part of Task 2.3. During this task, the team was also provided with available information not previously provided up to this point.



The walking tour of the neighborhood was led by the Mayor, City Planner, and the Council person for the neighborhood.

#### Task 2.3 Physical Analysis

As part of the initial fieldwork for the project, the Project Team evaluated the neighborhood's general physical characteristics through mapping, measurements, field notes and photography. Based upon that field research and existing data, the Project Team conducted an evaluation of the study area's existing conditions, with an emphasis on:

- Existing land uses
- Buildings/sites with potential for enhancement
- Buildings/sites with potential for redevelopment
- Streetscapes
- Streets and parking
- Existing/potential public spaces
- Pedestrian circulation

#### Task 2.4 Economic & Market Assessment

To understand the West 30s Neighborhood's overall market context, and to subsequently conduct a reality-based neighborhood revitalization plan, the Project Team conducted an economic and market assessment. This assessment determined the neighborhood's opportunities for housing, retail, services, offices and institutional uses based on the following key components:

#### Background Analysis

- Economic profile, including economic and demographic trends, to understand the "drivers" of demand for various uses
- Interviews with key business owners and/or operators; brokers and leasing agents; economic development and business association representatives; institutional representatives
- Inventory of existing land uses to the extent that such data was readily available (housing units by tenure, square feet of businesses by type, etc.)
- Analysis of factors impacting the neighborhood's marketability, including a review of pricing (sales and rents), ownership, product mix, absorption history, etc.
- Identification of possible market opportunities as input to the planning process



#### Neighborhood Strategic Inputs

This component of Task 2.4 expanded upon the background research and analysis outlined above. Key findings and recommendations of the analysis and strategic inputs were addressed here as part of Task 2.0 and integrated into the balance of the neighborhood revitalization plan as part of Task 5.0, as follows:

- Overall strategies to economically reposition the neighborhood
- Identification of possible development or redevelopment project opportunities based on market conditions
- Marketing strategy based on market opportunities

The process yielded an understanding of the possible market opportunities for various types of development, rehabilitation, and revitalization within the study area. For example, with regard to retail, the assessment helped identify opportunities for re-merchandising, entrepreneurship (community-based business development).

opment), expansion, or development of retail space within the study area. Specific types of retail uses or businesses (the "retail mix") were identified as market opportunities, along with initial place-making and marketing concepts. Initial baseline trategies were provided to indicate how business creation, marketing, and development can occur to help strengthen the area's image, resident access, and marketability. This task did not constitute a full retail market analysis, which would project the demand for different types of retail businesses. Rather, it was a first-stage assessment to identify opportunities and possible strategies. The same applies to other uses, including housing and offices.

#### Task 2.5 Residents Survey

While not part of the project's original scope, it was determined as the project evolved that more information would be needed regarding a wide variety of issues impacting neighborhood residents. Also, because the survey would be conducted by community volunteers on a door-to-door basis, it was hoped that the survey might help to further promote the project in light of the relatively low public turnout for the previous meetings. Examples of the types of information obtained included the person's housing tenure situation (own versus renting), employments, household income, expenditures, and utilization of social services.

The Project Team provided survey training for the community volunteers who then implemented and tabulated the survey results. The results were then analyzed by the Project Team to help inform the subsequent plan, which included comparing the results with those of a similar survey conducted in previous years.

#### Task 3.0: Visioning & Public Relations Campaign

In addition to work performed before and after the Task 3.0 Project Team trip to Covington, this task included a three (3) day trip to Covington by key Project Team members on February 23-25, 2010. The following sub-tasks were performed:

#### Task 3.1 Stakeholder Focus Group Meetings

The Steering Committee identified key stakeholders who could provide useful information and perspectives on the various issues affecting the neighborhood. Five (5) meetings with various stakeholder groups were conducted, with each meeting including up to ten (10) individuals having a common interest in the neighborhood. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour, and examples of stakeholder groups included the following:

- Residents meeting
- Property owners and real estate professionals meeting
- Business owners and operators meeting
- Community-wide interests meeting
- Public officials meeting

#### Task 3.2 Leadership Interviews

Building upon the leadership development efforts that previously occurred, the Steering Committee identified key leaders in the community whose input and support is critical to the success of the plan and its subsequent implementation. Key members of the Project Team conducted five (5) interview sessions with individual leaders and/or small groups of leaders.

#### Task 3.3 Public "Kick-Off" Meetings and Opinion Survey

Two (2) similar meetings occurred on separate evenings. One targeted neigh-

borhood stakeholders with respect to the meeting content and location, while the other targeted the broader community. These interactive evening forums featured the following components:

- Introduction of local representatives and the Project Team
- Explanation of the project process and objectives
- Identification of the neighborhood's challenges and opportunities
- Identification of other model neighborhoods
- Administration of an opinion survey

The opinion survey was created in PowerPoint with a series of specific questions and supporting graphics on key issues for the study area. Meeting participants were given a hard-copy (printed) version of the survey form to indicate their habits, opinions and preferences. The Project Team representatives walked participants through the survey using PowerPoint while the participants completed their survey forms. NCF tabulated the results of the survey, and the Project Team then analyzed the results.

#### Task 3.4 Public Relations Campaign

This task - targeted to the broader community - consisted of the following:

#### Press Releases

The Project Team prepared a series of press releases to help promote the West 30s Neighborhood and the planning project.

#### Website Content

The Project Team provided NCF with ideas, text, and graphics to communicate the project to the balance of the community via a website.

#### Task 4.0: Charrette & Concept Plan

Although the overall project methodology was designed to encourage strong public input throughout the life of the project, Task 4.0 offered one of the best opportunities for meaningful "hands-on" involvement of local and neighborhood representatives - including the Project Steering Committee, public officials, key stakeholders, and the public in general. The goal of the charrette process was to provide a forum for the public to achieve a consensus on the future of the neigh-



borhood. The most tangible outcome of the charrette was the creation of the Concept Plan for the West 30s Neighborhood. This five (5) day task conducted in March of 2010 required strong teamwork between the Project Team. The following sub-tasks were conducted:

#### Task 4.1 Follow-Up Field Work (Day 1 / Day 2 - morning & afternoon)

This task gave Project Team members another opportunity prior to the evening Public Workshop to build on previous impressions of the study area gained during Tasks 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0. In particular, examples of land uses, development and urban design features in the neighborhood that "work" and "don't work" were identified. Also, field information not previously obtained, but since recognized as necessary, was gathered as part of this task. The Project Team also used this time to create a conceptual diagram of the study area that identified existing conditions and issues, conveying them to the public in a highly-graphic manner.

#### Task 4.2 Public Workshop (Day 2 - evening)

Prior to Task 4.0, NCF recruited participants to be involved in the Public Workshop. Participants included key stakeholders representing a variety of interests in the study area. Among the stakeholders, the City government - including the Project Steering Committee - was well-represented, as well as neighborhood residents, business owners and institutional leaders. The Project Team, City representatives and Public Workshop participants gathered at the charrette facility (Faith Bible Church) and achieved the following steps over a roughly three-hour period:

#### Workshop Orientation

The Project Team consultants presented the following items:

- Workshop Purpose & Overview
- Background Research Findings
- Results of the Public Input to Date
- · Workshop "Ground Rules"

#### Planning Session

Participants were split into teams of approximately ten (10) members each, and each team created their own concept plan for the neighborhood. The concept

plans were created on "existing conditions" base maps with the help of colored markers coded to particular land uses and issues. Project Team consultants helped facilitate the process and answered questions.

#### Workshop Team Presentations & Wrap-Up

Following the completion of the Planning Session, the Workshop Teams reassembled into a single group and one or more members of each Workshop Team presented their plans. After each presentation, there was time for questions and comments. Following the Workshop Team presentations, the Project Team consultants concluded the evening by identifying common elements between the various ideas, and suggested how those ideas might be combined to form the basis for the Concept Plan that the Project Team consultants would produce as a prelude to the ultimate detailed plan.

#### Task 4.3 Concept Plan Development (Day 3 through Day 5)

Based upon the Task 1.0 community organizing and leadership training, the Task 2.0 research and analysis, the Task 3.0 visioning and PR campaign, and the results of the Day 2 Public Workshop, the Project Team developed the Neighborhood Concept Plan. The Concept Plan included an illustrated plan map and schematic site plans for key locations. It addressed the following key issues:

- Natural and historic resources
- Land uses
- Transportation and parking
- Buildings, urban design and public spaces
- Economic development
- Housing
- Social issues and public safety

At a point relatively early during this task (afternoon of Day 3), the Project Team met with the Project Steering Committee and key local officials and NCF representatives to receive feedback on the work accomplished up to that point of Task 4.0.

#### Task 4.4 Concept Plan Presentation (Day 4 - evening)

This evening meeting was widely-publicized and included the following compo-



The public workshop of the five-day charrette was the most dynamic step of the process.
Citizens were "deputized" as planners for the evening, and they formed teams that developed their own plans for the neighborhood.

#### nents:

- Opening Comments & Project Methodology
- Overview of Existing Conditions
- Results of the Market Assessment
- Explanation of the Public Input Results
- Presentation of the Concept Plan

The majority of time was dedicated to the Concept Plan, as opposed to the background information. Because of the importance of public interaction, a generous amount of time was also provided for an open discussion.

#### Task 5.0 Draft Plan Preparation

Based upon the public's and NCF's response to the Concept Plan presented during Task 4.0, the detailed draft plan was prepared. Components of this plan include the following:

#### Task 5.1 Physical Improvement Strategy

#### Illustrated Physical Master Plan

• Land use plan color coded by use (densities, housing types, mixed uses, etc.)



- Urban design plan illustrating streets, sidewalks, public spaces, parking and buildings
- Public space designs of parks and plazas

#### **Buildings**

- Building heights and setbacks
- Building scale and massing
- Facade design openings, orientation, etc.
- Roof forms

#### Transportation, Parking & Gateways

- Streets layout and connections
- Street and streetscape cross-section designs
- Alley locations
- Traffic calming opportunities / pedestrian facilities
- On-street and off-street parking location, design and management
- Mass transit
- Potential neighborhood gateway locations and treatments

#### *Infrastructure*

- Utilities
- Sewer and water
- Stormwater drainage

#### Key Plan Graphics

A specific amount of money was earmarked for key plan graphics to paint a vivid picture of the plan's implementation.

#### Task 5.2 Economic Development Strategy

This plan section includes the following four elements:

#### Branding & Market Positioning

This section describes the image or "identity" that should be conveyed to help market the West 30s Neighborhood to potential new residents, and it makes recommendations on the market position that the neighborhood should carve out.

#### Market Opportunities by Land Use

This plan section identifies opportunities for the various housing types that might be supported by the consumer market, as well as supporting retail, service, dining, office and institutional uses.

#### Business Development

This section of the plan features recommendations for business retention, expansion and recruitment, focusing on those business types that fall within the market opportunities identified.

#### Housing Strategy

This section of the plan addresses regulatory and financial considerations to improve existing housing and create new housing. It addresses the following types of challenges:

- Physically securing vacant houses
- Absentee landlords
- Code enforcement
- Rehabilitation of existing houses
- Development of new infill housing
- Gentrification

#### Task 5.3 Social Issues & Public Safety Strategy

- Day care needs
- Youth programs
- Programs for seniors
- · Adult education and job training
- Public safety
- Crime prevention design

#### Task 5.4 Implementation Strategy

This final sub-task of Task 5.0 features the following four components:

#### Organization & Leadership

This plan section makes recommendations on the organizational infrastructure necessary for sustained implementation of the plan.

#### Public Policy Recommendations

This section identifies key needed amendments to existing zoning and development regulations that will be required to implement the plan.

#### Cost Estimates & Financial Tools

- Cost estimate ranges for the plan's key physical improvements for public sector implementation
- Potential funding sources for both public and private sector costs
- Financial incentives for private investment both existing and potential new incentives
- Neighborhood Investment District (NID) designation to implement a "carrot and stick" approach to revitalization
- Potential availability of federal stimulus package funding

#### Implementation Matrix

This chart summarizes each key recommendation of the plan, references page numbers for more detail, and recommends sequencing within a general range of time periods.

#### **Task 6.0: Presentation & Revisions**

#### Task 6.1 Draft Plan Presentation

After sufficient time for NCF's review of the draft plan and needed revisions, the Project Team presented the draft plan to the City and the public.

#### Task 6.2 Final Plan Revisions

Based upon a review of the draft plan by NCF and input from the public presentation, the draft plan was revised and submitted to NCF as a final document.

#### Task 7.0: Implementation & "Quick Victory" Project

A specific and considerable amount of the project budget was earmarked for implementation. Until the plan's contents were known, the nature of this final component of the project could not be predicted. However, a "Quick Victory" project intended to give the implementation process some "coming out of the gates" momentum was a key planned element.





### SECTION CONTENTS

HISTORY

EXISTING SUB-AREAS

VACANT PARCELS

STREET TYPES & CONDITIONS

**COMMUNITY FACILITIES** 

COMMUNITY PARKS

**EXISTING ZONING** 

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

COMMUNITY SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS

SERVICES & PROGRAMS



### **History**

#### **Covington's History**

The following summary of Covington's history is adapted from a variety of sources, including the City's website and personal interviews:

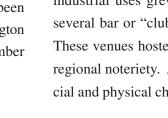
During the first decade of the 19th Century, St. Tammany Parish was part of a Spanish territory called West Florida. West Florida was not part of the Louisiana Purchase territory. Just two weeks prior to West Florida being ceded into the United States, the area that is now Covington was granted by the Spanish to a New Orleanian, Jacques Drieux. John Wharton Collins, a New Orleans merchant by way of New York, purchased the Drieux tract in 1813 and established the Town of Wharton on July 4th. He laid the town out in its unique pattern of squares within squares (ox lots) which were accessed by alleyways. He named the town's center the Division of St. John, which is now the historic district. It is this unique design that was largely responsible for the area's designation on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. The city was formally incorporated in 1816 by the state legislature and renamed Covington much to the chagrin of John Wharton Collins who then returned to live out his life in New Orleans. His body was returned upon his death in 1819 and he is buried in Covington Cemetery No. 1 facing City Hall at the corner of N. Columbia and Kirkland Streets.

There are conflicting stories as to how the city came to be named Covington. One theory is that Covington was named in honor of General Leonard Covington, a hero of the War of 1812. However, there is another theory that the city was named in honor of the Blue Grass whiskey enjoyed by town officials that was made in Covington, Kentucky.

As the Parish seat since 1829, Covington was the center of commerce, industry and government on the Northshore for most of the nineteenth century. The area's principle industries included lumber and related pine products, brick production and agriculture. Goods were transported via the Bogue Falaya River from the Columbia Street Landing across Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans. At the outbreak of the Civil War, St. Tammany Parish delegates voted "no" to secession

at the state legislature's convention. By the time Civil War was declared, eight national flags had flown over St. Tammany Parish. Following the Civil War and the area's economic recovery, the railroad arrived in 1887, and the first telephones were installed in 1884. Tourism became popular at the turn of the century. People believed in the medicinal powers of the ozone waters of the Northshore and visited hotels in Covington to bathe and partake of "the cure," as it had been dubbed during a yellow fever outbreak in New Orleans in 1878. In 1891, Covington was named "The Most Healthy Place in the United States" due to the low number of deaths per population recorded in the 1890 census.

Source of historic photographs: City of Covington



#### The West 30s History

The West 30s Neighborhood was developed primarily during the early part of the 20th century with a gridded street system fronted by single-family houses. It has historically served as the hub for Covington's African American community. As the residential population grew, a variety of institutional, commercial and even industrial uses grew as well. As recently as a few decades ago, there were several bar or "clubs" with live entertainment located in the Tyler Street area. These venues hosted some nationally-known performers, giving the area some regional noteriety. Although today the neighborhood faces many economic, social and physical challenges, it is on the verge of a rebirth.



"Rustic Landing" on Covington's Bogue Falaya River



19th century horse and buggy in Covington



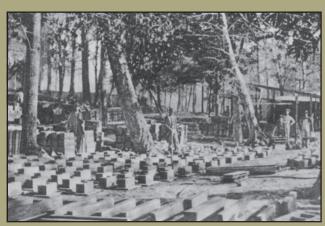
Columbia Street during the early-20th century



Columbia Street had dirt streets and flanking boardwalks



The last of Covington's horse and buggy era



Barellis Concrete Works - circa 1925



#### Historic Landmarks in the Study Area

As noted on the previous page, the Division of St. John was designated as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. A review of National Register sites on the website of the State Historic Preservation Office revealed that no individually designated National Register properties exist within the West 30s study area. However, there are multiple properties elsewhere within the study area that would still be considered historically significant, as follows (see map at right with numbers corresponding to text below):

#### 1) Covington Cemetery

John Wharton Collins arrived in Louisiana in 1810 and founded Covington in 1813. He died at age 35, and it is believed that his death resulted from health issues tied to his service in the Battle of New Orleans that he never recovered from. Collins was buried



on land fronting Columbia Street donated by his widow for use as a cemetery. It is the final resting place for many of the community's most famous figures.

#### 2) Rev. Peter S. Atkins Park

Located on Tyler, this park is perhaps more significant because of its namesake as opposed to the park itself. Reverend Peter Atkins was an important educator and civil rights leader in the West 30s community.



#### 3) Southern Hotel

The Southern Hotel is located on the north side of Boston Street between New Hampshire and Vermont Streets. Built in 1907 and once boasting such features

as formal gardens, tennis courts, and exotic caged animals in the lobby, this approximately 30,000 sq. ft. architectural gem is currently partially utilized as office space.



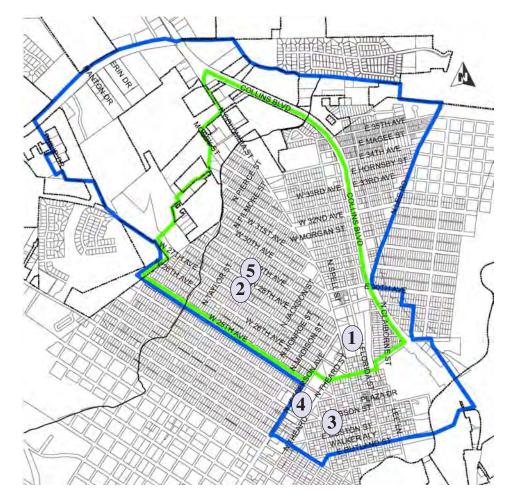
Early-1900s view of the Southern Hotel

#### 4) C.J. Schoen Middle School

Bound by E. 23rd Avenue, E. 24th Avenue, N. Theard Street, and N. Jefferson Avenue, this circa 1915 building was originally known as the Covington Elementary School. Lee Harvey Oswald, assassin of President John F. Kennedy, briefly

attended school here. Also, Governor Earl K. Long's sanity hearing was held in the school gym in 1959 (Source: Ann Gilbert - Inside Northside Magazine, February/March 2002 issue).





#### 5) Harrison Curriculum Center / Covington Rosenwald High School

Located on Tyler Street, this building was designed by August Perez and Associates of New Orleans and built in 1949 as the Covington Rosenwald High School. "Rosenwald School" was the name informally applied to over 5,000 schools, shops, and teachers' homes in the United States which were built primarily for the education of African-Americans in the early-twentieth century. The need arose from the chronic underfunding of public education for African-American children in the South, who were required to attend segregated schools. Julius Rosenwald, an American clothier who became part-owner and President of Sears, Roebuck and Company, was the founder of The Rosenwald Fund. Through this fund he contributed seed money for many of the schools and other philanthropic causes. To promote collaboration between white and black citizens, Rosenwald required communities to commit public funds to the schools, as well as to contribute additional cash donations.

In some communities, surviving Rosenwald Schools have been preserved because of the deep meaning they have for African-Americans as symbols of their community dedication to education. Others have been threatened by a lack of funds in rural areas, changing styles of education to consolidated and integrated schools, and other social changes. In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Rosenwald Schools near the top of the country's most endangered places and created a campaign to raise awareness and money for their preservation. In Covington, when the school building was transformed into a special education school, it was named by the Covington Rosenwald High School Alumni Association after Professor James Harrison, an important local educator.





### **Existing Sub-Areas**

The aerial photograph map at right provides an overview of the West 30s Neighborhood. The area outlined in green is the "primary study area," while the peripheral area outlined in blue is the "secondary study area." The aerial photograph map, as well as a windshield survey of the area, reveal the following key features:

#### **Residential Core**

Bound roughly by West 25th Avenue on the west, Collins Blvd. on the east, Buchannan Street on the north, and Jefferson Avenue on the south, this area is the heart and soul of the West 30s. It consists of two distinct grid street networks that adjoin along Columbia Street, resulting in triangular shaped lots (often undeveloped) along the west side of the street. With the exception of several churches, a few businesses, schools and parks, and similar non-residential uses, the area consists predominantly of single-family houses. There are very few sidewalks in the area, much of the infrastructure is deteriorated, and a large percentage of the housing is sub-standard and in need of rehabilitation. *This area is the primary focus of this plan and future revitalization efforts*.

#### **Commercial Corridors**

With the exception of the downtown area, which is more of a commercial node, there are four commercial corridors:

- *Columbia Street*: North of downtown, much of this corridor includes residences and institutions, so it is not a commercial corridor in the truest sense.
- *Collins Boulevard*: This corridor has many "strip commercial corridor" characteristics, although there are some light industrial uses and the ROW on the road's east side results in extensive front setbacks.
- Lee Road: This commercial corridor serves as the easterly boundary of the study area.
- *Highway 190*: This corridor, serving as the northerly boundary of the study area, shares many characteristics with Collins Boulevard.

#### **Industrial Areas**

Industrial uses within the study area are geographically concentrated along Collins Blvd., Hwy. 190 along the northerly boundary of the study area, and in the vicinity of 27th Avenue and Tyler Street within the residential core. Unlike the other two areas mentioned, the later is incompatible with surrounding residential uses.

#### **Secondary Sub-Areas**

Key identifiable sub-areas within the peripheral "secondary study area" for this project include the following:

- *The Ozones*: While it could be considered part of the "residential core" described above, its location east of Collins Blvd., as well as subtle demographic differences, distinguish it from that area.
- Downtown: This compact and historic downtown anchor the southern part of the study area.



Source of map data: City of Covington - 2010

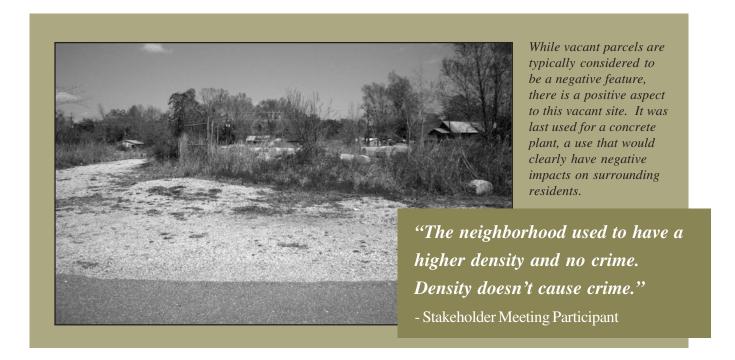


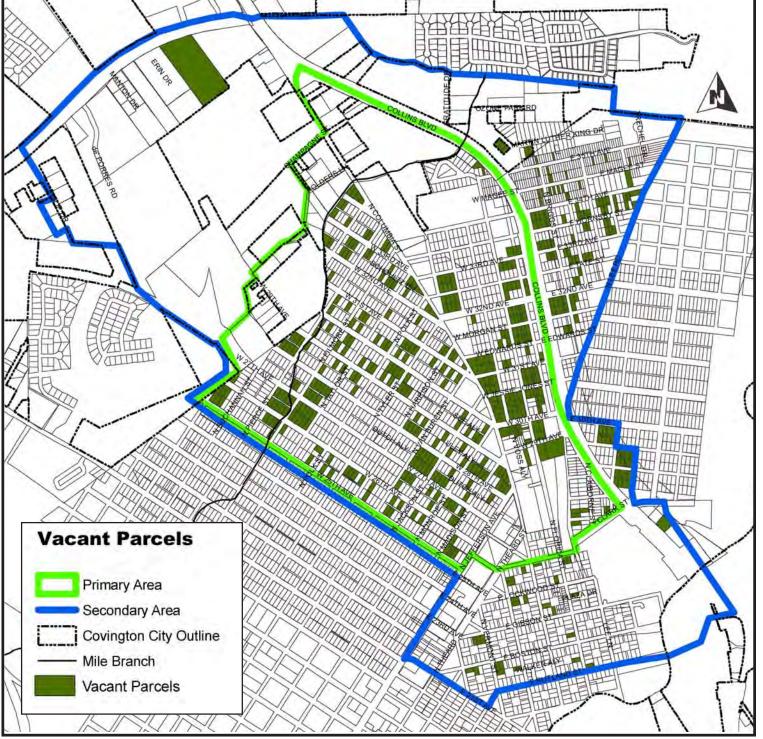
### **Vacant Parcels**

The map at right illustrates in dark green the study area's parcels that are vacant - a total of approximately 475 parcels. This map is approximate and not exact (based on aerial photo maps analysis and spot checking in the field). The greatest concentration is within the "primary study area," which correlates with the sub-area identical on the previous page as the "residential core." The sub-area east of Collins Blvd. know as "The Ozones" has a roughly equivelant amount of vacant parcels per land area.

It is noteworthy that the northern portion of the secondary study area, as well as the historic downtown to the south, have relatively low levels of vacant parcels. In the case of the former, there are actually relatively large areas of undeveloped land, but most of the parcels, which tend to be large, have at least some level of development on them. Thus, they are technically not considered vacant. In the case of downtown, the stronger economic conditions and market demand for real estate would seem to account for the lower rates of vacant parcels.

Unless a property lacks buildings because it is intentionally being used for public open space or environmental conservation, vacancies are typically a negative feature of a neighborhood. While it is often tempting for some communities to convert vacant parcels into parks, rarely is it a good idea to do so. Parks should be strategically located as part of a comprehensive network of public spaces, rather than being determined by failures of a real estate market.





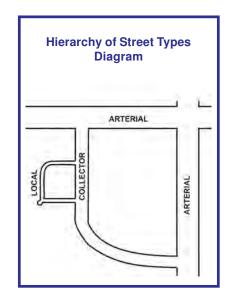
Source of map data: analysis of aerial photo map and supplemental field survey - 2010



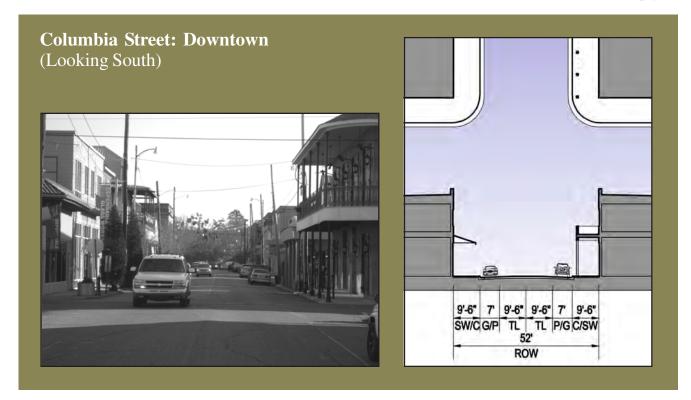
### **Street Types & Conditions**

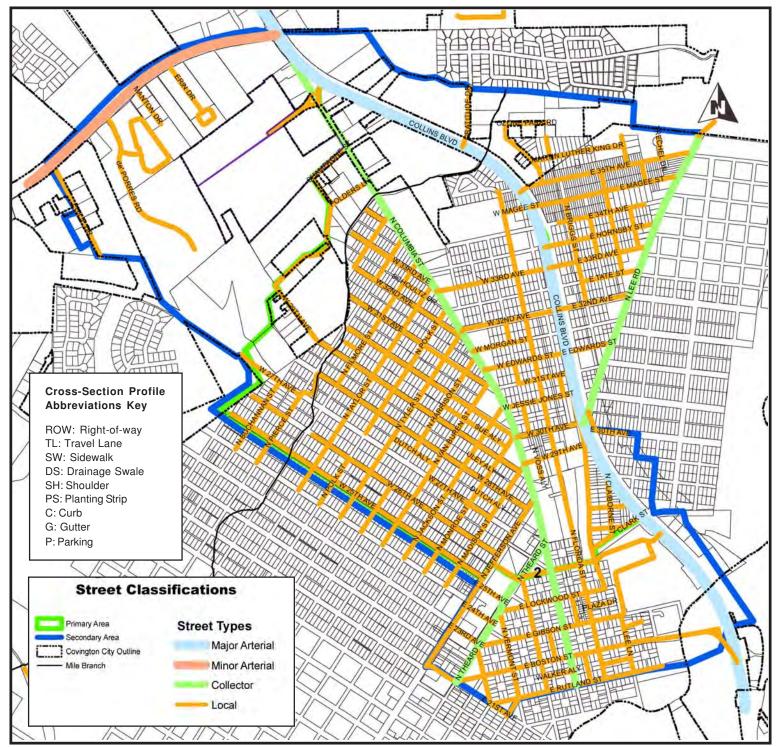
The study area is comprised of two distinct gridded street networks that adjoin one another at Columbia Street. The map at right classifies street types based upon their function within the overall street network in accordance with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) definitions for "urbanized areas." Definitions are below (in quotation marks), along with how they relate to the study area. This and subsequent pages include photographs and cross-section profiles of the study area's key streets:

• <u>Major Arterials</u>: This street type "should carry the major portion of trips entering and leaving the urban area, as well as the majority of through movements desiring to bypass the central city. In addition, significant intra-area travel, such as between central business districts and outlying residential areas... should be served by this system." The study area's only major arterial is Collins Blvd., aligned on a N-S axis.



• <u>Minor Arterials:</u> This street type "includes all arterials not classified as a principal and contains facilities that place more emphasis on land access than the higher system, and offer a lower level of traffic mobility." The (continued on next page...)





Source of map data: The Walker Collaborative - 2010

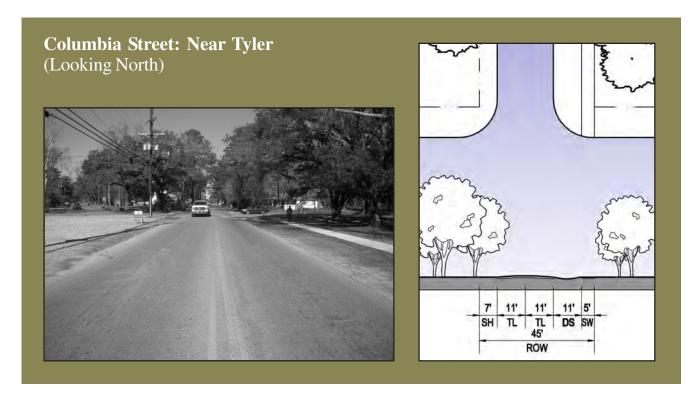


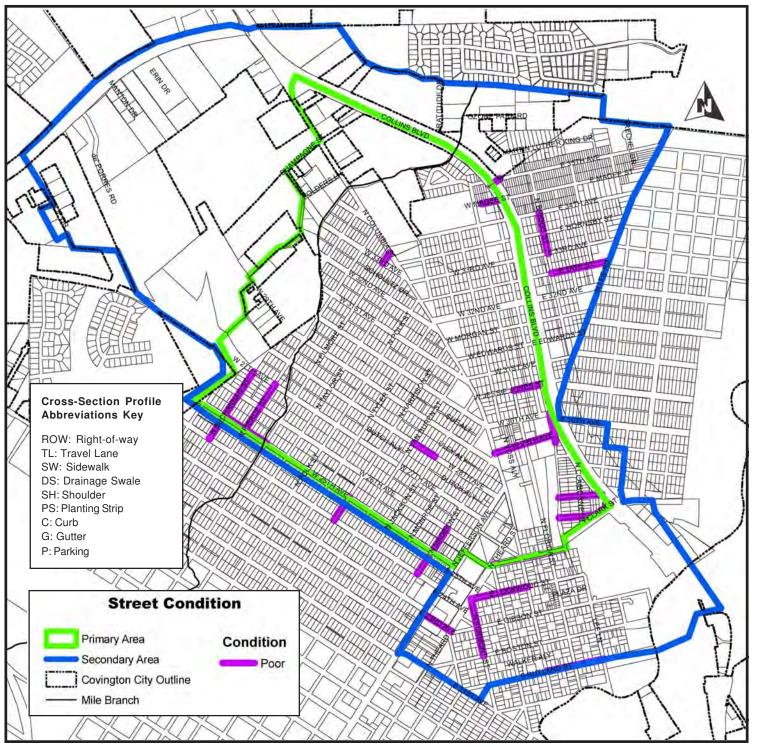
### **Street Types & Conditions**

area's only minor arterial is the Ronald Regan Highway (190 Bypass), which is oriented along an E-W axis along the northern boundary of the study area.

- <u>Collector Streets</u>: "The collector street system provides both land access service and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial areas. It differs from the arterial system in that facilities on the collector system may penetrate residential neighborhoods, distributing trips from the arterials through the area to the ultimate destination." Only three streets have been identified as collectors Columbia, Lee Road and Theard.
- <u>Local Streets:</u> "The local street system comprises all facilities not on one of the higher systems. It serves primarily to provide direct access to abutting land and access to the higher order systems." All of the streets not identified within one of the three categories featured on the previous page are considered to be local streets. Most are residential streets that carry relatively low levels of traffic.

The map at right, which is based upon Covington's current citywide Comprehensive Plan, highlights street sections determined to be in "poor" physical condition. Given that so many of the local streets in the study area are in need of improvements relative to those highlighted, this map undoubtedly identifies the worst of the worst. Examples of improvements needed for many streets include resurfacing the pavement, enhanced crowning for drainage, removal of obstructions from adjacent drainage swales, and repair/development of sidewalks. More street lighting is also needed in many locations for safety purposes.





Source of map data: City of Covington Public Works Department

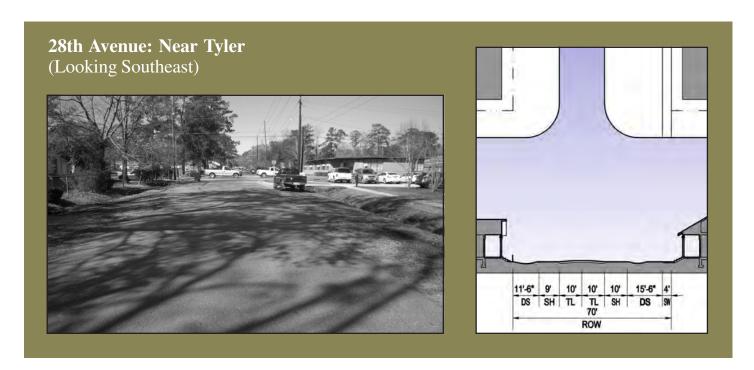


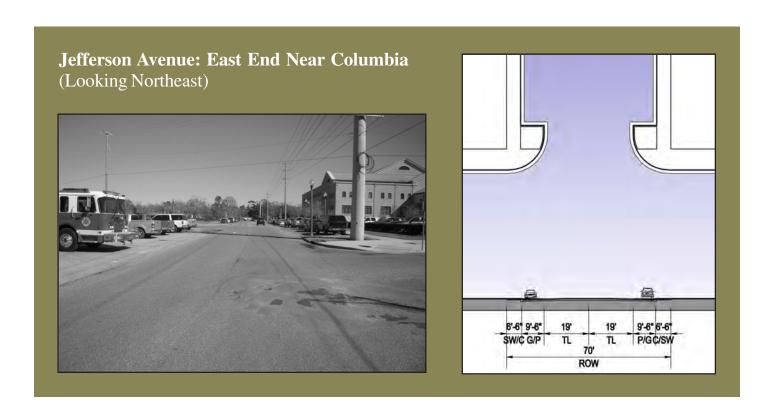
### **Street Types & Conditions**

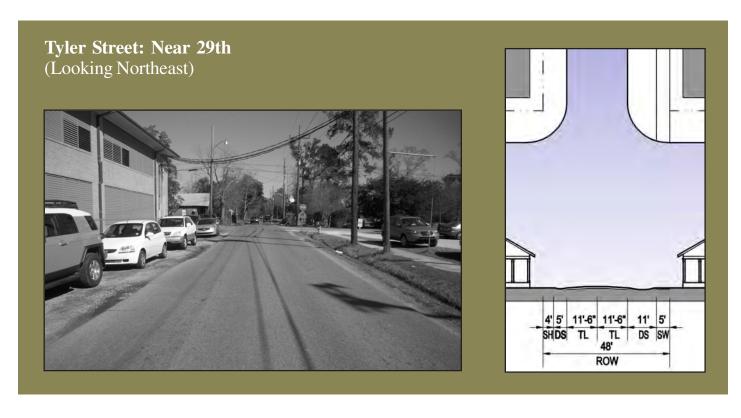
This page features a variety of streets in the study area with a broad range of cross section profile characteristics. For example, Jefferson Avenue's profile near Columbia (see below) features two 19 ft. wide travel lanes (one in each direction), a parallel 9.5 ft. wide parking lane and gutter on each side, and a 6.5 ft. wide sidewalk and curb on each side, all within a 70 ft. right-of-way (ROW). It is noteworthy that 19 ft. driving lanes are excessively wide and encourage speeding, in addition to generating more stormwater run-off and maintenance costs than are otherwise necessary. Widths of approximately 11 or 12 ft. are more typical and appropriate for such streets within an urban context. In contrast to Jefferson Avenue is Tyler Street. The segment near 29th Avenue is within a 48 ft. ROW and includes two 11.5 ft. travel lanes (one in each direction), a 5 ft. drainage swale on one side and an 11 ft. swale on the other, and 4 and 5 ft. sidewalks on either side.

#### Cross-Section Profile Abbreviations Key

ROW: Right-of-way
TL: Travel Lane
SW: Sidewalk
DS: Drainage Swale
SH: Shoulder
PS: Planting Strip
C: Curb
G: Gutter
P: Parking









### **Street Types & Conditions**

This page also illustrates some contrasting street cross-section profiles. Collins Boulevard, the study area's only "major arterial," features three 13 ft. travel lanes and a roughly 230 ft. wide right-of-way (ROW). At the other end of the spectrum are the study area's small residential streets. The segment of 29th Avenue near Tyler features a 70 ft. ROW and includes two 9.25 ft. travel lanes (one in each direction), a 28.5 ft. shoulder and drainage swale on one side and a 19.5 ft. shoulder and swale on the other side, and a 3.5 ft. sidewalk on one side. The segment of Jackson Street near 28th features a 45 ft. ROW and includes two 9.5 ft. travel lanes (one in each direction), an 8.5 ft. drainage swale on one side and a 13.5 ft. swale on the other side, and a 4 ft. sidewalk on one side. In general, the northwest-southeast oriented numbered streets west of Columbia tend to have larger ROWs (70 ft.), while the northeast-southwest oriented streets named after US Presidents tend to have narrower ROWs (45-48 ft.). The segment of Jefferson Avenue near Columbia is an exception to this rule.

#### Cross-Section Profile Abbreviations Key

ROW: Right-of-way TL: Travel Lane SW: Sidewalk

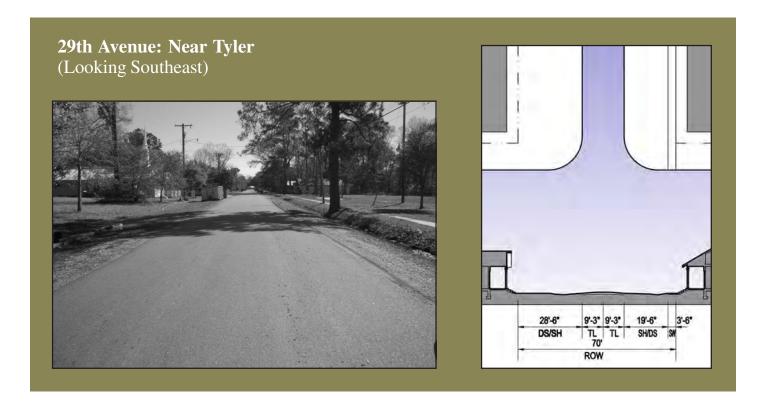
DS: Drainage Swale SH: Shoulder

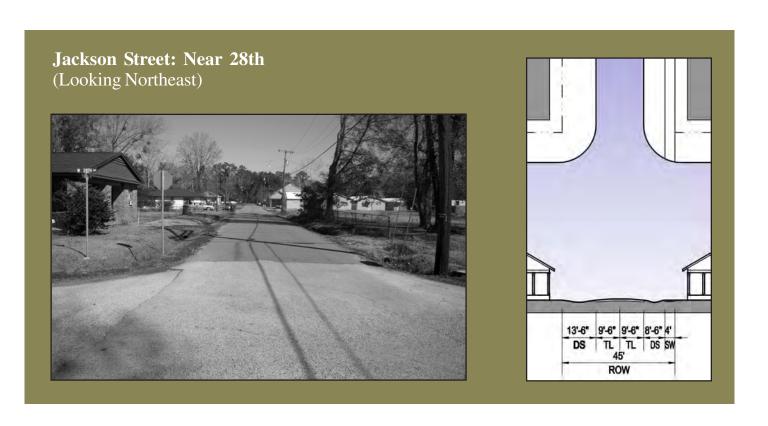
PS: Planting Strip

C: Curb G: Gutter

P: Parking

# 







### **Community Facilities**

Relative to the geographic scale of the neighborhood, the West 30s has a large number of community facilities. They are scattered throughout the study area and include those of the school district, the Parish, the City, and others, as described below. There are also several non-profit social service providers in the area.

#### Schools / Colleges

Of the four Parish schools in the study area, one is an elementary school, one is a middle school, and the other two are specialized programs - Covington Pathways and the a3 Virtual Academy. The school board headquartes is located at Jefferson and Boston. Other schools/colleges include the Aveda Institute and Delgado Community College.

#### St. Tammany Parish

The Parish facilities include the prison located in the north end of the study area, the Parish Justice Center on Columbia at the north end of Downtown, the public works department at the former Champagne property on Tyler, the St. Tammany Parish Hospital Community Wellness Center at 1505 N. Florida Street, the Homeland Security and Emergency Operation Center on Boston, and the St. Tammany Parish Fairgrounds on Columbia.

#### City of Covington

Schools / Colleges

1. Covington Pathways

4. a3 Virtual Academy

2. Pine View Middle School

3. Lyon Elementary School

5. Delgado Community College

6. St. Tammany School Board

The City has the largest number of community facilities within the study area. They range from the police station to the cemetery (see map at right). For the purposes of this plan, the new recreation center is described on the next page.

#### Other

The study area's other two key facilities include the Post Office and National Guard Armory, both on Columbia Street.

7. St. Tammany Parish Administration 12. Police Station

City of Covington

14. Criminal Investigation Unit

13. Fire Station #1

15. Animal Shelter

16. Water Tower

17. Cemetery

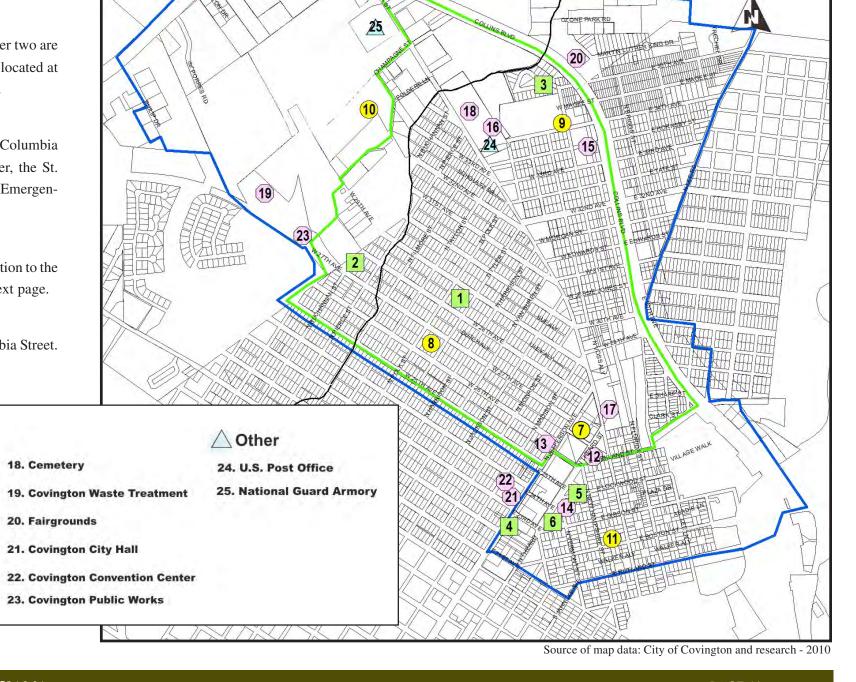
St. Tammany Parish

9. St. Tammany Community Wellness

8. St. Tammany Public Works

10. St. Tammany Parish Prison

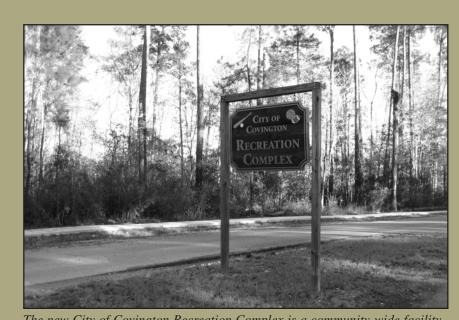
11. Emergency Operation Center





### **Community Parks**

The six parks illustrated on the map at right consist of a broad range of park sizes and purposes. Because the intent of this page is to focus on more conventional parks that are targeted to the neighborhood's residents (as well as the broader community in some cases), a few other parks are not addressed here, such as a small Downtown "pocket park" on Columbia Street. The parks shown here range from active recreational facilities, such as the new Covington Recreation Center and Ozone Park, to more passive parks not intended for team sports, such as Bogue Chitto Park on Columbia Street. A light green area representing a quarter mile distance around each park has been included on this map. That distance represents an approximately five minute walk for most people, and the resulting pattern illustrates a relatively efficient geographic spacing of the existing parks. In fact, the quarter mile radius of the three smallest and most centrally located parks overlap one another and serve the most dense residential area of the overall study area. It is noteworthy that, despite the proximity of some residents to the new recreation center that is accessed by vehicles off of Hwy. 190, pedestrian access from the south is a challenge and needs improvement.



The new City of Covington Recreation Complex is a community-wide facility, but it is particularly convenient to the West 30s Neighborhood. Once the remaining phases are completed and a stronger pedestrian connection can be created, it will be especially beneficial to neighborhood residents.

Regarding the West 30s' various recreational facilities, those surveyed believe that playgrounds are the most important. - Public Opinion Survey **Community Parks** Ozone Park Primary Area 2. Covington Recreation Complex Secondary Area 3. Rev. Peter S. Atkins Memorial Park Covington City Outline 4. Bogue Falaya Park - Mile Branch 5. Covington Pathways Park 1/4 mile = 5 minute walk 6. Burn's Ball Fields



### **Existing Zoning**

The current zoning for the entire City was recently rewritten and will soon be adopted, and the corresponding zoning map will also be revised and adopted within the near future. The implementation section of this plan for the West 30s will make recommendations based upon the most recent version of that draft zoning. However, in the meantime, this page will consider the current zoning, as depicted in the map at right, with additional comments on the draft zoning being considered by the City. Below are observations on key areas of concern:

#### Columbia Street

Much of Columbia north of 30th is now zoned residential, while the draft zoning being considered would designate much of this corridor as commercial. There is a danger that this road might evolve into a one-dimensional commercial corridor when accommodating more diverse uses, such as higher density housing and institutional uses, might be preferable.

#### Industrial Areas near 26th, 27th and 28th Avenues

As the current zoning map at right reflects, a relatively extensive industrial zone exists despite incompatibilities with the surrounding neighborhood. The southeasterly portion of this area is proposed for a commercial and office designation in the new draft zoning under consideration, which is likely a move in the right direction.

#### Downtown

While both the existing and proposed zoning permit a broad range of uses in the Downtown, as they should, the treatment as categories within the "commercial" classification lacks the advantages of more descriptive and easily understood terms, such as "mixed use."

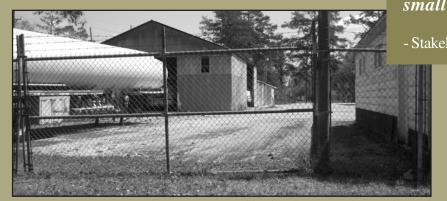
"Mixed use used to work because of small buildings and walkability."

Secondary Area

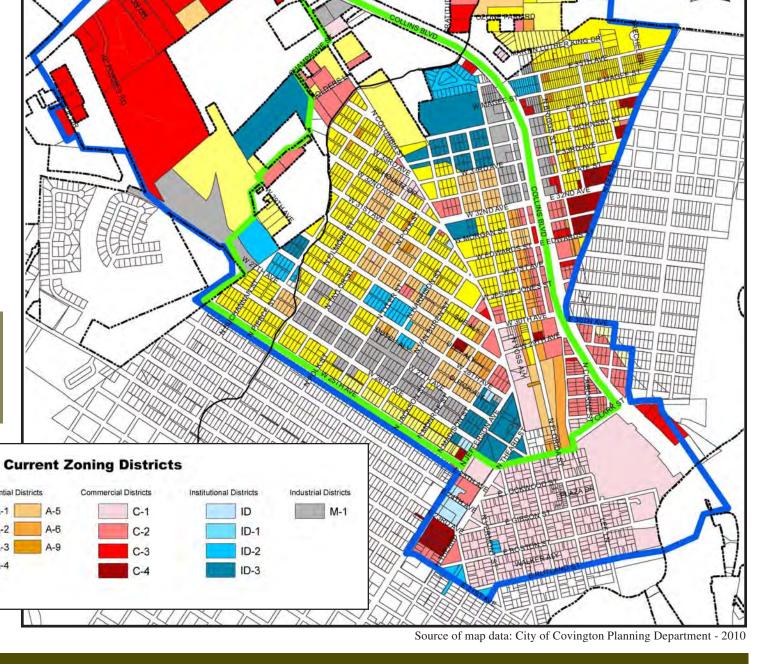
Covington City Outline

Source: City of Covington Planning Departmen

Stakeholder Meeting Participant



Numerous properties in the West 30s Neighborhood are zoned for industrial uses despite being directly adjacent to single-family residences. While such zoning is needed to accommodate existing uses, it may not be a viable long-term designation.





### **Socio-Economic Conditions**

Appendix A provides a detailed market assessment that analyzes economic and market conditions for the West 30s Neighborhood. However, below are key points to provide a general context for subsequent plan recommendations:

#### **Key Economic Conditions**

Economic issues are clearly some of the most fundamental confronting the West 30s Neighborhood, and they include the following findings:

<u>Poverty Among Residents</u> - primary issues include the following:

- Substandard housing
- Limited disposable income
- Unemployment and underemployment

Employment - employment challenges include:

- Limited employment opportunities
- Difficulty with transportation to jobs
- Many residents lack targeted training

With respect to training, while there are training opportunities available, much of the opportunities are inconsistent with the types of jobs actually available.

Businesses - key findings related to study area businesses include:

- Convenience retail is accessible
- The area may have potential for more entertainment and destination retail

Real Estate - characteristics of the study area's real estate market include:

- Substandard housing the market is negatively impacted by substandard conditions and the neighborhood's overall image within the community
- The Groves a housing development currently under way, is the most significant recent investment in housing in the neighborhood
- Law offices focusing on criminal defense were recently developed on Columbia Street to take advantage of the proximity of local courts and related resources
- A new commercial building is being built on Jefferson Avenue using a form that is consistent with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century architecture



This retail store on Columbia Street offers a wide range of goods that are convenient to many of the West 30s' residents, but it also has a history of social problems, such as loitering and drug dealing.

#### **Social Conditions**

Not surprisingly, many of the neighborhood's social challenges are tied directly to economic issues.

Education & Culture - findings on this issue include the following:

- Adult education is needed, particularly an increased level of motivation for those needing education
- Greater family support is needed for youth and their education
- There are opportunities for specialized education
- Residents need an enhanced self image and more positive role models
- Opportunities exist for celebrating culture and recreation

<u>Crime</u> - although crime levels have reportedly dropped in the neighborhood over the past few years, there are still strong perceptions of crime. Real challenges include:

- Drug dealing
- Domestic abuse
- Public safety and community trust

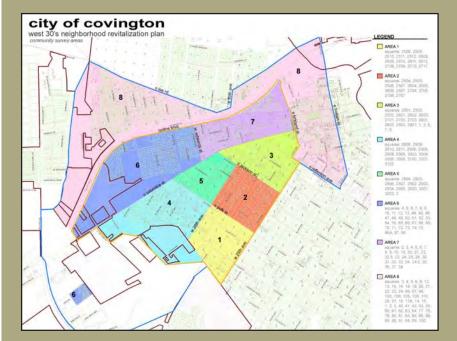
Other Social Issues - additional social issues include the following:

- Health problems reportedly prohibit many from working
- Substance abuse is another hurdle to employment
- There are some public sector uses in the area that have a negative impact and/or image, such as the parish jail

"We need to teach young people to do right."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

#### **Community Survey**





The Community Survey was administered at the outset of this planning process. Volunteer surveyors, who were primarily West 30s residents, went door-to-door and conducted a detailed survey of approximately 120 willing participants. The survey asked numerous questions regarding residents' family life, housing, employment, finances, health, habits, perceptions, and preferences for the future. This information was compared with the results of a similar survey conducted a few years earlier to identify trends. It also provided extremely valuable input into the creation of this plan.



### **Community Survey: Key Findings**

#### **Demographics**

- Average number of people per household: 2.8
- Average number of children per household: 1
- Average age: 26 years
- Median age: 32 years (youngest 2 months / oldest 96 years)
- Average duration in the same house: 16 years
- Female: 56.1%
- Median estimated annual income: \$17,275
- Median rent/mortgage payment: \$407 per month
- Annual income required to meet average housing costs: \$16,300
- Second highest household expenditure: utilities (average \$371/month)

#### **Education**

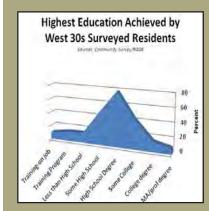
In general, there is a significant mismatch between the job training provided and the types of jobs that are actually available to West 30s residents.

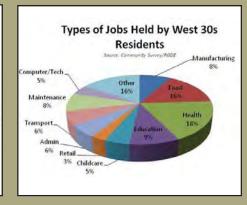
#### **Primary Training Received**

- Hospital Tech 14%
- Teaching 12%
- Retail 10%
- Mfg./Production 9%
- Construction 9%\*

#### Primary Experience Held

- Restaurant/Hotel -11%
- Nursing 10%
- Business/Mgt. 9%
- Professional 9%
- Construction 9%
- \* Note: Five of the respondents received WIN training. Of those, one is now working in construction.





#### **Primary Issues Ranked by Order**

- #1: Housing Conditions
- #2: Neighborhood Appearance
- #3: Lack of Jobs & Job Training
- #4: Housing Rents/Availability
- #5: Lack of Youth Activities
- #6: Crime & Safety
- #7: Negative Image of Community
- #8: Lack of Parental Control/Interest
- #9: Lack of Transportation Services
- #10: Lack of Parks & Recreation

#### **Employment**

Households with at least one (1) employed adult: 64%

#### Surveyed Adults Working: 29%

- Working in West 30s: 20%
- Own a business: 6%
- Want to own a business: 47%

#### Surveyed Adults Not Working: 71%

- Disabled / health issues: 31%
- Retired: 16%
- Unemployed (looking for work, laid off, or between jobs): 10%

#### Housing

- Positive Characteristics: central location / historic architecture
- Negative Characteristics: small size / poor condition (fair or poor: 67%)
- Housing Tenure:
- Owner occupied houses: 57%
- Owners with no mortgage: 42%
- Renters interested in homeownership: 44%
- Respondents believeing too many rentals exist in the West 30s: 50%
- Responses to the statement that there is not enough senior housing in the West 30s: 30% agree / 65% disagree

### Services & Cultural Amenities

#### <u>Public Services & Conditions:</u>

### Key Issues

- Drainage / flooding
- Street conditions / street lights
- Neighborhood appearance
- Police protection

#### Retail Goods & Services

- 51% from Hwy. 190 (except: West 30s salons)
- Lack of entertainment is an issue

#### Cultural Facilities Desired

- Movie theater / Stage theater
- Children's art academy
- Dance studio
- Art studio / gallery

# Best Opportunities for Community Participation

• Church, voting, farmer's market

#### West 30s Community Strengths

• Churches, "it's home," people, school

#### Health & Safety

#### Preventative Health Issues

- 33% walk often
- 74% watch TV often

## Recreational Facilities Needed in Order of Preference

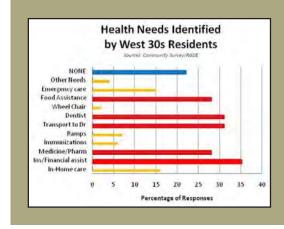
- 1. Recreation / community center
- 2. Computer lab
- 3. Basketball courts
- 4. Jogging /walking trails

#### **Safety**

- 22% feel unsafe by day
- 43% feel unsafe at night
- Illegal drugs are prevalent, but progress is being made
- 19% have been a victim of crime
- Causes of crime: lack jobs, lack of activities for kids

#### A Note About the Data

Because census data is ten years old and tract boundaries do not coincide with the study area, it is not valid for this plan. However, the Community Survey covered roughly 120 households, or about 12% of households, making it statistically valid.



As the graph at left indicates, the greatest health-related needs in the West 30s include (in order of ranking): insurance and financial assistance, dental services, transportation to health care providers, food assistance and medicine/pharmacies.



### **Services & Programs**

Because of the high rates of poverty and the perceived need for social services, there are a number of agencies providing such services to residents of the West 30s. In addition, there appear to be various public services and facilities that have landed within the West 30s not necessarily because they serve that community, but because there is less resistance to their presence there than there would be in other parts of the city or parish. While there is a mix of social services targeted to the West 30s, the presence of a plethora of those very services, along with a corrections facility, repair and maintenance facilities, and other "NIMBY" uses, contribute to a negative image for the area. Key organizations providing social and housing services, including those found within the West 30s Neighborhood, are listed below.

#### **Health Care**

- St. Tammany Parish Hospital
- St. Tammany Parish Community Wellness Center
- Volunteers of America
- Louisiana Rehabilitation Services

#### **Education & Youth**

- Harrison Curriculum Center
- The Covington Boys & Girls Club
- Pine View Middle School
- Elmer E. Lyon Elementary School
- Upward Community Services
- Kiddie College Day Care
- Delgado Community College
- Delta College of Art & Technology
- Aveda Institute
- Other Area Higher Education
- Southeastern Louisiana University-St. Tammany (SELU)
- Louisiana Technical College (Bogalusa)
- Grantham University

#### Family & Community Crisis Services

- The Food Bank of Covington
- The Red Cross Crisis Center
- Upward Community Services
- St. Tammany Parish Community Services
- All Saints Ministries
- Volunteers of America (VOA)
- Childrens Advocacy Center / Hope House
- Youth Service Bureau
- United Way
- Pregnancy Crisis Center

#### **Recreation & Culture**

- City of Covington Recreation Center
- Bobby Fletcher Senior Agricultural Center (fairgrounds)
- St. Tammany Art Association

#### **Affordable Housing Services**

- Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West
- Covington Housing Authority
- Northshore Housing Initiative (NHI)
- Neighborhood Housing Services
- Volunteers of America (VOA)

#### **Churches** (many offering social services)

- Faith Bible Church
- Covington 1st Church of God in Christ
- Greater Starlight Baptist Church
- Christ Temple Church of Christ Holiness USA
- Ephesus 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist Church
- Doughty Chapel AME Church
- Mt. Zion Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church
- Covington Faith Bible Covenant Church
- Bethel Reform Methodist Church
- Church of Jesus Temple
- First Missionary Baptist Church

#### Justice

- The St. Tammany Parish Justice Center
- The St. Tammany Parish Corrections Center
- The Office of Probation & Parole

#### **Other Government Facilities**

- St. Tammany Parish Department of Public Works
- · Louisiana National Guard
- U.S. Post Office

#### Other

#### West 30s

There are several other community and social service organizations located within the West 30s, along with fraternal organizations like Crescent Lodge #236 Covington RHA.

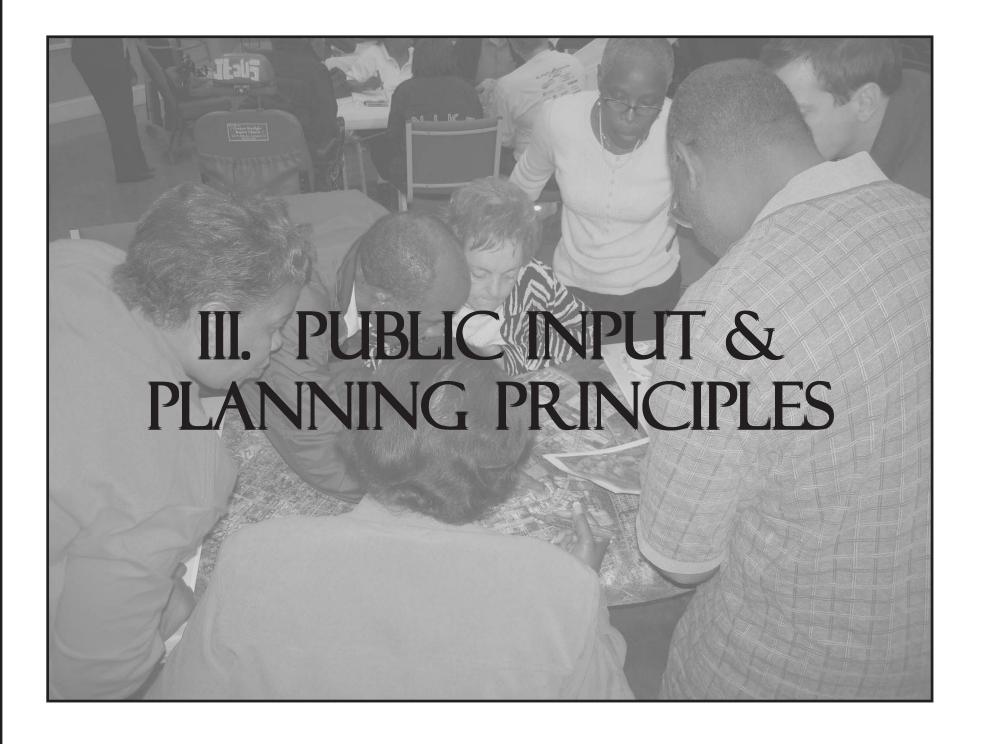
#### St. Tammany Parish

Parish-wide, there are at least 23 community organizations, 16 education organizations (other than schools and colleges), 25 faith-based organizations, 43 health care organizations, 10 organizations providing for basic needs, 26 organizations providing assistance for mental health and substance abuse treatment, 45 child and family service organizations, 13 elderly service organizations, 17 housing service providers, 12 financial assistance organizations, and six other community service organizations.

For much more information on all of these services and programs, as well as a general evaluation of them, please see Appendix A.

With respect to a wide range of potential services and programs for West 30s residents, those surveyed believe that job training is the most important.

- Public Opinion Survey





SECTION CONTENTS
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT
PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY
KEY PLANNING PRINCIPLES

# III. PUBLIC INPUT & PLANNING PRINCIPLES



### **Summary of Public Input**

From the very outset of this planning project, it has been recognized that meaningful public input and community buy-in will be critical to successful plan implementation. The following is a concise summary of the public input process utilized for this project (see pages 2-5 for a more detailed description of the overall project approach, including tasks not listed on this page):

#### Task 1.0: Community Organizing & Leadership Development

As the first step of entire project, this task included the following sub-tasks:

- Task 1.1 Community Organizing Strategy
- Task 1.2 Small Area / Sector Meetings
- Task 1.3 Leadership Development Training

#### Task 2.0: Research & Analysis

This task included the following sub-tasks:

- Task 2.2 Kick-Off Meeting & Study Area Tour
- Task 2.4 Economic & Market Assessment
  - Interviews with business owners and/or operators; brokers and leasing agents; economic development and business association representatives; institutional representatives
- Task 2.5 Community Survey (see description on pages 17-18)

#### Task 3.0: Visioning & Public Relations Campaign

With a strong focus on public input, the following sub-tasks were performed as part of this task:

- Task 3.1 Stakeholder Focus Group Meetings
- Task 3.2 Leadership Interviews
- Task 3.3 Public "Kick-Off" Meetings and Public Opinion Survey
- Task 3.4 Public Relations Campaign
  - Press Releases
  - Website Content

A summary of the Public Opinion Survey results is provided on the following page.

#### Task 4.0: Charrette & Concept Plan

The five-day charrette process was the most dynamic step of the project and the best single opportunity for hands-on involvement of the community. It included the following two public forums:

- Task 4.2 Public Workshop
- Task 4.4 Concept Plan Presentation

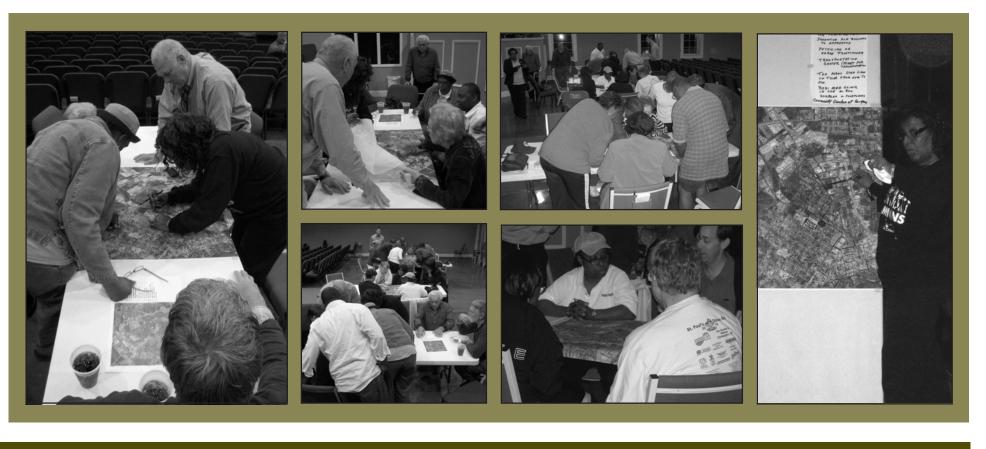
#### Task 6.0: Presentation & Revisions

This final task of the project, not including the culminating "Quick Victory Project" provides yet another opportunity for public input into the draft plan before being finalized.

#### Task 6.1 Draft Plan Presentation

#### **Key Ideas from the Public Charrette**

- Develop a Community Center in the Champagne Building
- Extend the greenway system to connect the new Recreation Center with Downtown
- Physically improve Columbia and Tyler, and develop adjacent businesses
- Provide job training and youth programs
- Develop new infill housing



# III. PUBLIC INPUT & PLANNING PRINCIPLES



### **Public Opinion Survey**

One of the several approaches used to solicit public input on the West 30s Neighborhood was a public opinion survey. The intent was to identify the community's perceptions and preferences regarding the neighborhood. Because of project budget constraints, the survey was not intended to be a statistically valid "scientific" survey. However, the results provide yet another extremely useful layer of public input. It was administered during two public meetings using a PowerPoint presentation that was correlated with a printed survey form that each respondent completed. The survey utilized a multiple choice format, and graphics were utilized to help illustrate the ideas being tested. The complete survey results are contained in Appendix B, but an overview of some of the key survey findings are contained on this page. Numbers indicate a ranking of the answers.

#### A. General

What people like *most* about the West 30s Neighborhood:

People
 Downtown
 Architecture
 Churches
 They grew up there
 Quality of life
 History
 Sense of place
 Other

What people like *least* about the West 30s Neighborhood:

Housing conditions
 Safety concerns
 Pedestrian access
 Business choices
 Image of the area
 Lack of transit
 Senior care options

Most popular ideas for improving employment opportunities in the West 30s:

1) Job training 3) Transportation to jobs 5) Other

2) Adult education 4) Child care services

#### **B.** Natural & Historic Resources

Response to statement: "Historic buildings should be restored when possible"

1) Agree strongly (68%) 3) Neutral (5%) 5) Disagree somewhat (1%)

2) Agree somewhat (28%) 4) Disagree strongly (3%)

#### C. Residential Areas & Housing

<u>Importance of streetscape improvements in residential areas:</u>

1) Very important (87%) 3) Neutral (4%) 5) Very unimportant (0%)

2) Somewhat important (7%) 4) Somewhat unimportant (1%)

Need for more affordable housing in the West 30s:

1) Much more needed (72%) 3) Not sure (8%) 5) Little more needed (3%)

2) Some more needed (12%) 4) No more needed (5%)

Types of housing needed beyond single-family detached (ranked by priority):

7) Condominiums

5) Discount store

Seniors housing
 Townhouses
 Duplexes
 Apartments

3) Accessory units 6) Triplexes / quads

#### D. Commercial Areas & Businesses

Importance of revitalizing the West 30s for the success of downtown:

1) Very important (65%) 3) Neutral (14%) 5) Very unimportant (1%)

2) Somewhat important (17%) 4) Somewhat unimportant (3%)

Desired businesses in the West 30s outside of downtown (ranked by priority):

2) Day care 4) Gym/health club 6) Bank

3) Grocery store

#### E. Transportation

1) Restaurants

Desired street improvements for the West 30s (ranked by priority):

Drainage swales
 Street lights
 Crosswalks
 Sidewalks
 Bicycle lanes
 Street trees

#### F. Public Spaces, Services & Programs

Desired civic facilities in the West 30s (ranked by priority):

1) Community center 3) Arts center 5) Other

2) Public library 4) Amphitheatre / bandshell

#### Preferences for Housing in the West 30s

#### **Top-Rated Multi-Family Housing**





#### **Top-Rated Single-Family Housing**









# III. PUBLIC INPUT & PLANNING PRINCIPLES



### **Key Planning Principles**

Even though the background information for a study area has been analyzed and public input has been solicited, a community is still not ready to shift into a planning mode until key planning principles are established. Those principles should be relatively general in nature, but they should help to provide direction to those doing the planning. When difficult decisions confront the planners, it is hopeful that the planning principles will offer a guiding light. The following principles were established for the West 30s Neighborhood and confirmed by key stakeholders:

- 1) Neighborhoods should preserve their natural and historic resources, including environmentally fragile lands and older buildings having positive architectural character. Preserving natural resources is important for environmental sustainability and for recreational benefits to neighborhood residents. Historic preservation is critical to maintaining community character and giving a neighborhood a competitive edge with other areas.
- 2) Neighborhoods should include a range of housing types (single-family detached, attached, etc.), tenure types (owner occupied and rental), and price ranges. Housing should also be safe and well-maintained. Housing should not only accommodate a range of economic levels, but it should also allow a person to live each stage of their life within the same neighborhood.
- 3) Neighborhoods should include accessible mixed-use areas for daily goods and services, as well as for employment opportunities. Businesses should be within walking distance of a large percentage of residents. Mixed use buildings should be permitted to allow active commercial uses on the ground floor and housing and offices on upper floors.
- 4) Neighborhoods should feature a variety of parks for a variety of uses, including passive uses and active recreational uses. Parks should include playgrounds for children, recreational facilities for individual and team sports, and natural open spaces and greenways for hiking, picnicking and similar low-impact uses.

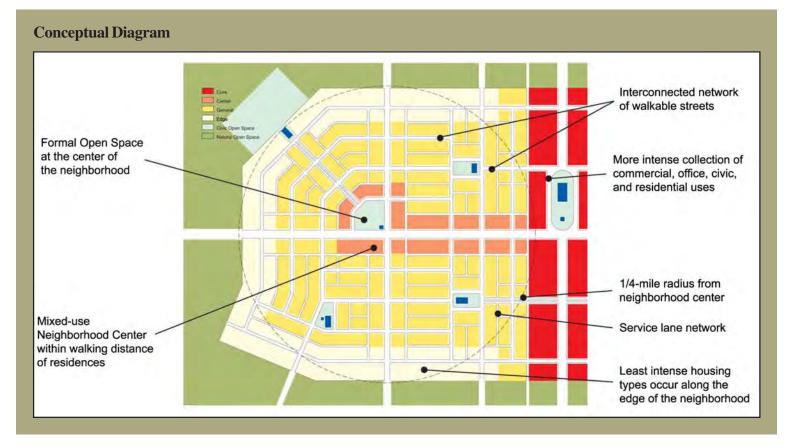
- 5) Neighborhoods should feature an interconnected network of streets that accommodate vehicles, but are also safe and user-friendly for walking, bicycling, and other modes of transportation. Interconnected streets minimize traffic congestion by distributing traffic over multiple streets, and they offer alternative routes for pedestrians. Streets should be designed as "complete streets" that put pedestrians and cyclists on an even keel with drivers.
- 6) Neighborhoods should include schools, facilities and programs to nurture the positive development of children and teens. Young people are indeed the future of the West 30s, and they should be a key focus of neighborhood revitalization efforts. Schools, facilities and programs should be geographically accessible to young people who may otherwise have transportation challenges.
- 7) Social service providers and churches should be available to enrich the lives of neighborhood residents. Key needed services include job training, child care, and adult education. While some of the West 30s churches are doing a wonderful job in some of these areas, they should not have to shoulder the burden alone. Both the public and private sectors can play a role.

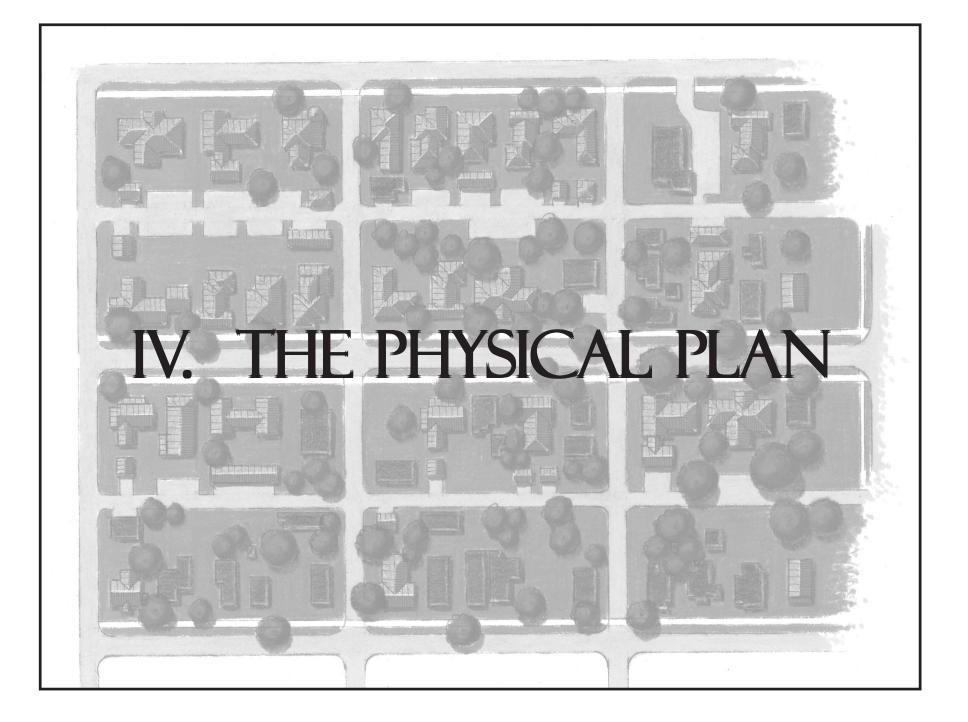
"The West 30s needs to be a walkable community.

We need mixed uses, including a small grocery

store." - Stakeholder Meeting Participant

8) Neighborhoods should be safe, well-maintained and attractive for the wellbeing of their residents. Neighborhood pride and social interaction are critical to achieving these goals. Local law enforcement officals and residents must forge a cooperative bond to improve public safety, and residents must take responsibility for their homes and properties.







### SECTION CONTENTS

- PLAN OVERVIEW
- COLUMBIA STREET
- COLUMBIA & TYLER
- JUSTICE CENTER AREA
- TYLER STREET
- HARRISON CURRICULUM CENTER
- 27TH & TYLER AREA
- 27TH AVENUE
- MIXED USE NEIGHBORHOOD
- INDUSTRIAL AREAS & CONTRACTOR CORRIDORS
- DOWNTOWN
- LAND USE PLAN
- TRANSPORTATION
- UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE
- GREENWAY & PARKS
- HOUSING
- COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES
- KEY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- DESIGNING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY



#### **Plan Overview**

**Columbia Street** - As the "front door" of the West 30s, this corridor should avoid a strip commercial development pattern. Instead, mixed use nodes should occur with primarily housing in between.

**Justic Center Area** - The Justice Center's scale should blend more seamlessly into its context by incorporating related adjacent mixed-use development that transitions into the neighborhood's scale.

**Tyler Street** - The design and adjacent uses of this street need to mature to catch up with the street's important role in the area's street network.

**Tyler & 27**<sup>th</sup> **Area** - The surrounding residential area and lack of good access preclude this area from growing further as a conventional industrial zone. A low-impact "Artisan Industrial Village" has potential.

**Mixed Use Neighborhood: Transitional District** - This area should transform into a residential, office and mixed use district with a residential scale and character.

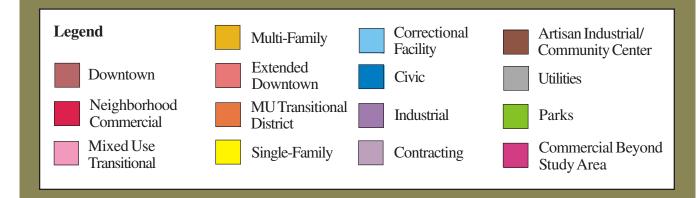
**Industrial Areas & Contractor Corridors** - As the industrial uses in the Tyler and 27th area contract, they should expand in appropriate areas, including contractor corridors along Collins and Regan Hwy.

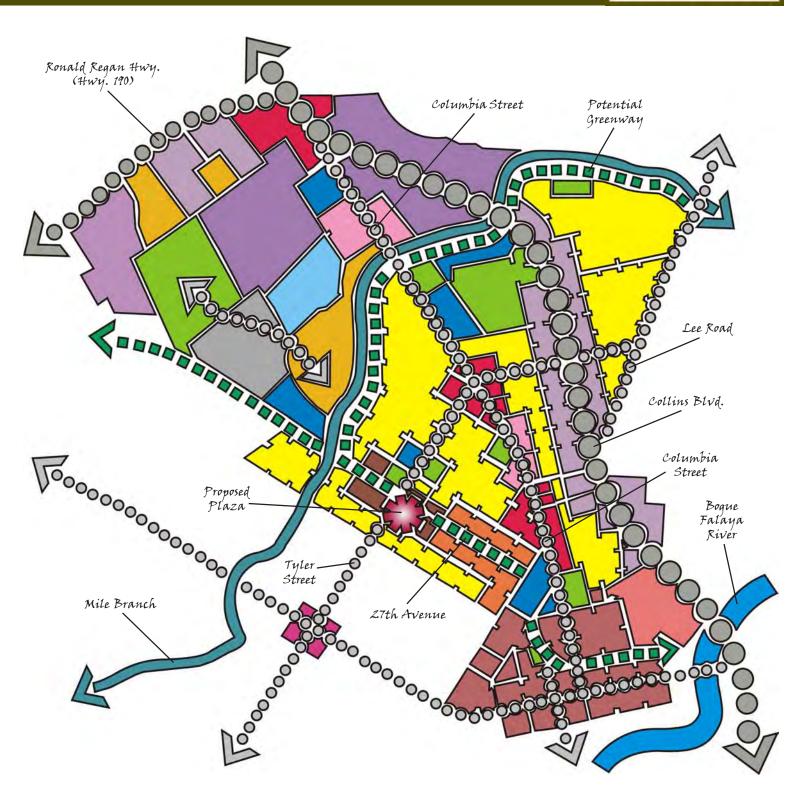
**Downtown** - The historic downtown could benefit greatly from a few key anchor uses in its core, such as a relocated city hall and an adaptive reuse of the vacant hotel. Business development is also needed.

**Greenway** - Known as the "Trace," segments of this linear open space already exist, but need expanding.

**Housing** - As perhaps the West 30s most fundamental issue, improvements in housing must be a high priority. More preservation and rehabilitation must occur, as well as more architecturally compatible infill development. Existing incentives need strong promotion, and new incentives should be adopted.

**Programs & Implementation** - Because so many of the West 30s challenges go beyond physical planning issues, a variety of programs must be coordinated to address the economic and social issues.







### Columbia Street: The West 30s' Front Door

#### **Background**

This street is one of the primary means for how visitors experience the West 30s Neighborhood. It serves as the "front door" of the neighborhood and has a tremendous impact on the area's image. From a real estate market perspective, the primary objectives should be to:

- 1) Add value to the nearby residential properties
- 2) Avoid duplicating the uses and development form already existing on Collins Blvd.

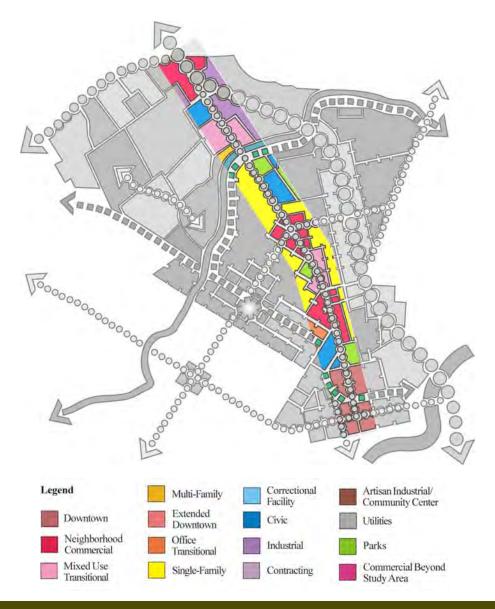
#### Recommendations

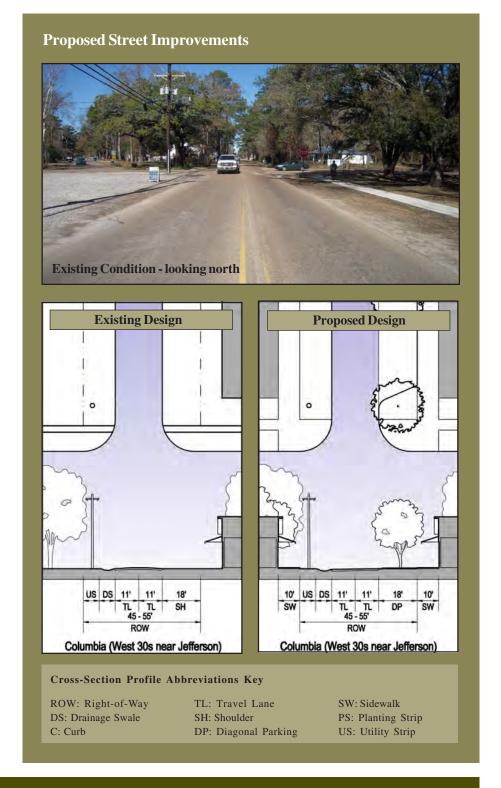
- Avoid "strip commercial development" along this corridor, including large signs, frequent driveways, front parking lots, and a lack of landscaping.
- Limit commercial and mixed-use development to specific areas or "nodes."
- Between the commercial and mixed-use nodes, provide primarily residential uses and maintain a green edge through landscaping similar to that which is already provided by the cemetery .
- Development should have a traditional urban form with buildings that address the street and parking lots located in the rear (or in small amounts to the side of buildings).
- Front parking may occur in the form of diagonal parking that is designed as on-street parking rather than a parking lot.

"Columbia Street is the face of the West 30s. We need to focus on it first and things can grow from there."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

- Enchance the pedestrian realm with streetscape improvements, including sidewalks, street trees, and human-scaled lighting. See the recommended street cross-section at bottom right.
- Enchance the private realm with design standards that mandate the implementation of the design principles recommended here. That implementation can occur through either the base zoning or through an urban design overall zoning designation.







### Columbia & Tyler: A Potential "100% Corner"

#### **Background**

In the real estate industry, the term "100 percent corner" refers to one of the key street intersections within a given area that has inherently high value based upon its strategic location. While it may not be obvious, the intersection of Columbia and Tyler is just such an intersection for the West 30s. It is not obvious at present because the area is underdeveloped and because both streets lack the types of physical improvements that might otherwise give them prominence. However, with the appropriate streetscape improvements and regulatory measures and incentives, it should be able to achieve its potential.



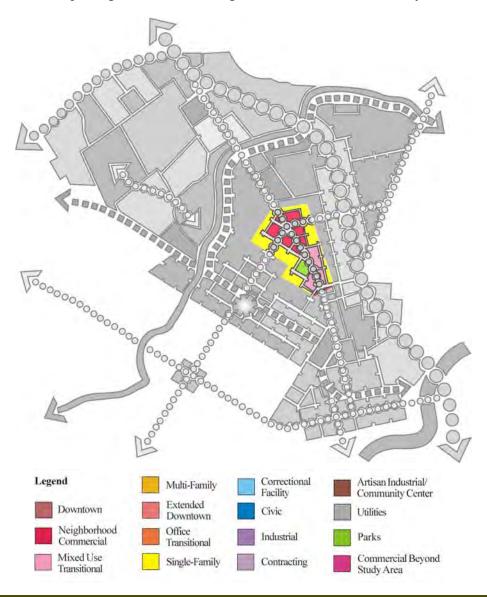


Fortunately, Columbia Street has not yet evolved into the type of strip commercial corridor shown at left. Features include parking lots in front of buildings, utility poles obstructing the sidewalks, large signs, and a lack of landscaping and humanscaled lighting.

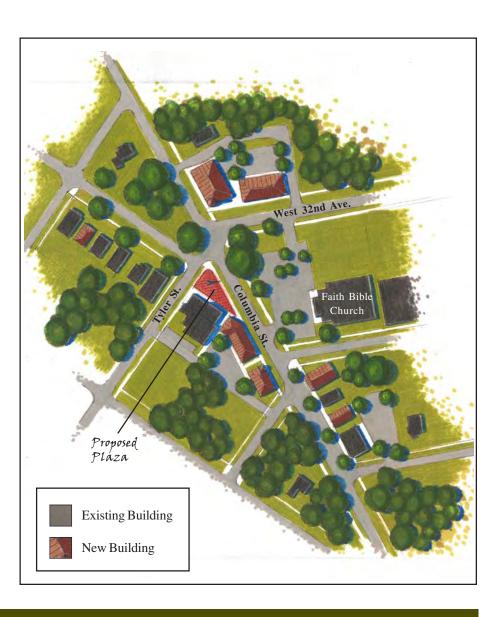
This steetscape exhibits many of the attributes that would enhance Columbia Street, incuding simple but attractive architecture, street trees, front setbacks occupied by shallow lawns (rather than parking lots), and small-scaled signage.

#### **Recommendations**

- Zone this area so it becomes a mixed use / commercial node rather than being part of a continuous commercial corridor.
- Rehabilitate and/or redevelop existing buildings as needed, and develop new buildings to fill in the current voids (see concept plan at right).
- Locate parking lots behind buildings (or to the side when necessary).



- Develop a small public space at the southwest corner of this intersection. It should be either a plaza or a park with substanial "hardscaped" portions. It might also include some focal point, such as a fountain or monument to add to the space's prominence.
- The recommended public space might be either a City-owned property or part of a privately-owned property offering public access.





### Justice Center Area: Making a Better Fit

#### **Background**

The Justice Center has an overall positive influence on the West 30s, but its scale dwarfs the surrounding area. Also, it needs to be economically leveraged more than is occurring at present. The Parish is contemplating the construction of a parking garage adjacent to the Justice Center on a site bound by Jefferson, Madison, 26th and 27th. While they initially considered including offices as part of the garage project, that idea appears to have been dropped. This site is currently occupied by a surface parking lot serving the Justice Center.

#### Recommendations

- Any new adjacent development should step down in physical scale and intensity from the Justice Center to create a smoother transition with the balance of the neighborhood.
- Offices, restaurants, services, and related commercial uses should be permitted within close proximity to the Justice Center, but their design and scale should be compatible with adjacent residential uses (avoid front parking lots, etc.).



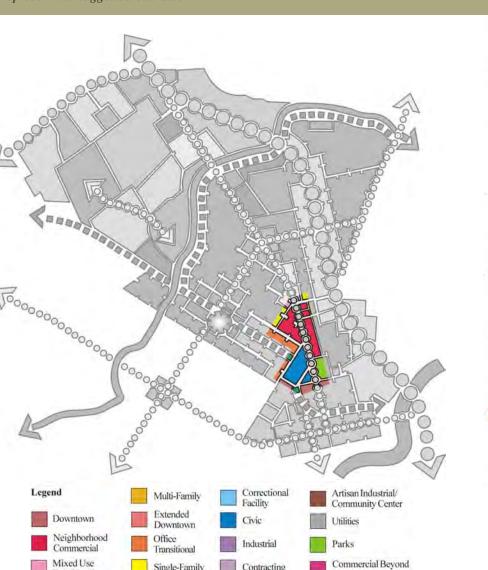
substantial scale calls for adjacent development that might serve as a transi-

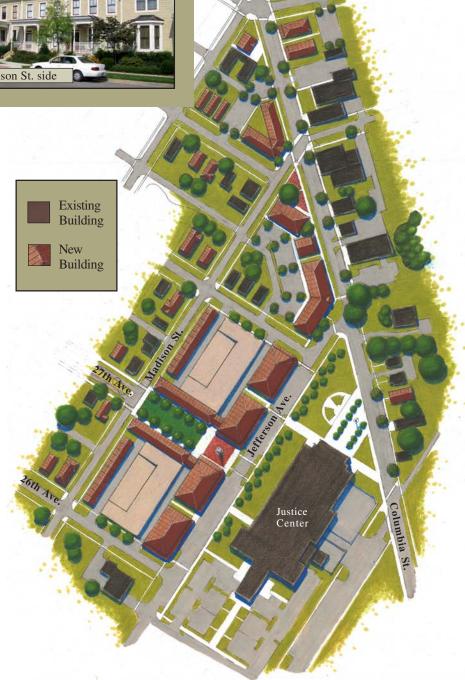
tion to the much smaller scale of the surrounding neighborhood.

Wrapping the Garage with "Liner" Uses
To leverage economic development from
the Justice Center and to transition better
with the neighborhood, the garage should
be wrapped with uses. Commercial space
with a masonry exterior should occur on
the Jefferson side and residential
development with a wood exterior should
line the Madison side. The photos at right
represent the suggested character.







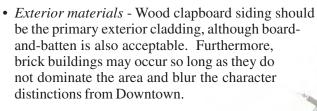




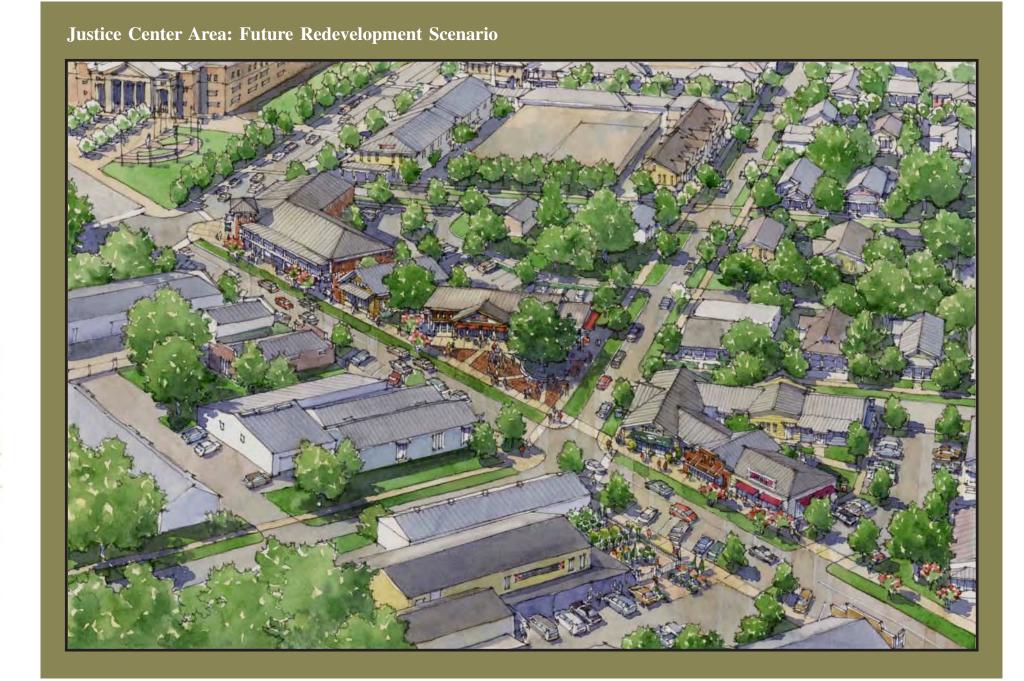
### Justice Center Area: Development Character

It is recommended that the development character for this area distinguish itself from that found in the Downtown, in addition to being reflective of the adjoining residential neighborhood. Page 54 of this plan include a set of design principles for new infill commercial development. Furthermore, below is a list of considerations specific to this particular area regarding the character of development, and they are illustrated in the rendering at right.

• *Roofs* - Roof forms should be primarily low-pitched gables with wide eaves and standing-seam metal should be the cladding. However, flat roofs are also acceptable when accompanied by a parpet facade.



- Facade design Facades may feature a traditional commercial storefront on the ground level or utilize more narrow vertically-oriented windows as found in residential architecture. Glass should not be reflective or tinted. Also, parapet facades should be used for flat roofs and may be used for gable roofs as well.
- Parking Parking should consist of parallel or angled (where space permits) on-street parking. Small parking lots are acceptable behind and beside buildings if landscaped and not extending into the front yard area.
- Site design Where viable, a green edge should occur along this street, particularly in the form of street trees.
- *Signage* Signs should be minimal in number and size, consisting primarily of low ground-mounted signs, facade-mounted signs, or hanging signs.



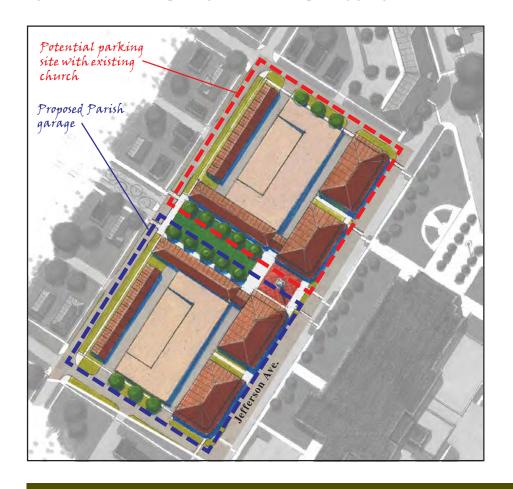
View

Cocation



### Justice Center Area: Parking Alternatives

As noted on the previous page, it is preferred that any new parking facilities adjacent to the Justice Center be wrapped in an active land use (housing, comercial uses, etc.). This approach will not only leverage economic development opportunities, but it will also help avoid the garage from becoming a barrier to the balance of the neighborhood. However, should the Parish elect to build a garage that is not wrapped with other uses, it should at least have an architectural quality to it. Recommendations on its design are at right. Furthermore, there have been discussions of also developing parking on the block bound by Jefferson, Madison, 27th and 28th. If the existing church decides to remain on this block, two different alternative designs are illustrated at bottom right - one with surface parking and one with a parking garage.



#### Alternative to Wrapping the Garage with Development

As previously stressed, it is recommended that any parking garage that might be developed near the Justice Center be fronted with development on the primary streets. However, should the Parish elect to not develop a garage wrapped with other uses, it is recommended that the design have an architectural quality that at least contributes to the aesthetics and character of the neighborhood. The photo at right represents one way to design a parking garage in a historic downtown to look more like a building than a garage. Key design principles that should be followed include the following:

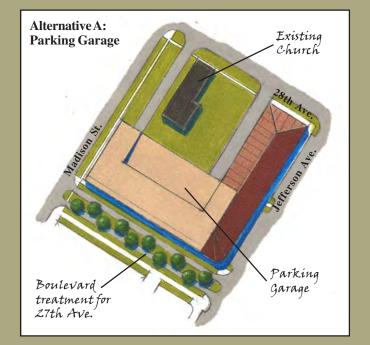
- Consider locating the vehicular entrance(s) on 26th and/or 27th Avenue, rather than the more visible Jefferson Avenue and Madison Street.
- Minimize the width of the vehicular entrance points to the extent possible.
- Break up the massing of the facades with vertical elements such as facade setbacks and projections, material changes, pilasters, and similar treatments.
- Include architectural design elements such as vertically-oriented openings and cornices.
- The garage's ramp system should not be readily visible from the adjacent streets.



#### Alternatives for Keeping the Church

First Missionary Baptist Church (below) is located on 28th. Should the church choose to remain there while the remainder of the block is developed, two concept plans are offered at right. Option A features a garage oriented along 27th with commercial development along Jefferson, while Option B features surface parking with development fronting 27th and Jefferson. Option B also shows this segment of 26th becoming a park.









### Justice Center Area: Habitat Triangle

This triangular block is informally referred to as the "Habitat Triangle" because the only existing structure once housed the local Habitat for Humanity office. It is bound on the east by Columbia, on the southeast by Madison, on the southwest by 29th, and on the northwest by Monroe (see red dashed line below). The property is owned by a local citizen interested in seeing the property utilized in a manner beneficial to the area.

As the blow-up below of the concept plan for the Justice Center Area illustrates, multiple infill buildings are proposed. It is certainly not important that the block's eventual redevelopment feature building footprints specifically as illustrated here. However, it is important that the principles be followed, which includes fronting the streets with buildings and centralizing most of the parking internal to the block. On-street parking will also be important to have.



#### **Proposed Character**

The blow up below of the rendering contained on page 27 illustrates the potential character for this block. However, as in the case of the concept plan discussed at left, the principles depicted are more important than the details. Consistent with the recommended character for all commercial and mixed use buildings within the areas designated on page 54 for "non-commercial forms," the following design principles are recommended:

- Front setback: can range from a shallow setback to no setback
- Building height: 1-2 stories
- *Roof forms:* primarily low-pitch gables/hipped / also flat or gabled with a parapet facade
- Facades: storefronts for groundfloor retail / vertical upper floor windows
- Windows: minimum solid-to-void ratio / non-reflective and untinted
- *Materials*: primarily wood (clapboard/board-and-batten) / some brick



#### **Proposed Uses**

With respect to potential uses for this site, it should be considered within the context of the commercial and mixed use corridor extending along Columbia from the Justice Center north to this site. A "main street" concept has been suggested for this area that features some regional destination uses, including the feed and seed business, which is increasingly attracting suburban shoppers for its nostalgic feel and plant/ lawn supply offerings. The former Habitat site should be marketed as part of this broader concept rather than attempting to market it alone. Within this broader context, potential uses include the following:

- Multi-tenant spaces (e.g., hair salon, foodstore/café, offices)
- Artist studio space
- Dance/performance/training space
- Community Development Corporation (CDC) offices

Also, because this site serves as a northern anchor for this corridor and has such proximity to the feed and seed business, it might have some interplay with the feed and seed business. Uses that can take advantage of the hardware/garden supply traffic that this business generates would be appropriate for the former Habitat property.



In combination, the former Habitat building on the corner of Columbia and Monroe and the feed and seed business across Columbia serve as anchors at the north end of this commercial and mixed use corridor. The corridor is anchored by the Justice Center at the south end.



### **Tyler Street:** A Street That Needs to Mature

#### **Background**

Designated on the City's current street classification map as just one of many "local" streets within the West 30s hierarchy of streets, Tyler performs an important function in carrying more traffic than most other NE-SW oriented streets within several blocks. With only two 11.5 ft. wide travel lanes, it is modestly designed like many local streets, but its functional significance lies in the fact that it connects the following key locations/uses (west to east):

- Hospital and commecial hub at 21st Avenue (west of the study area)
- Champagne property at 27th Avenue
- Harrison Curriculum Center and Pathways Park
- Columbia Street, Collins Boulevard and Lee Road (as 32nd Avenue)

#### Recommendations

In general, this street's design and adjacent land uses and development forms need to catch up with the street's importance. Improving the street's design does not mean needing to widen or add driving lanes, but rather to make it a higher quality and more pedestrian-friendly street. The following recommendations are offered:

• Develop, redevelop and/or enhance various key properties along this street as suggested elsewhere in this plan, including: enhancement and additional uses for the Champagne property, physical improvements to the Harrison Curriculum Center, enhancement of both parks fronting Tyler between 27th and 29th, and development of the proposed commercial node at Tyler and Columbia.

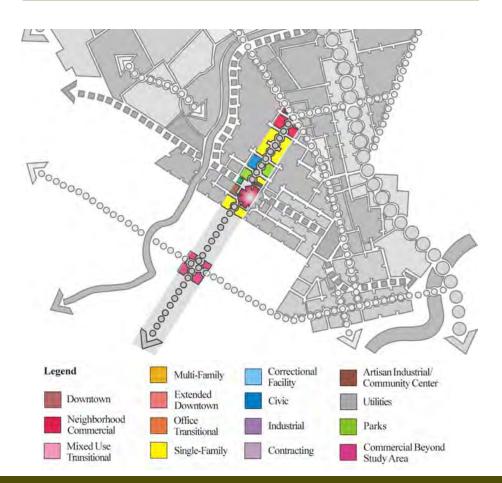
"The City did a sidewalk project for Columbia a few years ago. Now they need to provide sidewalks and lighting for Tyler."

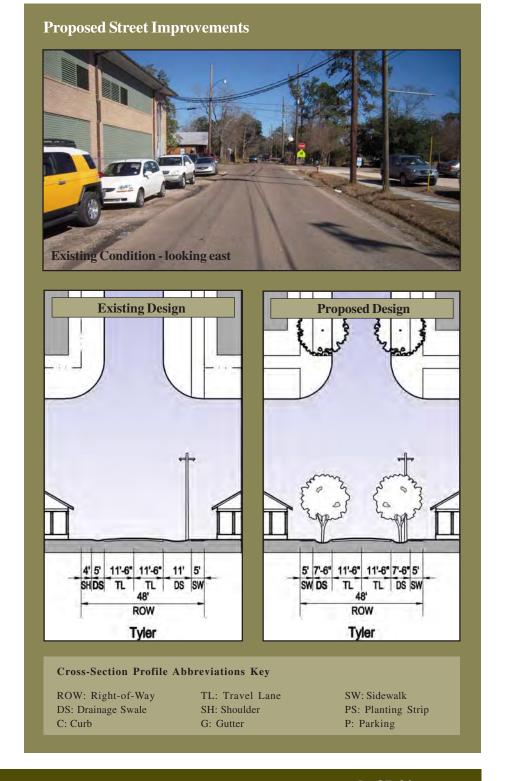
- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

• Improve the streetscape by rebuilding deteriorated sidewalks where they exist, developing new sidewalks where they do not currently exist, contouring drainage swales for a more consistent and optimal shape/size, and planting street trees. See the recommended street cross-section at bottom right.

#### **Trees & Drainage Swales**

Street trees have many stormwater benefits. They reduce stormwater runoff and soil erosion through canopy interception, absorption of rainwater, evapotranspiration, and increased soil infiltration. Trees may be planted to the edge of grass swales. It is important that trees do not hinder the flow of stormwater run-off within swales, especially within flood-prone areas where water needs to drain off quickly. It is equally important that trees are not planted directly in the bottom of dry swales where water might pool during rain events, causing the trees to become waterlogged. Native trees that are adapted to wet soil conditions should be chosen for swale plantings.







### Harrison Curriculum Center: Tyler St. Anchor

#### **Background**

The Parish school board recently prepared a preliminary site plan for improvements to the Harrison Curriculum Center, which is located on Tyler Street. The site is also bound by 28th Avenue, 29th Avenue, and Polk Street. Covington Pathways Park is located across Tyler Street from this important site, and Atkins Park is located across 28th Avenue from the site. The school board's proposed changes to provide additional parking will go far toward making the center a better, more functional place for its users and for the neighborhood as a whole. During this planning process for the West 30s, the community has identified the area around the center as the "heart" of the neighborhood. In addition to the Harrison Curriculum Center, plan recommendations for this geographic area address Atkins Park, the Champagne property, surrounding industrial properties, and the associated streets.

#### **Existing Conditions: Harrison Curriculum Center**







At present, much of the parking surrounding the school is treated as almost an afterthought. Some of it consists of a gravel surface, and much of it is 90 degree "head-in" parking. Such parking is difficult to safely back out of, and it is inconsistent with a more appropriate urban condition, such as angled parking integrated into the street's design.

#### Recommendations

The following two key suggestions are offered:

#### Tyler Street Improvements

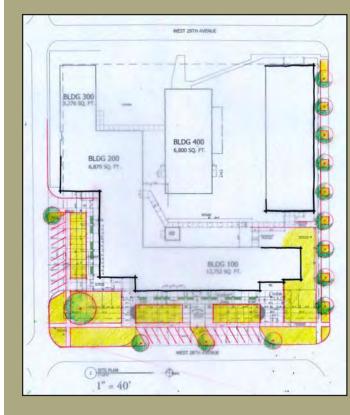
The community identified Tyler as an important street. It is the main southwest/ northeast axis through the neighborhood and carries a relatively high volume of traffic, including pedestrian traffic. Tyler connects the neighborhood to Columbia Street and Collins Blvd. to the northeast, as well as the hospital and interstate to the southwest. This plan's proposed cross-section recommends street trees within a combination planting strip and drainage swale on either side, flanked by a 5 foot wide sidewalk (see previous page). The segment of Tyler in front of the Harrison Curriculum Center currently has highly-utilized on-street parking. It is recommend that this on-street parking be retained, in addition to introducing street trees as indicated in the cross-section to help formalize the parking, to provide shade for parked cars and pedestrians, and to visually soften the blank wall of the building along Tyler Street. Many street segments throughout the neighborhood are missing sidewalks or they are deteriorated. Since Tyler is a very important street, it should receive priority for sidewalk improvements. The Parish school board has a great opportunity to set the tone for improving pedestrian access along Tyler by enhancing the sidewalks.

#### On-Street Parking Design

Typically, off-street parking for buildings in a historic urban neighborhood like the West 30s is located behind or to the side of the building. In cases such as this in which buildings occupy the entire block, parking cannot be located behind or beside the buildings. Therefore, it is recommended that parking for this site be treated as an extension of the street as it would have traditionally been in such a neighborhood. In the rough mark-up at upper right, angled parking is proposed because:

- 1) It decreases impervious surface and offers more area for turf or plantings
- 2) It enables the sidewalk system to extend across the property in a clear and predictable manner as a public benefit to the entire neighborhood
- 3) It is safer and easier for vehicles to back out of

#### Rough Mark-Up of the Center's Preliminary Site Plan



This rough mark-up of the preliminary site plan for improvements to the Harrison Curriculum Center illustrates the recommendations provided here, including the addition of landscaping and reorienting the parking to an angled configuration.





The Harrison Curriculum Center is unique as the only civic use in the West 30s fronting a public park on two sides. Covington Pathways Park is located to the southeast on Tyler and Atkins Park is located to the southwest on 28th.



### 27th & Tyler Area: Artisan Industrial Village

#### **Drawbacks with Existing Industrial Uses**

The vicinity of 27th and Tyler currently features several industrial uses. However, for the following reasons, future growth of these uses will be difficult:

- Lack of direct highway access
- Negative impacts to surrounding residences (aesthetics, truck traffic, potential environmental issues)
- Fragmented property ownership patterns makes land assemblage for growth a challenge
- Zoning does not exist to accommodate industrial expansions

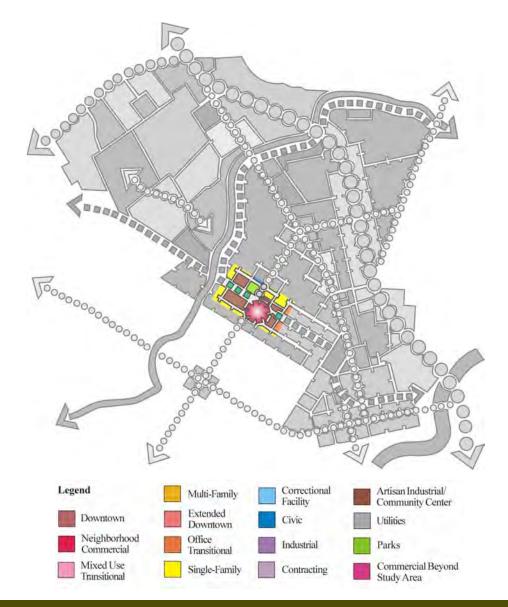
While it is not recommended that existing industrial uses terminate within the immediate future, it is recommended that alternative land uses be pursued for this area in the long-term future. See page 38 for specific recommendations on the future of industrial uses within the study area.



Because the existing industrial uses in the vicinity of 27th and Tyler are surrounded by residences and lack good access for truck traffic, it will be very difficult for them to grow. This area clearly lacks the characteristics conducive toward future industrial expansions.

"Industrial uses just aren't a good fit with a residential area. In addition to the noise and dust, the truck traffic is especially bad. It needs to go."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant





#### **Alternative Scenarios for Existing Industrial Properties**

Three alternatives have been identified for the future use of the existing industrial properties, as follow:

#### Status Quo: Maintain Existing Uses

Because of the constraints already described here regarding access, impacts to residences, and limitations to growth, this option does not appear to be a good choice for the long term.

#### <u>Campus</u>

One alternative initially identified as a viable option was the concept of a campus in which a variety of educational and job training programs might be housed together. One of multiple key players identified for this scenario was Delgado Community College. However, it was later learned that a similar concept involving Delgado is being developed within another community in the region, eliminating this concept from further consideration.

#### Artisan Industrial Village

This concept would build upon the industrial past of this area, but in a manner that is a much better fit for the surrounding neighborhood. Uses would consist of low-impacting industrial-type uses oriented toward a high level of craftsmanship and artistry. See more on this concept on the following pages.



### 27th & Tyler Area: Artisan Industrial Village

#### **Background**

As already explained, conventional industrial uses lack the ability to readily grow within the residential core of the West 30s Neighborhood. Of the three options outlined on the previous page, the Artisan Industrial Village concept appears to be most promising. In fact, the economic and market assessment conducted for this project determined that artisan industrial type uses are a growing market segment within the region. The village would be a holistic social/economic development project that combines economic development (jobs and hands-on skills training) with community functions, such as education, recreation, and civic space. See pages 65-67 for more on this concept.

#### Recommendations

The following types of businesses should be considered for this area:

#### **Wood Products**

- Custom architectural millwork
- Flooring
- Kitchen cabinetry
- Furniture
- Toys and puzzles

#### **Printing**

- Commercial litho printing
- Screen printing

#### **Specialty Artisan Foods**

- Bakeries
- Seasonings









These images represent just a few of the potential artisan crafts that might occur in the proposed Artisan Industrial Village.

#### Computer-Related Businesses

- Media
- Graphic design

#### Other Artisan-Type Businesses

- Stonework
- Fabricated metal (ornamental)
- Lighting fixtures/components

In general, artisan industrial type uses are growth sectors within the region. For example, screen printing has a 47% growth rate, commercial litho printing

has a 61% growth rate, and bakeries have a huge 526% growth rate within the region. On the other hand, it must also be recognized that not all of the uses suggested for further exploration are without some potential impacts to the surrounding area. In particular, stonework may generate some levels of dust, noise and truck traffic. See the following page for an explanation of the concept plan below.





### 27th & Tyler Area: Artisan Industrial Village

Below is a description of the concept plan illustrated on the preceding page:

#### Reuse of Existing Industrial Buildings

While it is not suggested that existing industrial uses be asked to unwillingly relocate, a variety of potential artisan industrial uses have been identified. The existing industrial buildings can be adapted to accommodate these uses. In the case of the building fronting Taylor, Polk and 27th, a new and more attractive facade is proposed.

#### **Improvement of Park Facilities**

Reverend Peter S. Atkins Memorial Park is bound by 27th, 28th, Polk and Tyler. The swimming pool was recently improved, and the City hopes to construct a roof over the basketball courts to provide protection from the weather at some point in the future when funding is available. To add to these improvements, it is recommended that a pathway system be provided, a gazebo / picnic shelter built, and the playground area be enhanced. See page 46 for detailed recommendations for the West 30s parks.

#### Plaza & Associated Public Spaces

To make the neighborhood a better place for current residents and more marketable to non-residents, it needs a physical "heart and soul." The plaza is proposed at the intersection of Tyler and 27th. While there are a variety of design options that might work here, the concept plan illustrates a substantial "hardscaped" area (pavers rather than landscaping), but with relatively large adjoining open green spaces. A focal point is also included in the form of a fountain or some other vertical feature. This location for the plaza was selected not only because of the significance of both Tyler and 27th within this plan, but also because of the potential of the adjacent Champagne property to serve a wide range of important functions for the Parish, the City, the community and the neighborhood (see recommendations at right for this property).



#### **Champagne Property:** Public-Private Partnerships

#### **Background**

This property once housed a beer distributorship, but is now owned by St. Tammany Parish and used for its public works operations. Only a portion of this property's 116,375 square feet of building space is presently being utilized. There are a variety of interior spaces, includ-



ing offices, meeting rooms, cold storage, and warehouse-type space.

#### Recommendations

Although the Parish has made no indications that it is interested in selling the property, that should not preclude the exploration of a combination of uses here that might include current Parish operations, certain City operations, private enterprises, and a community center. Specific potential uses, which might occur under any ownership scenario, include the following:

#### Wellness Center

This center represents an opportunity to move an existing center from its current low-visibility location and to better respond to the health needs of the neighborhood, including offering nursing services. Given the importance





could be coordinated with the proposed community center (see below). It could also help to combat health problems that intefer with employment.

#### Health Business Incubator

The incubator could feature both employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the neighborhood. Growth sectors within the region include:

- Home healthcare (130% growth between 1998 and 2007)
- Senior/disabled services (184% growth between 1998 and 2007)

Over 500 jobs have been created for the latter, and this sector will continue to grow because of our aging population. See page 67 for more.

#### **Community Center**

The Public Opinion Survey conducted as part of this project determined that a community center was the single most desired public facility for the West 30s. Ever since the previous center on Columbia was replaced by the National Guard facility, there has been much discussion in the community regarding the need. While a community center located within the West 30s could serve the entire community, it would be particularly beneficial to the neighborhood's residents. The individual components of a community center do not all need to occur under a single roof. This would be a holistic approach bringing together various

indoor and outdoor elements, recreation, training, and economic development, to create an exciting community gatherin place. Below is a list of components already existing in this area, as well as potential new components proposed:

### **Existing Components**

Swimming pool, basketball courts, parks/ playgrounds, Boys & Girls Club

### **Proposed Components**

Computer lab, seniors center, meeting space







### **27th Avenue:** Key Connector to Jefferson

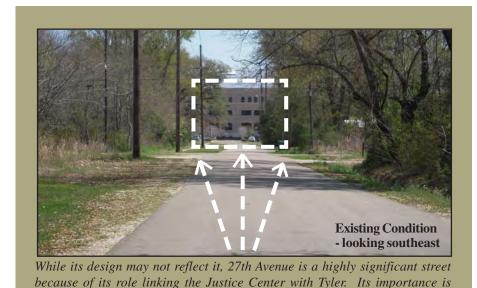
#### **Background**

With only two 9.25 ft. wide travel lanes and very broad shoulders and swales on either side, this modest street lacks sidewalks and other streetscape improvements. It also features a high number of vacant properties, including the former concrete plant, so there is tremendous potential for new infill development that might occur with street enhancements. With the Justice Center anchoring its southeast end and potential recommended improvements six blocks to the northwest at Tyler (improved parks, community center, etc.), this street needs to mature much as has been suggested for Tyler.

#### Recommendations

This street's design and adjacent properties should be improved as follows:

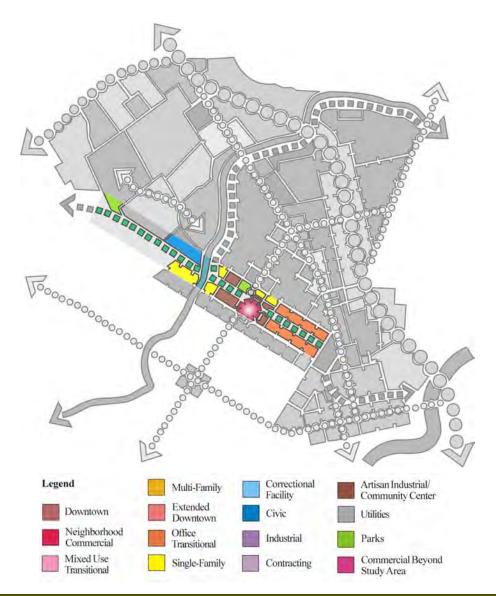
• Develop housing and low-impact commercial and office uses with a residential character along this corridor. See more on this issue on the following page regarding the proposed "Mixed Use Neighborhood" District.



further underscored by the strong sense of orientation provided by the Justice

Center's function as a visual termination when looking southwest.

• Enhance this street in accordance with one of the two options illustrated at bottom right. Option A would: 1) increase the pavement width to 24 ft., allowing for two travel lanes and informal (not designated) on-street parking; 2) reduce the width of the excessively wide shoulder and drainage swale on either side; and 3) provide wide sidewalks as an extention of the Trace. Option B would also include a pavement width of 24 ft., as with Option A, but the flanking swales would be replaced by a combination central median and swale with street trees.



## **Proposed Street Improvements** As the photo at bottom left con-**Existing Design** veys, a view looking down 27th to the southeast is terminated by the side of the Justice Center. This visual termination helps to orient the viewer and provides a strong identity to the corridor. Either of the alternative designs below would benefit the corridor, heighten its significance within the West 30s, and perhaps help spark adjacent private sector development. Also, this street's proposed multi-purpose trail has the potential to be extended north to access the City's new recreational center. **Proposed Design: Option A Proposed Design: Option B Cross-Section Profile Abbreviations Key**

TL: Travel Lane

MPT: Multi-Purpose Trail

SH: Shoulder

ROW: Right-of-Way

DS: Drainage Swale

C: Curb

SW: Sidewalk

M: Median

PS: Planting Strip



## Mixed Use Neighborhood: Transitional District

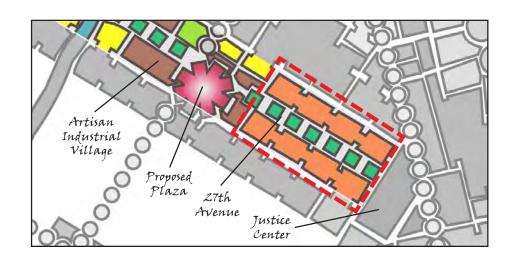
#### **Background**

As the aerial photograph map on page 7 and the vacant parcels map on page 8 of the Background Findings section demonstrate, there are numerous vacant properties located between the proposed Artisan Industrial Village and the Justice Center area to the southeast. In particular, the entire block bound by Van Buren, Jackson, 27th and 28th, once serving as a concrete plant, is vacant. Meanwhile, improvements are proposed for 27th Avenue, which serves as the main spine for this area linking the Justice Center and Tyler (see previous page).

#### Recommendations

It is proposed that this area be redeveloped as a residential and mixed use district. The non-residential uses should include offices, retail and service businesses. However, they should all be small in scale and include the following:

- Residential architectural character front porches, sloped roofs, wood exteriors
- Off-street parking should be behind the associated building or to the side if no more than one parking bay exists and the lot is screened.
- Generous amounts of landscaping and small signs







### Mixed Use Neighborhood: Transitional District

Even though this are may have some non-residential uses, it is recommended that the development character reflect that of a residential neighborhood. Pages 48-54 of this plan include a set of design principles for new infill development. However, below is a list of considerations specific to this particular area regarding the character of development, and they are illustrated in the rendering at right.

- *Roofs* Roof forms should be low-pitched gables with wide eaves and standing-seam metal should be the cladding.
- *Exterior materials* Wood clapboard siding should be the primary exterior cladding, although board-and-batten is also acceptable.
- Facade design and porches Facades should have a residential character with vertically oriented opening, but should not feature traditional large-size storefronts. Window and door glass should not be reflective or tinted. Also, front porches should be required and designed as those historically found in the neighborhood.
- *Parking* Parking should consist of parallel on-street parking. Small parking lots are acceptable behind and beside buildings if landscaped and not extending into the front yard area.
- *Site design* A green edge should occur along all property frontages, including grass planting strips and street trees.
- *Signage* Signs should be minimal in number and size, consisting primarily of low ground-mounted signs, facade-mounted signs, or hanging signs.



### Mixed Use Neighborhood (27th Avenue): Future Redevelopment Scenario looking southeast from Van Buren





### **Industrial Areas & Contractor Corridors**

#### **Background**

As previously explained in the section on the proposed Artisan Industrial Village, the industrial uses presently located within the residential core of the West 30s Neighborhood are a poor fit for their context. These industrial uses lack visibility, good access, and space to grow, and they generate negative impacts for area residents. Consequently, it has been recommended that, over time, such uses relocate to sites where they can be better positioned to grow and prosper. Meanwhile, Collins Blvd. and the segment of Ronald Regan Hwy. (190) on the north side of the West 30s are still relatively undeveloped, they lack good aesthetics because of generally low-quality development, and they need an identity. With these "givens" in mind, the following recommendations are offered.

#### Recommendations

#### **Industrial Areas**

It is recommended that the areas depicted in dark purple on the map at right be utilized for industrial uses. Industrial uses might include manufacturing, assemblage and warehousing as examples. Some of these uses aleady exist on these lands, but other lands are undeveloped or underdeveloped and in need of new businesses. These sites all enjoy the important characteristics lacking within the heart of the West 30s residential area - high visibility, strong truck access, and space to grow.

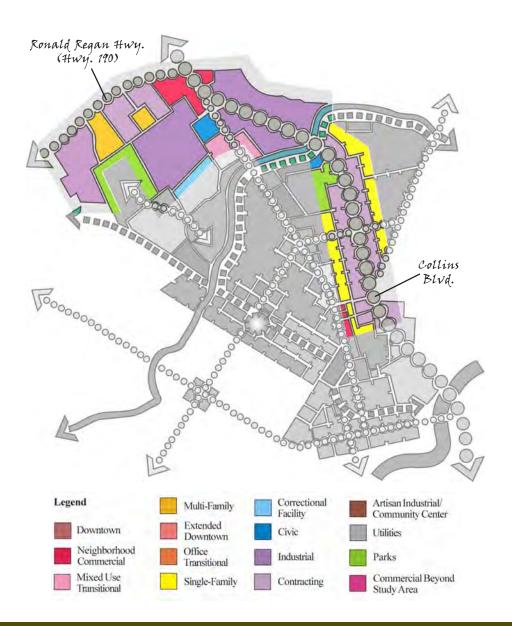
#### **Contractor Corridors**

A substantial portion of the corridors along Collins and Ronald Regan Hwy., not including the sites noted above in dark purple, are underdeveloped. However, much of the existing development features businesses that are related to the building contracting industry. Because this is a growth industry within the region, and because these corridors need to mature into something different from the strip commercial corridor that dominates Hwy. 190 Business from I-12 to Boston Street, it is recommended that those areas shown in light purple at right be redefined or "rebranded" as a contractor corridor.

#### **Potential Benefits**

This concept has numerous benefits, including the following:

- Gradual phasing-out of land uses negatively impacting a residential area
- Provision of a superior location for industries and contractor-oriented business with respect to visibility, access and space for future growth



"We need to market the positive sides of the area, including its undeveloped resources – both land and people."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant
- Provision of a market identity and greater utilization for an area currently lacking both
- Generation of additional retail and property tax revenues for the City and Parish
- Retention and expansion of employment opportunities within walking and bicycling distance of West 30s residents

#### **Specific Strategies**

To successfully implement this concept, the following actions should occur:

- Physical improvements to the Collins Blvd. and Hwy. 190 corridors, including sidewalks and landscaping
- Zoning changes for both corridors to tailor permitted land uses more closely to this concept
- Proactive marketing of both corridors for their respective uses, including recruiting targeted businesses

Design standards implemented through zoning to address architecture, landscaping and signage would be helpful to enhance the areas' appearance and image within the region. See more on this issue on the following page.



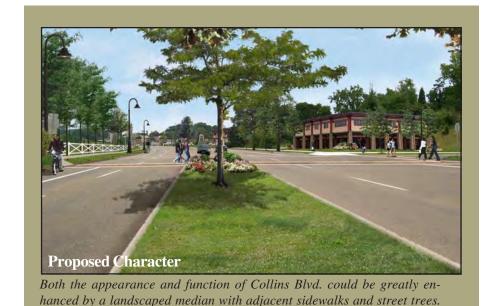
### **Industrial Areas & Contractor Corridors**

#### Collins Boulevard Design & Character

The proposed character for Collins Blvd. is less like a tired-looking industrial area and more like a finely-groomed suburban corridor. It is recommended that the street and corridor include the following features (subject to LDOT):

- Two driving lanes in each direction (four total lanes)
- Landscaped median with turn lanes at intersections
- Sidewalks and designated bike lanes on both sides of the street
- Broad planting strip between the street and sidewalk with street trees and drainage swales
- Street crosswalks at intersections with a highly visible paving treatment
- Human-scaled street lights (even if the existing tall cobra-head lights must remain)

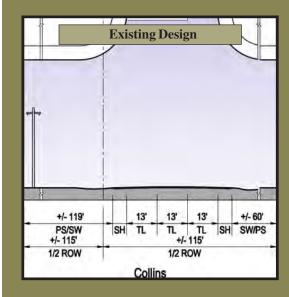
Design standards should also be adopted to require cross-access between sites, minimal driveway numbers and widths, extensive landscaping, and relatively small signage.

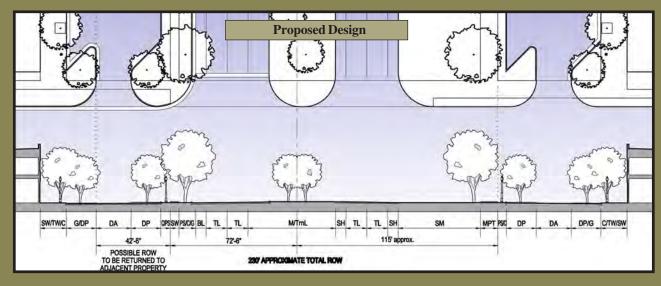


### **Proposed Street Improvements: Collins Boulevard**



The proposed design below is conceptual and would require more detailed study to implement, as well as DOTD approval. Because the current roadway is off center of the ultimate ROW according to property maps, it is assumed that the intent is that the existing roadway will eventually become one side of a divided highway. Based on that assumption, two optional approaches are illustrated below within a single cross-section. The first option (right half of cross-section) illustrates a more suburban cross-section with a large side median and a separated multi-purpose trail. In this approach, all private development occurs outside of the approximate 230' total ROW. The second option (left half of the cross-section) illustrates a slightly more urban - but still suburban - design. In this approach, the side median is much narrower and the multi-purpose trail is dropped in favor of dedicated bike lanes.





#### **Cross-Section Profile Abbreviations Key**

ROW: Right-of-Way TL: Travel Lane SW: Sidewalk M: Median DP: Diagonal Parking SH: Shoulder PS: Planting Strip TrnL: Turn Lane TW: Tree Well MPT: Multipurpose Trail C: Curb G: Gutter BL: Bicycle Lane SM: Side Median DA: Driving Aisle



#### **Downtown**

#### **Background**

Downtown Covington currently has many advantages, as follow:

#### Great Architecture & Existing Preservation Program

- National Register Historic District designation provides federal investment tax credit benefits for qualified historic building rehabilitations
- Local historic district designation provides design review protection via the City's Historic District Commission, as well as Certified Local Government (CLG) designation that qualifies the City for grants and technical support from the State

#### Diverse Uses

- Active ground floor uses most ground floor space is occupied by retail, services, and other uses, and restaurants provide life during the evenings
- Appropriate upper floor uses there are some residences and upper floor offices, although additional housing would be helpful to Downtown

#### **Existing Organizations**

• Covington Economic & Downtown Development Department - Among other activities, this City department promotes the availability of local, state and federal financial incentives. Covington was once part of the national and state Main Street programs, but it "graduated" from the program in 2003. This department, in part, helps to somewhat fill the void.

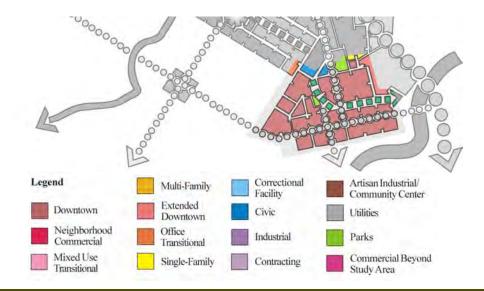
Of those surveyed, 82 percent believe that the revitalization of the West 30s Neighborhood is important for the future success of Downtown.

- Public Opinion Survey

• Covington Business Association - This entity recently rose from the ashes of the former Covington Association of Retailers (CARE). Though technically a city-wide organization, it is heavily represented by Downtown retailers and functions as a downtown merchants association.

#### Recommendations

- Actively recruit key destination anchors for Downtown, including entertainment venue/facilities and restaurants, as well as specialty destination clothing and food stores that are unique to the area.
- Actively recruit additional tenants and diversify the office mix in the Downtown, focusing on the area's attractive features for professional services, including architects, interior designers, information technology providers, web designers, and similar small specialty professional service firms. This approach will build a "captured" market for downtown retail and restaurants.
- Focus on "packaging" and branding the Covington experience, including recruitment/establishment of Downtown bed-and-breakfasts or a hotel (see next page). Attention should also be paid to streets beyond Columbia.
- Build on event activities and establish local historic tours, including African-American heritage tour of the West 30s.



#### **Preferences for New Downtown Businesses**

Toward the beginning of this project, a Public Opinion Survey was conducted to gauge public perceptions, opinions and preferences regarding the West 30s Neighborhood. Some of the questions posed related specifically to the Downtown. While this survey was not intended to be a statistically valid survey due to budget limitations, it still provided very useful information to serve as yet another layer of valuable public input regarding the study area. Below are the survey's results regarding public preferences for new Downtown businesses.

Business Type	Very <u>Desirable</u>	Somewhat <u>Desirable</u>	Not <u>Desirable</u>
A. Grocery Store	51%	39%	10%
B. High-End Restaurant	35%	38%	27%
C. Casual Restaurant	59%	41%	0%
D. Gym / Health Club	46%	40%	14%
E. Specialty Retail	48%	41%	11%
F. Personal Services	62%	32%	6%
G. Sports Bar	25%	33%	42%
H. Coffee House	42%	42%	17%
I. Ethnic Dining	53%	39%	9%
J. Live Entertainment	51%	39%	10%
K. Bakery	64%	30%	6%
L. Clothing Store	73%	27%	0%

As the results above reflect, the most desirable business type for the Downtown was a clothing store, while a bakery, personal services and a casual restaurant were not far behind. These numbers are not scientific, but they should generate interest from prospective new businesses.



### **Downtown:** Anchor Uses

#### **Background**

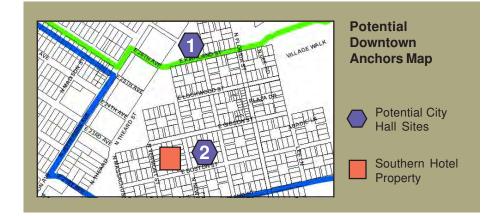
For a community of only approximately 9,600 residents, Downtown Covington is a relatively vibrant and economically healthy place. Its various advantages are summarized on the previous page. However, there is still room for improvement, including the utilization of vacant and/or underused space. While the Downtown is fortunate to have existing destinations such as the Heinerbrau microbrewery, it could benefit from a few more "anchor" uses that draw people and leverage spin-off benefits to other uses and businesses.

#### Recommendations

It is recommended that anchor uses for Downtown be explored. Anchors can be either public sector or private sector uses. The two most likely candidates for Downtown Covington are the rehabilitation and reuse of the Southern Hotel on Boston Street, and the relocation of City Hall to a more strategic location.

Historically, institutional uses... are primary anchors for downtowns... County courthouses, city halls, post offices, schools, and houses of worship are vital traffic generators that can help to keep retailers and services in business."

- "Downtown Planning for Smaller & Midsized Communities"
- American Planning Association's Planners Press



#### **Southern Hotel**

The Southern Hotel is located on the north side of Boston Street between New Hampshire and Vermont Streets (see map at left). Built in 1907 and once boasting such features as formal gardens and tennis courts, this approximately 30,000 sq. ft. architectural gem is currently only partially utilized (3,000 sq. ft.) as office space. Spaces for retail and office uses can be leased as small as 792 square feet and as large as 7,157 square feet. A potential parking lot is located diagonally at the corner of Boston and Vermont. One fortunate aspect of this property not enjoyed by many similarly situated properties in other communities is that the owner lives in the area, which increases the chances of the property's eventual rehabilitation and full utilization.

#### Potential Future Uses

In addition to the current use of offices, other uses that might be considered in the future if economically viable include the following:

- *Hotel* Given that the building was originally designed as a hotel and no such use currently exists downtown, this would be the ideal use. However, according to the owner, the interior would have to be gutted and rebuilt to provide bathrooms in each room, and that is not economically feasible.
- Housing The development of apartments and/or condominiums would face the same physical and financial challenges as would a hotel. However, until the current economic downturn occurred, the relatively new residential development on the east side of Downtown appeared to be prospering, so housing may be viable.
- *Retail* Ground floor retail could work in both scenarios described above.



Photo Source: Southern Hotel 11



#### City Hall

As a general principle, city halls and similar key civic buildings should be located within a community's downtown for two reasons. The first reason is symbolism, as arguably the most important building should be in the most important location. Secondly, downtowns should be given a high priority economically, and city halls can be strong generators of economic activity.

Covington's City Hall is currently housed within the Greater Covington Center at the corner of Jefferson and 23rd just west of Downtown. If it were located just a few blocks closer toward the Downtown core, it would have much greater economic spin-off potential because it would be within comfortable walking distance of numerous restaurants and shops. However, most people leaving the Greater Covington Center for a restaurant destination will choose to drive, and once they are behind a steering wheel, restaurants on Hwy. 190 and elsewhere become quite accessible. While it might make sense for the City offices to stay where they are for the foreseeable future, and it is not the intent of this plan to feature a site location study for City Hall, the following sites should be considered if a future move is contemplated (see the map at the bottom far left):

1) Old City Hall - Following a fire a few years ago, this building is now used only by the City police department. Assuming space may not exist for both a police department and other municipal operations, the police department might be relocated. It is noteworthy that this location is on the edge of Downtown, but because of the quality of the pedestrian environment leading to the core area along Columbia (storefronts, shaded sidewalks, etc.), the distance is much less of an issue than for the Greater Covington Center.

2) Old Parish Courthouse - This Parish-owned building is currently used by multiple public entities, including the Homeland Security and Emergency Operation Center. Informal discussions have revealed that these uses can likely be moved to one or more other locations. This building has a ceremonial public space fronting it and it is located in the core of Downtown. This location, however, may pose parking challenges that would need to be overcome. Also, the current average number of daily employees in the building is roughly 35 (nearly identical as City Hall), and visitors come and go from the building. If the building is used for City Hall, the current tenants should be relocated elsewhere Downtown so as to not result in a net economic impact that is a "wash."



### Land Use Plan: Diverse Uses at a Human Scale

#### **Background**

It is not the intent of this plan to create a proposed land use plan that is lot specific. Furthermore, the City's lack of a current existing land use map would preclude such an effort. Nevertheless, the proposed land use map at right does provide some overall direction with respect to what land uses should occur in which locations, including overall densities and physical form. It should serve as a basis for rezoning the study area to implement this plan once completed and adopted.

#### Recommendations

While other sections of this plan explain many of these concepts in much more detail, below is an overview of some key ideas within this land use plan:

Avoid patterns of continuous linear commercial development. Such patterns, in part, can lead to "strip commercial development," which Covington already has plenty of on Hwy. 190 Business extending north from I-12. Such corridors make for poor shopping experiences because they require the use of the automobile to get from destination to destination, yet they also make for poor transportation corridors because of the traffic congestion caused by numerous curb cuts and other features.

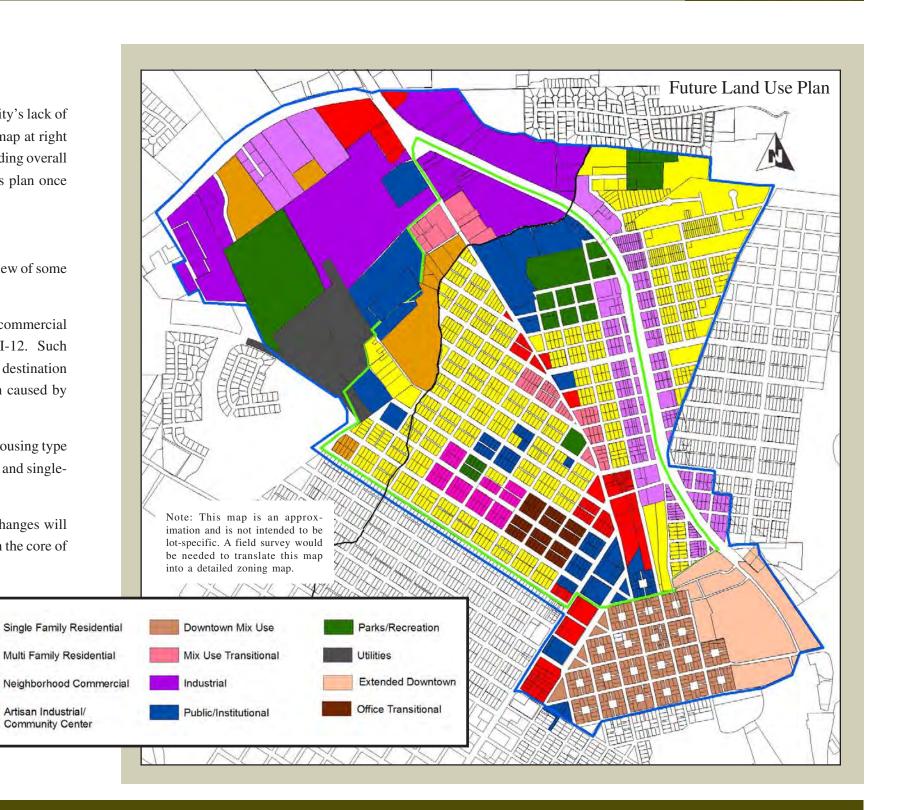
<u>Provide multi-family housing as a transitional use at key locations.</u> While the neighborhood's primary housing type should be single-family detached, attached housing makes a good transitional use between commercial and single-family uses.

Redefine Collins Blvd. and Ronald Regan Hwy. as contractor-oriented and industrial areas. These changes will expand employment opportunities within the West 30s, yet remove negatively impacting industries from the core of the neighborhood.

The following is a description of each proposed land use area, which also considers the issues of density, intensity and character. It is important to keep in mind that a land use plan differs slightly from a proposed zoning map, as one is describing a plan, while the other is for solely regulatory purposes. For example, the "Contracting"

"Columbia Street should not become all non-residential."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant





### Land Use Plan: Diverse Uses at a Human Scale

land use category describes the intended future uses and how the area migh be branded, while the zoning district name and permitted uses would likely not have such a narrow focus. Similarly, the "Correctional Facility" category is descriptive within the context of a land use plan, but this very specific land use might not warrant its own zoning category. Parks are also not typically assigned their own zoning classification.

**Downtown** - This category applies to the historic Downtown - the St. Johns District - and allows for the most diverse range of uses within a pedestrian-friendly environment. Uses should include retail, services, offices and residential, with the latter two occurring primarily on upper floors to keep the street levels vibrant. Intensity controls such as floor area ratios (FARs) are not necessary so long as urban design or "bulk" standards control building setbacks and heights. See page 54 for commercial building principles.

**Extended Downtown** - This area exists immediately east of the historic Downtown, and it features relatively new development. Its uses and character should be quite similar to that of the historic Downtown, although it can have a slightly less urban character and density than the historic Downtown. Nevertheless, future zoning for this area should help to forge a more urban form than its current relatively suburban character in which parking lots front onto streets.

**Neighborhood Commercial** - Only three areas have been given this designation and they are all along Columbia Street. This category is intended to permit small scale commercial uses serving a local market. Examples include retail, services, and offices, as well as upper floor housing and offices. Buildings should be relatively close to the street with parking lots located behind or beside buildings. Side parking lots should be small and screened with landscaping, fencing or other appropriate treatments, and vehicular cross-access should occur between adjoining lots. See pages 24-29 for a detailed description of these areas and page 54 for commercial building principles.

Mixed Use Transitional - Only two areas have been given this designation and they are both along Columbia Street. One is "transitional" for the two Neighborhood Commercial areas between Jefferson and Tyler, while the other is transitional between roughly Mile Branch and the post office to the north. This category is similar to the Neighborhood Commercial, but with smaller scale and less intense commercial uses, as well as residential uses. For example, a grocery store would not be compatible, but smaller scale retail and offices would be. Residential uses would be in the form of attached housing, such as townhouses and small apartment buildings.

**Multi-Family** - Although multi-family uses should be allowed to occur within several of the other classifications, such as Downtown and Mixed Use Transitional, this is the only category solely for multi-family housing. Three areas have been given this designation: one is on the north side of Mile Branch where The Groves - a new residential development - is about to occur. The other two are on Ronald Regan Highway and are intended to accommodate existing suburban-style multi-family housing developments.

Office Transitional - This category is applied to only one area within the West 30s - the area flanking 27th on either side between Van Buren and Jefferson. It is intended to allow small-scale office uses as a geographic transition between Jefferson Street and the Justice Center to the south and the industrial uses to the north that are proposed for the Artisan Industrial Village. As described in detail on pages 36-37, this area should retain a residential character, accommodate residences, and retain the current lot sizes and density. Office uses should minimize signage and parking lots. Because the Parish's proposed parking garages would be within this district, zoning should accommodate them so long as design standards are followed per this plan (see pages 26-28).

**Single-Family** - This classification is the most prevelant within the residential portions of the study area. It should protect and reinforce the existing single-family character, while utilizing the infill housing design principles provided on pages 48-52 of this plan.

Correctional Facility - This category applies only to the Parish's correctional

facility and, for zoning purposes, will likely be grouped within some broader zoning category that allows industrial and/or institutional uses.

**Civic** - This category of uses is geographically scattered to apply to uses such as schools, the Justice Center and the post office. Because of the diverse range of scales and characteristics of civic uses, development standards should be flexible when applied as zoning.

**Industrial** - Two large areas are designated for this category to accommodate existing industrial type uses. One flanks either side of the north end of Collins, while the other is immediately north of the Parish jail. This classification should allow a wide range of light industrial uses, including warehousing and assemblage. Zoning should focus on typical performance standards to minmize potential negative impacts, as well as the appearance from the street (see pages 38-39).

**Contracting** - Located along much of Collins and the south side of Ronald Regan Highway, this area is a hybrid between light industrial and highway commercial uses. While zoning should not limit uses to contracting-related businesses, they should be allowed and promoted here (see page 38-39).

**Artisan Industrial / Community Center** - The sole area with this designation is centered on Tyler and 27th. Because of the complexities of this use, pages 32-34 and 65-67 of this plan should be read for a complete understanding. While the permitted uses should be less impacting than the industrial uses that have existed here, the physical characteristics can remain much the same.

**Utilities** - As with the Correctional Facility category, this designation applies to a single site in the West 30s having a very specific existing use. In this case, it is the sewage treatment plant.

**Parks** - This classification is applied to all of the key existing parks in the West 30s. They are all publicly owned properties and should be limited from development other than site features and structures that are typical for a park. Parks are not usually given their own zoning designation, but are instead permitted uses within other districts, such as residential, institutional and/or open space. See page 46 for park recommendations.



### **Transportation:** Multiple Options for Travel

#### **Background**

In light of the tremendous past and future investment in transportation infrastructure in the West 30s, it is important that ample attention be given to this topic. As illustrated on pages 10 of the background findings, the key elements of the transportation system are a variety of street types and pedestrian walkways. With the exception of private non-profit transportation services, no transit system currently exists for the study area. Therefore, the major source of transportation in the West 30s - for those who are of driving age and can afford it - is the automobile. See pages 10-13 for more detailed information on existing streets.

The transportation network for the West 30s is designed on the traditional grid pattern, which evenly distributes traffic and provides multiple alternative routes for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. The current infrastructure is sufficient to accommodate most peak traffic loads. The study area's one "major arterial"

street (Collins Blvd.) and one "minor arterial" (Industrial Dr.) provide access to some key destinations. During emergencies such as hurricanes, Collins serves as the parish's evacuation route. The area's designated "collector" streets (Columbia, Lee and Theard) are efficient in funneling traffic to the arterial streets during both peak and nonpeak hours. The traffic management elements (turn lanes, traffic signals, etc.) for Downtown appear to function effectively. Although Downtown has an extensive sidewalk system, including a greenway segment, the residential portions of the study area have insufficient sidewalks. They are missing in may areas, and where they do exist, sidewalks are often physically deteriorated.



While sidewalks may not be needed for both sides of most minor residential streets, they should be maintained where they do exist.

Existing non-profit transportation services include St. Tammany Area Transportation (goSTAT) on-demand shuttle service, which ranges from \$1.50 to \$8 per trip, depending upon the distance. Only 40% of those surveyed in the Public Opinion Survey were aware of this program. The Council on Aging St. Tammany (COAST) also runs a free shuttle service for those over 60, which is much better known per the survey results.

#### **Comprehensive Plan Comments on Transportation**

The following comments relative to this plan section were made during the Covington 2007 Comprehensive Initiative Update public hearings:

- Tyler, Jefferson, Collins, 21st and Columbia, and 15th are most suited for mixed-modal transportation.
- Highway 190/Collins Blvd. and Jefferson Ave./21<sup>st</sup> Ave. are considered the two problematic intersections for traffic congestion.
- Most favored alternative modes of transportation were demandresponsive transit for senior and disabled citizens and the park and ride lot option.
- New traffic corridor between 21<sup>st</sup> and Columbia St. to provide additional access to the Parish facilities.
- Construction of a pedestrian crossing over the Tchefuncte River.
- Development of bike and pedestrian pathways to increase community and linkage.

#### Recommendations

- Provide sidewalks along the most heavily traveled streets, especially school routes and arterial and collector streets.
- Seek opportunities for the development of additional off-street parking in the Downtown, but not in a manner that results in the demolition of historic buildings or leaves a void in an important streetscape.
- Open dialogue with Parish leaders on the opportunity for a Parish-wide public

transportation system.

- More vigorously promote the goSTAT and COAST on-demand transit services.
- Aggressively pursue federal and state transportation grants. Budget matching funds, which are typically twenty percent (20%).
- Include a Capital Improvement Plan as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan. In addition, add a Capital Improvement Budget to the annual budget.
- Work with the Tammany Trace Foundation to identify funding and set aside rights-of-way (if necessary) to extend the St. Tammany Trace to the Covington Recreation Complex.
- Study a future extension of 27th Ave. or 29th Ave. (to Manton Drive) to the north
- Study the feasibility of establishing a Municipal Option Sales Tax (MOST) to fund designated capital projects (transportation and public facilities) for the City. This funding source could have up to a 1% sales tax on all goods and services and can include an optional sunset clause.

Pages 24-35 include a series of recommended changes to street cross-sections for Columbia Street, Tyler Street, 27th Avenue, and page 88 in the Implementation section addresses gateway treatments for the West 30s.

#### Collins Blvd. Widening

A road widening project has been proposed for Collins Blvd., although detailed designs are not yet available for this plan. Nevertheless, this plan proposes a design that would make the street much more attractive and user-friendly for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians (see page 39).

#### **Funding**

The Implementation section of this plan has specific recommendations for funding transportation improvements.



### **Utilities & Infrastructure**

It is the intent of this section to address only the key issues related to utilities and infrastructure that are most relevant to the revitalization of the West 30s.

#### **Stormwater Drainage**

In talking with residents, and as verified by field inspections, stormwater drainage is a significant issue for the West 30s. Specifically, the drainage swales that flank the streets do not drain properly, resulting in standing water. The City has indicated that piping stormwater into a more formal drainage system is cost prohibitive and cannot be seriously considered. Consequently, it is recommended that efforts be made to more vigorously monitor drainage ways and to remove known obstructions as promptly as reasonably possible. One idea that might be explored could be the use of supervised inmates to perform such work. Another option is the potential use of bioswales (see sidebar at far right), although their success would rely largely upon a serious commitment to ongoing maintenance. Regardless, given that current problems are likely to persist at some level despite the City's efforts, it will be important to continue the existing program of spraying for mosquitoes.



This drainage swale along the periphery of Atkins Park is typical of many throughout the West 30s Neighborhood. Despite the fact that no rain had occurred recently, the swales contained standing water, which serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

#### **Pole-Mounted Utility Lines**

The West 30's streets are lined with wooden utility poles supporting overhead lines throughout the area. The appearance of streetscapes could be enhanced

Utility poles strung with electrical and telephone lines are prevalent throughout the West 30s study area. While they detract somewhat from the area's aesthetic qualities, mature vegetation along the streets helps to visually obscure them, particularly during the non-winter months.



if they did not exist, although existing trees help to minimize their visual impact somewhat. While addressing the poles and lines should not be a high priority relative to the area's more pressing issues, there are two options to consider:

<u>Burial of Lines</u> - Because of the high costs of this option, it is likely only viable for the few streets that might be targeted for a major streetscape redevelopment, such as Columbia or Tyler. It is noteworthy, however, that a City policy requires underground lines for the construction of two or more houses.

<u>Relocation of Lines</u> - Relocating poles and lines from streets to alleys is a much more cost effective option, but would still be a challenge because of the numerous blocks where alleys have been vacated.

#### Street Lighting

Although crime has diminished in recent years in the West 30s, perceptions are still strong, and many surveyed cited increased lighting as a desired improvement. Consequently, it is recommended that an inventory be conducted at night to identify burned-out lights and gaps in lighting distribution to improve lighting.

Of those surveyed, the improvement of drainage swales was the number one pick among all potential road improvements in the West 30s.

Public Opinion Survey

#### **Bioswales**

Bioswales are landscape features designed to remove silt and pollution from stormwater runoff. They consist of a swaled drainage course with gently sloped sides - less than six percent - and filled with vegetation, compost and/or riprap. The water's flow path, along with the wide and shallow ditch, is designed to maximize the time water spends in the swale, which helps to filter pollutants and silt. Biological factors also contribute to the breakdown of certain pollutants. Depending upon the amount of available space, a bioswale can have a meandering or straight channel alignment.

A typical application of bioswales is around parking lots, where substantial liquid pollutions from automobiles (oil, antifreeze, etc.) is collected by the paving and then flushed by rain. The bioswale is installed around the parking lot's perimeter and treats the runoff before releasing it into the watershed or storm sewer. Another common use of bioswales is as drainage ditches adjacent to streets.

A decision to utilize bioswales should not be taken likely. Because they require a specific combination of plant species that are tailored to both their function and climate, they require a great deal of planning. Also, once installed they must be properly maintained to function as effective bioswales.

Photos by Cara Ruppert









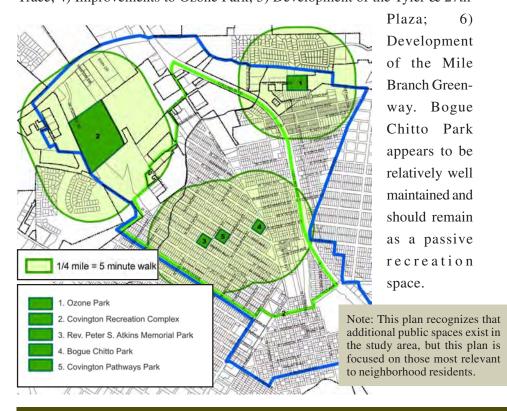
### Greenway & Parks: A Green Infrastructure

#### **Background**

Parks are not only an important resource for passive and active recreation, but they can also be used strategically as focal points for revitalization. In the case of parks that are well-maintained and used in a positive manner, they almost always add measurable property value to adjacent properties. Page 15 of this plan's Background Findings section provides an overview of the West 30s existing parks, as well as a larger version of the map below of existing parks.

#### **Recommendations: Priorities**

The text and graphics at right go into detail on recommendations for the greenway and parks. However, recognizing that the City has limited financial resources, it is important to prioritize recommendations. The following priorities are sequenced in order of importance and phasing: 1) Improvements to Atkins Park; 2) Completion of Covington Recreation Center; 3) Completion of Tammany Trace; 4) Improvements to Ozone Park; 5) Development of the Tyler & 27th



#### **Parks: Improving Existing Resources**

With the one exception of creating a new plaza at Tyler and 27th, as illustrated below and discussed on pages 33-34, it is recommended that the focus for parks be placed on improving existing parks. Below are recommendations for each existing park (numbers are correlated to the map at bottom left):

#### 1) Ozone Park (Ozone Park Rd.)

- Add new gravel and better define the edges of the parking area (use the new recreation center as a model).
- Provide evergreen trees and shrubs along the western edge to buffer the adjacent homes.
- Provide a few shade trees internal to the site in common areas.

#### 2) Covington Recreation Complex (Ronald Regan Hwy.)

• Continue with the completion of this project, including construction of a gymnasium and additional playing fields.

#### 3) Reverend Peter S. Atkins Memorial Park (27th & Tyler)

- Cover the basketball courts with a shed roof (already planned by the City).
- Build a gazebo / picnic shelter
- Provide a new, consolidated and enhanced playground area.
- Develop an interconnected system of pathways to link various uses/areas.

#### 4) Bogue Chitto Park (Columbia St.)

• This park should continue to function as a passive recreation park (picnicking, etc.), and good maintenance should be emphasized.

#### 5) Covington Pathways Park (27th & Tyler)

- Formalize the parking lot
- Develop and manage a community garden (see page 61 for details)
- Build a functional but attractive storage building for garden equipment

Suggested priority rankings for parks are listed at left.



#### **Greenway: Tammany Trace & Mile Branch**

While the West 30s is fortunate to have some existing segments of a greenway system for biking, walking, jogging and similar modes of transportation and recreation, it could greatly benefit from an expanded network.

#### Tammany Trace

This existing "rails to trails" project converted vacated segments of the Illinois Central Railroad into a paved greenway. The existing segment occurs primarily within the southern portion of the study area, including a trailhead on the edge of Downtown. It should be extended north to connect with the new Covington Recreation Center.

#### Greenway Along Mile Branch

This creek traverses the West 30s along a meandering east-west axis. While it currently lacks an adjacent greenway, there is strong potential that one could be created within the relatively inexpensive adjacent floodplains.

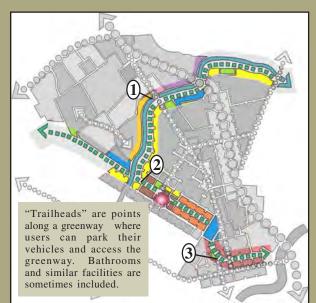


#### **Existing and Potential Greenway Trailheads**

- 1) Mile Branch at Columbia Street (Potential)
- 2) 27th Avenue and Taylor Street (Potential)
- 3) Covington Trailhead at Old Depot (Existing)









### **Housing:** Rehabilitation of Existing Housing

#### Why Building Rehabilitation is Important

The rehabilitation of older buildings should be the top priority for the West 30s relative to new development for multiple reasons. First, older buildings are an existing resource that can often be revitalized for less than the cost of new construction. Secondly, every dollar spent on rehabilitation has a greater local economic impact than the same dollar spent on new construction because rehabilitation is more labor intensive, and labor is more local than materials. And finally, older buildings give a neighborhood like the West 30s the special character that will attract new residents as the area revitalizes.

#### **Deciding What to Preserve**

It is recognized that not every older building can be saved, as some are so deteriorated that it is cost prohibitive to save them. However, the following factors should be considered in preserving a historic building:

*Cost of Rehabilitation* - Can a rehabilitation occur without substantially exceeding the costs of demolition and new construction?

*Architectural Character* - Does the building have some degree of merit that makes it contributing to the overall character of the West 30s? A historic sites inventory of the area would help to answer this question in advance.

Those questioning the advantages of preservation need only to look a few blocks west of the West 30s to see very similar houses that are in much better condition and selling for much more money. See page 80 regarding the implementation of a preservation program for the West 30s.

"... it's theoretically possible to have .... revitalization and no historic preservation, but I haven't seen it, I haven't read of it, I haven't heard of it."

Don Rypkema - April 8, 2005 Author: The Economics of Historic Preservation

#### Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Rehabilitation

- 1) A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- 2) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- 3) Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
- 4) Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
- 5) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.
- 6) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- 7) Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
- 8) Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
- 9) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- 10) New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Of those surveyed regarding the West 30s, 91 percent agreed with the following statement: "Historic buildings should be restored when possible rather than being replaced by new buildings." - Public Opinion Survey

#### Case Study: Habitat for Humanity - Nashville, Tennessee

The late-nineteenth century house pictured below was recently foreclosed upon, boarded up, damaged by fire, and scheduled for demolition. Nevertheless, Nashvilles Metro Historical Commission (MHC) talked the Metro Development and Housing Agency to acquire the building and donate it to Habitat for Humanity. With MHC's help on technical aspects, Habitat is now rehabilitating the building consistent with nationally

recognized historic preservation standards. The 1,900 square foot house in East Nashville already has a family lined up to occupy the house, and it is hoped that this will be one of many future historic rehabilitations by Habitat in Nashville. It is only the second such project in Tennessee.



Photo Source: Tim Campbell / National Trust for Historic Preservation

#### **Key Quotes from Preservation Magazine - Margaret Foster**

- "This is definitely a new business model for Habitat."
- Chris McCarthy, President & CEO of Habitat for Humanity Nashville
- "Reusing our existing resources not only makes good fiscal sense, but preserves the historic character of a neighborhood."
- Tim Walker, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Historical Commission
- "This is an extremely important project because we hope to use it as a model across the state with Habitat in historic districts."
  - Dan Brown, Executive Director of Tennessee Preservation Trust



### **Housing:** New Infill Housing

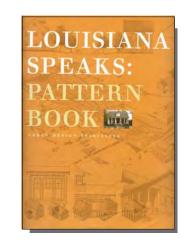
#### **Background**

While the rehabilitation of existing older buildings should be a top housing priority for the West 30s, the neighborhood has numerous vacant lots, as illustrated by the map on page 8 of this plan. Furthermore, there are many existing houses that are deteriorated beyond the point of economically-viable rehabilitation. And finally, there will always be market demand for new houses even in the best preserved and revitalized neighoborhoods. For all of these reasons, new infill development will be an important part of revitalizing the West 30s. Infill development will also help to provide for a greater variety of housing types in the West 30s, such as attached housing (triplexes, quads, townhouses, etc.). Not only is it important that new infill housing occur, but it should be designed to preserve and reinforce the most positive facets of the architectural character that makes the West 30s special and identifiable. In fact, the experience of similar neighborhoods across the country has revealed that incompatible infill housing can be a significant hinderance to revitalization and decrease propert values over time.

#### Recommendations

Because of the importance that infill housing be well designed to benefit the West 30s, a wide range of appropriate housing types have been designed and provided here specifically for the neighborhood. Seven different types are

contained here, and each includes a front elevation and a massing diagram. The basis for these designs are two fold. The "Louisiana Speaks: Pattern Book" was prepared shortly after Hurricane Katrina for the Louisiana Recovery Authority to give general direction for revitalizing neighborhoods throughout the state. The proposed building types contained in this plan build upon that effort by tailoring the pattern book's concepts to the specific design characteristics of the West 30s Neighborhood.



#### **Inspiration for Infill Housing**

Most of these houses existing in the West 30s study area, while a few are located just beyond the western boundary in the adjacent neighborhood.



of 2-story house









#### **Building Sizes and Dimensions**

The square footage for the building types on the following pages can vary greatly in order to meet the needs of the user. Alternatively, too much fluctuation can result in a building mass that is not consistent with the character of the existing community. In an effort to avoid this problem, it is advisable to encourage consistency in the main body frontage of the house, while allowing for smaller additions, or wings, to the rear of the side of the house that will add additional living space. This approach would be similar to the older "generational houses" found in many old neighborhoods, which have been added to, in a sensitive manner, over time. A general guide to building area and main body frontage ranges are included below according to building type.

Building Area per unit: 800 s.f. – 1200 s.f. Frontage for Single-Family Type: 16 ft. – 24 ft. Frontage for Two-Family Type: 28 ft. – 36 ft.

#### Creole Cottage

Building Area: 800 s.f. - 2000 s.f.

Frontage for 30 ft. Lot Type: 24 ft. - 32 ft.Frontage for 40+ ft. Lot Type: 32 ft. -40 ft.

Building Area: 1200 s.f. – 2400 s.f.

Frontage: 24 ft. - 40 ft.

#### Side Gallery

Building Area: 1000 s.f. – 2000 s.f.

Frontage: 18 ft. - 32 ft.

#### **Pyramid**

Building Area: 1000 s.f. – 2000 s.f.

Frontage: 28 ft. - 36 ft.

#### Townhouse

Building Area: 1400 s.f. – 1800 s.f.

Frontage with no garage: 16 ft. – 18 ft. min. Frontage with garage: 20 ft. min. – 36 ft.

#### Mansion Flat

Building Area per Two-Bedroom unit: 1000 s.f. – 1500 s.f. Building Area per Three-Bedroom unit: 1500 s.f. – 2000 s.f.



#### Side Hall

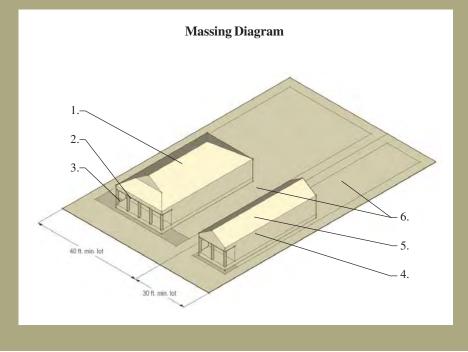


#### Elevation Key

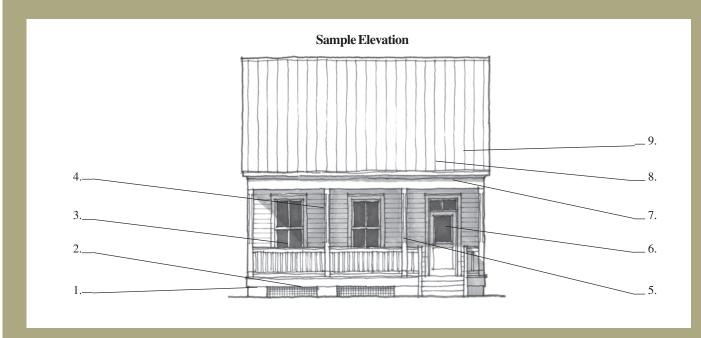
- 1. Pier foundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened
- 3. Vertically-proportioned windows
- 4. Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- 5. Lap or shingle siding at gable end
- 6. Lap siding
- 7. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 8. Closed eaves or exposed rafter tails
- 9. 8:12 to 10:12 roof pitch
- 10. Standing seam metal roof

#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Narrow side to street typ.
- 2. Attachments: Full porch typical
- 3. Setbacks: Match existing
- 4. Height: 1 story typ.
- 5. Roof: Front facing gable or hip typ.
- 6. Parking: Rear or side



### **Creole Cottage**

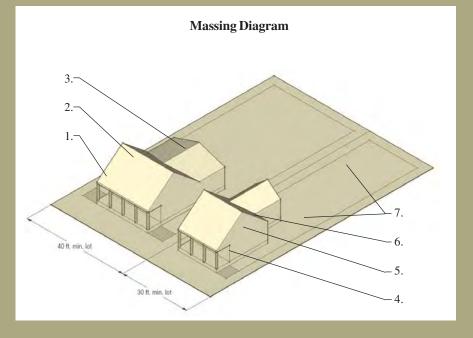


#### Elevation Key

- 1. Pierfoundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened
- 3. Vertically-proportioned windows
- Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- 5. Lap siding typ.
- 6. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 7. Closed eaves or exposed rafter tails
- 8. 8:12 to 10:12 roof pitch
- 9. Standing seam metal roof

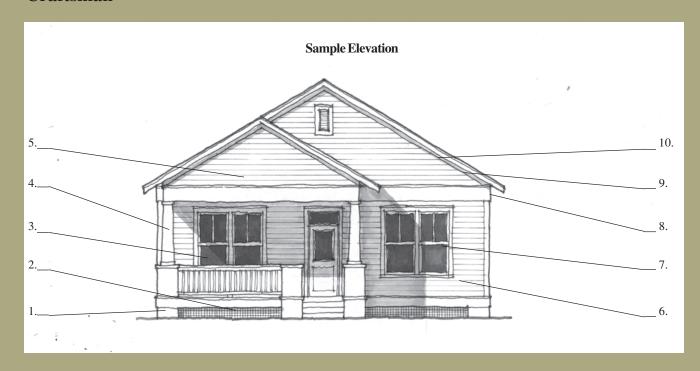
#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Broad side to street typ.
- 2. Attachments: Full porch under main body roof
- 3. Wings: Additions to the rear typ.
- 4. Setbacks: Match existing
- 5. Height: 1 to 1 1/2 stories typ.
- 6. Roof: Side gable typ.
- 7. Parking: Rear or side





#### Craftsman

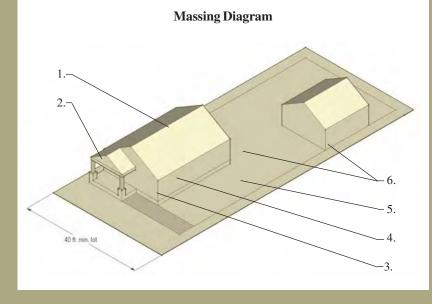


#### Elevation Key

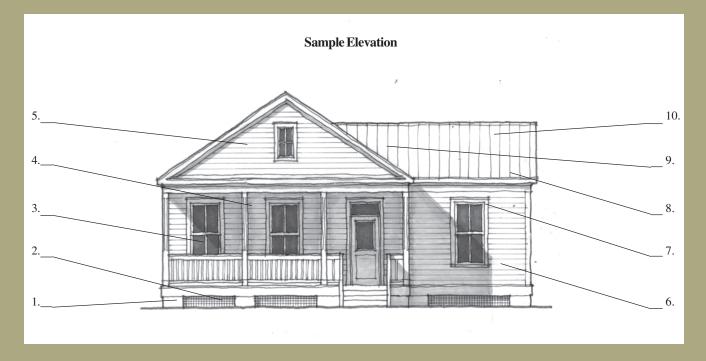
- 1. Pier foundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened
- 3. Vertically-proportioned windows (can be "ganged" abutting one another)
- 4. Battered columns on piers form horizontally proportioned openings
- 5. Lap or shingle siding at gable end
- 6. Lap siding
- 7. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 8. Exposed rafter tails typ.
- 9. 6:12 to 8:12 roof pitch
- 10. Shingles or standing seam metal roof

#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Narrow side to street typ.
- 2. Attachments: Partial porch typical
- 3. Setbacks: Match existing
- 4. Height: 1 to 1 1/2 stories typ.
- 5. Roof: Front facing gable typ.
- 6. Parking: Rear or side. Garage roof & material should match house



### **Side Gallery**

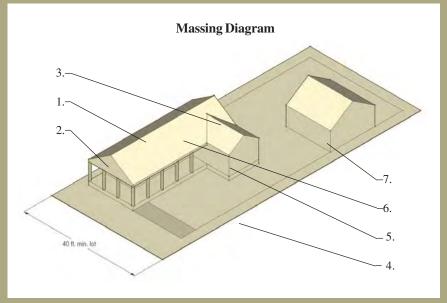


#### Elevation Key

- 1. Pier foundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened
- 3. Vertically-proportioned windows
- 4. Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- 5. Lap or shingle siding at gable end
- 6. Lap siding
- 7. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 8. Closed eaves or exposed rafter tails
- 9. 8:12 to 10:12 roof pitch
- 10. Shingles or standing seam metal roof

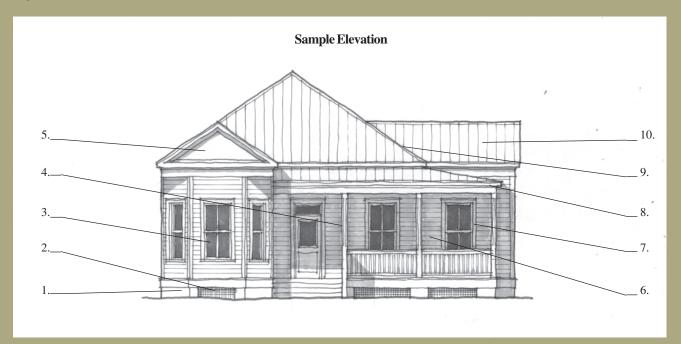
#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Narrow side to street typ.
- 2. Attachments: L-shaped porch typ. Side porch best on southern side
- 3. Wings: Side wings typ.
- 4. Setbacks: Match existing
- 5. Height: 1 to 1 1/2 stories typ.
- 6. Roof: Front facing gable or hip typ.
- 7. Parking: Rear or side





### **Pyramid**

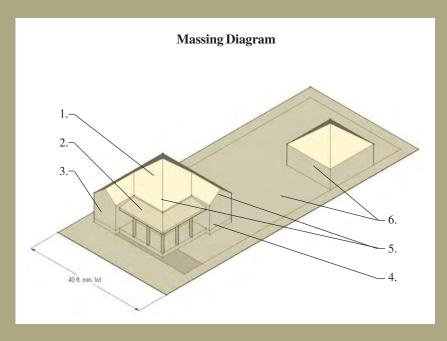


#### Elevation Key

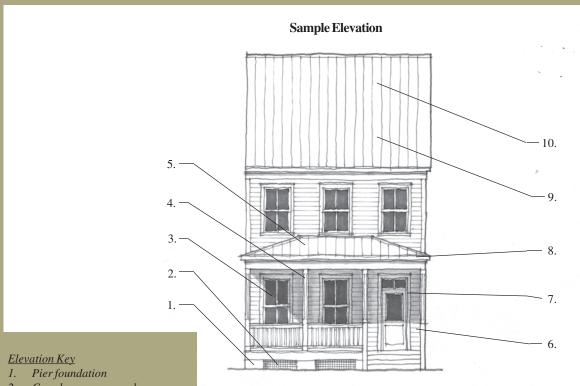
- 1. Pier foundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened
- 3. Vertically-proportioned windows
- 4. Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- 5. Lap or shingle siding at gable end
- 6. Lap siding
- 7. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 8. Closed eaves or exposed rafter tails
- 9. 8:12 to 10:12 house roof pitch, 2:12 to 4:12 porch roof pitch
- 10. Shingles or standing seam metal roof

#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Broad side to street typ.
- 2. Attachments: Full porch typical
- 3. Wings: Front and side wings typ.
- 3. Setbacks: Match existing
- 4. Height: 1 to 2 stories typ.
- 5. Roof: Hip typ. Gabled wings typ.
- 6. Parking: Rear or side. Garage roof & material should match house



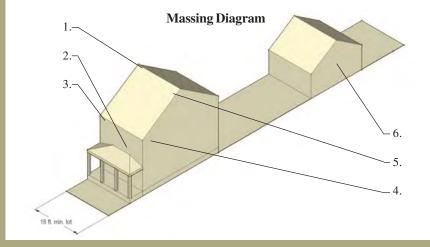
## Townhouse



- 2. Crawlspace screened
- . Vertically-proportioned windows
- 4. Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- . 2:12 to 4:12 porch roof pitch
- 6. Lap siding
- 7. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 8. Closed eaves or exposed rafter tails
- 9. 8:12 to 10:12 house roof pitch
- 10. Shingles or standing seam metal roof

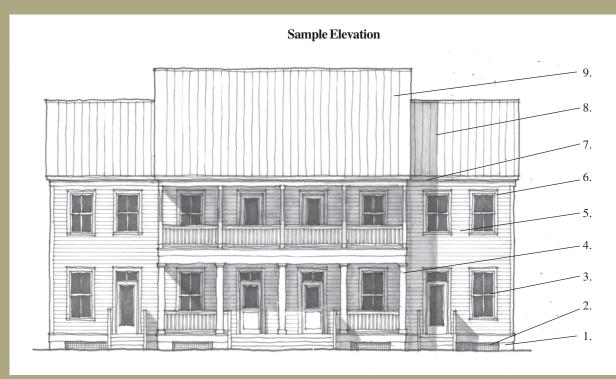
#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Narrow side to street typ. Attached on one or two sides
- 2. Attachments: Full porch or covered stoop
- 3. Setbacks: 10 ft. to 15 ft.
- 4. Height: 2 stories typ.
- 5. Roof: Side facing gable typ.
- 6. Parking: Rear





### **Mansion Flat**

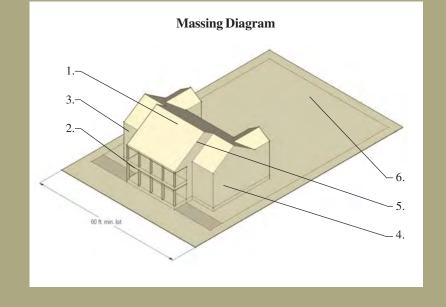


#### Elevation Key

- 1. Pier foundation
- 2. Crawlspace screened3. Vertically-proportioned windows
- 4. Posts or columns form square or vertically proportioned openings
- 5. Lap siding
- 6. 4 in. min. trim around openings
- 7. Closed eaves typ.
- 8. 8:12 to 10:12 roof pitch
- 9. Shingles or standing seam metal roof

#### Massing Diagram Key

- 1. Main Body: Broad side to street typ. Mass broken with side wings
- 2. Attachments: Full porch typical
- 3. Wings: Side and rear wings typ.
- 3. Setbacks: Match existing
- 4. Height: 2 to 2 1/2 stories typ.
- 5. Roof: Side gable or hip typ.
- 6. Parking: Rear



#### **Mansion Flats Description**

Although the scale of this building type might suggest a high-income market, it is actually multiple attached units. Basing its design on many of the older homes found throughout Covington, this building type would contain two and three bedroom units. Two-bedroom units would range in size from 1,000 square feet to 1,500 s.f., while three-bedroom units would range between 1,500 square feet and 2,000 square feet. Units could be either rentals or for-purchase.



### Housing: Public/Institutional Infill Housing

#### **Background**

Covington and the West 30s Neighborhood benefit from the Covington Housing Authority, a HUD-designated "high performing" agency. The authority manages two public housing complexes in the study area. Helen Frick Village, where the authority's offices are housed, is located at the corner of West 33rd Avenue and North Florida Street - between the fairgrounds property and Collins Blvd. While this development provides housing for households in need, the complex's design is incompatible with the character of the neighborhood, as illustrated at top right. Harry Owens Villa, a senior public housing development, is also located in the area. The community and West 30s are also fortunate to have Habitat for Humanity, St. Tammany West, a non-profit builder of affordable housing. This organization has been quite active within the West 30s by building numerous single-family detached houses. They are currently partnering on an infill housing development called The Groves at Mile Branch, located on Polders Lane. While Habitat's architectural design has been more compatible with the neighborhood than the housing authority's, their site design has not always fit into its context as well as it could (see photo at bottom near right).

#### Recommendations

It is recommended that the City work with the housing authority, Habitat, and any other entities building housing in the West 30s to ensure that future development fits well into the neighborhood from both an architectural and urban design perspective. The preceding pages illustrating appropriate housing types should provide clear direction. Also, it must be emphasized that good design does not have to be expensive. As the sidebar story at far right explains, Habitat for Humanity St. Louis is just one of numerous positive examples for how to build affordable homes that context sensitive.

Of those surveyed, 84% believe that a greater amount of affordable housing is needed in the West 30s.

- Public Opinion Survey

#### Building Design: Existing Public Housing in the West 30s

The photograph below is an existing public housing development in the West 30s. With the exception of the roof pitch, *every design feature is incompatible* with the neighborhood's traditional architecture, including:

1) the lack of a raised foundation; 2) brick facade; 3) square windows lacking a vertical orientation; 4) building orientation parallel with the street (not a vetical axis); and 5) the lack of front porches.



Site Design: Habitat for Humanity's Housing in the West 30s
The photograph below illustrates that the new Habitat house (far right)
has a front setback that is much deeper than the historic setback.



#### Case Study: Habitat for Humanity - St. Louis, Missouri

The St. Louis affiliate of Habitat for Humanity was established in 1986 with two employees in a church basement. Today it has 26 paid employees, over 5,000 annual volunteers, and has built hundreds of affordable houses for St. Louis households in need. In addition to these quantifiable achievements, they have achieved much with respect to qualitative objectives. In particular, they have found a way to build new houses in historic urban neighborhoods that physically fit in with their neighbors, yet are also affordable to build and own. The photographs below compare typical older houses in St. Louis' urban neighborhoods with houses being built by Habitat. While the Habitat houses often feature brick on only the front facade and do not include architectural detailing, their overall scale, form, setbacks, heights, and facade designs are quite compatible with their context. Furthermore, these houses can be built affordably, proving that good design does not have to be expensive. Although these Habitat houses would not be compatible with the West 30s Neighborhood, the St. Louis program serves as an excellent model for compatible infill housing.

**Existing Historic Housing:**College Hill Neighborhood - St. Louis







**New Infill Housing:** Habitat for Humanity - St. Louis









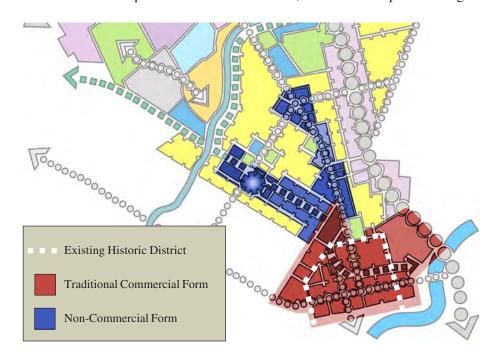
### **Commercial Development Principles**

#### **Background**

For the West 30s to be successfully revitalized, it is important that future development have a reasonably high level of quality and reinforce the area's positive characteristics. The previous pages have focused on the residential side of this issue, while this page will address commercial development.

#### Recommendations

The portion of the study area lying south of Jefferson and comprising the Downtown core is already controlled with design standards through historic zoning (see map below). The area roughly north of Mile Branch and east of Collins Blvd. lacks a significant amount of historic architecture, pedestrian-friendly form/scale, or design cohesiveness. While those areas should not be given up on in terms of their physical form, it is recommended that the primary focus be placed on the central portion of the study area that still retains a high degree of design continuity, historic character and pedestrian orientation. The map below distinguishes between two different types of desired character for commercial development within this focus area, and both are explained at right.



#### **Traditional Commercial Forms**

The photos below illustrate a wide range of compatible infill buildings. Numbers 1 and 3 are within the Downtown historic district, while number 2 was recently built on Jefferson just north of the historic district. Number 2 is the most historically faithful design. Number 3 is a somewhat abstract interpretation of historic prototypes, yet is fits into the Downtown with respect to its overall form and urban design characteristics.

#### Recommended Design Principles

- Front setback: built to the sidewalk
- Building height: 1-3 stories
- Roofforms: primarily flat with parapet / some low-pitch gables/hipped
- Facades: storefronts for groundfloor retail / vertical upper floor windows
- Windows: minimum solid-to-void ratio / non-reflective and untinted
- *Materials:* masonry (primarily brick)

It is noteworthy that these principles are generally consistent with the historic district's existing design standards, but are not intented to replace those standards (see page 80 for historic zoning recommendations).







#### **Non-Commercial Forms**

The photos below illustrate a variety of infill buildings compatible for the area roughly north of Jefferson. Number 1 shows historic houses converted to commercial uses, number 2 is a new mixed use building, and number 3 is a new commercial building under construction. All three are from communities other than Covington.

#### Recommended Design Principles

- Front setback: can range from a shallow setback to no setback
- Building height: 1-2 stories
- *Roof forms:* primarily low-pitch gables/hipped / also flat or gabled with a parapet facade (see # 3 below)
- Facades: storefronts for groundfloor retail / vertical upper floor windows
- Windows: minimum solid-to-void ratio / non-reflective and untinted
- *Materials*: primarily wood (clapboard/board-and-batten) / some brick









### **Key Development Opportunities**

#### **Background**

The West 30s is full of redevelopment opportunities. They range from buildings that could be physically rehabilitated and reused to vacant land that could be redeveloped from the ground up. Below is a summary of some of the key existing opportunities. The number designated for each opportunity below is correlated with the numbers on the map at right.

#### **Building Rehabilitations and/or Adaptive Reuses**

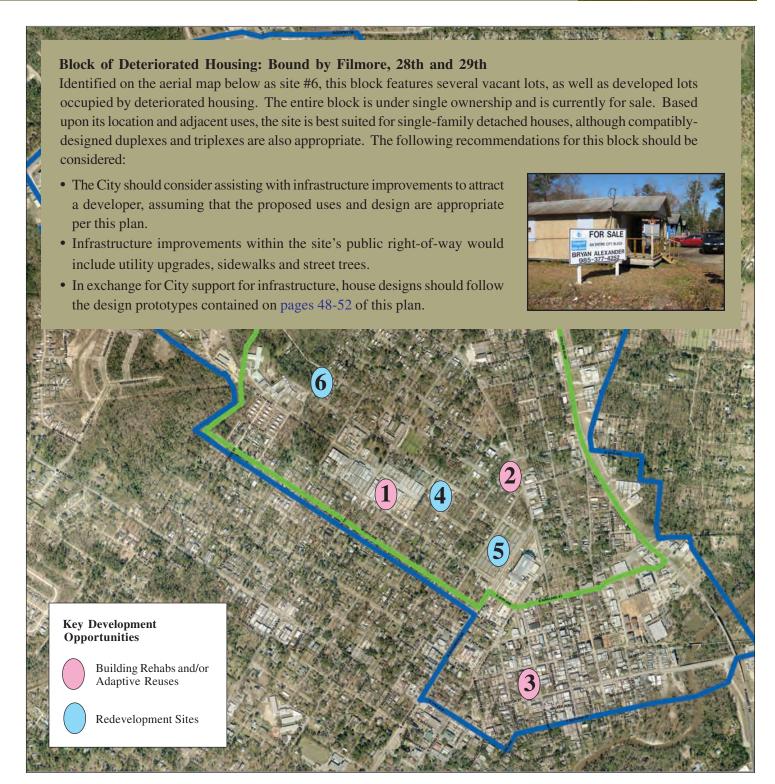
The following three properties represent opportunities to utlize the existing building:

- 1) Champagne Building This Parish-owned property has been the subject of much debate over the past few years. Currently used by their Public Works Department, its enormous size and structural characteristics make it adaptable for a wide range of uses, including businesses and community uses. See pages 34 and 60 for more information and ideas on this property.
- 2) Former Habitat Building This property is located on the west side of Columbia two blocks north of Jefferson. The building was recently used as offices for Habitat for Humanity, but is now vacant. The owner is interested in finding a use consistent with this plan. The balance of the block is relatively undeveloped and represents a larger opportunity (see page 29).
- 3) Southern Hotel Owned by a local businessman, this 1907 hotel is essentially vacant with the exception of some office space being leased. If substantially rehabilitated according to federal preservation standards and used for income-producing purposes, it could benefit from federal investment tax credits. However, adaptive reuse for lodging, housing, retail, and/or other uses may require gutting the building according to the owner. See page 41 for more information.

#### **Redevelopment Sites**

These three sites are either vacant or feature structures that would not warrant preservation:

- <u>4) Former Cement Factory</u> This site is completly vacant, but would require extensive clean-up of concrete. Its location on 27th Avenue makes it particularly important in light of this plan's recommendations for 27th (see pages 35-37).
- <u>5) Parish Parking Lots</u> These two existing parking lot sites are considered opportunities because the Parish has proposed developing one or two parking garages. A church exists on the northerly block. See pages 26-28 for more information.
- 6) Block of Deteriorated Housing This block of housing is owned by a single owner and currently on the market. Because of the poor condition of the housing, it appears that complete demolition would be the only viable option. The site's location near an elementary school and a new housing development (The Groves) make it particularly significant.





### **Designing for Public Safety**

Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) are built upon the idea that proper design and effective use of the built environment can reduce crime, reduce the fear of crime, and improve the quality of life. Built environment implementations of CPTED seek to dissuade offenders from committing crimes by manipulating the built environment in which those crimes may occur. The three most common built environment strategies are natural surveillance, natural access control, and natural territorial reinforcement.

#### **Natural Surveillance**

Natural surveillance increases the threat of apprehension by taking steps to increase the perception that people can be seen. Natural surveillance occurs by designing the placement of physical features, activities and people in such a way as to maximize visibility and foster positive social interaction among legitimate users of private and public space. As Jane Jacobs argued in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, streets are safer when environments are created that provide "eyes on the street." Ways to provide natural surveillance within the West 30s Neighborhood include:

- New development should contain windows overlooking sidewalks and parking lots
- "Active" spaces should be provided along the street. This includes porches and "public" rooms within residential buildings, as opposed to bedrooms, closets, or bathrooms.
- Neighborhood streets should be as narrow as possible and accommodate only slow moving traffic. Narrow streets are easier to cross, thus encouraging pedestrian activity, and they are much more pleasant for use and play.
- Landscapes should be designed to provide surveillance, especially in proximity to designated points of entry into homes and buildings. Avoid large evergreen shrubs near entries. Design landscapes to be visually permeable.
- Use the shortest, least sight-limiting fence appropriate for the situation.
- Avoid blind-spots in lighting design. Avoid too-bright security lighting that creates blinding glare and/or deep shadows. Utilize lower intensity lights

with more fixtures instead.

- Ensure potential problem areas are well-lit: pathways, stairs, entrances/exits, parking areas, ATMs, phone kiosks, mailboxes, bus stops, children's play areas, recreation areas, pools, laundry rooms, storage areas, dumpster and recycling areas, etc.
- Place lighting along pathways and other pedestrian-use areas at proper heights for lighting the faces of the people in the space.



Natural surveillance can be achieved through narrow streets such as this one that contains narrow pavement, street trees, and some on-street parking to help slow traffic and make cars and drivers more visible to neighborhood residents.

#### **Natural Access Control**

Natural access control is the use of building and landscaping features to guide people as they enter and exit a space. Natural access control limits the opportunity for crime by taking steps to clearly differentiate between public space and private space. Both entrances and exits should be taken into consideration in order to discourage intruders and close off any potential escape routes. The following are ways to provide natural access control within the

#### West 30s:

- Buildings should have a single, clearly identifiable, point of entry.
- Landscaping should include low, thorny bushes beneath ground level windows and climbing vines on fences to discourage intrusion.
- Sites and buildings should be designed to prevent access to roofs or upper levels.
- Fencing within front yards should be waist-level, picket-type fencing in order
  to control access and enable surveillance. Fencing in side and back yards
  should be shoulder-level and open to promote social interaction between
  neighbors. Substantial, high, closed fencing should be installed along rear
  property lines, adjacent to alleys.
- Locking gates should be installed between front and back yards.



Low fencing with an entry gate helps achieve natural access control by clearly differentiating between the public sidewalk and the private front yard of this home.

#### **Natural Territorial Reinforcement**

Natural territorial reinforcement uses design elements such as sidewalks, landscaping, and porches to clearly delineate between private and public property. Utilizing buildings, fences, pavement, signage, lighting, and landscaping



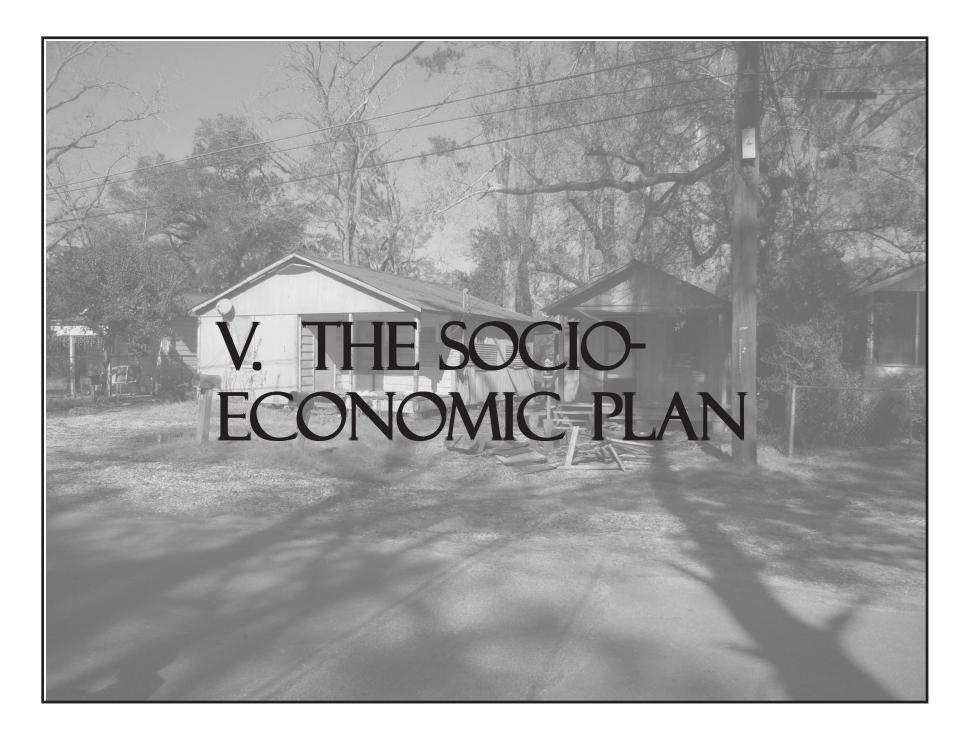
### **Designing for Public Safety**

to express ownership creates a feeling of territoriality and sends a message to offenders that the property belongs to someone and they should stay out. An environment designed to clearly delineate private space creates an environment where "strangers" or "intruders" stand out and are more easily identified. The West 30s could establish territorial reinforcement by incorporating the following approaches:

- Use landscaping as a natural barrier between private and public areas.
- Maintain properties and landscaping to signal to potential intruders that an alert and active presence is occupying the space.
- Plant more trees. Research results indicate that outdoor residential spaces with more trees are seen as significantly safer, more attractive, and more likely to be used than similar spaces without trees.
- Use low fences to mark the edges of residential properties.
- Install different color bricks or different materials for driveways and private walkways, so as to separate them visually from the street and public sidewalk.
- Avoid chain-link fencing and razor-wire fence topping. This type of fencing communicates the absence of a physical presence and a reduced risk of being detected.
- Display security system signage at access points.
- Provide seating in common and park areas to attract larger numbers of desired users.
- Schedule activities in common and park areas to attract more people and increase the perception that these areas are controlled.



Potential intruders would be discouraged from entering this property. Territorial reinforcement is achieved for this home because it is well-maintained, the private sidewalk leading to the home changes material from the public sidewalk, and security system signage is displayed near the front entrance.





## **SECTION CONTENTS**

**OVERVIEW** 

SOCIAL STRATEGIES

**ECONOMIC STRATEGIES** 

HOUSING STRATEGIES



### **Overview:** Intertwined Nature of Issues

Appendix A features a detailed study of social, economic and housing issues impacting the West 30s Neighborhood. Below is a concise summary of those findings, and the following several pages include a series of strategies to revitalize the area. Many of the ideas here were initially introduced in the previous plan sections. However, the physical aspects of those concepts were the focus, whereas this plan section will explain the economic and socially-based strategies to make those concepts a reality. While the following strategies have been split into three categories: social strategies, economic strategies, and housing strategies, the intertwined relationships of all three cannot be overlooked. Thus, there will be some necessary overlap.

#### **Summary of Key Findings**

#### **Employment**

There are limited employment opportunities within the West 30s Neighborhood, although several local retail and industrial companies do pro-actively hire a handful of residents from within the community. However, most West 30s residents lack qualifications for the types of well-paying jobs that may be available in the New Orleans region. Many of St. Tammany's more affluent residents commute elsewhere for work, since well-paying jobs are located outside of the parish. West 30s residents lack sufficient income to afford private transportation and, because there is a lack of public transit service in the area, many do not have access to employment even when those opportunities do exist. Many West 30s residents have received training, but that experience is not always aligned with the types of jobs that are available to many in the neighborhood. Other adult residents lack targeted training altogether.

#### **Housing & Social Issues**

Residents have access to certain housing and social services, but lack access to small business and entrepreneurial development resources even as they show a clear preference for self-employment. Affordability is key to most services, since many residents live at or near poverty levels and cannot afford retail

goods, services, transportation, and market-rate housing.

Many of the neighborhood's housing and social challenges are linked directly to economic conditions. There is a need for adult education and also for positive role models, improved self image, and family support for youth education. There are opportunities for specialized education and for celebrating local culture that have not been fully developed. While safety conditions have undoubtedly improved thanks to increased police enforcement, the neighborhood still suffers from a concentration of economic crime such as drug dealing, along with domestic abuse. There are issues relating to the community's trust of public safety efforts. In general, there are a number of social service and housing organizations and agencies targeting resources to the West 30s. Even so, stubborn socioeconomic issues persist among a share of the neighborhood's adult population.

#### **Strategies**

Strategies for addressing some of the key socio-economic challenges are provided on the following pages. Several strategies have been developed to respond to socio-economic issues identified by stakeholders, through the Community Survey, or based on analysis of economic data and social service delivery. These strategies are - to a large extent - also integrated with, and help drive, physical redevelopment in certain locations within the study area. The Physical Plan contained in the previous pages provides the output of these strategies in terms of land use, building reuse, design, and development.

Many of the neighborhood's social and economic issues relate to a lack of participation in the labor force, not necessarily unemployment but rather, an inability to participate because of health issues, disabilities, and other problems. Creating a healthier community, one that celebrates its youth, is a primary objective. Past efforts have attempted to bring training resources to the community within one industry. Linking residents with training opportunities and hands-on experience in a variety of areas where they have expressed an interest or that help to build the community is an alternative approach explored here. There are already numerous social service agencies and providers within or serving this community. More targeted, coordinated approaches are war-

ranted to ensure that the specific needs of the community are met especially, in health care, transportation, youth leadership development, and employment.

This socio-economic development plan has recommended several strategies that aim to integrate physical redevelopment with "soft" programs for socioeconomic development in the community. Most of these initiatives build on existing programs and providers, but emphasize a need for better coordination and more targeted approaches to this community. The most significant exception is the recommendation to create or engage a Community Development Corporation (CDC) for Covington and the West 30s that would be focused on business incubation, entrepreneurship, marketing, and coordination of resident work preparedness programs. Most of the recommended initiatives require only nominal funding, since programs and even facilities are in place, but are in need of slight modifications. In many cases, the recommendation is to seek partnerships with existing government and nonprofit agencies and especially with private industry, where there are opportunities for sponsorships that bring exposure and other benefits to private companies. Housing initiatives are also very important, but are captured in a separate section of this plan.

#### A Note About the Data Sources

Because existing Census data is outdated by ten years and tract boundaries do not coincide with the study area, it is not valid for this plan. However, the Community Survey conducted as part of this planning project covered roughly 120 households, or about 12% of households, making it statistically valid. A wide variety of other sources were used for data related to businesses and many of the non-residential issues. See Appendix A: Socio-Economic Analysis, as the numerous footnotes in that analysis detail the sources used.

"We need to improve parenting as much as we need to help kids directly. I bet 40% to 50% of the neighborhood's households are dysfunctional."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant



### Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

#### **Healthy Living**

Many of the unemployed adults in the West 30s attribute their inability to work to poor health or disability. Businesses cannot discriminate against people with disabilities, and some organizations pro-actively place people with disabilities in employment. So there is a need to address health and disability issues head-on and concurrently work to place people into appropriate jobs. Several strategies are recommended below to reduce the preponderance of health and disability issues in the West 30s as a hindrance to employment.

#### Community Wellness Center

St. Tammany Parish Hospital operates the Community Wellness Center that is currently located in an isolated corner of the West 30s off of North Florida Street near Collins Boulevard. As noted previously, this center offers limited health care services, including inoculations and other secondary health services provided by nurse practitioners. It is recommended that this center be relocated to the Tyler and 27th area and expanded. By doing so, the center becomes more accessible to a larger number of people near the heart of the community. The center's function would be expanded to offer more direct service for the West 30s community and other residents of Covington. The Wellness Center would also be coordinated directly with the health business incubator and with the recreation component of the proposed Community Center.

A clear finding of the Community Survey was the identification of health and disability as a key issue impacting on employment and, therefore, on the economic health of the community. By focusing attention on improving health conditions, informing lifestyle decisions, and increasing access to health services, this

"We don't need a bunch of planning and zoning right now. We need a bunch of psychiatrists."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

strategy aims to reduce economic dependency and improve self image in the community. Relocation and enhancement of the wellness center as part of development of the broader concept of a Community Center for the West 30s can help to provide a "quick victory" with visible results for direct service provision in the neighborhood.

#### Structure and Funding

It is recommended that the St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance and the local hospital work with the Parish Government on a strategic plan for relocating the facility to the more central location and on enhancing the services provided there. Specifically, it is recommended that the hospital add at least nominal resources for the center to track and improve community health and fitness. One suggestion would be to add a *community health educator* to staff or to sponsor more health and fitness education programs in the West 30s. Staff should coordinate with recreation and education programs and facilities that form part of the Community Center hub. In addition, there is a need to conduct an *inventory of disability issues* within the community, with a focus on identifying areas where disabilities can be overcome and people can be linked with job opportunities. In this instance, the Healthcare Alliance, the hospital, and perhaps organizations like Volunteers for America would coordinate with the proposed Community Development Corporation on the inventory and *job linkages program*.

#### Coordination

The Wellness Center should also be coordinating with other health-oriented and related non-profit service providers in the community, such as the Red Cross, Food Bank of Covington, Louisiana Rehabilitation Center, and Upward Community Services (and other faith-based organizations which are engaged in rehabilitation). As an intake center located at the heart of the community, this center could play a critical role in identifying various physical and mental health issues, inventorying disability concerns, and referring residents to other organizations and agencies - in the West 30s and throughout St. Tammany Parish - that can provide necessary services.

#### **Needs Assessment**

Located at 1505 North Florida Street, the existing Community Wellness Center is open Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM. The information on this page regarding the center was obtained through an in-person interview of staff with the St. Tammany Parish Hospital, the entity that operates the center. Recommendations for a relocated and expanded center are based, in part, upon staff input. Furthermore, the Community Survey conducted as part of this planning project provided a great deal of insights relative to health problems faced by West 30s residents and the types of services that might be useful.

It is acknowledged that a detailed needs assessment must be undertaken before this idea can be pursued further. The types of information that need to be obtained in an assessment include the following:

- What types of services are needed?
- Where are current gaps in services?
- What types of facilities are needed?
- What types of equipment are needed?

In conducting a needs assessment, the St. Tammany Parish Hospital will be key to providing information. Input from the Louisiana Drug Rehab Center and the St. Tammany Parish Office of Social Services will also be useful for the assessment.





### Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

#### **Recreation & Community Center Facilities**

The City of Covington has recently completed one phase of construction of a major new recreation center on the northern edge of the study area. Once completed, this facility will offer a variety of amenities, including playing fields and basketball courts housed in a gymnasium. As recommended previously in this plan, it is essential that the new recreation center be made as accessible as possible to the West 30s Neighborhood. Extension of the Tammany Trace has been recommended from the recreation center through the West 30s and the Tyler and 27th area, down towards the St. Tammany Justice Center.

#### Concept for the Tyler & 27th Area

Within the Community Center concept at Tyler and 27th, there is the opportunity to integrate existing neighborhood-serving recreation facilities with other community functions. Rather than competing with the new recreation center on the north edge of the study area, it will be important to capitalize on existing West 30s recreation uses, while also integrating other needed community facilities. Existing facilities at the Reverend Peter Atkins Memorial Park include the swimming pool, which has now been upgraded, and the basketball courts, which are scheduled to be upgraded by a roof covering. Integrated with these uses would be the Tammany Trace, a multipurpose room (which might be housed in unused space at the Champagne Beverage building to accommodate senior exercise, film nights, and/or community cultural events), a game room, and an expanded Boys & Girls Club. Ultimately, these facilities are meant to bring the community together and provide a place for physical and communal activity. Although a large new educational center is being developed east of Covington, there may be potential for GED courses to be provided at the West 30s Center.

#### Organizational Structure

These facilities are already, for the most part, operated by local government. The City would continue to have responsibility for the facilities, which should be upgraded and better integrated with each other. The City would work with the Parish on use of sections of the Champagne Beverage building for the multipurpose room and Boys & Girls Club.

"We need a community center in the West 30s' core area. It might be at the Champagne Building."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant







As the photographs above illustrate, the Parish-owned Champagne building is extremely large and capable of being adapted for a variety of uses beyond the current uses of the Parish, including a Community Center that might feature a Wellness Center.

#### The Big Draw - West 30s

Drawing America is a national non-profit initiative to promote drawing while building community throughout the United States. Why promote drawing? According to Drawing America - "Drawing develops perception, creativity, confidence, problem solving, focus, communication skills and opportunities for self-realization across age, disciplinary, socioeconomic, cultural and professional boundaries. Drawing is fun and for everyone!"

Drawing America's seed campaign is called "Big Draw USA: This Is Where I Live!" The Big Draw is a non-commercial, non-competitive event designed to get everyone drawing. The "Neighborhood Big Draw" project offers an opportunity to get neighbors drawing and to help them to learn about the place where they live. Below are two key questions frequently posed to Drawing America, along with their answers:

<u>Why draw buildings?</u> Architecture is an immediate subject that links individuals to their common place. Drawing local buildings gives residents, friends, and community members the opportunity to explore tangible history and discover the design and craft of our architectural heritage. In order to draw a building, we must really see it. The subject of architecture also invites reflection on the link between human built environments and nature.

<u>How does drawing build community?</u> As a community event, the Big Draw offers fun, participatory activities that foster cooperation and respect for individual effort. Big Draws generate joy through an engaging experience that connects across age, disciplinary, cultural and socio-economic boundaries.

It is recommended that a Big Draw event be pursued for the West 30s.

The St. Tammany Arts Association and the local schools would be likely cosponsors for the event.







### Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

#### **Community Gardens**

To encourage healthy living and to help abate issues of food security within the community, it is recommended that one or more new community gardens be established in the West 30s. A successful community garden already exists on W. 25th Avenue. Community gardens are increasingly popular in many cities to bring fresh produce to local communities, and provide healthy, outdoor activity for residents (see sidebar at far right). Individual residents/households are allotted small areas within the gardens and each family is responsible for their own area. There is also the opportunity for education and training, and for linking the community gardens initiative directly with training in specialty food preparation and culinary arts as part of the aforementioned concepts. Two potential locations are mapped at right. The Bobby Fletcher, Sr. Agricultural Center would make a particularly good location for a community garden because of its public mission as a facility, its available land, and its proximity to public housing in the area. The other proposed location is the Covington Pathways Park on Tyler.

#### Structure and Funding

The gardens would provide an opportunity for the Parish, the City of Covington and the LSU Agricultural Extension program to coordinate more on food security issues in the community. There is also an opportunity to engage Tulane University, which sponsors a research facility in the area, to work with residents on crop production. A partnership can also be developed and promoted with the O'Keefe Feed & Seed (garden supply) store located on North Columbia Street and with Larry's Hardware Store, which is also located on North Columbia. Given that 12% of surveyed West 30s residents identified basic food needs for their households, there is urgency to this effort that requires attention. Such efforts require only limited funding. For example, "seed" money could be attracted from local sponsorships from businesses like O'Keefe and Larry's, and there is the opportunity for a "quick victory" in plan implementation. The American Community Gardening Association is an excellent information resource.

#### Linking Community Gardens to Other Programs

There are multiple opportunities to link community gardening in the West 30s with other important programs, including the existing Farmers Market and the local Food Bank, as follows:

#### Covington Farmers Market

The farmers market is held twice a week, Saturdays from 8:00 AM to noon at the former City Hall property at 609 N. Columbia, and on Wednesdays from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Covington Trailhead at N. New Hampshire. In addition to selling local produce, locally raised meats, seafood, dairy products, plants, baked goods, prepared foods, and a variety of other food types, live music is performed to make the markets feel like festive events. The farmers market is a wonderful opportunity for community garden participants to sell their produce, as well as to showcase and promote the West 30s community gardens in general.

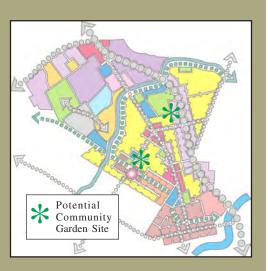
#### Food Bank of Covington

The Food Bank of Covington is operated by the All Saints Ministries, a religiously-based non-profit entity that serves St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, and Washington Parishes. They receive no city, state or federal funding, yet they provide a wide variety of social services to the needy. The Food Bank helps to feed qualified multi-member households. The families receive approximately 70 items of food twice a month. Non-perishable foods, such as canned meats, vegetables and fruits, are distributed, as well as fresh produce and meats when available. On an average day, the Food Bank helps feed 80 families. The West 30s community gardens could participate in the "Add a Row" program, in which local farmers add one or more rows of crops to donate to the Food Bank.

#### **Community Gardens: Potential Additional Locations**

Community gardens are a program implemented in communities throughout the country. Occurring most typically in urban neighborhoods, they consist of a common plot of land being shared by multiple people for gardening. Each participant is assigned a particular area within the garden. The benefits include both the practical aspect of people producing their own food for very little cost and the sense of community that the gardens can help to build. With the possible exception of the land, the most critical element in implementation is an organization to manage the program. Tools can either be shared and stored in a communal tool shed on the site or people be required to utilize their own tools.

For the West 30s, at least two new potential sites exist: one near Collins Blvd. and the Fairgrounds, and the other in or near Pathways Park on Tyler. Gardening tools and materials for constructing an on-site tool shed might be donated by local businesses, and the LSU Ag Center's Master Gardener program would be a likely sponsor.









Community gardens are a great activity for all ages, but especially children.

Photos source: Project for Public Spaces



### Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

#### **Families & Youth**

The youth of the West 30s are the future. While it is important to uplift adults through training and adult education (continuing education), job creation, social services, and transportation, a focus needs to be placed on youth identity, self-image, activities, talent, and professional development. Obviously, some of the other programs discussed in this section would also address the needs of youth. But there also need to be "champions" for youth and programs specifically designed to shelter and promote those youth who are motivated to succeed.

#### Youth Activities

The City has developed a recreation center on the periphery of the neighborhood and this plan has recommended strengthening and further development of existing community facilities (including recreation, computer lab, Boys & Girls Club, and meeting space) within the heart of the West 30s. With these developments, there is only the need to ensure coordination and to integrate the programmatic element.

#### Structure and Funding

Local schools, churches, and the Boys & Girls Club play a lead role in programming activities, such as athletics, after-school education and training, GED classes, computer labs, and cultural activities. The City of Covington, particularly its Recreation Department, has a role to play in ensuring coordination not only of facilities, but also of athletic leagues and other recreation and after-school programs. Funding can also be sought from the private sector for sponsorship, for example, of a computer/IT lab and facility at the Champagne Beverage building. Microsoft, Apple, and other computer-related companies provide technology grants and donate computers for this purpose. There are many successful examples of cities that have pro-actively encouraged access to computer technology and training with the help of major corporate sponsors. A full schedule of activities should be inventoried by the City's Recreation Department to help in coordination.

There are a number of local churches in the area that can or do also play an

important role in providing after-school and weekend activities for youth, as well as activities for seniors. The City's Recreation Department should coordinate with the churches and organizations like Volunteers of America to ensure that their activities are included in the schedule inventory. Once these activities have been inventoried, a schedule should be posted and also delivered to targeted neighborhoods such as the West 30s to ensure that people are aware of the activities available to their children. More importantly, the schedules should be posted in area schools and churches, and teachers and ministers can help encourage students to participate. It is also noteworthy that the Greater Starlight Baptist Church on 28th Avenue just completed a large addition that might be able to accommodate youth activities, including the Boys & Girls Club. This idea warrants detailed discussions with church representatives.

#### **Community/Youth Leadership Development**

An effort should be promoted to honor and promote leadership within the community, with a special emphasis on youth. Where possible, youth with special talents, abilities, or performance within the West 30s and other parts of Covington should be identified by schools, parents, social service agencies, and others. Training activities, as identified in this plan, would target those youth and adults identified as having particular talents, interest, experience, performance, or even just a positive outlook relevant to the skills involved. Annual events would be designed to honor students with special achievements in school, but also in community activities such as helping the elderly, leading a basketball team, or singing in church. Students with a positive attitude about learning and their future should be "appointed" to an optimist club or other local organization where the schools and local leaders would help ensure that they are plugged into activities that encourage their development.

Churches and social service agencies should continue where possible to focus on working with adults and parents to encourage their children and to provide positive role models. Annual festivals and events, such as the successful Martin Luther King Day Celebration in 2010, should be strengthened to include awards and prizes for outstanding achievements in the community and to celebrate local culture and abilities. Ultimately, these efforts would aim to build a support

network for youth that desire to succeed even when they do not receive support from friends and family. These efforts would also help to improve self-image and encourage a positive outlook for the future to show children that they can succeed.

#### **Special Events**

In addition to their fund-raising potential to benefit the West 30s Neighborhood and its supporting entities, special events could be important because would give residents - particularly childeren - an enjoyable activity, and they would attract people to the area to have a positive experience. Even if participants do not spend money in the West 30s' businesses during the event, the exposure to the area might cause them to have a more positive opinion of the West 30s. While a long-term goal should be to have at least a few special events in the area annually, a short-term goal should be the establishment of an annual festival that celebrates the West 30s history and culture. It might also be tied to a specific theme such as food, music and/or art. Other special events that might occur in the future could be tied to parades for key holidays.

With regard to a location within the West 30s for special events, the two-block segment of Tyler connecting Pathways Park and Atkins Park may be an ideal location. The street could be closed for the events, and the two parks would provide plenty of space for the activities. If the proposed plaza is built on the Champagne property, this location would be even better suited for special events.

Special events might be an excellent way to draw people into the West 30s to have a positive experience and perhaps develop a more positive opinion of the neighborhood.





# Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

# Organizational Structure

Again, there is a need for coordination of leadership development within the neighborhood. A number of organizations can play a role, but there is a need for some central coordination of the various activities and organizations. A strengthened Friends of the West 30s entity or the proposed CDC could coordinate with the City, churches and faith-based organizations, social service agencies, schools, and training institutions to meet and determine a coordinated approach. In many communities, this effort is led by non-profit social clubs and civic or cultural organizations such as Civitan, 4-H, Optimists, and others. There is the opportunity to attract or open a branch of one of these organizations within Covington (to the extent that they do not already exist) and attract membership from among community leaders identified by the aforementioned organizations.

# **Transportation Services**

Another key issue identified in the West 30s is the lack of public transport to jobs in the area. There are several opportunities to increase transport services in the community, although the ideal approach would be for local jurisdictions to work regionally on a comprehensive system with coverage that includes communities in need of public transport. In the meantime, "interim" recommendations include the following.

#### **Employer-Sponsored Van Services**

For working people under 60 yeas of age, the only existing non-profit transportation service is St. Tammany Area Transportation (goSTAT) ondemand shuttle service, which ranges from \$1.50 to \$8 per trip, depending upon the distance. Only 40% of those surveyed in the Public Opinion Survey were aware of this program. While the hospitals have a van service for employees, it is limited to shuttling employees from remote parking lots to the hospital facilities. There are opportunities to expand transit services for medical employees, as well as for other industries as they relate to geographic clusters of local residents. For example, there is the opportunity for collective transport for those working

in education. The Parish government could examine the opportunities for capturing federal transportation funds for school employee transport needs. Larger manufacturing and distribution companies could also be encouraged to provide van pick up for employees in need. However, most such services will not be very effective unless there are economies of scale or a travel corridor that includes sufficient numbers of workers. Alternatively employers could be encouraged to provide vouchers for a centralized van service, as explained below.

#### Transport Entrepreneurship

The need for transportation could be met with the opportunities for creating a private transport company based in the West 30s that would serve not only West 30s residents, but also other residents of Covington and the Parish. Such services could be contracted collectively, for example, by the Parish government, social service organizations, and institutions like Delgado Community College for transport service to the elderly, for medical appointments, for training or school, and for work transport.

## Structure and Funding

The St. Tammany Parish Economic Development Foundation (EDF) and the aforementioned Covington/West 30s CDC could work to identify those in the community who would be targeted for entrepreneurial opportunities relating to the transport service, sponsor their training, and help provide seed funding. Furthermore, the transport business would be coordinated with the other entrepreneurial efforts in the West 30s. Because such businesses would provide a public service, there is a benefit to local government to participate in their funding and development.

This final issue within the recommendations for social strategies serves as an excellent jumping off point to the next section on economic strategies. While there is much overlap between many of the social and economic issues addressed in this plan, there is perhaps none more than in the case of transportation services given the strong connection to employment.

"Parenting is the most important thing. You can educate kids and fill pot holes, but that won't help if the family is dysfunctional."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant



# Social Strategies: Kids, Seniors & In Between

## **Public Safety**

As noted elsewhere within this plan, key criminal activity in the West 30s includes drug sales, burglaries, and occassional violent crimes. The subject of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) was addressed previously on page 56-57 in the Physical Plan section. In addition to design approaches, there are programmatic approaches for enhancing public safety within the West 30s, as follows:

## **Police**

While an ideal scenario would allow the City to hire additional police officers and assign them to the West 30s area, that may not be a fiscally realistic scenario. Nevertheless, as explained in the funding portion of Section VI (Implementation Strategy), as well as Appendix D on funding, there are federal economic stimulus funds available for hiring additional officers. The down side of such a program is that, even if attainable, the funding would eventually terminate, leaving the City with the option of either eliminating those positions or finding alternative funding.

Regardless of funding issues, an increased police presence in the neighborhood should be a goal. It is strongly recommended that, rather than using conventional officers in squad cars, bicycle officers be considered. While the limitations on their ability to respond rapidly and pursue vehicles are an obvious down side, back-up units in vehicles can address that issue. The benefit of bicycle officers is that they can get a clearer sense of what is actually occuring in the neighborhood because their vehicles do not serve as buffers between themselves and the public. Bicycle officers are better able to interact with the public and build relationships with residents to greatly enhance their efforts in law enforcement. If bicycle officers are indeed utilized, it will be important to use officers with personalities and attitudes that are a good fit for the West 30s. To be truly effective, officers should work hard to be perceived by residents as friends rather than foes.



Bicycle-riding police (or "bike cops") have been extremely effective in a variety of environments, including downtowns and urban neighborhoods like the West 30s.

# Neighborhood Watch Program

Neighborhood Watch programs occur in thousands of communities across the country as a means of supplementing the limited funding and staffing of many police departments. They are based upon the concept of involving as many residents as possible to provide a network of communication and support. A formal watch program for the West 30s could be sponsored by the Covington Police Department, perhaps also in coordination with the recommended community development corporation (CDC). Two important organizational components of such a program are a committee that meets regularly and interacts with the police, and a series of "block captains" throughout the neighborhood. The block captains would serve as the liaisons between the committee/police and the residents in their immediate vicinity. The committee should periodically meet with residents to instruct them on how to inform the committee and police on illegal activities, as well as how to look out for their own well-being and that of their neighbors. In addition to communicating about known criminal activity, watch program participants can also report conditions that might contribute toward crime, such as street lights that are not working. With proper training, participants could even perform neighborhood audits based upon Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies.

"Technical jobs are needed. Violence and crime drop when economic prosperity grows."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant



# **Economic Strategies:** Investment & Jobs

## **Employment & Training**

Several strategies have been developed that focus on employment and training within the West 30s Neighborhood. As noted previously, these strategies are also integrated with physical redevelopment within certain portions of the study area. The Tyler and 27th area, for example, is recommended for integration of employment-generating artisan industrial uses, along with associated training and business incubation, information technology, a relocated community health facility, and Community Center hub (see pages 32-34 regarding the "Artisan Industrial Village"). Employment creation would also be emphasized through new office and mixed-use development immediately north of the St. Tammany Parish Justice Center (see pages 36-37 on the "Mixed Use Neighborhood: Transitional District"). Collins Boulevard and Ronald Regan Highway (190 Bypass) are recommended for infill, redevelopment, and marketing as a "contracting corridor," which would focus on job creation centered around the area's existing strengths for design, construction, and building contracting. These strategies are explored below.

### **Artisan Industrial Village Concept**

A concept has been developed for infill and redevelopment surrounding North Tyler and 27<sup>th</sup>, which is perceived by many residents as the heart of the West 30s Neighborhood. Because of the importance of Tyler as a cross-town thoroughfare that links key institutions and streets, such as the St. Tammany Parish Hospital with Collins Boulevard, there are opportunities to create synergies between an employment/community node at this location and other job hubs along Tyler Street.

The overall concept would integrate existing and prospective industrial businesses, several of which have an orientation to "artisanal" craft - such as the cabinet maker, printer, and a downtown glass company that might consider relocating here, with new businesses that would build on this mix. Also associated with this concept would be the adjacent recreational facilities (as explained elsewhere in this plan), computer/graphic design lab, government and non-profit offices, and the St. Tammany Parish Wellness Center, which

would be relocated from its current more isolated location. Integrated directly into the Artisan Industrial concept would be "soft" programming, including craft and technology apprenticeship and training programs, as well as community-wide events, such as festivals celebrating black history month and St. Tammany's African-American heritage.

#### Contex

The Tyler and 27<sup>th</sup> area has served as an industrial node for some time, with two large beverage distributors, an oil company, printing company, and several artisan businesses. Even so, the area is not particularly competitive as an industrial location for distribution because of its lack of direct highway access, truck lanes and parking, and incompatible surrounding residential uses. The departure of the two large beverage distributors confirms this lack of marketability and suggests an opportunity for transition away from heavy distribution to light industrial and mixed-use.

At the same time, the area is physically attractive as a campus setting and offers large portions of the distribution buildings potentially for classroom space. Ideally, the area could make an attractive location for training facilities. However, the current proposal to concentrate and consolidate several training and education facilities in one campus east of Mandeville (as explained in Appendix A of this plan) effectively reduces opportunities for an education campus at this site.

Other opportunities for uses in this area were explored and, based on more detailed economic analysis, it was determined that there is a growing job market relating to craft and artisanal industries. Further, the integration of such clean businesses into the fabric of the neighborhood could also make for an interesting business and community center that would add value to the market for housing in the surrounding area. The results of the economic analysis are reflected below.

### **Artisan Growth Sectors**

A more detailed assessment of employment growth and economic opportunities was conducted within key "artisan" industrial sectors within the New Orleans Metro Area and St. Tammany Parish. The analysis identified the following

types of businesses that could present opportunities for further development, consistent with Covington's historic image and the need for low- and medium-skill jobs within the community. This list also includes certain types of businesses that already exist within the community or could be integrated with the concept.

#### Custom Wood Products

- Custom Architectural Millwork -wood doors & windows
- Flooring 526% employment growth in millwork since 1998
- Kitchen cabinetry e.g., Greg Arceneaux, Acadian & Creole Cabinetmaker based in the West 30s
- Furniture 69% growth
- Toys & Puzzles
- Signs

# Printing

- Commercial Litho Printing 61% employment growth since 1998, E.g., Mele Printing Company based in the West 30s
- Screen Printing 47% growth since 1998

#### Stonework

• 9% growth in ornamental cut stone (however, there may be noise and dust impacts on the surrounding residential community)

#### Fabricated (ornamental) metals

• 97% growth overall since 1998)

## Ornamental glass

• E.g., Glassworks, which is considering a move from downtown

### Lighting fixtures/components

## Computer-related

- Media
- Graphic design

# Specialty "Artisan" Foods

- Bakeries 526% growth in last ten years
- Seasonings

The concentration or "clustering" of these uses would help to create some synergies that would strengthen Covington's overall appeal as an historic town with an interesting small business mix. Strong linkages could be made with



# **Economic Strategies:** Investment & Jobs

Downtown Covington, which already has a mix of complementary businesses (e.g., Mo's Art Supply, Artmasters T-shirts, various art and framing galleries, etc). Linkages could also be made with Covington's emerging I.P. North, "Creative and Digital Hub for the Northshore." The types of art and technology businesses that Greater New Orleans, Inc. (the regional economic alliance) is trying to attract to I.P. North could complement the hands-on artisanal industrial businesses in the proposed Artisan Industrial Village to solidify Covington's reputation as a hub for the "creative class." Also, food production should be linked with the existing Farmers Market.

#### **Industrial Real Estate Market Conditions**

There would need to be a pro-active effort to attract these businesses, some of which might be accommodated within the former beverage distribution facilities, one of which is owned by the Parish government. Because of the Parish government's role in the real estate of this community, it is incumbent upon the Parish and its economic development agency to assist in recruiting and incenting artisan industrial companies to locate in vacant industrial space in this area.

Overall demand for industrial space is expanding in the region, despite the decrease in manufacturing employment, as more companies seek distribution and specialty industrial space. According to brokers, there has been a significant movement of industrial users to the Northshore, which is consistent with the findings on employment trends. Industrial development now tends to have an orientation to mixed-use and towards industrial service, the latter being consistent with the type of development that has occurred along the Ronald Regan Highway at the north edge of the study area. There are few specialty industrial districts in the region like the Artisan Industrial Village envisioned in the West 30s, although there has been rehabilitation in New Orleans' Warehouse District and other older industrial areas. The lack of a directly competitive industrial district can help in marketing this district and Covington's arts and technology focus.

# **Example Artisan Industrial Districts**

There is no one standard for the concept of artisan industrial districts. This concept was developed based on the relative strengths of the West 30s neighborhood for the conversion of industrial and warehousing uses into more of a neighborhood-oriented live-work node, as well as the growing market for moderate-skilled artisan labor in the New Orleans metropolitan region.

#### Artist Lofts vs Artisan Industrial

There are many examples nationwide where artisan uses (and artists' housing) have converged in what was once a manufacturing or heavy industrial zone. The decline of heavy manufacturing uses, coupled with the need for low-cost artist live-work space, has led to conversion of relatively attractive and well-built Victorian industrial buildings for artisan uses in many cities. Buildings in the old mill towns of New England and industrial cities like Baltimore and Chicago are reinvented for artist lofts and studio spaces. New Orleans' own Warehouse District has reinvented itself as a trendy home to artists and galleries. However, the conversion of Victorian mills and brick warehouses into artist lofts is not exactly the same as the concept introduced for the West 30s, namely to encourage the development of clean, low/semi-skilled artisanal craft and production industries in existing warehouse buildings to help form part of a more integrated, multi-use, community-oriented node. Ultimately, the concept would also help create an identity for the West 30s neighborhood and enhance its asset value and marketability. This concept has similarities with the Italian efforts at promoting craft and artisanal industries through clusters in order to compete on global markets. Some US examples come close to the economic development portion of this concept, as described below:

#### **Examples**

#### San Francisco

In San Francisco, the PACE-SF Community Benefit District is oriented to the economic development of the largely "artisan" manufacturing and general production/distribution/ repair (PDR) business community in the city's Eastern Neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were impacted by the closure/relocation of job-rich manufacturing and heavy industries out of the Bay Area. The well-constructed buildings, infrastructure, and reasonable rents in the area helped attract an eclectic mix of artisanal design/manufacturing businesses across (seven) industries such as:

- Product and industrial design
- Architecture and interior design
- Furniture and cabinet making
- Fine arts, theater and dance

- Green construction

- Consumer products

- Food and food processing

What is particularly relevant to the West 30s is that infill housing has been integrated with the "industrial" blocks, resulting in the development of "truly mixed-use neighborhoods." The neighborhoods are located within the City's designated Enterprise Zone, which has helped target economic development resources to the community. PACE-SF is also establishing a local special assessment district "created and controlled by local property owners, small businesses, and residents – to fund and support the economic and overall development of the neighborhoods." Funds might also be "ring-fenced" or captured from the property tax rolls specifically for use on programs in this district. The key programs for this district include the following:

- Small business "concierge" services in support of small local businesses
- Branding and marketing of the district as a place for artisanal design and manufacturing
- A "platform" through which small businesses in the neighborhoods can have a unified voice around shared needs
- A "coherent external identity" for the community for the purpose of economic development and marketing
- Creation of liaisons with local workforce training programs that focus on development of artisanal workforce skills and fostering the creation of jobs for local residents

#### Maryland

The State of Maryland operates an Arts and Entertainment District program, the first statewide program of its kind on the United States. While this program targets a somewhat different and more specific industry sector, it has some similarities to the concept of an artisan industrial district. Local jurisdictions in the State apply on a competitive application process for designation of specific areas as arts and entertainment districts within their boundaries. If selected, the specified districts benefit from a package of State and local tax incentives and other programs aimed at encouraging the development of arts (including individual artists), entertainment, and related support businesses. Artists who live and work in the district, along with property owners who renovate buildings for artists or for an arts & entertainment purpose, can gain the following benefits:

- A property tax credit on qualifying renovations
- A waiver on the state's admissions and amusement tax
- An income tax credit for most artistic work generating revenue within the district, as well as other municipal tax benefits, determined at the local level and packaged with the State incentives



# **Economic Strategies:** Investment & Jobs

## **Training & Apprenticeships**

An intensive training program led by WIN did provide exposure for severalhundred West 30s residents. The outcome of this program, which focused on construction occupations, was positive in the sense that some residents did initially acquire jobs in the construction field. Over time, it does appear that only about one in five of those who received training may still be employed in construction. About 100 people were placed in construction jobs at the conclusion of the training, and retention is estimated at 20%. The West 30s Neighborhood has a total estimated adult population of about 1,010, with a total working population of about 300 (see Appendix A for data sources). If 20 of the 300 adults in the community (or about 7%) are employed in construction thanks to some extent to the WIN program, then this is roughly equivalent to the share of all St. Tammany jobs in construction (7.4%).

Consequently, the West 30s would be expected to have not more than about 20 to 25 residents employed in construction out of the working population. Therefore, the WIN program could be considered a success to the extent that at least 20% of those trained were still working in construction after several years. Of course, an important objective would be to increase the number of employed adults overall.

More importantly, the Community Survey found that many residents have other interests and skills besides construction, and that there is a need to tap into those occupations that hold interest with local residents. Graphic design and information technology training would be very important based on the survey findings. Employment in these fields is growing exponentially and there will be increased demand in St. Tammany Parish for these skills as administrative services, back office, and other businesses expand. Healthcare-related training would also continue to be important, as discussed previously.

The artisan occupations would also hold interest and would provide an opportunity to tap into the entrepreneurial interests of West 30s residents. Developing a specialized craft would provide opportunities for contract work, such as in development of ornamental work, furniture, and components like windows and

doors. Much of this work is complementary with the construction training and with the other businesses being targeted for Covington's I.P. North. Key training opportunities could be linked with existing programs or could be coordinated as part of an artisan apprentice pool to attract potential employers. These opportunities are disaggregated below.

# Artisan Craft Apprenticeships

A program should be developed to focus on creating an apprentice pool for custom millwork and other building crafts. Such a program would be developed in partnership with key corporate contributors, such as The Home Depot, local developers and homebuilders, printing companies, and various contractors. Efforts would also promote the development of a contractor corridor along Collins / Ronald Regan Highway (190 Bypass). Apprenticeships would be developed in the following craft fields:

- Woodworking and millwork
- Furniture making
- Sign making and specialty wood products
- Screen printing
- Ornamental metalwork
- Glassmaking
- Lighting fixtures and shades

# Specialty Artisanal Culinary Arts Apprenticeships

A similar partnership should be developed with high-profile restaurant chefs from throughout the New Orleans area to sponsor and raise funding for culinary training in or targeting the West 30s. Sponsorship among local kitchen suppliers would be targeted. Other elements, such as a community garden (discussed earlier in this section) and a training kitchen might be accommodated in the community. Sponsorships could also be attracted from large restaurant chains, franchises, and food companies.

- Baking
- Seasonings and specialty sauces
- Ethnic foods

#### Computer-Related Training

Delgado and other area institutions already provide training in computer fields. Greater New Orleans, Inc. marketing efforts oriented to development of I.P. North should also be coordinated with the community colleges and high schools to focus training programs in the following fields and to proactively recruit students from within the West 30s Neighborhood. Training efforts would focus on the following, and would be available to adults and children/teens alike:

- Basic computer literacy
- Graphic design
- Electronic media and game design

Every effort would also be made to encourage those West 30s residents who have not completed high school to gain their GEDs or otherwise complete their high school education. As employers have stated, a high school education is critical to qualify for most jobs in the area. Thus, the nearly 20% of West 30s adults who lack a high school education are most likely to be dependent on government assistance over the long term. Regardless of whatever training programs or apprenticeships are pursued, a minimum goal would be to reach out to the under-educated residents through targeted GED efforts.

Among those who have completed their high school education or GED, there is the opportunity to create more entrepreneurship or small business development training. Again, Delgado already offers business training, and there are other institutions in the area that provide this training. Often, however, financial constraints, lack of interest, lack of transportation, and past failures prevent residents from participating.

### Structure and Funding

Ideally, all of the aforementioned training efforts, including GED, artisan industrial crafts, computers, foodservice, and entrepreneurship would be coordinated by a community development organization or corporation (CDC) that would have a specific focus on the West 30s. Such a CDC, under the tutelage of the St. Tammany Parish Economic Development Foundation (EDF), would have the unique interest in pursuing corporate and other sponsorship to support training, apprenticeship, and entrepreneurship development efforts. The CDC would



# **Economic Strategies:** Investment & Jobs

also be engaged in promoting the project and the West 30s Neighborhood to attract business and entrepreneurial development.

Rather than mass training efforts that spread resources among a large number of disinterested people, this strategy favors a more targeted approach to link residents through apprenticeships and sponsorships with on-the-job training within their specific areas of interest. By doing so, such efforts can leverage higher retention rates. Again, while the numbers will seem small given the amount of effort contributed to training programs, the results must be placed in the context of the overall economic base and the large gains that can be achieved for a core group of adults and teens within the neighborhood.

#### Wellness Center & Health Business Incubator

Integrated into the Tyler and 27<sup>th</sup> concept area would be a Community Wellness Center and business hub. It is envisioned that the Wellness Center and business hub would occupy a part of the Champagne Beverage building or other vacant space in this area. The Wellness Center was described earlier with the recommended social strategies, while the health business incubator is described below.

An opportunity for creating more direct linkages with jobs in the region is through a health business incubator. Such an incubator, which might be sponsored by the St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance or its member hospitals, would focus on health business and entrepreneurial recruitment and development, as opposed to nursing and other skills already covered by Delgado and other community training institutions.

#### **Growth Sectors**

Economic analysis identified several growth industries in health care that could engage local residents in direct business operation. Among these are the following:

- Home Healthcare with St. Tammany employment growth up by 130% since 1998
- Senior/Disabled Services growth of 184%, over 500 jobs created since

1998. This industry will grow further with the aging of the population. Primary services might include: 1) food service; 2) driving and delivery; 3) cleaning services; 4) caregivers; and 5) other services.

Local residents with training or experience in nursing, business, food service, accommodations, cleaning, maintenance, and healthcare technologies would be recruited to participate in a local incubator or would be recruited as a pool of staffing for other small businesses attracted to the area.

# Structure & Funding

The incubator would operate out of the Champagne Beverages building or other available space in the Tyler and 27th area. The proposed CDC would attract St. Tammany Healthcare Alliance, St. Tammany Parish Economic Development Foundation (EDF), and other sponsorship, Parish funding, and partnerships with Delgado for business training. Because of the CDC's links with the neighborhood, it would be best placed to locate and recruit potential participants. It would be expected that not more than about four to five businesses would participate in the incubator program within a given two-year period. A majority of the participants would be sourced from within the West 30s, but the program would gradually open to others from within Covington and surrounding areas of St. Tammany Parish.

### Collins / 190 Contractor Corridor

Another concept for enhancing employment growth within and near the study area is the marketing of Collins Boulevard and the Ronald Regan Highway (190 Bypass) as a "Contractor Corridor." This concept was first introduced on page 36 of this plan. The Collins Boulevard and Ronald Regan Highway (190 Bypass) already have a cluster of industrial service and contracting businesses. However, there are underdeveloped parcels, vacant sites, and opportunities for higher and better use of some of the land within the existing highway corridor. By concentrating contractor and building supply uses in the corridor, there is the opportunity to define, brand and market the area for these uses and, thereby, generate scale for attracting more of these businesses. Ultimately, the clustering effect can help create a destination for builders and consumers seeking such supplies in the market.

## Comparative Advantages

The Collins / Regan Highway (190 Bypass) Corridor provides good accessibility, exposure, and room for expansion of service industrial and supply businesses, especially in comparison to existing industrial buildings within the center of the West 30s neighborhood. The Collins location has less negative impact to residential neighborhoods than the existing industrial uses in the Tyler and 27th area, and yet provides access to West 30s residents for employment and service. Industrial service businesses will typically locate where land and buildings are less expensive than in prime industrial locations, such as at major highway interchanges. Collins Boulevard and the 190 Bypass provide this cost advantage.

# Packaging & Structure

Encouraging the development of this corridor will require proactive business recruitment and marketing. Ultimately, it will be important for the St. Tammany Parish Economic Development Foundation (EDF) to "package" the area to attract business. Key elements of this strategy might include the following:

- *Partnership* between St. Tammany Parish Economic Development Foundation (EDF), the proposed Covington/West 30s CDC, industrial property owners, and brokers to establish a marketing committee or structure. A key player might be Coldwell Banker, which has been actively involved in the development and marketing of service industrial mini-parks along Highway 190 Bypass.
- Coordination with existing businesses and property owners.
- *Planning* effort to identify and target (re)development parcels and sites for development of service industrial and contractor parks with physical definition.
- Integration of the Bobby Fletcher, Sr. Agricultural Center (the Parish-owned fairgrounds facility) with a branded gateway entrance and stronger Collins Boulevard orientation, to incorporate facilities that could serve the parish as a mini trade show center. This trade show hub would have a focus on the building industry, construction, artisan industrial, food/local agriculture, art/design, & technology. The center, along with the National Guard facility, could be made available for larger community-wide festivals and events, such as a St. Tammany culinary art fair. The marketing committee would help seek planning and design funds for these enhancements.
- Development of a marketing and recruitment strategy oriented to attracting and retaining businesses in contracting, building, and supply. The effort would also promote the corridor on an on-going basis.



# **Housing Strategies**

#### Overview

Appendix A contains the background materials upon which the following housing strategies are based. This section provides several strategies for enhancing the housing within the West 30s Neighborhood. Because the historic character of the neighborhood's housing is one of its strengths, some of the recommendations focus on creating incentives for rehabilitation of historic units. But there is also a broader objective to encourage owners of investment properties to maintain those properties rather than placing all of the financial burdens of maintenance on tenants. Assessment records indicate that investors (or others who do not live in the community) own roughly 70% of the private housing stock within the neighborhood. This number includes both occupied and vacant units. Slightly more than 50% of occupied units are owner-occupied, so many of the vacant units are clearly owned by investors.

Maintenance is differentiated from full rehabilitation, which requires more significant investment in the property. Further, there is the opportunity to reduce the cost of utilities and maintenance through weatherization and other efforts to increase energy conservation. There is also the effort to engage residents, especially those who already have benefited from construction training or maintenance experience, to participate in providing maintenance services for property owners within the neighborhood. Finally, there is the opportunity to diversify the housing mix over time and, in doing so, diversify the income mix in the neighborhood and expose the neighborhood's youth to a broad spectrum of role models in the community.

# Housing Rehabilitation & Maintenance

There is a serious need for both basic maintenance and full-scale rehabilitation of existing housing within the West 30s Neighborhood. Small investors hold a large share of the existing housing units in the West 30s, characterized mainly as detached, single-family homes like "shotguns." Many are in poor structural condition, evidenced by the presence of lead paint, windows and roofs in need of replacement, deteriorating roof framing and floor joists, and basic system

"Rents of \$700 to \$800 a month are being paid for substandard housing."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

Owner occupancy is important. We need to get rid of slumlords."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

weaknesses (drain clogging, water accumulation, and electrical system weaknesses (e.g., 40 amp service). Many of the units also lack modern appliances and are energy inefficient. The cost burden of maintenance and energy leakage is falling on the renter or homeowner at present, rather than on investors. The high vacancy rate (up to 36%) is also testament to the poor condition and low marketability of many existing units. The following strategies aim to shift much of the maintenance burden back to the investor/landlord, but also create incentives to assist them with rehabilitation and economies of scale to lower overhead expenses for regular maintenance.

## Leveraging an Historic District

Much of the housing delivery in the West 30s has focused for some time on new construction of affordable units (both infill and planned-unit development), rather than on rehabilitation of existing units. To some degree this makes sense because of the number of vacant parcels and the ease of purchasing for greenfield development over purchase and rehab of homes from individual investors. However, it is highly recommended that efforts focus on housing rehabilitation going forward in the delivery of affordable housing.

New construction needs will already be met through The Groves at Mile Branch Creek and the number of new infill units that have been built by Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West. There is a need to re-focus efforts on rehabilitation of existing stock because of the historic character of the neighborhood and its amenity value for marketing. The West 30s has a unique, inherent asset in its historic housing and ambiance that cannot be replicated easily through new

greenfield development. As noted earlier, those assets are relatively rare in St. Tammany Parish and there is a need to conserve them in order to maximize the neighborhood's image and marketability. Further, the excessive number of vacant units needs to be addressed through rehabilitation, while constriction of additional new units will only reduce the marketing potential for existing vacant housing.

## Cost of Rehabilitation

No comprehensive survey has been completed, so it would be difficult to determine the exact cost of rehabilitation throughout the neighborhood. Further, rehabilitation costs will range significantly, not only because the housing typologies and age are diverse, but also because the condition of the properties ranges as well. Builders and developers who work in the area estimate that rehabilitation (to a high standard of quality and historic accuracy) will range from \$150 to \$200 per square foot on average (excluding acquisition costs). By comparison, new rental units (in 2, 3, 4, and 8-plex buildings) at The Groves at Mile Branch Creek are estimated to cost about \$187 per square foot inclusive. Excluding certain development costs (land use approvals, market studies, surveys, geotechnical reports, environmental reviews, etc), the cost is closer to about \$180 per foot. Thus, the cost of rehabilitation of single-family investor housing (to a high standard) is likely to be similar to the cost for new construction of rental units within this neighborhood.



Many of the West 30s existing houses are in dire need of repair, but that does not mean they are beyond hope. To salvage the historic character of the neighorhood and retain a potential future competive edge, a focus should shift from new construction to the rehabilitation of houses that are still viable to save.



# **Housing Strategies**

Need for Financing Assistance

The Groves at Mile Branch Creek is being financed in part with private debt, but is also taking advantage of the Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), which are providing equity-equivalency of about 50% of project financing cost, as well as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for another 42% of project cost (mainly for infrastructure). Thus, public financing is playing a major role in the delivery of this new, greenfield project. Without some financing assistance, it would be difficult for privateinvestors to match these foot-by-foot costs through rehabilitation and continue to deliver affordable housing (currently priced at about 40% of the market rent) in existing housing stock and still generate a return on investment.

## Historic District Designation

There has not been a comprehensive survey conducted of West 30s housing conditions, nor an historic survey of housing quality and significance. Ad hoc observations suggest that West 30s housing was not built with the same standard of materials, craftsmanship, size, or quality of housing in other parts of Covington. While it may be apparent that most of the individual homes lack the quality of other historic housing in the city, they collectively represent the heritage of a relatively intact, early-20th century working class neighborhood. More importantly, they represent an important part of the fading history of an African American community in the South. For these reasons, rather than the significance or quality of construction of any individual home, it is worth exploring the possibility of creating an historic district in the West 30s of Covington. Establishment of a recognized district, even with designation only at the local level and without the traditional design standard requirements, could help significantly in enhancing the image and marketability of the housing (at a minimum) and leveraging historic investment tax credits (at a maximum) to support rehabilitation. At the least, there is a need to conduct a thorough housing conditions assessment in order to evaluate the stock and identify strong and weak areas.

#### Community-Based Homeowner Rehabilitation

There are alternatives to the prospect of individual investors rehabilitating individual homes at these costs solely for affordable rental housing. One alternative approach is to encourage community-based building and rehabilitation using skills developed within the community.

At present, there is already a community-based builder in the West 30s who is helping to renovate existing housing, primarily for senior homeowners who have equity in their property. His approach to financing is to purchase the property at existing (nominal) value through a non arms-length transaction, finance construction materials using the equity on the property, and then re-sell the rehabilitated unit back to the owner at profit. He works with the homeowner to arrange a payment schedule that is satisfactory to both parties and he retains ownership until the work is paid. So far, this arrangement has helped ensure relatively timely payments in most cases. Since he uses his own labor, he pays his own fee out of the profits. This approach seems to work well for trustworthy homeowners on fixed-incomes and concurrently provides a profitable enterprise for a local resident. While the builder must meet codes, a concern would relate to whether the rehabilitation meets recognized standards for historic preservation.

## Small Builder Assistance

There are opportunities to assist such community-based efforts, such as through small business loans and operating capital in order to reduce the risk of default. Clearly, the opportunities are magnified if the builder were to have higher-value contract rehabilitation jobs that helped to cross-subsidize his work in the West

Of the approximately 120 people interviewed in the door-to-door Community Survey, the number one issue was housing.

- Community Survey Results

30s. The St. Tammany Housing Partnership might help create a Builder Partnership Program to create partnerships between such small, community-based builders and larger companies in the region to develop contract relationships and secure higher-level training in historic rehabilitation, business development, and financing. Other types of incentives for small builders could be leveraged through a neighborhood investment district (NID), as explained later in this section.

Cross-subsidy of affordable rehabilitation could also be accomplished through rehab to create for-sale, market-rate units within the West 30s. Based on average rents, existing West 30s housing would be valued at about \$65,000 per unit, which is wholly consistent with the neighborhood's median housing market value of \$64,000 (based on St. Tammany Parish assessment records). However, the average housing price in St. Tammany Parish is closer to \$260,000. Based on the relative size of West 30s housing units, the neighborhood should be able to support housing in the \$110,000+ range at market rates or about 70% higher than current values indicate. If the neighborhood's small houses were to be expanded, they would fetch even higher prices. However, full market-rate pricing could only be achieved if neighborhood conditions are improved, the image of the area is enhanced, and the mix of housing is tilted away from a preponderance of affordable units.

Over time, it is important to encourage the development of an income-diverse neighborhood that preserves and protects affordable housing while also welcoming more affluent residents who provide the neighborhood with role models in various professions and walks of life. Children growing up in poverty need role models and examples of people like themselves who have achieved and moved up through education and hard work. Clearly, the negative impacts of gentrification, such as displacement, should be avoided. This objective is best accomplished by creating incentives for investors (again, see NID below) balanced by gaining control of properties that can be dedicated for affordable housing (as through the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program or through participation through non-profits like Habitat for Humanity and affordable rental



# **Housing Strategies**

housing organizations). *In other words, the optimal scenario is for the West* 30s to become a mixed-income neighborhood that protects its affordable housing while integrating market-rate units.

It should be noted that, so long as all new housing in the area is oriented to creating more affordable units, it will be challenging to rehabilitate and sell existing housing at market rate prices. The volume of affordable housing within the neighborhood (between Habitat's infill units, Hope Village, The Groves at Mile Branch Creek, Public Housing Authority housing, and the multitude of under-maintained investor-owned units) overwhelms the market-rate segment in the area. Efforts to diversify would incorporate rehabilitation, but also development of new, market rate units (as explained later in this section).

## Habitat Homeownership Rehabilitation

Habitat for Humanity's welcomed efforts have focused on new construction, as noted earlier. There is a longer-term need to shift the organization's focus in this neighborhood to the more complex task of housing rehabilitation and upgrading for homeownership. Housing rehabilitation costs may be prohibitive to many private landlords, but Habitat should be able to access various foundation and government grants (e.g., HOME) and funding mechanisms to close the gap in financing for rehabilitation. Habitat in other markets has made this shift and is also able to leverage its resources for homeownership training and readiness to complement the capital rehabilitation of housing. There are several "Habitat ReStores" in the area, including Hammond, Sliddel, Mandeville and New Orleans, in which people donate building components and furnishings

"We need a variety of housing types, architecture, and materials. We need an area of preserved shotgun houses."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

(cabinets, appliances, furniture, etc.) for sale towards the rehabilitation of Habitat houses.

One concept for either Habitat or a community builder, in concert with investors, would include rehabilitation of a core block of "shotgun" houses which might also include expansion of the units. Such a concept would have far-reaching impacts on surrounding blocks in the neighborhood and would also provide a powerful marketing tool that illustrates the neighborhood's unique heritage. Shotgun houses have a deep connection not only to African-American history, but also west African (Yoruba) heritage, and are therefore an important component of the historic character and fabric of the area. The gap in financing for rehabilitation of these units (estimated through "back of the envelope analysis" at \$50,000 per unit) would be met through the combination of foundation and federal grants and loans discussed above.

#### Neighborhood Investment District (NID)

There is a need to encourage both proactive maintenance and rehabilitation in rental housing. The Neighborhood Investment District (NID) initiative is intended to accomplish this through stronger regulation as well as through targeted financial and other incentives. See page 75 for examples of NIDs in other communities.

### Regulation ("Sticks")

Code enforcement and other regulatory tools are critical to ensure that absentee (and local) landlords maintain and upgrade their properties. In addition to stronger code enforcement, there is the opportunity to develop a rental licensing program like those found in other communities that requires landlords to meet certain standards in order to receive renewals on their licensing for rental property. Licensing can be coupled with a rental inspection program to pressure landlords

to maintain a standard for occupancy. Another tool might be to adopt residential conservation overlay zoning, which is a form of "historic zoning light" that is focused on housing stock preservation and compatible infill housing. However, as explained in more detail on page 80, the degree of support needed among property owners is likely many years away.

## *Incentives* ("Carrots")

Kenyon Univer-

sity research has

indicated that the

word "shotgun"

may have originated from the

Yoruba word

(Shogun) mean-

ing "house" or

"God's house."

Folklore places

the word in the

context of being

able to shoot a

single shotgun

bullet from one

end of the house

to the other. The

research also

places the archi-

tecture and de-

sign of the house

squarely within

the African-

American histori-

cal context.

There are several incentives that can also be implemented in tandem with stricter enforcement of regulations. The City of Covington or the Parish (e.g., working through the St. Tammany Housing Partnership) can provide technical assistance, such as through a "Paint & Porch Program" that brings out specialists to work for free with property owners on the best ways to rehabilitate and upgrade their houses. Technical assistance can be coupled with low-interest rehabilitation loans or grants as part of the Paint & Porch Program. The program could ensure that such grants would not have to be paid back until the house is sold. Funding for such programs typically comes from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. Since Covington is not an "entitlement community," CDBG funding for this program would need to be obtained through the Parish.

Tax abatements can also be provided based on the cost of rehabilitation cost or investment made into properties. The City or Parish can also establish a linked-deposit program for low-interest rehabilitation loans to encourage property owners and developers to reinvest in housing. In operating such a program, the City's treasurer would deposit money in banks that agree to offer an interest rate subsidy to the borrower. The program would be administered by the participating banks, not the City government, to provide low-interest loans to homeowners who reinvest in their property. Homeownership can be encouraged through purchase incentives whereby the City and/or Parish works to help fund or waive appraisal fees, origination fees, application fees or other costs associated with the purchase of property for homeownership within the specified NID.

Finally, the City can help remove any existing regulatory barriers that may prevent existing homeowners from expanding their properties. Many of the existing homes in the West 30s are less marketable because they are relatively small and do not meet the current market standards for size or layout. Therefore,



# **Housing Strategies**

strict regulation on the expansion of these homes only serves to make them less marketable and encourages rental use over homeownership, resulting in worsened physical conditions. Encouraging reinvestment in properties, including expansion, is essential and should be regulated primarily in terms of design standards that would be implemented for the NID.

### Marketing

It is also recommended that a marketing committee be established under the auspices of the CDC (see socio-economic development report) to work with brokers and property owners and increase the visibility of the neighborhood's housing in the local and regional market. The committee would also develop marketing materials that would discuss the various aforementioned incentives. This committee would coordinate with various non-profit and for-profit developers, and with private property owners as part of an overall marketing program.

### Rental Housing Maintenance Cooperative

There is the opportunity to create a maintenance co-operative among community residents that would help incent upgrading and maintenance as a direct service to investors and landlords. The effort can also enhance opportunities for move-up homeownership among existing residents. Although explained in more detail below, it is noteworthy that there are few known examples of this program actually being implemented. A general model might be the tenant management associations in public housing which manage and maintain their own housing. Nevertheless, there is a case to be made for creating a pilot program through state government or a national foundation.

The cost of rehabilitating and maintaining investor-owned houses can result in rents that are not affordable to a large share of West 30s residents. Local landlords lack incentives to upgrade and maintain their housing as affordable units, and non-profit developers are already heavily engaged in large projects in this neighborhood. There is a need to create economies of scale, which can reduce the marginal cost of maintenance. Therefore, this strategy aims to help

incent the upgrading and maintenance of privately-held affordable rental housing in single-family houses. Key steps in this process are as follows:

- Identify private investors who own houses or buildings with up to 5 units that are held for rental purposes in the West 30s.
- Create a database of these investors for the purposes of communication, organization, and tracking of affordable units.
- Establish a communications network for landlords or their representatives with housing in the West 30s.
- Promote the concept of an Investor Property Maintenance Co-Operative to help create economies of scale and thereby reduce overall operating costs and increase short-term investor profits. The co-operative would be established as a separate non-profit to serve the needs of the small individual investors who would receive its services at nominal cost or through a set membership fee. In exchange for receiving the cooperative's benefits, investor members would be obliged to observe a cap on rental escalations and to provide first right of refusal for sale to existing tenants. The cooperative's primary features and benefits to its members include:
  - Seed funding from the Northshore Foundation or from a Housing Trust Fund that could be established by the City or the Parish, for the purposes of establishing the co-op and for basic administration. Over time, the co-operative would pay its own way out of membership fees and foundation support. Using foundation support for start-up soft costs would avoid constraints imposed on direct use of the money for rehabilitation. Over time, the cooperative might seek project-based direct financial assistance for rehabilitation work.
  - Access to Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for use by the co-op on infrastructure and other housing upgrade projects. The private investors would not otherwise have such access on their own.
  - Use of the Foundation's staff person for grant writing and other fundraising
    to attract support for affordable housing upgrade and maintenance projects,
    and to cover added costs associated with lead paint abatement as required
    by law. In order to participate, investors would be constrained in terms of
    annual escalations in rents and through tenant sale provisions.

"The neighborhood needs more mixed-income housing, including moderate and upper income housing."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant
- Centralized operations management, maintenance, marketing, and monitoring capabilities that would not otherwise be possible for small landlords without the time or resources to do so. Thus, economies of scale can be created that reduce the overhead cost to the investor. Marketing could be focused on securing, upgrading, leasing, and homeownership of West 30s vacant units. Theoretically, the larger the investor membership base the larger the gains from economies of scale. Reducing operating costs has the advantage of allowing landlords to conserve capital for making physical improvements to their properties without the need for public funds.
- Reduction in code violations should occur if there is more centralized management and attention to the regulatory requirements on rental property.
- Training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities targeting West 30s residents could be created by the co-op in various maintenance, marketing, and construction services. This effort would pick up on where the previous WIN program left off (see socio-economic development strategy) and leverage some of the skills base that has been created along with existing maintenance skills in the neighborhood. Such an effort could attract even more funding to the co-op, especially if the effort is expanded city-wide or in coordination with other non-profits. A partnership could be created (similar to the Builder Partnership described earlier) with the help of the St. Tammany Housing Partnership, to link the cooperative with large rental housing maintenance and management companies in the area. The cooperative could then be contracted to work with community-based builders, as well as large rental property maintenance and management companies.
- Participation by the Northshore Housing Initiative perhaps as co-op board members providing input with regards to housing needs in the area.
- Potential for tax incentives to encourage maintenance of rental properties so long as they meet the requirements for affordable housing production



# **Housing Strategies**

(as in escalation caps and sales restrictions). These incentives might be included under the NID program (see above).

- Coordination with the proposed Contractors Corridor (see socio-economic development report) could help to further reduce costs and create economies of scale. The co-operative would work directly with the marketing committee for the corridor to create relationships that guarantee bulk business at lower material cost.

# Weatherization and Energy Conservation

The Community Survey and interviews with residents identified utility costs as a serious burden on the low-income households in the West 30s. Utility costs are the second highest expenditure made by West 30s households after rent or mortgage payments, and account for nearly 20% of household income. Property investors have shifted most of the responsibility for utility costs, as well as housing maintenance, to renters in the neighborhood. Since housing is not modernized or upgraded, much of it tends to lack energy efficient systems or modern energy-saving appliances. Poor housing conditions only worsen the energy loss incurred through leakage and other issues.

Weatherization and energy conservation measures in these houses could have a major impact on utility costs and, by extension, could increase disposable income and savings among West 30s residents. Given the financial status of the community's households, every effort should be made to reduce the utility burden on these households. In doing so, total housing costs would decrease, freeing up household income for healthcare and other essential expenditures.

#### Local & State Programs

The St. Tammany Community Action Agency, the State of Louisiana, and Volunteers of America (VOA) have programs for weatherization that can benefit the West 30s. It is recommended that those agencies initiate a dialogue, coordinate efforts, and focus their attention on the specific issues of the West 30s. Such efforts might include a detailed housing survey to identify key problems and help to address them. While these programs could benefit all residents in the West 30s, there are also opportunities specifically for seniors. The VOA

implements a "Repair on Wheels" program to assistance seniors on home repairs.

## Federal Weatherization Assistance Program

The federal government has programs in place to assist with such efforts and the emphasis on energy conservation has made such funding more available than ever. The federal weatherization assistance program has existed for many years, but some \$5.0 billion has been allocated to the program recently as part of the new American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Many jurisdictions have not taken advantage of the program because of difficulties with using the funds, but federal and state programs are worth pursuing in partnership with local housing initiatives and non-profits.

# **Diversification of the Housing Mix**

There is a need to diversify the neighborhood's housing mix to accommodate market-rate units. By increasing the amenity value of the neighborhood, celebrating the historic character and African-American heritage, and rehabilitating or creating housing stock that appeals to a more affluent market, then there is the opportunity for residents to "move up" rather than move out of the community as they succeed. There is also the opportunity to attract new residents, help reduce the area's high vacancy rate, and promote more infill of the many vacant lots scattered throughout the area. At the same time, diversification must be balanced with efforts to protect existing affordable housing stock and prevent full gentrification of the neighborhood to the detriment of existing residents.

### **Marketing**

While a full housing market analysis has not been conducted for this plan, existing market data suggest that St. Tammany Parish has not been immune to the national real estate downturn nor the financing troubles experienced by many communities. However, sales remain relatively stable and rental occupancy is high throughout the market. Market data suggest that, unlike in many other markets, St. Tammany Parish continues to have significant demand for housing priced below \$150,000, but houses at higher prices are selling. More importantly, communities like Covington will remain attractive locations for a higher-educated

Of those surveyed, 79% agreed that the West 30s Neighborhoods "needs more 'for-purchase' housing relative to rental housing."

- Public Opinion Survey

market base because of the amenity value and historic character. Experience suggests that historic communities, as well as new traditional neighborhood developments (TNDs), retain market appeal and value at a higher rate than the average residential neighborhood.

There is the market opportunity to rehabilitate existing housing for sale in the \$110,000 to \$150,000 range to appeal to residents within the West 30s as move-up housing, and also to attract new homeowners who are seeking affordable, market-rate housing in a neighborhood with an historic ambiance and is accessible to Downtown Covington and area highways. One clear opportunity for building value for attracting niche market-rate buyers would be to create economies of scale with broad impact and rehabilitate entire blocks of houses. This may require acquisition, but also could include equity partnerships with existing property owners. The focus of such efforts would be on blocks that have a significant number of vacant units, as well as those that have intact historically significant homes.

While it is unusual for an entire block to be owned by one individual who is interested in selling, the assemblage of multiple adjacent lots will produce an economy of scale and more control of the context that can lead to greater success.





# **Housing Strategies**

Unfortunately, current building costs would not make rehabilitation or new housing construction in this price range feasible without financial assistance. Given rehabilitation costs, it is likely that historic investment tax credits and other incentives would still be required even if the homes are sold at market rates. There would likely be a financing gap of \$50,000 per unit that would need to be met by a combination of tax credits, federal neighborhood reinvestment assistance, and other incentives.

As the overall housing market continues to improve, demand will increase for higher-priced housing (e.g., \$200,000+) near Covington's Downtown and more affluent neighborhoods. Over time, this shift will provide opportunities for new construction of housing, as well as rehabilitation/expansion of some historic units located to the southern and western portions of the study area. Areas between the Justice Center and the 27<sup>th</sup> and Tyler node would also gradually become more marketable for market-rate housing as the Artisan Industrial Village and associated community amenities become a reality.

### **Land Banking**

Given the long-term opportunities for integration of market-rate housing, it is recommended that a land banking approach be employed to establish control and also influence the parameters of development. Such land banking might focus on the south/western section of the study area between the Justice Center and the 27<sup>th</sup> and Tyler area. This area includes a number of vacant lots and under-utilized land that is relatively close to Downtown. The land banking effort might be led by the City in partnership with private land owners. The City would allow for consolidation of parcels, site assembly, and permitted development in this area in exchange for controls that meet the design standards set by the plan (and, prospectively as part of an historic district), and also for integration of a percentage of affordable housing into new development - perhaps as part of an "inclusionary" zoning overlay district (see sidebar at far right). New and rehabilitated housing would complement mixed-use development recommended as part of any new Justice Center parking complex (as noted elsewhere). See page 85 for ideas on how to fund a land banking program.

### **Amenities**

As noted earlier, amenities help to establish asset value for the community and are an essential part of the overall strategy to diversify the income mix. Neighborhood-oriented amenities and an Artisan Industrial marketing theme have been integrated into the 27th and Tyler concept. Streetscape and landscape will also contribute to amenity value. Marketing linkages with Downtown restaurants and retail will be critical for attracting residents who will want to walk to Downtown.

But there are also opportunities for specialty retail market development closer to the neighborhood, such as along North Columbia Street. The Justice Center area through to about 30th Avenue can be marketed as a core "main street" retail district for the West 30s. O'Keefe Feed & Seed has become a regional destination for gardening supplies, attracting consumers from throughout St. Tammany Parish and beyond. Every effort should be made to celebrate the historic character of this business and the surrounding retail buildings and uses such as Larry's Hardware, All Saints Thrift Store, and others. Businesses in this area could cater to the hardware, garden supply, and specialty home furnishings market, along with food stores and eating places. While the retail market potential for the area has not been tested, information garnered from businesses suggests that the market is changing and growing for destination home and garden merchandise that meets the needs of affluent consumers.

### **Avoiding Gentrification**

Gentrification is a common problem in neighborhood revitalization in which, as the neighborhood becomes enhanced over time and property values increase, existing residents are forced to relocate elsewhere because they cannot afford to pay the increased rents or property taxes. The overall housing strategy for this plan is to diversify the income mix by attracting more market-rate housing. While this strategy, successfully implemented, will have an impact on housing prices, it is important to keep in mind that most of the low-income residents in the West 30s are renters and not owners. Therefore, the key to avoiding gentrification is to create rental incentives for landlords through a "carrot and stick" approach (as has already been recommended) to:

# **A Word About Inclusionary Zoning**

Inclusionary zoning is a tool in which developers are required to provide a certain amount of affordable housing as part of their developments. When used, it is usually applied throughout a jurisdiction (city, county, or state). For example, in New Jersey this policy is referred to as "fair share" housing and all municipalities must accommodate their share of the state's affordable housing need. However, there are examples of municipalities requiring affordable housing or an equivelent cash contribution as a condition of approval for development projects, but the units can be created off-site - such as within a targeted neighborhood. Below is a summary of sample legislation recently approved by Arlington County, Virginia, that resulted from an intensive negotiation process involving private developers, the public, and non-profit sectors:

The developer chooses whether to provide a cash contribution or to provide affordable units using a percent of the increased gross floor area (GFA) above 1.0 Floor Area Ratio (FAR). For on-site units, the requirement is 5% of the GFA; for off-site units nearby, 7.5%; for off-site units elsewhere in the county, 10%. Cash contribution rates in 2010 are: \$1.71/sq. ft. of GFA for first 1.0 FAR; \$4.56/sq. ft. from 1.0 to 3.0 FAR for residential; \$9.13/sq. ft. of GFA above 3.0 for residential; and \$4.56/sq. ft. above 1.0 FAR for commercial. Cash contribution amounts are indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Housing in the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan statistical area (MSA).

Aside from inclusionary policies, there are other incentives to encourage the production of affordable housing, such as: density bonuses that can be enacted as zoning overlays; accessory housing unit overlays zones (or permitted per the base zoning); waivers of fees and tax exemptions within a specific district; and streamlined approvals and permitting processes.

With respect to the use of inclusionary zoning in Covington, research indicates that, as of 2007, Louisiana is one of only 13 states that explicitly authorizes inclusionary zoning or "clearly implies such authority by granting broad powers to promote affordable housing."



# **Housing Strategies**

- Incentivize landlords to re-invest in their properties and maintain them as affordable housing. This strategy can be achieved through tax incentives (e.g., abatements, PILOT programs, etc.), low-interest loan programs as part of a designated Neighborhood Investment District (NID), and similar incentives.
- 2) Regulate landlords to compel them to maintain properties, as addressed previously.

It is noteworthy that other tools for avoiding gentification exist, but they are not being recommended for the West 30s. For example, rent control ordinances have been employed in some communities, particularly a few large cities in the northeast, such as Boston. However, it is assumed that such an approach might be considered to be to heavy-handed to generate sufficient support in Covington.

Tools already addressed on the previous page include land banking and inclusionary zoning. Furthermore, to protect existing homeowners from the tax effects of gentrification, special taxing districts can be created where there is a cap on the percentage increase in property taxes. In some jurisdictions, the cap is citywide so that it is fair to everyone. Determining which tools might be viable and supported in Covington will require extensive discussions and meetings among relevant parties and individuals as part of the implementation phase of this project.

## **Examples of Neighborhood Investment Districts (NIDs)**

There is no set "standard" for NIDs, since different municipalities design such mechanisms to respond to specific issues within their communities. The concept of an NID in Covington combines reinvestment tools used in other locations. Examples of the "packaging" of incentives and regulations include the following:

<u>Washington, D.C.</u> has a "Neighborhood Investment Program" that designated 12 neighborhoods for targeted public investments, regulatory and safety enforcement, and private sector incentives. The program responds to the specific

community issues and targets for housing and economic development within each of the designated neighborhoods. Maintaining a stock of affordable housing is a critical goal in many of these neighborhoods, and the program has enabled the targeting of funds (through a "neighborhood investment fund") for public improvements (such as sidewalks, libraries, and other public facilities) and acquisition/development of affordable housing, coupled with tax abatements aimed at private reinvestment as well as targeted enforcement of regulations in rental housing. Among the relevant powers enabled by the program are targeted housing code enforcement, receivership of slum properties, rent stabilization measures, and acquisition/redevelopment of units for affordable housing.

<u>Columbus</u>, <u>Ohio</u> has "Neighborhood Investment Districts" (NIDs) where residential tax incentives are oriented to stabilization in seven neighborhoods and to upgrading of housing within these and other specific areas. Many Ohio cities offer property tax abatements as an incentive for reinvestment in affordable housing in targeted neighborhoods. The City explains that beneficiaries of the programs are: "existing owner-occupants who upgrade their property within the NID; buyers of a new single-family home constructed within a NID; landlords who invest a substantial amount to upgrade rental property; and buyers of condominiums converted from rental or commercial use." Benefits are as follows:

- Homebuyers of new, infill housing do not pay property taxes on their new homes for 15 years, but they continue to pay taxes on the vacant land value.
- Owner-occupants of single-family homes making improvements of at least 20% of the current tax value are exempt from paying property taxes for 10 years on the increase in value due to improvements.
- Owners of rental property who make improvements of at least 50% of the tax value of their property are exempt from paying property taxes for 12 years on any increase in the value of their property due to improvements. In many jurisdictions, the property must remain as rental, must meet codes, and the increase in rent is capped at a certain percentage.
- Buyers of single-family homes where improvements are at least 50% of value are exempt from paying property taxes for ten years on the increase in value.

The City also has a Homeownership Development Program (HDP) targeted to the NIDs. This HUD-funded program provides gap financing (forgivable loans) of up to \$30,000 per unit for development or rehabilitation of housing for incomequalified homebuyers. There are various applicant/property criteria for eligibility.

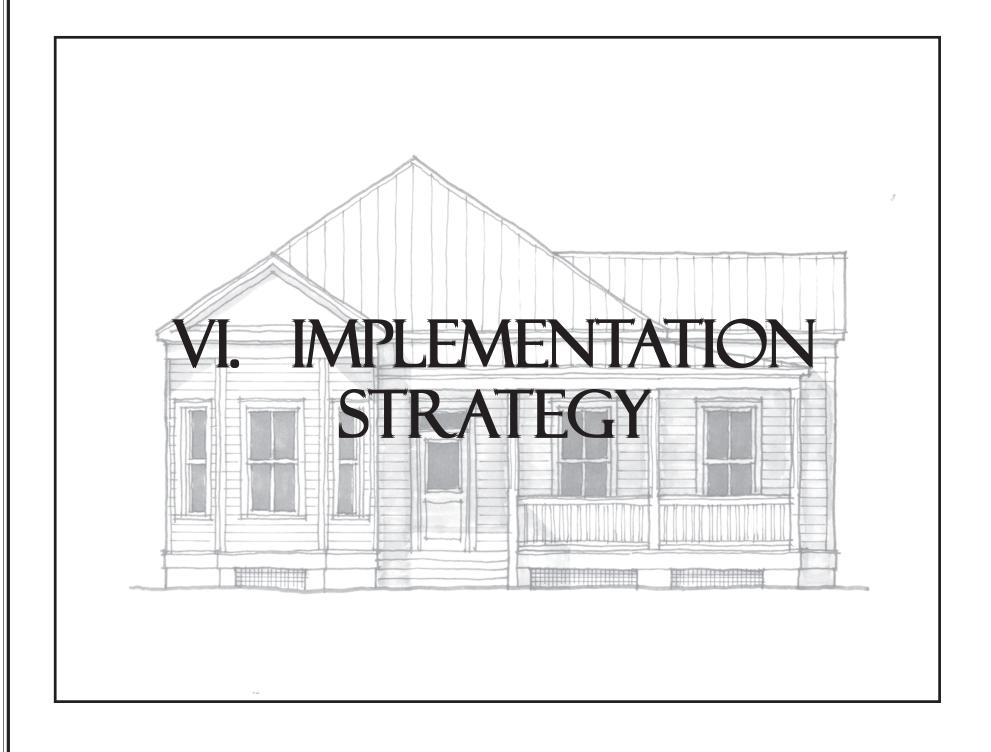
Milwaukee, Wisconsin has a Targeted Investment Neighborhood (TIN) Program to target not only resources for investment, but also "city services to reduce crime, clean litter, and compel landlords to fix up their properties." Regulatory agencies target resources to code enforcement within these TIN neighborhoods, while the City concurrently provides incentives for housing rehabilitation, as well as increased service delivery. The program partners with a community organization within targeted neighborhoods to "stabilize and increase owner-occupancy, strengthen property values and improve the physical appearance of the neighborhood." Benefits offered include: 1)Home rehabilitation grants of up to \$10,000 for property owners within the TIN who meet the City's qualifications; and 2) Financial assistance for first-time homebuyers who live within the TIN.

# **Summary**

This section has focused on addressing housing conditions as the key issue, identified by residents and through planning and economic analysis, impacting on the livability and marketability of the neighborhood. Housing efforts in the West 30s have focused on development of new, affordable housing rather than on rehabilitation of the existing stock. Yet, the unique identity and long-term marketability of the neighborhood is tied closely with its rich heritage, historichousing, and charming ambiance proximate to Downtown Covington and major commuter routes. There is a gap between the cost of rehabilitating existing housing and the prices that would guarantee a private investor a return. This gap would be difficult to fill unless conditions in the neighborhood are improved.

At present, investors are passing along most of the burden of maintaining existing housing and paying for utility costs to the individual renter or homeowner. Maintenance costs are so high that renters forego making any improvements, leading to further dilapidation of the housing stock. The burden of maintenance costs should be shifted back to the investor through a balanced combination of regulatory "sticks" and incentive "carrots." Energy efficiencies should be increased, with the assistance of federal grants, to reduce the utility cost burden on households and, thereby, free up disposable income for healthcare and other essential expenses. By engaging property owners more effectively in the maintenance and upkeep of properties, conditions in the neighborhood should visibly improve and marketability should increase.

As greater investment is made in maintenance of existing stock and in amenities that help to create asset value, there will be more support for market-rate housing in rehabilitated or new/infill units. While there is apparent demand for market housing in the \$110,000 to \$150,000 range, rehabilitation and construction costs are too high to generate a return at these prices. It will be more likely that market-rate housing will be integrated through a land banking approach to create a core area between the Justice Center and the 27<sup>th</sup> and Tyler node to attract private investment interest for market-rate housing. If control is established in this area, partnerships with private property owners can reduce constraints to development, while ensuring the integration of mixed-income housing.





# SECTION CONTENTS

**ORGANIZATION** 

PUBLIC POLICIES

COSTS

**FUNDING** 

**PRIORITIES** 

QUICK VICTORY PR

PROJECT



# **Organization:** Who Does What?

Successful revitalization of the West 30s will rely upon a concerted effort among multiple groups. There must be a clear understanding of which entities will be responsible for specific roles. *A CDC is recommended on the following page*.

# **City of Covington**

### Planning & Zoning Department

This department is important to the revitalization of the West 30s, as evidenced by its key role in the preparation of this plan. Primary responsibilities for the implementation of this plan should include:

## Planning Initiatives & Code Revisions

- Revisions to the City's draft zoning regulations consistent with this plan and summarized on pages 42-43 (land use plan) and pages 78-79 (zoning), which might be done either "in-house" by City staff or through consultants.
- Initiation of potential new overlay zones, such as those suggested for Columbia, Collins, and the Mixed Use Neighborhood along 27th per page 80.

### Development Review

• Addressing both planning and preservation issues to better insure the protection of historic resources within the West 30s, including appropriate infill development per the model building designs on pages 48-54 of this plan.

### Economic & Downtown Development Department

In coordination with other City departments and the proposed Community Development Corporation (CDC), this department can work on the following:

- Continue efforts Downtown with the Covington Business Association.
- Pursue a partnership with the Parish to identify diverse uses for the Champagne property, including a Community Center per pages 34 and 60-62.
- Working with other City departments and the CDC, pursue physical improvements in the West 30s, including streetscape improvements, stormwater management, park enhancements, and the St. Tammany Trace extension.
- Assist in marketing the West 30s per pages 65-68, including working with the proposed CDC on the Artisan Industrial Village and Contracting Corridor.

## Other City Departments

- *Parks & Recreation Department* Improvements and on-going maintenance of parks per page 46 of this plan.
- *Public Works Department* Street maintenance and improvements to the storm drainage system and street lighting in accordance with page 45.
- *Police Department* On-going public safety and working with residents on programs such as crime watch and "ambassadors" per pages 64 and 88.
- Codes Department Establish per recommendations on page 81.

#### St. Tammany Parish

The Parish is an important stakeholder in the West 30s in light of their many facilities located in the study area. They will be important partners regarding a number of issues for this plan, including the future use of the Champagne site.

#### Friends of the West 30s

This fledgling grass-roots organization should continue to grow its membership and activities. It should function as a typical neighborhood association giving a voice to the residents, as well as serving as a neighborhood networking forum.

### Other Existing Entities

In addition to the entities discussed above, there are numerous other existing groups that can be important partners in revitalizing the West 30s Neighborhood. Given the importance of social issues, many of these partners are already listed on page 19 in the "Key Findings" section of this plan. Examples of just some of the organizations that will be critical to revitalization efforts include the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation, the Covington Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, the Northshore Housing Initiative, Neighborhood Housing Services, and this plan's source of funding - the Northshore Community Foundation, just to name a few.

"Our biggest challenge is getting people involved. We need to rekindle their spirit."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

#### **Churches: The Backbone of the West 30s**

While the West 30s Neighborhood is lacking in many areas, churches is not one of them. Churches have provided a critical cultural foundation to local residents for over a century, and they will have an equally important role in the future. Among the area's existing churches are the following:



- Faith Bible Church
- Covington 1<sup>st</sup> Church of God in Christ
- Greater Starlight Baptist Church
- Christ Temple Church of Christ Holiness USA
- Ephesus 7th Day Adventist Church
- Doughty Chapel AME Church
- Mt. Zion Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church
- Covington Faith Bible Covenant Church
- Bethel Reform Methodist Church
- Church of Jesus Temple
- First Missionary Baptist Church

"I use my church to build people up, not people to build my church up."

West 30s Minister

Most of the churches go far beyond merely conducting Sunday services. Instead, many offer programs unrelated to formal religion and provide a variety of support programs and life skills. Churches are the heart and soul of the West 30s.



# **Organization:** West 30s CDC

### **Background**

While there are numerous organizations that should play a role as partners in the revitalization of the West 30s, experience has shown that a significant difference can be made through an entity with a singular focus on neighborhood revitalization. It is important that some sort of organization represented by direct stakeholders, and supported (in part) by outside resources, spearhead the revitalization effort (see page 85 regarding funding the organization).

#### **Recommendations Overview**

Prior to the initiation of this planning effort, the Friends of the West 30s was organized. While there will always be an important role for such a group and it should work closely with the City implement this plan, an outgrowth of this grass roots group should be a new Community Development Corporation (CDC). Unlike Habitat for Humanity, which has done an excellent job in recent years with providing housing in the West 30s, the CDC would be active only in the West 30s. It should have the following characteristics:

- A board of directors represented by a variety of interests, including City government and real estate professionals, but that also consists of actual West 30s residents
- *Professional staffing* by at least one person, with the goal of expanding staffing if and when financial resources become available
- A strong relationship with the City is critical, but its offices should be located outside City Hall and in the neighborhood to avoid a regulatory image.
- A focus on "soft" programming (e.g., training, entrepreneurship, marketing, partnerships, etc.) and not in direct development of housing or commercial projects, at least in the near term. This concept differs from many CDCs.

#### **Committee Structure**

Similar to the National Main Street program's system of committees to focus on key issues for downtown revitalization, a similar system of committees should be utilized by the proposed CDC for the West 30s Neighborhood, as follows (committee names are subject to change):

"Apathy is a big issue. There's an expectation that someone else will do it."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant

#### Commercial Real Estate Committee

This committee should be established to include representatives of key City departments, the Chamber of Commerce, property owners, real estate brokers, and retail and office tenants. The role of the committee would be to help implement this plan's recommendations for commercial and mixed use areas (including the proposed Mixed Use Neighborhood along 27th Avenue) regarding issues such as design improvements, funding, business recruitment, marketing, and entrepreneurial development.

### Residential Real Estate Committee

This committee should work with the City and other relevant entities to help rehabilitate, develop and market housing within the West 30s per this plan's recommendations on pages 48-52 and 69-75. Habitat for Humanity, among other groups, should be a key partner and should be represented on the committee, as well as local residential brokers and agents. The committee's role might also include sponsoring request for proposals (RFP) processes to attract developers to redevelop key properties within the neighborhood, as well as perhaps initiating its own housing development projects at some point in time. It should be a catalyst for the rehabilitation of existing housing in particular.

#### **Industrial & Contracting Corridor Committee**

This committee should work closely with the City's Economic and Downtown Development Department and the St. Tammany Economic Development Foundation to pursue recommendations on pages 67-68 of this plan. Also, working with property owners and existing businesses, the committee needs to pursue zoning revisions, infrastructure enhancements, greater definition of industrial sub-districts, the adoption of financial incentives, and aggressive marketing.

# Model Organization: Hard Bargain Mount Hope -Franklin, Tenneessee

The Hard Bargain Neighborhood

was established in 1875 by a former slave
who named it after the difficult land acquisition deal he
struck. Hard Bargain Mount Hope Redevelopment (HBMHR) is a non-profit entity whose
stated mission is to "impact lives and preserve history by restoring existing homes, building quality
workforce housing, and revitalizing generational

- 1) Build high-quality, affordable homes for purchase.
- 2) Renovate and restore existing homes.
- 3) Beautify the public spaces in the neighborhood.

neighborhoods." Their three primary goals are:

Their activities include meetings and design workshops with residents, fund raising events, property acquisition, and selling homes to households in need of quality housing. Volunteer efforts to improve properties are a key activity. While this organization serves as a good model in many

ways, the neighborhood is much smaller than the West 30s. The plan below was key to their success.





# **Public Policies:** Zoning

#### **Background**

Revitalization plans are implemented through a wide range of means, but one important one can be public policies. Public policies include plans, regulations and financial tools. The latter will be addressed seperately in a subsequent section entitled "Costs and Funding." This discussion of public policies will focus on the most significant types of policies in light of the West 30s, which include zoning, historic zoning, design overlay zoning, and building codes and enforcement.

## **Zoning**

Zoning addresses permitted land uses, as well as development densities and character. Because the entire City of Covington is in the process of being rezoned via a new zoning ordinance, this section will address both existing and proposed zoning, as well as recommendations stemming from this plan.

# Existing & Proposed Zoning

Page 16 of this plan features an existing zoning map and an overview of some key points. However, the City's zoning ordinance was recently rewritten and adopted, and the corresponding zoning map will soon be finalized. Concerns with the proposed zoning as applied to the West 30s include the following:

# Columbia Street

The draft zoning being considered would designate most of this corridor through the West 30s as Neighborhood Commercial (NC). The NC designation is limited to small-scale office, professional services, and retail, and can be no larger than 5,000 square feet in gross floor area. It also allows residential uses per the RM-1 three and four family residential designation. Although the permitted uses are appropriate to the area, there is nothing to preclude parking lots from being located between buildings and the street, which would negatively impact the street's character. It is recommended that this zoning classification, at least as applied to Columbia, prohibit parking in front of buildings.

Industrial Areas near 26th, 27th and 28th Avenues

A multi-block industrial area exists here despite incompatibilities with the sur-

rounding residential neighborhood. While currently zoned for such uses, that use is continued by the proposed zoning's designation of Light Industrial/Manufacturing (ML). The proposed ML zoning is inconsistent with this plan's proposal for the area to transition out of conventional industrial uses and into the proposed Artisan Industrial Village. It is important to remember that an alternative zoning would still leave the existing uses "grandfathered in," but variances would be required for any future expansions.

# Single-Family Residential - Existing Small Lots (RSL)

This district, which covers much of the West 30s residential areas, accommodates small lots. The minimum required lot size for a single-family house is 2,700 square feet, the minimum lot width is 30 feet, and the minimum front setback is 15 feet - all of which work for the West 30s. However, this zoning also permits three and four-unit buildings, which is not comaptible the neighborhood. Those provisions should be reconsidered.

# Two-Family Residential (RS-3)

This classification has been applied to the area immediately north and west of the existing industrial area in the vicinity of Tyler and 27th. It requires slightly larger lots (10,500 sq. ft.), wider lots (75 ft.), and deeper front setbacks (20 ft.) than the balance of the neighborhood where RSL zoning will be applied. It also allows duplexes and up to three-unit townhouses. First, townhouses should never be precluded from fronting a sidewalk, as that is their historic and optimal relationship to the street. Secondly, townhouses should be limited to specific locations per this plan, and the proposed location is incompatible with this plan.

RSL - Single-Family - Existing Small Lots District

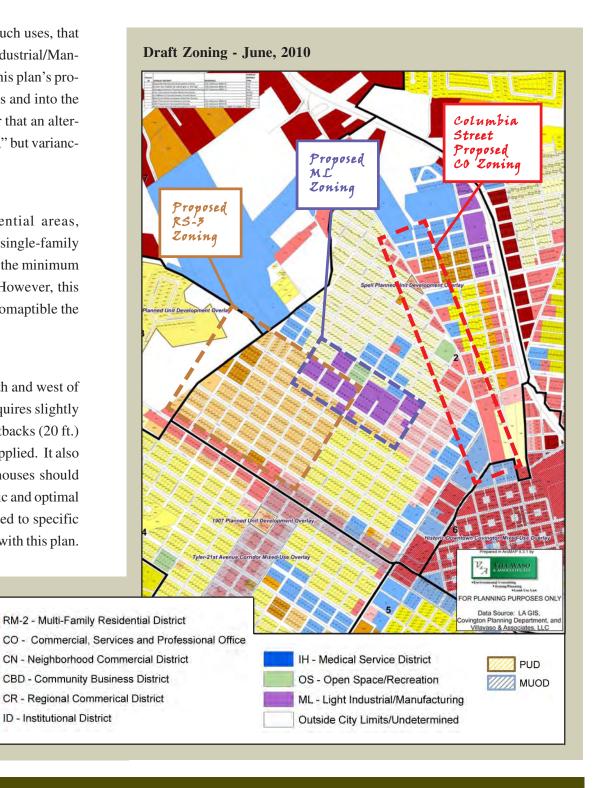
RLL - Single Family Residential - Existing Large Lots

RS-1 - Single Family Residential District

RS-2 - Single Family Residential District

RS-3 - Two-Family Residential District

RM-1 - Three/Four-Family Residential District





# **Public Policies:** Zoning

# **Zoning Recommendations**

For a plan such as this one for the West 30s to be successfully realized, it is important that any needed public policy amendments be approved. Zoning revisions are a common tool - among many others - for implementing a plan. Two different approaches have been offered in this plan to fine-tune the West 30s' zoning for this plan's implementation, and each is explained below:

#### Proposed Land Use Plan

Pages 42-43 of this plan feature a proposed land use plan. The map and legend for this plan are repeated on this page at far right. This plan creates a series of land use categories with descriptive names. Each category is delineated on the plan map, although it is noted that the boundaries are not lot-specific and would require a more detailed field survey to translate the land use plan into zoning. This section of the plan also provides a description of each land use category with respect to key permitted land uses, physical form and character. One option for the City is to take this plan and provide the level of detail necessary to translate it into zoning, including conducting a field survey to fine-tune the district boundaries. Another step would be to decide on the district names and create detailed text regarding permitted land uses, densities/intensities, and design standards (lot sizes, building heights, setbacks, etc.)

# Modifications to the Draft Zoning

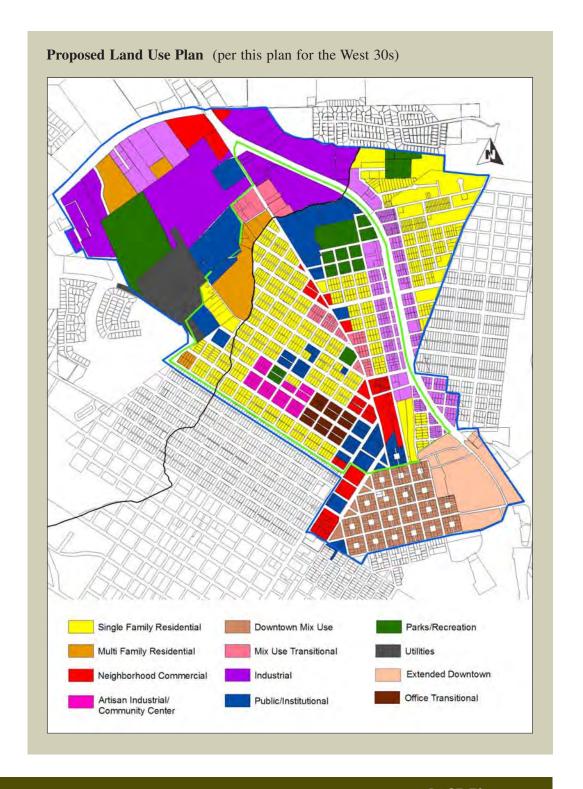
Another approach to the zoning for the West 30s would be to take the current draft zoning and make adjustments according to the comments on the previous page. For example, revisions to the draft zoning would include:

- Neighborhood Commercial (NC) Prohibit parking areas between the street and the building
- Light Industrial/Manufacturing (ML) Replace this zoning classification with an Industrial Artisan classification (which would still retain existing industrial uses via "grandfathering")

- Single-Family Residential Existing Small Lots (RSL) Because the
  predominant uses and character of this area within the West 30s are
  that of a single-family district, three and four-unit buildings should not
  be permitted.
- Two-Family Residential (RS-3) This classification should not permit townhouses as applied to the West 30s. Furthermore, townhouses should never be required to have a front setback of 20 feet within any district in any location. Instead, they should relate more closely to the street.

### Summary

This plan offers two alternative approaches to dealing with the draft zoning currently under consideration. The City can either: 1) start with the recommended land use plan of this plan and provide the detail necessary to translate it into zoning; or 2) adjust the draft zoning under consideration per the specific comments about it on the previous page and summarized on this page.





# Public Policies: Special Districts

# **Downtown Historic Zoning**

## **Existing and Proposed Historic Zoning**

Covington's historic Downtown has been protected by local historic zoning for many years and that same protection is continued with the proposed new zoning. The Historic Downtown Covington Mixed-Use Overlay District (HDC-MUOD) covers not only the National Register district, but also some adjacent peripheral areas that are also deemed as being significant. The proposed ordinance provisions are unusual for historic zoning for two key reasons. First, they regulate land uses despite being considered an "overlay" zone, which typically only addresses design issues. Secondly, while there is a separate existing preservation ordinance and design standards, this new zoning includes design standards only for signage and it does not address the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) process.

As noted, the City has a pre-existing ordinance and design standards that serve as a "safety net" for the missing components in the HDC-MUOD. That ordinance is good enough to meet the State's Certified Local Government (CLG) standards. While it has many positive features, such as "demolition by neglect" provisions, it lacks economic hardship provisions and provisions for the designation any new districts. It also can only delay demolition for up to 90 days, and the separate design guidelines lack sufficient detail and graphics to be as effective as they should be.

### **Historic Zoning Recommendations**

It is recommended that the existing historic preservation ordinance (Chapter 54) be revised to include district designation provisions, economic hardship provisions, and the ability to delay demolion for more than 90 days, if not indefinitely. It is also recommended that new design standards be prepared that offer much more detail, as well as supportive graphics. Because of the complexity of such ordinances and design guidelines, their drafting is typically a distinct stand-alone project rather than being part of a broader rewrite of an entire zoning ordinance.

### Other Potential Design Overlay Districts

As indicated already, "overlay" zones typically address primarily design issues and do not affect the provisions of the underlying "base" zoning, such as permitted land uses and density. In addition to the existing historic district already applied to Downtown, other overlay districts worth consideration for designation over the existing underlying "base" zoning (if and when sufficient stakeholder support can be generated) include the following two types:

#### Corridor Overlays

The map at bottom right highlights three potential corridor overlays. They include segments of Columbia, Collins Blvd., and the proposed mixed use neighborhood anchored by 27th Avenue. The latter would focus on retaining a residential character, while the other two would focus on the quality of development, cross-access between adjacent properties, minimizing driveways (both quantities and widths), sidewalks, landscaping, human-scaled lighting, and signage.

# Residential Conservation Overlay

Sometimes referred to as "historic zoning light," such a neighborhood-wide overlay would focus on the preservation of housing stock and compatible infill housing, while lacking the level of restrictions typical of traditional historic zoning. Relative to the corridor overlays that would impact business owners in particular, this type of overlay would likely present the greatest challenge in building sufficient support because of the residential nature of the area.

It is strongly recommended that design overlay zones not be pursued unless there is substantial support among impacted property owners, which may require a major educational effort on the process and benefits. An alternative to overlay zoning that is frequently used by many communities is to simply integrate the design standards directly into the base zoning. An example of a community that recently adopted such a code is Northport, Alabama's, new Core City Codes. Furthermore, the Louisiana Speaks plan and pattern book created shortly after Hurricane Katrina advocate this approach via the "SmartCode."

If support is lacking for designation with regulatory implications, another option is a district "in spirit" that recognizes the special nature of the area primarily as a economic development tool for marketing purposes, but without regulations.

# **Issues Often Addressed by Overlay Zoning**

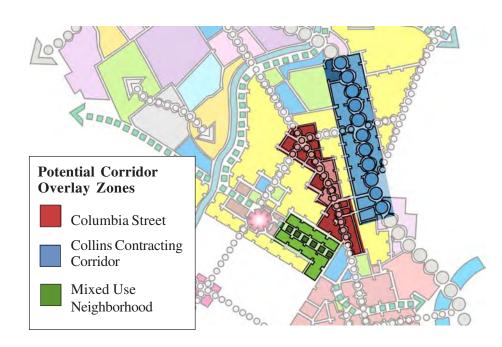
Overlay zoning districts superimpose a distinct set of regulations over the underlying base zoning. Such districts typically focus on design issues, as opposed to land uses, densities and intensities of development. The following design issues are commonly regulated:

- Lot sizes and orientation
- Building heights and setbacks
- Roof forms and slopes
- Signage and landscaping
- Access to the site
- Lot frontage width
- Facade design including orientation of openings and ratio of solids to voids (door and window openings)
- Materials

It is noteworthy that overlay zones not only have minimum front setbacks and maximum building heights, but they often feature maximum front setbacks (or "build to" lines) and minumum building heights.

"There needs to be design standards for housing here to insure some level of quality."

- Stakeholder Meeting Participant





# Public Policies: Building Codes & Compliance

There are two key issues related to building codes: the substance of the codes and their implementation. Below are sections addressing each issue.

# **Building Codes**

One hurdle frequently encountered by those rehabilitating historic buildings is building codes. Codes written with modern buildings in mind are typically not sympathetic to the inherent limitations of older buildings. For example, upper floor spaces being rehabilitated for residential uses frequently have trouble meeting emergency access requirements and similar standards. Fortunately, however, the International Existing Building Code (IEBC) provides a tremendous amount of flexibility in dealing with older buildings, and that code is used by the City of Covington. The key to success will be the attitude of building officials toward the importance of historic rehabilitation and how they interpret and apply codes. Also, many communities have found success through the use of a committee that has a good understanding of the intent of the building code and can make exceptions based on alternative designs that meet the intent of the code, while remaining consistent with the character of the community. If this issue proves to be a challenge in the future, it is recommended that Covington's code officials meet with their counterparts in one or more other communities in the region that have a strong reputation for accommodating historic building rehabilitations. New Orleans may be one nearby model given their substantial success in the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

## **Compliance**

There are two key issues related to building code compliance for the West 30s: 1) staffing and organization, and 2) the overall approach to compliance. Each is addressed below.

#### **Staffing & Organization**

Because of limited funding, only two code compliance staff currently exist, and they are shared with the fire department. Consequently, they can only respond to reported violations. It is recommended that a distinct Code Compliance

Department be established with staffing that is dedicated solely to the code compliance function.

#### Approach to Compliance

Property owners in violation are currently given a 30-day notice and they then must appear in City Court if remedies have not occurred. According to code compliance staff, the City's emphasis is presently on compliance rather than punishment. In fact, the City sometimes makes repairs to buildings and places a lien on the property if they have trouble pursuading the owner to make the repairs themselves.

By law, the City cannot condemn a secured building retaining its structural integrity. However, keeping buildings secured is not always easy, as boarded-up buildings are often entered by simply prying off the boards covering the openings. It is recommended that the City take serious measures to insure that secured buildings stay secured, such as using screws instead of nails to attach boards. In some cases, sheet metal might even be considered for reaccuring problems with security.

In general, avoiding the demolition of older buildings having a character that contributes to the neighborhood and that are still capable of being salvaged should continue to be a goal of the City. Furthermore, it is recommended that code enforcement become more vigorous when used as part of a more comprehensive and targeted strategy. For example, if and when the Neighborhood Investment Districts (NIDs) recommended on pages 71-72 are designated, aggressive code compliance efforts should be applied.

However, one consideration must always be kept in mind when enforcing building codes within lower-income neighborhoods. While it is generally a worthy goal to try to improve housing conditions for residents, there can be unintended consequences. Code compliance initiatives can result in costly building repairs that prompt residents to relocate because the repairs trigger increased rents. The same situation can lead to the demolition of housing, which has similar results for the residents, in addition to the further loss of the neighborhood's



Code compliance efforts must walk a fine line. On the one hand, the goal of eliminating sub-standard living conditions is a noble one. However, if aggressive enforcement results in residents having to leave their dwellings because required improvements lead to increased rents, unintended consequences may result.

housing stock.



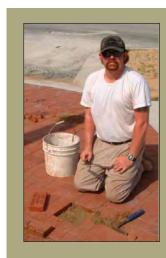
# Costs

## **Background**

When considering the potential costs of implementing a plan such as this, there are two key principles to keep in mind:

- 1) The general nature of a plan such as this, which covers a broad geographic area and an extensive range of issues, precludes the ability to pinpoint costs. By definition, a comprehensive plan is general. Depending upon the specific recommended project, another layer of much more detailed work must usually occur before costs can be estimated with any degree of certainty. For example, streetscape recommendations would need to evolve into actual engineered drawings before costs can be estimated in detail.
- 2) Because of the phased and incremental approach required to implement a revitalization plan, high projected costs should not be overly daunting. For planning purposes, this plan has estimated a ten-year time horizon for implementation (see pages 86-87). After the inital "sticker shock" fades, most communities have found that they can, over time, implement their plans to a large extent. Plan implementation alway occurs in a matter of degrees: rarely is a plan completely implemented, and rarely is a plan completely not implemented. Also, many of the recommendations in this plan are not "big

ticket" items, particularly the organizational and public policy recommendations.



While no downtown or neighborhood was ever single-handedly revitalized through streetscape improvements, they can be a useful component of a comprehensive strategy. If carefully targeted to specific areas of focus, they can stimulate adjacent private sector development, enhance aesthetics, and broadcast a message that improvements are indeed occurring.

#### **Public Sector Costs**

Because of the many unknowns regarding a project such as the adaptation of the Champagne property for alternative uses, including components of a Community Center and private enterprises, a separate feasibility study would be required to predict costs. However, this plan's recommended streetscape redevelopments are one area in which some very general projections can be made. At right are the approximate costs of a streetscape redevelopment for Columbia Street. Costs are estimated based upon cost-per-unit standards for similar projects elsewhere and they would need to be localized for added accuracy. A generous contingency figure (30%) has been included. Regardless, the only way to have any degree of certainty of costs would be to have the engineering work completed. Nevertheless, the projected figure of approximately \$1.7 million provides a general idea.

#### **Private Sector Costs**

To the extent that many of the costs associated with this project will be incurred by the private sector for development, some general per square footage costs are useful. The section of this plan on housing within the "Socio-Economic Plan" (starting on page 69) features some approximate numbers, as follow:

Residential building rehabilitation (high quality): \$150-\$200 per sq. ft.

Residential building new construction (the Groves): \$180 per sq. ft.

While the numbers cited above are an average from multiple builders active in Covington who were interviewed, there are differing opinions on costs. For example, others believe that more accurate numbers include \$125 per sq. ft. for rehabilitation and \$150 per sq. ft. for new construction. Regardless, it must be understood that rehabilitation costs can vary widely from project to project, depending upon the condition of the subject building. These numbers must also be contrasted with market conditions, including the ability of a substantial share of the West 30s' market to afford a single-family house in the \$110,000 to \$150,000 range.

# **Approximate Streetscape Costs** Columbia: Theard to Tyler (3,150 ft.)

Street Resurfacing

\$11.55/ft./lane @ 3,150 ft. X 2 lanes = \$72,765

Diagonal On-Street Parking \$20.00/ft./lane @

3,150 ft. X 1 lane = \$63,000

Street Marking

\$4/ft. @ 3,150 ft. = \$12,600

(10 ft. X 3,150 ft. X 2) = \$321,930

Sidewalks (Replace/Develop) \$5.11/sq.ft. @ 63,000 sq. ft.

Handicapped Ramps

\$1,300/ramp @ 40 = \$52,000

Street Trees

\$300/3" cal. & inst. @ 157.5 (40 ft. spacing) = \$47,250

Street Lights

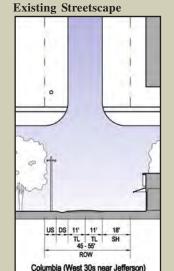
\$5,000/light @ 157.5

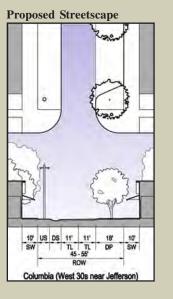
(40 ft. spacing) = \$787,500

SUB-TOTAL \$1,357,045

Contingencies (30%) \$407,113.50

TOTAL \$1,764,158.50





These numbers are very general and cannot be projected with any level of certainty until the actual design and engineering is conducted. These numbers will need to be reviewed and verified/revised by the City's engineer.



# **Funding**

# **Background**

Appendix D features a description of numerous federal, state and local funding sources and financial incentives for a variety of activities that are relevant to this plan. Below is a summary of the most promising programs grouped with the types of projects proposed in this plan.

#### Recommendations

<u>Funding of Community Development Corporation (CDC)</u> See page 85 for a detailed explanation.

# Funding for Planning & Policy Development

As indicated on page 80, the City is in need of an improved historic preservation ordinance and design standards. This issue is limted to this project's "secondary study area" where the locally-designated historic district is located, but there are other preservation opportunities for the balance of the West 30s. Covington is a designated Certified Local Government (CLG) by virtue of its existing historic preservation program that meets federal and state standards, which makes it eligible for CLG grants for technical assistance for projects such as preservation ordinances and design standards.

## Potential Projects for Funding

- Rewriting of historic preservation ordinance
- New historic district design standards
- Brochure on history of the West 30s Neighborhood
- Oral history project to document the West 30s

## Potential Funding Sources

- CLG grants \$10,000 maximum grant / 50% match required (cash or in-kind)
- Preserve America grants \$20,000 \$250,000 grants

### Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings (including modest older houses)

Most of the programs specifically for historic buildings require National Register designation or eligibility, which will limit most of those opportunities to the historic Downtown area. However, many others are targeted more toward affordable

### housing.

## Potential Projects for Funding

- Restoration of the Southern Hotel
- Rehabilitation of other historic buildings

#### Potential Funding Sources

- Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credit (federal) building rehabilitation costs
- Certified Local Government Program (federal) stabilization and rehabilitation studies
- Save America's Treasures Program (federal) rehabilitation costs, etc.
- Preserve America Program (federal) rehabilitation studies
- HOME Program (federal) upper floor apartments
- Low & Moderate Income Housing Tax Credit (federal) upper floor apartments
- Community Development Block Grants (federal) acquisition, rehabilitation costs, etc.
- New Market Tax Credits (federal) investment in Community Development Entities (CDEs) for rehabilitation projects
- Section 108 Loan Guarantees (federal) acquisition, rehabilitation costs, etc.
- Federal Economic Stimulus Programs (federal) neighborhood stabilization program, weatherization assistance program, and housing assistance program
- Youthbuild (federal) housing rehabilitation projects
- State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (state) building rehabilitation costs
- Restoration Tax Abatement (state) property tax freeze at pre-rehabilitation rate
- Facade Loan Program (city) current maximum grant of \$1,000
- Community Reinvestment Act Financing (private) acquisition/rehabilitation loans
- Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund (private) equity for rehabilitation costs

Of those surveyed who indicated that they would like to renovate their house in the West 30s, 75% cited "getting a loan" as the single biggest hurdle to achieving their dream.

Public Opinion Survey Results

# Development of New Housing

Given the large number of vacant lots or lots occupied by buildings beyond saving in the West 30s, the development of new infill housing represents a significant opportunity.

# Potential Projects for Funding

• Infill housing throughout the neighborhood

# Potential Funding Sources

- HOME Program (federal) new housing
- Low & Moderate Income Housing Tax Credit (federal) new housing
- Community Development Block Grants (federal) land acquisition, development costs
- Section 108 Loan Guarantees (federal) land acquisition, development costs
- New Market Tax Credits (federal) investment in Community Development Entities (CDEs) for housing
- Federal Economic Stimulus Programs (federal) housing assistance program
- Community Reinvestment Act Financing (private) acquisition/construction loans

# Land Acquisition and/or Development of Community Facilities

### Potential Projects for Funding

- Improvement of parks
- Community gardens development
- St. Tammany Trace / Mile Brach Greenway development
- Parking development

#### Potential Funding Sources

- Transportation Enhancement Funds (federal) new parking lots and bicycle facilities, greenways/Trace
- Community Development Block Grants (federal) land acquisition, development costs
- Section 108 Loan Guarantees (federal) land acquisition, development costs
- Community Reinvestment Act Financing (private) land acquisition/development loans

# Public Infrastructure

# Potential Projects for Funding

- Sewer, water, electrical, gas and telecommunications upgrades
- Relocation of utility poles and overhead lines



# **Funding**

- Improvements to drainage facilities
- Streetscapes redevelopment Columbia, Tyler, 27th, etc.

## Potential Funding Sources

- Transportation Enhancement Funds (federal) streetscape redevelopment
- Community Development Block Grants (federal) all forms of public infrastructure
- Section 108 Loan Guarantees (federal) all forms of public infrastructure
- Louisiana Economic Development Award Program (state) assistance with publicly owned infrastructure

# Cultural Programs

# Potential Projects for Funding

- Festivals / special events
- Historic interpretation
- Educational/arts programs

### Potential Funding Sources

- CLG grants (federal) historic interpretation
- Save America's Treasures Programs (federal) historic interpretation
- Transportation Enhancement Funds (federal) historic interpretation
- National Endowment for the Arts Challenge America Grant arts and music programs

#### **Business Development**

## Potential Projects for Funding

- Business recruitment efforts downtown, neighborhood commerical, industrial
- Creation of proposed Artisan Industrial Village
- Marketing efforts for proposed Contracting Corridor

#### Potential Funding Sources

- Community Development Block Grants (federal) all forms of business development
- Section 108 Loan Guarantees (federal) all forms of business development
- Small Business Administration Programs (federal) Section 7(a) loans, consulting through SCORE
- Brownfields Economic Development Initiative BEDI (federal) clean-up of contaminated industrial sites

- Federal Economic Stimulus Programs (federal) job training program
- Louisiana Enterprise Zone Program (state) tax credits for job creation
- Louisiana Economic Development Award Program (state) assistance with publicly owned infrastructure to benefit new businesses or expansions
- Louisiana FastStart (state) workforce recruitment, screening and training
- Industrial Tax Exemption (state) applies to investments in industrial land, buildings and equipment
- Quality Jobs Program (state) cash rebate for job creation
- Business Development Center (local) limited to consultation and education
- Covington Low-Interest Loan Program (local) for a variety of business costs, such as land, facilities, equipment (funding pool is currently depleted)
- Community Reinvestment Act Financing (private) business loans

## Other Types of Initiatives

# Potential Projects for Funding

- Establishment of a CDC
- Housing rehabilitation/construction training program for young people
- Hiring of neighborhood ambassodor / bike police officer

### Potential Funding Sources

- New Market Tax Credits (federal) investment in Community Development Entities (CDEs)
- Youthbuild (federal) program to train at-risk youth in construction and efforts to achieve GED
- Federal Economic Stimulus Programs (federal) police hiring program

#### Special Districts

A variety of different special districts applied at the local level were considered for the West 30s, as follows:

### Neighborhood Investment Districts (NID)

An NID is an approach in which a neighborhood or portion within it is targeted for a concentrated effort at revitalization. Rather than using a random and difused approach throughout a large area with no results, a combination of "carrots" (incentives) and "sticks" (regulations) are used in concert. Examples of incentives include property tax abatements and grants and low-interest loans for housing revitalization and development. Examples of regulations include design standards to insure quality design and construction, as well as code enforcement for existing housing. The designation of an NID is recommended for the West 30s. See pages 71-72 for more detail on this concept.

## Tax Increment Financing Districts

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a financial tool used by local governments in which money is borrowed for physical development (infrastructure, components of the development, etc.) and the bonds are paid off by the incremental tax revenue increase resulting from the new development. While it can be an extremely attractive financial mechanism in certain situations, it is not likely to be feasible for the West 30s as the scale of potential redevelopment would not be large enough to be economically viable.

### Business Improvement Districts

A business improvement district (BID), also referred to as a "special taxing district," is a tool in which ad volorem property taxes are earmarked for commercial revitalization efforts. Depending upon the state enabling legislation, funds can typically be used for a broad range of activities, including supporting an entity, marketing and promotion, and "brick and mortar" projects. In the case of this study area, it would be most applicable to Downtown. A BID requires a majority of property owners to support the concept, and it is unlikely that there would be sufficient support within the near future for such a program. However, it is a concept that should be revisited at some time in the future.

Note: An analysis of the costs and potential funding sources for housing rehabilitation and new construction is included on pages 69-71.



Youthbuild is a national program with a focus on teaching "at risk" youth building construction skills for affordable housing and helping them earn a GED. Funded partially by HUD, it has helped over 47,000 young people across the country.



# **Funding**

# **Community Development Corporations (CDCs)**

The creation of a CDC is a very high priority for this plan. CDCs are funded through a variety of mechanisms, including the following potential sources:

- HUD-distributed CDBG funds (for specific project requirements)
- New Markets Tax Credits (brings equity investors into projects)
- Equity investment in commercial projects (with returns reinvested in CDC)
- DHHS Office of Community Services (competitive grants)
- Municipal, County, State grants, and lending programs (e.g., Louisiana Department of Economic Development)
- US Treasury Department grants and CDFI Fund
- USDA Rural Development Intermediary Relending Program
- USDA Rural Development Rural Enterprise Fund
- Revolving loan funds
- Greater New Orleans Foundation
- US Small Business Administration (SBA) Micro-Loan Fund

Other potential sources via foundations, individuals, and corporate contributory income includ the following:

- Ford Foundation
- Chase Community Giving Advisory Board
- Eugenie & Joseph Jones Family Foundation
- Vinmont Foundation, Inc.
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

#### **Land Banks**

Land banks are discussed earlier in the Socio-Economic Strategy of this plan as a potential tool for housing development. They can be funded through a variety of mechanisms, depending on enabling legislation typically at the State level, as follows:

- *Seed funding* from Local Government, typically out of a tax collection and foreclosure budget, can be utilized for land banks.
- Fees associated with delinquent tax collection (and tax lien sales, penalties,

and interest) are targeted to the land bank, which uses them for the management and disposition of properties.

- *Property tax capture*, in which a portion (e.g., 50%) of property taxes generated by properties restored to productive use are captured, can be used toward land banking. Where derelict or tax-delinquent properties are declared, purchased, and rehabilitated/made tax recoverable, then a portion of the tax revenues generated by the redeveloped property for a certain period (e.g., 5 years) are captured for use by the land bank.
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) can be used for certain land bank purposes, such as demolition of buildings and construction of infrastructure, through bonds.
- Grant funds can be used for various specific functions, such as administration.
- *Developer partnering*, with land as equity, can be used in land banking to generate returns that can be reinvested.
- *EPA/Brownfield funds* can be used for environmental remediation, consultants, and contractors.
- *CDBG funds* can be used for demolition and other purposes relating to land bank functions.
- Work release programs and other initiatives, in collaboration with the prison system, can be used for property clean-up, brush clearing, maintenance, etc.
   The proximity of the nearby Parish prison would seem to make this approach particularly viable.

It is noteworthy that the most successful "traditional" land banks are organized at the metropolitan level and for the most diverse real estate mix possible. Small-area land banks will have fewer resources at their disposal and will take a longer time to effect change, but they can still have a proactive role to play if city-wide resources are targeted to the West 30s.



**Priorities:** Where Do We Start?

# **Geographic Targeting**

A key principle that this plan follows is that, to achieve revitalization success within a study area as geographically expansive as the West 30s, a narrow focus must be applied to very specific areas. In other words, investing random efforts and funding in an uncoordinated manner throughout the study area will yield little in the way of long-term positive results. Instead, targeting a variety of physical, social and economic initiatives to very defined locations will bring the greatest long-term benefits. Once key locations become stablized and revitalized, revitalization will spread geographically from those points with less need for external public-sector help.

### **Three-Pronged Geographic Strategy**

In deciding where to begin revitalization efforts, three principles will be simultaneously applied:

# Spread Improvements from Stable Edges

One proven strategy is to build upon the healthy edges of a revitalization area. The most definitive heathly edge for the West 30s is the north side of Downtown at roughly Jefferson Street. Areas lying south of Jefferson tend to be relatively strong economically and physically, while conditions markedly drop of to the north. Investors will perceive less risk investing in such areas.

# Focus on High Visibility Corridors

Another strategy that has often proven successful is to focus on the most visible corridors because of their impact upon the image of an area in the minds of local residents and visitors, as well as their high traffic levels that give them strong market support. Most Covington residents who live and work outside of the West 30s rarely, if ever, travel down streets such as Van Buren or 30th. However, many travel down Columbia.

### Plant Seeds of Improvement in the Neighborhood's Heart

A third strategy for revitalization efforts is targeting improvements to the symbolic heart of the study area. In the case of the West 30s, that would be

# **Implementation Matrix**

No.	Recommendation	Page #	Responsible Party	Time-Frame
Α.	Organization & Funding			
A-1	Establish a new CDC and strengthen the Friends of West 30s organization	77	City / Various Partners / Residents	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
A-2	Pursue and/or adopt recommended funding tools for West 30s	83-85, App. D	City / CDC / Various Partners	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
A-3	Hire staff for the recommended new CDC	77	City / CDC / Various Partners	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
A-4	Establish a Code Compliance Department in the City and begin stronger enforcement	81	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
В.	Public Policy			
B-1	Implementation of crime prevention strategies - crime watch, ambassadors, etc.	64	City / Residences / "Friends" group	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
B-2	Revise base zoning to implement this plan's recommended Land Use Plan	42-43, 78-79	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
B-3	Apply design overlay zoning with design standards to Columbia, Tyler and Collins	80	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
B-4	Designate and implement Neighborhood Investment District (NID) target areas	71-72	City / CDC	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
B-5	Explore Conservation Zoning for residential areas based on level of interest	80	City / CDC	Mid Term (Yrs. 1-3)
B-6	Prepare and adopt a Capital Improvements Plan & Budget for the City	44	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
C.	Housing & Economic Development			
C-1	Develop repair programs for both owner-occupied and rental housing (weatherization, etc.)	69-75	CDC	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
C-2	Develop programs for home ownership	69-75	CDC	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
C-3	Initiate programs for job development, adult education, and health	58-68	CDC	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
C-4	Implement marketing & promotion strategies for D'town & Industrial/Contractor Corridors	38-41, 67-68	City / Econ. Dev. Found. / CDC	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
D.	Transportation & Public Spaces			
D-1	Streetscape redevelopment along Columbia Street	24	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
D-2	Tammany Trace extension north to City Recreation Center (Ronald Regan Hwy.)	46	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
D-3	Increase street lighting and clear drainage swales throughout the West 30s	45	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
D-4	Explore the use of bioswales and relocation of overhead lines (key streets only)	45	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
D-5	Establish one or more community gardens	61	City / LSU Ag. Ext. / "Friends" group	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
D-6	Streetscape redevelopment along Tyler Street	30	City	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
D-7	Repair/add sidewalks to streets linking schools to other key streets	44	City	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
D-8	Improvements to Atkins Park - playground, paths, gazebo/picnick shelter, etc.	46	City / CDC / "Friends" group	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
D-9	Improvements to Pathways Park - improved parking, community garden, etc.	46	City / CDC / "Friends" group	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)

See the continued matrix on the following page

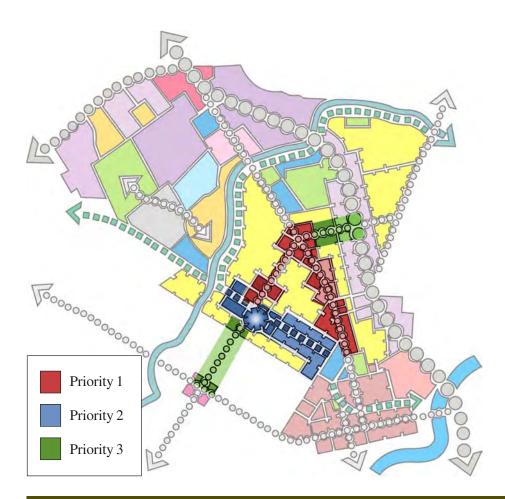


# **Priorities:** Where Do We Start?

the neighborhood's core in the vicinity of Atkins Park, which also happens to be an area with other parks and multiple churches.

# **Combining the Three Strategies**

The map below illustrates the results of combining the three principles outlined above. The southerly segment of the Columbia Street corridor has been given the top priority because it extends from a strong edge (Downtown) and it is the most highly visible corridor within the neighborhood core portion of the study area. Connected to that corridor and pentrating the neighborhood's core is the most easterly segment of Tyler. The next priority is the symbolic heart and



# Implementation Matrix (continued)

	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·			
D-10	Improvements to Ozone Park - improved parking and landscaping	46	City / CDC / "Friends" group	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
5			0::	
D-11	Extention of 27th or 29th to the north (needs detailed study)	44	City	Long Term (Yrs. 7-10)
D-12	Streetscape redevelopment along 27th Avenue	35	City	Long Term (Yrs. 7-10)
0-12	Streetscape receiveropment along 27th Avenue	33	Oity	Long Term (11s. 7-10)
D-13	Development of Mile Branch Greenway connecting to Tammany Trace	46	City	Long Term (Yrs. 7-10)
				20119 101111 (1101 1 107
D-14	Plaza development at the Champagne property	33-34	City / CDC	To be determined
E.	Buildings & Facilities			
<b>-</b> .		24.22	B : 1 (0); (0B0	N T (2/ / 2)
E-1	Adaptation of the Champagne Property for a Community Center and other uses	34, 60	Parish / City / CDC	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
E-2	Site improvements to Harrison Curriculum Center	31	School Board	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
L-2	Onte improvements to Hamson Gamediani Genter	01	Oction Board	Near Terrir (113: 1-5)
E-3	Construction of Parish garages by Justice Center	26-28	Parish	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
E-4	Complete the Covington Recreation Center - gymnasium, playing fields, etc.	46	City	Near Term (Yrs. 1-3)
				0.00
E-5	Redevelopment and infill with commercial uses along Columbia Street	25-29	Property Owners / Developers	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
E-6	Adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for Artisan Industrial Village	32-34, 65-67	CDC / Property Owners / Developers	Mid Term (Yrs. 4-6)
L-0	Adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for Artisart industrial village	32-34, 03-07	CDC / Froperty Cwillers / Developers	IVIId Terrir (TTS: 4-0)
E-7	Relocation of City Hall to a location closer to the Downtown Core	41	City	Long Term (Yrs. 7-10)
_ /				
E-8	Adaptive reuse of the Southern Hotel	41	Property Owner / CDC	To be determined

geographic core of the neighborhood anchored by multiple parks and the Champagne property. Part of this area includes the industrial blocks anchored by 27th, which connects back to the strong edge to the south at Jefferson. Finally, the third priority area is two segments of the Tyler corridor that make important linkages at either end. One segment extends from roughly 26th Avenue to the west beyond the West 30s, while the other is the segment of Tyler that transitions to 32nd Avenue and extends to Collins Blvd. These third priority areas are significant primarily because of their roles in connecting to important peripheral areas.

It is important to note that a recommendation associated with a particular priority area can be implemented sooner or later than other recommendations for that particular priority area. For example, the Champagne property is located within the Priority 2 area, but its adaptive reuse has been recommended as a near-term project. The three priority areas are intended to suggest a general focus for priorities and sequencing, and should not be seen as rigid frameworks, particularly if unexpected opportunities arise.

### Picking the Low-Hanging Fruit

Regardless of geographic considerations, another factor that impacts implementation sequencing is the cost and level of difficulty involved. Even if not directly associated with a Priority 1 area, plan recommendations that are relatively inexpensive (public policy changes, etc.) and that do not pose major challenges are generally designated at near-term projects to implement.

#### **Implementation Phasing**

The Implementation Matrix beginning on the previous page has categorized each major plan recommendation into three periods over a ten year time horizon. This timeframe is intended as a conservative approach that is realistic with respect to the limited financial resources of the City and other key partners.

#### Near Term (Years 1-3)

Key projects include adaptive reuse of the Champagne property, streescape improvements to Columbia Street, extension of the Tammany Trace, and improving street lighting and drainage, as well as projects already planned such



# **Priorities:** Where Do We Start?

as the Parish garage(s) at the Justic Center and site enhancements to the Harrison Curriculum Center. Other near term projects are less costly programmatic and policy measures, such as zoning revisions, funding tools, strengthening the Friends of the West 30s, and establishing the proposed CDC.

# Mid Term (Years 4-6)

Mid term projects include streetscape improvements for Tyler, a range of improvements to three different parks, strategies for Downtown and the proposed industrial and contractor corridors, creation of the proposed Artisan Industrial Village, and exploring conservation zoning for residential areas.

# Long Term (7-10)

Among the long term recommendations are the relocation of City Hall to the Downtown, extention of 27th or 29th to the north, development of the greenway along Mile Branch, and streetscape improvements to 27th.



# Quick Victory Project: Off the Starting Blocks

## **Background**

A "quick victory project" is a project that is implemented soon after the completion of a revitalization plan. The intent is to continue the momentum built during the planning process and to demonstrate to the public immediate results. Quick victory projects do not have to be costly relevant to other recommendations of the plan, but they do need the following three characteristics:

- 1) High visibility
- 2) High odds of success
- 3) Strong promotion to broadcast the results

#### Recommendations

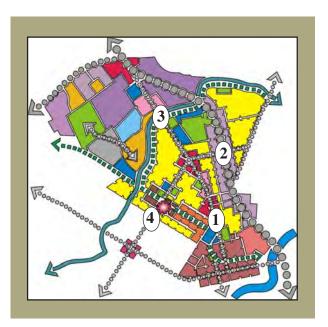
There are several potential quick victory projects for the West 30s, and they are listed below with comments. *It must be understood that multiple quick victory projects can occur*, including spacing them out and carefully sequencing them to maintain implementation momentum. The projects are listed below in order of likely success and/or priority:

- 1) Establishing a West 30s CDC The idea of creating an entity with a singular focus on revitalizing the West 30s is explained on page 77 of this plan, as well as throughout Socio-Economic Plan section. Seed money might be used to secure office space and pay for office equipment and supplies. A stable funding source would be needed to hire any staff. While such a group will be important to function as a catalyst to spark improvement, some stakeholders may prefer something more tangible than an organizational program.
- 2) Community Garden(s) See page 61 for an explanation of this idea. The quick victory project could be limited to just one garden versus multiple gardens. Depending upon the selected location, it may lack the public visibility of some of the other potential projects. However, it should be very feasible from a cost perspective. It is assumed that no cost would be incurred for the use of the land. Gardening tools and the materials for constructing an on-site tool shed

might be donated by local businesses. The concept's success will be contingent upon a capable entity managing the program.

- 3) Gateway Treatment(s) A gateway treatment would feature some physical element that signifies one's arrival into the West 30s Neighborhood. Locations should be points at which a strong sense of arrival occurs, and potential locations include the following (see map below with correlated numbers):
- 1) Columbia at Jefferson (south)
- 2) Collins at 32nd (east)
- 3) Columbia at Mile Branch (north)
- 4) Tyler at 25th (west)

Gateway treatments can come in many shapes and sizes, including signage welcoming visitors to the "West 30s," landscaping, vertical architectural elements, and banners. While not overly costly and easy to do in phases, the risk is that implementing this idea before s u b s t a n t i a l improvements occur in

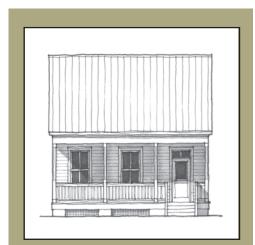


the neighborhood may underscore the area's shortcomings. Upon seeing the gateway and entering the West 30s, visitors may be underwhelmed unless more visible improvements are made.

<u>4) West 30s Ambassadors</u> - The "ambassadors" would actually be police officers (either off-duty or supplemental on-duty) utilizing bicycles. Bike-mounted officers can be effective at building relationships with residents and other stakeholders that officers in automobiles can achieve. However, it would be

critical that the assigned officer(s) have a positive and non-threatening attitude with the public. Also, an on-going source of funding would be required.

5) Demonstration Infill House - The City could donate a vacant tax-delequent lot to one or more builders who would construct a house to demonstrate the viability of compatible infill housing. The house might then be made available to a worthy household based upon income and other criteria. It might even be a Habitat for project or one for the proposed CDC. While worthy by many respects, this project's most direct benefits would be limited to a single household.



Building a demonstration infill house based on one of the designs in this plan (pgs. 48-52) could provide local builders with a valuable model for future housing in the West 30s.

<u>6) Gazebo / Picnic Shelter at Atkins Park</u> - This proposed new structure is illustrated in the plan on page 33. It would not only add to the aesthetics of the park, but it would make it more user-friendly for picnickers and other groups.

Because of the potential to achieve the design at no cost by one or more local architects, as well as getting the materials donated by local businesses, the potential costs make it a doable project. The location is also one very





These images show the range of designs for a gazebo/picnic shelter. The one at left is a traditional gazebo based on historic prototypes, while the one at right is less traditional, but more functional.



central to the neighborhood, and the park's connection to the legacy of Reverend Atkins give it additional symbolic meaning.

7) Move and Adapt the "Red House" for the CDC Offices - This building is an attractive historic cottage located on Florida Street behind the Village Walk and across from the Whitney Bank Operations Center. It is currently owned by the bank and used for storage. If the building could be donated by the bank, it might be moved to a vacant lot on 27th between the Champagne Beverage property and the Justice Center and adapted to offices for the proposed CDC. Through fund-raising efforts and partnerships, much of the work to transform the building might be donated. For example, local banks might contribute to the costs of relocating and renovating the building, and local architects might be willing to donate design services. This project could help tremendously to give the new CDC a foothold in the neighborhood.



Known as the "Red House," this building could be relocated to the heart of the West 30s and adapted into office space for the recommended Community Development Corporation (CDC).