

FLORIDA CORRIDOR PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JUNE 2024

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The Florida Corridor Plan aims to rejuvenate the 12-mile stretch of Florida Street and Florida Boulevard in Baton Rouge, addressing decades of economic decline and a history of racial segregation. The plan is a roadmap for future change along the entire corridor with a specific focus on six “neighborhood centers” that are vital to the resilience and vibrancy of the corridor and region. The vision for the corridor is to reinvest in the neighborhoods that connect Baton Rouge while becoming a more resilient place for residents, businesses, and visitors to thrive. Further, this plan capitalizes on existing transportation infrastructure investment that balance vehicular traffic demands with

“The corridor is also often viewed as a dividing line between north and south Baton Rouge.”

“THE GREAT CHALK LINE”

pedestrian safety and public transport improvements. What if more people who worked along the Corridor chose to live along the Corridor? This project aims to shift the competitive advantage back to the Corridor.

This planning initiative is part of a larger effort involving the City-Parish, Build Baton Rouge, and the Cortana Corridor Economic Development District (CCEDD). Historically, the Florida Corridor served as a significant commuter route, linking over 85,000 residents across 17 neighborhoods. However, it has also been a symbol of racial and economic division, separating less affluent Black neighborhoods to the north from more prosperous White neighborhoods to the south. Recent challenges such as changing retail patterns and auto-centric development have further contributed to the corridor’s decline. The Cortana Corridor Economic Development District (CCEDD), managed by Build Baton Rouge, seeks to reverse this trend by leveraging investments around the recently completed Amazon Fulfillment Center at the former Cortana Mall site to revitalize the corridor.

VISION

The Florida Corridor becomes a resilient place where current and future neighborhood residents, businesses, and visitors can thrive.

GOALS

- FOSTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- MAKE THE CORRIDOR MORE RESILIENT
- ADDRESS INEQUALITY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- PROMOTE MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOODS
- ENHANCE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
- IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS & CHOICE
- IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

An Inclusive Planning Process

The inclusive, year-long planning process involved extensive stakeholder engagement with over 4,000 participants through a variety of outreach methods and events held at locations across the Florida Corridor. An overarching project Vision, Goals, opportunities, and needs were established through ongoing collaborative engagement with the corridor communities.

Corridorwide Strategies & Market Demand

Existing market capacity today and in response to growth projections were analyzed to ensure development recommendations for the Florida Corridor were aligned with real market potential for the area. In the long-term, if the

Corridor can attract 8,000-11,000 new residents, there will be additional demand for restaurants, cafes, and other neighborhood-serving retail stores.

Growth and Demand Projections¹

- *New Multifamily Supportable Units through 2033: ~4-8 buildings; 600-1,200 Units*
- *Capture of Total East Baton Rouge Parish Multifamily Renter Pool: 15-33% Capture*
- *10-Year Estimated Retail Demand with New Population Growth: ~20,000 SF*
- *New Supportable Restaurants & Bars Through 2033: ~50,000 SF*
- *New Supportable Miscellaneous Neighborhood Retail Stores* Through 2033*

Policy and Program recommendations were presented for the Florida Corridor as a whole, presented as an Implementation Matrix. Each Action Item is presented with a Lead, Support, Funding Source, and details related to schedule and sequencing to ensure Build Baton Rouge has the tools and teeth needed to get these catalytic improvements off the ground.

Neighborhood Centers

An Advisory Committee composed of governmental agencies, civic associations, and community stakeholders guided the project, ensuring that diverse perspectives and representative leadership voices are integrated into the revitalization efforts. Through a series of workshops, the Advisory Committee focused the planning effort around six Neighborhood Centers—defined as “20-minute neighborhoods under the Parish’s comprehensive plan “FUTUREBR.” For each Neighborhood Center, physical context and market analysis identified Opportunity Sites – individual or combined

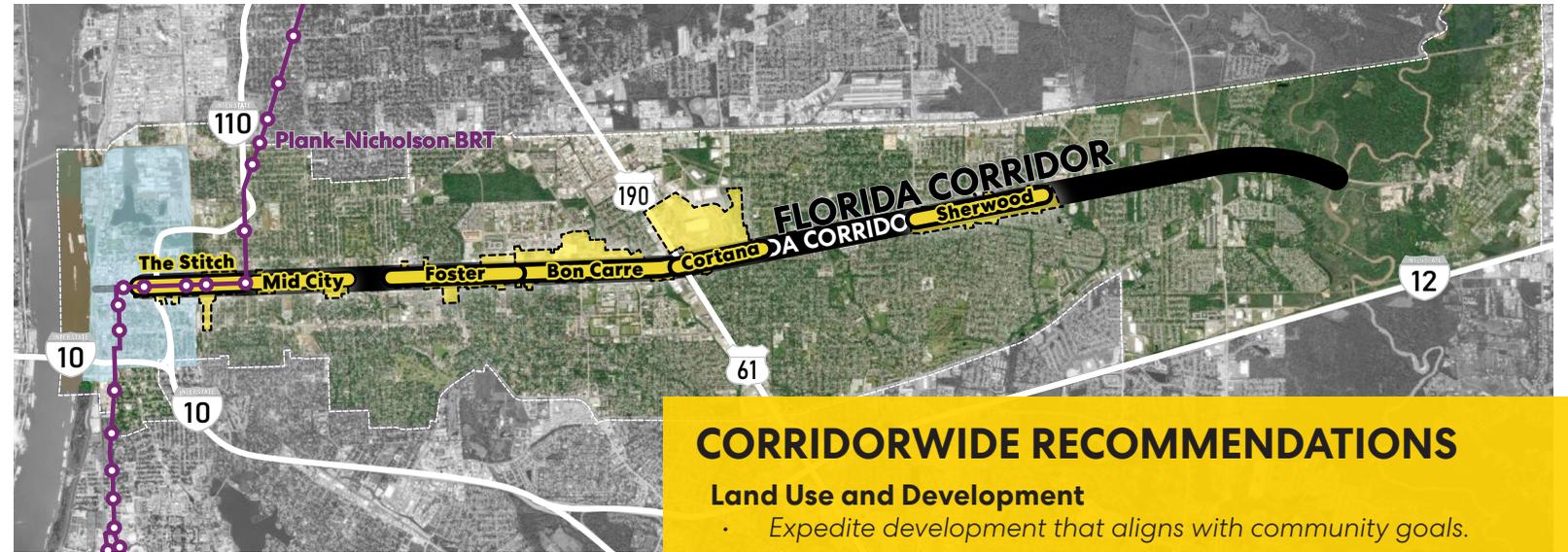
¹ Source: CoStar, ACS 2019 5-Year Data, Esri, HR&A analysis

parcels which presented the greatest potential for future redevelopment projects based on a variety of factors including scale, ownership, and adjacencies.

A distinct area vision, market potential, and redevelopment priorities were defined for each of the Neighborhood Centers, refined through public outreach and engagement with the Advisory Committee and area stakeholders. Improvements in each of these areas were influenced by streetscape improvements and Plank-Nicholson bus rapid transportation (BRT) project funded by the MOVEBR Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements Program, the largest such investment in East Baton Rouge Parish’s history. Within the

set of Opportunity Sites, a Catalyst Project – including both redevelopment and placemaking concepts – is presented in greater detail. These Catalyst Projects were identified as the most likely or impactful projects for near term pursuit by the project team and Advisory Committee.

Considering recent market trends, the three detailed catalytic redevelopment sites along the Florida Corridor can capture a large share of the future market capacity. Existing retail supply generally meets demand across the Corridor; however, in the short-term, intentional small-scale retail can still help activate nodes and support the success of mixed-use developments.



Above: Map of six Neighborhood Centers and Study Area boundary.

CORRIDORWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Land Use and Development

- Expedite development that aligns with community goals.
- Create a Florida West Zoning Overlay.
- Address blighted properties.

Placemaking

- Create incentives and programs to enliven public spaces.
- Invest in green infrastructure and tree cover.

Transportation

- Implement new parking & access management policies.
- Improve safety and reduce speeding on cross streets.
- Expand on the MOVEBR investments for greater impact.

Right: Corridorwide recommendations in summary.

FLORIDA CORRIDOR NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Considering slow absorption rates and existing vacancy, only a modest demand for new office is likely in the short-term. Thus, the near-term real estate market favors multifamily construction with small-scale retail on the ground floor. The multifamily demand projections should be spread across the three catalyst sites in phases to ensure healthy absorption. If privately led developments move forward in the interim, then those would also capture market demand, which would lower the development assumptions for the proposed catalyst redevelopment sites.

The Stitch: N 5th Street – N 19th Street

The I-110 ‘Stitch’ spans the transitional area from the Central Business District to Downtown East across the I-110 Highway. This area, with large vacant parcels and high social vulnerability, is the Corridor’s weakest link and greatest potential to catalyze change. Combining workforce development and affordable housing alongside MOVEBR street and BRT investments will foster equitable, transit-oriented development near downtown and Mid City.

Mid City: N 22nd St – Park Hills Drive

The Mid City focus area is anchored by Baton Rouge General Hospital with several supporting medical facilities. There are large setbacks on building lots as the Corridor becomes more auto-oriented.

Catalyst Project #1: Surface Parking Redevelopment fronting Renaissance Park



Concept for the redevelopment of the existing underutilized surface park lot fronting Renaissance Park into a multi-phased, mixed-income residential development positioned adjacent to the planned Plank-Nicholson BRT Station at 16th and Florida Street.

Catalyst Project #2 Activate I-110 Overpass



Concept for activation of space underneath I-110 structure. Examples like Parasite Skæ Park in New Orleans, LA provide inspiration for active uses in this forgotten space, drawing new activity and creating a connection between the parcels to the east and west.

Catalyst Project: Acadian Thruway Corner Redevelopment



Investment in the parcels surrounding the Bridge Center including new retail, greenspace, and affordable residential across Seguro Drive (east).

Foster & Florida: *Ward Creek – Marquette Ave*

The Foster & Florida focus area includes Baton Rouge Community College and the BREC headquarters, and the Mid-City Tower (recently renovated), the Allied Health facility, and the Rouses Supermarket. The Cortana Corridor Economic Development District (CCEDD) begins in this focus area.

Cortana: *Airline Hwy – Monterrey Blvd*

The Cortana focus area, which includes the western extents of the CCEDD, includes the Amazon Fulfillment Facility, a redevelopment of the former Cortana Mall.

Sherwood: *Sherwood Forest Blvd – Flannery Rd*

The Sherwood focus area is the most residential section of the corridor, yet has the fast speed limits of all the focus areas. This section is the most diverse of the focus areas, with markets and shops to support the Asian and Latino residents of Baton Rouge.



Catalyst Project: Large Site Redevelopment as Multifamily Housing

This large parcel presents an opportunity to work with a willing developer to build on existing residential development momentum in the nearby area with the Borden Dairy Apartment Complex, currently under construction. This concept proposes Multifamily Housing in two larger buildings fronting Florida Blvd, with Townhomes to the rear.



Catalyst Project: Employee Amenity Hub at Monterrey Plaza Shopping Center

This catalyst project is a lower-cost, temporary use opportunity to activate the Monterrey Plaza vacant strip retail center with community-serving temporary uses to create a hub of amenities that benefits proximate Amazon workers.



Catalyst Project: Placemaking gateway and programming at Sherwood Plaza

Sherwood Plaza's Asian Supermarket and Seafood Restaurant offer a great anchor to build identity in this, the most multi-cultural Neighborhood Center in the study area. Identity-building could take the form of bold gateway signage into the shopping center and culture-driven events.

Bon Carre: *Marquette Avenue – Airline Hwy*

The CCEDD continues through the entirety of this focus area, anchored by Bon Carre business center. This area has Liberty Lagoon and Independence Park as an anchor civic use along with suburban-oriented retail centers. It also has several charter schools.

Catalyst Project: Activate the Bon Carre Campus Edge

Implement high-visibility grounds improvements along the Bon Carre Business Center campus edge fronting Florida Boulevard. Activate and renovate Bon Carre, drawing in new companies, industries, and public or institutional partners.

Towards Implementation

The status quo is untenable. By doing nothing, the neighborhoods, Parish, and region will be held back. There ought to be a sense of urgency amongst civic, neighborhood, and institutional leaders to act and implement this plan. Overall, the Florida Corridor Plan represents a strategic initiative to transform a historically divided and neglected area into a vibrant and equitable corridor, fostering sustainable development and improving quality of life for residents in Baton Rouge. The following document outlines the assessment, recommendations, and implementation strategy to make the Florida Corridor a more resilient place for residents, business owners, and visitors to thrive. Our future generations depend on it.