

**INTRODUCTION, VISION STATEMENTS, AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**INTRODUCTION**

This Phase Three of Terrebonne’s Comprehensive Plan Update is the culmination of an update effort which began in early 2009 with Phases One and Two. The motivation for updating the 2004 Comprehensive Plan was largely attributable to the impacts and lasting effects the storm of 2005 had on Terrebonne Parish. These storms turned out to be accelerants for change as many of the bayou communities lost population. People in these lower lying communities, weary of repeated storm flooding, sought higher ground in the northern reaches of the parish. In addition, the Planning Commission, upon adopting the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, committed to reviewing the plan every five years and making changes as necessary.

A comprehensive plan can be constructed to help a community avoid an undesirable future, or to create options so that more desirable futures can be achieved. The implication underlying any plan is that actions must be taken in the present to effect change over a period of time to achieve the desired result or the desirable future. Individuals take such actions in their daily lives hoping to build a better future for their families. But the community in which they live is no different. Collectively we have the ability to work toward a common goal: a more desirable future for our parish.

The approach taken in the first two phases of the Comprehensive Plan Update was to set the stage for the creation of a more desirable future for the citizens of the parish. Through the public participation and outreach effort of Phase Two, citizens played an important role in shaping the two Vision Statements (one for the parish; the other for Downtown Houma) that will ultimately guide the

plan, its goals, objectives and actions or strategies. The words of the eminent American poet, Carl Sandberg underscore the importance of the Vision Statement to the overall planning effort.

*“Nothing happens unless first a dream.”*  
-Carl Sandberg

The most important part of the early effort in this update to the Comprehensive Plan was the facilitation of a process which allowed citizens to help shape the Vision Statement for the plan. The process used guided participants through a visioning exercise designed to give them an understanding of where the parish stood currently, where it appeared to be heading based on demographics and growth trends and what these could mean for the future. Finally, the visioning exercise helped participants to articulate where they wanted the parish to be in the year 2030. The important characteristic of this visioning exercise was that participants had to be helped to overcome their tendency to describe where they *thought* the parish would be, or what they *thought* it would look like in twenty years. The visioning process was designed to get participants to attempt to clearly articulate what they actually wanted the parish to look like in several important categories. The difference between projecting the status quo into the future, and understanding how the situation would be with a more desirable outcome is the difference between accepting what one thinks will happen (NOT a vision) and, if this is undesirable, projecting a favorable future state or outcome (a Vision). In articulating where they *wanted* the parish to be, citizens were establishing the “dream” that defines the framework for a more desirable future. Such dreams can be compelling. As James R. Lucas, a notable corporate management consultant in facilitating corporate retreats has indicated, the vision should be so compelling as to propel us toward the future.



*"Vision is the dream or picture of the future that draws us – no PULLS us – into the future."*

-James R. Lucas

*community filled with opportunity such that its youth will choose to remain in the parish to continue to build and enjoy the 'Good Earth,' preserving it for future generations."*

**The Parish**

Two Vision Statements were constructed on the basis of participation in the visioning exercises held during several community meetings throughout the parish, including one in Downtown Houma, as part of Phase Two of the plan update process. One vision pertains to the parish and articulates a vision that has been shaped by certain "themes" which emerged during these community meetings. Given the size and diversity of the parish, it is not surprising that some themes were emphasized or given considerably more attention than others. But there is one exception. There was virtual unanimity for the completion of the Morganza hurricane protection system and added drainage levees.

On the basis of these emerging themes, the following Vision Statement was crafted and will be used to guide the development of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

***"By 2030, Terrebonne Parish will be a safe, secure and resilient coastal community that is well-protected by a completed hurricane protection network; a community that provides expanded and diverse job opportunities in technologically-oriented industries supported by adequate infrastructure and an effective transportation system; a community that embraces and promotes its unique culture through efficient use of its land resources; a community that protects and sustains its physical environment through the effective enforcement of sensible regulations; and a***

This vision for Terrebonne's future provides a solid, well thought out basis upon which to build a plan. More information on the visioning process as well as information relative to Phases One and Two of the planning process can be found in the Interim Report dated November 2009. This document is available on the TPCG website.



**Downtown Houma**

Since Downtown Houma was to be included in the Comprehensive Plan Update, but as a stand-alone plan, a broad spectrum of downtown interests also participated in a visioning exercise specific to the downtown area. Downtown Houma was represented by property owners, business owners, people who work downtown, and members of the downtown redevelopment community as well as members of the Downtown Development Corporation.



During this visioning exercise, certain “themes” for the downtown area began to emerge. These include public safety, parking, traffic issues (large trucks), residential and lifestyle issues, tourism (cultural and heritage), and business growth. The top six priority themes or visions for downtown which emerged from the Downtown Houma visioning exercise are the following. Each statement begins with “By 2030, Downtown Houma will have become...”

- A safer downtown community in which to live and work for all including visitors and tourists, by installation of surveillance cameras and increased police presence especially at night.
- A desirable mixed-use residential area attracting both young and old to live and work in a pedestrian-friendly environment, by making downtown more attractive, by encouraging residential conversions of old buildings through utilization of all available tax credits and grant programs and through development and application of new, flexible regulations.
- A cleaner, well-maintained and landscaped, uncluttered and brightly lighted downtown with attractive signage and with more shops and eateries, by using trustees or paid staff for routine clean-up and maintenance of landscaping, by relocating all overhead wires/utilities underground, by requiring property owners to maintain store-fronts, and by on-going litter abatement program and education.
- A viable tourist attraction with shops and development along the bayou reflective of local culture and heritage, by establishing or taking full advantage of programs to encourage investment and re-investment in the downtown area.
- A less congested downtown, by shifting large trucks to alternate route(s) away from Main Street to the extent possible.

- A downtown better served with parking, by development of a parking facility or garage.

On the basis of these emerging themes, the following Vision Statement for Downtown Houma was developed:

***“By 2030, Downtown Houma will have become a desirable, safe and secure, mixed-use destination, attracting visitors, workers and shoppers to its diverse venue of businesses and shops—many of which have been established to capitalize on and promote local culture and heritage—supporting a variety of commercial and residential developments in a well-maintained, attractively landscaped, less congested, pedestrian-friendly environment.”***

Both of the Vision Statements above, one for the parish and the other for Downtown Houma, have been used to guide the development of the respective elements of the plan itself.

### **The Guiding Principles or Goals**

In order to operationalize the Vision Statements crafted for the Comprehensive Plan Update, it was necessary to distill them into a handful of guiding principles or overarching goals which the plan update would strive to achieve. Each of these goals was supported by policies, objectives, and strategies or actions which, if attained, would lead to achievement of the goals, and ultimately to the visions articulated for the parish by the citizens of the parish. These are set down in considerable detail in Chapter 12 – Action Plan. The guiding principles or goals are introduced here so that the reader will begin to see the connection to these as the various chapters of this plan update are read and studied.



**Goal #1: Sense of Place and Connectedness**

Terrebonne Parish has all the elements in place to help it attain the “sense of place” that distinguishes attractive destination locations from other less fortunate communities. Among other things, what seems to be lacking primarily is a sense of pride in the community. Terrebonne can be that place which transmits a sense of place to all. A way to accomplish this is currently underway with the parish’s branding efforts. The chapters in this document which pertain to Essential Community Design and Downtown Houma provide other elements which can help to establish a sense of place and also serve to “connect” all areas of the parish.

**Goal #2: Safe and Efficient Transportation System**

Given the manner in which Terrebonne Parish has developed over the years, an efficient transportation system is necessary to allow the local economy and society to function. However, our transportation system must work well for all users, not just automobiles and drivers. For a number of reasons, transit in Terrebonne should play a more important role in the foreseeable future. It will help the parish spend less money on highway capacity improvements since both money and right-of-way space is increasingly constrained, if transit is able to effectively capture more “choice” riders. Secondly, by reducing trips and the number of cars on the road, transit can help Terrebonne and the region achieve improve air quality. Lastly, transit plays a crucial role in any affordable housing strategy, since transportation and housing are inextricably tied together and are increasingly consuming more or household incomes. This is particularly hard on lower income families who must pay a higher proportion of their incomes for transportation in order to access employment opportunities.

**Goal #3: Efficient and Attractively Varied Land Uses**

The citizens of Terrebonne Parish are entitled to an attractive and efficient land use pattern, one that conveniently meets their needs for shopping, employment and the myriad of other needs that modern life generates. Some of these needs should be able to be met by a convenient stroll or bike trip. Not all neighborhood generated land uses should have to rely on automobile trips.

Mixed used developments are gaining in popularity in such places as downtowns and they are in Terrebonne as well. These should be encouraged because they are efficient land uses and can help turn shopping areas into attractive 24-hour spaces where pedestrian traffic and sidewalk activities are encouraged.

**Goal #4: A Sustainable Community Through Avoidance of Hazards, Nuisances, and Environmental Degradation**

The economy of Terrebonne Parish is closely tied to its abundant natural resources. For this reason alone, therefore, environmental degradation is detrimental to the long term sustainability of the parish. But, Terrebonne is also a coastal parish and is susceptible to damaging storms and related natural disasters. It is impossible to avoid such hazards, but the parish can certainly mitigate their damage. For some time now the parish has aggressively pursued an elevation program designed to lift as many homes as possible out of damaging flood waters. Development in the low lying areas should not be prohibited, but should take place in accordance with best practices for coastal living. Through such practices and programs, the parish can achieve sustainable development, reducing its need for federal disaster assistance.





**Goal #5: High-Quality Infill Projects and Redevelopment throughout the Parish**

Infill development which is attractive, compatible from a design standpoint to the surrounding neighborhood, and landscaped should be encouraged throughout the parish, but particularly in the urbanized area where utilities and infrastructure already exist. Such development represents a more efficient utilization of public infrastructure, with the savings possibly passed on to the consumer. Depending on the size of the parcel, infill development can be used for certain types of housing which may be considered affordable, particularly if the site is readily accessible to transit. In all cases, infill development should be facilitated by the adoption of regulations that ensure the attractiveness of development without causing development costs to be increased. Although infill development must be market-driven, parish government can play an important facilitating role.

**Goal #6: Effective Public Services and Facilities**

The underpinnings for a high quality of life in Terrebonne Parish are effective public services and facilities. This is not to say that there should be a library in every neighborhood or a police station on every corner. It means that such services and facilities must be adequately funded to meet the projected growth and development of the parish. Such services should be made available when needed at a fair cost to the consumer. Public facilities should be located on the basis of coverage and they could be convenient to pedestrians and bicyclists alike.

In conclusion, the citizens of Terrebonne have articulated their Vision for the future of the parish. They have prepared a good foundation on which to build the plan. The extent and direction of growth in the parish has been documented and the citizens of the parish, in response, have played a vital role in shaping the parish's future.

*"What we imagine, we can make happen."*

-GE Radio Ad Copy

Finally, Providence wishes to sincerely thank all the citizens of Terrebonne Parish who took the time to participate in this multi-year planning effort, whether at public meetings or on the Steering Committee. Without their input, suggestions, and questions, this plan would be meaningless. We wish also to thank the Terrebonne Parish President Michel Claudet who took a keen interest in this plan from the beginning, as well as Mr. Pat Gordon, Director of TPCG Planning and Zoning Department, and his assistants: first, Ms. Jennifer Robinson and, then Mr. Chris Pulaski whose valuable assistance cannot be overstated. We also acknowledge the Planning Commission, those citizen planners, who voluntarily give of their time in the discharge of this vital duty for the people of Terrebonne Parish and for their participation in this planning effort as well.

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