

**CHAPTER 1  
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. During the last comprehensive planning effort, the Houma-Terrebonne Regional Planning Commission (Planning Commission) committed to review of the Comprehensive Plan every five years. The motivation for updating the 2004 Comprehensive Plan was provided primarily by the storms of 2005 and 2008, and the impacts and lasting effects these had on Terrebonne Parish. These storms accelerated land loss and caused many in the Terrebonne’s bayou communities, weary of repeated storm flooding, to move to higher ground in the northern reaches of the parish. The Planning Commission initiated this Comprehensive Plan Update in early 2009. This document represents its completion.



A comprehensive plan can be constructed to help a community create options so that a more desirable future can be attained. The plan can also help the community avoid an undesirable future. The goal of any plan is to identify those actions that, if taken in the present, will over time achieve the desired result,

the desirable future. Individuals take such actions in their daily lives hoping to build a better future for themselves or 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 first step is to agree on what that future should be. This occurs early in the planning process.

The approach taken in the first two phases of the Comprehensive Plan Update was to develop that vision or goal for the future. The public provided input regarding their priorities and desires for the future through the public participation and outreach effort of Phase Two. This input was critical to 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 Parish and its planning consultants facilitated the development of these Vision Statements by providing an understanding of current conditions in the parish, where it appeared to be headed based on demographics and growth trends, and what these trends could mean for the future. With this knowledge, as well as their own experiences, participants articulated where they wanted the parish to be in 2030.

The visioning process was designed to help participants clearly put into their own words that they actually wanted the parish to look like in the future in several important categories, not how they thought it would look based on current trends. At most meetings during the visioning exercises,



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. As it was explained by meeting facilitators, the difference between projecting the status quo into the future, and understanding how the situation would be with more thoughtful planning 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 expressing 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.

parish and expresses 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, therefore, that different 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 approved, and will be used to guide the development of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

*“Vision is the dream or picture of the future that draws us – no PULLS us – into the future.”*  
 -James R. Lucas

*“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 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.”*

Armed and fortified with these Visions, the Parish and its planning consultants worked with citizens to decide what activities to encourage that will help build the future envisioned, and what counterproductive activities to discourage. These are described in detail throughout the chapters of this planning document.

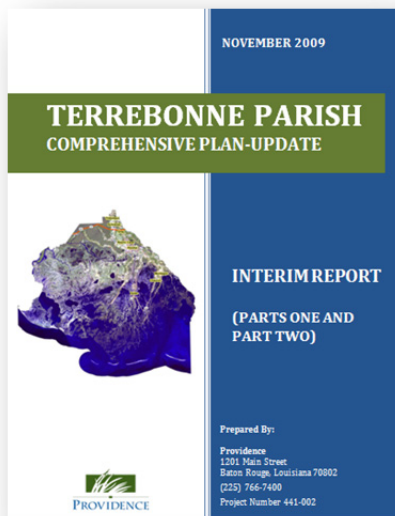
**Vision Statements**

**The Parish Vision Statement**

Two Vision Statements were constructed with the assistance of citizen participation in the visioning exercises held during several community meetings throughout the parish, including one in Downtown Houma. These were done under Phase Two of the plan update process. One vision pertains to the



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.



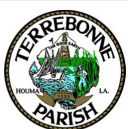
### Downtown Houma Vision Statement

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, parish government officials, as well as members of the Downtown Development Corporation.

During this visioning exercise, as before, 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 and approved:

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.

*“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.”*

**The Guiding Principles or Goals**

In order to translate into action 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 goal is supported by policies, objectives, and strategies or actions which, if attained, is expected to result in achievement of the goals, and ultimately of the visions expressed for the parish by the citizens of the parish. These are set down in considerable detail in Chapter 12 – Action Plan. In a modified format, Chapter 12 will also serve as an Executive Summary of this plan update. 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.

**GOALS FOR PLAN UPDATE**

- # 1: Sense of Place and Connectedness
- # 2: Safe and Efficient Transportation System
- # 3: Efficient and Attractively Varied Land Uses
- # 4: A Sustainable Community through Avoidance of Hazards, Nuisances, and Environmental Degradation
- # 5: High-Quality Infill Projects and Redevelopment throughout the Parish
- # 6: Effective Public Services and Facilities

**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 engaged communities. Among other things, what seems to be lacking primarily is a focus, something that can help citizens of the parish understand and feel the pride that comes with attainment of “sense of place.” Terrebonne can be that place which transmits a “sense of place” to all. One way to accomplish this is currently underway with the parish’s branding efforts. The chapters in this planning document which pertain to Essential Community Design and Downtown Houma provide other elements which can help to establish a sense of place and encourage a sense of pride in the parish by its citizens. These also serve to “connect” all areas of the parish as well.

**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, particularly 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 improve its air quality. Lastly, transit plays a crucial role in any affordable housing strategy, since transportation and housing are very closely tied together and are increasingly consuming more of 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**

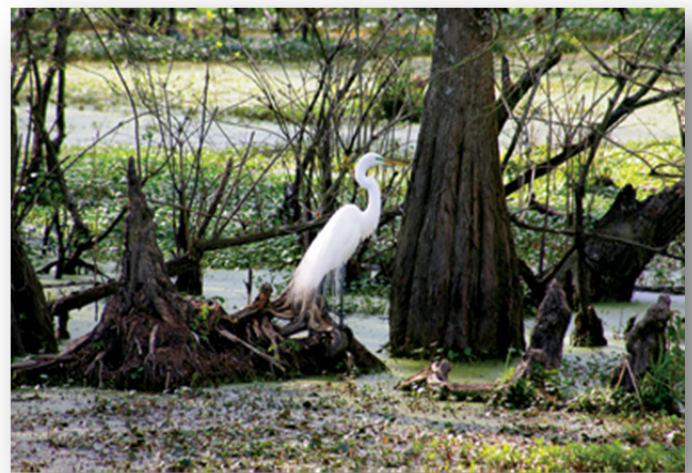
The citizens of Terrebonne Parish are entitled to an attractive and efficient land use pattern, one that conveniently meets their needs for shopping, employment and the myriad of other needs that modern life generates. Some of these needs should be able to be met by a convenient stroll or bike trip. 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 can safely flourish.

**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.

### **Resiliency and Sustainability**

This comprehensive plan update was funded under the state's Comprehensive Resiliency Program administered by the Louisiana Recovery Authority, Office of Community Development-Disaster Recovery Unit. This document, therefore, is a contribution to Terrebonne Parish's multi-faceted effort to build resiliency and sustainability into the community.

Why is community resiliency important? The ability or capacity to rebound from a disaster is key to a community's survival. The time to develop those qualities associated with resiliency is not after the disaster strikes. Resiliency, therefore, is built through community preparedness, a prior-planning activity which is vital for crisis management. A comprehensive planning effort is one of many ways in which community resiliency can be strengthened, even if the planning effort only points out those areas where additional work is needed.

At the community level, resiliency is defined and achieved by the speedy restoration of commercial activity and critical government services. Without these there is little chance of building a sustainable local economy. The restoration of these vital activities and services must be supported by four key components which are, in most cases, critical government services. These are potable water, wastewater treatment, energy, and transportation. Although the Parish's Hazard Mitigation Plan addresses important issues and critical needs relative to these key components, this planning document also discusses methods and actions which can be taken to promote community resiliency. No one document, however, can adequately address the myriad avenues which lead to community resiliency. The approach is multi-faceted. This Comprehensive Plan Update is one of the many facets helping to build community resiliency in Terrebonne Parish.

A sustainable community is one that is able to meet the needs of its citizens without undermining the natural resources, financial base, and environmental quality upon which life in the community depends in the long term. A sustainable community is one that identifies and pursues actions and projects designed to reduce overall risks to its population from various hazards, such that future reliance on available funding flowing from disaster declarations is greatly diminished. This Comprehensive Plan Update contributes to the efforts and great strides Terrebonne Parish has made toward sustainability.

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 have 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 of little value. We wish also to thank Terrebonne Parish President Michel H. 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. Finally, we thank the Terrebonne Parish Council whose initial approvals set all this in motion.

Providence was most ably assisted in this planning effort by three consulting firms whose logos appear on the cover of this document. Without the efforts of Morris P. Hebert, Inc., Franklin Industries, LLC, and Brown+Danos landdesign inc., our work to complete the plan would have much more difficult and prolonged.

