Future Land Use & Development Plan – Part 1

Existing Conditions & Characteristics

Introduction

The community of Morgan City, Louisiana, is a prosperous City founded upon its unique water resources. The Atchafalaya River, Intracoastal Canal, and Lake Palourde are unique advantages for water-based shipping, industry, and recreation. However, an evolving economy and recent natural events have stimulated thinking about the future course of the City, both in terms of how it maintains its importance as an industrial center, and how it establishes a vision for long-term sustainability and resiliency to potential future natural events.

The City is addressing this through a planning process that will yield two major products: a *Future Land Use and Development Plan (FLUDP)* and a *Zoning and Land Development Code (ZLDC)*. The FLUDP will describe how various portions of the City should be used to meet local goals of economic development, neighborhood preservation and stability, recreation, environmental conservation, and community character. The ZLDC will establish regulations related to the subdivision and/or development of property within the City. Together, these products will enable City leaders and staff to align public investment with private development in order to create a sustainable long-term growth model for the community.

Part 1, *Existing Conditions & Characteristics* of the FLUDP provides a brief summary of observations, analysis, and input gained since the beginning of the planning process. It will establish a context for the recommendations found in **Part 2, *Future Land Use & Development Goals and Objectives***, by identifying the major characteristics of existing development and describing the key factors that will likely influence growth over the next fifteen to twenty years. This document will set the stage for updating the City's zoning and land development regulations.

It should be noted that, as of the time of this documents delivery, one critical piece of data was not available. The City is currently working

with the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to determine new Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) flood zone boundaries. As this information is finalized, it should be incorporated and considered as part of the FLUDP and subsequent ZLDC.

Existing Land Use and Development Context

The following section describes the important land use and development considerations in Morgan City.

Land Use Influences

Morgan City's historic land use pattern is primarily shaped by the waterways that define it boundaries; the Atchafalaya River, Intracoastal Canal, and Lake Palourde. As displayed in **Map 1.1, *Land Use Influences***, these features (among others) establish the framework for the major industrial and recreational aspects of the community. The Atchafalaya River and Intracoastal Canal waterfronts host the City's industrial base. Older industrial lots along the Atchafalaya River extend inland to the east side of Front Street, and quickly give way to some of the City's oldest neighborhoods. Larger industrial development lines the Intracoastal Canal. These lots are substantially larger, and extend inland to Railroad Avenue. North of Railroad Avenue, non-water based industrial uses blend into retail and residential uses.

From the waterfront, a consistent grid was established that contains much of the City's traditional development. This original grid is bound generally by the Atchafalaya River to the north and west, Sixth Street to the east, and Ditch Avenue to the south. Other portions of the City have seen more contemporary development. The north side of the City east of Sixth Street includes more modern housing on a street network that is well-integrated into the old grid, though its block sizes vary from the original pattern. South of this modern housing network is a modern office area that has a "super block" pattern. Here, older streets have been removed to create larger parcels that can meet the demands of contemporary development.

Perhaps no portion of the City illustrates its evolution better than Highway 182. Its variety of lot sizes, surrounding context, and transportation infrastructure demonstrate changing development practices and influence of enhanced personal mobility over the past 100 years.

While much of the southern and western portions of the City are fully developed, most of the northern and eastern portions remain in their natural state (with the exception of Lake End Park and a residential development located between Justa Street and Walnut Drive). While development proposals have been considered for portions of these undeveloped areas along Lake Palourde, none have commenced construction.

Existing Land Use Patterns

There are clear delineations between developed and undeveloped areas of the City. The overall footprint of the City has remained largely unchanged for several decades. Most of the undeveloped areas are subject to substantial flooding, though recent and planned future investment in levees is creating and will create new developable land.

Residential neighborhoods vary greatly depending on the era of development. Much of the pre-1950 housing exists south of Sixth Street. Pockets of planned housing exist throughout the City and are generally located where neighborhoods abut prominent corridors or other uses.

Morgan City's commercial spine is Highway 182. Development along this corridor includes small industrial and intensive commercial lots in the eastern half, and transitions to a more retail-oriented pattern of large-lot and small-lot mix in the central and western portions.

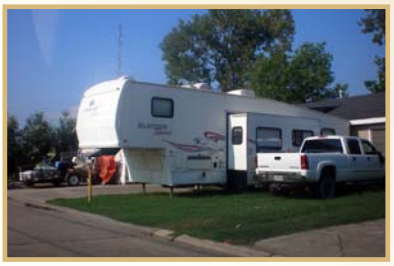
The growing office district at the north end of Brashear Street hosts much of the professional jobs in the City. The Teche Regional Medical Center anchors the west end of the area, and several clinics and medical support offices surround it. Other blocks are occupied by general office functions transitioning to retail uses toward the Highway 182 corridor.

Industrial activity is mostly strung along the Atchafalaya River and Intracoastal Canal. Lighter industrial activity is present along Railroad Avenue, and in smaller locations through the fringes of established neighborhoods.

Morgan City's existing land use characteristics are displayed in **Map 1.2, *Existing Land Use***, and summarized in **Table 1, *Existing Land Use Characteristics*** (on page following map).

Table 1, Existing Land Use Characteristics

	Parcels		Area (Acres)	
	Qty.	% of Total	Qty.	% of Total
Residential	***6185***	***77.6%***	***805.6***	***27.5%***
Single-Family	5760	72.3%	692.5	23.6%
Mobile Homes	256	3.2%	59.6	2.0%
2-3 Units	36	0.5%	9.4	0.3%
4+ Units	133	1.7%	44.1	1.5%
Commercial	***1207***	***15.1%***	***914.8***	***31.2%***
Retail	634	8.0%	258.7	8.8%
Industrial	182	2.3%	417.8	14.3%
Office	226	2.8%	63.2	2.2%
Government Services	44	0.6%	14.6	0.5%
Institutional	121	1.5%	160.6	5.5%
Open Lands	***578***	***7.3%***	***1209.3***	***41.3%***
Recreation	20	0.3%	68.6	2.3%
Utility/Infrastructure	18	0.2%	5.0	0.2%
Vacant	540	6.8%	1135.7	38.8%
Total	**7970**	**100.0%**	**2929.7**	**100.0%**



Development Trends

The following sections highlight various factors that are affecting the quality and character of the built environment.

Accessory Vehicles

As displayed in **Map 1.3, *Accessory Vehicles***, a comprehensive, parcel-based field survey determined that there were 285 boats, 62 recreational vehicles, and 136 cargo trailers visible from the street. Further determination was made as to whether the vehicles were located in the roadway, driveway, or front/side yards. Although accessory vehicles were found throughout the community, they were predominantly located in single-family residential areas. In addition, the survey showed that these accessory vehicles were relatively dispersed throughout the single-family residential areas, where no single area exhibited a greater concentration than another area.

During the public participation portion of this plan, residents expressed dissatisfaction regarding the prevalence of stored accessory vehicles in

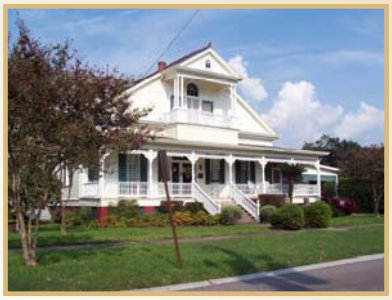
the public's view. They indicated that it detracted from the City's visual appearance and reduced the overall quality of life in the community. When accessory vehicles were stored within the line-of-sight of vehicular traffic, residents expressed concerns that it was created hazardous driving conditions and endangered pedestrians.

Accessory Structures

As displayed in **Map 1.4, *Accessory Structures***, there were 984 parcels (out of approximately 8,500 parcels) that had accessory structures. Similar to what was found with accessory vehicles; accessory structures were relatively dispersed throughout single-family residential areas in the community. The survey further showed that the predominate use of these accessory structures was for storage (653 structures) and that over 20 parcels had mobile homes sharing the same parcel as the primary residence. Although there was not a direct analysis made, it appeared that there were more accessory structures located in areas with smaller lots; this may be due to the existence of smaller back yards or the inability to screen the storage by a privacy fence.

Building Condition

As displayed in **Map 1.5, *Building Condition***, an analysis was done to determine the building condition of structures within the City. This analysis (based on an excellent to dilapidated grading scale) evaluated structures in the community based on their structural condition as well as their aesthetic appeal as a function of routine maintenance.



As determined by the survey, the City's residential areas exhibit varying levels of condition. In some of the newer residential areas, e.g., the subdivision located between Justa Street and Walnut Drive, the overall condition is excellent. Likewise, the residential areas north of Marguerite Drive and east of Sixth Street are in excellent to good condition. In many other parts of the City, however, the condition of residential structures is not as good. For example, in the area bounded by Federal to Front Streets and Levee Road to Belanger Street, the residential structures show a substantial amount of decay and increased dilapidation. Just south, in the area bounded by Federal to Front Streets and Belanger Street to Railroad Avenue, the overall condition improves to fair to good. One other area of significance is the multi-family housing project bordered by Marguerite Street and Veterans Boulevard. Despite being built using durable brick construction, the general condition of these structures exhibit significant signs of weathering and various states of disrepair.

The City's commercial areas also exhibit varying levels of condition. Along the City's main commercial corridor, Highway 182, there were large areas of excellent to good condition (i.e., near Highway 90, from

Cottonwood to East Streets, and east of Roderick Street) intermixed with fair to poor (i.e., Redwood to Cottonwood Streets, East to Roderick Streets, and east of Industry Road). Railroad Avenue's commercial areas, in contrast, largely exhibited good to excellent conditions.

Many of the City's industrial areas are separated from the community by Railroad Avenue and the Seawall. These areas have been designed and maintained to serve a functional purpose. Consequently, there has not been much consideration in the past as to their visual appearance or the impact on the overall quality and condition of the built environment. In the areas where industry is not separated from the community (e.g., the industrial areas along Highway 182), this lack of consideration has a greater impact on the perceived quality of life in the community.

Vacant Structures

A survey was also taken of all the vacant structures in the City. As displayed in **Map 1.6, *Vacant Structures***, there was a strong correlation between the areas with fair, poor, or dilapidated building conditions and the amount of vacant structures. As the City moves forward with redevelopment and revitalization efforts, priority should be given to proactively acquiring these properties and returning them back to the tax rolls as soon as possible. This could be effectively accomplished using a variety of redevelopment / revitalization techniques, which could include facilitating public/private redevelopment efforts similar to those that were recently undertaken by the Community Action Agency along Shore Street.

Building Materials

As displayed in **Map 1.7, *Building Materials – Front***, and **Map 1.8, *Building Materials – Side***, a wide range of materials have been used to construct structures in the community. Out of over 7,600 structures surveyed, the majority were constructed out of brick and siding (i.e., 38 percent and 39 percent, respectively). Residential construction was divided between brick and siding, where newer construction predominantly used brick and older construction used siding (i.e., metal, vinyl, or asbestos). Many residences exhibited a blend of the two, although the primary material tended to be brick, while vinyl was a supplementary material in the overall façade.

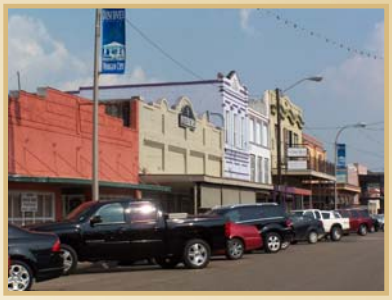
The commercial corridors ranged from the more expensive stucco to less costly (and less durable and desirable too) metal. These structures tended to also be differentiated by age, where newer and contemporary structures primarily used brick, stucco, and decorative stone; and older construction used metal. The industrial areas followed traditional

industrial construction practices by utilizing metal as the dominant construction type.

Existing Character Framework

Morgan City is made up of a variety of land uses and character types. In this context, "character" is dependent upon a number of factors, including land use, but also defining attributes like street pattern, right-of-way width, lot size, building and impervious cover, scale, and open space. Generally, Morgan City includes the following character types:

Downtown / Downtown Fringe

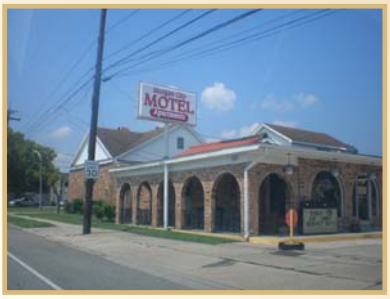


General Area: From Front Street to Third Street, and from Railroad Avenue to Highway 90.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Traditional zero-setback downtown on Front Street, Railroad Avenue, and some blocks extending east to First Street.
- Civic center consisting of the historic Public Library, City Hall, and other community-based services.
- Downtown fringe consisting of residential structures (some of which have been converted into local institutional or office uses) and Lawrence Park.

Highway 182 Corridor – Western Segment



General Area: Brashear Avenue from Front Street to Fifth Street.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Small-lot development in traditional mixed-use or residential structures.
- Mix of local retail and services uses, including home office, auto service, restaurants, and general retail.
- Generally pedestrian-oriented with buildings located toward the street, although some sites have been retrofit to accommodate automotive access.

Highway 182 Corridor – Central Segment

General Area: Highway 182 from Fifth Street to Redwood Street.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Mix of small-lot single-tenant retail and large-lot multi-tenant commercial centers.
- Buildings are typically set back from the street and focus on automotive access to the site and parking areas.
- Mix of local retail and services uses, including office, general retail, auto service, hotel, restaurant, and regional commerce.

Highway 182 Corridor – Eastern Segment

General Area: Highway 182 from Redwood Street to eastern City limit boundary.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Mix of small-lot commercial development and large-lot multi-tenant commercial centers.
- Building location varies from small setbacks with small parking lots in front of the building, to larger front yards with substantial parking in front of the building.
- Mix of local commercial and industrial uses, including small offices, local general retail, restaurants, auto service, hotel, small industrial and manufacturing, car and truck rental, and recreation/entertainment.

Maritime Industrial

General Area: Atchafalaya River and Intracoastal Canal Waterfronts.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Medium or large-lot industrial development reliant upon access provided by waterfront or Highway 182.
- Industrial sites are typically buffered from surrounding residential areas by the Front Street flood wall or the above-grade Railroad Avenue rail corridor.
- Mix of local heavy industrial and non-industrial uses including heavy manufacturing, shipping, schools, cemeteries, and pockets of residential development.

Neighborhood Industrial

General Area: Scattered sites and corridor throughout the City.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Small or medium-lot industrial development not reliant upon intense transportation access or infrastructure.
- Industrial lots are frequently integrated among or abutting residential blocks with various degrees of buffering.
- Mix of local industrial uses with relatively low nuisance.

Office District

General Area: From Sixth Street to David Drive and from Greenwood Street to Pine Street.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Large-parcel office development on urban "super blocks" with significant setbacks to accommodate parking in front of the building.
- Small areas of traditional platting and grid hosting residential structures mixed in with office infill.
- Mix of office and commercial uses including general office, medical office and support clinics, restaurants, general retail, multi-tenant commercial centers, auto sales and service, boat sales and rentals, local services, and residential.

Traditional Neighborhood

General Area: Most residential areas west of Sixth Street and south of Highway 182.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Pre-World War II neighborhood development with typical lot widths of 50 feet.
- Some blocks have alleys that provide rear-loaded parking, while blocks without alleys use curb-loaded on-site parking.
- Relatively high lot coverage limits the ability to store multiple vehicles on-site.

Contemporary Neighborhood

General Area: Most residential areas east of Sixth Street and north of Highway 182.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Post-World War II neighborhood development with typical lot widths of 60 to 65 feet.
- There are no alleys and lots use curb-loaded on-site parking.
- Additional lot width permits for better on-site parking of multiple vehicles.

Mixed Housing Development

General Area: Scattered sites throughout the City.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Multiple parcel or block developments that include several residential structures.
- May include dedicated open space or recreational amenities shared by residential structures.
- Parking is typically shared by multiple residential structures.
- May include a distinct internal street network, or be well integrated into the surrounding grid pattern.

Open Space

General Area: Primarily north of Highway 90 and east of Veterans Boulevard.

Land Use and Development Characteristics:

- Large tracts of undeveloped natural open space.
- Active open space at Lake End Park includes picnic facilities, a marina, boat launch, beach, and pedestrian trail network.

Illustrated in **Map 1.9, *Existing Land Use & Character Types*** is the geographic distribution of the various land use and character types described above.

Existing Environment and Infrastructure

Much of the impetus of this FLUDP stems from the recent natural events that have demonstrated the fragility of the community and need for appropriate long-term development policies. Of course, the primary environmental factor is the risk of flooding. Over the past several decades, the City has taken steps to mitigate this risk by building flood walls and levees to protect its built environment and most sensitive areas. The levees and existing flood zones are displayed in **Map 1.10, *Existing Levees & FEMA Flood Zones***.

A new levee was recently constructed that sets the stage for development along Lake Palourde waterfront. Concurrently, FEMA has been moving forward with new DFIRM boundaries. The actual impact of the floodplain boundaries and new levee are not yet known however; as the new DFIRM boundaries are currently under dispute. As finalized DFIRM information becomes available, it must be assessed and taken into account as it relates the built environment. In addition to the levee system, infrastructure such as the Railroad Avenue rail corridor also provides protection to neighborhoods from flooding.

Despite these infrastructure improvements, there are still portions of the City that are at risk. As development or redevelopment occurs in these areas, mortgage lending policies will require that commercial and residential development be designed to mitigate the flood risk to either the site or occupiable structures.

Precedent Plans and Policies

The FLUDP is not a "start from scratch" vision for Morgan City. Rather, it is founded upon an understanding of what the City desires to be as articulated by existing plans and policies. As described earlier, this plan sets the stage for an update to the City's zoning and land development regulations.

One of the plans that had an impact on built environment is the Morgan City Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in 1972. In that plan, it foresaw rapid population growth between 1983 and 1993 reaching a total of 64,000 persons.[1] However, that projected growth never materialized. Rather, the City's current population is 12,500 persons;

[1] The Comprehensive Plan for the City of Morgan City was adopted in June of 1972 and established a target population as 64,000 persons by the year 2002 for planning purposes.

about 5,000 persons less than were in the City in 1972.[2] Given the reductions in the actual population, many of the original assumptions of the plan are no longer relevant; particularly how growth would impact infrastructure and services.

In addition, many of the planning theories and methodologies have evolved over the past 40 years. Consequently, these changed circumstances have left the City without a concrete guiding document (i.e., a "vision"), and has resulted in a piecemeal approach to development planning and approval within the City.

In contrast, other recent planning efforts provide relevant guidance and direction for particular areas in the City. One of these more recent planning efforts was the *Atchafalaya Gateway Initiative*.[3] The following summarizes the recommendations specifically relating to changes in land use and development from this plan:

- Build upon existing investment to create a unified appearance for the various components that make up the East Municipal Complex on East Boulevard between the Highway 90 interchange and Highway 182.
- Construct Swamp Overlook (i.e., the Visitor Information Center) at the foot of East Boulevard.
- Remove housing to create an entry sign at the foot of the Federal Ramp off Highway 90.
- Adequately screen unsightly commercial properties adjacent to key corridors or residential areas.
- Enhance access to Mr. Charlie (i.e., the International Petroleum Museum and Exposition center).
- Update the zoning ordinance and development regulations.
- Improve landscaping and parking below Highway 90.

Another plan that will impact the future built environment is the *Morgan City Main Street Program Master Plan*,[4] which helped to define the future of the established historic district. As illustrated in **Map 1.11, *Historic District***, the district encompasses much of the Downtown area, including Front, First, and Second Streets between Greenwood Street

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.
[3] Atchafalaya Gateway Initiative was adopted in 2002.
[4] The Morgan City Main Street Master Plan was prepared in 2004.

and Railroad Avenue. As a result of this plan, new development and redevelopment in this area must be highly sensitive to the development context and historic value of the Downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods.