

THE FUTURE GROWTH OF THE OCHSNER MEDICAL CORRIDOR



23-24 JUNE 2015
A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT



Urban Land Institute Louisiana

Urban Land Institute Louisiana, a District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), has 213 members statewide. ULI is a nonprofit research and education organization established in 1936 with more than 30,000 international members. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI shares best practices through both practical professional development education programs and ULI's research and publications. The organization sets the standard for high-quality information on urban planning, real estate development, growth and land use.

Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission

The Jefferson Parish Economic Development Commission (JEDCO) is an independent yet complementary arm of Jefferson Parish government with the main objective of attracting, growing and creating new business in Jefferson Parish. JEDCO's mission is to proactively influence the economy through the retention and creation of quality jobs, entrepreneurship and investment in Jefferson Parish. Since its inception in 1987, JEDCO has aided thousands of companies through business incubator and loan programs, tax incentives and rebate programs, workforce development and information services. JEDCO also promotes Jefferson Parish's positive business climate locally, regionally and nationally through targeted media campaigns, tradeshow participation and regular press announcements. While dedicated to assisting existing Jefferson Parish businesses, JEDCO's efforts also target the recruitment of new businesses for the area.

JEDCO has a staff of 15 and is directed by a Board of Commissioners, of which the Jefferson Parish Council nominates seven members, the Jefferson Parish president appoints one representative, and 13 board appointees represent area business organizations. Business representatives serve five years, with representatives of the parish council and president serving for the duration of their nominator's term in office.

Ochsner Health System

Founded in 1942 by five physicians, Ochsner Health System is one of the largest independent academic health systems in the United States and Louisiana's largest not-for-profit health system.

During Hurricane Katrina, Ochsner was the only hospital in the region to maintain full services. Since that time, Ochsner has become a catalyst for the region's revitalization and has emerged as the uncontested healthcare leader in the Gulf South. In the past 11 years, Ochsner has grown from a one-facility/3,000 employee hospital to a 25-hospital/17,000+ employee regional health system. Ochsner's expansion began with the acquisition of a 140-bed hospital in Baton Rouge in 2006 and has continued more recently with the 2014 acquisitions of St. Charles Parish Hospital and Ochsner Medical Center – River Parishes through partnerships under the Ochsner Health Network launched in June 2015.

Many within the healthcare industry understand that Ochsner is a preeminent and top-tier health system. Ochsner is the clear and dominant market leader in the Greater New Orleans area (market share and consumer preference), and a leader across the Gulf South Region. Ochsner serves patients from every parish (county) in Louisiana, every state in the nation, and more than 90 different countries. Every year, Ochsner facilities support more than 1.4 million patient visits, and that number continues to grow.

Ochsner Medical Center, the original main hospital campus on Jefferson Highway, is a 473-bed acute care facility. It is the home to nationally recognized specialty care and the majority of Ochsner's academic programs, including the Ochsner Clinical School in partnership with the University of Queensland. The most complex cases (transplant, new procedures, cancer, etc.) are cared for at this facility. Attached to the hospital is the Brent House Hotel, a 137-room facility that caters to families of international, transplant and other complex and extended-stay patients. Ochsner also hosts more than 600 medical students and 550 allied health students in clinical rotations; many of these students and residents, some of which come from as far away as Saudi Arabia and Australia, utilize local housing owned by the hospital.

This campus and its affiliated offices in Elmwood are the largest employer in Jefferson Parish by a margin of 8,000 people, with around 14,500 employees. Ochsner continues to be the largest employer in the state and is consistently rated as Top 50 Best Places to Work by employees.

Technical Assistance Panel Program

ULI Louisiana's Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) process is designed to enhance community leadership, clarify community needs and assets, and advance land use policies that expand economic opportunity, maximize market potential, and conserve natural environments. TAPs are typically intensive, two-day working sessions, where expert volunteers address a land use challenge proposed by the sponsoring organization about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area.

ULI Louisiana's criteria for selecting communities to work with include the following: strong local leadership capacity; a clearly defined scope of work, and three to four well-articulated questions to be addressed during the TAP; a defined geographic boundary (neighborhood, district, corridor, etc.); and transferability to other communities in the region.

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Ochsner

Medical Center

THE FUTURE GROWTH OF THE OCHSNER MEDICAL CORRIDOR

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PART 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A HEALTHCARE LEADER READY TO RISE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

In June 2015, Ochsner announced its plan to spend \$250 million to expand its 33-acre Ochsner Medical Center campus on Jefferson Highway. Financing the project will be, in part, covered by a bond sale that is meant to take advantage of current favorable interest rates. The campus improvements are slated to move quickly, and the need for comprehensive decision making regarding smart and sustainable campus expansion is immediate. Ochsner will also continue to expand to the north toward Earhart Expressway on the 40+ acres it currently controls and to the west toward Causeway Boulevard, including its acquisition of the Whitney Bank Building at Labarre Road. Ochsner's expansion improvement plans currently include the following:

- Addition of patient capacity, represented by an increase to 700 beds, many for long-term care
- Additional buildings to house expanded out-patient and surgery services and academic functions
- Addition of floors to existing buildings to accommodate more care facilities
- Addition of residential capacity for families of long-term care patients and Ochsner students and residents
- Better access to the campus from Jefferson Highway (east-west), River Road (south) and Earhart Expressway (north)
- Parking to accommodate additional staff and patients that will come with this growth
- Improved pedestrian connections across Jefferson Highway

In order to determine the best ways to combine Ochsner's vision for their expanded campus with local and regional connectivity and the long-term opportunity to create a vibrant, mixed-use and walkable community along the Jefferson Highway Corridor, Ochsner and JEDCO partnered with ULI Louisiana to conduct this ULI Technical Assistance Panel. The questions that were addressed by this TAP were:



Clockwise from top left: TAP panelists Jeff Bell, Stefan Marks and Paul Flower; Guests listen to speakers at the TAP reception on Tuesday, June 23 at Southport Hall; Paul Flower, Stefan Marks and ULI Louisiana Chair Steven Massicot; TAP panelists Dana Brown, Tom Gibson and Peter Trapolin talk with TAP moderator Cindy McSherry of ULI Chicago.

1. How should Jefferson Highway, River Road, and Earhart be upgraded and improved to complement the growth planned on the Ochsner campus and to promote compatible development opportunities and needed support uses (retail, housing, office)? Examine aspects including, but not limited to, a services/utilitarian standpoint, aesthetic considerations, way-finding or access into and around the Oschner campus, and proposed real estate uses.
2. What should be incorporated into a Jefferson Highway improvement plan and Ochsner Master Plan to positively impact the surrounding residential communities from safety, sustainable and livable standpoints?
3. How could the main accessways within the site area be upgraded to address visual and physical connectivity across parish lines, to the airport, and future economic development along and serving the Ochsner Medical Center corridor?
4. With up to 3 million square feet programmed for the Ochsner campus and future mixed-use development, what measures could be taken to minimize the impact on the surrounding neighborhoods and visually bring developments to a human scale that is comforting and uplifting to Ochsner's patients?
5. What multi-modal – public transit (buses, light rail), automobile, bicycle, pedestrian – transportation modes/systems/improvements would address demands of Ochsner's employees, vendors and patients, neighboring residential communities, and future commercial and residential development?

PROCESS

A team of seven panelists from across the country was assembled by ULI Louisiana to serve as an independent group of experts to study Ochsner's expansion plans and the existing conditions of Jefferson Parish immediately adjacent to Ochsner's Jefferson Highway campus. The study included major thoroughfares that drive traffic to the hospital and recommendations for smart growth solutions.

Led by representatives of Ochsner and JEDCO, the team began the two-day process with a tour of the site study area, bounded by Earhart Expressway, River Road, Dakin Street and Causeway Boulevard. This was followed by hours of meetings with community stakeholders. These stakeholders included the following:

- Site area residents
- Ochsner Health System employees
- Employees of the state, parish and/or city
- Local experts addressing issues such as transportation, retail, real estate and planning

Instead of answering each individual TAP question as listed above, the group decided on an approach that would encompass answers to all of the questions, and their implications. That concept is a town center, imagined by the group as "O-Town," built up as a mixed-use development that serves the needs of Ochsner's staff, patients, scholars, the local community and the parish all at once. O-Town is a holistic response to the concerns and insights of the many stakeholders interviewed by the panelists, and helps Ochsner's expansion needs evolve into a plan with enormous potential impact for Ochsner, businesses and other economic drivers as nurtured by JEDCO, and the entire region.



Left: Ochsner's Bobby Brannon and JEDCO's Jerry Bologna speak to guests at the TAP reception on Tuesday, June 23 at Southport Hall. Right: Panelists deliver their final report on Wednesday, June 24.



PART 2

PANEL RECOMENDATIONS

“O-TOWN” FOR A BETTER JEFFERSON PARISH

Ochsner has worked for decades to build their Jefferson Highway campus hospital, community hospitals and later regional affiliate hospitals under a brand that represents world-class care. Patients travel from across the globe and from all regions of the country to receive care at the main campus facilities. However, as they approach the hospital from Jefferson Highway, the main point of access, they are greeted by a corridor that has not seen significant investment in many years: blighted, sometimes empty shopping centers and low-end retail and restaurants surround the campus. Utility poles mar the sightlines of the campus itself. Confusing signage and various entry points make access to the hospital’s different facilities difficult. The area of Old Jefferson surrounding the Ochsner campus does not reflect the quality of care that is provided at this facility, and the campus itself is also in need of significant upgrades. As one panelist put it, a world-class hospital deserves a world-class corridor – and a world-class campus.

To create this, Ochsner needs to approach its expansion in a holistic way that considers the needs of the surrounding community, the ways that visitors access campus, and the amenities offered on and around campus. By turning Ochsner’s main campus into a town center for Old Jefferson, the organization can best serve its patients, employees and the surrounding community.

To help stakeholders envision what this future mixed-use development could look like, TAP panelists mocked up a plan called “O-Town,” a name that builds on Ochsner’s “O” logo that it commonly uses for branding. O-Town will turn Ochsner’s main campus into a destination, providing an unforgettable experience for patients receiving care at its facilities, those who work at the hospital and those who live adjacent. The redevelopment and expansion of the Jefferson Highway campus will be catalytic for the region, especially for the area surrounding campus east to west, from Causeway to the Jefferson Parish line, and from the Mississippi River to Earhart Expressway on the north and south axis. JEDCO and Jefferson Parish will benefit from the economic possibilities that are fostered through such smart growth.

O-Town will bring a variety of much-needed retail to its campus to serve employees, visitors and the community as a whole. A variety of high to moderate-level housing will be developed on site to cater to doctors, fellows and students who travel from around the world to study and work on campus. It will be pedestrian friendly, with walkways allowing for safe movement around campus – even across busy Jefferson Highway – as it will be redesigned to slow traffic and invite bikers



The West Patient Tower as seen from Jefferson Highway.

and pedestrians. Greenways will be developed to provide areas for relaxation and respite for families at the hospital and those in the surrounding neighborhood. They will also help manage stormwater and reduce localized flooding. O-Town will develop with fingers reaching out into the community, inviting people onto the site with resident-focused programming and even space designated for the community. Access will be improved overall with Jefferson Highway's beautification and with additional access to campus from Earhart Expressway, and signage and wayfinding techniques will help people more intuitively navigate around Ochsner.

This approach will benefit Ochsner's administration and affiliates in many ways. Employees will face less traffic and be able to run errands on site at various retailers, leading to a more enjoyable work experience and a faster return to their families. Patients will have a more memorable and pleasing stay, as will the families of those receiving long-term care. Residents will feel that Ochsner considered their needs and desires in its redevelopment plans. The redevelopment will be catalytic for the area, igniting retail development and improving property values and residential offerings in adjacent neighborhoods. Jefferson Parish will see an economic boost and increased job and training opportunities. This winning strategy for Ochsner allows its various users and neighbors alike to reap benefits.

Additionally, the panel recommends extending Ochsner's study area to mirror the TAP study area, bringing in Causeway Boulevard to the west and the Orleans/Jefferson Parish line to the east, to really get a sense of the community, the opportunity for a town center and the identity of the area as a whole.

The TAP panel recommends the considerations on the following pages to Ochsner's administration and JEDCO as Ochsner undertakes its expansion.



Various views of Ochsner's Jefferson Highway campus and its approaches on Jefferson Highway.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

With a significant increase in size and capacity on Ochsner's campus as expansion takes place, there will undoubtedly be an equally significant increase in vehicular traffic on all roadways accessing both the north and south sections of the site. Since most visitors and employees will access the site by car, traffic patterns and easing increasing traffic counts is key. It is also critical, however, that Ochsner helps encourage more people to use other modes of transportation through internal incentives and by working with local and regional transportation agencies to improve transportation options.

Jefferson Highway Improvements

The majority of visitors to Ochsner's main campus access the hospital's facilities by car via Jefferson Highway, which connects to Causeway Boulevard on the west and Orleans Parish's Claiborne Avenue to the east. Panelists conclude that this will continue to be the main approach even as an exit ramp off Deckbar Avenue is specially built in coming years. Jefferson Highway also

connects directly, via Claiborne Avenue, to Ochsner's closest satellite hospital, Ochsner Baptist, which lies approximately four miles to the east in Orleans Parish. Therefore significant effort and investment need to be made toward improving the appearance and use of Jefferson Highway. Jefferson Highway as it looks and operates today does not speak to the world-class facility that Ochsner currently is, nor to the improvements that lie ahead. "A world-class facility deserves a world-class street, and Jefferson Highway is Ochsner's main gateway," one panelist said.

Jefferson Highway has not functioned as a state highway in many decades, but rather as an arterial roadway. Ochsner and the Jefferson Parish Streets Department need to collaborate with the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD), which owns Jefferson Highway and pays the parish to manage, to complete a study to assess the feasibility of a 'road diet' for Jefferson Highway, especially between Causeway Boulevard and the Jefferson Parish line. A road diet could entail taking out



Panel sketch depicting the site area and the potential Ochsner expansion across Jefferson Highway, including an aerial idea of what efforts to "green" that corridor would look like.

a lane on each side of the four-lane road, or narrowing the lanes, to insert a bike path, to widen sidewalks, reduce curb cuts and to allow room for plantings and pedestrian-scale lighting. It would also slow traffic through what is, and should be, a more pedestrian-friendly corridor.

Further, the panelists agreed that instead of spending millions to construct a new pedestrian bridge over Jefferson Highway to connect Ochsner's north and south campuses, efforts should focus instead on slowing traffic on the street to make street-level crossing safe and easy. Several panelists witnessed people darting across Jefferson Highway within mere feet of an elevated pedestrian bridge. This suggests that people prefer crossing at street level even when the prospect is more dangerous. As one panelist put it: "Calming or slowing traffic can be done through design. A 'road diet' and other measures will help people drive as if they're in a pedestrian place instead of making pedestrians feel like they're trying to cross a vehicular road." The cost of a pedestrian bridge would also be significant, especially when Americans with Disabilities Act requirements are taken into consideration.

Traffic calming measures could also include the insertion of roundabouts or J-turns, which are guided 90- and 180-degree turns in separate lanes. Those would allow drivers to merge in the opposite direction by yielding and avoid additional traffic signals. Studies should also evaluate the timing of traffic signals along Jefferson Highway to ensure they are operating to optimize traffic flow.

The redevelopment of Ochsner's campus to offer more retail and residential options will inherently make the entire site more pedestrian-friendly and reinforce the importance of pedestrian movement in a healthy community. However, additional design measures along Jefferson Highway can further reinforce this new priority. Investment in the design and implementation of plantings, furnishings and lighting for the pedestrian scale need to be made. Sidewalks must be widened and provided with appropriate amenities to encourage walking.

Collaboration with Jefferson Parish officials will also be important when assessing Jefferson Highway's utility needs. Panelists identified removal of utility poles as a "basic" need to improve the look of Ochsner's campus along that main corridor and elevate it to that of a world-class facility by burying electrical lines. Existing and new utility transformers should be located away from highly visible areas. Coordination to ensure the permanent elimination of unsightly infrastructure from the sightlines on and around campus is necessary. Sanitary sewer and stormwater drainage must be discussed for needed upgrades as well, particularly considering Ochsner's expansion plans.



Various examples of signage along Jefferson Highway directing visitors to different parts of Ochsner’s Jefferson Highway campus.

Wayfinding on Ochsner’s Campus

Many panelists reported finding Ochsner’s signage and other wayfinding measures on and around campus to be confusing. Thus, the panel recommends, especially as the campus grows, more study and design work to be dedicated to wayfinding at Ochsner to allow visitors approaching the site and already on campus to easily understand where to go to access their final location. This should be done both through visual cues and signage. Visual cues could include plantings, treatments of paving styles and even design of new buildings so that “people recognize where they are going without even having to wait for signs,” one panelist said. Signage should be readable yet attractive, and could possibly utilize color-coding measures for ease of understanding.

Further, the panelists stressed that while one “front door” is important for Ochsner’s image, it is not necessarily the entrance most patients and staff will use. Significant effort needs to be expended in developing clearly understood directional signage around and throughout the expanding campus.



Clockwise from top left: Ochsner’s main campus is primarily accessed via River Road; Jefferson Highway; and Causeway Boulevard. Residential Deckbar Avenue is also a heavily-trafficked thoroughfare.

Other Corridors for Access

Exit and entrance ramps off of Earhart Expressway would improve vehicular access to Jefferson Highway. There are three interchanges that would greatly improve access to Ochsner’s campus for patients, visitors and staff. These locations are Causeway at Earhart, Deckbar Street at Earhart and Dakin Street at Earhart. Ochsner’s understanding is that all have been explored as potential options by one or more of the authorities having jurisdiction—DOTD, the Regional Planning Commission, and Jefferson Parish. Ochsner administrators also understand that funding to complete any one of these entrance and exit ramps has not been secured and will ultimately be determined by the incoming state administration. While the panelists agree that these interchanges will remain secondary access points to Jefferson Highway and the hospital campus, stakeholders recognize that one of these interchanges (Deckbar at Earhart) will be an important solution to mitigate traffic congestion on Jefferson Highway as the campus expands. Unofficial long term plans suggest an employee parking garage to be constructed on the north campus and to be located near the on and off ramp of the proposed Deckbar at Earhart interchange. If successful, this interchange solution would enable thousands of Ochsner employees to access

their designated parking garage without having to use Jefferson Highway. This preferred solution would also alleviate traffic congestion along Jefferson Highway, allowing better patient and visitor access as the campus expands.

One problem raised by a stakeholder is speeding on residential streets near campus. The speed limit on Earhart is 60 MPH but on Deckbar it slows to 25 MPH, and drivers often greatly exceed that speed. Measures to slow traffic on residential Deckbar Avenue need to be considered and undertaken by Ochsner if it seeks to encourage more employees to use that road to access the hospital facilities.

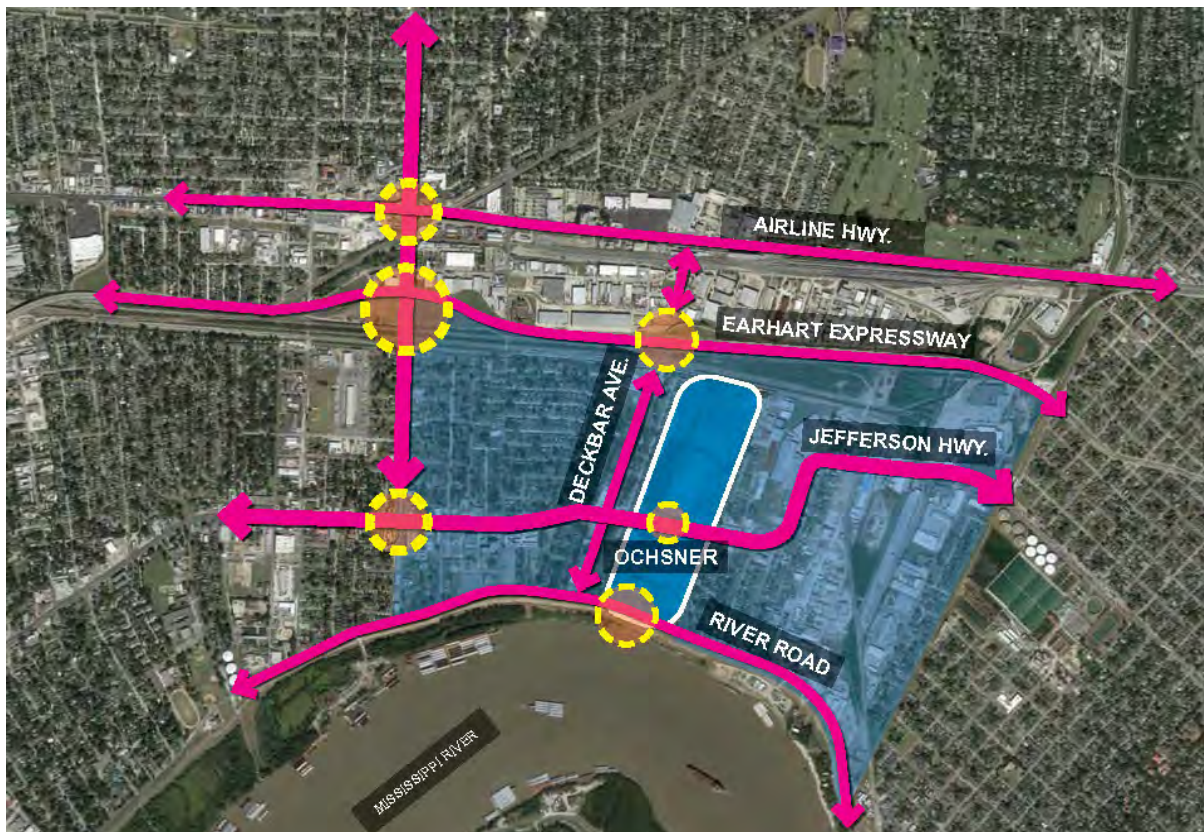
Any improvements to strengthen the identity and aesthetics of all the corridors that visitors use to access Ochsner – especially Causeway Boulevard, which is the main access to and from Interstate 10 and Jefferson Highway, as well as Airline Drive and River Road – are critical and should be undertaken by Ochsner’s administration. Design guidelines for street tree plantings, pedestrian lighting, wayfinding and identification will help people easily get to campus.



River Road and the back of Ochsner’s Jefferson Highway campus.

The majority of drivers moving south along Causeway will exit at Jefferson Highway rather than driving to the end, where Causeway terminates at River Road. The panel recommends that, as Causeway represents the western border of the re-imagined site area, Ochsner should be integrally involved in redesigning that southern portion of Causeway to integrate it more fully into the new and improved look of Ochsner's campus.

Earhart Expressway is a corridor that the panel believes needs to be studied at a greater scale. Their consensus is that it is likely a grossly underutilized corridor. While the addition of westbound access to Deckbar will allow more drivers to utilize Earhart, the expansion of Deckbar to Airline Drive would also be an important improvement. It would connect Airline with River Road, which would open possibilities for easing traffic and improving circulation. (It should be noted that Dakin Street, another significant north-south access road near campus that is also a residential street, cannot be considered for expansion to access Earhart or Airline due to problems crossing railroad tracks.)



This map, created by TAP panelists, illustrates the main access points throughout Jefferson Parish that lead visitors to Ochsner's main campus, with the most important existing or proposed interchanges highlighted.



“Whatever is done in the future,” one panelist stated, “needs to manage traffic efficiency while maintaining a high level of service.” Ochsner’s continued close involvement with the parish along with DOTD officials will be crucial as its campus expands.

Modes of Transportation

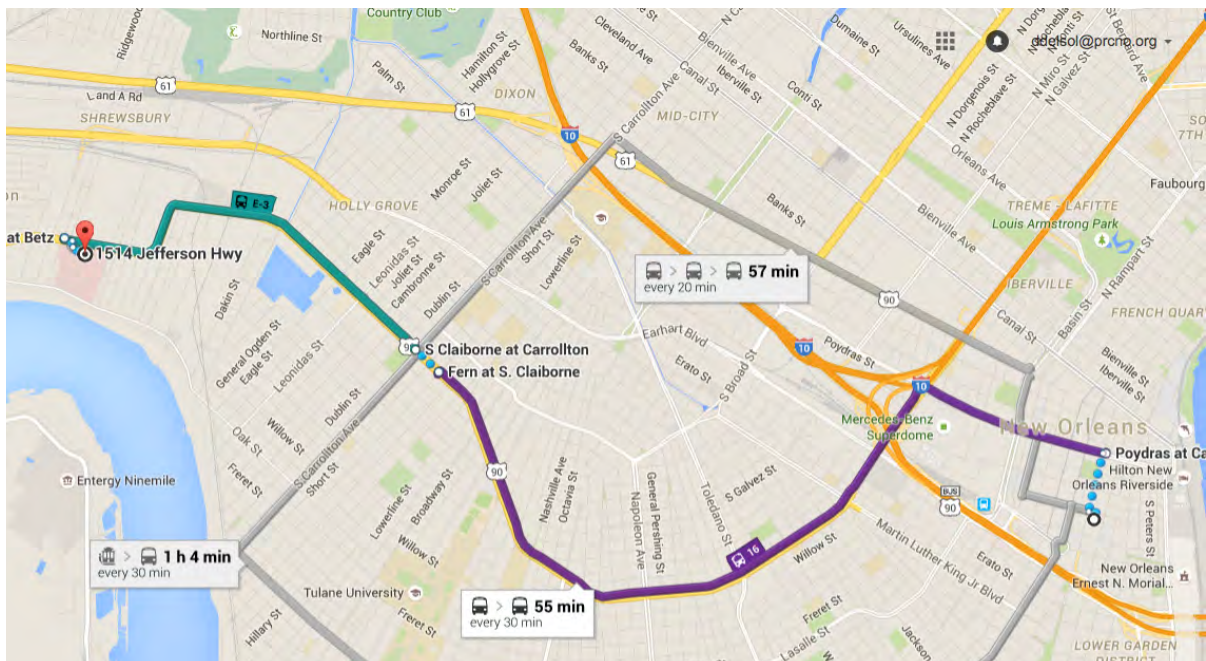
The majority of people visiting Ochsner’s campus will arrive by car. However, as Ochsner expands and its administration works with Jefferson Parish officials to improve the overall transportation network of the campus, the site and the whole region, it is crucial to explore opportunities to bring more people to Ochsner without increasing vehicular traffic. Studies need to be conducted to determine the best ways to address and program vehicular parking and transportation alternatives to save square footage that might be dedicated as parking spaces for other uses. This should culminate in the development of a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation program for Ochsner’s expanded main campus. Panelists identified Houston and Seattle as examples of cities with world-class hospitals that have successfully completed such plans.

Currently, there are not strong alternative transportation options in Jefferson and Orleans parishes. Access to Ochsner via the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and the Jefferson Transit (JET) bus systems need to be enhanced. Buses need to run with enough

frequency to service Ochsner employees and patients. “The hospital is a 24/7 operation that runs every day, but transit services do not meet those needs,” one panelist said.

Ochsner and Jefferson Parish officials should also meet with staff of TransDev, the company that operates New Orleans’ RTA. The goal would be to discuss extending their service along Claiborne past its current stop at Carrollton, where Ochsner-bound riders currently disembark to wait for an infrequent JET (Jefferson Parish transit) bus to take them the additional two miles. One panelist attested to the possibility that now may be an ideal time for the RTA to consider “blurring” the parish lines to better serve riders bound for Ochsner’s Jefferson Highway campus and that the RTA board is receptive to ideas that include enhancing regional connectivity. Another panelist remarked that, if pursued with the guidance of the Regional Planning Commission, this endeavor could be the first step towards a comprehensive regional transit network for the entire area – something many feel is both sorely lacking and highly needed.

Additional routes should also be considered when looking at bus routes and tweaking existing service to better serve Ochsner’s many employees and patients. For example, perhaps a direct route will someday be needed between Delgado’s campus on Airline and Ochsner. Longer-term



As this map indicates, a visitor to Ochsner’s main campus from New Orleans’ downtown who is using public transit will have to ride two separate buses and walk between the two to complete their journey. Starting downtown on the New Orleans RTA Claiborne bus route, the rider will disembark at Fern Street and then walk 0.4 miles past Carrollton Avenue, where a Jefferson Rapid Transit bus will take them the rest of the way, along Jefferson Highway, to Ochsner main campus. Efforts should be made to streamline this process for transit riders.



Existing parking on the back side of main campus.

plans could involve exploring the option of adding a bus rapid-transit system to connect the campus with downtown New Orleans – an idea that one expert stakeholder stated has been greatly successful in other cities.

Ochsner’s expanded campus will need to include a transit hub as a drop-off area for bus riders that is large enough for two to three buses. Panelists recommend locating this in a relatively central location near Deckbar on the north campus.

Carpools are also a cheap and effective strategy to reduce traffic, but their implementation requires incentives such as preferential parking. Incentives could also be explored to encourage Ochsner employees to ride their bikes or utilize mass transit to get to work. Creative and flexible planning that yields employee amenities such as on-site childcare and telecommuting, for example, can have a large impact on the frequency and amount of people traveling to and from campus.

Recommendations already mentioned above in relation to Jefferson Highway improvements that focus on making the campus and immediate surrounding area friendlier to pedestrians are also inherent in the suggestions for improving access to Ochsner. People walking or biking to campus from nearby areas will benefit and be more likely to utilize such healthy modes of movement if improvements to sidewalks and easy to understand pathways are developed throughout the site. A mixed-use development approach to Ochsner’s expansion also encompasses this principle: if visitors to campus are also able to visit retailers while on site, this lessens their need to get back on the road and contribute to traffic to run errands.



The existing retail that surrounds Ochsner’s main campus along Jefferson Highway leaves much to be desired. Clockwise from top left: A CVS Pharmacy located on Jefferson Highway at Deckbar is the only convenience store in the vicinity; blighted, mostly empty strip malls surround main campus along Jefferson Highway, and some of that property should be acquired and redeveloped by Ochsner with the guidance of JEDCO; the Picadilly cafeteria and Dot’s Diner are two of a very few surrounding restaurants.

O-TOWN AMENITIES

A mixed-use town center development will bring much-needed retail and community amenities to an area of Jefferson Parish where both are sorely lacking. These amenities will help transform the hospital complex into a “place,” a memorable site that can be utilized by those affiliated with Ochsner and those who are not. Retail, greenspace and other amenities should be carefully planned to promote healthy living and wellness.

Retail

As one stakeholder described it, “Jefferson Highway has a fair amount of commercial blight. It is lacking in fundamental resources. There isn’t a place within walking distance to get a meal. Though the Brent House Hotel [for families of extended-stay patients] is at 83 percent capacity year round, CVS is the only retail in the area. There is demand.”

Ochsner and JEDCO should commission a market study to assess the retail needs of the site area. These findings will help Ochsner better plan as it acquires and begins to transform the blighted

Jefferson Plaza square, and as it begins the overall design of its campus expansion. Retail located in the study site should serve Ochsner employees and patients but also the surrounding community by fulfilling the needs identified in the market study.

Higher-end retail than what is present now along Jefferson Highway between Causeway Boulevard and the Orleans/Jefferson Parish line is not going to simply appear with news of Ochsner's expansion; Ochsner itself will have to invest in bringing quality retail to its campus in order for more retailers to open businesses and services. However, panelists and stakeholders alike are confident that Ochsner's investment in improving retail and residential options on its campus – especially if Ochsner is to approach its expansion as a mixed-use town center development – will be catalytic for Jefferson Highway and the surrounding region.

The insertion of a significant amount of quality retailers across campus will also increase walkability of the entire study site, which is important and desirable. It will also, as mentioned before, cut down on traffic and commuting time for employees and provide health benefits for those who take advantage of the pedestrian opportunities. If Ochsner employees can stay on campus to pick up groceries and dry cleaning, therefore saving them the time and expense of making additional trips to other sites, they will enjoy convenience of working on a campus. Visitors and community members will also reap the benefits of having convenient and variety retail options on Ochsner's campus. To serve everyone, instead of simply Ochsner affiliates, designs need to make much of the retail easily accessible from the street.

Ochsner administrators can feel confident undertaking this level of retail development thanks to their own success. The new Internal Medicine building on the north campus was designed to imitate an airport terminal to engage patients instead of appearing simply as a waiting room. Patients can visit a café, look onto a garden, buy medicine or other sundry items, and work with technology gurus to install medical apps on their smart devices. "It has been a big hit with patients," one stakeholder said. This modern, interactive and vibrant approach to planning should be considered when developing retail across campus, but also expanded. One panelist notes, "Any new retail should be oriented to the street and not located within Ochsner buildings with no street presence," so as to make it clear that the public is welcome to use these retail facilities and therefore increase the potential customer base.

Stakeholders and panelists recommend that Ochsner's administration works with Jefferson Parish officials on the creation of a commercial parkway overlay zone for the area from Causeway



Ochsner's adaptive reuse of an existing warehouse for its new internal medicine complex was an impressive "green" development plan that resulted in a beautiful new facility.

Boulevard to the Orleans/Jefferson Parish line to the east-west and River Road to Earhart Expressway to the north-south. This will implement development standards for all new construction and site redevelopment: building envelopes, massing and fenestration, governing how a building addresses the street are all examples of aspects that will be governed under such guidelines. "This will ensure that your investments are never diminished by someone who develops next to your property," one panelist said. The overlay zone would be enforced by the Parish. "We believe Jefferson Plaza will be a catalyst for the entire area, so we want that overlay district in place before everything gets going," the panelist said. "If it's not in place by the time you begin to redevelop your campus, it then becomes too late if someone builds something that doesn't add to your investment in this area."

New retail development must be coordinated with the wayfinding and aesthetic beautification efforts explored above to create a cohesive town center-like campus. Retail should be connected by wide, walkable (and ideally bikeable) paths that are tree-lined for shade and lighted for safety. Ochsner should continue efforts to help redevelop the area as a whole, like they have in the recent purchase and closure of a pool hall and a low-end convenience store for redevelopment. It should also work with parish offices to help offer façade improvement grants to long-standing businesses along the Jefferson Highway corridor that are unlikely to otherwise improve.



Top: Streets lined with small, historic cottages comprise the neighborhood adjacent to Ochsner's Jefferson Highway campus, and Ochsner owns many and rents them to resident physicians. Bottom: Ochsner also owns the Levee Run apartment complex, which has 143 apartments that lease to community members both affiliated and unaffiliated with Ochsner.

Housing

Ochsner currently owns dozens of single-family cottages in the residential streets surrounding campus as well as the Levee Run apartment building with 143 units. These offerings are inadequate to meet the varied needs of the students, fellows and physicians who have come to Ochsner for several weeks or years to work and study. A significant number of students come from Australia or Saudi Arabia thanks to partnering programs. Each group has differing needs – some are single, others have families, and some have housing needs based on religious beliefs. Ochsner needs to plan new residences that reflect a variety of options to accommodate students

comfortably and attractively. Some can be dormitory style, but others must accommodate a need for more privacy. Students and fellows need excellent social and learning environments to help them thrive, one stakeholder said, and high-quality housing that meets their individual needs is an integral part of that.

Modern, attractive living facilities can be used as a tool to attract top-tier students and young fellows from across the nation and world to choose to study and practice at Ochsner. Many, especially those coming from other countries, will also arrive without a vehicle. This is another reason that increased connectivity to mass transit and on-site retail are both important endeavors for Ochsner to undertake as it simultaneously plans for construction of these new residences. For those who cannot or do not wish to drive a car, a grocery store, a convenience store, a community center, restaurants and other retail need to be easily accessible by foot or bicycle.

Sites along the Mississippi River on River Road should be considered for redevelopment to house high-end condos for doctors. Demand is high for quality housing in Jefferson Parish. While it is not desirable for Ochsner to buy up the entire surrounding neighborhood, administrators should think creatively about how the low to moderate-income housing options in the immediate surrounds could be uplifted by its own residential development efforts. Several stakeholders mentioned the potential for the entire neighborhood to transform into a “hot pocket for young professionals” – with quick access to New Orleans’ Uptown amenities and cheaper Jefferson Parish tax and insurance rates, the area is ripe for the development of a variety of attractive housing types.

Finally, one stakeholder challenged Ochsner to be a better landlord to the residential property it does own with general refurbishing and improvements. Improving the property values of the entire area and encouraging renovations and new construction will ultimately benefit Ochsner. “We’d love to see a day when our nurses and doctors could move back into the area and walk to work,” one stakeholder said.



Left: The Brent House Hotel. Right: A bike trail along the Mississippi River that runs directly behind Ochsner's Jefferson Highway campus.

A First-Class Hotel

The Brent House is owned and operated by Ochsner for the families of long-term care patients and other extended-stay affiliates. The 137-room facility is dated and in need of redevelopment or replacement. No other similar lodging options exist for individuals in the immediate area, and a high number of patients and families visit the campus for transplant and other complex surgeries, making hotel rooms a necessity. Ochsner wants to expand their reach to the give patients' families and other affiliates the best stay possible. And a first-class hospitality facility is an important element to enhancing the image of the campus and O-Town, panelists agree. Creating a lodging facility with a retail focus and restaurant that would service the global campus and neighborhood is worthy of consideration. Growing the campus's other retail options is important for the families of Ochsner patients who are staying at the Brent House, as many may not have a car but need access to affordable food options and other amenities.

River Access

The Mississippi River is an incredible asset, and it is currently greatly underutilized by Ochsner. As one panelist said, "Ochsner is located on the Mississippi River but most people could never realize that while on the campus." The panel recommends creating an on-ramp to the Mississippi River levee bike path at the end of Deckbar Road, where it meets River Road, to provide employ-



Left: The view of the Mississippi River from Ochsner's Cancer Center. Right: Some greenspace on Ochsner's main campus.

ees, students, long-term care patients and their families, and community members access to the river. A bike share or bike rental service would be a great amenity. This would allow Ochsner to physically connect its campus to the Mississippi River and benefit from the bike trail and Uptown amenities such as Audubon Park and Oak Street. Providing access to the trail and the opportunity for walking and biking promote Ochsner's stated goal of healthy living while also providing an opportunity for respite for patients, families or others. This would have to be accomplished in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"That node is one Ochsner should take advantage of and brand for themselves," one panelist advised.

Greenspace

Both the Ochsner campus and the site area as a whole are lacking in greenspace. Ochsner's site redevelopment should include a significant amount of square footage dedicated to open space for leisure and to promote healthy living. Walking paths and at least one therapeutic garden for long-term care and recovering patients are important additions to campus planning.



Community Space

Panelists concur that Ochsner needs to make strident efforts to better engage the community. Part of this effort should manifest as literal space to hold community programming. Ochsner has already created a plaza between two new structures on its campus directly north of Jefferson Highway. One stakeholder, on a tour of campus, said that the administration is thinking of perhaps hosting a weekly farmer’s market on the site or other community programming. The panelists think it is very important to engage the outside community in this space and agree that concepts such as a farmer’s market or an outdoor health fair could be ways that the whole community could utilize the space. That option would also promote health and wellness. The goal, as one panelist stated, is less about bringing people into Ochsner and more about providing a space that can promote wellness for the entire community. Ochsner should also seriously consider dedicating a space in a building on the edge of campus as a community room. This would be a welcome offering to the neighborhood that could, due to its location, be secured separately from other healthcare facilities on site.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What is Ochsner’s “community,” panelists asked? The Ochsner community is one of patients, staff, students and physicians. But the surrounding community should also be included. From Rio Vista Avenue to the west to Coolidge Street to the east, Ochsner’s campus is surrounded by residential

streets filled with single-family homes. While many are owned by Ochsner and used for housing, more are privately owned. Stakeholder interviews revealed that area residents need to be integrated more into Ochsner's planning process and engaged at a meaningful level, panelists said.

One panelist described the need to engage the surrounding community as Ochsner putting fingers out into the neighborhood, and fingers coming back in from community members. This runs contrary to the approach stakeholders previously identified where Ochsner sought to create buffers around its campus from the neighborhood. By redeveloping campus to be more of a walkable town center with green spaces and retail options open to the public, there will be no need or desire for buffers.

"The idea of a town center came from the neighbors," one panelist said. "Many liken Ochsner to an 800 lbs. gorilla – it's going to get what it wants to get. 'But what would really make this great,' resident stakeholders said, 'would be a walkable, sustainable community and we all felt like we were part of it. This resonated from a number of people we interviewed – people from the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, Jefferson Parish employees, residents and others.

"You can be a great regional healthcare system," the panelist continued, "or you can be a great regional healthcare system that transforms a whole segment of Jefferson Parish. Ochsner can be the seed, providing amenities that will uplift residences and the whole community."

Residents tended to voice the most concern, however, panelists said. They feel left in the dark, assuming the worst about Ochsner's future plans because they have not been consulted or engaged in the planning process adequately. One problem lies in the lack of an organized neighborhood group in the immediate area. Though residents of Rio Grande Avenue tend to act as a neighborhood, there is no formal association, making Ochsner outreach difficult in the past. Though Ochsner needs to begin the construction phase of their expansion soon, it is critical that administrators make more of an effort to engage neighboring residents first to ask their opinions about what could and should take place as the campus grows. That doesn't mean that their desires must be met. It is at least asking, hearing and valuing the answers that are given, that matters, panelists said. They recommend creating a neighborhood engagement position or team to send Ochsner employees knocking on neighbors' doors. In addition to asking their opinions, Ochsner officials could share current master plan details with residents with the caveat that the plan is always evolving. Follow up, especially if residents have specific questions or concerns, is also vitally important in establishing trust with neighbors.

As discussed previously, completing a market study to determine which retail needs would best serve the community is key to developing retail that indeed can be utilized and appreciated by area residents in addition to Ochsner affiliates. The economic development aspects of Ochsner's expansion – job creation, training opportunities, the ripple effect of new retail, the tax dollars generated by large amounts of new economic activity – will also contribute mightily to the surrounding community.



PART 3

MOVING FORWARD

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT FOR JEFFERSON PARISH

The panelists explored many different facets for expanding Ochsner's campus into a world-class destination and a memorable, amenity-filled town center for Jefferson Parish and the entire region. "The key," one panelist said, "is connecting everything."

Quality of life for medical residents and students must be exemplary to attract top talent, and that should be reflected in the housing and retail options present on site. Patients are already receiving top care at Ochsner; they and their families should also remember their visit to the campus and be impressed by its beauty, its ease of access and its functionality. Employees should reap the benefits that would come with increased retail options, more biking and walking options across campus and better managed vehicular traffic on and around the site. And environmental sustainability should be considered in all plans, from increasing the amount of greenspace on site to continuing a precedent Ochsner already set on its north campus of adaptively reusing existing buildings.

Branding is crucial, and Ochsner is missing out on many opportunities, even before O-Town is built, to make their campus a true "place," panelists argued. Utilize its location in Louisiana, on the Mississippi River, next to New Orleans, to make it more of a culturally exciting destination to receive health care or study or practice. Utilize existing assets to become more of a destination even before ground is broken on O-Town, a transformative mixed-use redevelopment and expansion of Ochsner's campus.

The Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic are medical facilities known in households around the world. Transforming Ochsner's campus into O-Town could elevate an already renowned medical facility to the level of memorable healthcare location. "It would be unique for the whole region and a game changer," one panelist said.

Panelists stress that involving the community in a significant way as plans are formed for Ochsner's expansion is of utmost importance. Also critical is the establishment of an overlay zone to protect development with design and usage standards as it begins to flourish.

Stakeholders agree that, with upcoming elections at the state and parish levels, and with other improvements already being sought in other parts of Jefferson Parish such as Fat City, the timing is ripe for Ochsner's administration to approach the Jefferson Parish council or several of its offices to move forward with these transformative ideas. "There's an appetite for this sort of thinking," one stakeholder said. The preparation of financial analyses to predict tax revenue that could result from many of the endeavors recommended in this report would significantly bolster advocacy efforts on the parish and state levels. No one doubts Ochsner's pull as the biggest employer in Jefferson Parish. By approaching parish officials as a partner and having Ochsner's new, big plans incorporated into long-term parish planning to ensure that its "destination health care" status will be achieved, it is made clear that with this expansion project, *everyone* wins.



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