

GRETNA DOWNTOWN 2020



CITY OF GRETN A LOUISIANA



A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN



WITH THANKS FOR MAKING THIS REPORT POSSIBLE:

Mayor Belinda Constant

Gretna City Council:

Wayne A. Rau, At Large

Milton L. Crosby, District 1

Joseph A. Marino, III, District 2

Mark K. Miller, District 3

Jackie J. Berthelot, District 4

The Citizens of Gretna

City of Gretna:

Matthew Martinec

Danika Gorrondona

Azalea Roussell

Danny Lasyone

Raylyn Stevens

Gretna Historic District Commission

Project for Public Spaces:

Kate Rube / Gary Toth

Tulane Regional Urban Design Center:

Grover Mouton / Nick Jenisch

Gustavo Rodas / Gavin West

Christian Ardeneaux / Alex Sixt

Tulane School of Architecture Students:

Cassidy Rosen / Gwen Asbury / Lolade Frankel / Christopher Haack / David Kearing

Gianna Morelli / Seunghye Park / Matthew Raybon / Alyssa Rogut

Maya Sassoon / Adam Shields



This report is issued by the administration of Mayor Belinda Constant & Gretna City Council.

It was created in collaboration with the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center throughout Fall 2015 with ongoing input from the citizens of Gretna.

"I believe it is critical for the City of Gretna to share a collective vision for the long-term success of downtown, building upon the hard work of our city and citizens who have already brought countless activities, cultural events, and economic development to downtown. Gretna Downtown 2020 will serve as a blueprint for continued improvements in the public realm over the next 5 years and beyond." *-Mayor Belinda Constant*

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INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

DOWNTOWN GRETNA



01

PURPOSE

This report aims to create a shared vision for the long-term vibrancy of Historic Downtown Gretna. By 2020, the City of Gretna can augment the visual character and amenities available downtown, building upon already robust programming. The City's ultimate goal is to create a high quality of life by creating a dynamic public realm, and to draw additional commerce to the study area, creating a critical mass of activity within the context of a small, historic, walkable, and family friendly area. Downtown will be a unique destination within the metro area, and continue to serve as the heart of Gretna and the entire Westbank.

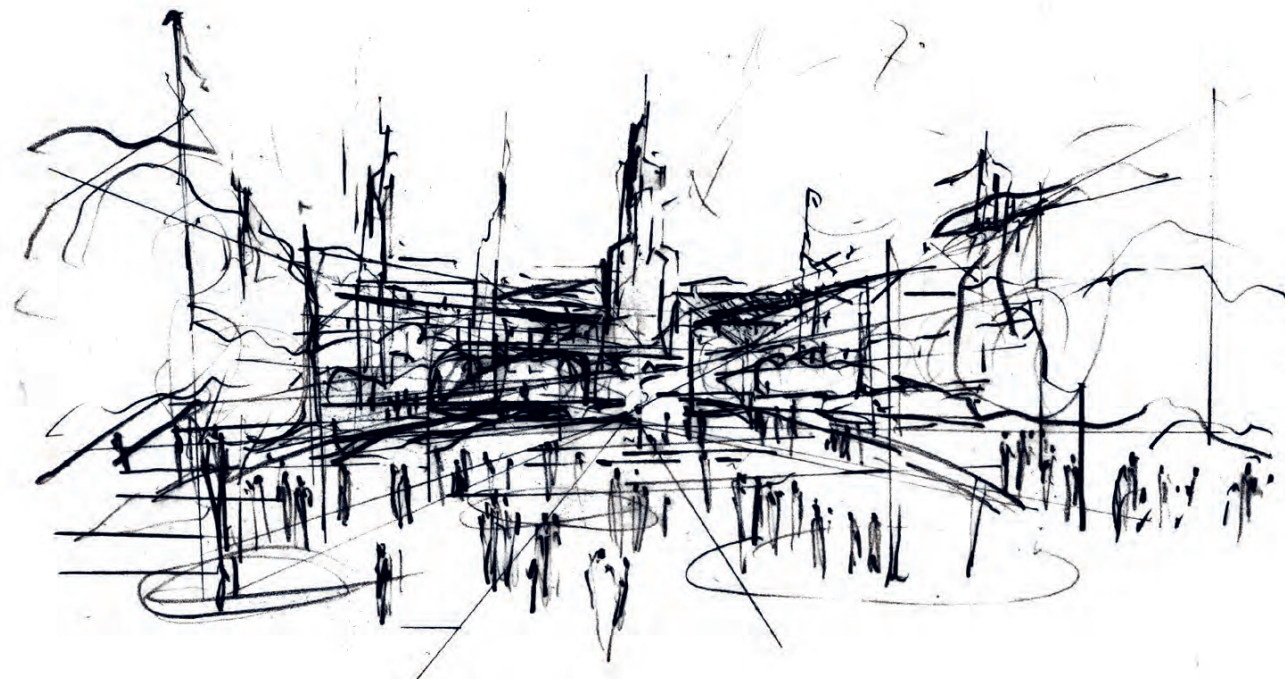
This document should serve as a guide for administrative and political decisions while offering a template for future capital projects, working at the nexus of quality-of-life, economic development, and cultural heritage. It was created in collaboration with the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center throughout Fall 2015 with ongoing input from the citizens of Gretna.

The report also serves as a complement to the concurrent study conducted by the Project for Public Spaces. While PPS focused on providing recommendations for immediate and fast-track solutions, Gretna 2020 will focus on middle and long-term improvements to the public realm.

TEAM

This report was created by the City of Gretna in collaboration with the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center (TRUDC) and students of the Tulane School of Architecture. The Center works closely with towns and cities across the Gulf South to envision public spaces, provide planning services, and engage citizens around issues of design.

TRUDC provides design and planning services augmented by the energy and ideas of our professional degree students. The Center engages residents, businesses, city leaders, administrators, and staff to ensure the creation of realistic visions, goals, and schematic designs.



FOCUS AREA



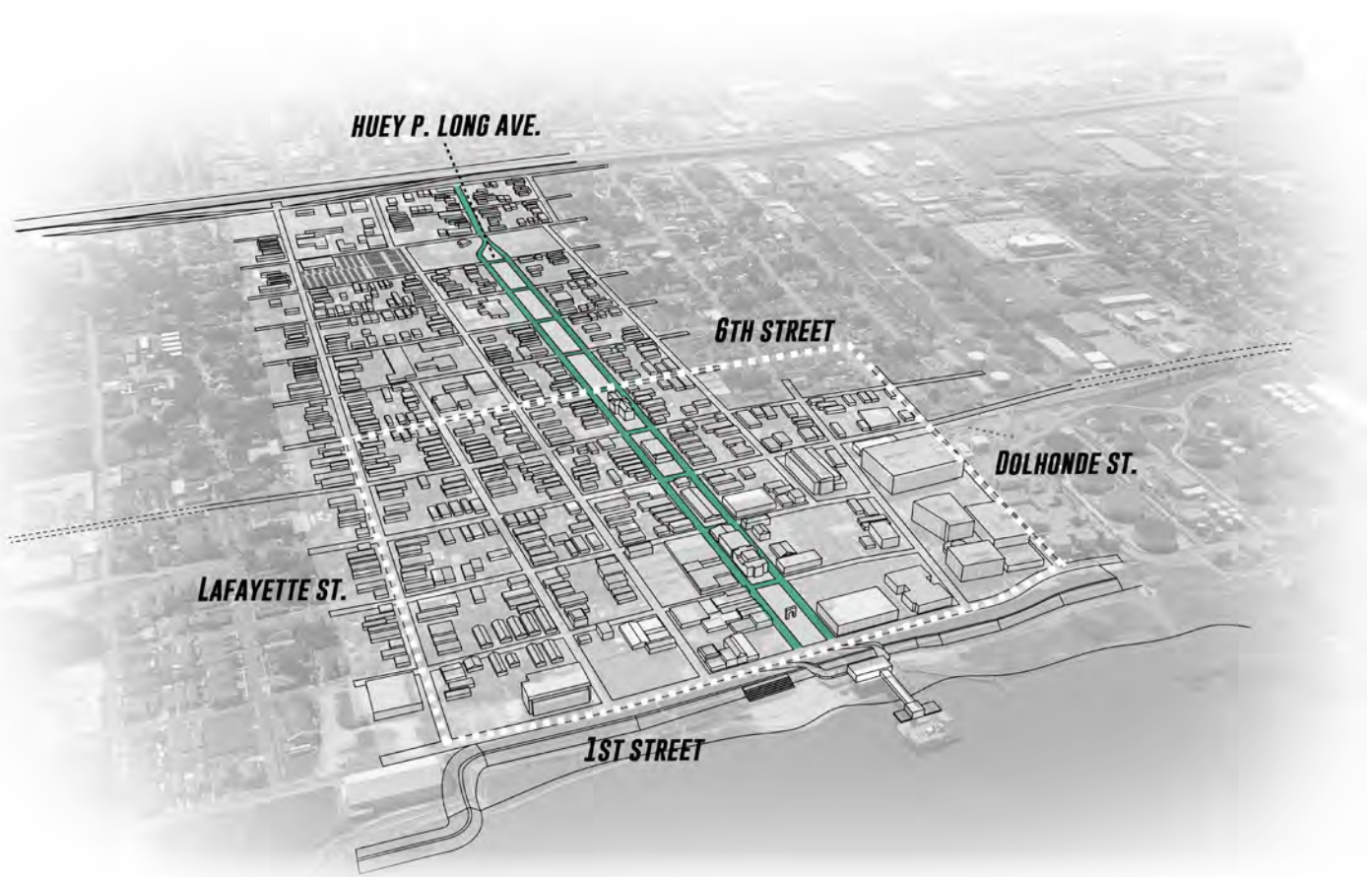
Downtown Gretna features the greatest number of civic and cultural institutions in the city, and serves as a hub for markets, festivals, and other events. This study focuses on downtown in order to reinforce the area's character and charm, including historic buildings, cultural entities & art, walkable streets, a regular schedule of events, and a family-friendly atmosphere. The report will suggest using improvements in the public realm to create a consistent visual experience, serve community needs, and ultimately attract additional commerce.



Small business often forms the backbone of towns and cities such as Gretna. Making improvements to the public realm, including streetscapes, upgrades to Memorial Square and the levee, street furniture, drainage, and lighting represent continued investment in the strength of downtown and its ability to draw both residents and visitors to the area.



Gretna's rich history began along the Mississippi River in McDonoghville, Mechanikham, and Gretna. These historic communities, alongside newer neighborhoods throughout the City, form the basis for Gretna's identity, visual character, and architectural heritage.



The enclosed study and schematic designs are focused on Historic Downtown Gretna. Small downtowns in US cities typically served as economic drivers until automobile-serving commercial corridors and suburban development became prevalent in the second half of the 20th century. However, downtowns have enjoyed a resurgence in the last decade as more and more people seek out neighborhoods with historic character and contain mixed uses in a walkable setting.

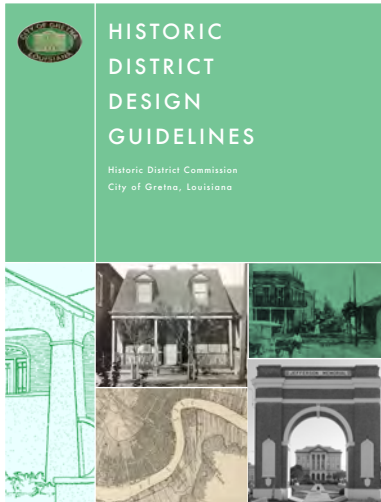
The City of Gretna has worked hard to create a dynamic environment in the downtown, including regular festivals, riverfront entertainment, the farmers market, holiday displays, and recreational space. This report focuses on downtown in order to build on these ongoing efforts, encourage continued economic development, and to create a destination that can serve residents and visitors alike.

The primary study area is from Lafayette Street to Dolhonde Street, and from 6th Street to the Mississippi River. In addition, the entire Huey P. Long Avenue corridor has been closely considered, along with several other satellite locations that represent common entry points into the downtown.

CONCURRENT PLANNING PROJECTS

The City of Gretna has undertaken a number of planning initiatives which, taken collectively, will continue to build on the success of Downtown with benefits to the entire city. Outlined below are recently completed or ongoing planning and design projects that represent a concerted effort on behalf of the City Administration to improve infrastructure, provide public amenities, and distinguish Gretna as a unique destination on the Westbank and the entire metro area.

DOWNTOWN:



Historic District Design Guidelines

Created to protect the architectural character of historic Gretna, the Historic District Design Guidelines require that all properties within the designated district pass a design review process during renovation of existing buildings or new construction.

The guidelines ensure that renovations are completed with architectural details and proportions appropriate to a building's original style, and that new buildings are created within the scale and style of Gretna's existing urban fabric.



Project for Public Spaces

PPS is an organization that advocates for the principles of good planning in the public realm. The organization espouses a highly participatory public planning process, and often suggests short-term interventions to improve public space, referred to as a lighter/quicker/cheaper strategy.



PPS visited Gretna in September 2015, hosted a public planning meeting focused on Huey P. Long Ave. between 1st and 4th Streets, and issued a report that summarizes public input into suggestions for block-by-block streetscape improvements, provides precedent examples for review, and proposes a number of fast-track changes that could jump-start the process of improving Downtown. More information can be found at www.pps.org.



Main Street

Gretna has achieved designation as a Certified Local Government, which allows for application to the national Main Street program. This designation was achieved, in part, when the City enacted its historic preservation ordinance and began to enforce the ordinance through a local preservation commission.

Main Street is a national network of over 2,000 historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. Application to this organization signals Gretna's dedication to the continued success of downtown. Participation in Main Street requires a significant commitment by a local body given authority by the city to guide the downtown's branding, promotion, and creation of a safe, inviting environment for all.

Gretna recognizes the importance of neighborhoods across the entire city, and has secured funding to undertake a complete review and restructuring of the City's comprehensive zoning ordinance. This work will be conducted by a professional planning team and provide needed updates to the existing code. Such analysis will allow the City to evaluate its physical condition across the entire city, and encourage continued development while protecting the current character and quality of life enjoyed by Gretna residents.



The improvements are an opportunity to improve the visual streetscape, address drainage and sustainability issues, and improve both pedestrian safety and the experience of drivers traversing this section of State roadway.

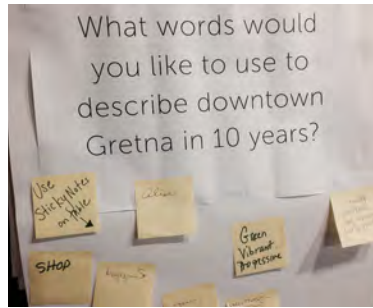


The proposed 4th Street extension is an important project that will remove significant truck traffic from Downtown Gretna. The long-planned project is funded and will begin in 2016 with Phase 1 from Burmaster to Richard Street.



DOWNTOWN VISIONING PROCESS

PUBLIC MEETINGS



02

This study envisions Downtown Gretna as a unique family, cultural, recreational, and commercial destination for the Westbank & Jefferson Parish. The City enjoys numerous existing assets including historic architecture, spectacular river views, robust civic programming, and walkability. With the addition of careful branding and consistent visual character across public investments, Downtown Gretna will continue its rise as a great city center with a small town feel.

GOALS

The goal of this study and its recommendations is to encourage implementation of both short and long-term improvements within the public realm, including roadway and plaza materials, programming additions to Memorial Square, and a number of other primary goals:

- Provide a common vision for the continued success and revitalization of downtown Gretna
- Cluster activities in downtown that would support Gretna as a destination, including trips by East Bank residents across the river

- Examine parking use to avoid over-supply and support a quality pedestrian experience
- Provide safe and accessible multi-modal transportation to attract added users, helping to activate and enliven the downtown
- Create a brand for downtown planning and revitalization that will remain consistent and recognizable for 5 or more years
- Create a destination that appeals to residents and visitors of all ages

ASSETS



Memorial Square

The square serves as a public center and is a recognizable destination and focus point for visitors. It also provides for:

- Gathering/seating in park-like setting
- Civic pride via holiday displays, etc.

Downtown Residents

A growing number of residents live close to downtown and provide a level of energy and activity necessary for any successful town center.

City Hall

The historic building serves as an idyllic backdrop for Memorial Square, provides city services in the heart of downtown, and further activates the City's primary urban open space.

Farmers Market

The weekly market brings countless residents to downtown, providing foot and vehicle traffic that can help to attract additional commerce to the area. Its location also draws visitors further up Huey P. Long Ave., moving away from a singular focus on Memorial Square, and increasing chances that visitors will come to Gretna for more than one consecutive activity.

Cultural Institutions

From the German-American Cultural Center to the City's new theater and civic venue, from the Rail Depot to the open-air pavilion, Gretna has a wealth of concentrated civic resources, activities, and institutions.

Parish Buildings & Employees

Though dominant in size, the parish courts & other buildings provide an employment base and contribute to the level of commercial patronage downtown.

Walkability

Gretna's historic grid and mixed-use development ensures that the downtown remains an accessible and attractive place to live and work.





Levee

The levee literally brings people to downtown via its levee-top recreational trail. It also serves as a venue for festivals and regular music and film programming, passive activities such as dog walking and frisbee, and provides a visual reminder of the City's connection with and access to New Orleans.

- View
- Recreation
- Festivals

Historic Context / Buildings

Preservation efforts have and will ensure Gretna's historic qualities remain intact.

Safety / Affordability / Access to New Orleans

These are all popular reasons for locating in Gretna.

Public Programming

The City and civic organizations offer a whole host of planned and casual events that include:

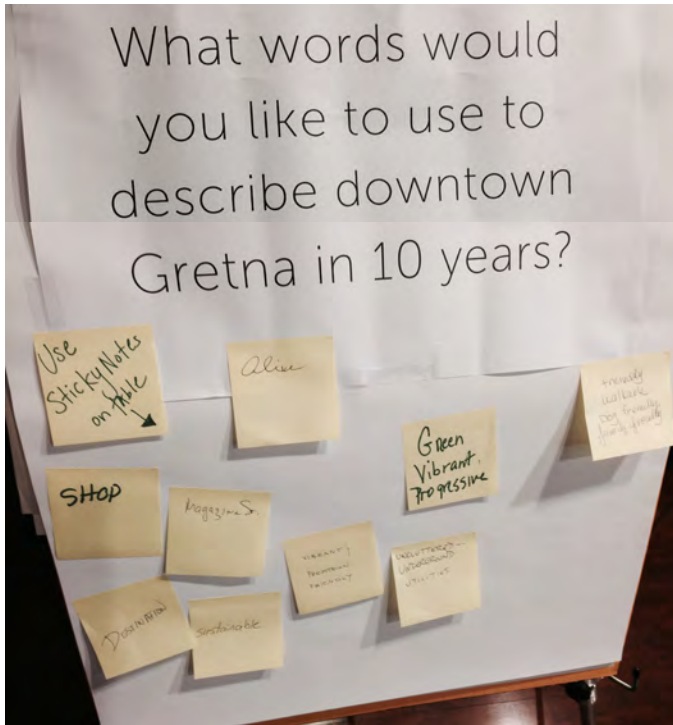
- Riverfront drive-ins & concerts
- Festivals
- Food truck night
- Artwalk

Small Business

A number of small businesses are located downtown, and represent the backbone of the City's past present & future.



OUTREACH & COMMUNITY INPUT



PUBLIC MEETING #1

In September of 2015, Project for Public Spaces was welcomed by the City of Gretna to provide initial observations about downtown and host a public meeting focused on participatory planning and citizen input. This was one of the first times citizens were asked to come together to help shape the future of the City.

The planning session provided information about immediate and short-term investment ideas in the public realm, such as curb bump-outs, street painting, and streetscape improvements. Planning leaders showed examples from other communities throughout the US and abroad, which spurred discussion and group brainstorming.

Notably, separate working groups performed block-by-block surveying, cataloging existing assets and possible improvements along Huey P. Long Ave. from the levee to 4th Street, in order to encompass the most visible, central, civic area within the downtown.

While this successful engagement and participatory planning informed the downtown visioning study contained in this report, Project for Public Spaces will also issue its own observations and report from its findings.



WHAT WE HEARD

It is important to reflect upon the comments and observations of the meeting participants, as they serve alongside municipal representatives as the local experts on Downtown Gretna and possibilities for its improvement. It is also critical to

distill these brainstorm and conversations into identifiable categories. These action areas then necessarily inform the design recommendations contained in this report.

WORDS TO DESCRIBE DOWNTOWN IN 2020

-Green/vibrant/progressive

-Sustainable

-Alive

-Shop

-Magazine Street

-Friendly/walkable/dog & family friendly

-Uncluttered (underground utilities)

-Vibrant & pedestrian friendly

Green infrastructure/
water management

Recruit more retail &
restaurants

Install consistent streetscape/
landscaping

ACTIVITIES YOU WANT TO SEE IN DOWNTOWN

-Walking on closed streets (weekends)

-Ride a bike or walk from other sections of town

-Strong sense of community

-people know and greet each other

-local businesses thrive w/support of people and govt.

-opportunities for all to be involved in decisions that affect us all

-Watch live music/attend festivals

-Eat and do fun activities

-Converse with friends

-Enjoy more restaurants

-Shop/watch movies

-Day spa/nail spa

Identify/prioritize common
pedestrian routes

Shaded public seating /
Build on festival success

Recruit more retail &
restaurants

OUTREACH & COMMUNITY INPUT



PUBLIC MEETING #2

In October of 2015, the City of Gretna asked the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center to host a public planning session focused on the downtown. After participating in the prior planning session, TRUDC was able to build upon the planning principles and subsequent discussions from the first downtown-focused meeting.

Calling once again upon the citizens of Gretna, the session provided a framework for discussion while relying on group work sessions to answer key questions that would inform the creation of a visual identity for downtown. Three working groups were formed to provide the planners with observations, ideas, and the lived experience of local citizens:

Gateways

Participants were shown precedent examples for gateways to stress the importance of identifying the various entryways into downtown; group discussion revolved around signage and other wayfinding techniques including visual installations, murals and art, street painting, and other concepts.

Waterfront

The waterfront team focused on Memorial Square and the levee as infrastructural pieces critical to the identity and success of downtown. Given the City's success with planned festivals and civic programming, the group focused on physical

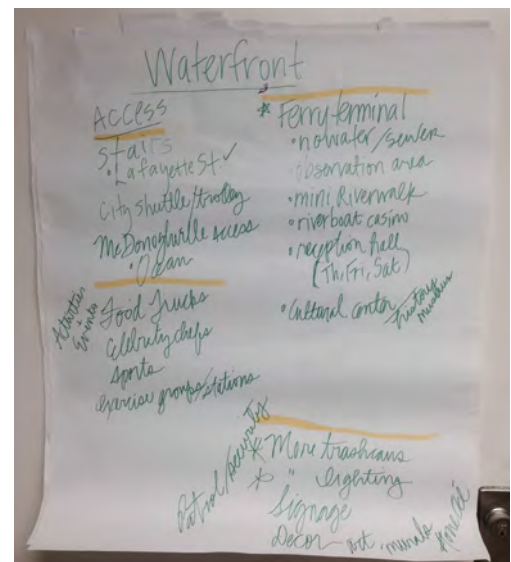
improvements to encourage increased passive use of these public areas. While activities specific to children might be accommodated within Memorial Square, less formal areas could be defined along the riverside of the levee, including permanent seating, shading, volleyball, and more.

Huey P. Long Ave.

The group discussed strategies to create a consistent visual character along "Huey P.," keeping in mind the needs of its multi-modal users from bikes to pedestrians to vehicle traffic. Participants pointed out problem areas for both cars and pedestrians, and ideas included material changes at intersections, landscaping, and speed control devices.

WHAT WE HEARD

Comments and ideas were noted in each group and reported out to the larger meeting. As in the first public session, group work provided focus on key areas and topics and have thus informed the conceptual planning recommendations and design possibilities laid out within this report.



GATEWAYS & WAYFINDING

- Consistent gateways
- See Audubon Place/Fountainbleu
- Consider under the overpass
- Overhead signage
- Include Stumpf & Lafayette

Execute gateway installations simultaneously for visual consistency and greatest impact

Explore vertical markers and signage where truck traffic prevents overhead signage

Consider additional highway exit gateways

WATERFRONT & MEMORIAL SQUARE

- More levee access
- Food trucks, seating for restaurants
- Exercise stations
- Trash receptacles, lighting, art
- Reception Hall @ Ferry Terminal
- Viewing binoculars
- Make it a destination
- Water element

Accommodate outdoor / informal dining

Provide defined areas for non-programmed activities such as volleyball

Include fountain or splash pad in Memorial Square

Add levee access stair at Lafayette & in McDonoghville (Ocean St. or alternative)

Additional public furniture for square and levee

HUEY P. LONG AVE.

- Lighting all the way down Huey P.
- Diversified retail/commercial
- Consistent landscaping additions
- Public art

Install consistent streetscape/landscaping/lighting

Recruit additional retailers to downtown

Consider public art for levee & neutral ground

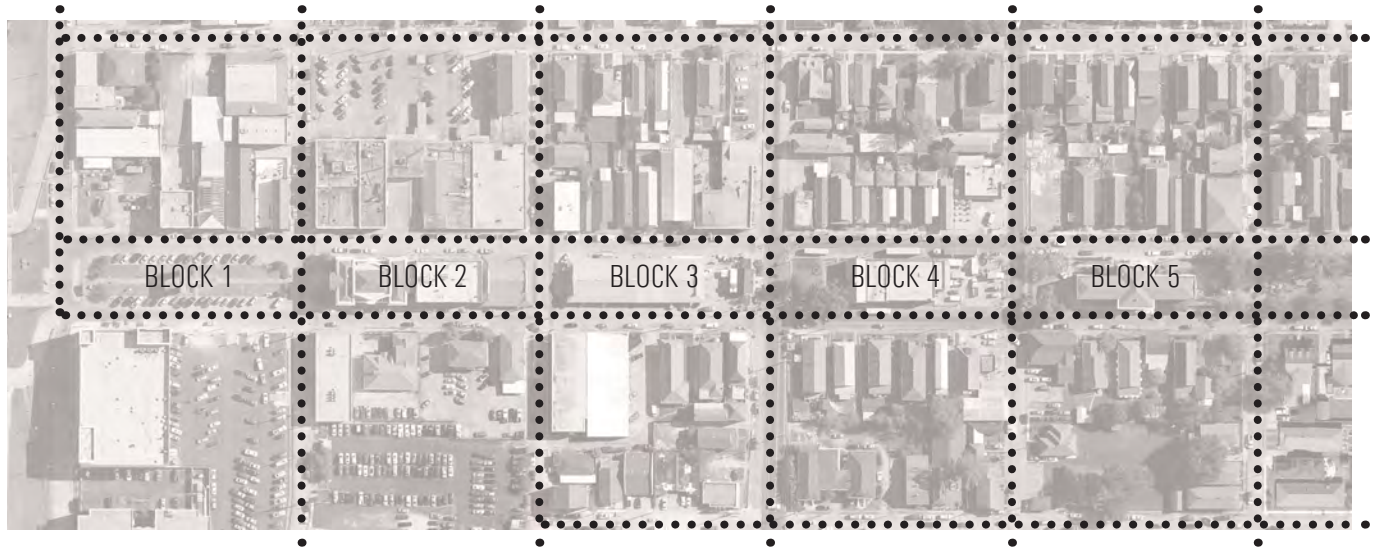
ANALYSIS

PARKING

Accommodating vehicles requires an ongoing measure of compromise for any city. Providing space for vehicles is critical to support both visitors and residents, yet an overabundance of urban space given to parking can create a negative experience for pedestrians, and uses space that might otherwise hold new development.

This study observed parking occupancies within two blocks of Huey P. Long Ave. at several key times during a typical week, and can broadly conclude that apart from during festivals and major events, parking is available within 1/8th of a mile (approx. 2 blocks) of almost any destination in Downtown Gretna. Such availability is well within the typical 1/4 mile threshold most commonly noted as the distance Americans are willing to walk to commercial destinations. Though block-by-block analysis is most telling, an overall average parking occupancy of less than 50% demonstrates that parking availability is not a significant issue in Gretna. Parking spaces counted do not include handicapped parking, permit only parking, residential-only parking, or private lots.

DAY & TIME	PUBLIC PARKING SPACE USAGE (Averages)									
	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3		Block 4		Block 5	
Weekday afternoon	61/115	53%	26/66	39%	41/114	36%	31/45	69%	23/91	25%
Weekday morning	65/115	57%	32/66	48%	37/114	32%	22/45	49%	33/91	36%
Farmers Market morning	77/115	67%	57/66	86%	109/114	96%	36/45	80%	45/91	49%
Weekend evening	55/115	48%	25/66	38%	33/114	29%	31/45	69%	40/91	44%



"It's estimated that there are three nonresidential parking spaces for every car in the United States. Such coverage comes with environmental costs. The large, impervious surfaces of parking lots increase storm-water runoff, which damages watersheds. The exposed pavement increases the heat-island effect, by which urban regions are made warmer than surrounding rural areas."

-Eran Ben-Joseph, Professor of Urban Planning, MIT



Conclusions:

- Parking is adequate for most to all of the observed times, including peak usage during the business day, weekday lunch, and farmers market.

- The subtraction of a small amount of parking spaces in Memorial Square or elsewhere will likely not affect access to business or courts.

- In order to create a critical mass of businesses in Downtown, additional development could be pursued on open parking lots without overall detrimental effect.

- Maintenance of consistent parallel parking options will ensure that businesses maintain parking very near their locations.

- Continued enforcement of paid parking and 2hr. limits will ensure that customers will be able to park near local businesses and that street parking is not disproportionately used by those with day-long parking needs.

- As streetscape improvements are made and private development continues, pedestrians will be willing to walk further distances; if the walking experience is a pleasant one, with plenty to see and do along the way, parking several blocks from ones destination will not represent a burden.

ANALYSIS

STREET CONDITIONS & PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

The conditions and quality of public right of ways (including roads and sidewalks) directly relate to accessibility, pedestrian safety, drainage, and the visual character of downtown. Broadly, the existing sidewalk & street conditions in Downtown Gretna are good, with particular consideration of the metro area's challenging soil conditions and frequent inundation. As in all cities, however, improvements could be made. Outlined below are several opportunities for repairs, improvements, and other future considerations aimed at providing easy accessibility, a high quality of life for residents, and an attractive urban landscape that can attract additional businesses to the area.



Curbs & Sidewalks

In several locations, and most prominently riverbound on Huey P. Long Ave. between 1st & 2nd Streets (Memorial Square), the curb is abnormally high in relation to the street level. Both administrators and residents have pointed out that it can block car doors and make it difficult for elderly and disabled residents to ascend. The curb height may add drainage capacity during street flooding events, but it hinders pedestrian access in one of the busiest parts of downtown.

Alternate means of water management can include permeable paving strips in the parallel parking zone, which could be executed in conjunction with the reduction of curb height at this location.



More prevalent than the issue outlined above is the opposite condition, shown at left. While streets often crest in the center to aid in drainage, the street surface should terminate at a raised curb to ensure runoff does not continue onto sidewalks, but rather into municipal drains. This is another instance where permeable paving used in the parallel parking area can help to capture some street runoff and prevent pooling on streets and sidewalks. [Riverbound Huey P. Long Ave. at 4th Street]



Special Materials

While the prevalent street and sidewalk material is concrete, special materials are used at several locations along Huey P. Long Ave. to indicate pedestrian crosswalks, including at 2nd & 3rd Streets. While using alternate materials can pose a maintenance challenge, it is often an effective way to create a pedestrian-friendly environment by choosing materials that relate to the human rather than vehicular scale. The materials can also be raised at intersection crossings to serve as both a speed “table” and an indicator of safe crossing. [Expressway-bound Huey P. Long Ave. at 3rd Street]



Curb Bump-outs & Landscaping

Due to Downtown’s relatively dense urban layout, there is not a high prevalence of street trees or landscaping. However, there are a number of urban spaces that represent missed opportunities for additional landscaping, and can also help with water management. Yellow-striping as shown at left is used throughout downtown to indicate no-parking areas, or to help define the lane of vehicle traffic. Making sure to consider vehicle turning radii, with special notice of trucks and emergency vehicles, these painted areas can be converted into planted bump-outs with curbed edges. If concern for vehicle turning radii make such bump-outs impossible, they can still safely be converted to permeable paving to aid in drainage and provide visual relief from the dominant look of concrete. The planned 4th Street extension will help take truck traffic off the streets of Downtown, and should eliminate the need for truck traffic to traverse Huey P. Long Ave. between 4th and 5th Streets, ultimately allowing for even further greening of the Avenue. [Riverbound Huey P. Long Ave. at 3rd Street]



Street Furniture & Shading

Benches and trash cans are located throughout downtown, and provide a consistent service to residents and visitors. There is an opportunity, however, to create more highly utilized seating areas in conjunction with landscaping and other means of providing shade.

Benches by the Memorial Arch (left) provide a place to sit, but do not offer shade or a real sense of place. The benches in front of City Hall provide a better example of how seating and landscaping can be combined to provide shade and create a desirable outdoor experience.

ANALYSIS

LIGHTING

Lighting is an important element that contributes to safety, accessibility, and a consistent visual character. To build up the commercial success of Downtown Gretna, it is important to provide a safe and well-lit walking environment. Increasingly, new homeowners are seeking walkable, mixed-use downtowns that provide a variety of services within walking distance of home. The experience of walking needs to be a pleasant one to encourage additional and longer-distance pedestrian trips. Lighting is critical to maintaining Gretna's reputation as a safe city, and providing peace of mind to residents walking to their homes or cars after enjoying dinner Downtown.



Lighting along Huey P. Long Ave. between 11th and 6th Streets includes consistent use of traditional lamp posts, which double as banner-holders for seasonal and other signage needs. The pairing of lamp posts at Huey P. Long & 11th, before the street splits to accommodate a neutral ground, also provides a visual emphasis of this natural “gateway” into Downtown.



Larger lamp posts are used between 6th and 1st Streets, and while they also feature banners, the lighting can appear out of scale with the character of Downtown Gretna. Using a consistent but smaller-scaled lamp post could provide a pedestrian-scaled amenity that would fit in better with the small downtown feel of Gretna, and be better paired with banners, planters, and other suggested streetscape improvements.



URBAN PRINCIPLES & VISUAL CHARACTER

Creating consistent edges along the streets of Downtown Gretna is an important feature of urban life that provides visual interest and allows for a concentration of various services and amenities within a short walking distance. This reduces the need to drive to each destination, and allows small businesses to benefit from the customer base of those around them.

While the Parish Courthouse and associated buildings provide an important level of activity and potential customer base, their associated surface parking dominates the entire upper side of Memorial Square, which historically featured a large theater and a number of small businesses. While parking remains a legitimate need for both Parish and local entities, additional commercial development in this location would better serve the long-term needs of Downtown. In the short term, however, there are many substitutes to the creation of an urban edge. Street trees, low fencing in combination with hedges and other landscaping, or both could help the large Parish parking lot help to better define the street edge and provide a sense of completeness to Memorial Square.

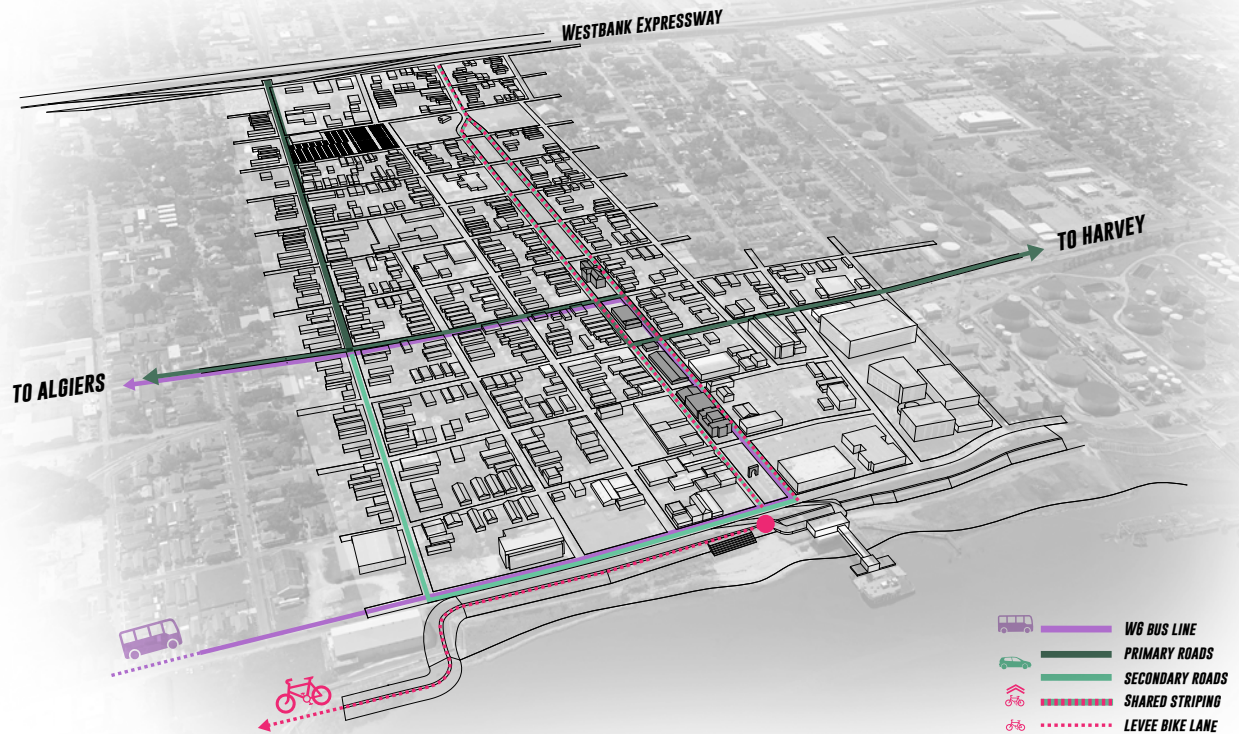


This historic photo of Memorial Square shows how the original street edge completed all three sides of the square, defining a true sense of place.



Even when inactive, this sleepy Oregon town provides a high quality pedestrian experience with continuous development along the street edge, transparency on the groundfloor to provide visual interest, and streetscape amenities including lighting, brick crosswalks, and flower baskets.

PRECEDENTS & ACTION AREAS

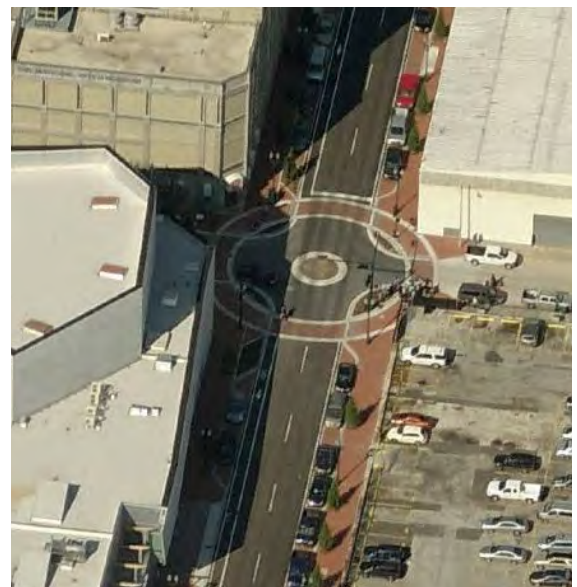


MOBILITY

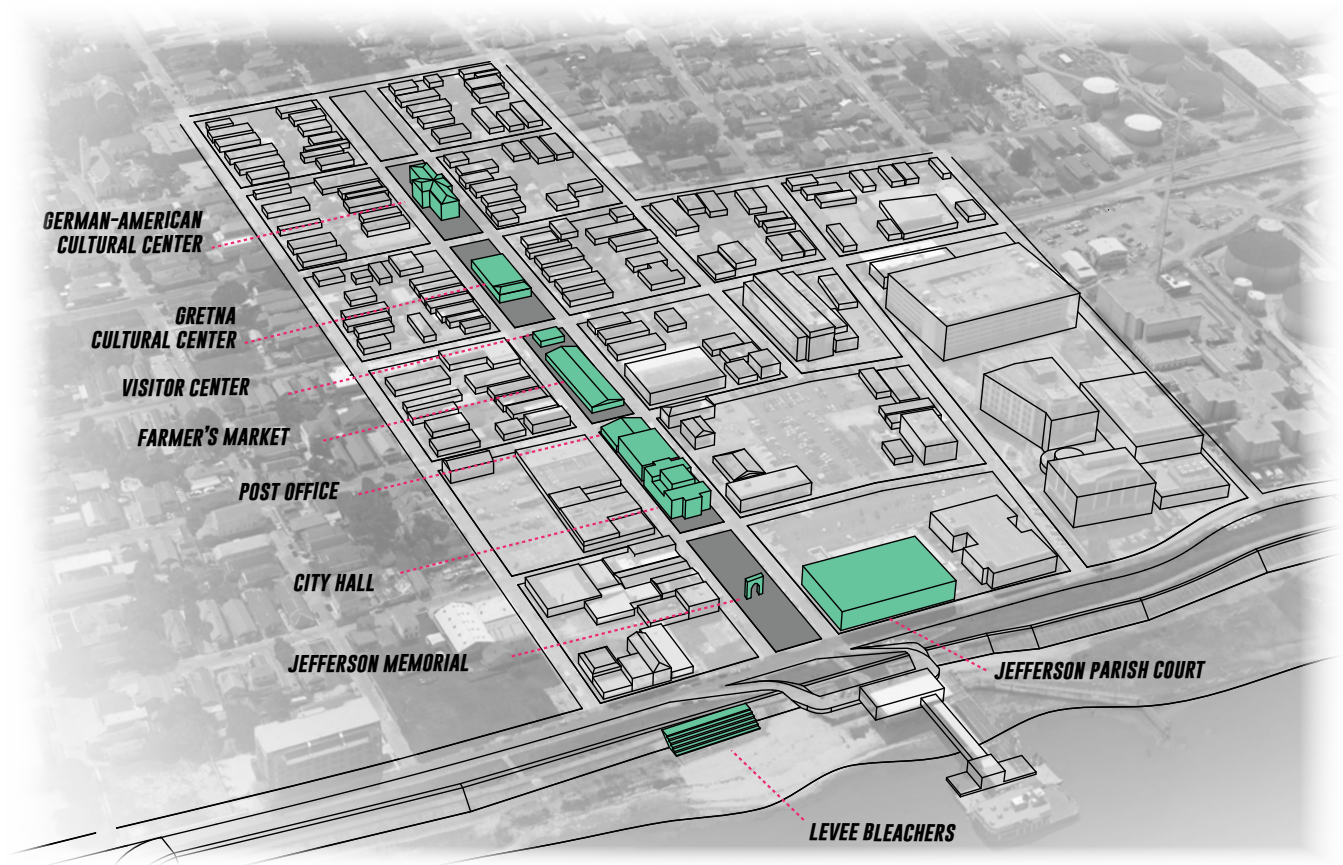
Mobility, and accessibility for multiple modes of transport are what mark the success of many small towns and cities. Classic planning studies observe that people seek out other people, whether in densely populated cities or friendly town squares.

As investments are made in the public arena, they should be structured to consider all modes of transport, with particular attention on the quality of the pedestrian experience. Streets should be repaired and maintained to accommodate vehicles and provide drainage capacity, but additional investments should be made to prioritize bicyclists and pedestrians.

Bicycle racks can be paired with curb bump-outs and landscaping to ensure bikes remain safe and out of the way, while paving materials, street trees, and planters will encourage additional foot traffic. Given the narrow width of most downtown streets, bicycle “share-striping, already installed along Huey P. Long Ave. is likely the best option for alerting motorists of their duty to yield to cyclists. Fully-striped bike lanes would be appropriate for wider streets such as 5th Street.



Material changes can serve as visual cues that help vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians increase their awareness of other modes of travel [Magazine Street adjacent to the National WWII Museum]



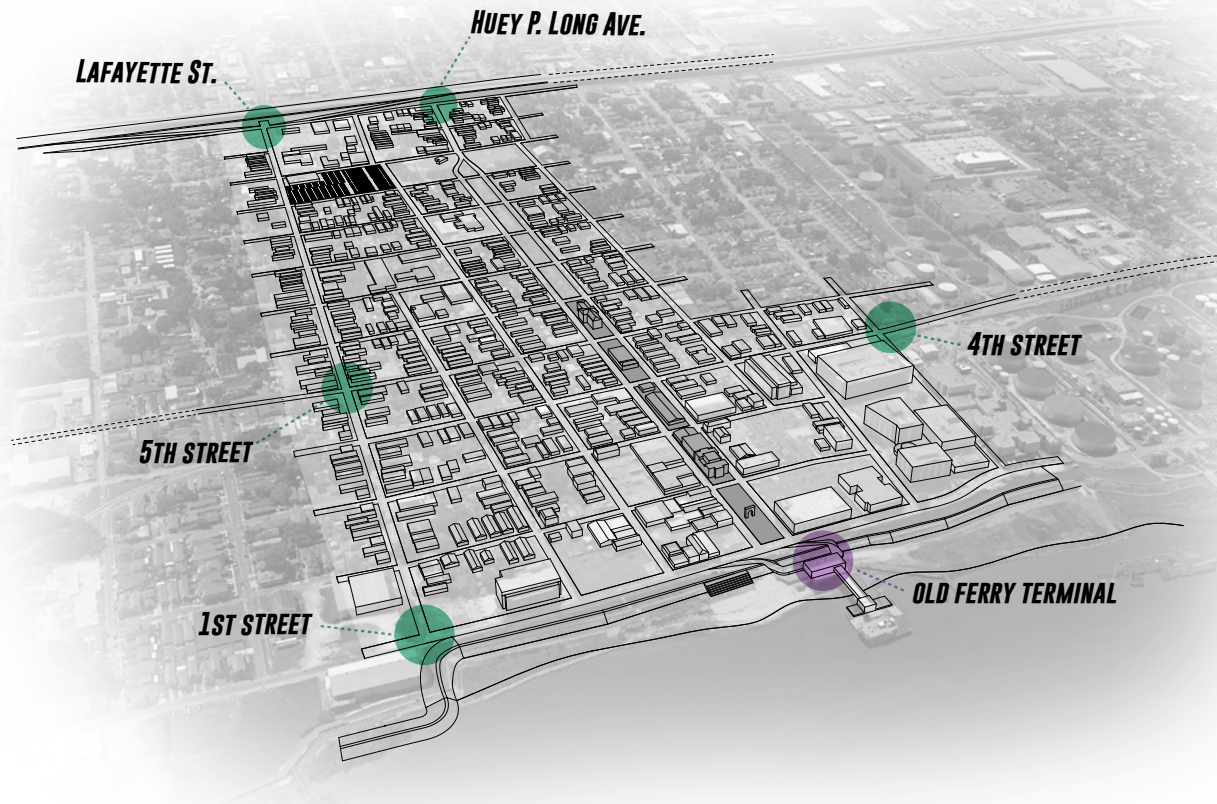
CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS

A concentration of civic and cultural attractions are located along Huey P. Long Ave. between 6th & 1st Streets, culminating in Memorial Square and the levee. It is important to support these institutions and continue to invest in the public realm around them, as they represent unique amenities which distinguish Downtown Gretna from other towns and cities.

Cumulatively, these institutions form a linear center or “spine” that help to define Downtown and benefit the small businesses locating along Huey P. Long Ave. This is the area where public investments will be seen and felt by the most residents and visitors.



PRECEDENTS & ACTION AREAS

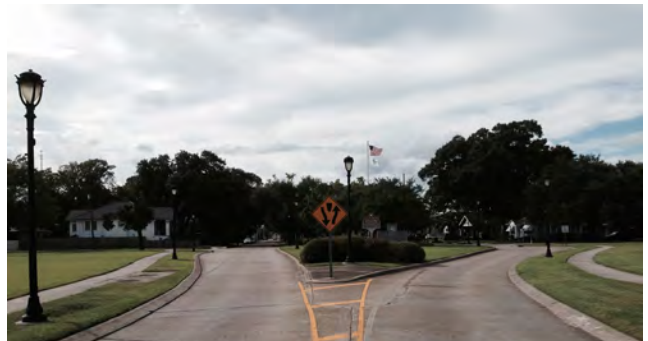


GATEWAYS

Gateways are critical to any destination that relies upon visual markers, signage, and wayfinding. Visitors and even some residents of Gretna may be unfamiliar with the easiest routes to downtown, and should be aided by a series of signs or other visual means indicating the proximity and direction of downtown.

Primary gateways to the downtown include:

- Lafayette St. at Westbank Expressway
- Huey P. Long Ave. at Westbank Expressway
- Lafayette St. at 5th St.
- Lafayette St. at 1st St.
- Dolhonde St. at 4th St.
- Ferry Terminal (inactive)



An existing gateway at Huey P. Long Ave. and 11th St. mark the beginning of the avenue's neutral ground, but is seen much less often than the peripheral gateways and could benefit from additional visual markers or signage.



Gateways are sometimes marked with physically defined entryway signage. A challenge for this study was to identify and prioritize entry points that might help both residents and visitors define the outer limits and reach of Gretna's downtown, and its need for identification at high-traffic corridors at its periphery.



Highway signage is often helpful in drawing visitors to a downtown and/or historic area they might not know about, or are aware of but have never visited. Gretna should pursue signage placement along the Westbank Expressway and its service roads.



Traditional monument signage used in conjunction with landscaping is the most common way to announce entry into a particular town, neighborhood, or zone. Gretna may elect to utilize a variety of related signage solutions depending on their location and the contextual scale of their surroundings.



Murals and other artwork can provide temporary or sometimes permanent visual interest, particularly on building sides that lack openings or architectural details. Gretna has already implemented several murals and should work with additional building owners where possible to enhance the visual experience along unadorned or underdeveloped portions of downtown.

PRECEDENTS & ACTION AREAS



MEMORIAL SQUARE

The riverfront square forms the heart of Downtown Gretna, features major centers of employment, civic services, and strong local businesses. The square deserves focus because it is so often visited, and its improvement will be seen and felt by almost all downtown visitors.

The current open space is attractively arranged yet serves almost exclusively as a pedestrian through-way. Aside from a few unshaded seating areas, the square does not provide for any other activities in its current configuration.

The connection of the square to the levee is another missed opportunity marked by potted palms but without clear pedestrian crossings or logical pick-up zones for the public transit circulator.



Due to the visibility of parking beside the Parish courthouse, in addition to vacant buildings across the square, the urban edges of the historic square are far from intact, and do not provide a consistent pedestrian experience that might draw visitors with additional commercial locations, restaurants, & shops.



The square in Sedalia, MO (top) provides a passive park space, while Contra Costa's town square (bottom) uses a more active approach, with spaces for vendors, urban seating, and a water feature.

These challenges call for the use of landscaping, reduced parking, clear crosswalks, added programming, shade, and other amenities. All of these must be paired with a long-term solution to develop or redevelop the empty lots and vacant buildings along the square, allowing the square to operate as it once did in its historical heyday.



Rain gardens can capture and naturally filter water, help to define the street edge, provide beauty and visual interest, and serve to visually unite areas through repetitive installation.



Curb bump-outs paired with landscaping create a welcoming pedestrian environment by shortening street crossings and visually highlighting safe zones, can be designed to accommodate even large turning vehicles, and provide a space for landscaping and water capture.

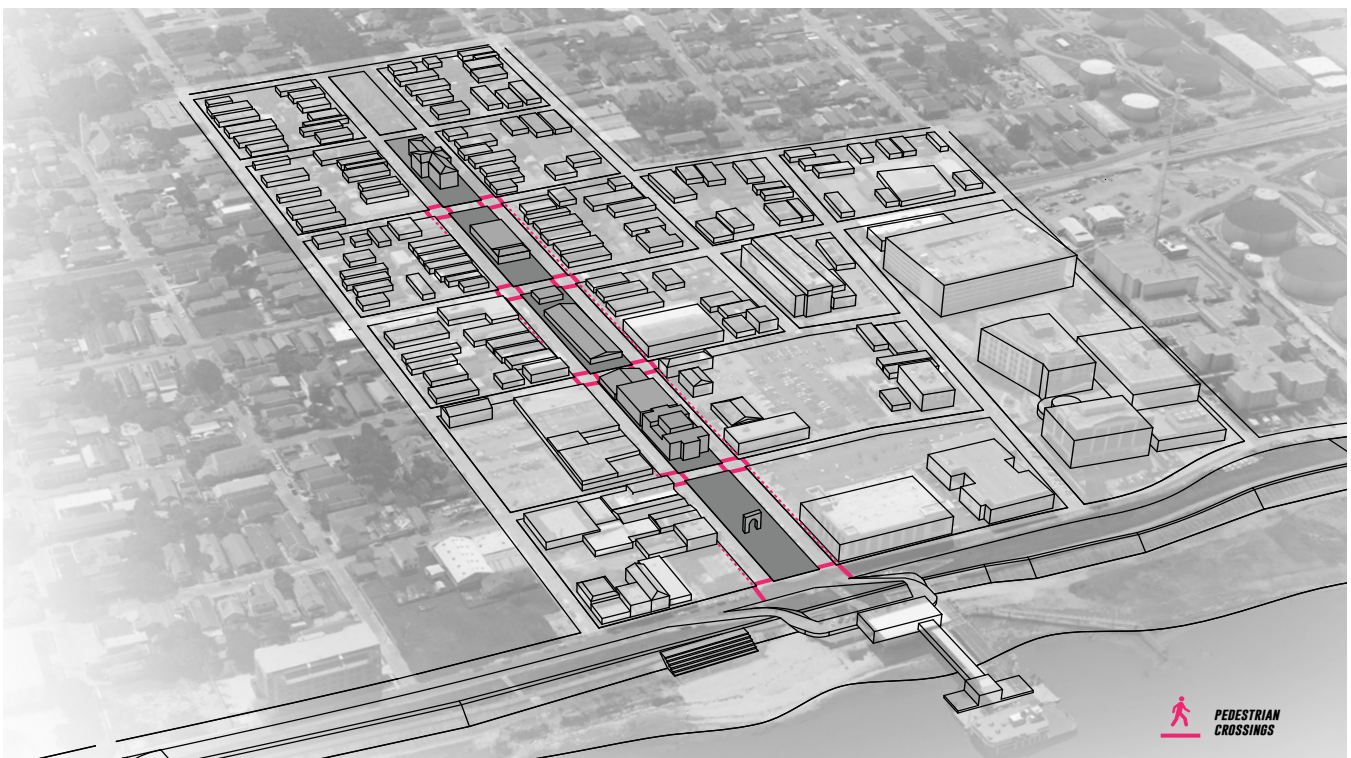
STREETSCAPE

Improvements along public streets can include seating, lighting, landscaping, waste management, and more. Such investments are often quickly felt, but must be also be carefully maintained over time.

Repetitive streetscape improvements, including lamppost banners, planters, and others are common ways to establish a common visual language along a corridor or within an urban district. The simple experience of seeing the same type of installation throughout a downtown can aid residents and visitors in sensing the district as a whole. Gretna's historic design guidelines contribute to this concept through the protection of Gretna's consistent architectural scale and heritage. New streetscape improvements will similarly need to respond to the existing context, meet needs identified through public meetings, and be applied consistently across the downtown.

Streetscape improvements often represent quick and relatively low-cost options for cities looking to improve the visual character of their downtowns, and can be paired with more capital-intensive long-term solutions.

Fast-growing trees can provide shade and screen unwanted vistas, as larger slow-growth trees become established. Street painting can grab the attention of passers-by, while brick or stone crosswalks and intersections provide a long-term solution for creating a consistent visual identity and increasing the awareness of both pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.





JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

PHOENIX IRON WORKS
About 700 feet SW of
this site, east first son
for their Corporation. They
on a May 1901. The gun,
a 10-inch diameter,
fired an 8-inch diameter
explosive shell. A powder
blast was reported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DESIGN CONCEPTS



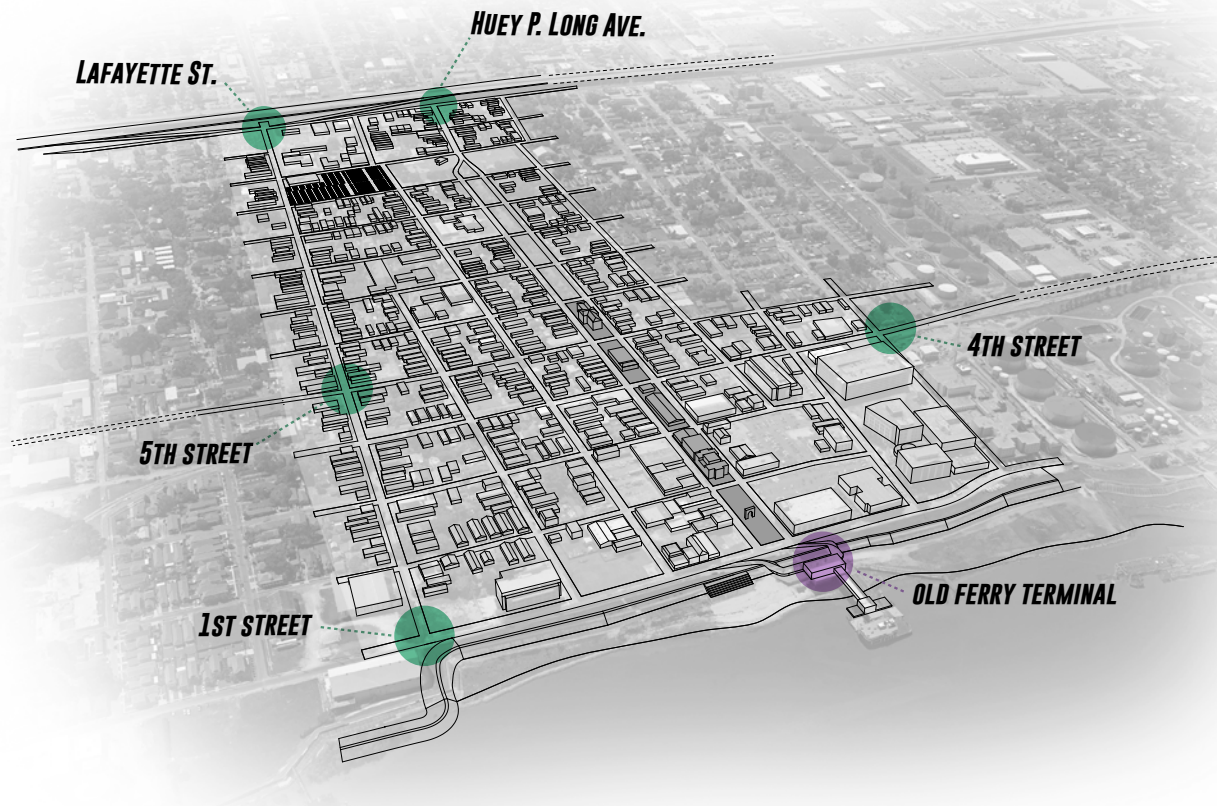
03

The following recommendations include design concepts, planning principles, focus areas, signage, & architectural design. While the designs provided are conceptual, the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center will continue to work with the City of Gretna to identify paths to implementation.

The design ideas represent a coalescing of input from the city administration, elected officials, residents, and business owners. Associated renderings are not final solutions, but represent realistic options to be carried forward by the City towards the vision of Gretna 2020.

While it would be impossible to undertake every suggested solution within the 2020 timeframe, this report recommends an approach that considers each of the primary study areas and creates priorities within them. Many of the recommendations include short-term solutions that can be implemented quickly alongside capital-intensive projects that may take longer to plan and execute. These design recommendations are meant to provide a consistent approach and visual language to inform the prioritization and implementation phases.

GATEWAYS



Gateways are a city's means of telegraphing the qualities and location of its destination points. By identifying peripheral entryways, Gretna has the opportunity to guide visitors and even local residents to the center of Downtown.

These goals can be accomplished with signage and other visual aides, murals and other art, and traditional streetscape improvements such as curbing, lighting, and crosswalks.



The existing streetscape lacks curbs, vertical landscaping, and pedestrian-scaled lighting



A disconnect exists between the entrance to Huey P. Long Ave. at the Westbank Expressway, and its natural gateway condition at 11th St., where the neutral ground begins, lampposts mark the entrance, and the historic house is located.

This study proposes improvements to the two block stretch between 11th and the Expressway, including curbs, painted or alternate material crosswalks, a small neutral ground, and the addition of street trees and lighting.

These improvements will provide a human-scale to a stretch of the corridor that feels akin to the wide open commercial corridor alongside the Expressway and does not currently provide scale, shelter, or visual interest for pedestrians.

The proposed design features an implied gateway using curbs, lighting, and street trees. These features will provide a separation between vehicles and pedestrians, and provide a visual cue that drivers should slow down and reorient to the neighborhood scale around them rather than to the highway environment from which they came.

GATEWAYS



As outlined earlier in this report, gateways are essential to consider as wayfinding devices through brand building, directional assistance, and recognition of visual consistency across geography.

The gateways outlined above represent the best opportunities to get the attention of vehicle traffic along the Westbank Expressway service road. Once within the street grid of downtown, additional visual markers are proposed to enhance internal wayfinding.

The intersection of Huey P. Long Ave. and the Westbank Expressway is a classic urban design challenge that often occurs at neighborhood edges. The smaller-scaled residential blocks of Huey P. eventually run into the much larger-scaled and generously zoned commercial development along the Expressway.

While it is difficult to compete with the large scale of the Expressway, service road, and their fast-moving traffic, it remains important to make a gesture at this neighborhood edge that informs both residents and visitors that Downtown Gretna is nearby, and more importantly that it's streetscape, lighting, trees, and signage all indicate an attractive and engaging experience.



3 4
5 7 Colorful vertical markers such as this one from Bellevue, WA could be paired with arrows at "internal" gateways to further enhance wayfinding and direct visitors toward Downtown



1 Existing building at Huey P. Long Ave. and the Westbank Expressway



1 A mural could be a dynamic part of the gateway proposed for this location

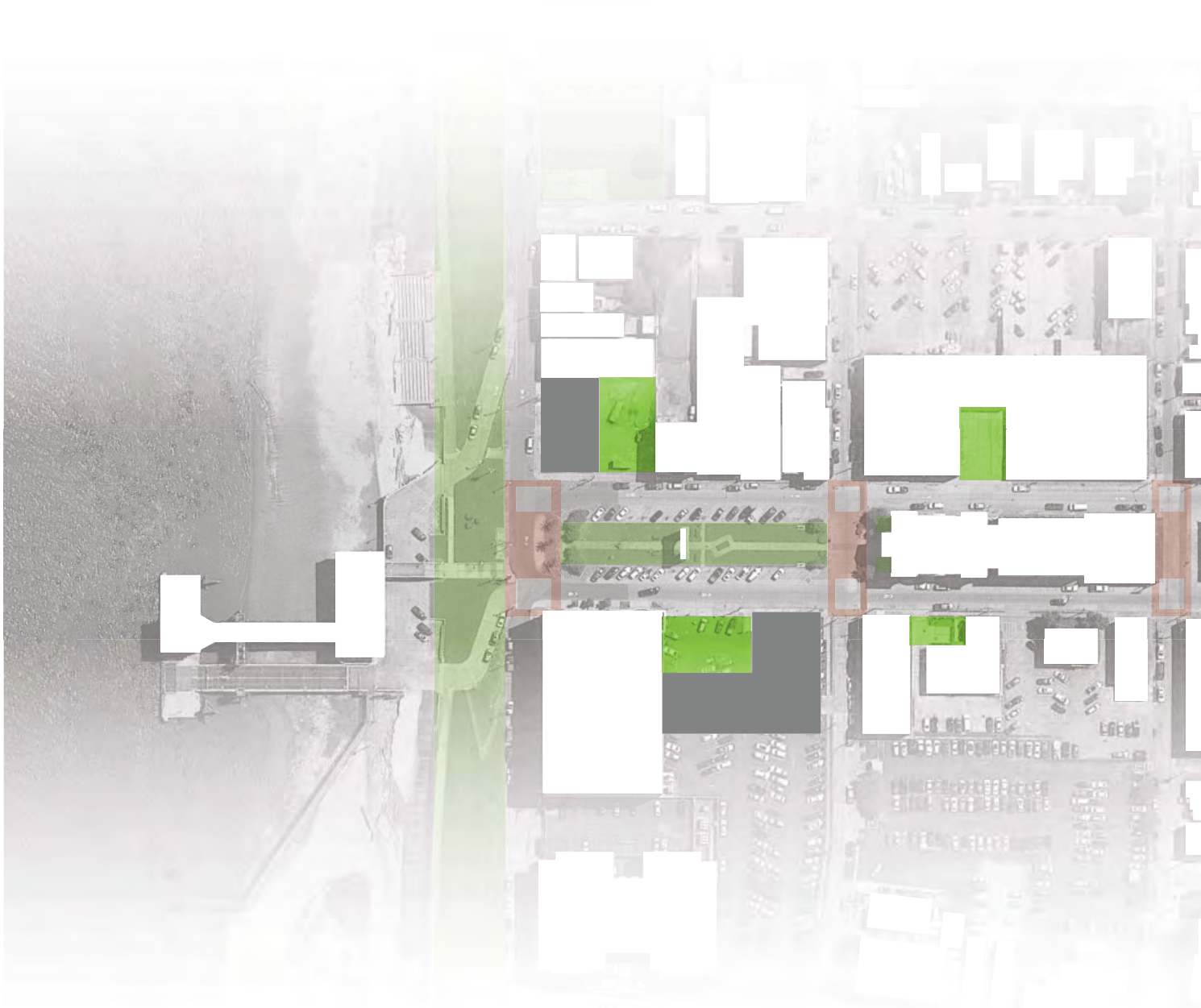


6 Signage and an additional levee-access stair are proposed at the intersection of Lafayette St. & 1st St. The stair will facilitate easier access to the levee, and signage will guide those who may have exited the expressway at Lafayette and are looking for the center of Downtown

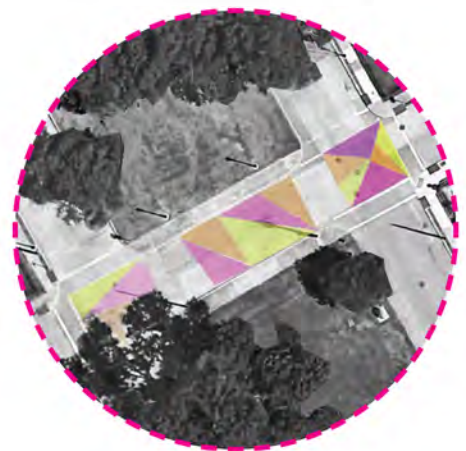


1 Signage along the Westbank Expressway service road could be paired with landscaping and streetscape improvements to guide residents and visitors towards Downtown
2

STREETSCAPING



Organized street painting is an easy way to define pedestrian space and foster community spirit, even if later replaced with permanent materials such as brick or stamped concrete.

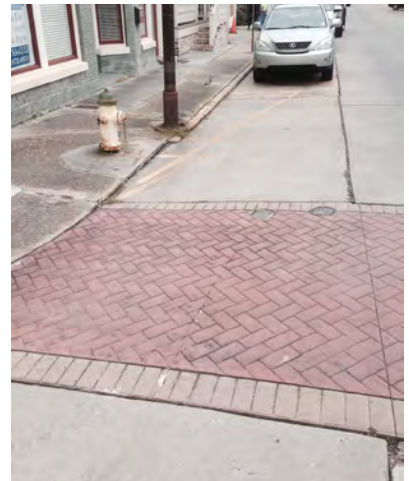
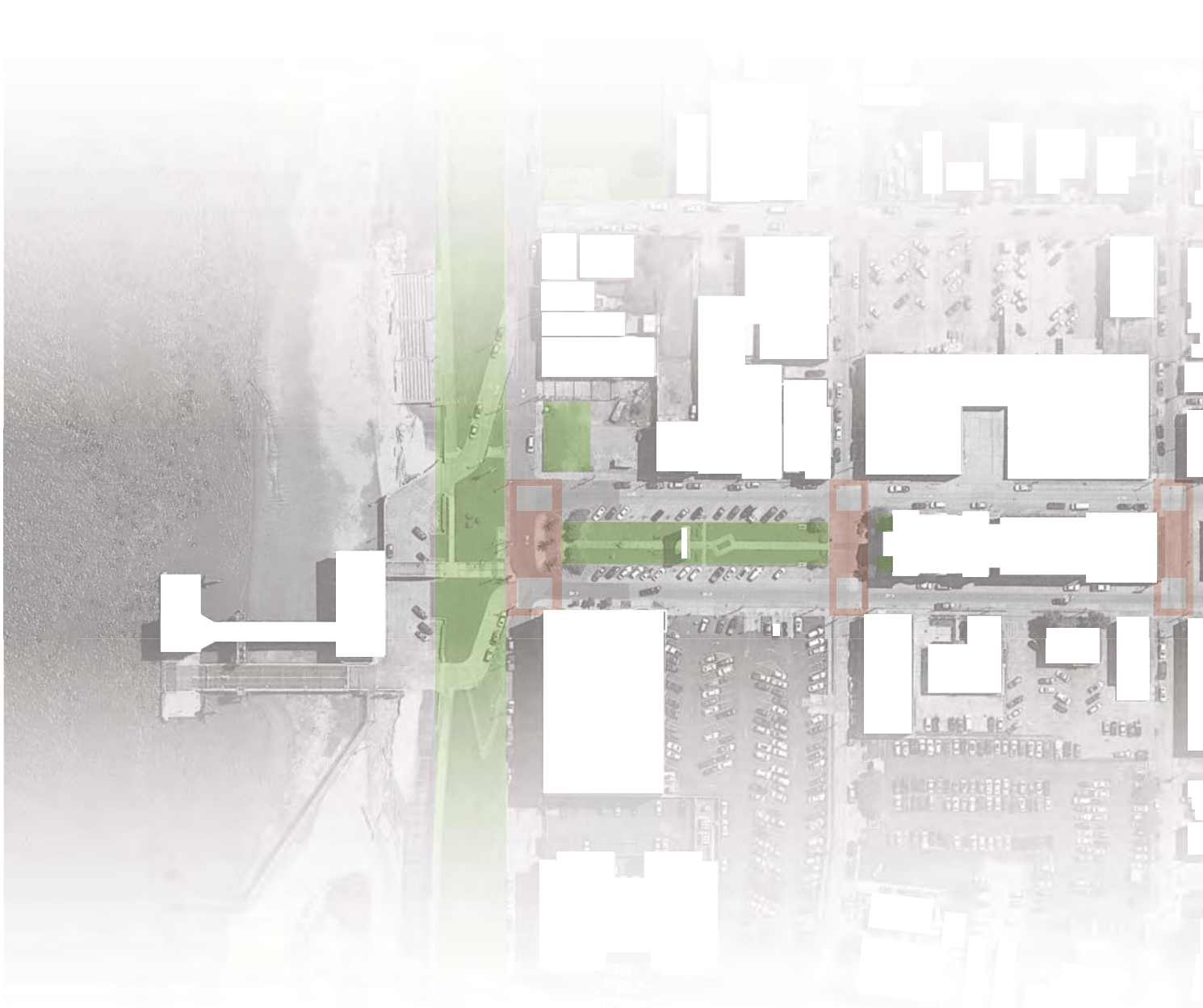




The existing urban fabric of downtown Gretna is dense, but relatively low-scaled. This allows for a walkable and pedestrian friendly atmosphere. However, the diagram above shows existing green space, and highlights why Memorial Square and the levee are so important to downtown. With the addition of the Huey P. Long Ave. neutral ground on the residential side of the avenue, these green spaces are critical to the quality of life that downtown can offer.

The existing urban fabric of downtown Gretna is dense, but relatively low-scaled. This allows for a walkable and pedestrian friendly atmosphere. However, the diagram above shows existing green space, and highlights why Memorial Square and the levee are so important to downtown. With the addition of the Huey P. Long Ave. neutral ground on the residential side of the avenue, these green spaces are critical to the quality of life that downtown can offer.

STREETSCAPING

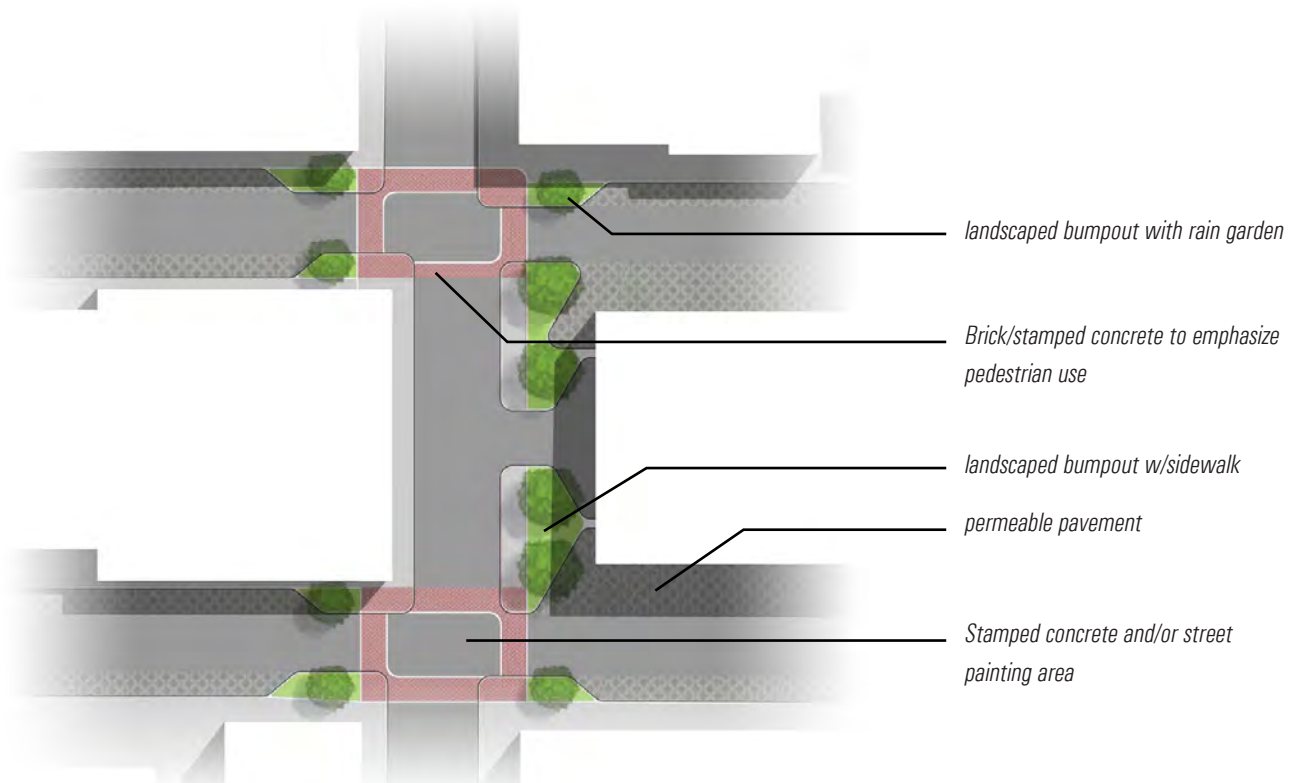




The use of consistent, pedestrian-scaled streetscape materials will provide a unique and consistent visual character throughout the study area. Using brick, stamped concrete, or other materials “claim” the intersections as focus areas; vehicles must take note of pedestrian activity, and pedestrians can utilize the intersections during municipally-sanctioned events where the intersections can be closed to traffic.

As an interim measure, intersection painting is another popular and less capital-intensive means of “claiming” intersections. Some cities commission noted artists, while others turn the practice into a lively contest of neighborhood identity.

STREETSCAPING

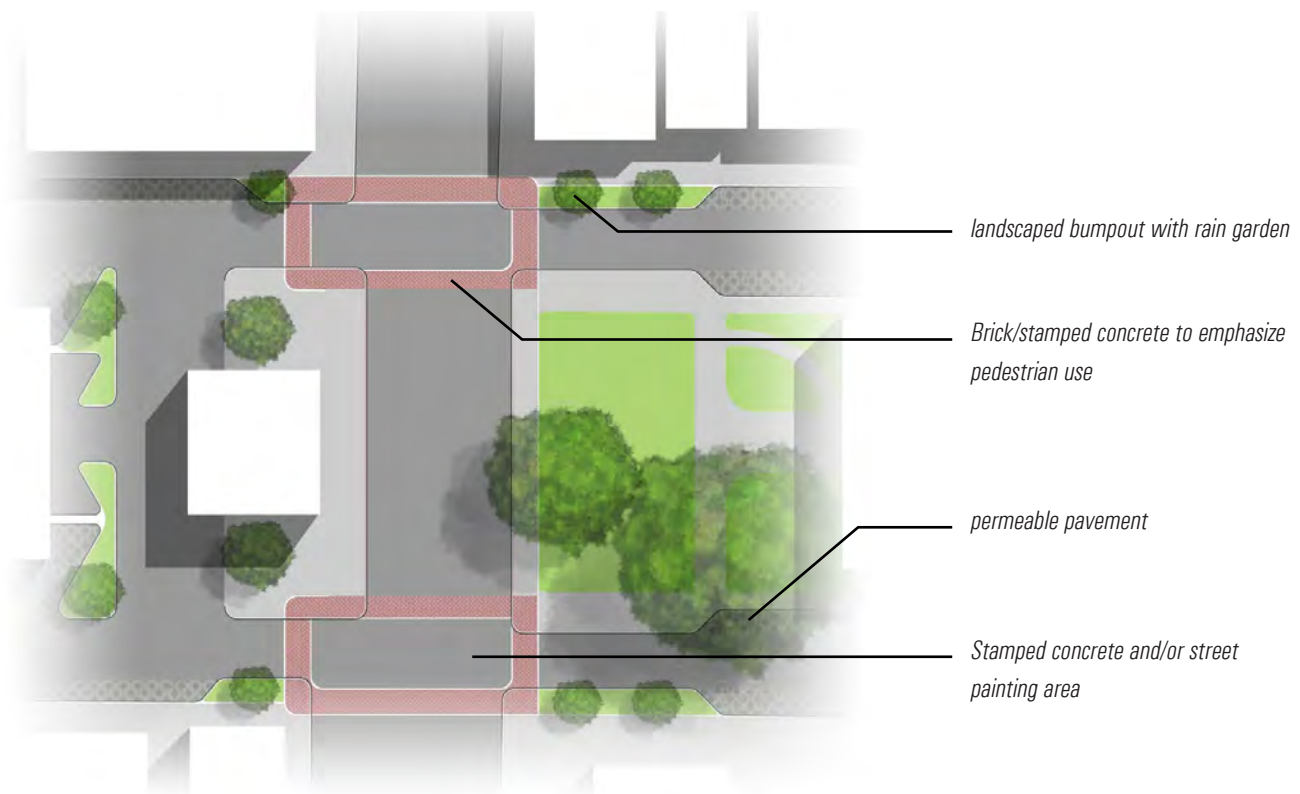


Huey P. Long at 3rd St.

This intersection connects the City Hall & Post Office block with the Farmers Market structure. Because of the market and other events under the pavilion, it is a likely candidate for street closure during events, providing additional space for pedestrian gathering and informal commerce.

The intersection features curb bump-outs at corners where parking is already disallowed. These bump-outs can be landscaped but should use low plantings that do not interfere with vehicle and pedestrian visibility. After installation, bollards or other means are sometimes used temporarily to ensure the features are seen by motorists.





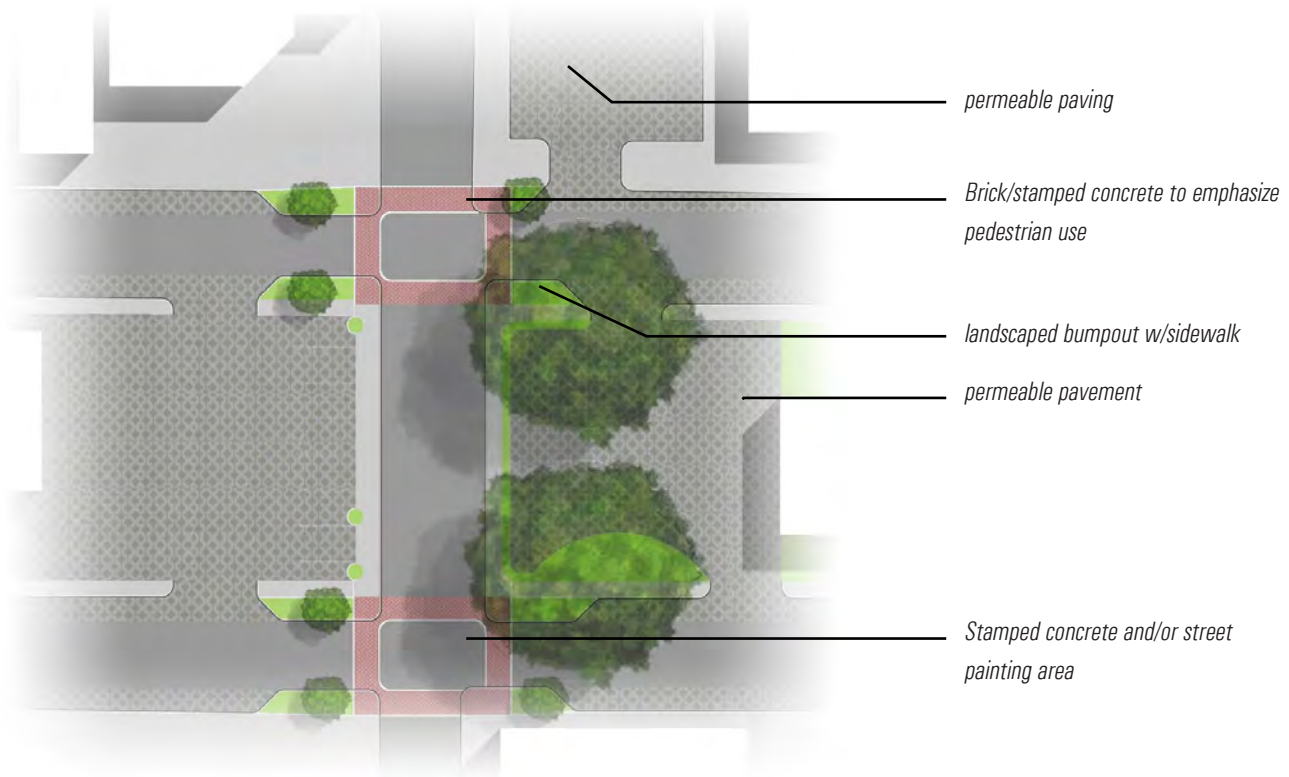
Huey P. Long at 4th St.

This intersection connects the rail depot with the Cultural Center, and is also given an entirely new surface. As at other intersections, the new material may be slightly raised, which transforms the intersection into a traffic-calming “speed table.” This will only be possible in locations where sheet flow drainage across the intersection is not relied upon for flood control.

Curb bump-outs are provided to increase drainage capacity and slow traffic. Bump-outs shown along the lower portion of the intersection may not be possible until the completion of the 4th Street extension project, as relatively heavy downriver traffic turns right onto Huey P. Long from 4th Street.

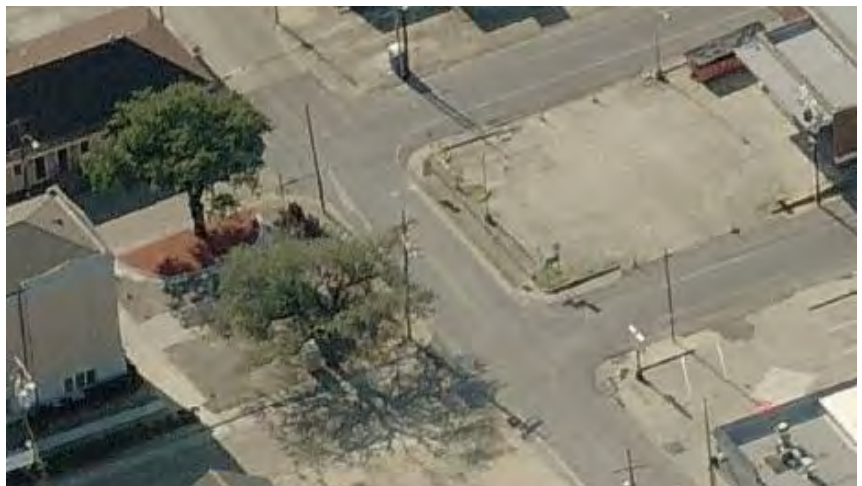


STREETSCAPING

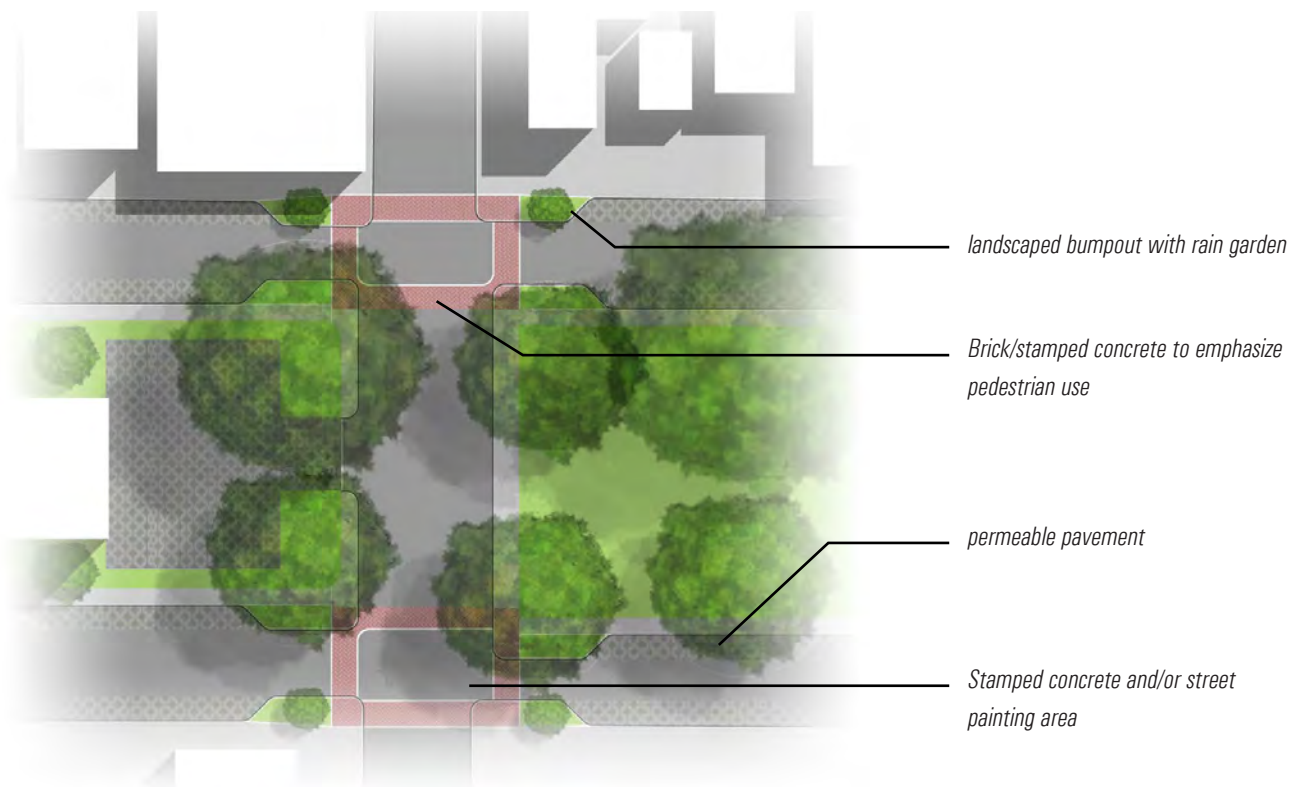


Huey P. Long at 5th St.

The intersection connects the Cultural Center with the German Cultural Center, and represents a good opportunity for additional landscaping. With consideration for visibility related to traffic flow from Huey P. Long Ave. turning left onto 5th Street, a designated state road, limited curb bumpouts are provided. However, the parking lot behind the Gretna Cultural Center needs definition using a low, green, landscaping edge to replace an existing and unnecessary concrete barrier.



As at other intersections, permeable paving is utilized in parallel parking zones.



Huey P. Long at 6th St.

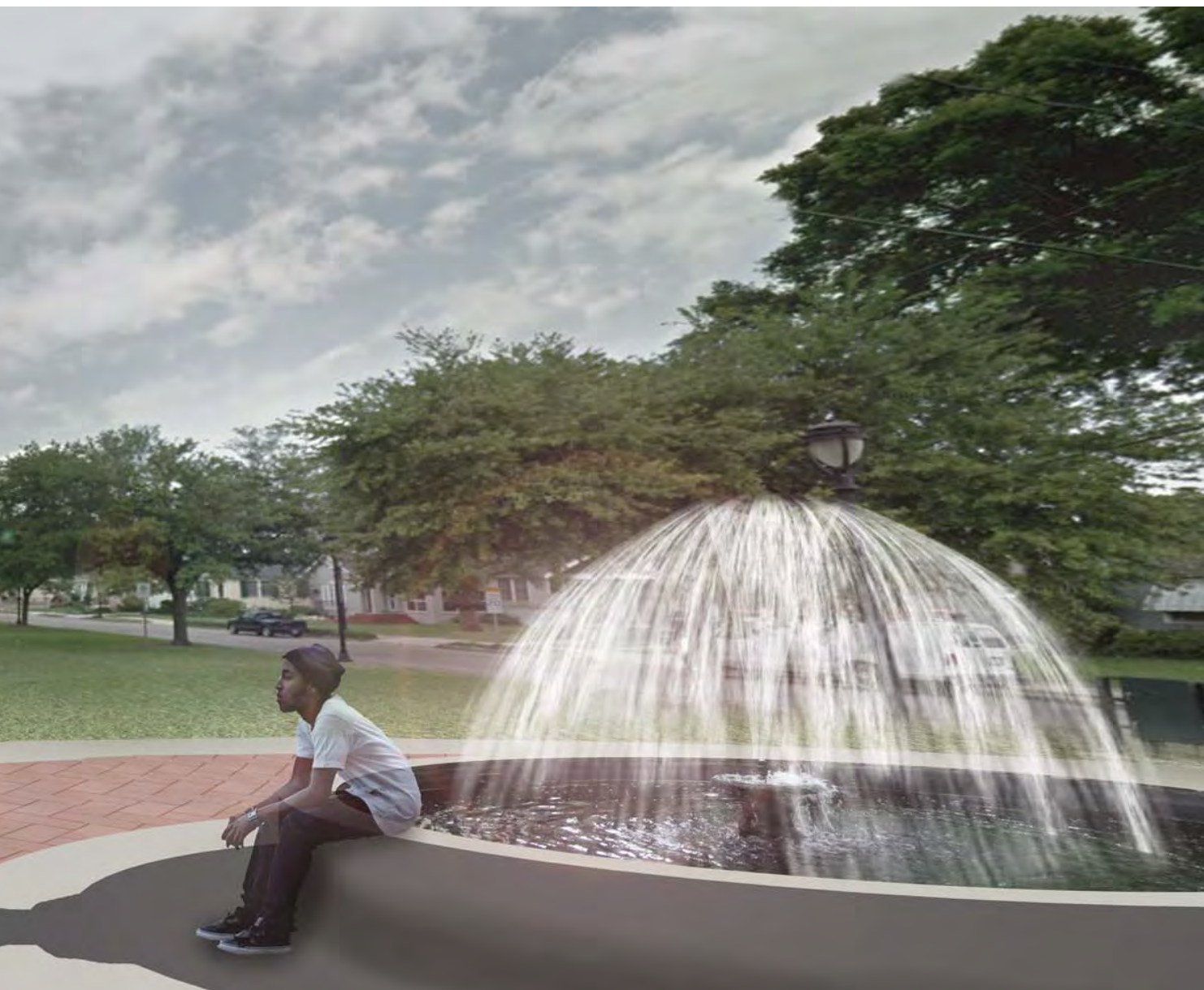
This intersection represents a link between the commercial and mixed-use Downtown along Huey P. Long Ave. towards the river, and the primarily residential zone along the Avenue towards the Westbank Expressway.

The neutral ground serves as a linear park and needs little improvement. However, a fountain or other urban feature will provide a number of benefits: it will serve as a visual cue of entry into Downtown proper, it will provide a passive gathering space for residents, and will allow for the extended use of the intersection for small neighborhood events or those associated with the German Cultural Center.



STREETSCAPING





Huey P. Long Ave. at 10th St.

The area between the Westbank Expressway and the park-like setting of Huey P. Long's neutral ground should be used to create a definitive, identifiable gateway to Downtown. This fountain, located at the intersection of 10th St., will complement the existing monuments, lighting, & flagpole, and be paired with new signage, trees, & landscaping to create a consistent entryway with pedestrian-friendly amenities.

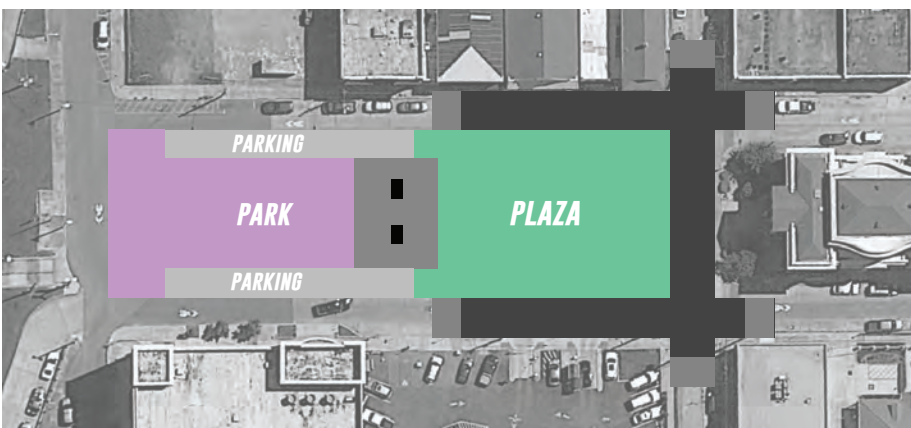
MEMORIAL SQUARE



Memorial Square is the visual and civic center of Downtown Gretna. It is known to most residents and visitors due to the location of City Hall, the Courthouse, the Memorial Arch., ferry terminal, and Riverfront.



This design proposal separates the square into two halves, removing parking from the area between the Arch & City Hall to provide more pedestrian-friendly space for gathering and events.



The approach aims to provide a plaza-like experience on one side of the Arch and a more passive, park-like setting on the other. In order to achieve the feel of a plaza, unique treatment of the streets along this entire half of the square will help define the area and slow incoming traffic.



The City of Gretna desires to create a memorial space that residents and visitors will want to spend time in and reflect upon. In recognition of the continued importance of the Memorial Arch, its history and commemoration, the square maintains a central path to ensure the square's focus remains on the Arch.

To provide for circulation the central path creates areas on either side defined for specific activities. On the river side of the Arch, simple landscaping is used to provide tree-shaded seating areas, and to provide a buffer between parked cars and pedestrians using the square.

On the City Hall side, the Plaza is defined by four quadrants of activity:

- 1 - Shaded seating
- 2 - Shaded seating with access to outdoor dining and restaurant services
- 3 - Children's play equipment
- 4 - Splash pad

Shading devices are used to encourage use of the space throughout the year. These features will attract additional users to the square, providing an additional customer base for existing and new businesses. The use of several scales of shade trees, low plantings, and other landscaping will provide a much richer experience for residents and visitors than the current grassy square provides.

MEMORIAL SQUARE



Excessive surface parking typically contributes negatively to a downtown's image, but is a common condition that occurred in urban centers throughout the US during the development of suburban commercial corridors and tract housing.

While the surface parking along Memorial Square has a relatively high percentage of use and serves the court complex, it currently does not contribute to the streetscape or urban character of the square or associated side streets.

Recently planted trees along 2nd Street will screen the parking as they continue to grow, but further interventions along Huey P. Long Ave. are needed.

The City of Gretna has explored the possibility of creating a temporary corner commercial location at Huey P. and 2nd Streets. Such a development would "hold the street edge" and provide further definition to Memorial Square.

Additional landscaping and street trees could be paired to further screen the large parking lot and help to reduce the perceived scale of the large courthouse building. In the long term, these interventions could be replaced by commercial development, but would require a comprehensive deal with Jefferson Parish to determine where current parking could be relocated and/or partially absorbed by street parking.



The schematic designs in this report aim to provide additional amenities to draw existing residents and new visitors to Downtown.

City Hall and Parish Court visitors will have new public space to enjoy, with the ultimate goal of drawing new businesses and development to Downtown.

Existing restaurants may take advantage of the opportunity for outdoor dining within the square, an idea enthusiastically supported by both residents and business owners at both public meetings.

Additional seating would allow parents and siblings to enjoy shade as children play on new dynamic learning equipment or splash in the fountain.

MEMORIAL SQUARE

Berms, landscaping, and low walls are used (shown at right) to separate traffic from the interior square and to help define several passive green spaces suitable for sitting and gathering.

The archway remains the square's central feature, and is accented by the central pass-through pathway leading from City Hall to the levee.

While some angle and parallel parking is maintained to serve businesses, several spaces are removed to accommodate additional street trees that would otherwise be too close to existing buildings.

The design aims to create a dynamic plaza, in which pedestrians will feel comfortable crossing the street in any location along the square, and are guided to do so by material changes and other visual cues. Vehicle controls including bollards are still used to ensure that pedestrians can pass easily from one area of the plaza to another, yet vehicles remain cautious and restricted.





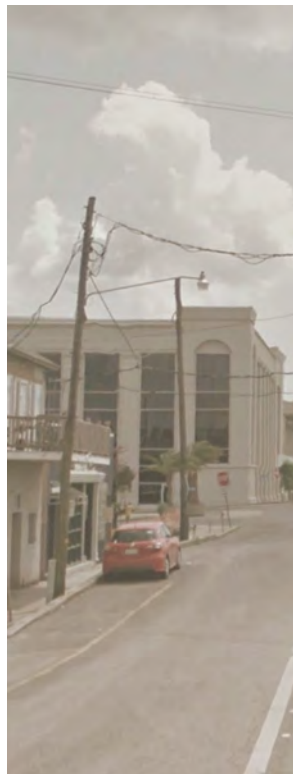
RIVERFRONT APPROACH

In many ways, the riverfront serves as another gateway into downtown, and many associate arrival at Memorial Square with arrival to Gretna. The square and riverfront serve as the front porch of the city, and provide an unparalleled recreational amenity and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity along the levee.

Because the levee-top path essentially ends at Memorial Square, a linear shade structure has been proposed to visually mark the importance of arrival in Gretna, and to provide services to pedestrians and bikers including shade, respite, and water. The structure also provides a visual cue to those in Memorial Square that there are more amenities worth the climb atop the river levee.

Gretna should augment its efforts to utilize the riverside of the levee, as it has successfully done with riverfront concerts and movies. Residents seeking passive uses like green space and active recreational uses like beach volleyball could enjoy such features as river heights allow.

At public meeting #2, residents brainstormed about possible future uses for the Ferry Terminal, which used to provide easy access to the Eastbank. Use as an event space would require a significant renovation investment, but would provide a space unlike any other in the metro area, with beautiful views of the river and New Orleans, and associated outdoor space for gathering.







IMPLEMENTATION

GOALS

The recommendations and goals of this study coalesce around several distinct urban design principles and programmatic suggestions:

- The provision of defined street edges, developing empty lots where possible or utilizing fencing and landscaping to create clear visual boundaries
- A well-appointed and maintained pedestrian realm including public furniture, shade, consistent landscaping & lighting
- Streetscaping materials that slow traffic and promote a vibrant pedestrian experience while also contributing to water management and beautification
- The opportunity for activities beyond special programming & festivals, including passive & active recreation, kids play spaces, outdoor dining, and more

As Gretna begins the process of rewriting its comprehensive zoning ordinance, there will be an opportunity to address some of the design issues and recommendations in this report. Municipal codes can require the definition of street edges, degree of transparency, particularly in commercial applications, and consistent setbacks, landscaping, and other features.

Architectural design guidelines are another tool that could be developed in conjunction with existing historic preservation guidelines to ensure that new developments and major renovations feature appropriate architectural design, quality materials, signage, and more, both in downtown and throughout the City.

FUNDING

Capital projects require careful planning over time, and a committed effort to identify and pursue multiple funding sources, including local municipal funds.

The City of Gretna will employ broad coordination with Parish, State, and Federal officials to seek implementation funding for the proposals outlined in this report.

Federal

FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)
USDOT Transportation Alternatives Program
USDOT Urban Systems >200k
HUD Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Section 319 Funding

State

Office of Community Development Disaster Recovery Unit
Department of Transportation & Development (DOTD)
Governor's Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness
Department of Culture, Recreation, & Tourism
State Historic Preservation Office
State capital outlay
Louisiana Main Street Program

Private Foundations

Riggio Foundation
Feil Family Foundation
Ford Foundation



Contacts:

City of Gretna
Matthew Martinec
504.363.1568
mmartinec@gretnala.com

Tulane Regional Urban Design Center
www.trudc.com
trudc@tulane.edu