# Greauxing Resilience at Home

City of Baton Rouge–Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Imagine Plank Road Plan for Equitable Development



GEORGETOWN CLIMATE CENTER

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## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

Louisiana is one of the hardest-hit areas in the United States as extreme weather events and regular flooding become more frequent and intense.<sup>1</sup> These challenges often fall "first and worst" on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color or "BIPOC" and low-income communities.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true in the U.S. Gulf Coast region and the state of Louisiana.

Over time, these challenges are being exacerbated by population increases and transitions as climate and non-climate drivers (e.g., people moving out of urban centers into more rural areas) influence where people choose — or are able — to live.

In southeast Louisiana, resilient, affordable housing initiatives are critical to ensuring equitable adaptation that takes into consideration the myriad overlapping challenges facing all Louisianans, but especially those living in communities that have long borne a disproportionate burden of risk.

Over a two-year period between fall 2020 and spring 2022, **Capital Region Planning Commission** and **Georgetown Climate Center** partnered with dozens of people from government, private, and nonprofit sectors and community stakeholders in Region Seven of the **Louisiana Watershed Initiative**.<sup>3</sup> The result of that partnership effort is **Greauxing Resilience at Home: A Regional Vision**<sup>4</sup> (Regional Vision), a resource to inform Region Seven's ongoing work to increase community resilience by promoting affordable housing and nature-based solutions.

Regional and local governments in Region Seven can use the Regional Vision to identify potential legal, planning, and policy tools and projects to increase the affordability and availability of housing and the use of nature-based solutions. In addition, the Regional Vision offers insights for policymakers across Louisiana, throughout the Gulf Coast region, and nationally.

This report is composed of 24 individual case studies developed by Georgetown Climate Center to support the Regional Vision. These case studies describe best and emerging practices, tools, and examples from Louisiana and other U.S. jurisdictions to make progress on these complex and challenging issues. These case studies are intended to provide transferable lessons and ideas for regional and local governments addressing housing and mitigating flood risk as integrated parts of comprehensive community resilience strategies. Collectively, these case studies present a suite, although not an exhaustive list of tools and approaches that can be used to facilitate any of these efforts.

1 STATE OF LA., LOUISIANA CLIMATE ACTION PLAN: CLIMATE INITIATIVES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNOR 15–16 (Feb. 2022), available at https://gov.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/CCI-Task-force/CAP/ClimateActionPlanFinal.pdf.

2 See id. at 15–17.

3 The Louisiana Watershed Initiative is an effort to create a paradigm shift in floodplain management towards a strategy that approaches flood risk reduction from a nature-based solutions and land-use-based approach. A part of this approach includes identifying eight separate regional watershed management areas to assist in achieving cross-jurisdictional activities.

Region Seven is one of these eight watershed regions. Region Seven encompasses the upper part of the toe of Louisiana's boot. It spans eastward from the Mississippi River near Baton Rouge across the Northshore (i.e., north of Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas) to Mississippi and along the Mississippi River to the Bonnet Carré Spillway. The region includes 13 parishes and 45 incorporated municipalities.

4 To reflect their connection to Louisiana's cultural heritage, the project team and members of Region Seven that participated in this process chose to use the word "Greaux," a French-inspired phonetic spelling of the word "Grow," to brand this product. Where possible, all the case studies share a consistent organizational format to allow easier cross-comparison of tools, processes, and takeaways:

- The **Background** section introduces the regional and local context (e.g., location, demographics) for each case study, including the following facing each jurisdiction: extreme weather risks, housing and environmental challenges, and development pressures.
- The **Housing** section focuses on the legal, planning, and policy tools and projects that have been designed and implemented to support the growth and preservation of housing affordability and availability.
- The **Environment** section highlights how vulnerable habitats like floodplains and other open spaces are being restored, conserved, and protected as a part of comprehensive resilience strategies to provide important ecosystem and community benefits like reducing flood risk and creating community assets, such as parks and trails.
- The **Community Engagement** section summarizes how governments have provided different types of public engagement opportunities and how affected residents have contributed to these planning and decisionmaking processes.
- The **Funding** section identifies how the programs, plans, and projects discussed have been funded by federal, state, and local government and private and nongovernmental sources.
- The **Next Steps** section captures the anticipated future actions that featured case study jurisdictions may take in implementing these tools and strategies.
- The **Considerations and Lessons Learned** section concludes with the primary takeaways from each example that other regional and local policymakers and communities may consider when developing or implementing their own housing and resilience strategies using these legal, planning, and policy tools.

A few additional notes about the case studies:

- The case studies selected prioritize relatable and scalable models from places similar to Louisiana: Wherever possible, Georgetown Climate Center aimed to acknowledge and lift up the work of jurisdictions and nongovernmental actors in Region Seven and neighboring watershed regions to inspire peer-to-peer sharing and actions from as close to home as possible. These resources are drawn from 12 states, with an emphasis on regions and local areas in the Gulf and Mid-Atlantic: Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Examples and lessons drawn from these regions are easiest to apply to a Louisianan context because they feature similar geography or analogous impacts from flooding and other climate effects.
- There are no perfect, "one-size-fits-all" solutions: While the case studies and resource entries informing the Region Vision are instructive for Region Seven and beyond, none of them are "perfect" examples of how to solve these complex and challenging issues. Georgetown Climate Center found no single case study or resource that provides a point-for-point or model for what Region Seven is trying to accomplish. No other jurisdiction identified is currently trying to integrate housing, flooding, equity, resilience, and population changes together in a single plan, ordinance, or policy. However, some jurisdictions are moving in that direction, or are making progress on discrete elements of what will eventually become a more holistic strategy. Therefore, this report and the Regional Vision draw analogous connections and recommendations that can be combined to facilitate more comprehensive planning and land-use efforts.

The case studies in this report were informed by interviews with practitioners and community leaders in charge of designing and overseeing this work. No statements or opinions, however, should be attributed to any individual or organization included in the *Acknowledgements* section of this report.

It is also important to note that the examples described in each case study are ongoing and the content included in this report is current as of spring 2022. For future updates about these and other case studies and the Regional Vision, please visit **Greauxing Resilience at Home: A Regional Vision** and Georgetown Climate Center's **Adaptation Clearinghouse**.

## City of Baton Rouge – Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana Imagine Plank Road Plan for Equitable Development

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Imagine Plank Road: Plan for Equitable Development (plan) is an equitable transit-oriented development (TOD)<sup>1</sup> plan developed to guide revitalization of the Plank Road corridor, an area in north Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish (parish).

Released in November 2019, the plan is a response to historical disinvestment in the Plank Road corridor and addresses issues of infrastructure decay, jobs and commerce, and health and safety. The plan is anchored by a new bus rapid transit (BRT) system that will run along the corridor and connect it to other parts of Baton Rouge. There are seven new developments proposed along the corridor, each designed to provide quality of life amenities and generate tax revenue while preserving local neighborhoods' history and culture.

The Plank Road plan is notable for its goals, metrics, and recommendations for equity-focused community revitalization. At the project level, local policymakers can look to the plan for specific efforts related to urban affordable housing, community-driven development, green infrastructure, and community engagement. More broadly, the plan demonstrates how policymakers can integrate equity across various development initiatives in order to lay a foundation for long-term stability and growth.

Build Baton Rouge (BBR) is the lead agency on the plan and took an approach that emphasized community engagement and public-private partnerships in planning and implementation. The Plank Road plan will be implemented concurrently with FUTUREBR, the comprehensive master plan adopted by the parish and the City of Baton Rouge in 2011.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "Transit-oriented development, or TOD, includes a mix of commercial, residential, office and entertainment centered around or located near a transit station. Dense, walkable, mixed-use development near transit attracts people and adds to vibrant, connected communities." *Transit-Oriented Development*, FED. TRANSIT ADMIN., https://www.transit.dot.gov/TOD (last updated Apr. 11, 2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> *FUTUREBR*, CITY OF BATON ROUGE–PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE, LA., <u>https://www.brla.gov/662/FUTUREBR</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

## BACKGROUND

The Plank Road corridor is a north-south transit corridor in Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana and the parish seat of East Baton Rouge Parish. The history of the Plank Road corridor underscores the drive behind the plan, which centers equity in its vision of the corridor as "a thriving, socially diverse and walkable network of neighborhoods anchored by good transit, strong local businesses, quality housing, and resilient infrastructure."<sup>3</sup>

Under segregationist laws and policies, the corridor developed as a primarily white working-class community over the 20th century as Baton Rouge's population grew with the local oil industry. When the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*<sup>4</sup> required public schools to integrate, some white families began fleeing to suburbs developing along south Baton Rouge, ultimately pulling over 7,000 students from the local public school system.<sup>5</sup>

Around the same time, local officials used federal funding to develop highways through Black communities in north Baton Rouge, fracturing social and economic networks.<sup>6</sup> Despite the corridor remaining a well-traveled route, buildings and infrastructure fell to disinvestment and disrepair.

Today, residents in the Plank Road corridor experience higher levels of poverty and lower levels of car access, educational attainment, and employment than East Baton Rouge Parish as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

After years of experiencing the effects of racist policies and disinvestment, 2016 culminated in a convergence of events that served as the impetus for the Plank Road plan. First, the Plank Road plan developed out of a 2016 study of the Plank Road and Florida Boulevard corridors conducted by the City-Parish.<sup>8</sup> The Plank Road and Florida Boulevard corridors have the highest transit ridership in Baton Rouge.<sup>9</sup> The study made recommendations related to housing, economics, connectivity, urban planning, and the relevant agencies best suited to leading these improvements. Second, in 2016, public salience around inequality in Baton Rouge was high. The police shooting of Alton Sterling and devastating flooding called attention to Baton Rouge as a "tale of two cities," with lower-income majority-Black neighborhoods in the north and wealthier majority-white communities in the south.<sup>10</sup> Third, Sharon Weston Broome was elected as mayor after

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 18 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>. <sup>4</sup> Brown v. Bd. of Educ. of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> *Id*. at 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> *Id*. at 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> City of Baton Rouge–Parish of East Baton Rouge, La., Florida and Plank Corridor Study (Dec. 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> *Id*. at 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Paul Dudley, *Five Years Later: The Alton Sterling Shooting*, 4WWL (July 5, 2021), https://www.wwltv.com/article/news/local/5-years-later-the-alton-sterling-shooting/289-67fff16d-6476-4f99-9686bca73bc30a97; see, e.g., *What caused the historic August 2016 flood, and what are the odds it could happen again?*,

campaigning to address these inequities. Mayor Broome then channeled her political momentum toward putting the 2016 study's recommendations into action.

Twenty stakeholders, including state agencies, local agencies, and the Center for Planning Excellence, met in January 2018 to begin charting an equitable transit-oriented development plan for Plank Road. BBR then hired New Orleans-based planning firm Asakura Robinson with the support of a \$100,000 grant from JP Morgan Chase Partnerships for Raising Opportunity (PRO).<sup>11</sup> The final Plank Road plan was completed in November 2019. The Plank Road plan will be implemented concurrently with FUTUREBR, the comprehensive master plan adopted by the parish and the City of Baton Rouge in 2011.<sup>12</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF THE PLANK ROAD PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Plank Road Plan for Equitable Development establishes five equity objectives, termed Equity Benchmarks: Cultural Expression, Commerce and Jobs, Community Wealth, Enhanced Connectivity, and Health and Safety. Each benchmark includes metrics that further define how equity objectives can be met. In addition to seven proposed catalytic developments, the plan includes recommendations for projects, programs, and policies that can help implement the plan's vision. The plan was the product of numerous public-private partnerships. In addition to collaborating with other government entities, BBR leveraged private and philanthropic funding sources and consulted with various business, academic, and nonprofit experts throughout the process. In particular, LabGov/Co-City Baton Rouge has served as a key community engagement partner to help implement and operationalize the plan in the corridor.<sup>13</sup>

Regional and local policymakers in receiving communities<sup>14</sup> or other regions and municipalities experiencing population growth can look to the Plank Road plan as a model for equitable transit-

ADVOCATE (Aug. 5, 2017), <u>https://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana\_flood\_2016/article\_3b7578fc-77b0-11e7-9aab-f7c07d05efcb.html</u> ("In August 2016, historic floods devastated parts of south Louisiana after a slow-moving system

dumped more than 20 inches of rain in parts of East Baton Rouge and nearby parishes in a three-day span."). <sup>11</sup> Urban Planning, BUILD BATON ROUGE, <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/our-work/urban-planning/</u> (last visited July 28,

<sup>2021).</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *FUTUREBR*, CITY OF BATON ROUGE–PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE, LA., <u>https://www.brla.gov/662/FUTUREBR</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> LabGov Baton Rouge, LABGOV GEORGETOWN, <u>https://labgov.georgetown.edu/active-experiments/labgov-baton-rouge/</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> "Receiving communities" or "receiving areas" are broad terms used to refer to locations experiencing population growth and transitions in response to people leaving vulnerable coastal, flood-prone, or other types of areas due to severe or chronic climate impacts. *See* Katie Spidalieri and Annie Bennett, *Managed Retreat Toolkit: Crosscutting* P o l i c y C o n s i *dcialtEquityi & dcaresving Communities*, GEORGETOWN CLIMATE CTR. (2020), https://www.georgetownclimate.org/adaptation/toolkits/managed-retreat-toolkit/social-equity-receiving-communities.html.

oriented development. Although the plan is not expressly a climate-focused plan, it has direct relevance for policymakers who seek to build capacity for new residents while preventing displacement and improving the quality of life for existing residents. The following sections highlight the plan's recommendations for affordable housing, community-driven development, and green infrastructure.

#### HOUSING

In the Plank Road Plan, Benchmark 3: Community Wealth focuses on affordable housing solutions. As investment increases in the corridor, rising rent and property taxes can threaten to displace existing residents. Affordable housing recommendations include:

Leverage tax credits to build new affordable housing;

Establish repair programs aimed at landlords that include agreements to preserve affordable housing;

Establish trainings and financial assistance to help new homebuyers with down payments and closing costs;

Provide financial aid to existing homeowners to cover property tax increases and repairs;

Freeze property tax assessment values for lower-income homeowners;

Capture property tax increases to be reinvested in local projects; and

Establish a community land trust to maintain long-term affordability.<sup>15</sup>

Recommendations in the plan address multiple housing needs, but focus primarily on affordable homeownership. Home ownership is seen as not only protection against displacement due to rising rents, but also as a way to encourage local investment by anchoring residents' equity in the neighborhood. For example, affordable homeownership can offer homeowners increased spending power and the ability to borrow against the equity of the home.<sup>16</sup> By increasing and protecting homeownership in the community, neighborhood stability can also support social networks and generate civic mindedness.

#### **Community-Led Housing and Development Initiatives**

The plan includes two primary strategies to increase community leadership in local housing and development: establishing a community land trust (CLT) and land banking.<sup>17</sup> In the climate adaptation context, CLTs and land banks in receiving areas can help prevent residential

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 45 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>. <sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> *Id*. at 90–94.

displacement, provide affordable housing options for incoming residents, preserve local cooperative control over developable land, and streamline processes to convert underutilized land into community-serving uses.<sup>18</sup>

A CLT is a localized nonprofit organization that maintains permanent ownership of the land on which residential structures sit while selling or leasing homes built on the land.<sup>19</sup> This allows CLTs to implement lease or resale conditions at low rates that preserve affordable housing long term.<sup>20</sup> For example, the sale price of a CLT home may be capped at a certain value and a portion of profits may go toward maintaining the land held in trust for all residents. CLT land can also be put to other community-serving uses, such as food production and commerce.<sup>21</sup> The Plank Road Corridor does not currently have an established CLT.

Land banking enables a form of cooperative land management similar to the CLT model.<sup>22</sup> In land banking, a public entity owns land-banked properties and has the responsibility to maintain and the authority to develop them.<sup>23</sup> Because the land is held by a public entity, land banking can enable greater public participation in efforts to convert underutilized or blighted properties into more productive land uses. Land banking can also reduce blight by consolidating adjudicated properties and streamlining code enforcement.<sup>24</sup>

One challenge to blight management has been the parish's backlog of tax sales with questionable validity, which makes these properties risky to redevelop.<sup>25</sup> Transferring these properties into a land bank can solidify ownership and enable their development into productive use.

BBR has a land bank established by its enabling statute. As of July 2021, BBR currently holds at least 85 adjudicated Plank Road properties that were transferred to the agency by the Parish Council.<sup>26</sup> The seven proposed catalytic developments along Plank Road are to be built on land-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See Jessica Grannis, Acquisition Tools: Community Land Trusts in Katie Spidalieri and Annie Bennett, Managed Retreat Toolkit, GEORGETOWN CLIMATE CTR. (2020), https://www.georgetownclimate.org/adaptation/toolkits/managed-retreat-toolkit/conservation-land-trusts.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Id.

 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$  *Id*.

 $<sup>^{21}</sup>$  Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> *Id*. at 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> A tax sale is a sale of a real estate property that is mandated by a government entity when the owner has reached a certain point of delinquency on his/her property taxes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Urban Planning, BUILD BATON ROUGE, <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/our-work/urban-planning/</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

banked sites,<sup>27</sup> providing a civic center, green spaces, and mixed-use developments with housing, retail, eateries, and a grocery store.<sup>28</sup>

The challenge most often faced by CLTs is acquisition of properties for the trust, and the challenge most often faced by land banks is disposal of properties in the bank. Because CLTs and land banks share a mission to serve the community and facilitate community-led development, the plan recommends establishing a cooperative "community land bank" hybrid program under BBR in which properties in the BBR land bank would be developed and maintained in conjunction with a new community land bank governance structure. In turn, this new community land bank would benefit from reduced maintenance costs and gain ownership of land for productive development and access to BBR's established development partners.<sup>29</sup>

#### **ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions**

Environmental resilience is a major element of the plan's Benchmark 5: Health and Safety. The Health and Safety benchmark emphasizes solutions that integrate environmental resilience with the public health benefits of green space. There are two primary categories of recommendations: increasing green space and increasing green infrastructure.

Several neighborhoods in the Plank Road corridor do not have access to a park within a ten-minute walk.<sup>30</sup> One of the catalytic projects proposed along the corridor is an "EcoPark" to be developed on land held in the BBR land bank and to include elements that mitigate flooding and heat-related risks.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the EcoPark will be the result of developing land bank properties in conjunction with the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC). It will incorporate nature-based and green infrastructure solutions for small-scale climate mitigation efforts. To support broader public health goals, the plan's recommendations also include high quality programming to serve youth, seniors, and healthy lifestyles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 44 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> The plan's executive summary document describes the seven types of catalytic developments proposed: Food Hub; Civic Center; Build Baton Rouge Office, Childhood Learning Center, and Housing; Society of St. Vincent de Paul (the fourth and fifth types of the catalytic developments proposed); Transit Oriented Development (mixed use); and an EcoPark. BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 8 (Nov. 2019), available at <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road Summary 2019.11.01\_web.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 92 (Nov. 2019), *available at* https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> *Id*. at 78.

Additionally, the plan recommends incorporating natural hazard mitigation into infrastructure improvements, including increases in tree cover and permeable surfaces.<sup>32</sup> All communities in the Plank Road corridor are designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as being within 500-year or 100-year floodplains with areas adjacent to creeks, bayous, and channels at high risk of flooding.<sup>33</sup>

The city aims to implement the Plank Road plan in accordance with the Parish Stormwater Master Plan, which the East Baton Rouge City-Parish began developing after the area suffered historic flooding in August 2016. Scheduled to be completed in 2022, the Stormwater Master Plan will identify flood vulnerabilities in the parish and inform priority investments for flood risk mitigation.<sup>34</sup>

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Because of the plan's equity focus, BBR invested significant resources in soliciting community input and more than \$50,000 was spent on a variety of engagement initiatives.<sup>35</sup> BBR partnered with LabGov Georgetown and New York University's Marron Institute of Urban Management to launch a new "urban regeneration" project in Baton Rouge applying LabGov's Co-City Methodology.<sup>36</sup> This methodology is grounded in and driven by community input. The project "Co-City Baton Rouge" officially launched in Baton Rouge in May 2019, but work on the collaborative effort started about six months prior. This work focuses on access to, and the governance of, shared "commons" resources — like shared community spaces and neighborhoods — and access to open spaces.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> *Id.* "Flood hazard areas identified on the Flood Insurance Rate Map are identified as a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). SFHA are defined as the area that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. The 1-percent annual chance flood is also referred to as the base flood or 100-year flood. Moderate flood hazard areas, labeled Zone B or Zone X (shaded) are also shown on the FIRM, and are the areas between the limits of the base flood and the 0.2-percent-annual-chance (or 500-year) flood. The areas of minimal flood hazard, which are the areas outside the SFHA and higher than the elevation of the 0.2-percent-annual-chance flood, are labeled Zone C or Zone X (unshaded)." *Flood Zones*, FED. EMERGENCY MGMT. AGENCY, https://www.fema.gov/glossary/flood-zones (last visited July 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> East Baton Rouge Stormwater Master Plan and 20-Year Stormwater Capital Improvements Plan, CITY OF BATON ROUGE–PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE, LA., <u>https://stormwater.brla.gov</u> (last visited July 28, 2021). The plan is scheduled to be completed in mid-2022 and currently in Phase Two of development. *FAQs*, CITY OF BATON ROUGE AND PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE, <u>https://stormwater.brla.gov/faqs/</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Summary\_2019.11.01\_web.pdf;</u> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 19 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> About LabGov Georgetown, LABGOV GEORGETOWN, <u>https://labgov.georgetown.edu/about\_labgov/</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

To collect input from residents and local businesses about their needs and vision for the corridor, BBR deployed initiatives including a visioning survey, a community roundtable, mailings, and interactive programming, including an event featuring local food vendors and a street festival. BBR also assembled a steering committee of nonprofit and public agency partners, ultimately meeting with dozens of corridor stakeholders across numerous sectors throughout the planning process.<sup>37</sup>

Leveraging the area's social and cultural networks, BBR employed a team of community members who live and work in the corridor as "community ambassadors" to publicize opportunities for public input. According to BBR, existing individual and institutional networks fostered by churches, nonprofits, and commercial enterprises are "perhaps the greatest opportunity available to BBR to achieve sustained impact in the Corridor."<sup>38</sup>

As a result of dedicated engagement, BBR was able to identify several priorities that are reflected in the plan's goals and proposals. Participants commonly emphasized the need for local residents' interests to come first, calling for initiatives to:<sup>39</sup>

Reinvest wealth in the local economy;

Address blight affecting rental and abandoned properties;

Build sidewalks and crosswalks to increase safety and connect businesses;

Improve food and retail shopping options;

Increase recreational spaces and programming for physical and creative activities, particularly for children and youth;

Increase bus frequency and upgrade transit facilities;

Preserve long-term quality affordable housing for residents; and

Preserve the diverse cultures and characters of Plank Road neighborhoods.

Interactive and locally led engagement opportunities like those developed by BBR and LabGov reveal residents' priority needs, in addition to facilitating accountability in local agencies and private development partners. This commitment to community-led decisionmaking is especially important in neighborhoods like Plank Road that have experienced negative consequences in the past due to racist policies and disinvestment, such as displacement and disruption to small businesses. Inviting these types of conversations throughout a planning process can help build trust that planned projects and policies will effectuate community goals. Incorporating feedback into

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 19 (Nov. 2019), *available at* <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>. <sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> *Id*. at 19–20.

the plan shows participants their input is valued, generating a sentiment of civic efficacy that can empower further participation and communal decisionmaking in the long term.

### FUNDING

Funding for the plan itself and for individual projects, programs, and policies recommended in the plan includes a mix of private and public sources.

To help finance the planning process, BBR secured \$225,000 in grant funding from private sources, including a \$100,000 JP Morgan Chase Partnerships for Raising Opportunity (PRO) Neighborhoods Planning Grant.<sup>40</sup> To implement the new bus rapid transit system, the City-Parish secured a \$15-million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development (BUILD) program.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, BBR has acquired initial money to start work on some key projects contained in the plan. In 2018, Baton Rouge voters passed a sales tax that will dedicate a portion of tax revenue to infrastructure updates throughout the parish including along the Plank Road corridor.<sup>42</sup> The program, titled MOVEBR, is expected to generate \$1 billion over 30 years toward improving traffic signals, sidewalks, and transit facilities along the Plank Road corridor.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the Capital Area Finance Authority approved a \$865,000 line of credit in 2020 for BBR to spend on housing development across the parish.<sup>44</sup>

Although funding has not been secured for all projects proposed in the Plank Road plan, the plan includes numerous state and federal grants as well as tax revenue tools that could potentially be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Urban Planning, BUILD BATON ROUGE, <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/our-work/urban-planning/</u> (last visited July 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The U.S. Department of Transportation Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development (BUILD) program is a competitive grant program that "funds investments in transportation infrastructure, including transit." *See Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Grants Program (formerly TIGER)*, FED. TRANSIT ADMIN., <u>https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/better-utilizing-investments-leverage-developmentbuild-transportation-grants-program</u> (last visited July 28, 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> "The MOVEBR Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements Program is the most significant transportation infrastructure investment in the history of East Baton Rouge Parish. The 1/2 cent sales tax proposition, which excludes food and drugs, was approved by the voters of East Baton Rouge Parish on December 8, 2018. The tax became effective on April 1, 2019 and will continue for 30 years until March 31, 2049. Proceeds of the tax can only be spent on the list of projects approved by the voters." *MOVEBR Program Overview*, MOVEBR, <u>https://movebr.brla.gov/page/movebr-program-overview</u> (last visited July 28, 2021); *see also MOVEBR Projects*, MOVEBR, <u>https://movebr.brla.gov/page/project-list</u> (last visited July 28, 2021) (Search for "Plank Road" in the "Search" field).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Timothy Boone, Build Baton Rouge Gets \$865,000 Line of Credit, Pledge of \$300,000 from Broome, ADVOCATE (July 16, 2020),

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\_rouge/news/business/article\_16b23f84-c7ab-11ea-8357-7746c95a6d81.html.

secured to fund projects.<sup>45</sup> For example, the plan includes suggestions for creating tax increment financing (TIF) districts, business improvement districts (BID), and neighborhood improvement districts (NID) to capture tax revenue for investment in local projects and services beyond the capacity of local government. Governed by local boards, BIDs and NIDs can help ensure that the benefits of revitalization are reinvested in the Plank Road community and responsive to residents' needs.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

To guide implementation, the plan includes an Implementation Matrix that organizes all proposed projects, programs, and policies in a table.<sup>46</sup> For each strategy, the matrix lays out the type of recommendation, the relevant Equity Benchmarks, required steps, a five-year implementation timeline, the organizational lead, and partner organizations. By consolidating the strategies and breaking down their required steps, the Implementation Matrix provides a comprehensive overview of actionable items that decision-makers can use to identify priorities and partnerships.

Private development partners are expected to be key throughout implementation. One potential approach to collaboration with private developers can be facilitated through a contract called a "cooperative endeavor agreement."<sup>47</sup> Cooperative endeavor agreements allow public entities to maintain ownership and take leadership while working with private developers to create community infrastructure improvements on public land. In contrast to publicly subsidized private development, public-private partnerships can enable greater public input in the decisionmaking process and help ensure that the benefits of development are reinvested in the community.

As of July 2021, BBR has made progress on increasing the number of properties in the land bank, securing funding for the EcoPark, establishing a revolving loan fund for small businesses, and advancing a grocery-anchored mixed-use development and a community kitchen. The agency is also continuing to work through the Co-City Baton Rouge partnership to begin building a community advisory board of corridor residents and recruiting community members to serve on the future board of the CLB, the innovative hybrid of a land bank and CLT.

## **CONSIDERATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Overall, the Plank Road plan serves as a noteworthy example of equity-informed planning for neighborhood growth that considers the needs of the members of that community. It has particular applicability for areas experiencing historical disinvestment and socioeconomic distress. Here, a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> BUILD BATON ROUGE, IMAGINE PLANK ROAD: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT 101–109 (Nov. 2019), available at <u>https://buildbatonrouge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Imagine-Plank-Road\_Final-</u> <u>Report\_2019.11.06\_web.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> *Id*. at 108–114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 60; La. Rev. Stat. § 33:7633 (2021).

convergence of data with the Plank Road and Florida Boulevard corridor studies, a moment of social reckoning, and strong executive leadership in Mayor Broome converged to contribute to an opportunity to address long-standing racism and disinvestment in the Plank Road corridor. Datadriven plans and policies and governmental support are key to getting started and maintaining momentum on development projects, especially where there is a need for sustained reinvestment in the face of population transitions and growth. Further, citizen science and lived experiences can serve as important inputs to compliment other traditional data sets.

Due to the complex and interdisciplinary nature of climate adaptation, legal and policy tools for managed retreat are not limited to direct mitigation of environmental hazards. Initiatives to improve affordable housing and public transit systems, for example, may also be priorities in a comprehensive climate adaptation plan as a part of building broader social, economic, and individual and community-wide resilience. For receiving communities experiencing population growth due to voluntary movements of people away from vulnerable or more hazardous coastal and flood-prone areas, establishing an equitable framework for development can help prevent housing displacement, support public health, and promote community engagement in the planning process.

The Plank Road plan demonstrates several equitable approaches to adapting the built environment. Housing is a key component of equitable adaptation planning, and climate resilience in the housing sector may include considerations beyond sustainable buildings to include access to quality and stable housing for people of all income levels. Because property tax costs can rise significantly with new development in the area, local policymakers can consider programs that prevent displacement by providing financial assistance for taxes and repairs. Ongoing work through Co-City Baton Rouge is showing how a community land bank can offer innovative solutions for cooperative land ownership that can preserve long-term affordability, maximize productive land use, and ensure that new development serves the local community. For infrastructure improvements, policymakers may dedicate particular attention to how streets and other public spaces can be built to simultaneously increase connectivity and public health and mitigate flooding and extreme heat.

Engagement with current residents of existing communities is also a part of comprehensive climate adaptation plans and processes, and like BBR, local policymakers should invest meaningful resources toward soliciting community members' priorities, needs, and visions for their neighborhood. A publicly engaged planning process can reveal the community's priorities, support accountability, and build trust in public and private entities designing and implementing the plan. Engagement initiatives can be entertaining, creative, and fun. Interactive events, such as street festivals, can create an attractive and low-pressure environment for valuable conversations throughout the planning process.

To conduct the technical work of creating a plan or implementing a project, policymakers should look to opportunities for financial and technical assistance from public, private, philanthropic, nonprofit, and academic partners as with Co-City Baton Rouge. Public-private partnerships can help supplement government support and funding availability to plan for and implement complex, interdisciplinary resilience and redevelopment plans and projects, especially in the face of a changing climate and conditions.