

III. Riverfront Segments – Downtown Riverfront

Pontchartrain Expressway to Canal Street (Warehouse District, CBD)

The late 1970s and 1980s saw a major shift in land uses along the downtown riverfront that reestablished a connection to the Mississippi River for the people of New Orleans. The Hilton Hotel Riverside (and later One River Place condominiums) helped begin the transformation of the riverfront away from industrial use. The 1984 Louisiana World Exposition and Fair (World's Fair) was the biggest step in beginning the revitalization of the downtown riverfront. The World's Fair site later transformed into the Rouse Company's Riverwalk Marketplace and first phase of the Convention Center.¹ A portion of the Riverwalk was developed into a cruise ship terminal, which is now undergoing further expansions. There are only a few sites left with redevelopment potential and only one of these is directly on the riverfront.

The 1990s saw the emergence of river and land-based casino gaming. The former Rivergate Convention Center was demolished for Harrah's Casino, the city's only land based casino, at a prominent site near the convergence of Poydras and Canal Streets. Riverboat gaming berths were constructed next to the Hilton Hotel and further upriver at the end of Race Street. These however were short lived and have since been vacant sites.

The Warehouse District, partially in response to the World's Fair, began major warehouse conversions into hotel and residential uses. The renovation of an historic warehouse facility into the Contemporary Arts Center has spurred numerous galleries and studios in the area and has created an Arts District.

A Riverfront Streetcar was constructed in the late 1980s, connecting the Convention Center with the Vieux Carré. The Riverfront Streetcar was the first new streetcar transit line, followed by the Canal Streetcar in 2004, to be constructed in the city since the removal of most lines in the mid twentieth century.

The period before and after the World's Fair saw several plans specifically addressing opportunities for redevelopment of large vacant parcels and riverfront access from the Warehouse and Central Business (CBD) Districts. In addition to the 1992 Riverfront Strategic Policy Plan (Riverfront Plan), two other documents addressed issues specific to this area. The Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans authorized the "New Orleans Riverfront in Transition" (Port Plan) in 1990. This began a historic public planning process for potential alternative, non-maritime uses along the riverfront while ensuring that Port maritime authority was retained. The City commissioned Frederick R. Harris, Inc. to produce the study "New Orleans Riverfront Evaluation of the Area from Press Street to Jackson Avenue" which in part addressed the potential for and impact of casino gaming in the area.

The Riverfront Plan, the Port Plan, 1992 Harris report, The 1999 Land Use Plan, and the 2003 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan share many similar recommendations. The common/relevant themes of these previous planning efforts in the Warehouse and Central Business District areas include:

- Improve public access to and along the riverfront.
- At key parcels, promote mixed-use development with ground floor commercial uses and an orientation to the River.
- Develop the Thalia, Erato, and Upper Julia Street wharves with river-oriented uses.
- Encourage more open space along the riverfront.
- Create a design review district covering the riverfront.
- Redesign the Canal Street Ferry Terminal to improve the pedestrian connection between Spanish Plaza and the Aquarium.

Land Use, Zoning, and Access

This portion of the riverfront currently hosts the most intensive uses along the riverfront. The Port is currently constructing a new terminal and parking garage at the Erato Street Wharf, just downriver of its headquarters at the Thalia Street Wharf. The Julia Street Cruise Terminal consists of two terminals that occupy the ground floor of the former Canadian Pavilion from the 1984 World's Fair. The upper floor remains unoccupied. From the end of Julia Street downriver, the building contains the Riverwalk Marketplace on the second floor and support and parking uses at the wharf level below. The wharf platform on the riverside of the building hosts more cruise terminal activity and parking.

From just downriver of Girod Street, the Riverwalk occupies the ground floor while the One River Place condominium and the Hilton Hotel occupy the upper levels. The building ends at Spanish Plaza, a large formal public open space where special events often occur. The Creole Queen and Cajun Queen cruise boats dock here. A boat terminal formerly used by the Flamingo Casino leads to the Hilton Hotel. The Canal Street Ferry Terminal marks the downriver boundary of Spanish Plaza and separates it from the Aquarium and Woldenberg Park.

On the landside of the rail tracks and floodwall, the existing three phases of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center span two thirds of a mile, from Henderson to Julia Streets. The Warehouse District, which lies riverside of the Convention Center, continues to see conversion of large historic warehouse buildings into apartment, condominium and hotel developments. Also, new developments are replacing historic structures, such as the Harrah's Casino Hotel at the intersection of Poydras and S. Peters Streets.

¹ The Convention Center has expanded its initial conversion of the World's Fair site to three phases. The third phase, completed in 1998, extends under the Crescent City Connection into the Lower Garden District.



Riverwalk Marketplace between Julia and Girod Streets



Julia Street Cruise Terminal
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Pontchartrain Expressway to Canal Street (Warehouse District, CBD)

Land Use, Zoning, and Access, *continued*

A few large vacant and underutilized sites still exist and have a potential to impact the area. Most notable of these sites is the Hilton/Riverwalk parking lot, also known as the "Whale Lot." The lot currently provides parking for the Riverwalk Shopping Center, the Convention Center, and neighboring businesses.

The World Trade Center, formerly known as the International Trade Mart, and the adjacent Canal Street Ferry Terminal occupy the terminus of the two most prominent streets in the area, Poydras and Canal Streets. Redevelopment here has the potential to notably redefine the connection between the river and the Central Business District.

The area on the riverside of Convention Center Blvd., extending to Tchoupitoulas and Decatur Streets from Girod to Iberville Streets is zoned CBD-2. The district allows a wide variety of uses, but all new developments greater than 50,000 square feet are subject to site plan review and traffic impact analysis. Generally, there is no height limit, however the riverside of Convention Center Blvd. has a height limitation that varies from 70 to 85 at the street edge. Floor Area Ratios vary from 7.0 (residential) to 10.0 (non-residential) to 12.0 (mixed-use) with some increases allowed through bonuses. The two CBD-8 and CBD-9 Districts that encompass the Warehouse District allow for a variety of commercial, office, warehousing, and some light manufacturing uses. They have lower scale height limits than the CBD-2 District. Height restrictions vary from 50 feet for CBD-8 to 85 feet for CBD-9. This specialized zoning appears to be adequate for the area.

The Downtown Design Review District encompasses the entire riverfront in the area. The district was created to apply certain design standards that ensure vistas to and from the downtown area and regulate height along the riverfront. The overlay district requires site plan review for all projects in the district. Some of the design standards are a good model for a potential riverfront overlay district, however there should be some modifications based on updated goals for access and a Riverfront Promenade.

The Riverfront Streetcar was completed in 1990, running from the area behind the Convention Center (John Churchill Chase Street) to Esplanade Avenue. The Port of New Orleans Place access road was also constructed between the Riverwalk and the rail tracks for Riverwalk and cruise ship terminal access. Access to the river in this area is complex, and is discussed in the next section.

Issues and Opportunities

- Few riverfront public access opportunities exist along Convention Center Blvd
- Lack of continuous access along the riverfront at the water's edge
- Poor design of the Poydras/Canal Street Node and the Canal Street Ferry Terminal area
- Development opportunities at Hilton/Riverwalk parking lot and Julia Street Cruise Terminal
- Lack of review for Port of New Orleans development projects

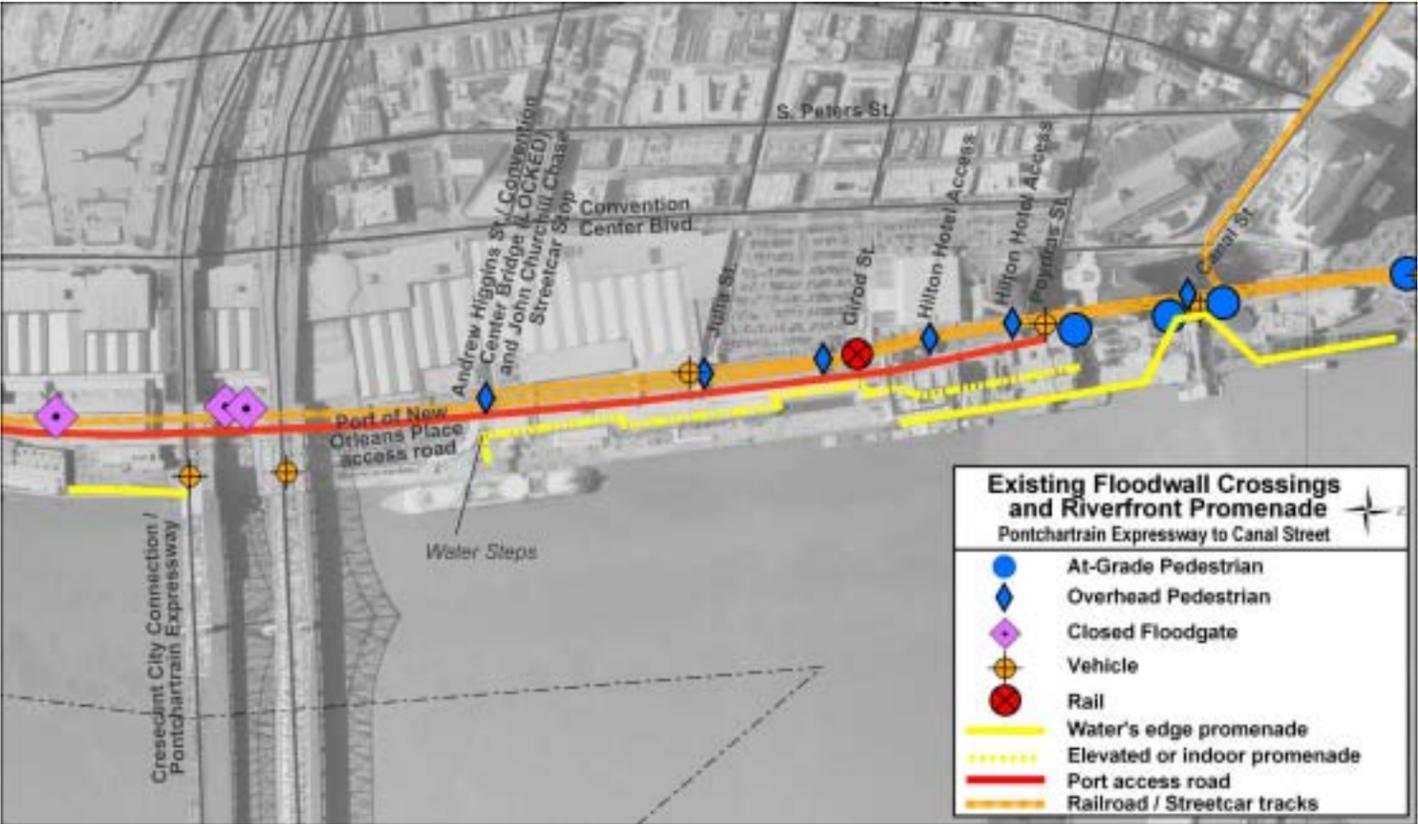
Access to the Riverfront

The three phases of the Convention Center extend over 13 city squares as a contiguous building and therefore wall off the adjacent neighborhood from the riverfront and block access to most of the water's edge. However, there are a few access opportunities which help define several minor access corridors and nodal points in this segment of the riverfront. The terminus of Andrew Higgins Drive, and Howard Avenue further away from the river, intersects with John Churchill Chase Street at the Convention Center. Here, a pedestrian bridge exists through the Convention Center and over the floodwall and railroad tracks, leading to the John Churchill Chase streetcar stop and the "Water Steps", a sculptural remnant from the World's Fair. However, this access bridge is usually closed for public use. Agreements from the Convention Center should be negotiated to ensure that the pedestrian bridge be unlocked and available for public use. The Convention Center could use this access to develop small commercial facilities along the route for conventioneer and tourist use. This access corridor should link the riverfront to the Warehouse District, including the expanding D-Day Museum.

At the end of Julia Street, one may access the Riverwalk shopping center's second floor balcony, but not the water's edge. The only water's edge access occurs through the mall at the end of Girod Street, and at Spanish Plaza. (See map to the left.) Julia and Girod streets are designated as minor access corridors in this plan to help facilitate riverfront access for the emerging Arts district. Future development at the Hilton/Riverwalk parking lot and of the hotel at the Julia Street Wharf should ensure that these access corridors remain and are enhanced. The developer of the hotel should work cooperatively with the Port, the Coast Guard, and the City to further these connections to the water's edge. Better signage indicating these routes should be installed.

Riverfront Promenade

The Warehouse and Central Business Districts lack adequate parallel access along the riverfront as well. From the Port of New Orleans headquarters at the Thalia Street Wharf, pedestrians and cyclists are blocked from continuing downriver at the water's edge. Because of security issues, the Coast Guard and the Port of New Orleans restrict access along the water's edge near cruise ship terminals. Indications are that the Erato Street cruise terminal, currently under construction, will direct pedestrians to the landside of the terminal via a narrow sidewalk that is shared by a taxi zone.



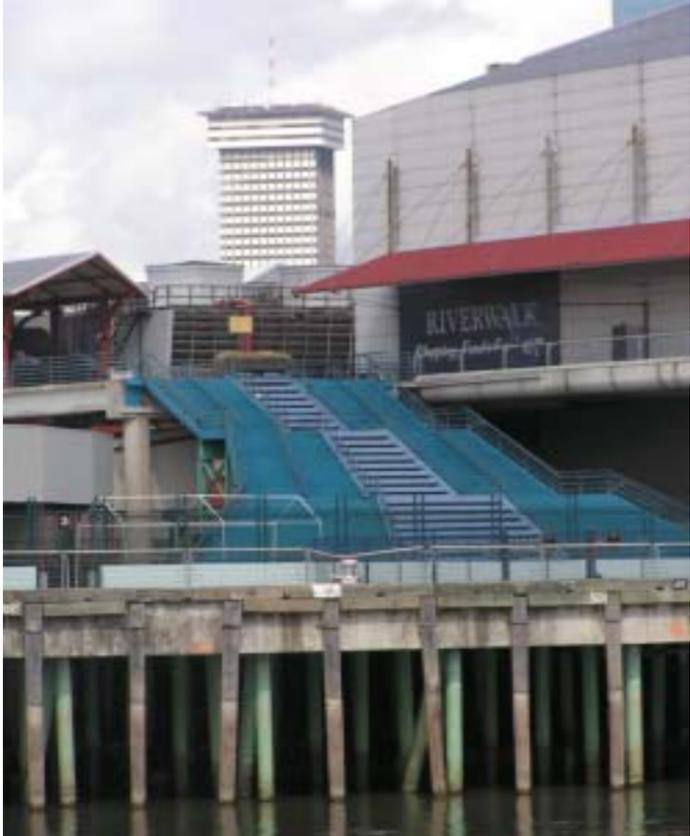
Upriver end of Riverfront Promenade near Riverwalk



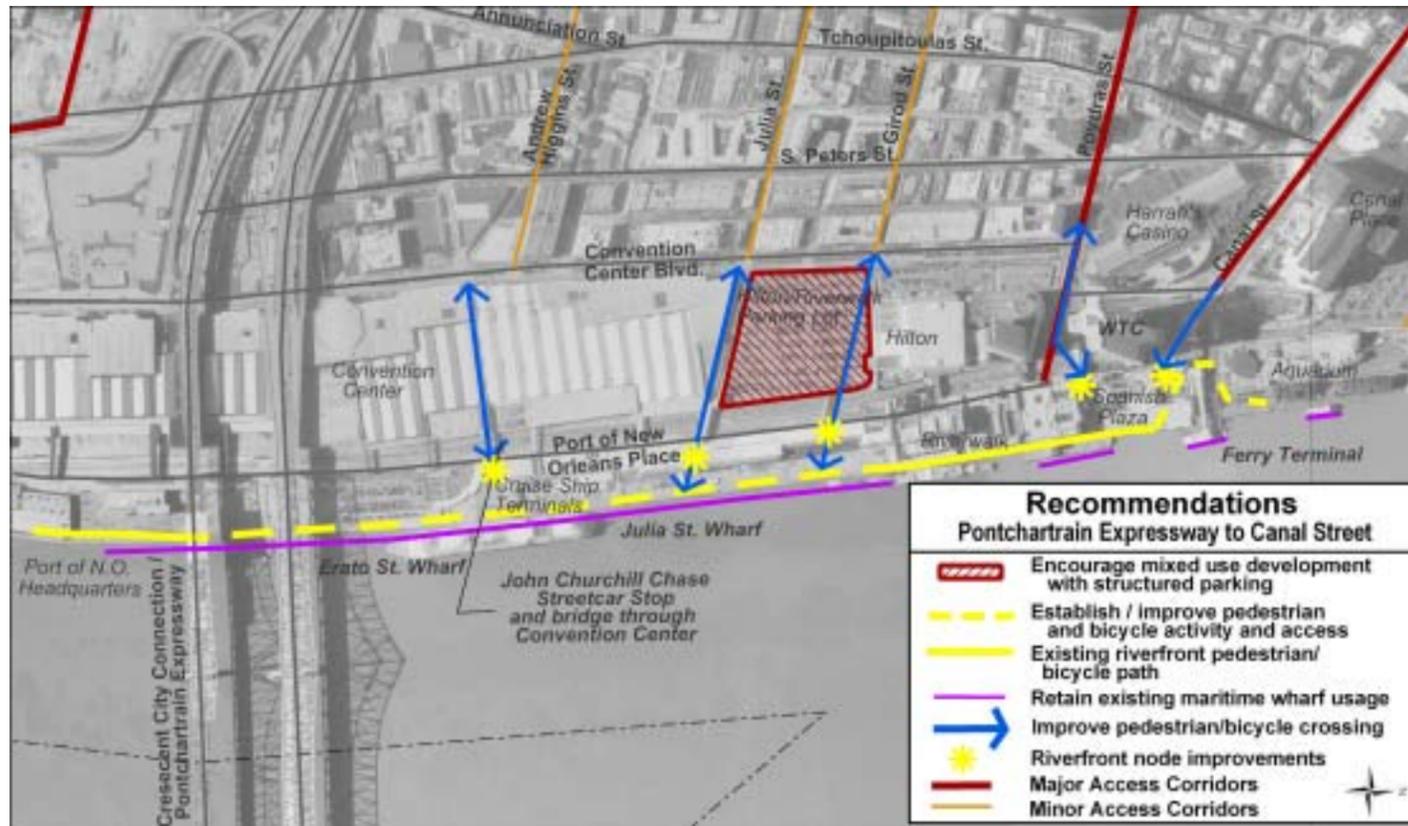
Floodwall opening at Canal Street Ferry Terminal



Railroad crossing at Riverwalk



Water Steps at leading from Julia Street Cruise Terminal to balcony walkway and bridge to Convention Center



Issues and Opportunities, *continued*

At the upriver end of the Julia Street Cruise terminal, public access is directed away from the riverfront up the Water Steps. Continuous access along the riverfront from this point occurs from the top of the stairs, along a poorly marked exterior balcony. The balcony runs along the unused second floor of the Julia St. Cruise Ship Terminal, ending at the Riverwalk, where the public may enter and continue downriver only inside the shopping center. Near the terminus of Girod Street, the public may continue inside the Riverwalk, or return to the water's edge along a riverfront promenade to the Spanish Plaza.

Arrangements should be made to allow water's edge access without compromising either the Port or U.S. Coast Guard security issues. This may be accomplished by allowing access when cruise ships are not docked, and clearly directing access around the terminal when they are. Representatives from both the Port and the Coast Guard indicate that such a strategy may be acceptable. The alternate route at the Erato Street Cruise Terminal should be improved with better signage, and widened if possible or separated from taxi and bus zones.

The proposed future development at the Julia Street Cruise Terminal will combine terminal uses at the ground and second levels with a high rise hotel above. This should accommodate a clearly marked alternative route through the development, to be used when cruise ships are docked. This alternate route could take place at an exterior balcony overlooking the river, or inside the hotel as long as access hours are not overly limited.

If these alternative routes are not in place, pedestrians wishing to travel along the riverfront will need to be directed to Convention Center Blvd. between Henderson and Julia Streets. This one mile long detour lacks pedestrian friendly uses and presents potential conflicts with convention activity.

Canal and Poydras Street Terminus

Continuous access encounters another obstacle at the Canal Street Ferry Terminal. An obscure, winding pedestrian path leads from the Spanish Plaza to the Aquarium and Woldenberg Park, crossing vehicular ferry traffic. Lack of clear access results in a safety hazard with pedestrians finding it simpler to walk along the rail tracks between Spanish Plaza and the Aquarium. Efforts should be made to redesign the ferry terminal, with input from users on both sides of the river, to increase the connectivity of the pedestrian path.

The terminus of two of the city's most prominent streets, Poydras and Canal, which this plan designates as major access corridors, does not end at the riverfront in a unified, grand manner. Instead, the streets end in an undefined mixture of traffic patterns, multiple axes and entry points, poor signage, and a lack of "place making." The proposed redevelopment of the World Trade Center into a hotel offers the potential for streetscape improvement. The design of the open space surrounding the hotel will play an important role in improving the transition between the CBD and the riverfront. Eventual redesign of the area will need to involve collaboration between the City, Harrah's Casino, the Hilton Hotel, the Riverwalk, Audubon Institute, and the State (owner of the ferry terminal).

Major Development Opportunities

There are a small number of large vacant parcels for future development in the Warehouse District and CBD. The most prominent developable parcel, the Hilton/Riverwalk parking lot, offers the biggest potential for a mixed-use development. Proposals for this property have included a Grammy Music Hall of Fame, or other entertainment venues, combined with a hotel development. Since the lot currently offers parking for the adjacent uses, any future development should try to accommodate parking for the use on the site as well as nearby uses. Future development should maintain, if not enhance, the two existing access routes at Julia and Girod Street described above.

The hotel proposal at the Julia Street Cruise Terminal has been in the conceptual phase for some time. Complex issues of ownership and servitude rights between the City and the Port need to be clarified between the two entities.

These two development sites are currently within the Downtown Design Review Overlay District. This district applies certain design standards for riverfront development. The standards, though, are not adequate to address all of the issues for this area. There is no requirement for providing a promenade along the riverfront, nor are access routes required other than at Julia Street and Caliope Street (where the pedestrian bridge through the Convention Center exists but is not accessible). The requirement for only site plan review, as opposed to full development plan review, does not offer sufficient review of the complex issues such as review of traffic impacts, architectural elements, or massing. It does not give the public or other riverfront stakeholders an opportunity to review and comment on the proposals. The District is also applied to non-riverfront corridors, thus its standards are not specific to the riverfront, reducing its ability to coordinate riverfront development.

Further high-rise development is appropriate in the CBD riverfront area, where it has flourished. Height in the expansive CBD-2 District is unlimited, however, sites along certain streets are height-restricted at the street edge. New dense development in this area will need to address increased traffic flow and parking demand, and would benefit from improved transit options.

Lack of Review of Port Development

All Port facilities are reviewed by the State Fire Marshal and must receive certificates of occupancy by the State. Current Port policies require that non-maritime developments along the wharves, such as the proposed hotel and amphitheater, also obtain City building permits. Interpretation of State law has indicated that maritime projects on Port controlled property are exempt from City building and zoning codes. However, maritime projects that involve the general public such as cruise ship terminals are also not reviewed for compliance with City laws. This makes it difficult to ensure that public access and other design characteristics for cruise ship terminals coincide with City standards. With such an intense public use, cruise ship terminals should be reviewed by City officials for compliance with all safety, zoning and design guidelines found in City ordinances that are applicable to other public uses.

Recommendations

Land Use and Zoning:

1. Modify the existing design review process to include standards for riverfront access and promenade.

Transportation and Access:

1. Ensure access to the riverfront is available via the existing Convention Center bridge and that the route is well marked.
2. Work cooperatively with the Port of New Orleans and the Coast Guard to ensure continuous riverfront access at cruise ship facilities at certain times. Modify existing facilities to allow access and create signage and pedestrian amenities.
3. Improve pedestrian connection between Spanish Plaza, the Aquarium/Woldenberg Park, and the ferry terminal.
4. Ensure any development at the Hilton/Riverwalk parking lot addresses public access to the riverfront at Julia and Girod Streets.
5. Closely review required traffic impact analyses for large projects in the area.

Design:

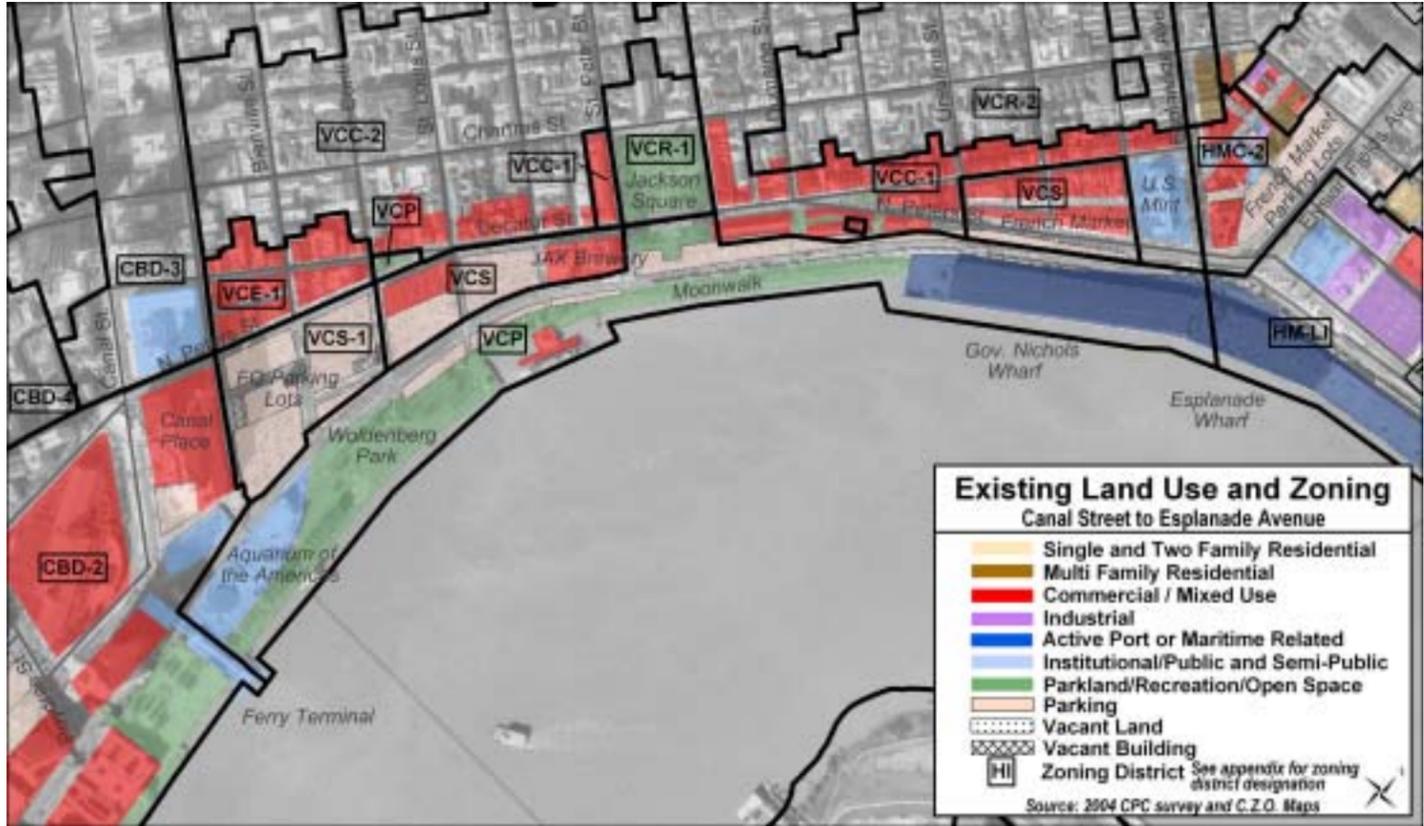
1. Use design ingenuity to overcome existing public access obstacles created by the previous lack of planning.
2. Utilize the redevelopment of the World Trade Center to increase the prominence and design quality of the terminus of Poydras and Canal Street. Establish a collaboration of entities surrounding this riverfront node to work for improvements.
3. Work cooperatively with the Port of New Orleans to ensure design and local building code review of cruise ship terminals.



Spanish Plaza

III. Riverfront Segments – Downtown Riverfront

Canal Street to Esplanade Avenue (Vieux Carré)



Woldenberg Park and Upper Vieux Carré surface parking lots
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The Vieux Carré riverfront areas¹ evolved over the past 40 years from industrial warehouse and maritime wharves to institutional, commercial, and park uses. The conversion of the Dumaine Street wharf to the Moonwalk, along with the creation of Washington Artillery Park, established a link from Jackson Square to the river in 1973. Later transformations of the Canal Street Ferry Terminal (1979), Jackson Brewery (1984) and the creation of the Riverfront Streetcar (1988) further increased the riverfront connection for the Vieux Carré residents and tourists. Dramatic past (and unrealized) plans for the riverfront in this area have included an expressway and the creation of a pedestrian-only zone on Decatur Street in front of Jackson Square.

The largest impact in recent history occurred with the demolition of sheds along the Bienville Wharf and the creation of the Aquarium of the Americas, Entergy I-Max Theater and the 10 acre Woldenberg Park. The improvements established a continuous connection along the riverfront from Canal Street to the Governor Nichols Wharf. The development set a precedent for the future potential of the city's riverfront. Small cruise ships including the Cajun Queen, the John James Audubon, and the Natchez now depart from Woldenberg Park and the Toulouse Street Wharf.

The 1992 Riverfront Strategic Policy Plan, the 1999 Land Use Plan, and the 2002 Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan contain the following common/relevant themes for the Vieux Carré area:

- Encourage expansion of open/park space along the riverfront in the Faubourg Marigny.
- Redevelop the surface parking lots in the upper Vieux Carré to include ground floor commercial and mixed uses.
- Maintain a 50 foot height limit, the existing street grid, and view corridors toward the river.
- Promote the use of major arteries to divert traffic from the Vieux Carré.

Land Use, Zoning, and Access

This segment of the riverfront consists of a variety of land uses with different levels of scale and intensity. The riverfront areas, as described above, include the Aquarium, Woldenberg Park, and the Moonwalk pedestrian promenade. The Governor Nichols Wharf marks the downriver boundary of the publicly accessible riverfront. This wharf and the Esplanade Avenue Wharf are currently used by the Port of New Orleans for break bulk cargo. The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad maintains a corridor of tracks through the entire area that also serves the Riverfront Streetcar. A long narrow strip on the riverside of the floodwall from Washington Artillery Park to Barracks Street, consists of surface parking lots, owned by the French Market Corporation.

¹ Although the squares between Iberville and Canal Streets are not officially a part of the Vieux Carré, they are included in this study area because the Aquarium, at the foot of Canal Street, and Woldenberg Park form a contiguous riverfront parcel that warrant their inclusion.

The entire area on the riverside of the floodwall is zoned VCP-Vieux Carré Park District. This district is the only zoning district in the city specifically created for a riverfront area. Within the VCP District, only parks and open space uses are permitted. A restricted number of commercial and maritime uses must be approved through the conditional uses process. The district has a height limit of 50 feet. No structures, other than minor accessory buildings, are permitted in the area from St. Peter to Ursuline Streets (extended) and an open space ratio of 75% is required on the remaining portions of the district.

On the landside of the floodwall, the Canal Place development, between Canal, Iberville, and N. Peters Streets, consists of a high rise hotel and higher density commercial uses than the adjacent Vieux Carré. The parcels between Canal Place and Jax Brewery are surface parking lots with four historic structures, only one of which is fully occupied. The French Market occupies a large portion of the lower Vieux Carré from Jackson Square to the US Mint. Other commercial uses on the riverside of Decatur Street include the mixed use Jax Brewery buildings. Institutional uses flank the area, with the Aquarium and a small electrical substation at the upriver end, and the U.S. Mint museum at the downriver end.

The Canal Place development is zoned CBD-2, the same district that extends along the riverfront in the Central Business District. This district allows for a wide variety of commercial, office, and tourism uses. There is no height limit for the Canal Place properties.

A new VCS-1 Vieux Carré Service District has recently been created to support development of the surface parking lots between Iberville and Conti Street. This District is similar to the VCS- Vieux Carré Service District downriver of this parcel with the exception of allowing a hotel as a conditional use. Both districts allow for residential and small commercial uses, offices, bars, nightclubs, and restaurants and have a height limit of 50 feet. Zoning for the French Market, Jax Brewery, the US Mint, and nearby properties are zoned either VCC-1 Vieux Carré Commercial District or VCS-Vieux Carré Service District. The entire area, with the exception of the parcels upriver of Iberville Street, are under the jurisdiction of the Vieux Carré Commission, which must approve any work on the exterior of buildings to ensure the historic Vieux Carré is maintained.

The Vieux Carré is unique in that it is the only portion of the downtown areas that has many opportunities to access the river. With the exception of Iberville and St. Peter Streets, pedestrian floodwall openings exist at every street from Canal to Ursuline Streets. In addition, all of these access points occur at grade level, crossing the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad right of way. A riverfront promenade extends along this entire corridor. Recent improvements to the Moonwalk added wheelchair accessible ramps to the top of the levee. The riverfront is also served by the riverfront Streetcar, which has stops at Esplanade Avenue, Ursuline, Dumaine, Toulouse, Bienville, and Canal Streets.

Canal Street to Esplanade Avenue (Vieux Carré)

Issues and Opportunities

- Potential redevelopment of Governor Nichols Wharf
- Increasing pedestrian access
- Maintaining views of river
- Potential redevelopment or improvements of surface parking lots
- Concerns of excessive tourist oriented uses
- Planned improvements of French Market property

Governor Nichols Wharf and Pedestrian Access

The Governor Nichols Wharf, along with the neighboring Esplanade and Mandeville wharves, are currently in use by the Port of New Orleans. While these wharves are currently needed by the Port for their cargo uses, the Port has indicated that they may be available for non-maritime uses in the future. At this time, redevelopment of wharves for non maritime purposes will require relocation of the Port cargo operations. This could be cost prohibitive for any potential developer.

Residents have expressed a desire to maintain a “working wharf” in the area in order to retain the authenticity of the historic relationship between the river and the Vieux Carré. In the near term while the Esplanade and Mandeville wharves are used by the Port, the stevedoring activity provides an exceptional observational experience from the Moonwalk and other vantage points. However, if modernization and consolidation trends or security needs cause the cessation of stevedoring, the land area may be used for various educational, institutional, entertainment, or recreational uses and the river itself may still be used for docking. Retaining portions of the wharf sheds for the land activities should be considered, but a continuation of the Moonwalk pedestrian promenade (with a separate bicycle path) to the Faubourg Marigny and the provision of additional green space would be of paramount importance. Navigational difficulties and public safety will need to be considered in any public use of the location. (See discussion under Navigational Issues on page 11.) The Port may also continue to dock vessels along the water’s edge under their maritime servitude.

This plan designates as minor access corridors all of the streets in the Vieux Carré that currently lead to riverfront. These access corridors should continue to be improved to enhance pedestrian and bicycle access entry points and should in no instance be built across.

Riverfront development Height

Some residents have expressed a desire to see future development of available riverfront property limited to one or two stories in height in order to maintain river views from properties along Decatur and North Peters Streets. This concern is especially focused on potential development of the surface parking lots in the upper Vieux Carré. However, the maximum allowable height for these parking lots, which comprise the new VCS-1 Vieux Carré Service District, is 50 feet. This height limitation corresponds with other areas of the Vieux Carré, including the existing VCS-Vieux Carré Service District

containing the Jax Brewery development, and the VCC-1 Vieux Carré Commercial District, containing the French Market. Requirements for maintaining the historic street grid will help retain the existing view corridors to the riverfront and access at the numerous floodwall openings.

The existing height limit in the VCP-Vieux Carré Park District on the river side of the floodwall is 50 feet. Structures of this height along the water’s edge may eliminate any potential views from buildings on the landside of the floodwall. To preserve views of the river, the building height in the VCP District should be limited to 35 feet. This is the equivalent of a two story structure and the approximate height of the existing wharf structures.

Vieux Carré Parking Lots

The major development opportunities for the Vieux Carré riverfront are the nearly twelve acres of surface parking lots, located between Iberville and Toulouse Streets and behind the floodwall from St. Ann Street to Barracks Street. While parking is important for the Vieux Carré, surface lots do not take the best advantage of prime riverfront property, especially in the Vieux Carré. A better balance of parking with residential and small commercial uses with a river orientation should be achieved. Improving transit options throughout the city and within the tourist sector would help to reduce the need for parking in the Vieux Carré.

The recent rezoning of the surface parking lots and vacant structures near the riverfront between Iberville to Conti Streets was meant to encourage the redevelopment of this prime but underutilized property. The new VCS-1 District would authorize a hotel as a conditional use in an existing building, in this case the seven story building at 111 Iberville. The remainder of the site is proposed to be developed as mixed use buildings with both residential and pedestrian-oriented commercial spaces. Adequate parking to serve these uses will need to be provided. Providing some parking for public uses would help offset the loss of public parking for the area. Generally, the character of the development should be complementary to the historic Vieux Carré.

Non-accessory parking lots were added as conditional uses in the VCS-Vieux Carré Service District in 2003. This was done in order to allow the existing non-conforming parking lots to be improved, subject to design and landscaping standards. This also affects the recently created VCS-1 district as well. A mechanism should be established to ensure that the existing lots will be brought up to the current landscape and design standards for parking lots in the CBD, unless these lots are not redeveloped for other uses.

Tourist Oriented Uses

Many residents of the Vieux Carré are concerned about a saturation of tourists in the area. The 2002 Tourism Management Element of the City’s Master Plan recognizes that tourism development should focus on areas outside of the Vieux Carré in order to relieve the pressure. Restrictions on timeshare buildings, bed & breakfasts, package liquor stores, massage parlors, adult establishments, tattoo parlors, and T-shirt shops should be maintained.



Governor Nichols Wharf shed



Floodwall opening at Ursulines St.

Canal Street to Esplanade Avenue (Vieux Carré)

Issues and Recommendations, continued

French Market Revitalization

The French Market is currently undergoing a “Market Revitalization” planning process that will restore the unique character and integrity of the market and improve its economic viability. The Market consists of approximately 11 acres of city owned property in the lower Vieux Carré, including nearly three acres of public parking between the floodwall and the railroad tracks and another two acres of surface parking on Elysian Fields Avenue between Chartres and N. Peters Streets. As a part of current planning for the site, the public should be involved in determining desired utilization of the French Market, including the surface parking lots. Future development should address the goals for open space, recreation, and a balance of resident and tourist oriented commercial uses. Consideration should be given to the reduction of the parking areas on the riverside of the floodwall in favor of more green space. As recommended in previous planning efforts, the parking lots on Elysian Fields Avenue should be converted into mixed use facilities, with ground floor commercial uses and additional commercial parking. This could offset the conversion of parking on the riverside of the floodwall to green space.

An urban design plan is needed for the foot of Elysian Fields and Esplanade Avenues that would create a more clear connection with the riverfront and French Market, enhance aesthetics, and improve traffic safety. A traffic circle that addresses the traffic flow from the convergence of streets and potential new developments may be considered.

Recommendations

Land Use and Zoning:

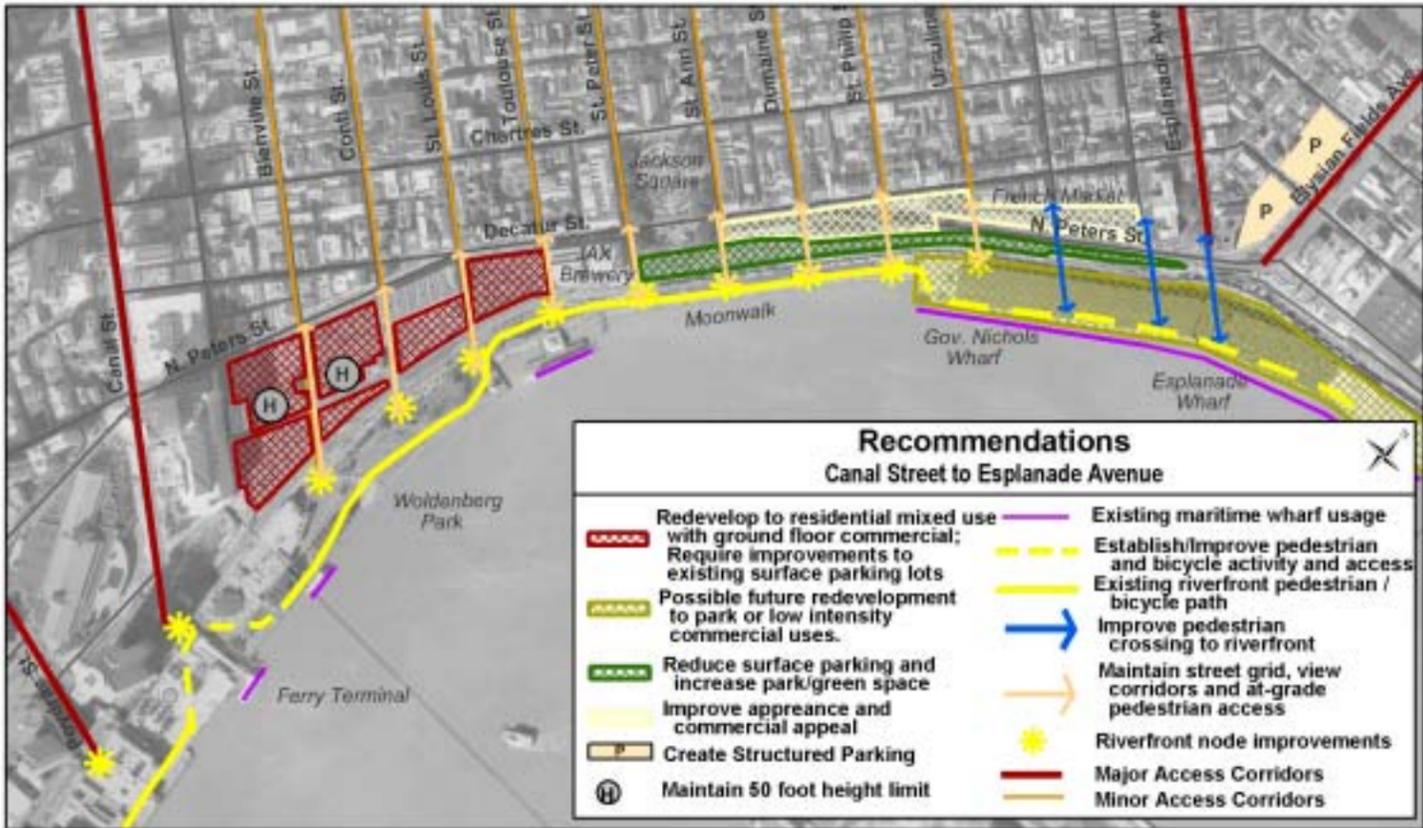
1. If maritime uses are relocated, support redevelopment of Governor Nichols Wharf to park or low intensity commercial uses. Remain mindful of navigational issues.
2. Support the redevelopment of the surface parking lots in the upper Vieux Carré to mixed use residential and low intensity commercial uses with structured parking.
3. Continue to support a balance of tourism uses with the needs and desires of Vieux Carré residents. Continue to pursue tourist destination options in other areas of the city.
4. Consider the reduction of surface parking riverside of the floodwall in the French Market area in favor of open, green space. Pursue the creation of low rise structured parking on the Elysian Fields lots with ground floor commercial uses.

Transportation and Access:

1. Improve pedestrian and bicycle access opportunities to the riverfront from the lower Vieux Carré, especially if redevelopment of the Governor Nichols Wharf occurs.
2. Retain the historic street grid and at-grade pedestrian rail and floodwall crossings to the rivers edge in the upper Vieux Carré.
3. Continue to improve transit options for the area to relieve parking pressure.
4. Ensure provision of adequate parking for any redevelopment of parking lots in the Vieux Carré.
5. Consider a traffic circle that addresses the traffic flow at the convergence of N. Peters Street, Esplanade, and Elysian Fields Avenues.

Design:

1. Maintain and enforce a 50 foot height limitation for development of the upper Vieux Carré parking lots on the landside of the floodwall. Ensure view corridors to the riverfront are retained.
2. Bring the existing parking lots into compliance with the landscaping and design requirements outlined in 15.2.13 of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance.
3. Amend the height limit of the VCP District from 50 ft. to 35 ft.
4. Improve the appearance and commercial appeal of the French Market by creating a more usable and attractive open air market that has better connections to the river and the neighborhood. Maintain a balance of resident and tourist oriented commercial uses.
5. Develop an urban design plan for the foot of Esplanade and Elysian Fields Avenues that would create a clearer connection to the river and the French Market, enhance aesthetics, and improve traffic safety.



St. Philip Street / French Market floodwall opening



Moonwalk pedestrian improvements