

FIGURE 10.5/DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Housing

Downtown housing can activate a city during the “off” hours of evenings and weekends. It can also help address the problem of workers needing to drive long distances to reach their jobs by providing housing near major employers. Finally, housing can introduce a residential component to the Downtown community, carrying with it a deeper vested interest in its success. Apart from a few small pockets of residential development, Downtown Biloxi currently lacks housing.

Key Issues

- Lack of a residential community in the Downtown limits activity in the area to weekdays and daytime only.
- There is a large imbalance between jobs and housing in the Downtown area.
- New housing development must be mindful of storm vulnerability and emergency evacuation issues.

Economic Development

The Downtown area is home to some of the largest employers in the City of Biloxi. In 2007 Beau Rivage Casino and Resort had over 2,800 employees; Hard Rock Hotel and Casino had over 1,300 employees; the Biloxi Regional Medical Center had over 840 employees; and the City of Biloxi had over 680 employees. Additionally, Downtown Biloxi is home to retail and office businesses along Highway 90 and surrounding the former Federal Courthouse building.

Enhancing and maintaining Downtown Biloxi’s image as a premiere destination is closely tied to positive economic development in the area. The Downtown epitomizes the heritage of “Old Biloxi.” New residential, retail, and office development should be compatible with the Downtown’s historic

architectural character and maintain its pedestrian-friendly ambiance.

Key Issues

- Several large employers and visitor-oriented businesses form the “engine” of the Downtown area’s economy. Currently few Downtown uses capitalize on this potential market (e.g., shopping and restaurant districts to complement the casinos; mixed-use development to complement the governmental and institutional buildings.)
- There is great potential to increase the number and concentration of retail and other commercial establishments. Vacant buildings and sites provide land for new businesses, while employees and visitors to the area are potential customers.
- While there are good architectural design standards in place for renovations to existing buildings within the Downtown Historic District, standards to ensure compatibility of new commercial or mixed-use development with the existing fabric of Downtown Biloxi need strengthening.
- There is an opportunity to position the Downtown as a center of business incubation and workforce development for the surrounding East Biloxi community.

10.3 / DOWNTOWN VISION, CONCEPT, AND STRATEGIES

Downtown Vision

Create a vibrant 24-hour, mixed-use, walkable, economically sustainable, and environmentally resilient Downtown that celebrates Biloxi's rich heritage while embracing architecturally compatible new development.

Downtown Concept

The revitalization concept for Downtown Biloxi seeks to restore its position as a vibrant activity center for the city and the region through a phased revitalization action program. In the short term (3-5 years), revitalization can be catalyzed by focusing on a core area encompassing the two casinos, the Rue Magnolia pedestrian corridor, the Lameuse Street Site, and the Old Library Site. Rue Magnolia can be transformed into a pedestrian-oriented shopping and restaurant district that complements the shopping and restaurants in the casinos. The positive momentum of development along Rue Magnolia can extend northward and ultimately connect Vieux Marche to the casinos. The Lameuse Street Site is an ideal location for mixed-use / entertainment-focused development as it is a large site with great access and visibility. The Former Library Site can be developed into a new Biloxi Town Square with mixed-use buildings surrounding a central open space. New development on these sites north of Highway 90 can serve as amenities that, together with streetscape improvements along Highway 90, will draw pedestrian traffic to and from the casinos, activating the Downtown area. A wide range of amenities (shopping, restaurants, family-oriented attractions) will also result in longer stays of casino patrons.

Long-term revitalization strategies include architecturally compatible and moderately scaled development of other opportunity sites, including: revitalization projects on segments of the Howard Avenue and Caillavet Street corridors; "gateway" development on the north side of Beach Boulevard at Caillavet Street on the north side of Beach Boulevard across from Beau Rivage; the Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard Site; the Federal Courthouse Site; and infill development along Reynoir, Lameuse, and Main Streets. New mixed-use development with residential components located outside of designated flood hazard areas will bring much needed pedestrian activity to the Downtown in the evenings and weekends, creating momentum for additional positive development. To attract both visitors and residents, Downtown is in need of more businesses with evening hours, second-floor residential units, outdoor cafes, coffee shops, gift shops, neighborhood-sized groceries, ice cream parlors, and other similar retailers.

The image of Downtown should include attractive, well-lit, and walkable streets. Architectural, parking, and street design guidelines should direct the design of new development so that priority is given to the pedestrian realm, reinforcing the identity of "Old Biloxi."

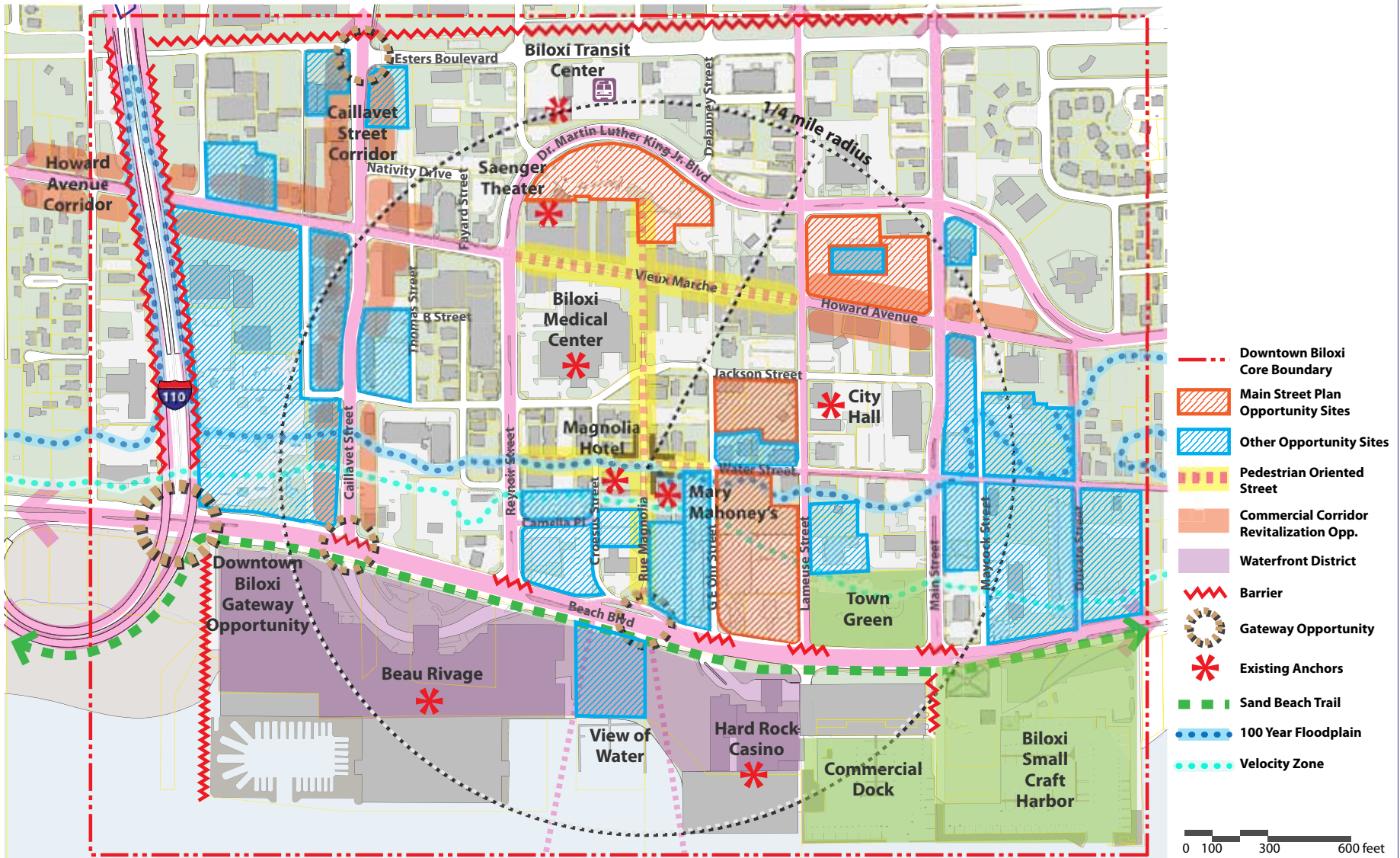


FIGURE 10.6/DOWNTOWN OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

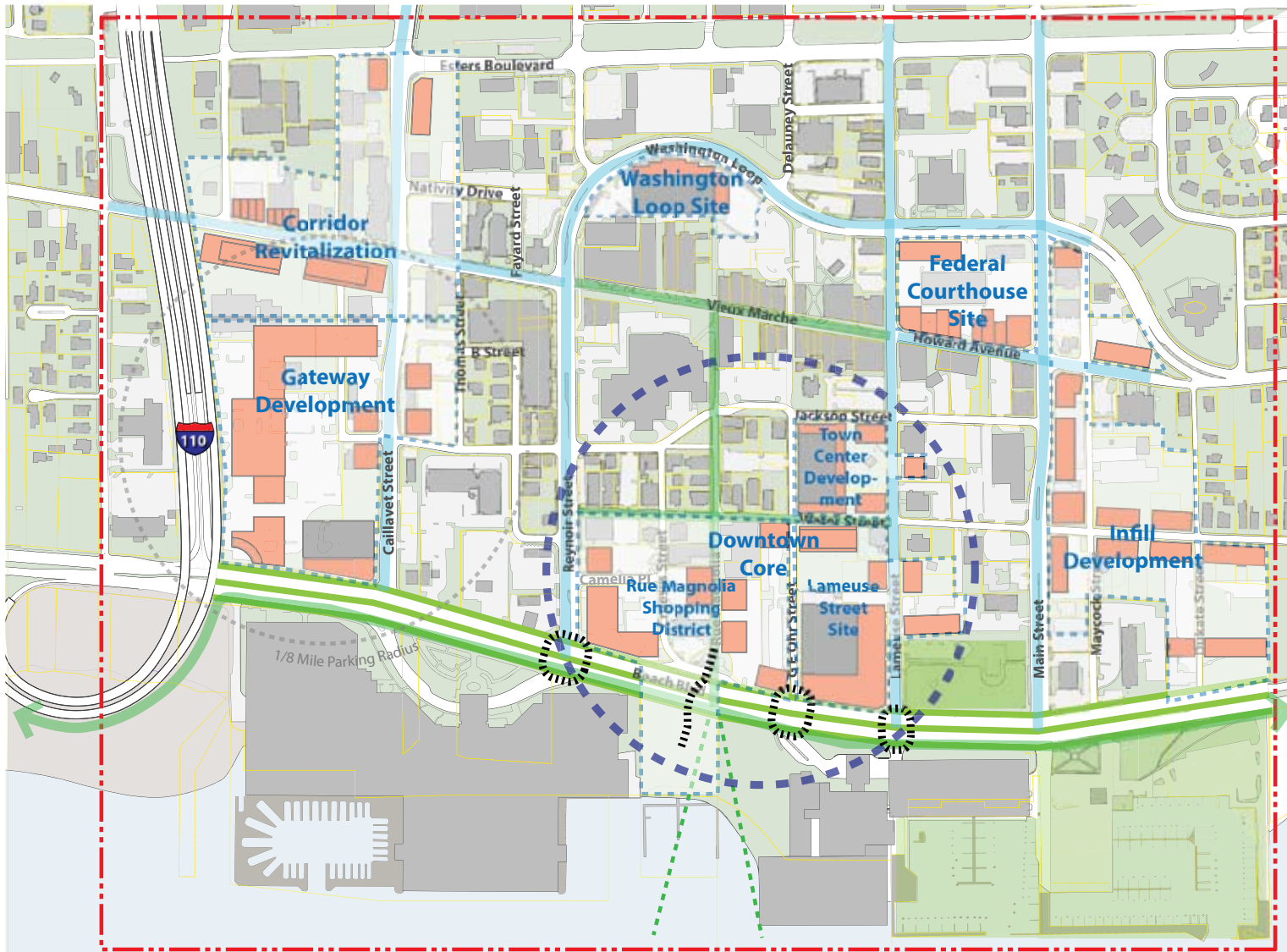


FIGURE 10.7/DOWNTOWN CONCEPT MAP

Downtown Strategies

Strategy 1

Establish stronger pedestrian connections across Beach Boulevard, linking casinos to the rest of Downtown. Drawing pedestrian traffic from the casinos into Downtown amenities will bring a wide range of activity to the Downtown area and benefit the casinos by encouraging longer patron stays.

Priority Actions

- Retime and coordinate traffic signals so that pedestrians have ample time to cross the road.
- Restripe and “texture” intersections so that pedestrian realms are more clearly defined.
- Implement streetscape improvements along Beach Boulevard.

Strategy 2

Focus short-term investment in the central core of Downtown Biloxi with clear visibility along Beach Boulevard, in order to draw pedestrian traffic from the casinos north along Rue Magnolia toward Vieux Marche.

Priority Actions

- Redevelop “catalytic sites” on Lameuse Street through public-private partnerships in which public infrastructure investments (e.g., a parking garage, public open spaces, streetscape improvements) incentivize private investment (e.g., mixed-use residential, retail, and office development).
- Promote a “Rue Magnolia” shopping district / “Restaurant Row” centered along a pedestrian walkway

with Mary Mahoney’s Restaurant as a major anchor. Provide parking behind buildings with access from adjacent streets.

Strategy 3

Rehabilitate existing buildings in the Downtown and develop new ones in a manner that responds to Biloxi’s unique context and character.

Priority Actions

- Develop architectural design guidelines for new mixed-use buildings in the Downtown that captures the visual character of “Old Biloxi.” Design guidelines should address building scale, orientation, height, massing, composition, façade treatment, and details.
- Implement a façade improvement program through the Biloxi Main Street District that allocates grants for building owners or tenants to improve their storefronts. The Gulfport Main Street District Façade Master Plan Grant Program is a possible model.

Strategy 4

Develop Downtown housing above commercial space in mixed-use buildings. Wherever possible, locate mixed-use buildings with residential uses outside the 100-year floodplain. For buildings located within the 100-year floodplain, ensure that ground floors with commercial uses are flood-proofed or utilize them for parking. Develop new Downtown office space at ground level or above retail space in mixed-use buildings.

Priority Actions

- Change the existing CBD zoning to allow mixed-use development by right rather than as a conditional use.

Gulfport Main Street District Façade Master Plan Grant Program

The Gulfport Main Street District Façade Master Plan Grant Program was developed to encourage existing and future Downtown property owners and long-term tenants to upgrade the public facing facades of their buildings. The goal is to improve the appearance of the Gulfport Main Street District in an effort to make it more appealing to consumers and potential new business operators. Nationwide, similar programs have resulted in significantly increased business revenues, increased property values, and renewed civic pride.

The goal of the program is a comprehensive rehabilitation of many Downtown buildings at once on a block-by-block basis. The property owner gives the City a temporary easement (usually 5–7 years) on the facade of the building, allowing the local government to spend funds on its improvement. In exchange for this temporary easement, the grant funds pay for a facade improvement program. This type of program allows for a single source of project management, design, and construction. Moreover, when used in conjunction with a grant source like the Mississippi Development Authority’s Community Development Block Grant Program, the facade enhancements can be realized at no cost to the building owner or tenant.



- Consider including incentives (e.g. increased intensity, increased building height, reduced or alternative landscaping and open space requirements) in the LDO to further encourage mixed-use development.
- Enforce and enhance the Architectural and Historical Review Commission (AHRC) Design Review Guidelines to ensure that new development complements Biloxi's historic character.

Strategy 5

Strengthen the Howard Avenue and Caillavet Street commercial corridors through design guidelines and streetscape improvements. Howard Avenue is envisioned as an east-west spine across the Downtown, linking many of Downtown Biloxi's key anchors (i.e., the Biloxi Regional Medical Center, Vieux Marche, and municipal buildings) to the rest of East Biloxi. Caillavet Street (part of the Greater Downtown Planning Area) is envisioned as its north-south counterpart, connecting Downtown Biloxi to redeveloped uses along the corridor and the IP casino to the north.

Priority Actions

- Enact a Corridor Overlay Redevelopment "framework district" that provides redevelopment incentives on segments of Howard Avenue and Caillavet Street to promote redevelopment in appropriate locations while establishing basic design standards for buildings, parking and open space.

Strategy 6

Encourage redevelopment of the 12-acre Beau Rivage property at the northwest corner of the Caillavet Street/Beach Boulevard intersection, creating an opportunity for a Downtown

gateway and anchor for Howard Avenue and Caillavet Street.

Priority Actions

- Initiate a dialogue with Beau Rivage representatives on future plans for the property.
- Through enhancements to the Downtown Architectural Design Guidelines, apply urban design standards to ensure that future development of this property is appropriately scaled and transitions smoothly to the historic Downtown core.

Strategy 7

Develop an open space preservation and enhancement strategy for Downtown Biloxi that incorporates:

- Public open space in front of City Hall
- Green parking lots
- "Complete Streets" with green infrastructure
- Micro-parks
- Streetscape improvements along major roads
- Connection to an enhanced Sand Beach Trail and public walkway zone around East Biloxi
- Preservation of view of Mississippi Sound from Rue Magnolia
- Enhanced landscaping and tree protection standards, especially preservation of live oaks
- A Town Green with a small outdoor amphitheater
- Redevelopment of the former federal courthouse

Priority Actions

- Incorporate open space into catalytic development projects, starting with a public square as part of redevelopment of the Former Library Site.

- Pursue partnerships with Downtown businesses to “green” the Downtown pedestrian environment.
- Enhance Town Green with an outdoor amphitheater.

Strategy 8

Promote alternative modes of transportation, such as bicycles and public transit, to reduce vehicular traffic and create a more walkable Downtown. Minimize the impact of parking lots on the pedestrian realm.

Priority Actions

- Establish the Biloxi Transit Center (on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard) as a multimodal transportation hub for buses and a future regional transit service along the east-west corridor (existing CSX rail line).
- Work with CTA to fully implement the Gulf Coast Transit Development Plan proposal to develop a streetcar trolley system serving the tourism industry in Biloxi. This system can have expanded stops as the Downtown develops.
- Develop Howard Avenue, Caillavet, Reynoir, Lameuse, and Main Streets into “Complete Streets” that accommodate all modes of transportation.
- Conduct a Downtown sidewalk inventory, verifying sidewalk locations, conformance to ADAAG, condition and access to parking lots.

Strategy 9

Develop and implement a strategy to meet Downtown parking needs as revitalization efforts move forward.

Priority Actions

- Update the 1999 parking study by 1) evaluating the available capacity of public parking in relation to potential demand and 2) creating a strategy to provide

sufficient parking as sites in the Downtown area are developed.

- Improve parking lot lighting in the CBD
- Consider incorporating new CBD off-street parking requirements (e.g., demonstration of adequate parking within a 1/8 mile radius of the proposed development, trash dumpster screening/enclosures) into the LDO.

Strategy 10

Market and develop other “Opportunity” infill sites over the long term in response to increased demand in Downtown Biloxi’s real estate market sparked by earlier revitalization activities. Key sites include:

- Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard Site
- Federal Courthouse Site
- Downtown Biloxi Gateway Site
- Infill sites on Reynoir Street
- Infill sites on Lameuse Street
- Infill sites on Main Street

Priority Actions

- Institute more flexible standards to facilitate appropriate development of existing lots, providing incentives for minimizing building footprints and maximizing open space in floodplain areas.
- Enact a new Planned Development – Infill District with flexibility and incentives to enable high quality development on small fragmented lots.
- Develop a site for a small business incubator in the Downtown area where its central location and access to nearby resources will benefit future entrepreneurs and the East Biloxi community.

