

Main Street Neighborhood Planning Study.

Executive Summary. August 2009.

Completed by the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio
for the Biloxi Housing Authority &
the Gulf Coast Housing Resource Network

With generous support from the John S. & James L. Knight Foundation

GCCDS

Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Mississippi State University College of Architecture Art + Design

Main Street Neighborhood Study.

Introduction.

The Gulf Coast Housing Resource Network is a group formed to share information, to avoid competition in procuring properties for affordable housing development, and to partner on these and other redevelopment efforts. The core members of the network working in East Biloxi are:

- Back Bay Mission,
- The Biloxi Housing Authority,
- The Gulf Coast Community Design Studio,
- Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast,
- The Hope Coordination Center (formerly EBCRRA), and
- Mercy Housing & Human Services.

In 2008, these organizations worked with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Knight Foundation to identify catalyst projects to spur redevelopment in the East Biloxi area. The Knight Foundation provided the group funds to pay for planning and pre-development work leading to revitalization activities in the Main Street Neighborhood Area of East Biloxi. (Figure 1.)

In August 2009, GCCDS produced their final planning and analysis report, entitled “Main Street Neighborhood Planning Study.” This is an executive summary of the full published study.

The purpose of the study is to develop an initial community plan for restored and rehabilitated housing, as well as new commercial spaces in the area. The phases of the study include:

- Background Research and Analysis
- Market Analyses
- Building-Related Challenges and Opportunities
- Preliminary Proposals
- Community Response
- Conclusions

The study focuses on East Biloxi, the City of Biloxi’s historic core and the area of the city most hard-hit by Hurricane Katrina. In addition, this area of Biloxi is home to most of the city’s African-American and Vietnamese populations. Already struggling with disinvestment, substandard housing, and a general lack of resources and political agency prior to the storm, these neighborhoods now must contend with the increased costs of rebuilding and insuring homes, the financial and urbanistic impacts of elevating buildings, and the mounting pressures of casino-oriented development along their peripheries. The planning study focuses on the recovery of the lower-income neighborhoods struggling to rebuild, the commercial corridors facing disinvestment well before Katrina struck, and the bayous and lowlands that regularly experience flooding. Six distinct zones are addressed:

- The Caillavet Street Commercial Corridor
- The Main Street Mixed-Use Corridor
- The Division Street Mixed-Use Corridor
- The Main Street Neighborhood
- The Bayou Auguste Park Area
- The Oak Street Commercial Corridor

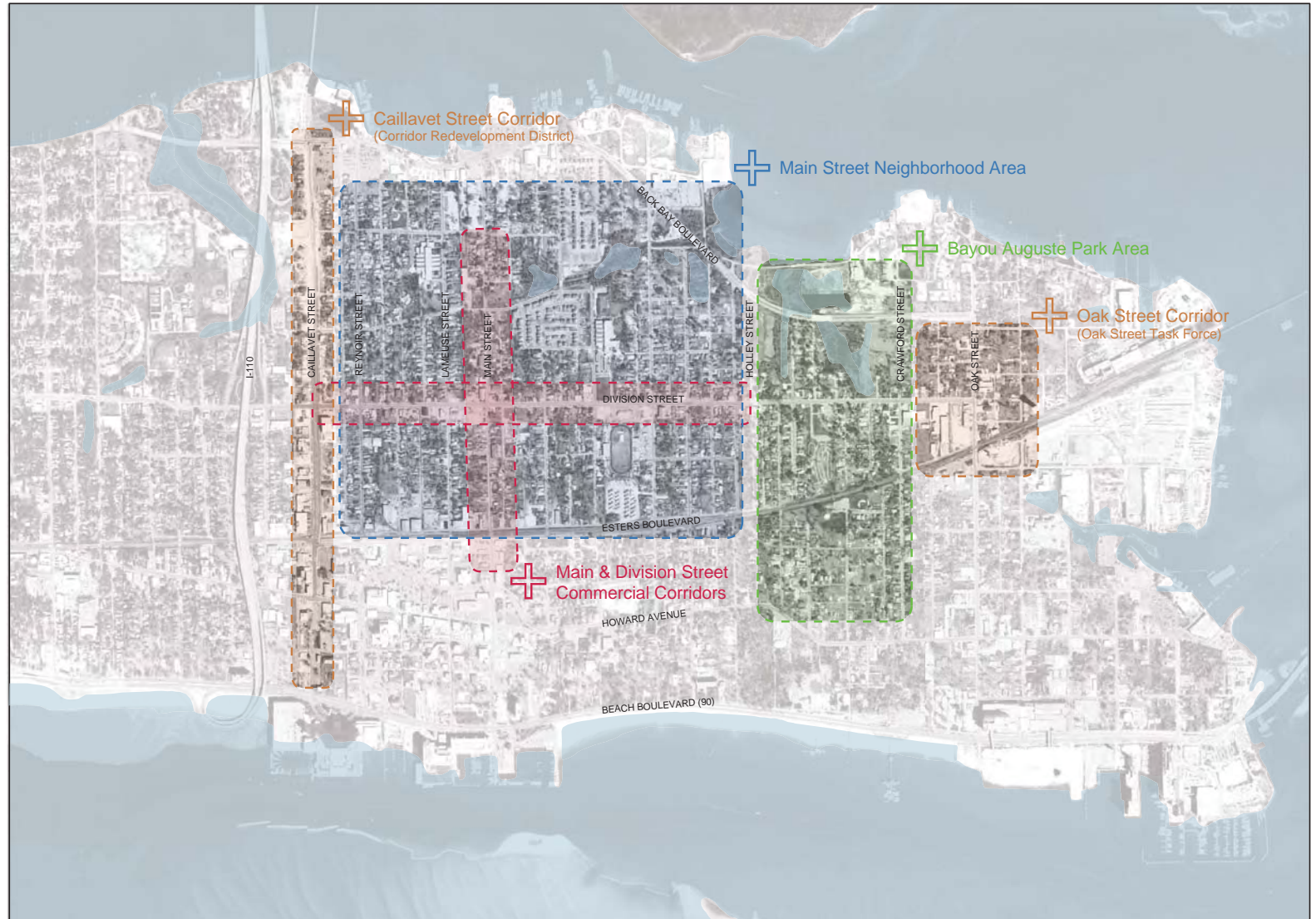
Each area is described in the final planning report, with emphasis on the Main and Division Street corridors and the Main Street residential areas.

FIGURE 1.

Main Street Neighborhood Study.

Primary Planning Areas.

June 2008



Source: FEMA orthophoto, 2007.

0 | 0.125 | 0.25 | Miles | 0.5



Division Street Corridor.

Division Street is the core of the East Biloxi community in many ways. It contains the majority of the community's many institutions (churches, schools, nonprofits like the Salvation Army, the future Kroc Community Center, and John Henry Beck Park). It is the parade route for the community's many festivals. It is the main transportation route, for cars, bicycles, and bus transit. It is also the only area with significant commercial zoning. Despite this, Division Street is rarely mentioned in previously published plans.

FIGURE 2.

Division Street Land Use Analysis

October 2008

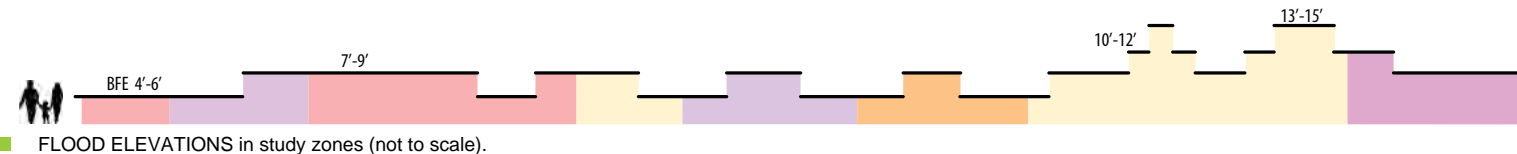
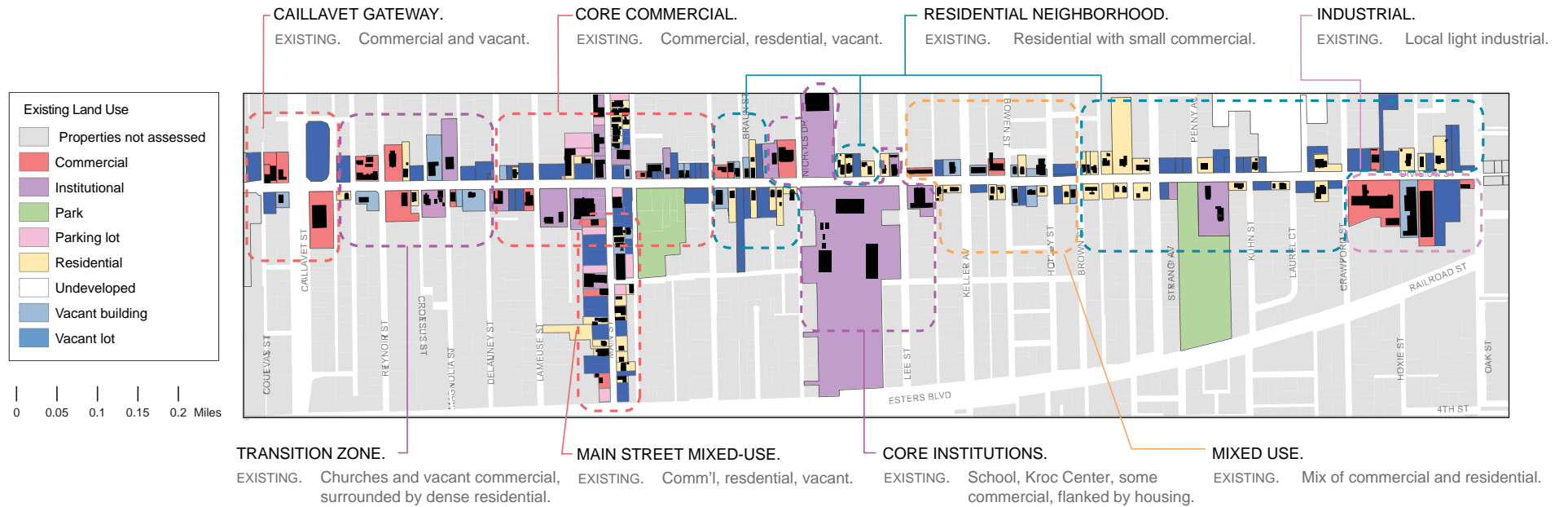
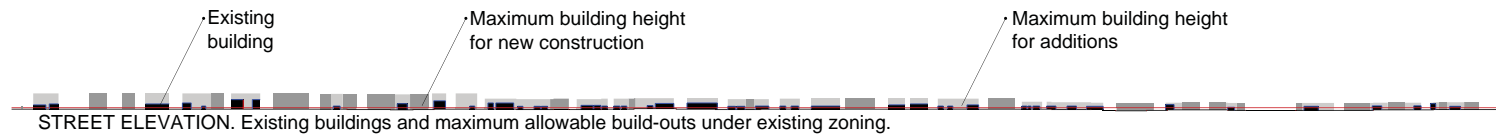


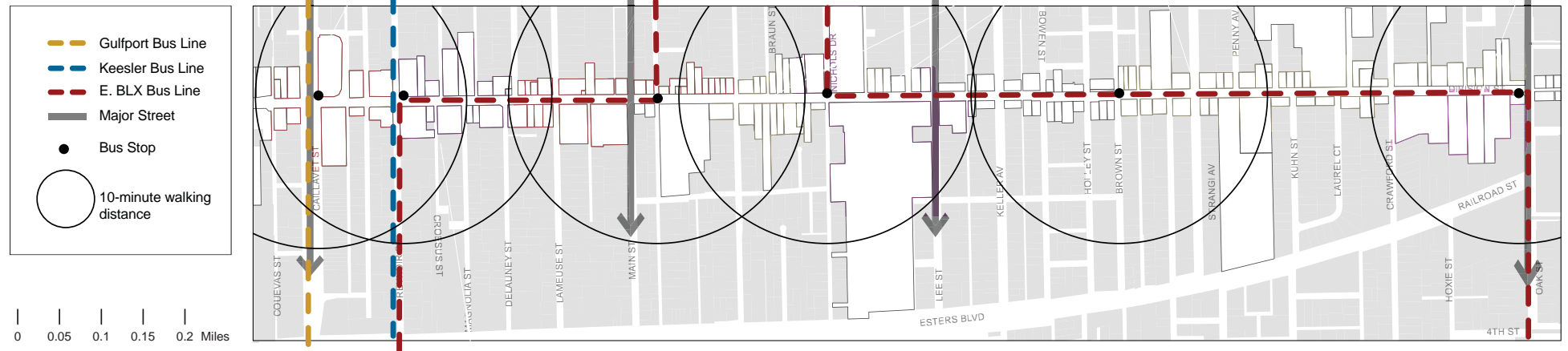
FIGURE 3.



FIGURE 4.

Transportation Linkages on Division Street

October 2008



Main Street Corridor.

Historically, Main Street was the central commercial thoroughfare of Biloxi's African-American community. It was an alternative to the downtown area that served Biloxi's white community. However, for various reasons, in recent years the Main Street neighborhood commercial corridor has lost much of its vitality.

The areas closest to the train tracks and between Division Street and the Back Bay are primarily residential, mostly single-family homes. Some of these are historic buildings, repaired after the storm, and others are new homes built to replace those lost to Katrina. The heart of Main Street, where one can imagine its heyday, is the area between Murray and Division Streets. The newly constructed clinic and the Nance Temple Church of God, in addition to the area's proximity to John Henry Beck Park, begin to suggest an important civic location at the intersection of Division and Main. For the most part, Main Street is on higher ground, and is less threatened by future storm risks than some other areas of the neighborhood. As a result, this is a good area to continue infilling and even in which to build more densely.

FIGURE 5.
Main Street
Existing Zoning
October 2008

- B-2 Community business
- B-4 General Commercial
- RS-5 Single Family Residential
- RM-25 Multiple-family high density
- I-1 Light & heavy industrial
- Existing buildings

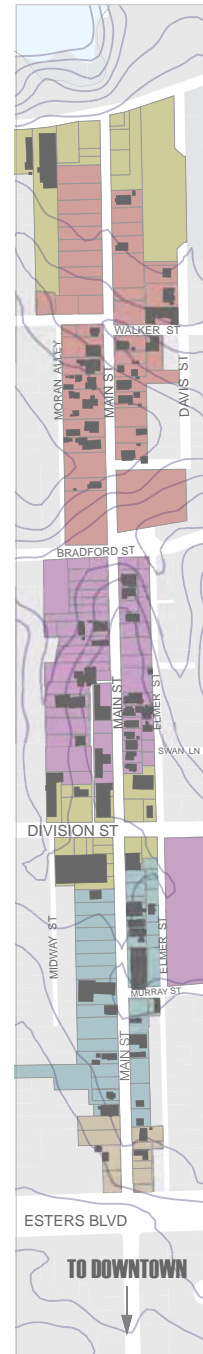
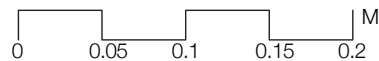
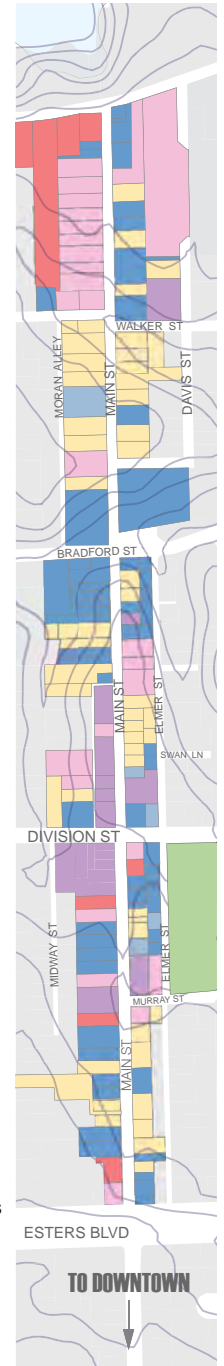
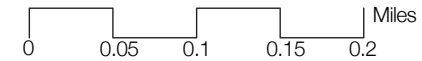


FIGURE 6.
Main Street
Existing Land Use
October 2008

- Key to Existing Land Use
- Properties not assessed
 - Commercial
 - Institutional
 - Park
 - Parking lot
 - Residential
 - Vacant building
 - Vacant lot



Residential Strategies.

The residential landscape that is emerging is one of repaired homes built at or just above grade; and elevated infill houses ranging from 3'-0" to as much as 17'-0" above grade. In addition, there are op-

portunities for elevated multi-unit housing and accessory dwelling units, as well as the possibility of developing a no-build zone in very low lying areas.

FIGURE 7.

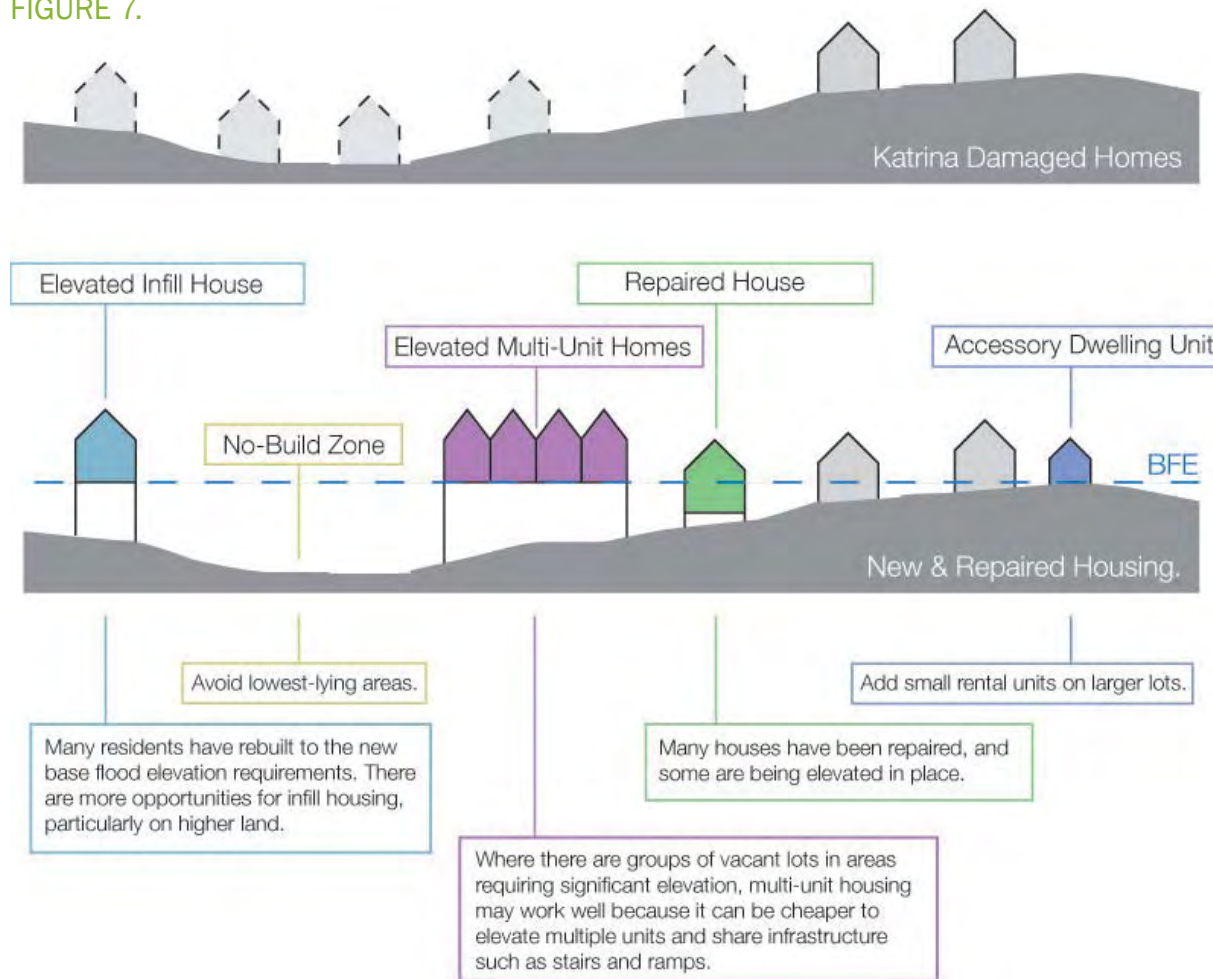


FIGURE 8-10. 9-10 from archrecord.com.



Commercial Strategies.

FIGURE 11.

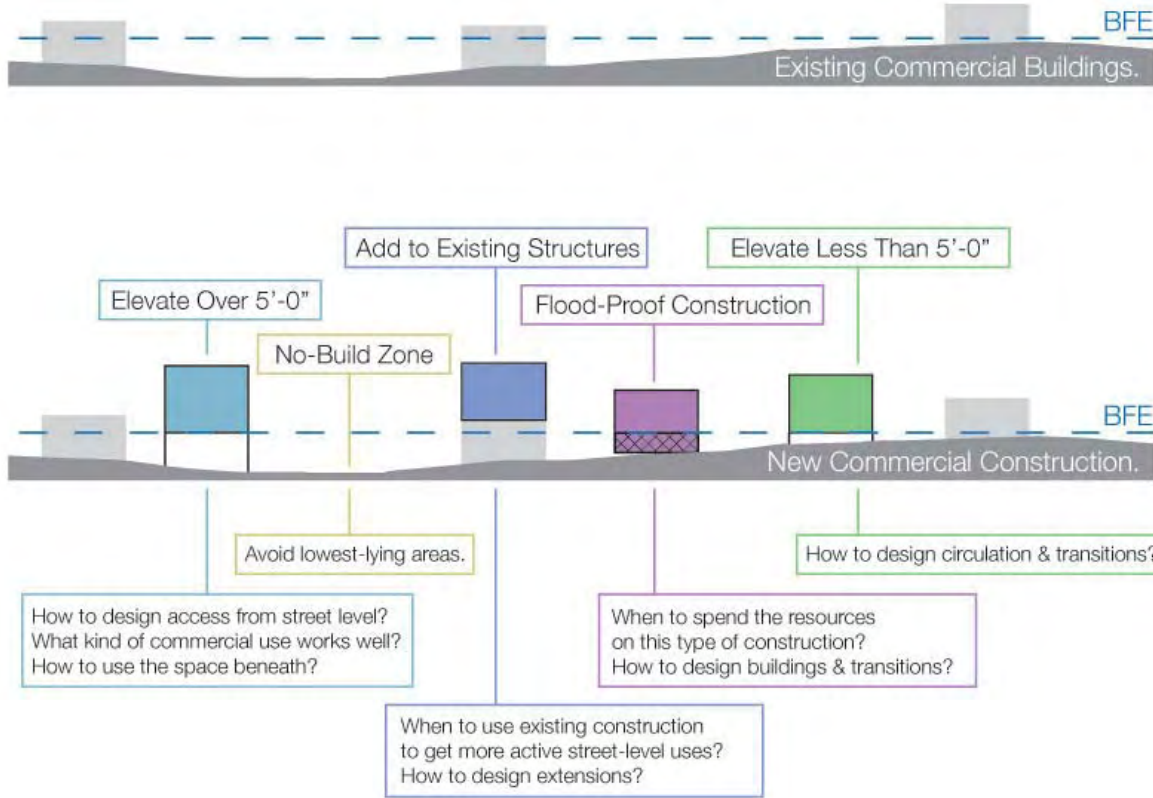


FIGURE 12. Floodproof construction strategies.

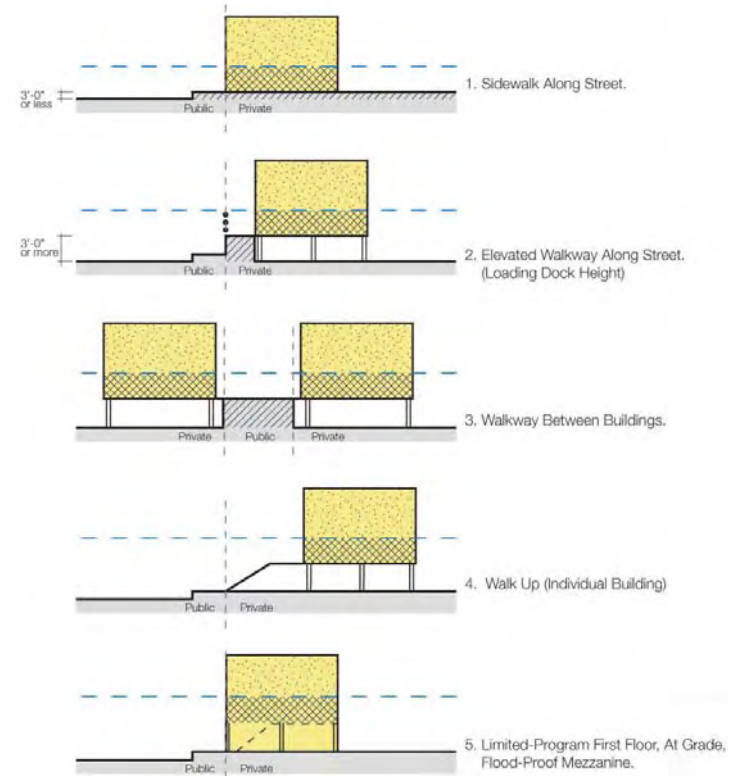


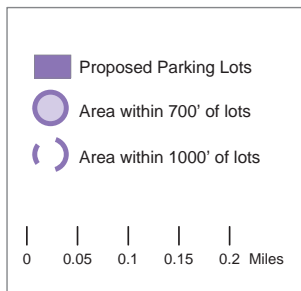
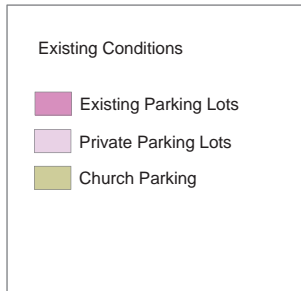
FIGURE 13-15. A mixed-use building elevated less than 5'; a commercial building elevated a full story; and a residential addition to an existing commercial building.



Parking.

Current zoning allows for clustered, shared parking to be created in commercial areas. This strategy could productively use some of the vacant lots on the street now, while alleviating the pressure on small businesses to find properties large enough to meet parking requirements. Shared parking would meet the needs of different users in the community: lots could be used by businesses during the week and churches on weekends. East Biloxi's dense, walkable nature also contributes to the feasibility of using small parking lots located every few blocks.

FIGURE 16.
Division Street
Parking Analysis.
 June 2009.



Streetscape Improvements.

FIGURE 17. A potential streetscape improvement plan for residential sections of Division Street could incorporate wider sidewalks for accessibility, on-street parking, trees for shading pedestrians, and rainwater catchment gardens, all while maintaining Division Street's distinctive width and retaining walls.



Recommendations.

A number of recommendations are made throughout the final study. The recommendations are collected here and shown by category, as addressed within the report. Time frame breakdowns and suggested responsible parties are included in the final report.

Residential.

- Continue to build infill housing on vacant lots in established neighborhoods on higher ground.
- Encourage development of ADUs particularly on higher ground to increase density in safer areas and provide alternative sources of income while meeting the area's need for affordable rental units.
- Develop no-build zone around bayous and create restored wetlands surrounded by buffer zones of usable park space to create amenities for residents and tourists, while providing greater protection from storms and greater capacity to absorb stormwater runoff without municipal treatment or polluting overflow.
- In areas requiring significant elevation, focus development close to existing neighborhoods to take advantage of repaired infrastructure and safety.
- In these areas build small clusters of multi-unit housing to distribute the cost of elevation, stairs, and elevators over several units.

Commercial.

- For buildings under 5' above grade, use shared platforms, secondary sidewalks, intermediate stairs with benches and planters or other similar infrastructure to soften transition to higher build-

ings and allow access to ground floor uses.

- Create building forms that allow for multiple uses. These may be larger buildings, as shown in this document, or smaller ones that can be used for residences not but adapt to commercial over time.
- Take advantage of existing buildings, which have at-grade entrances. Renovate them or new uses, or create new additions that incorporate space of residential uses above commercial ground floors.
- Where financing allows and where the land use requires it, as with very public programs, use flood proof construction to build closer to grade.

Zoning.

- Encourage mixed-use development along commercial streets like Division, Main, and Oak.
- Create an overlay district for the Main Street community allowing for smaller front yard setbacks, perhaps even establishing max front yard setbacks, and encouraging parking to be located on the side or rear setbacks.
- Consider allowing vertical circulation, porches, overhangs, and other elements that help link elevated buildings to grade to be built in setbacks.
- Consider creating East Biloxi overly to allow smaller lot sizes as of right.

Parking.

- Discourage large parking lost in front of buildings to reduce heat-island effect, improve pedestrian environment, and maintain historic character of East Biloxi streets. Encourage parking to be

located at the side or rear of buildings.

- Create small parking lots in strategic areas (largely West of Main Street) to support existing and new commercial development and allow for overflow church parking on Sundays. These parking lots can use permeable paving, plantings, fences, and other elements to improve the visual appearance of the street, reduce the heat-island effect, and manage stormwater runoff, as well.
- Develop a Division and Main Street commercial corridor parking plan that takes into account newly created public lots in reducing the required on-site parking ratios for new commercial development.

Streetscapes.

- Incorporate sidewalk improvements into Division Street repairs. In particular, widen existing sidewalks to allow ADA accessibility; remove utility poles from walking paths, potentially burying utilities if feasible; in western portions of street introduce trees for shade, stormwater management, improved appearance and reduction of heat-island effect; in eastern portions of street, introduce bioswales or other vegetation to manage surface water while providing an attractive amenity.
- Preserve and maintain existing retaining walls, steps, and other architectural features that contribute to the unique urban fabric of the area.
- Consider removing center, shared turning lane to allow for widened sidewalks without expanding overall right of way.
- Provide improved street lighting that creates evenly-lighted sidewalks for greater security.



GCCDS

Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Mississippi State University College of Architecture, Art + Design
425 Division Street Biloxi, MS 39530 <http://www.gccds.org>