



# RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN & DESOTO PARK CONCEPT PLAN

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

<b>Eskew+Dumez+Ripple</b>	Architecture.Environments.Urban Design
<b>The Waterfront Center</b>	Community Programming
<b>Suzanne Turner</b>	Urban and Landscape History
<b>Audubon Nature Institute</b>	Governance.Operations
<b>Plan Baton Rouge</b>	Charrette Logistics
<b>ABMB</b>	Consulting Engineers





# LETTER OF SUBMISSION

Facility Planning and Control  
State of Louisiana, Division of Administration  
Attn: Lisa Smeltzer  
1051 Third Street, Room B31  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

25 November, 2003

Riverfront Master Plan and DeSoto Park Concept Plan  
EDR Project Nos. 03015-20 and 03022-10

Dear Lisa:

On behalf of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, I am pleased to submit the Baton Rouge Riverfront Master Plan and DeSoto Park Concept Plan. The Plans build on the work initiated in Plan Baton Rouge and continued through the Capitol Park Interpretive Plan and Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan, and embody the ideas brought together by the community during the February 2002 Design Charrette.

The vision of the Master Plan is one of a City reunited with its waterfront, a waterfront which is both the heart and center of urban activity, clearly identified and celebrated as such. The Master Plan sets forth nine Implementation Components, addressing key Riverfront issues -- connectivity, waterfront identity, placemaking, pedestrian circulation, recreational spaces -- with specific and feasible recommendations. With these Plans, Baton Rouge can look forward to a new Riverfront vitality, firmly anchoring this crucial stretch along the River in its proper role as the City's urban center.

Respectfully Submitted,

R. Allen Eskew, FAIA  
Director

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## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

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## MASTER PLAN PROFILE

**Background** The Riverfront planning process began in February of 2002 with a three-day Design Charrette that involved individuals representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds and talents within the community. Under the guidance of Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, architects and master planners, participants discussed concepts and proposals which have now taken shape in the form of this Riverfront Master Plan. A summary of the Plan is outlined below:

**Goals** The primary goal of the Riverfront Master Plan is to reunify the urban fabric with the waterfront in a way that will improve connectivity within the City as a whole, and make the City a more livable environment. The vision is one of an active Riverfront, at once the heart and the center of the City, clearly identified and celebrated as such.

**Recommendations** The Plan draws on seven Guiding Principles which separate out these overarching goals according to the New Urbanism principles embodied in Plan Baton Rouge. From there, nine Implementation Components make specific observations regarding existing Riverfront definitions, image and linkages, and recommend steps to address issues and problems. The Components work to unify the Riverfront and make it more accessible to the public -- both physically, with measures such as signage and pedestrian routes, and conceptually, in terms of how the community thinks about and interacts with the Riverfront and Downtown areas.

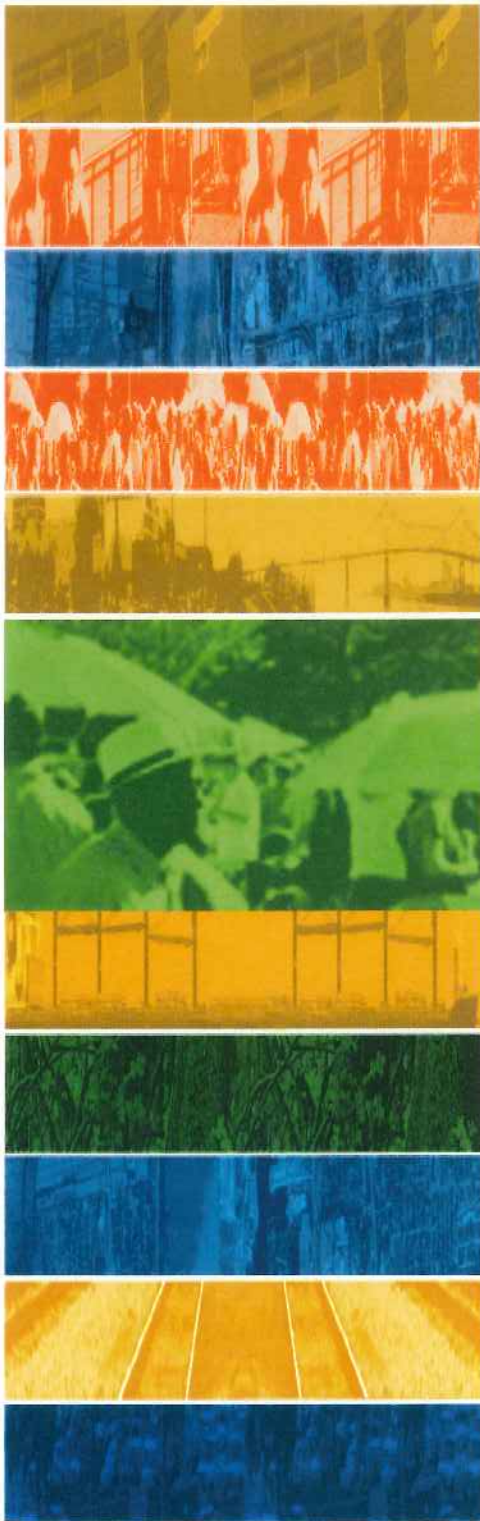
The Plan also includes the DeSoto Park Concept Plan, which provides a rough outline for the proposed park, in both use and layout. The Concept Plan provides schematics and sectional drawings that can later be used as the conceptual basis for detailed drawings by the landscape architects and engineers selected through the State competition.

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## SCOPE/WORK PLAN

**Work Plan** The Master Plan work plan anticipated seven steps, which were centered on a 3-day charrette that brought together a broad selection of stakeholders and members of the community. The charrette was facilitated by Eskew+Dumez+Ripple and took place in January of 2002.

- Step 1 Collection of background material and research
- Step 2 Facilitation of a 3-day community planning charrette
- Step 3 Division of post charrette design recommendations
- Step 4 Review of design recommendations with key community leaders
- Step 5 Production of final charrette report
- Step 6 Presentation of final report to Steering Committee
- Step 7 Final presentation to Baton Rouge civic and business community

<b>Stakeholders</b>	Spanish Town	YMCA	Scotlandville -- CDC
	Beauregard Town	Richard Preis	Scotlandville Beautification C'ee
	Jennifer Grand	Hearins	Scotlandville Business District
	LASC	Jay Dardenne	Port Allen Mayor's Office
	LSU	Mayor's Office	North BR CDC
	Old State Capitol	DDD	Hartley -- Vey
	Southern University	CVB	Bob Dean
	Centroplex	Clare Bateman	LA State Museum
	DPW	BREC	Congressman Richard Baker
	Metro Council	Arts Block	Senator Mary Landrieu
	Rail Road	CRPC	Senator John Breaux
	USS Kidd	Reich Associates	Exxon & other River plants
	Casinos	State Parks	Rolfe McCollister
	Sheraton	Legislators	
	The Advocate	South BR CDC	

**Steering Committee** Mark Drennan (represented by Sarah Kracke)  
Skipper Post  
Davis Rhorer  
Southern University representative  
LSU representative

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## DESIGN TEAM PROFILES

**Eskew+Dumez+Ripple** EDR is a nationally recognized Architectural and Urban Design firm that creates projects of architectural excellence that resonate with a specificity of place. The firm is committed to enhance and protect both the cultural and natural environments of the communities it serves, evident in the collaborative nature of process, technical craftsmanship of design, and long-term sustainability of their projects.

**Suzanne Turner** Suzanne Turner is a landscape architect and consultant for the preservation and interpretation of historic and cultural landscapes. She was Associate Dean of the College of Design and Coordinator of the Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University. Her work has been recognized through several awards and honors.

**The Waterfront Center** The Waterfront Center is a non-profit educational organization that promotes sensitive, site-specific urban waterfront planning and development. Focusing on the unique relationship between the water and the community, the Center assists these communities and professions in establishing long-term uses of waterfront resources for public benefit.

**Audubon Nature Institute** The Audubon Nature Institute promotes conservation projects throughout the Southeast. Their mission is to enhance the survival of wildlife through ongoing education and research. The Institute operates several self-sufficient facilities, including the Audubon Zoo and the Audubon Nature Center.

**Plan Baton Rouge** Plan Baton Rouge is a blueprint for the redevelopment of downtown into a 24-hr city that will attract workers, students, tourists, and local residents. Over 100 projects include public spaces, art galleries, retail, hotels and restaurants. The Plan, carried out through the charrette process in June 1998, was facilitated by Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, an Architecture and Town Planning firm specializing in New Urbanism.

**ABMB** ABMB Engineers experience in civil and structural projects includes planning, design and plan preparation, project estimation, inspection, and construction supervision. To ensure the quality, economy, and viability of its projects, ABMB has compiled a Quality Control Manual detailing guidelines for successful designs and projects.

## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

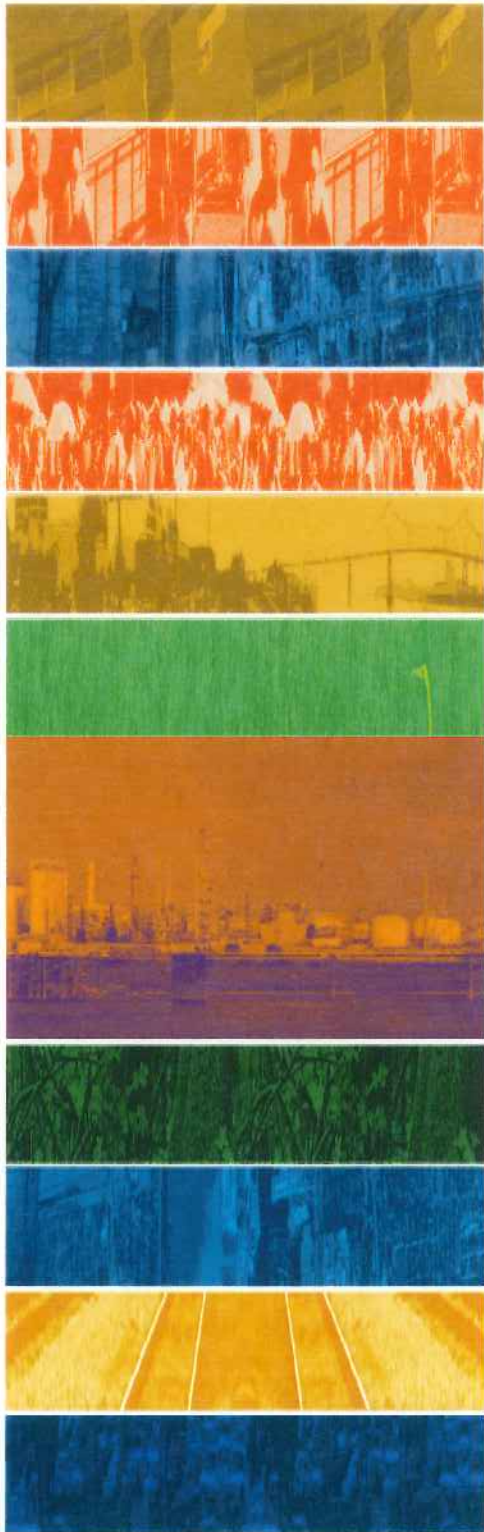
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RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN





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**CONTEXT OF THE MASTER PLAN**

The Baton Rouge Riverfront has always been defined by its strategic geographic location. To be properly understood, the Riverfront must be viewed not only in the larger geographical context, but also in terms of the historic, economic and social forces that shaped its development. Only in this broader environment can the opportunities -- and constraints -- of the Riverfront be fully appreciated. The Plan thus begins with the Riverfront's national, state and regional context.

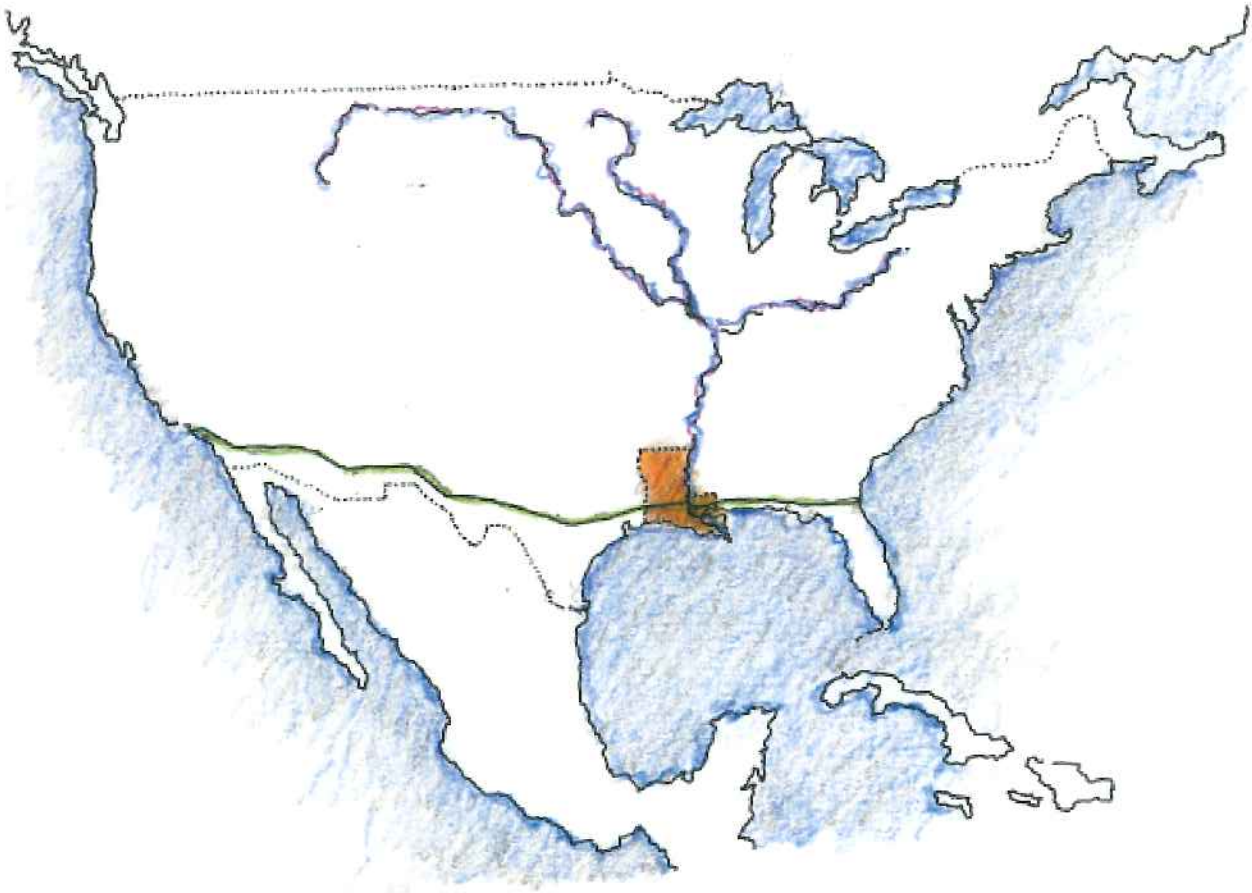




**NATIONAL CONTEXT: Mississippi River  
as Defining Element**

**National Context** Any description of the Mississippi River is inevitably filled with superlatives: Mighty. Majestic. Timeless. Serene. Not without justification has the largest waterway in North America earned its place at the heart of the nation's identity. Not only did it draw the country together geographically, with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, but it served as a major economic engine for the developing nation, providing a major two-way transportation artery for the agricultural and later the petro-chemical industries.

Today the Mississippi continues to play a preeminent role in the life of the communities along its borders, necessarily serving as a physical and psychological focal point for activities extending to either side.



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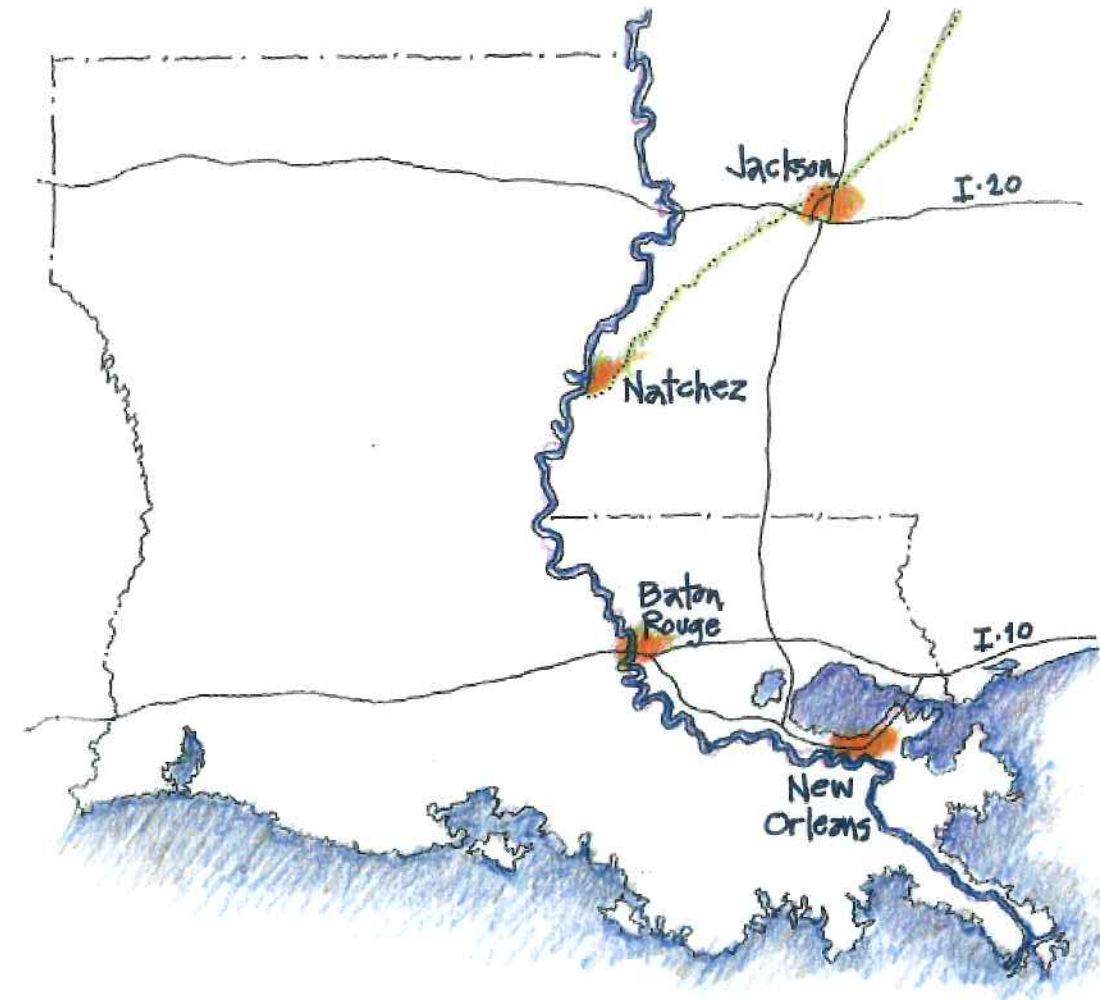


## STATE CONTEXT: The River as Central Focal Point

**State Context** In Louisiana the Mississippi River has always been the lifeblood of the state. Early on, the river provided essential transportation possibilities that allowed the French and Spanish explorers to penetrate its inhospitable geography. The River quickly became the primary means for transporting both raw and finished materials, activity which in turn became the very *raison d'être* for the communities which grew up along its edges.

On the political level, the Mississippi became a major trump card which politicians used in the geopolitical struggles in Washington D.C., a dynamic which was exploited to its fullest by Huey P. Long. Under his administration, the Airline Highway Bridge was constructed across the River with a clearance low enough to preclude all major shipping activity upriver of the state capitol. Efforts to implement a system of flood control consumed enormous resources throughout the state's history, but the need for effective measures was already recognized in 1717, when de la Tour, Bienville's engineer, opposed the founding of New Orleans at its present site precisely for that reason.

With the flood control system in place, transport tonnages for such commodities as oil and gas, grain, chemicals, iron and steel have doubled every decade since 1930. Indeed, without the River it is doubtful that Louisiana would have more than just a nominal industrial base. Thus, it is the River that has shaped the state from its inception, and continues to define its present and future course.



## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

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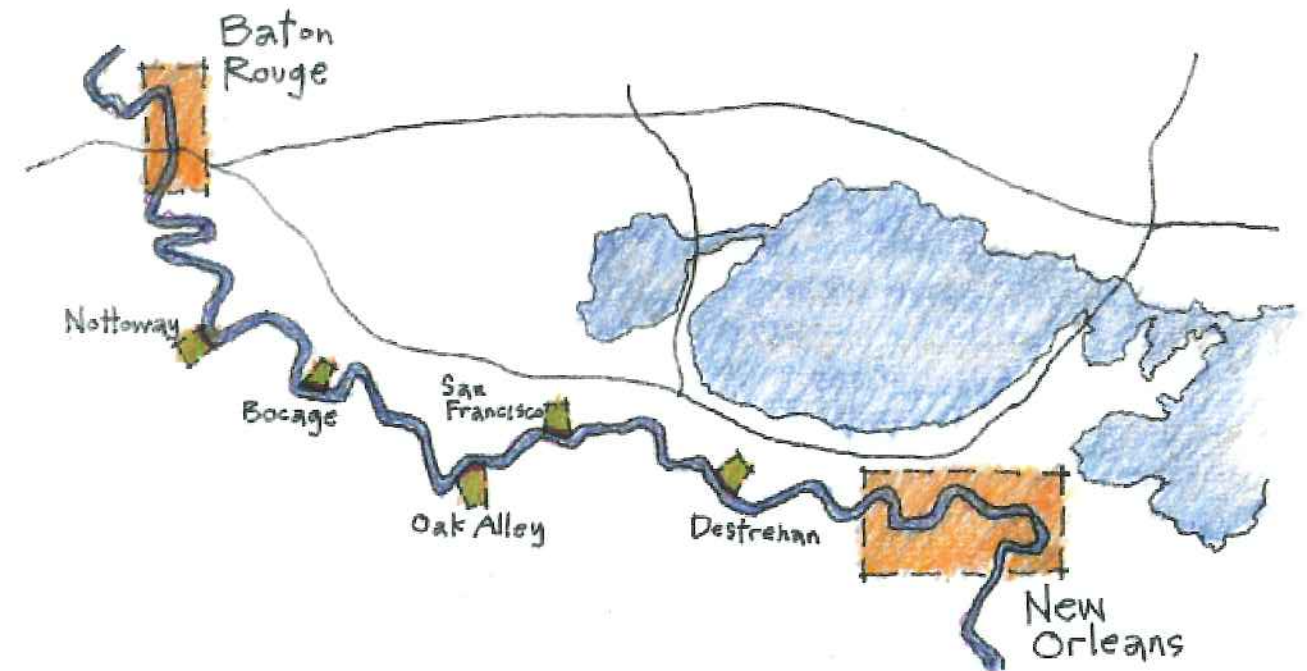
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## REGIONAL CONTEXT: The Baton Rouge - New Orleans Corridor

**River Road** The most important feature in the regional context is the Baton Rouge - New Orleans corridor, a stretch of land which is as much known for its petro-chemical industry as for the antebellum plantation homes lining the Mississippi River. Although long since supplanted by Interstate 10 as a transportation artery, the River Road has earned a special niche in the folklore of Louisiana life. Perhaps most striking to the present day visitor is the stark contrast between the enormous, quite often overpowering petro-chemical and shipping-related facilities and the quiet, tree-lined plantation properties.

**Interpretive Plan** As part of a recent Interpretive Plan of River Road prepared by Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, five distinct overlays or "loops" were conceptualized, each with its own designated points of interest. An inventory of these structures and facilities opens up the corridor to the outsider according to their historic, industrial/commercial, landscapes and "Americana" value. When the signage is installed and the corresponding visitor guide, brochure rack pamphlet and audio CD are developed, the corridor will have achieved important new tools for cultural tourism.

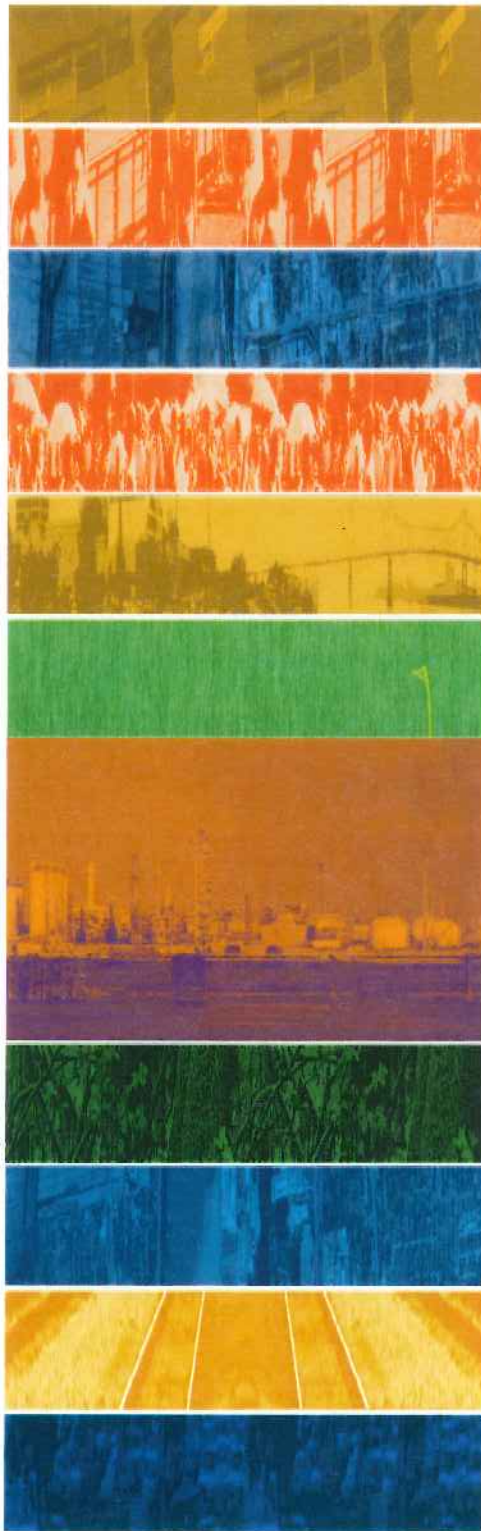


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## MASTER PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles form the cornerstone of the entire Master Plan. They establish the Plan's overall direction and priorities, and lay out the fundamental planning values for the Implementation Components which follow.

The Guiding Principles of this Plan were articulated by the participants of the Design Charrette in February 2002, who in turn drew for inspiration on the New Urbanism principles contained in Plan Baton Rouge and subsequent planning initiatives. The vision contained in the Guiding Principles is one of a City reunified with its waterfront, a waterfront which is both the heart and center of urban activity, clearly identified and celebrated as such.

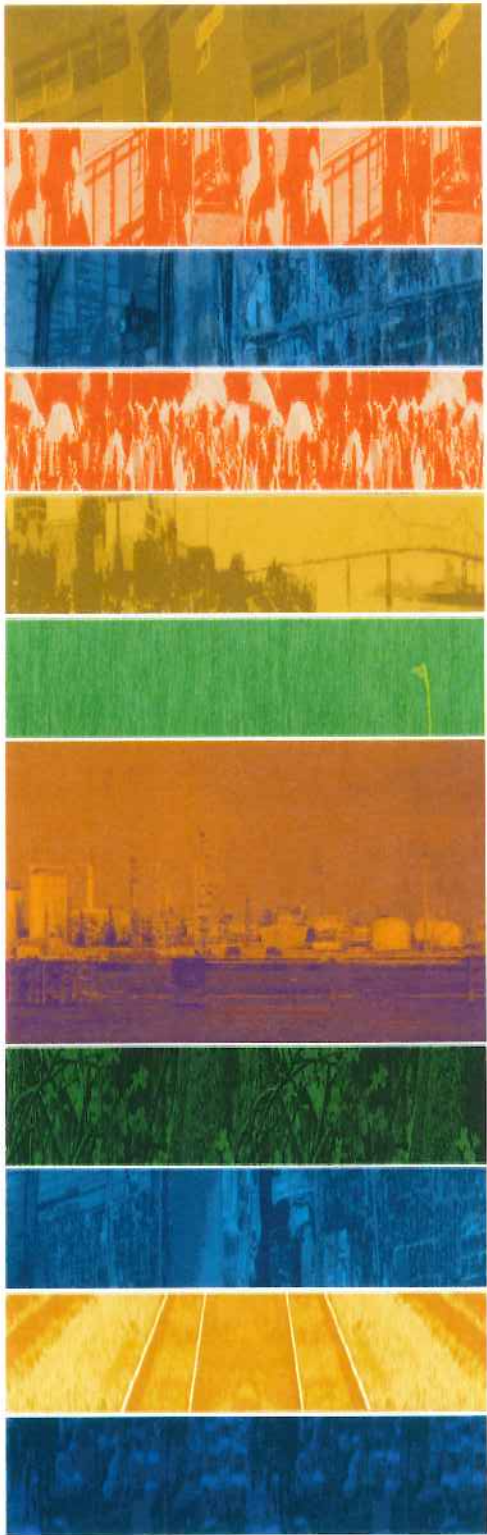


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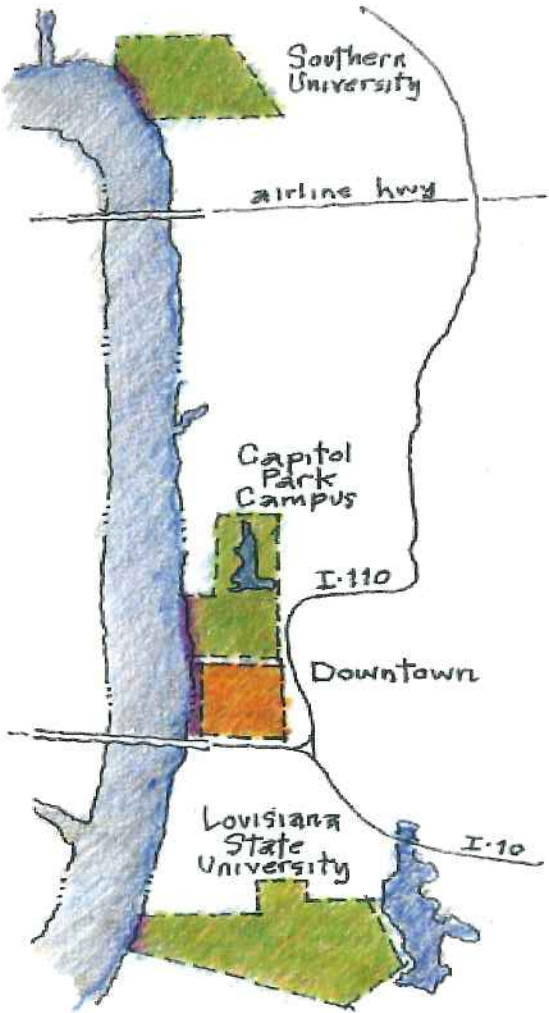
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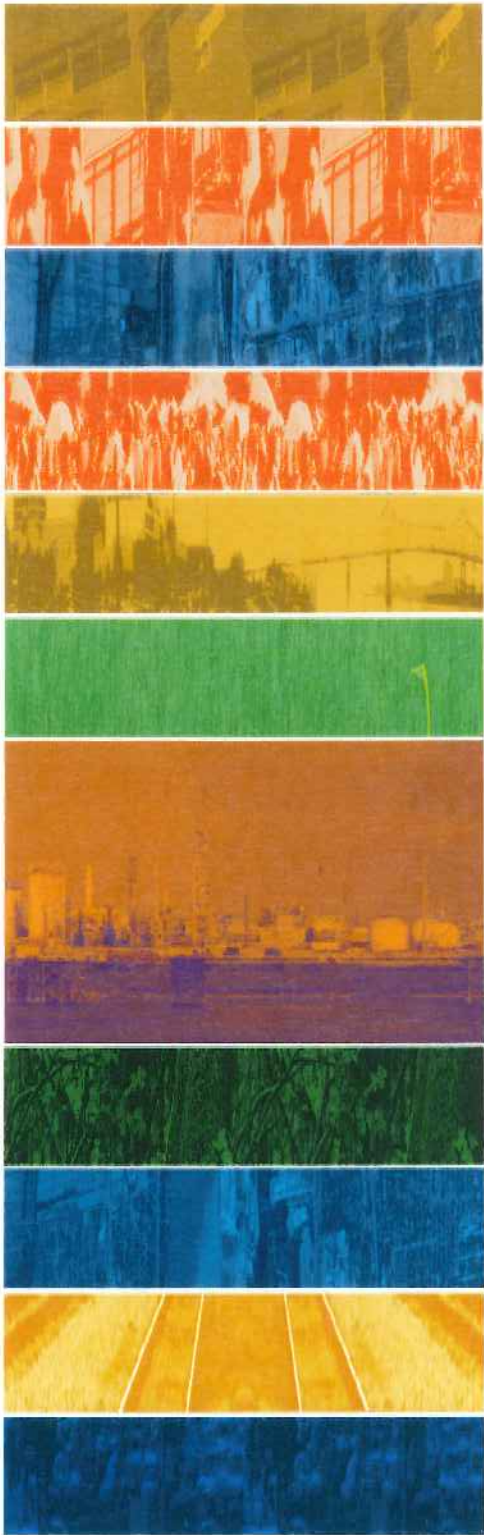
**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 1**

**Reconnect the City with the River**

Create a waterfront which interfaces naturally with the City, by orienting each aspect of community development and daily life towards the River.







**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 2**

**Celebrate the Magnificence of the River**

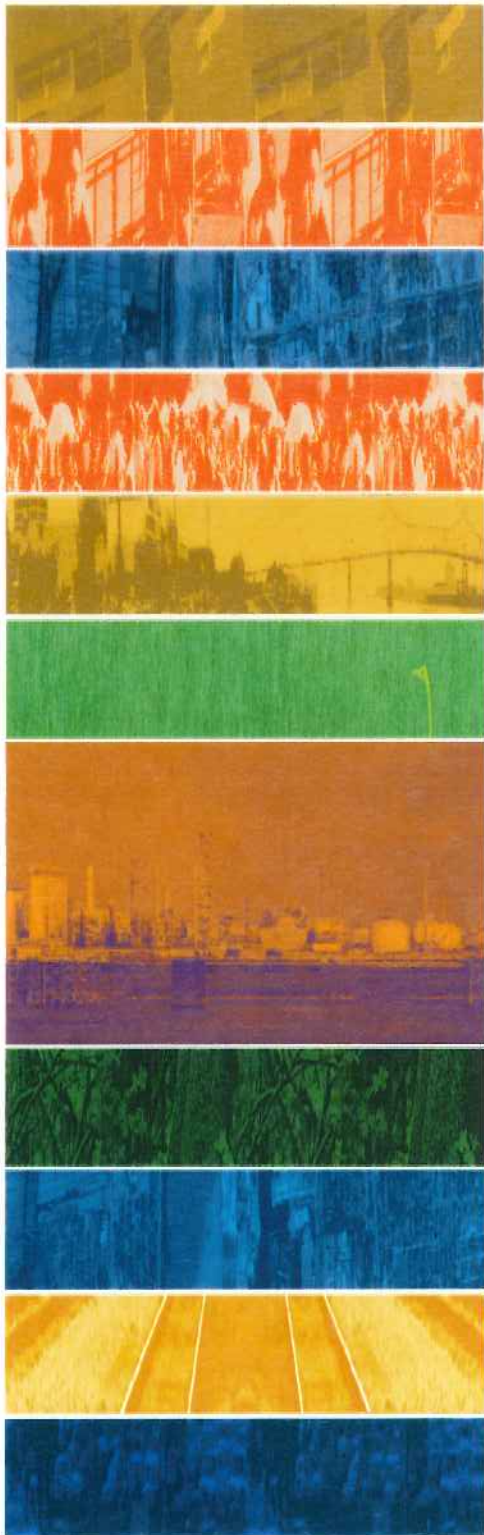
Create an environment which communicates the River’s essential role in the historical, economic and cultural life of the City, and from which visitors, residents and workers can witness its beauty and strength.



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**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 3**

**Reinforce the Pedestrian Experience**

Create a safe and inviting environment which will encourage visitors, residents and workers to experience the Riverfront by walking.



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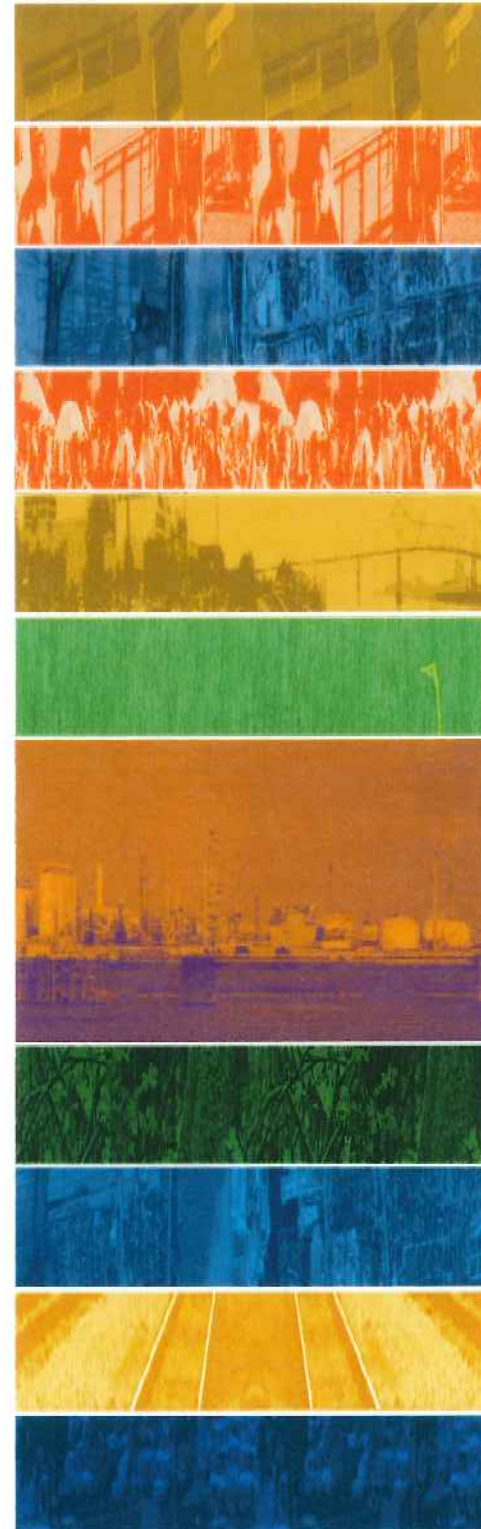
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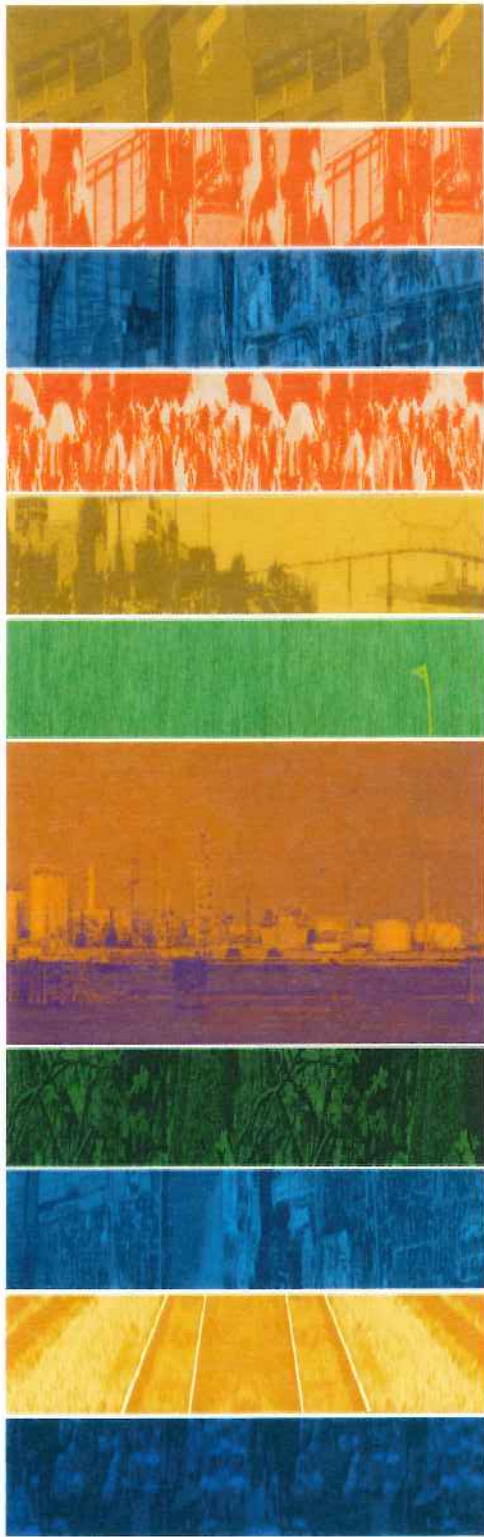
### GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 4

#### Strengthen Community and Neighborhood Linkages

Use the riverfront as an opportunity to strengthen linkages between cultural, educational, commercial, and political entities within the City. Build connections with the adjoining residential neighborhoods to enhance their relationship with the River.







**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 5**

**Create a Network of Open Spaces**

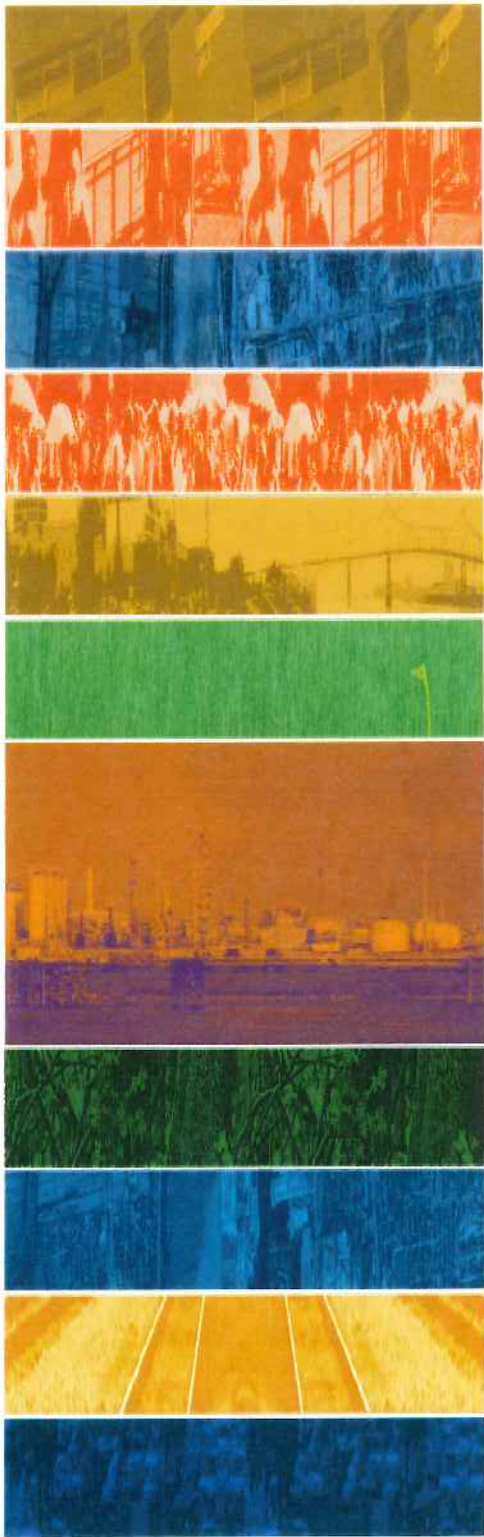
Encourage outdoor activity by creating a network of open spaces, thereby enlivening the riverfront and allowing the community to take full advantage of the range of opportunities afforded by the River.



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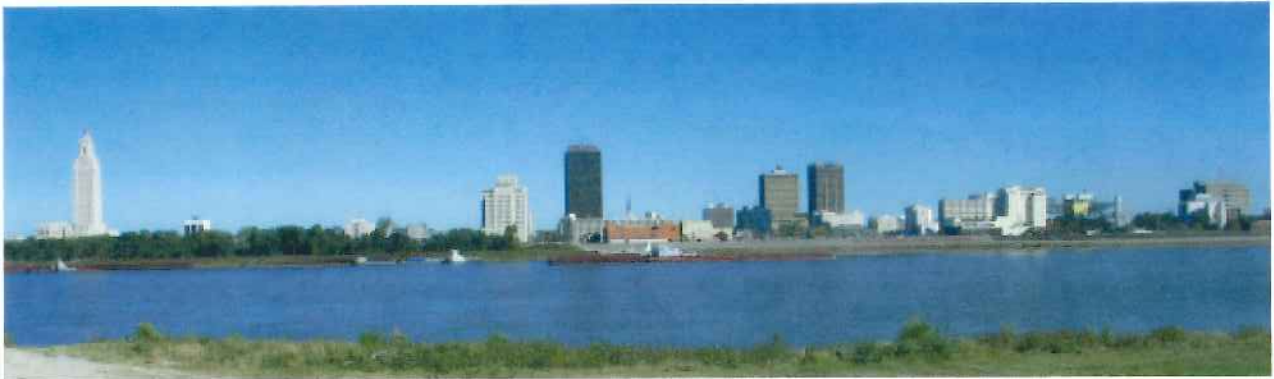




**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 6**

**Give the Riverfront a Sense of Place and Identity**

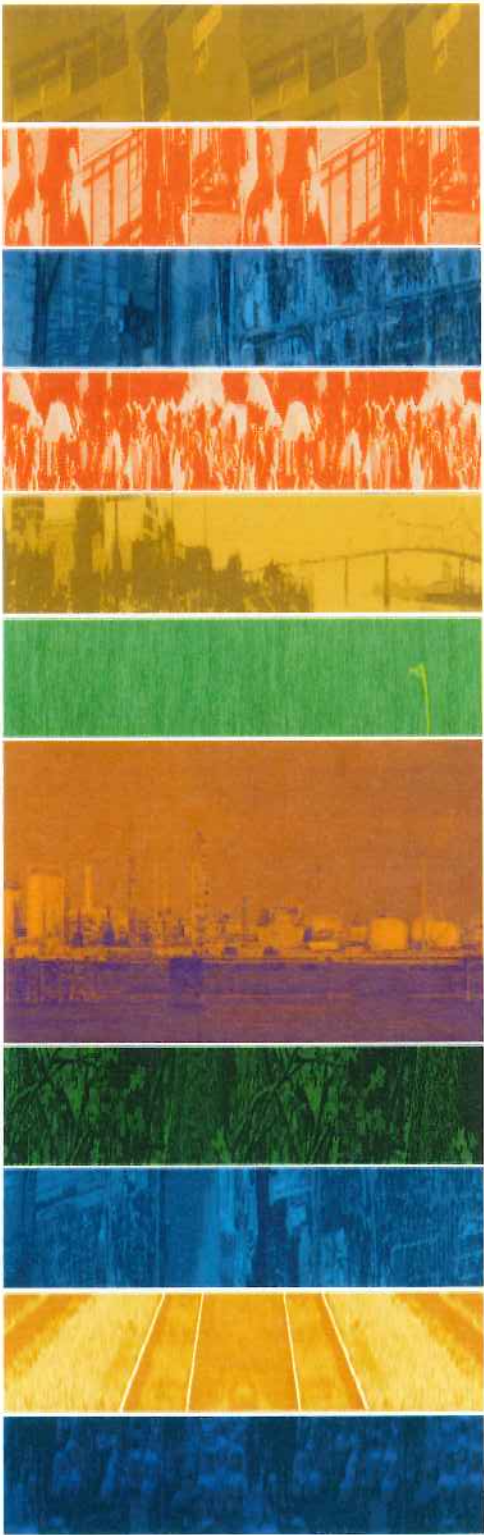
Increase visits to the Riverfront from other parts of the City and the region as a whole by giving the Riverfront a strong sense of place and a high profile identity.



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**GUIDING PRINCIPLE No. 7**

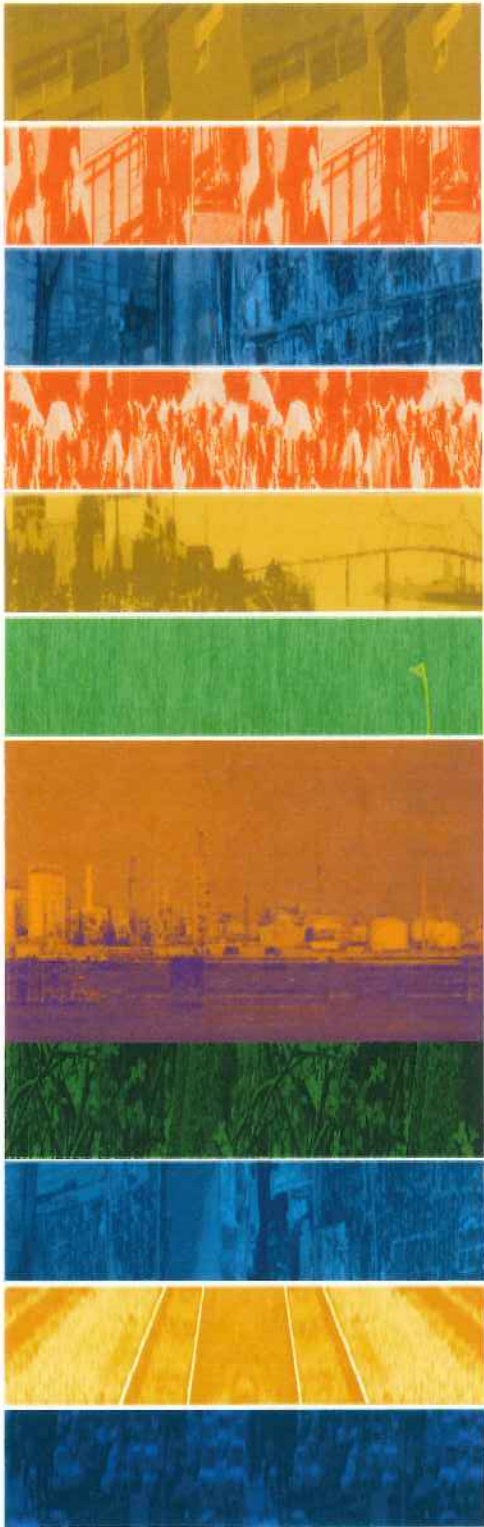
**Spur Revitalization Efforts**

Strengthen revitalization efforts already underway in the Downtown area and capitalize on the Riverfront as a valuable asset that will draw in new resources to the downtown and the City.



New Downtown Trolley System





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**MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS**

The Implementation Components form the body of the Master Plan, building on the goals and values set forth in the Guiding Principles. The Components begin by establishing a broad Riverfront definition that will make possible an array of community linkages and set the stage for a vibrant, re-energized waterfront area.

They then address signature urban elements and a branding strategy which will clearly communicate the message of the Riverfront as the City's urban core. The Plan next designates specific, readily identifiable Places: a new DeSoto Riverfront Park, Red Stick Levee, and the Municipal Pier, providing recommendations to animate these areas as meaningful destinations for visitors and residents alike. Once established in their own right, these places will bring to life a large part of the vision expressed in Plan Baton Rouge and subsequent planning documents.

Finally, the Components stress linkages with the northern and southern edges of the Riverfront, Southern University and LSU respectively, with recommendations that will tie these institutions to the Downtown and strengthen community connections.





## 1. DEFINING THE RIVERFRONT: Five Sub-Areas

**Observation** By 1999, with the completion of Plan Baton Rouge on the basis of Andres Duany's New Urbanism principles, tremendous interest and momentum for planning had developed among Baton Rouge's leadership and the public at large. This then began to translate into further mandates -- the \$50 million expansion of the Centroplex, a Master Plan and Interpretive Plan for Capitol Park, a Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan, the Bicycle Path and in 2002, this Riverfront Master Plan. Even by national standards, Baton Rouge had embarked on an impressive program -- inspired and propelled by Andres Duany's initial workshops -- to reinvent its downtown core.

With this planning activity came the realization that the River not only had the potential for linking together, conceptually and geographically, Baton Rouge's downtown area, but that this could be extended to encompass the City's most vital cultural, educational and governmental institutions. The River has thus begun to take on a dynamic role in the revitalization of Baton Rouge, creating new synergies and relationships and breaking many of the old patterns which had witnessed the suburban outmigration of the 1970's.

**Goal** Define the Baton Rouge Riverfront to broadly encompass the City's vital components located along its edges, thereby creating new linkages that will in turn foster and encourage further revitalization.

**Recommendations** The Riverfront should be made to extend from Southern University to the north, to and including Louisiana State University to the south, thereby including each of the five principal institutional and geographic elements located along its flanks:

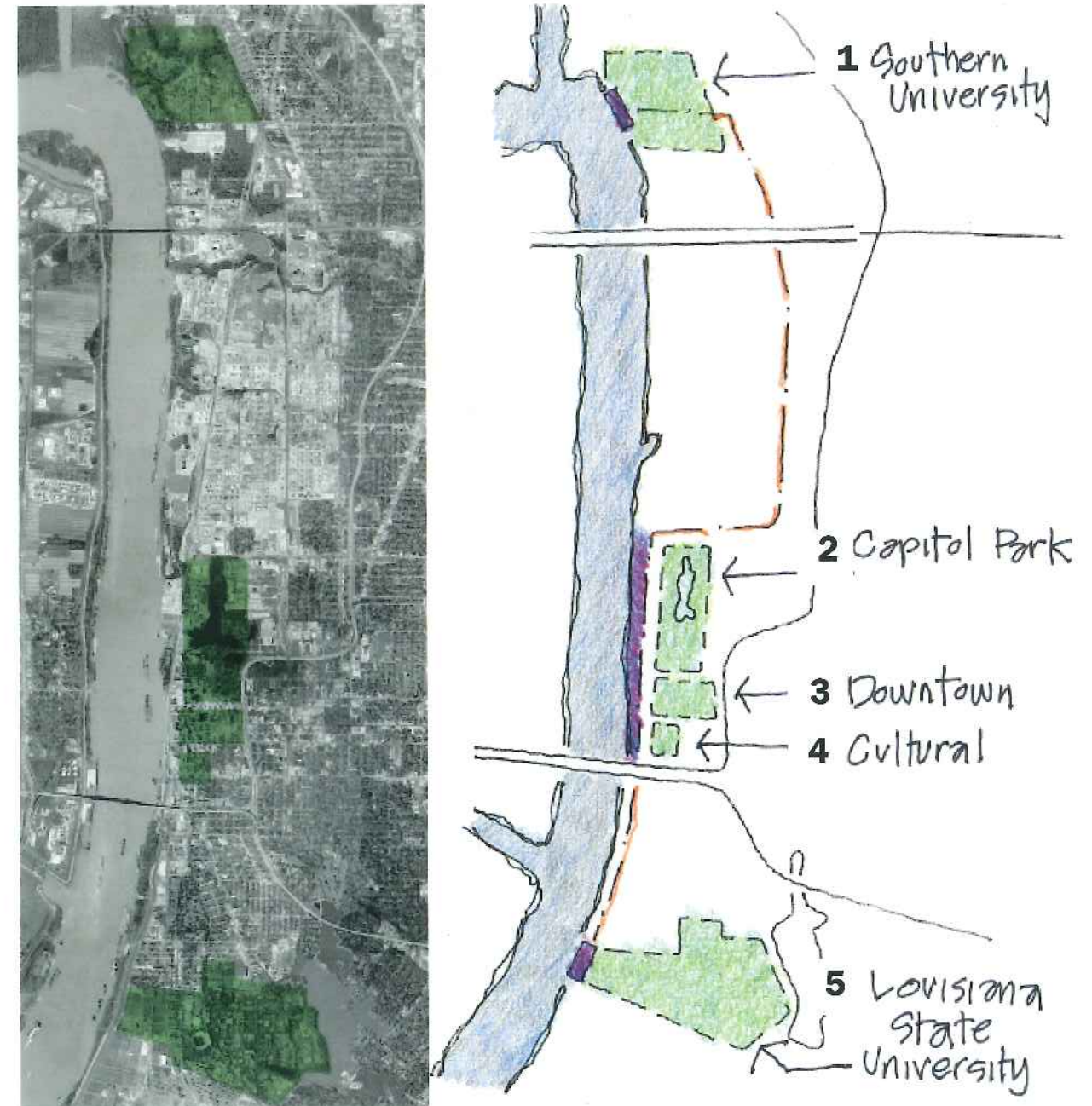
1. Southern University
2. Capitol Park
3. Downtown Area
4. Cultural Area
5. Louisiana State University

By broadening the definition to encompass this 10 mile stretch -- as opposed to the 1/2 mile of riverfront in the downtown area -- the River will serve to unify these elements which have until now lacked a common identity.

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## 2. DOWNTOWN IMAGE: Signature elements

**Observation** As a capitol city located on one of the great rivers of the world, downtown Baton Rouge is accessed daily by visitors who come from many points of origins and with a multitude of purposes. The immediate access to the Downtown Riverfront is primarily via an elevated expressway system which includes a pair of bridges spanning the River. An expanding cultural tourism business on riverboats, some of which make a port of call at the Downtown Riverfront, also affords an initial view of the City to visitors. The Interstate, bridges, and River contain the Downtown in a fashion which can provide the opportunity for reinforcement of existing elements.

But the presentation of the City to these visitors, be it from the River or, more typically, from the Interstate, has lacked a visual sequence that could supply downtown Baton Rouge with a defining identity -- a signature. Wayfinding signage to lead first time visitors to their destination according to certain well established routes would help, but those articulated in the Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan have not been fully implemented. At a time when cities are rediscovering their downtown cores, a sense of arrival and centrality is essential to the mission of rediscovering urban vitality.

**Goal** Establish a visual cueing of the City in both silhouette and fabric that clearly indicates arrival at the downtown core. Use icons and markers to define an urban outline and to begin to re-weave the fabric of the downtown which was the original core of the City.

**Recommendations**

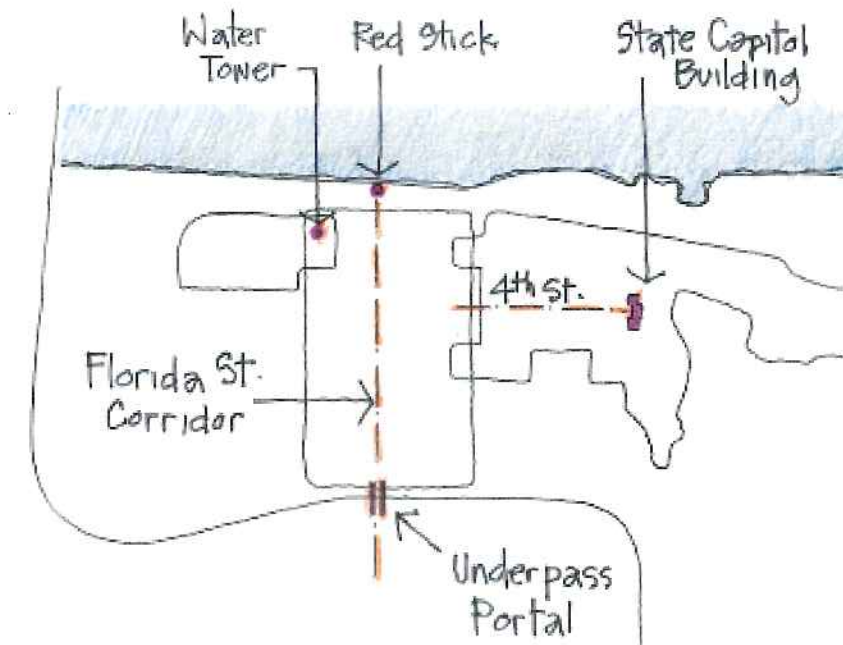
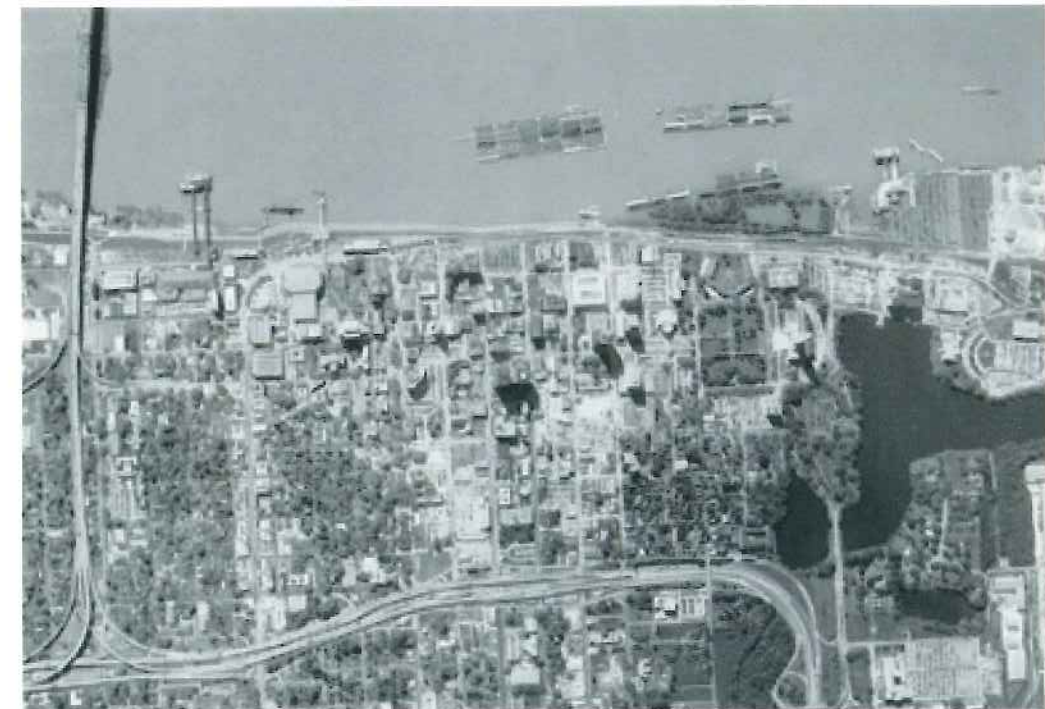
- At the north end of the Downtown Riverfront, there is a new generation of office buildings and cultural facilities which are serving to bring the 200 acres of the State Capitol Park together as a true campus. Through Plan Baton Rouge and the Capitol Park Interpretive Plan, this campus is enjoying a strengthened identity which allows Capitol Park to serve as the northern anchor for the downtown.

- Moving south, the Central Business District is an eclectic mix of 19th Century buildings interspersed with mid and late-20th century office towers -- a natural result of incremental development. Here the focus should be on the pedestrian experience, to support and reinforce revitalization efforts.

## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

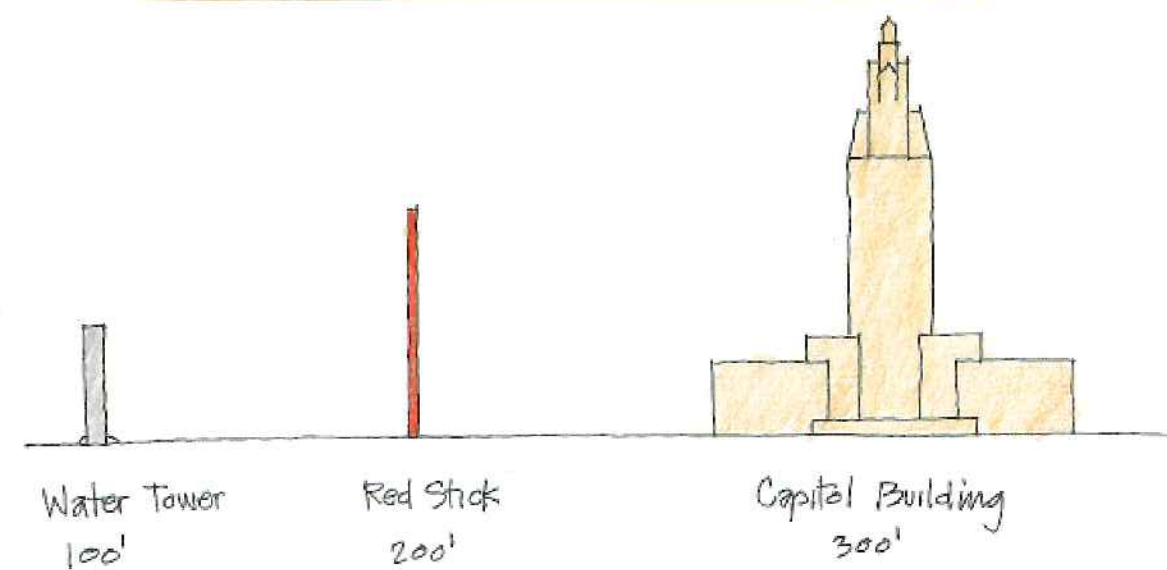
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**Downtown Image  
Recommendations (cont'd.)**

- Florida Street, as the primary at-grade artery leading to the Downtown Riverfront, has been the historical path of eastward urban expansion. In recognition of the strength of this East-West axis, this Master Plan proposes Florida Street as the appropriate location at the Levee for a significant 200' red sculptural marker, to commemorate the founding of Baton Rouge (see Red Stick Levee, p. 33).
- The Shaw Center for the Arts, a six-story, multi-venued cultural arts facility with a sparkling, crystalline facade, is expected to become the heart of the Downtown, a magnet which will draw dynamic new energy to the Riverfront. The Shaw Center plaza includes the existing 100' water tower, another readily identifiable marker along the Riverfront, which, upon restoration, will take on a renewed importance as a Downtown identifier.
- The Centroplex has now an expanded convention center, an arena, and a 2200 seat performance hall. This complex has an impressive presence, amplified by the adjacent Louisiana Science Center Planetarium and the always active maritime museum and the USS Kidd. Together these facilities form a solid anchor for the southern end of the Riverfront.
- Finally, unlike many struggling urban areas, Baton Rouge has two intact and vibrant residential neighborhoods bordering its downtown, both on the National Historic Register. These neighborhoods, Beauregard Town and Spanish Town, give a distinct character to the downtown image and identity.



## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

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### 3. DOWNTOWN BRANDING: Marketing Strategy

**Observation** Following the outmigration that began in the 1970's, with retail business following suburban residential development, the Downtown Riverfront was left with a large void that Baton Rouge has only begun to overcome in the past few years. On weekends and evenings in particular, when office workers had left, the Downtown was an empty core. Yet surveys show that all of the great dynamic American cities, even those with suburban fringes, have retained a spiritual center at their downtown core. Thus, even within the urban-suburban constellation, healthy, vibrant communities need a dynamic downtown.

**Goal** Strengthen and reinforce at every opportunity the momentum established by Plan Baton Rouge and the re-urbanisation of downtown Baton Rouge, and communicate to the community the essential role a vibrant downtown plays in the life of a city. Seize the opportunity to identify the Downtown as a place of cultural, retail and commercial diversity. With the re-establishment of the core as vibrant center, comes the opportunity to develop consolidated marketing strategies for Downtown events.

**Recommendations**

- Implement a Downtown branding strategy that will include trailblazing signage beginning five miles from the downtown core. Select key Interstate exits as primary vehicular feeders. Draw on the work already accomplished in the Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan.

- Identify the following designations for the Downtown core components that allows visitors to place them easily:

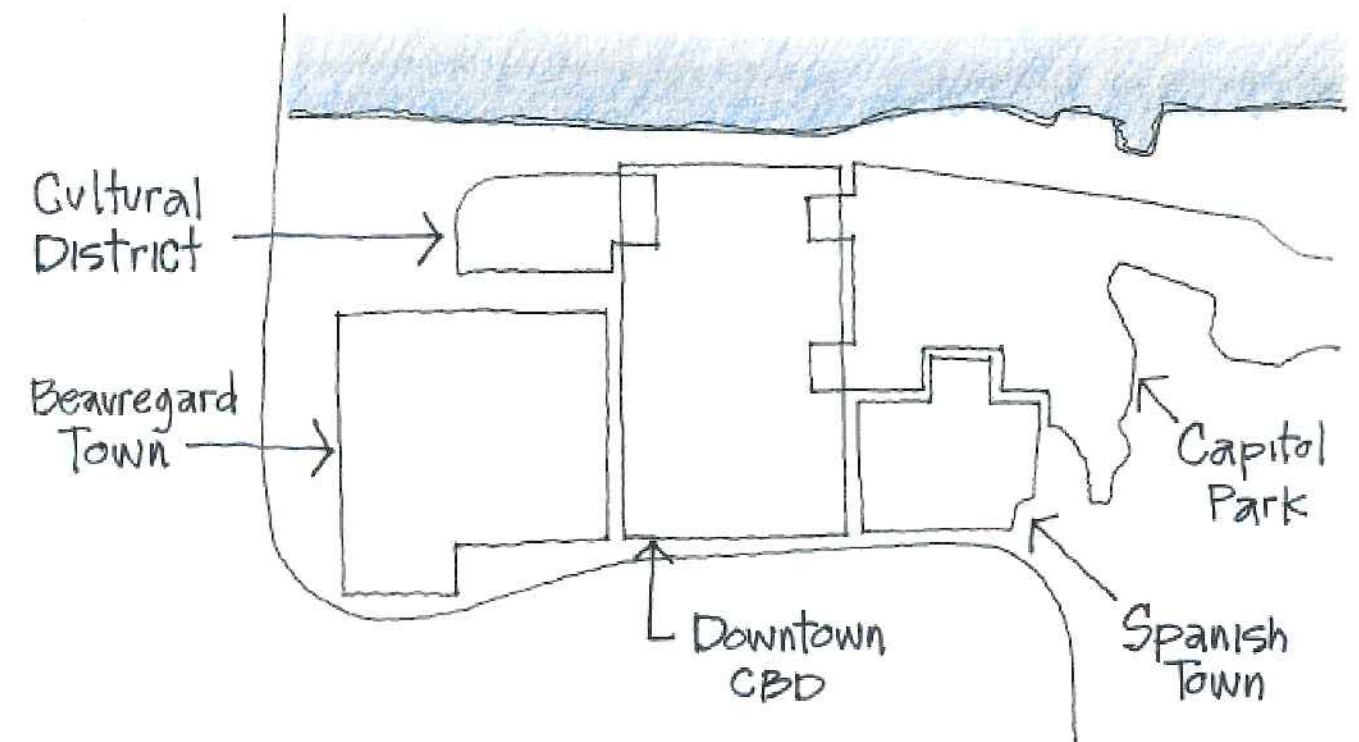
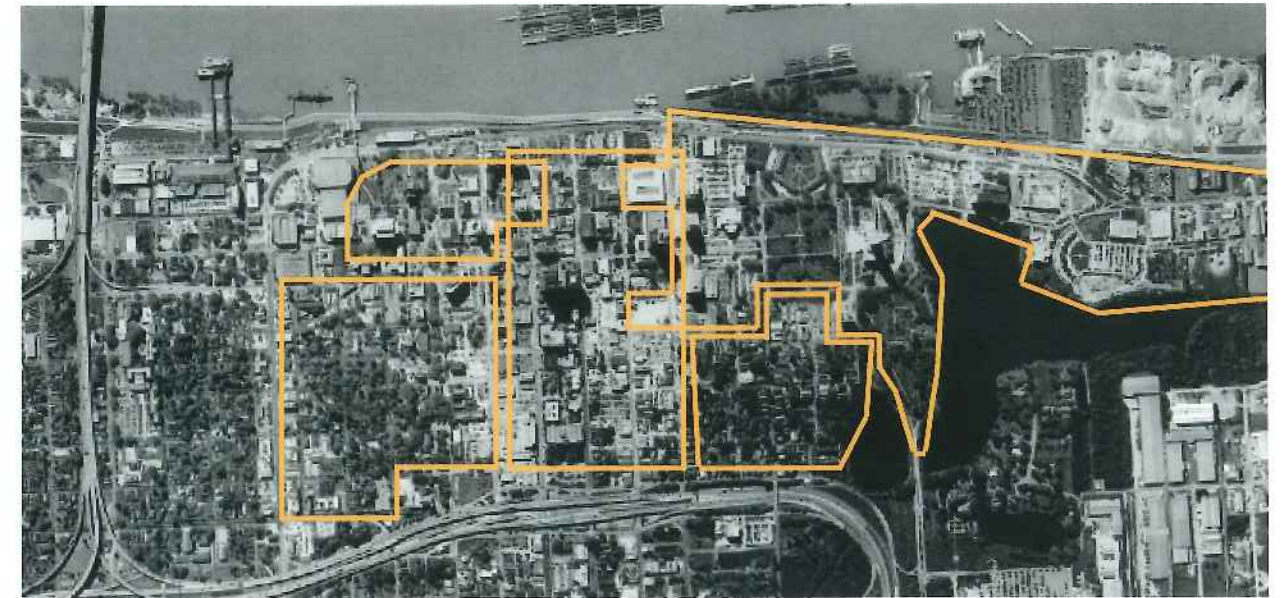
1. Capitol Park
2. Downtown Central Business District
3. Cultural District
4. Spanish Town
5. Beauregard Town

- Add a sixth component, the Downtown Riverfront, as a distinct component that will complement and in turn help to unify the other elements.

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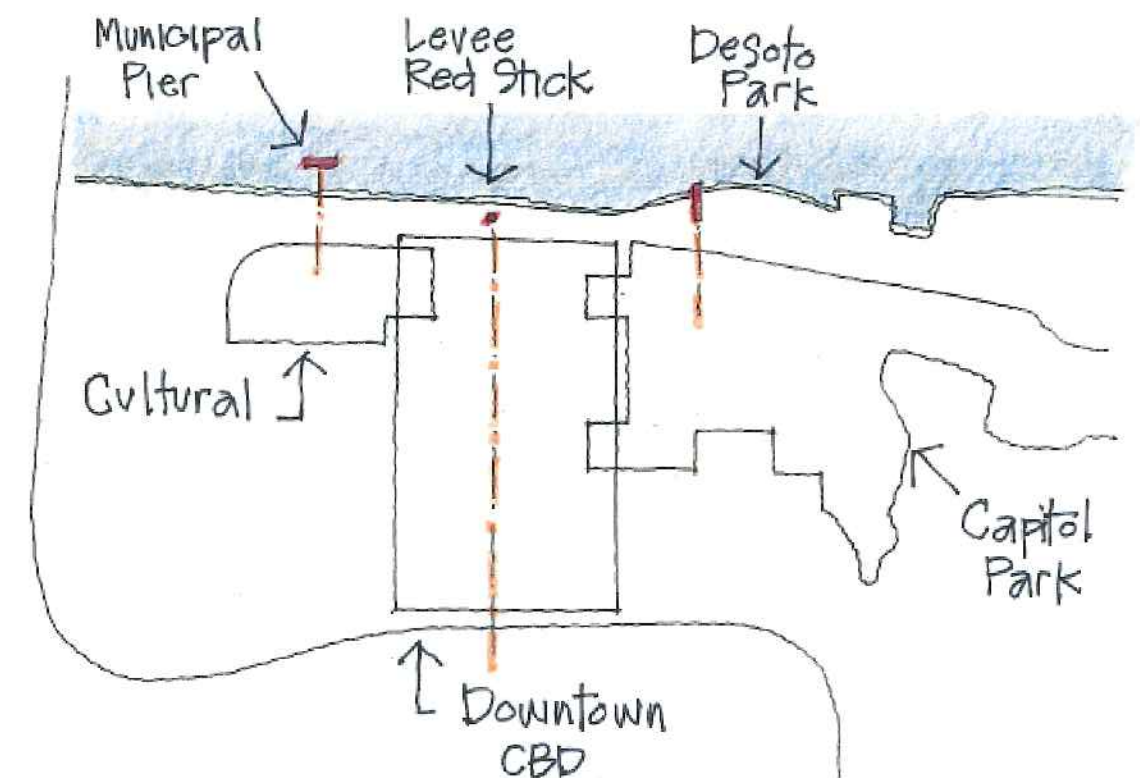
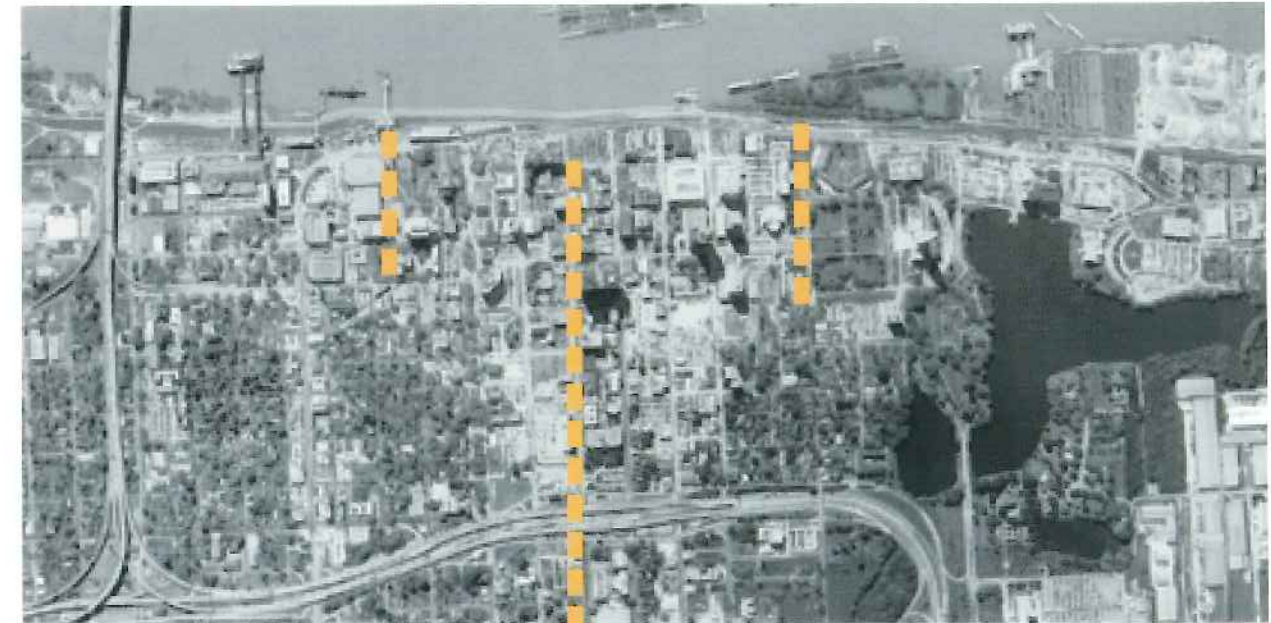


## 4. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE: Downtown Riverfront Destinations

**Observation** The Downtown Riverfront extends along a significant stretch of the River and includes a number of distinct visitor attractions -- for example, the Louisiana Arts and Science Center, the USS Kidd, the Centroplex, the Municipal Pier, the Governor's Mansion and Casino Rouge. Nevertheless, the perception of the Downtown Riverfront has suffered from an overall lack of sense of place. Without an easily identifiable geographic destination, residents and visitors are less inclined to make the trip.

**Goal** Create a sense of place at the Downtown Riverfront in the form of a multi-venued destination which will provide for active and passive recreation, opportunities for civic events, and a focal point for Baton Rouge on the River.

**Recommendations** Break up the Downtown Riverfront into individually manageable and "image-able" pieces which then can be easily identified as places at the Riverfront. The call will then become to "meet up at [name of the place] at the Downtown Riverfront." The existing Municipal Pier, Red Stick Levee at the foot of Florida St. and the new DeSoto Park to the north will naturally assume a larger identity as riverfront destinations when characterized as the three component parts of the Downtown Riverfront whole. As each component takes on separate functions within the larger system, they bring the entire Riverfront area to life with a multitude of options for the visiting public.



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## 5. RIVERFRONT CONNECTIONS: Vehicular Access and Pedestrian Circulation

**Observation** Two factors helping to explain the historic lack of connection between Baton Rouge and the River are the busy transit routes established along its edges, including both railroad and vehicular traffic, and the levees which contained the River but created visual barriers. These physical and perceptual impediments decreased the public's inclination to access the River, despite the ultimate draw of its magnificence and the spectacular views commanded from its banks. Now, on the strength of the New Urbanism principles expressed in the Plan Baton Rouge, there is a re-emerging downtown flanked by two historical, residential neighborhoods listed on the National Historic Register, Beauregard Town and Spanish Town.

**Goal** Create a sense of connection and access for pedestrians in the Downtown Riverfront area that will help to build a riverfront identity for Baton Rouge and establish a "porch" on the River for the adjoining areas.

**Recommendations** A circulation plan should be developed consisting of two major components: clearly defined Points of Access to the River, and a Pedestrian Loop.

### 1. Points of Access

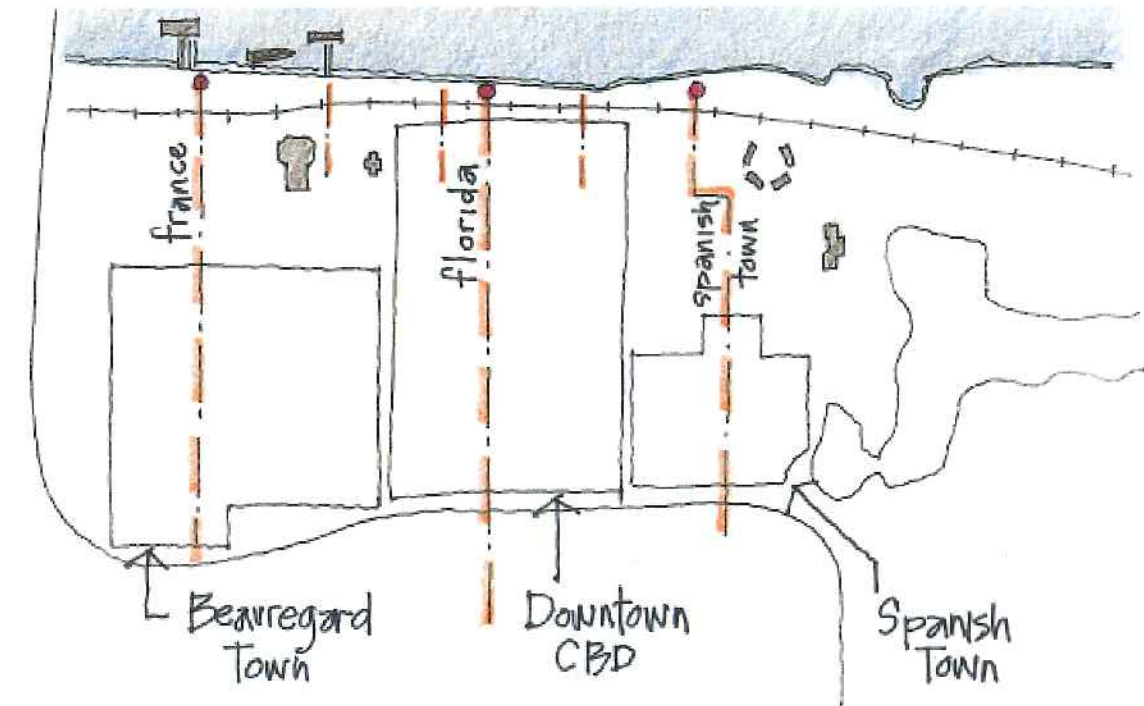
Three points of access, at France St., Florida St. and Spanish Town Road, will constitute dominant perpendicular connections linking interior areas with the downtown Riverfront:

- The France Street artery will serve to connect Beauregard Town with the Riverfront, ending at the Municipal Pier.
- Florida Street, which links up the rest of Baton Rouge with the downtown and tracks the development of the City from its original center out into the suburbs and their major regional shopping malls, will constitute the second major artery, arriving at the Red Stick as the symbolic marker for the City.
- The third artery will be Spanish Town Road, linking up Spanish Town with the Riverfront, and together with France Street, establishing for these communities their own sense of access to the River.

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Florida Street at River Road



**Pedestrian Circulation  
Recommendations(cont'd.)**

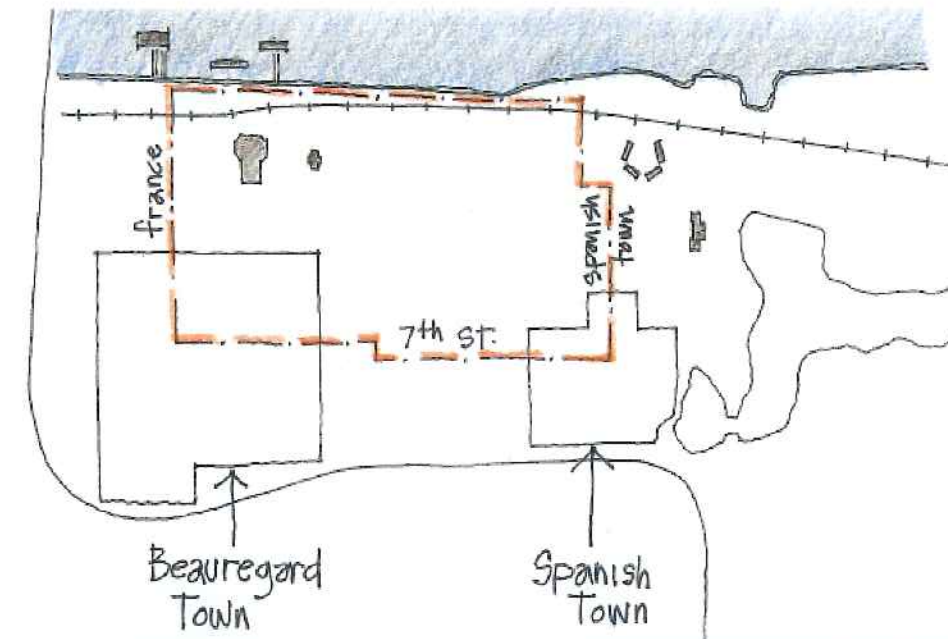
**2. Pedestrian Loops**

One of the hallmarks of a vital downtown is significant pedestrian activity. To encourage the re-emergence of walking at the Downtown Riverfront, a Pedestrian Loop should be established, using the France St. and Spanish Town Road Points of Access, linked by 7th Street and the Levee. Amenities such as brick pavers, street trees, decorative lighting and signposts, benches and waste receptacles will help to identify the loop as specifically intended for pedestrian usage.

- The 7th Street artery was chosen because of its smaller, pedestrian-oriented scale, and its location, which will make the Pedestrian Loop approximately 2.4 miles in length. At a typical walking speed of 250 feet per minute, pedestrians will be able to complete the loop in just under an hour.
- At River Road, the issues of vehicular movement, safety and visual access to the River again become critical. The taming of the River Road traffic is already underway through the efforts of the Baton Rouge Department of Public Works and the Louisiana State Department of Transportation. At-grade pedestrian crossings with crosswalks and lights at the new Visitors Center have been designed. Nevertheless, pedestrian bridges spanning the railroad lines, which are used for train marshalling to service the upriver petro-chemical facilities, will be the key to encouraging pedestrian usage of the loop:
- Centroplex Bridge This structure was oftentimes criticized at the Design Charrette as being unattractive, but it could be restyled by taking the structure down to its load-bearing elements and re-designing its cladding in keeping with the River theme.
- DeSoto Park Bridge Plans for a second pedestrian bridge at DeSoto Park have already been drawn, and once construction funding is secured the bridge will provide a safe, reliable pedestrian access to the park, not dependent on train schedules or subject to traffic flow.

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**7th Street**



**Spanish Town Road at 7th Street**



**France Street**



**River Road**



## 6. DESOTO RIVERFRONT PARK

**Observation** There is presently no large, public gathering venue along the Baton Rouge Riverfront, yet there is the potential for annual signature events that could use the park as a focal point. Woldenberg Park and the riverfront at Audubon Park in New Orleans are two examples of the successful urban usage of a riverfront park. In Baton Rouge, the park could be used for outdoor concerts, fundraising events such as marathons, 4th of July and other holiday events, and civic occasions such as the annual convening of the state legislature.

**Goal** Establish a significant public park at the downtown Riverfront that becomes the front porch for the Baton Rouge community onto the River. This park will constitute the fulfillment of one of the cornerstone goals and visions articulated in previous plans, notably the Plan Baton Rouge and Capitol Park Interpretive Plan, which saw a new riverfront park as fundamental catalyst for all future development of the Riverfront area.

- Recommendations**
- Use the batture area extending upriver from North Street as the new park, to be named DeSoto Park in honor of the Spanish explorer who discovered the Mississippi River in 1541.
  - The park will include active and passive recreation, with everything from picnics to music events and spontaneous sports activities, a boardwalk, and a “wildness” area. From the park, visitors will be able to observe shipping, barge mooring and other industry-related operations.



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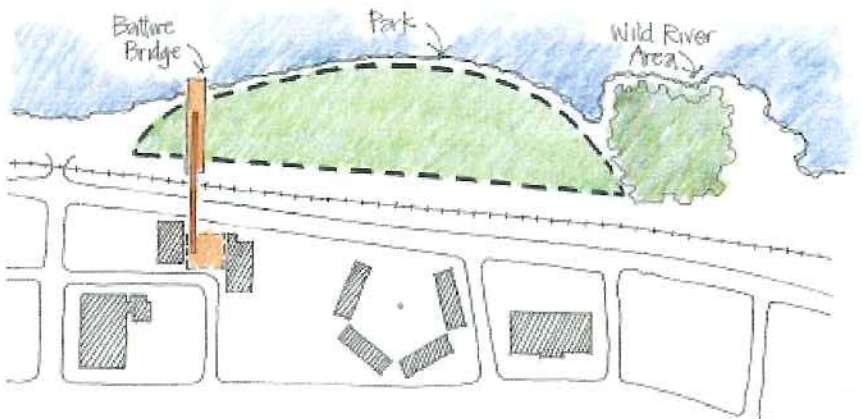


## 6. DESOTO PARK: Sizing Options

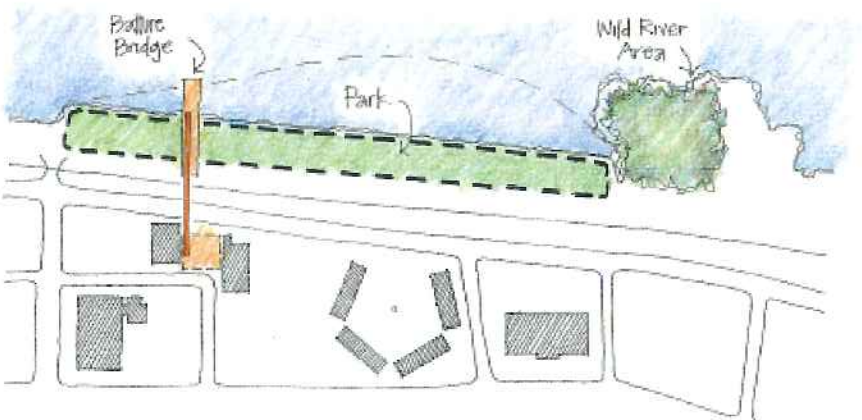
**Observation** The 20-acre batture is under control of the State and has now become available for use as a public park. This strategically located parcel of land is within the 100-year flood plain and is therefore subject to seasonal flooding because of natural fluctuations in River elevations. Nevertheless it is possible to take this parcel -- or a portion of it-- out of the flood plain and thereby create a park which is elevated and stable. The exact sizing of the park will be a function of capital construction investment, operating cost exposure and flexibility for multi-event programming.

**Goal** Within the 20-acre footprint, identify the appropriately sized flood-proof park that will balance construction and operating costs with programming needs, as well as retain elements of the wild. The park should have a dual character which encompasses both the "wild" and "tame" aspects of the riverfront.

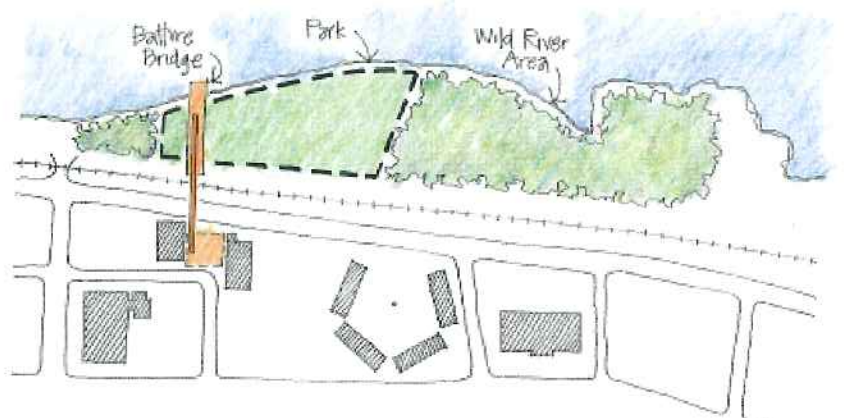
- Recommendations**
- After evaluation of three sizing options, for a 5, 10 or 20 acre park, there was a public consensus at the Design Charrette that a 10-acre flood-proof park area would strike the proper balance between park usage and cost considerations.
  - The engineering solution for the design of the park is to create a structural bulkhead along the perimeter of the park using sheet piling, which will establish an elevation for the park well above the flood plain.



20 Acres



5 Acres



10 Acres

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## 6. DESOTO PARK: Comparisons

**Observation** During the Design Charrette the participants found it useful to be able to use a reference from personal experience when considering the optimal sizing of the new park. Participants discovered that the potential 20-acre footprint of the batture was in fact larger than Woldenberg Park in New Orleans, which is only 16-acres in size. This revelation opened up for the participants the possibility that the proposed acreage could become a park of national significance in quality and size.

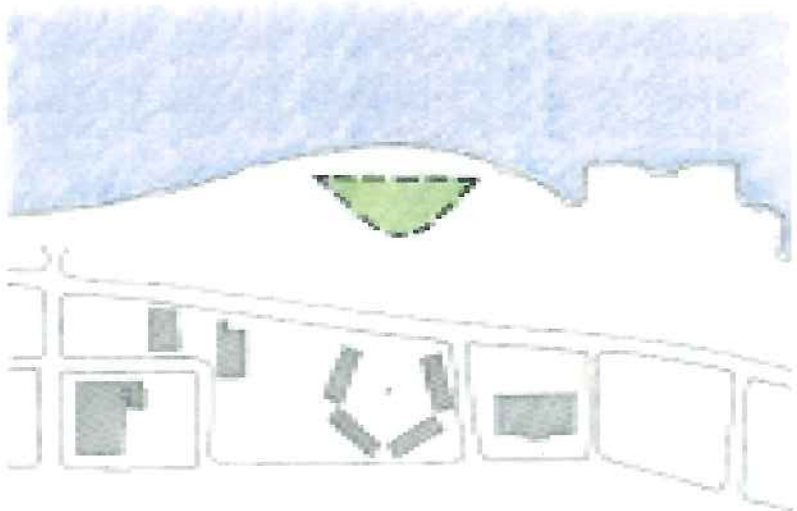
**Goal** Create a park with both an active and passive outdoor recreational environment that will compare with other riverfront parks of national significance.

- Recommendations**
- Ensure a top quality visitor experience at the park by studying national “Best Practises” for riverfront park management and usage, starting with the Audubon Nature Institute, as operators of Woldenberg Park in New Orleans.
  - Foster a park solution that provides new riverfront usage without sacrificing the working waterfront.

**Note:** The grassy lawn area at Woldenberg Park is a flexible special events area capable of hosting large public gatherings and staged concert performances for audiences of up to \_\_ people. It is highlighted and then transposed on to the DeSoto Park graphic for purposes of comparison.



Woldenberg Riverfront Park\*  
New Orleans



Desoto Park\*  
Baton Rouge



New Orleans



Woldenberg Riverfront Park

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## 6. DESOTO PARK: Development Options

**Observation** The 20-acre footprint of the future DeSoto park presents a range of development options which will supply the Riverfront with a multitude of recreational opportunities, and will significantly increase the number of visitors to the Riverfront.

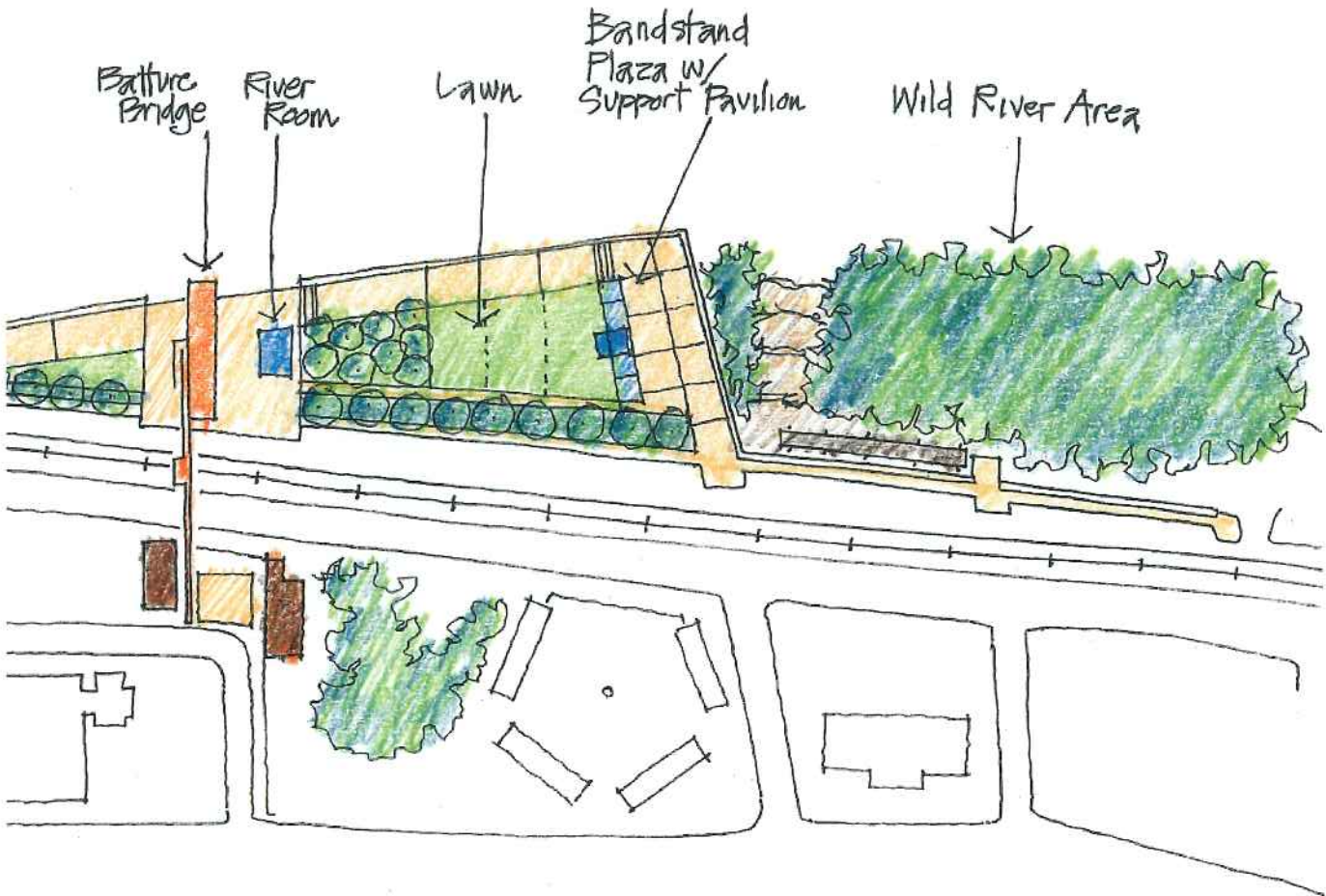
**Goal** Develop the park into a high quality recreational area, to include both passive and active activities, which can be used for nature exploration, outdoor concerts, civic activities and fundraising events, without sacrificing an active commercial waterfront.

**Recommendations**

- Establish a “wildness” area at the north end of the park that will provide visitors with the opportunity to experience the River’s edge in its natural state, together with the local vegetation and wildlife. Preserve the existing willow trees that catch natural as well as man-made objects as they float by, thereby creating an ever-changing theater of river-borne curiosities. Provide pedestrian access via a concrete ramp leading down to the water alongside the edge of the wildness area.

- The rest of the park should be on an elevated platform to protect against periodic flooding. A large grassy lawn will cover most of the center of the park, providing space for a wide range of passive and active activities, as well as concerts and community events. At the upriver edge of this park, adjacent to the wildness area, will be a paved plaza area that can accommodate a bandstand with a support pavilion. These facilities will allow for event staging, with a magnificent view of the River as a backdrop. As a continuation of this plaza, along the River, will be a boardwalk promenade running the length of the park that can be used for walking or jogging.

- Construct a pedestrian bridge crossing River Road and the railroad and extending to the River which will provide safe and reliable access to the River, and give visitors an elevated view across the water. The bridge will connect up with the new Visitors Center on River Road, thereby creating a natural access point to the waterfront. On the river side, the bridge will connect up with the “River Room,” a restaurant and special events hall where visitors will be able to buy refreshments, use the restrooms, and attend organized functions.



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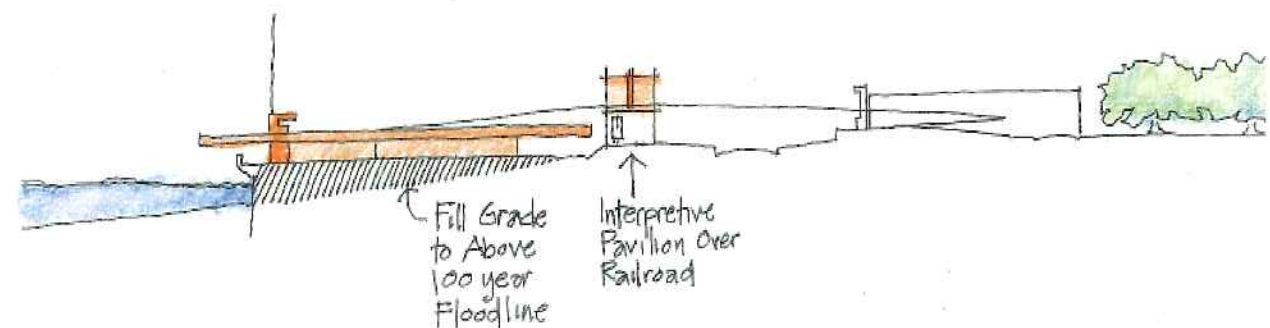


## 6. DESOTO PARK: Batture Bridge and the River Room

**Observation** Because of the intermittent at-grade conflicts with the railroad, pedestrian access to the Riverfront is at times compromised. A bridge is needed for dependable, uniform access. Also, there is currently no facility for refreshments or dining along the Riverfront.

**Goal** Build a pedestrian bridge across River Road and the railroad lines, connecting the Riverfront with the new Visitor Center presently under construction on River Road. Establish a restaurant/cafe for visitors along the Riverfront.

- Recommendations**
- Construct a pedestrian bridge that will span the railroad corridor and River Road, extending out to the River, to provide safe and reliable waterfront access. The bridge should also act as an interpretive platform that will tell the story of the rail connections and intermodal transport linkages along the River.
  - At the River side, the bridge should slope downwards and extend slightly out over the water, thereby providing a dramatic visual experience. On the land side, the bridge will tie into the new Visitors' Center at an at-grade entry court, providing an inviting and easy access to the waterfront for those at the Visitors' Center.
  - Next to the bridge on the Park a restaurant/cafe and special events hall is proposed, to be named the River Room, which would service the refreshment needs of park visitors as well as allow for private and public events bookings at a facility overlooking the water.
  - Potentially, the bridge will also stimulate the adaptive re-use of the Central Plant Facility, located adjacent to the Visitors' Center but which is scheduled for re-location in the Long Range Master Plan for the Capitol. This could free up the shell of the building for new visitor amenities.



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7. DOWNTOWN PLACEMAKING: “Red Stick Levee”

**Observation** The existing levee at the Downtown Riverfront has undergone tremendous improvement as the result of the 1989 Plan Baton Rouge, and the work of the Army Corps of Engineers. The promenade is still lacking in some visitor amenities, however, primarily shade and seating. There is an existing sculpture depicting a red stick on the levee by the noted artist Frank Hayden, but the sculpture lacks the size and graphic identity to serve as a large scale community icon.

The ferry system linking Port Allen with Baton Rouge has been out of operation since the construction of the Interstate bridge. Presently, the landing area is not used. Numerous improvements to the waterfront on the Port Allen side have been completed, together with the construction of a landing facility which could be used for docking tourboats, water taxis and ferry connections.

**Goal** Distinguish this section of the levee as a destination with its own identity, so that it serves not only as a connector between the DeSoto Park to the north and the cultural facilities to the south, but also as a place which will attract visitors in its own right.

- Recommendations**
- Use Red Stick Levee as a venue for public art, a sort of linear open-air art gallery. The levee can be a permanent showcase for rotating public art and sculpture.
  - Reserve the Port Allen ferry location for future use by tour boats, ferries and other river vessels to support further development of cultural and environmental tourism as an economic generator. Investigate design and maritime requirements for the future re-establishment of a docking facility and floating platform when economic conditions support new investment.



Former Port Allen Ferry Landing



Waterfront Improvememts at Port Allen

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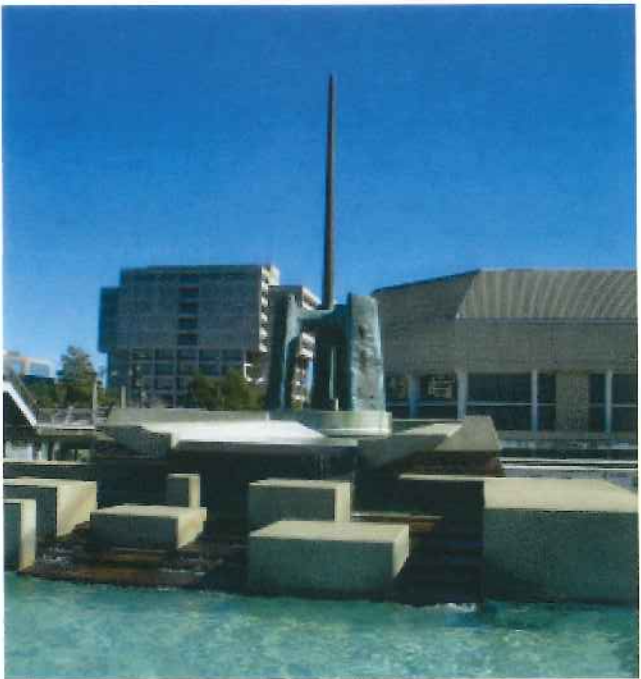
**Red Stick Levee  
Recommendations (cont'd.)**

- Implement pedestrian-friendly improvements to the levee consistent with the improvements downriver at the Municipal Pier, and within the restrictive guidelines of the Army Corps of Engineers, to include shade trees, benches and lighting in accordance with the DDD's Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan.
- Place at the center of the levee, at the base of Florida Street, a tall, 200' red steel shaft which will serve as a monumental edifice commemorating the founding of Baton Rouge. The post will be unadorned except for a FAA strobe beacon at the top, and will be illuminated at night from below.

The simple design of this structure will have the graphic clarity to be seen and recognized from a distance by people on the street, in vehicles, and from boats on the River. As such, it will for the anchor for the mid-point of the Riverfront, clearly identifying the center for the City's contemporary urban core, with reference to its historical context.



**Pedestrian amenities at Municipal Pier**



**Hayden Red Stick Sculpture**



**Baton Rouge Riverfront with photo montage of proposed 200' Red Stick edifice**

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## 8. CULTURAL DISTRICT: Municipal Pier

**Observation** The Municipal Pier functions ineffectively because of its structural support system and ramping system which snags floating debris. The ramp in particular is a maintenance liability and safety concern because it is rigid and not able to accommodate fluctuations in water levels. The “paper clip” vocabulary of the pier design is also less than optimal, as it misses the opportunity to signify this location as the primary municipal portal.

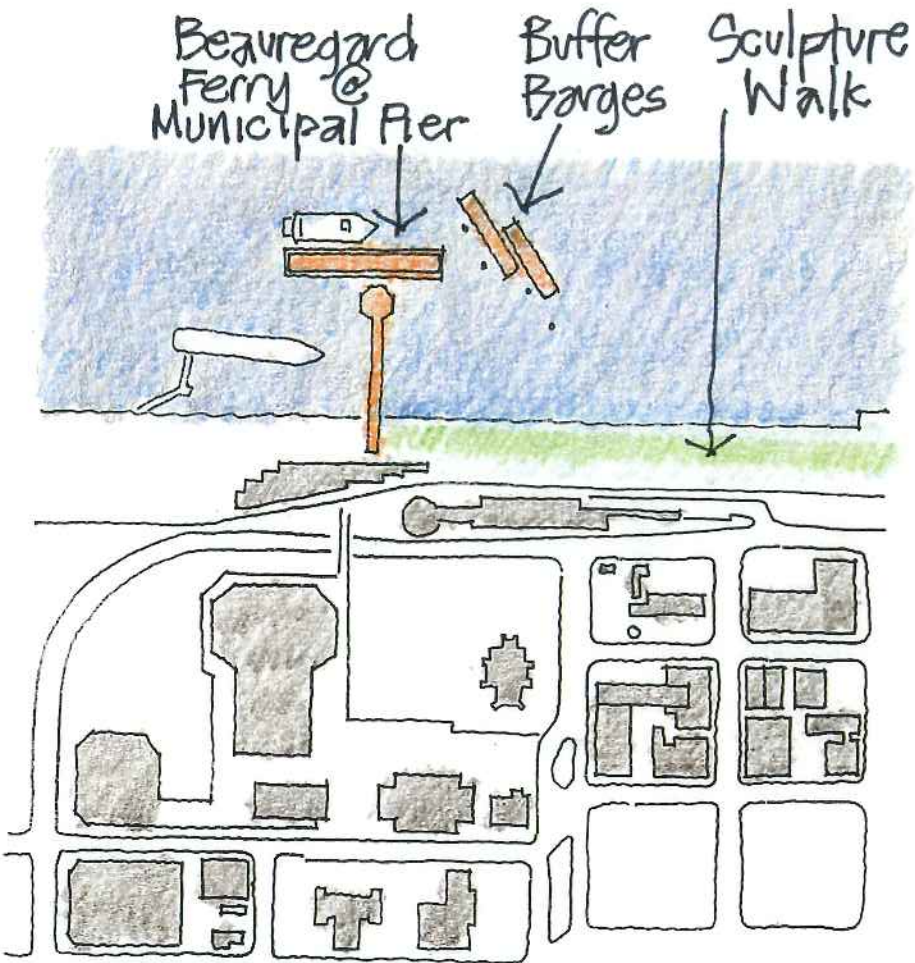
**Goal** Re-establish the municipal pier as the primary entrance for visiting vessels to the City. Remedy the operational and structural issues associated with the physical infrastructure of the pier.

- Recommendations**
- Remove the paper clip hoops that created the previous identity and replace with light standards and banner poles appropriate to an upgraded municipal presentation.
  - Remove the ramp structure that winds down to the water and replace with a floating platform and hinged ramp that is flexible and can move with the fluctuations in water levels.
  - Install buffer barges upriver of the pier to create a protected eddy condition for vessels mooring at the floating platform. Buffer barges also create a shield against floating debris and add a measure of protection against runaway barges.
  - For purposes of downtown marketing and branding, the generic “Municipal Pier” designation should be replaced with “Beauregard Landing at Municipal Pier.”

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Existing Municipal Pier



## 8. CULTURAL DISTRICT: The Shaw Center for the Arts

**Observations** Baton Rouge has an ever-expanding and vibrant arts community but has lacked appropriately scaled venues for quality performances and exhibits. The community has been in need of facilities to fill the sizing niche between large and small venues to foster ongoing growth in the arts.

The LSU Museum Foundation has sought a location in which to develop a university art museum that would serve as a connective catalyst between the university and the community. Also, the LSU Department of Art has recognized the need to establish an off-campus teaching facility to open up a community outreach link.

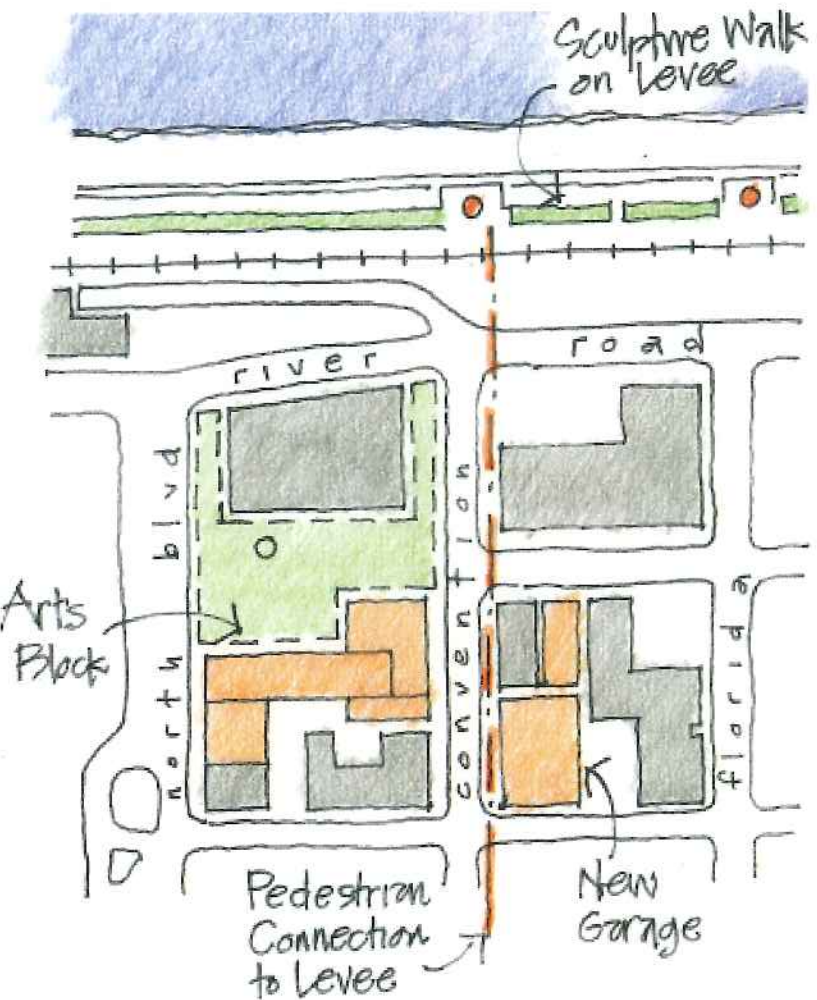
**Goal** Develop a multi-venued cultural facility for the visual and performing arts. Through consolidated efforts, a synergy can be created that in turn supplies presentation venues of national and international significance. The venues will provide presenting opportunity for community based arts, and for university faculty and students.

- Recommendations**
- Create a state-of-the-art multi-venued facility on a two-block public space that will tie directly to the Riverfront and act as a catalyst for downtown events that then spill over to the Levee. This spectacularly designed structure will include six stories of cultural activities, and provide visitors with stunning River views from its upper-storey galleries as well as a roof-top terrace and cafe.
  - Extended plaza spaces around the facility will have pedestrian-friendly amenities including a large fountain, cafe and restrooms, making it an attractive and inviting public space. The plaza will have connecting extensions towards the River that will provide easy access to the Riverfront. Redesign of River Road at that juncture will provide for protected pedestrian crossings and street signalization on demand.
  - An adjacent 250-car parking garage will facilitate visitor attendance at events in and around the Center, as well as those extending out onto the Riverfront. These events will further activate the foreground of Red Stick Levee and reinforce the cultural arts theme of this section of the Riverfront.

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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<b>The Waterfront Center</b>	Community Programming
<b>Suzanne Turner</b>	Urban and Landscape History
<b>Audubon Nature Institute</b>	Governance.Operations
<b>Plan Baton Rouge</b>	Charrette Logistics



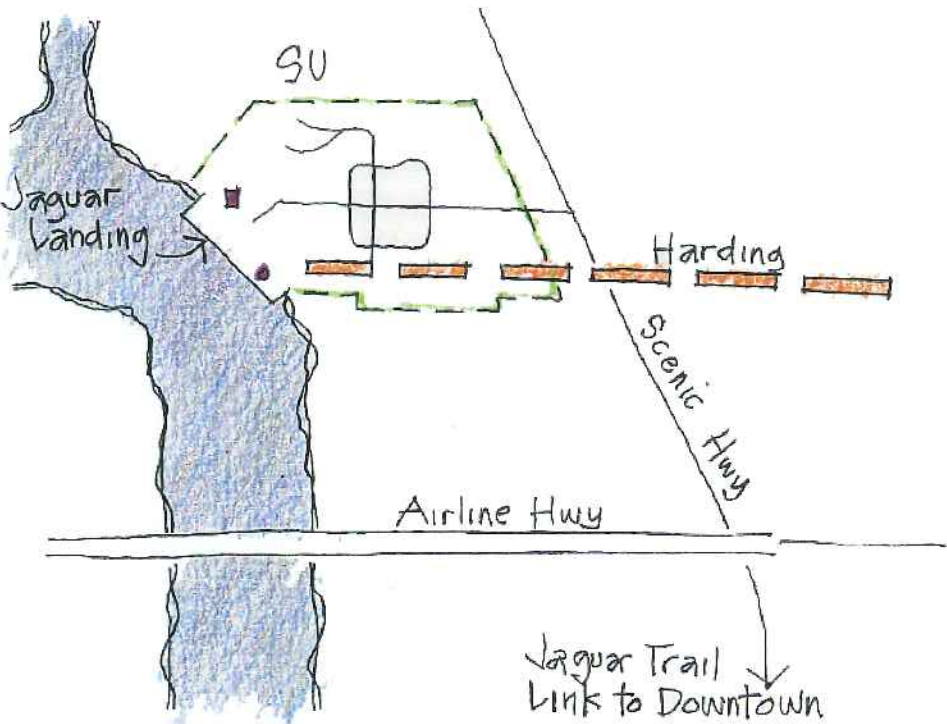


## 9. UNIVERSITY LINKAGES: Jaguar Landing

**Observation** Southern University sits atop a 90' bluff overlooking the River, a location which affords a spectacular view extending southwards well beyond the Downtown. At present there is no major defining marker at the top of the bluff celebrating the presence of Southern University, nor is there riverside access. Southern University is surrounded by petro-chemical facilities and related infrastructure, which since 9-1-1 are acknowledged to be potentially high risk terrorist targets. A riverside docking facility at Southern University could be used in this era of new security upgrades as a form of emergency egress.

**Goal** At the River's edge below the bluff at Southern University, develop a university pier, Jaguar Landing, at which tour boats, ferries, and other water vessels can be moored. Establish connections to the Downtown through a pedestrian and bicycle path.

- Recommendations**
- Work with the Baton Rouge Public Works Department to develop a coordinated pedestrian and bicycle path linking Southern University with the Downtown, with Choctaw and Scenic Highway as primary street corridors.
  - At Southern University, on the bluff overlooking the River, erect a 100' tall totem, in blue and gold, celebrating the university. The marker will be lit at night, forming a series of Riverfront markers, together with the Red Stick at the Downtown and a third marker at LSU.
  - Develop a municipal pier at Jaguar Landing similar to the pier at the Audubon Park riverfront in New Orleans. The pier should be of a size adequate to accommodate tour boats and river ferries, and also provide a point of emergency egress for the campus population.



View southwards from bluff at Southern University

## RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN

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## 9. UNIVERSITY LINKAGES: Tiger Landing

**Observation** The 1200 acre LSU campus adjoins the River at the end of a cross-campus pedestrian walkway that forms a spine through the center of campus. As part of its long term campus Master Plan, a pedestrian and bicycle path is envisioned along the levee, but as yet there has been no formal development initiative.

**Goal** Extend the same pedestrian and bicycle path that runs alongside the levee at the Downtown Riverfront southwards to the LSU campus. Where the path meets the campus pedestrian walkway, establish a university pier, Tiger Landing, similar to Jaguar Landing to the north.

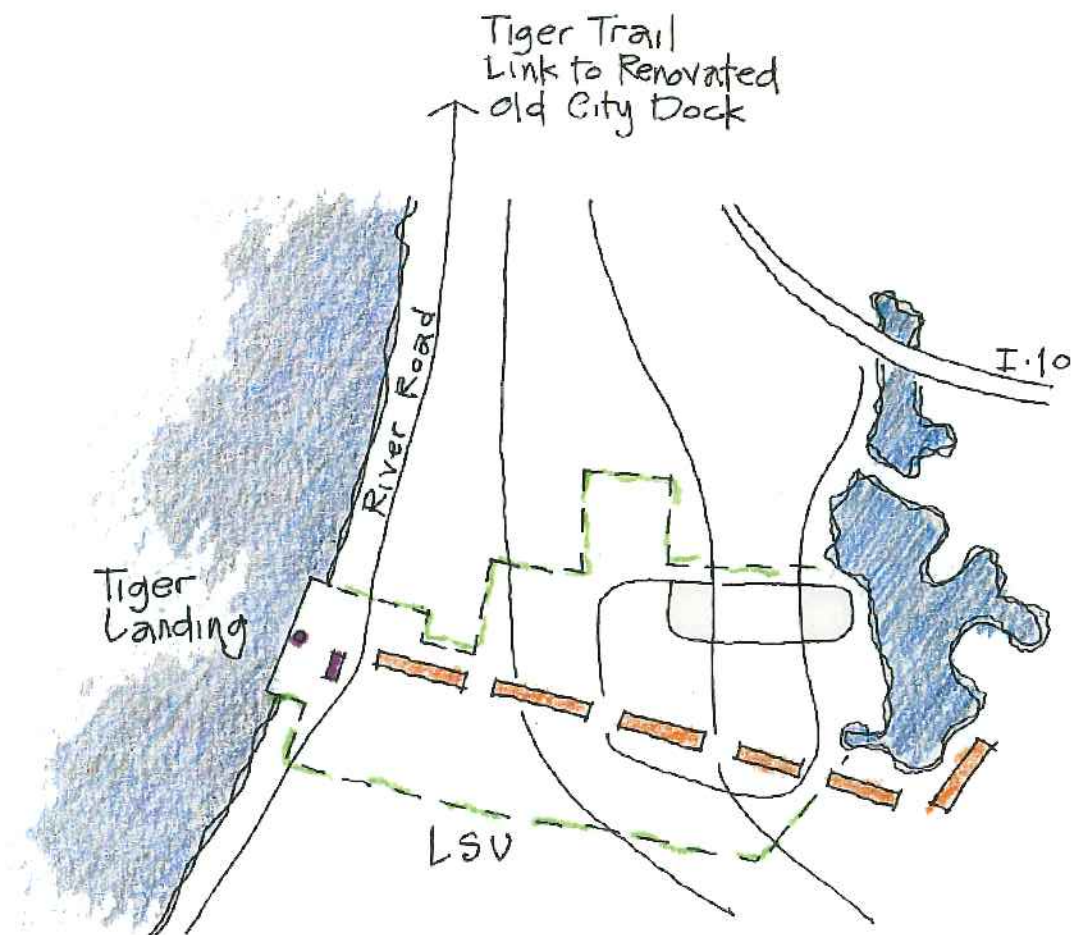
- Recommendations**
- Construct a pedestrian and bicycle path on the levee from the LSU campus to the Downtown, to connect up with the existing boardwalk at the Interstate bridge. On the LSU side, connect up with the existing pedestrian walkway running through the center of campus.
  - Where the pedestrian and bicycle path reaches the pedestrian walkway, erect a 100' tall totem to correspond with the marker at Jaguar Landing, which will celebrate Tiger Landing and the LSU campus. The marker will be clearly visible from the River to passersby and will be illuminated at night.
  - Construct a landing pier that will serve as a campus "porch" on the River which will give the university true riverfront access and be large enough to accommodate riverboats and ferries.



Top of Levee facing Skip Bertman Drive



Skip Bertman Drive



### RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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DESOTO PARK CONCEPT PLAN





## SCOPE/WORK PLAN

**Observation** The origins of the DeSoto Concept Plan can be traced to a funding opportunity that arose for the construction of an engineering platform at the batture, a platform which would -- literally and figuratively -- lay the basis for the future park. Though funding for the design and construction of the park itself were not yet at hand at the completion of the Charrette, the State made the decision to go ahead with a basic concept plan that would be specific enough to move the engineering phase forward based on realistic projections of public use.

**Goal** Provide a basic conceptual outline for the DeSoto Park which, though not in any way determinative of the final landscape design, will make possible the construction of an engineering platform to take the park out of the 100 year flood plain. The concept plan will also help to identify future right of way and access issues that need to be resolved before actual design and construction of the Park can begin.

**Recommendations** The following DeSoto Park Concept Plan was prepared by Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, setting forth in a descriptive, but not prescriptive, fashion the basic layout and dimensions of the new park.

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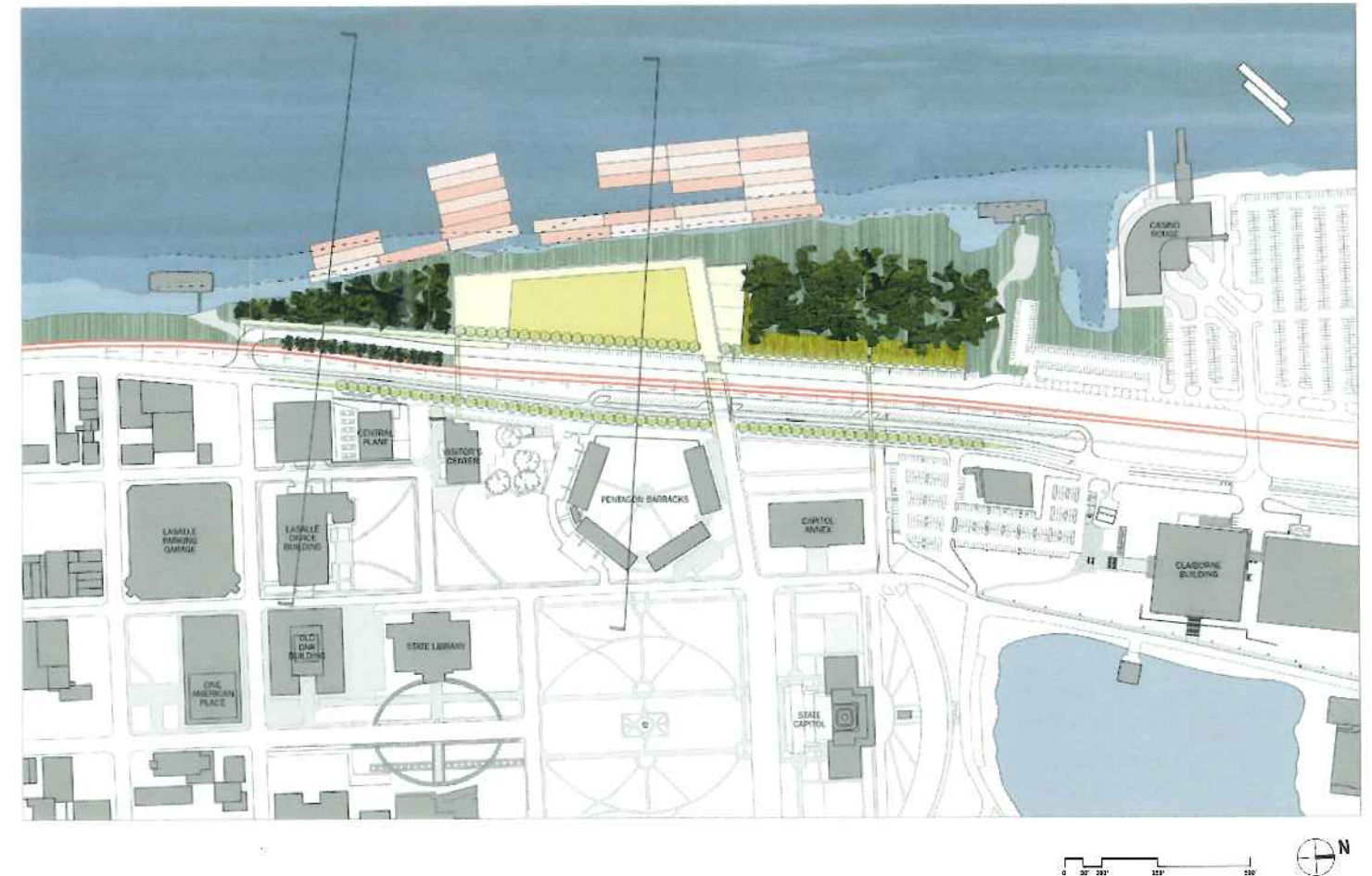


## URBAN CONTEXT

**Observation** The site for the new park is ideally located along the River between North St. and the Claiborne building. It thus spans the stretch of riverfront between the commercial parts of Downtown and the government offices at Capitol Park, thereby providing new recreational and open space within easy reach of downtown workers and residents of the adjoining neighborhoods. The park will supply an informal recreational area, in juxtaposition to the formal landscaped areas of the Capitol Park gardens. The location will also tie in with the planned Pedestrian Loop, whose Spanish Town Road axis terminates at the southern edge of the park. From there Park pedestrians will be able to walk along the Levee at the Downtown Riverfront, and farther south to the LSU campus once the planned pedestrian and bicycle path is completed.

**Goal** Develop a passive and active recreation area which will form a geographic focus for visitors, residents and workers, and provide a public space which is extremely flexible in its range of potential uses.

- Recommendations**
- Establish a Concept Plan for the park which will allow for a wide range of activities to take place, through the creation of different environments: active and passive recreation, a “wildness” area that allows for nature exploration, and vista opportunities that reveal the majestic character of the River as well as its commercial and industrial importance.
  - Improve the quality of the visitor, pedestrian and neighborhood resident experience by providing new outdoor experiences and by improving access to the River.



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## ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

**Observation** The Downtown Riverfront is lacking an area which provides an open space large enough for occasions such as music concerts, civic events, festivals and other public gatherings.

**Goal** Develop the park with open space that provides great opportunity in the range of possible use. Attendees at public events will enliven the Riverfront, and contribute to Downtown revitalization.

**Recommendations**

- The park will be constructed on a raised platform overlooking the River, at the center of which will be an open grassy area that can accommodate a wide range of uses.

- Possibilities for activities at the park include:

- Music concerts
- Open air festivals and trade shows
- Seasonal events such as 4th of July celebrations and Mardi Gras
- Community and State government civic events
- Fundraising events
- Marathons and other sporting activities such as punt-pass-and kick competitions
- Private gatherings such as weddings receptions or annual corporate functions



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## PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

**Observation** Passive environments at the park could include both landscaped areas and nature areas. Here along the Riverfront, both types would provide for a variety of different individual activities.

**Goal** Create two distinct passive environments within the batture footprint, one affording park visitors with an open area in which to relax and enjoy the views of the River, and one at the fluctuating water level where visitors can experience the natural and wild seasonal character of the River.

- Recommendations**
- On the elevated platform create a large grassy area with a boardwalk and benches along the water's edge that can be used for strolling, jogging, picnics, and watching River activity.
  - At the north end of the park, leave a section of land within the flood plain to create a natural "wildness" area. This will allow park visitors to learn about the vegetation and animal life at the water's edge, as well as to "discover" the array of man-made and natural objects that float by and get snagged in the trees and shrubs. This "Huck Finn" wildness area will change with the seasons and with the periodic fluctuations in water levels, providing an ever-changing theater for discovery.
  - The wildness area should be accessible via a natural embankment at the levee leading down to the water, as well as a concrete walkway leading downwards along the northern edge of the park platform.



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## PROGRAMMED ACTIVITIES

**Observation** In order to understand better the dimensions of the new park, the raised platform area can be compared with an athletic field as a familiar point of reference. Here it becomes clear that the platform would be nearly twice the size of a football field, bringing home the point that the new park could accommodate many large scale activities

**Goal** Develop the raised platform of the Park so as to allow for a multitude of programmed activities, with the River as a magnificent outdoor backdrop.

**Recommendations**

- The raised platform could be approximately 200 by 600 feet, with a central lawn occupying two-thirds of that space. This would allow considerable area for concerts and events, as well as for passive recreation activities. Bordering the grassy area could be a hard surface which would become a pedestrian walkway along the River side, and an area for stages, food stands and festival setup at the downriver end of the lawn.

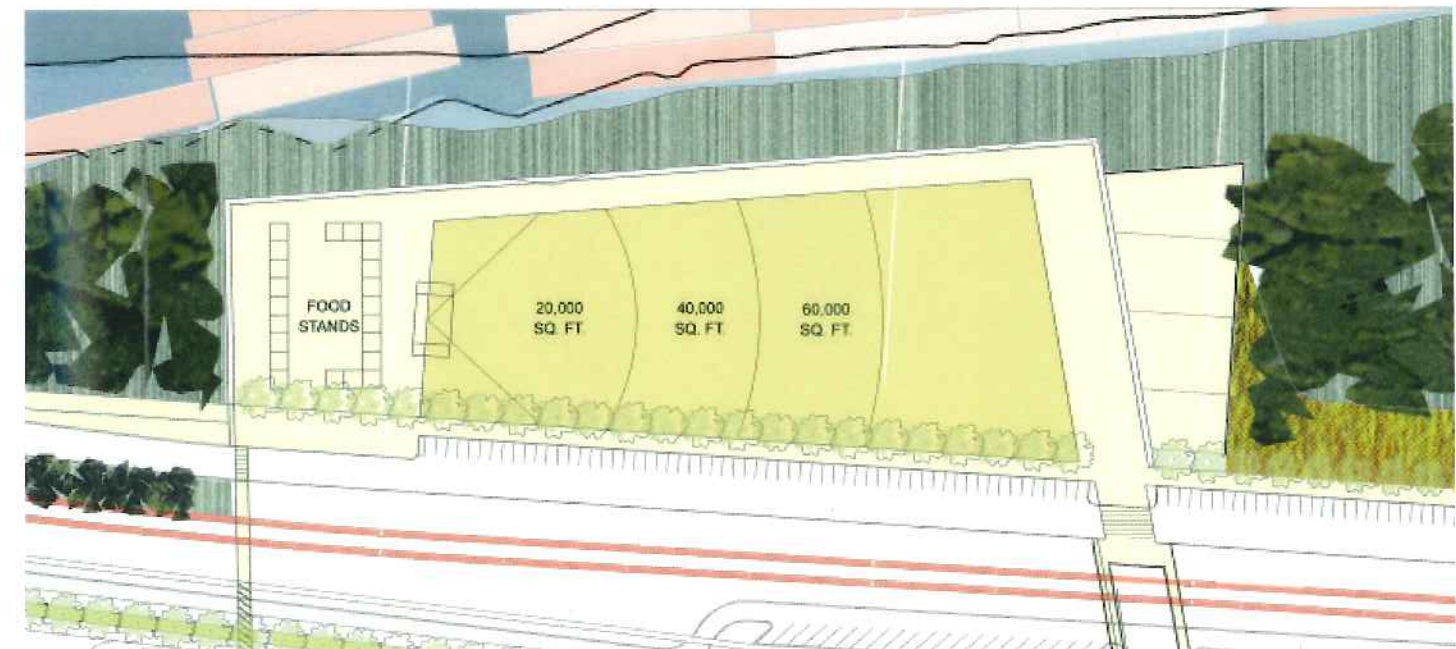
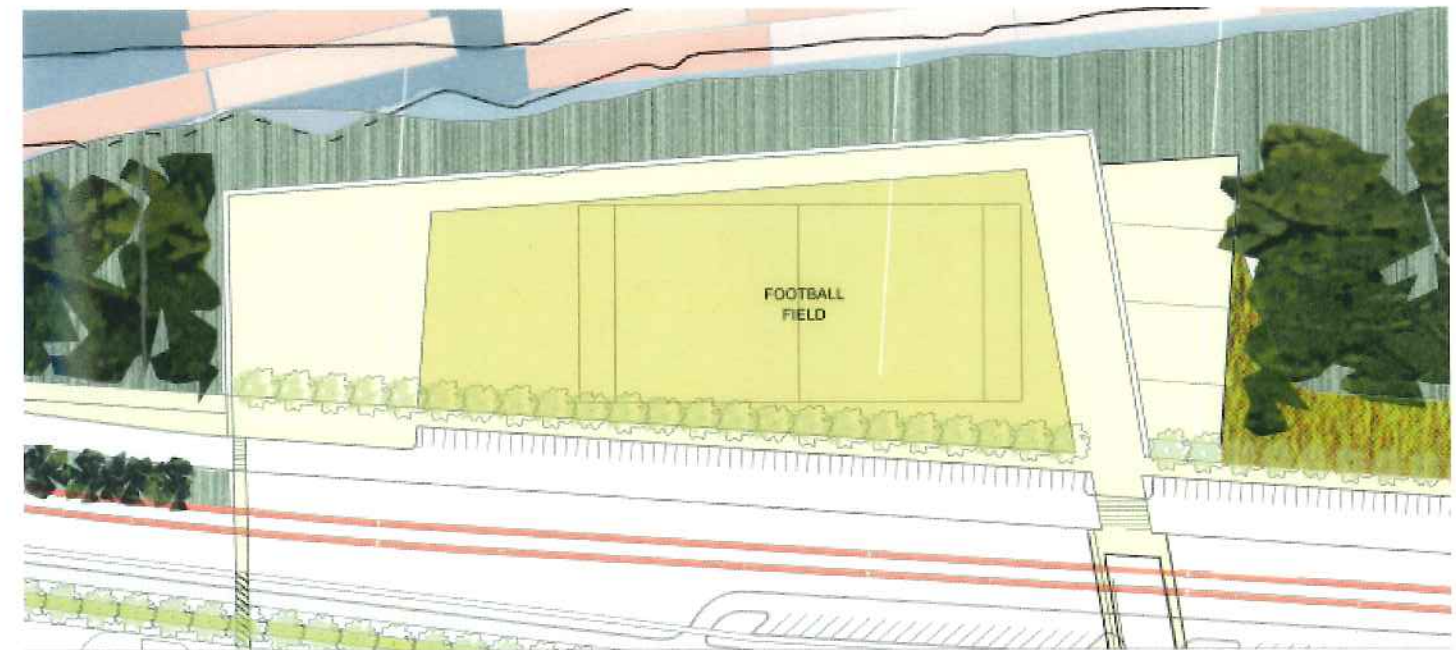
- If used as a concert venue, square footages can be used to estimate crowd capacity at various density levels. With over 65,000 square feet, or 1.5 acres in total, the central grassy area will be able to host large enough crowds to accommodate significant events and performers.

- Parking can be supplied on the river side of the railroad tracks adjacent to the Park, with vehicular access from North St. and continuing along the levee. Parking can also be supplied on the other side of the tracks, with vehicular access directly from River Road. 60' spaces for busses and festival setup vehicles can be supplied in this area.

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## SECTIONS

**Observation** Baton Rouge sits atop a bluff at the edge of the River whose water levels fluctuate 30' from seasonal high to seasonal low. A park located along the water's edge provides opportunities for the public to interact with the River in a variety of environments and at a variety of grade changes.

**Goal** The park should provide for different visitor experiences at different elevations, from the water's edge to the elevated platform area.

- Recommendations**
- At the platform and grassy lawn area, the park will be at the same elevation as the City, and will give visitors an elevated, panoramic view of the River.
  - At the rampart leading down to the River, water levels will rise and fall according to River conditions. The rampart will serve as an intermediary between the constructed platform and the wildness area.
  - At the wildness area, the Park will be at water level, at the base of the levee. The natural sandbar formed by the sedimentation will slow the water flow and create natural eddies at the river's edge.



Section at Lawn



Section at Rampart



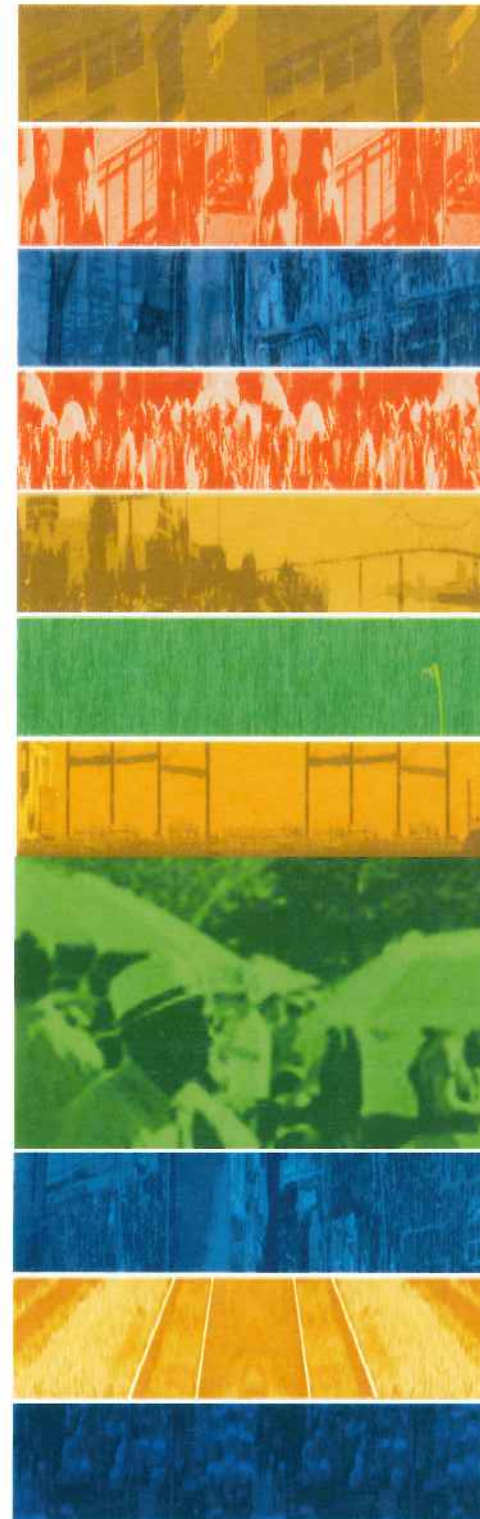
Section at "Wildness" Area

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## Implementation Steps

With the dual completion of the Riverfront Master Plan and the Concept Plan for DeSoto Park, a vision for the Riverfront is now in focus. These two plans build on and reinforce the 1999 Plan Baton Rouge, the Capitol Park Interpretive Plan and the Downtown Visitors' Amenity Plan, following their initiatives in a progressive evolution.

With the completion of the DeSoto Park Concept Plan, implementation has begun and the following subsequent steps are recommended consistent with the incremental sequence of public funding:

- Step 1** Effective November 2003 construction began on the DeSoto Park engineering platform. This work, budgeted at \$11.4 million, includes bulkheading of the platform to take the park out of the 100-year flood zone, at-grade access and parking.
- Step 2** Construction of a pedestrian bridge connecting the new Visitors' Center with the park and extending out to the River, to provide spectacular views and safe waterfront access.
- Step 3** Construction of the River Room, a restaurant/cafe and special events hall which will cater to park visitors as well as private and public functions.
- Step 4** The final step will be the construction of the park itself, using the design of a landscape architecture firm selected through the state competition process.

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