

# BR CHOICE | Executive Summary

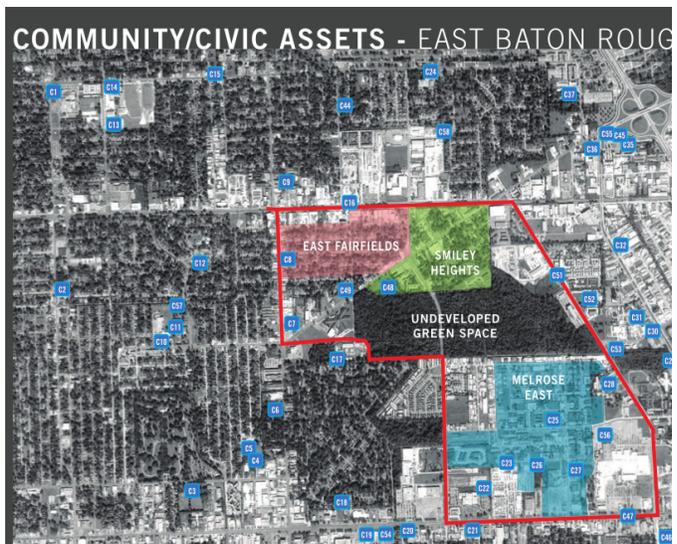
## RESILIENCY



In August 2016, a massive rainstorm dumped nearly 30 inches of rain across East Baton Rouge Parish, causing catastrophic flooding within hours. More than 146,000 homes were inundated; the water caused nearly \$4B in residential property damage. As this storm ravished the **East Fairfield - Smiley Heights - Melrose East neighborhood**, a \$60M water

research campus was under construction five miles away, created as a partnership between Louisiana and East Baton Rouge Parish governments, the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, Louisiana Universities and Nonprofits. The **Water Campus** covers 35 acres along the Mississippi River and will provide 1.6M square feet of laboratories, research facilities and commercial space for more than 4,000 researchers and scientists. The Baton Rouge (BR) Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Team is a partner in this effort, focused on resilient transformational planning, including: 1) Assembling a team of local and nationwide experts in design and community development to set priorities and allocate resources to manage risks for prevailing hazards; 2) Attracting and effectively deploying capital for housing and community development needs; 3) Planning for sustainable, people-oriented systems and networks.

Baton Rouge is in the midst of a building boom, the number of construction permits, centered primarily in the Downtown Development District, has nearly doubled in the last five years. The **Ardenwood Village Public Housing Site** located in the **East Fairfield - Smiley Heights - Melrose East** neighborhood has not benefited from this good fortune. Years of disinvestment and neglect have turned this once thriving residential area into a blighted, disenfranchised community.



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The **East Fairfield - Smiley Heights - Melrose East** neighborhood was developed in the 1970s in response to the expansion of the nearby shopping mall. Suffering from intense competition from commercial centers, shopping rates declined, and the mall was abandoned. Without these neighborhood services and conveniences, many

INNOVATION



stakeholders moved out of the area, resulting in high vacancy rates, buildings in disrepair and blighted lots. Today, the neighborhood has a poverty rate of nearly 60%, one of the highest crime rates in the city, a vacancy rate of 21%, a failing elementary and middle school and severely distressed subsidized housing. However, with strategic planning and targeted investments, the neighborhood has significant potential: 1) Over **500 new apartments and single-family homes** are planned; 2) Both a **\$17M Career Technical Center** and a **\$25M Auto Training Center** opened in 2018; 3) A **High-Tech Start-Up Business Incubator** located in the abandoned mall was converted through adaptive reuse; 4) **200-acres of Mixed-Use Development** is planned in the center of the neighborhood, as well as a new **Multi-Modal Connector**.

PLACE MAKING



The **East Fairfield - Smiley Heights - Melrose East** neighborhood has a burgeoning creative population of artists and cultural historians that are drawn to this community. The neighborhood serves as an innate **Outdoor Art Gallery of over 24 murals** and **Post-Impressionist Painters named streets**. Local grassroots organizations have multiple existing initiatives that integrate art into community building to

enhance civic engagement, reduce crime, stimulate economic growth, eradicate blight and establish the neighborhood's cultural identity. The BR Choice Transformation provides an opportunity to build upon this organic creative placemaking, including: 1) **Automotive Technology Art Installations** throughout the neighborhood; 2) **Creative Mediums Workshops** and **Community Art Events** that use art as a social revitalization tool and a natural form of self-expression and therapy; 3) **Visual Wayfinding** to connect neighborhood assets, incorporate art and link tactically-placed **Vegetable/Flower Gardens** to create a community with an identity.