

BATON ROUGE TRANSFORMATION PLAN

*A CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE
IN SMILEY HEIGHTS + MELROSE EAST*

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
THE CITY OF BATON ROUGE MAYOR'S OFFICE
EAST BATON ROUGE PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY
INTEGRAL GROUP
EAST BATON ROUGE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DISCOVERY	31
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	9	THE PLAN	57
OVERVIEW	12	People	57
Vision and Goals	15	Neighborhoods	77
BATON ROUGE HISTORY	1.7.....	Housing	101
CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS	2.1...	APPENDICES	121

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



This project would not be possible without the support of the following federal, state, and local partners. We thank you for your generous support in developing a holistic transformation plan that will create opportunities to enhance the quality of life among neighbors in the BR choice community.

Respectfully submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 2015

GRANTEE

City of Baton Rouge, Office of the Mayor-President
Melvin L. "Kip" Holden, Mayor-President
East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority, Co-Grantee
Richard Murray, Executive Director

GRANTEE PROJECT MANAGER

Gail Grover, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Baton Rouge City Police Department
Baton Rouge Fire Department
Councilmember Donna Collins-Lewis
Department of Human Development and Service
Department of Juvenile Services
Department of Public Works
East Baton Rouge Parish Emergency Medical Services
East Baton Rouge Parish Library – Eden Park Branch
East Baton Rouge Parish Metropolitan Council
East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office
EmployBR
Louisiana Workforce Development Area-21
Office of Community Development, City of Baton Rouge
Office of the Planning Commission

LEAD PARTNERS

East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority
Integral Group, LLC
Louisiana State University College of Human Sciences & Education
Office of Social Service Research and Development

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Ardenwood Village Residents
Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission (BREC)
Baton Rouge Community College
Bon Carre Business Center
Capital Area Transit System
Capitol Middle School
East Baton Rouge Parish School System
Energy
Melrose East Community Association
Melrose East Community Resource Center
Melrose East Residents
Melrose Elementary School
New Hope Baptist Church
New Hope Substance Abuse Center
Partners for Progress Incorporated
Recovery School District
Smiley Heights Residents
Star Hill Baptist Church



EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH
**HOUSING
AUTHORITY**
4731 NORTH STREET, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70806

LSU
College of
**Human Sciences
& Education**



COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS:

Boys & Girls Club Campus Federal Credit Union
Capital Area Human Services District Capital Area
United Way Communities in Schools Crossover
House Diplomas Now Family and Youth Service
Center East Baton Rouge Mortgage Finance
Authority Kurious Kidz Louisiana State University
School of Architecture Louisiana State University
School of Kinesiology Louisiana State University
School of Social Work Mayor's Healthy Beginnings
Initiative (Healthy BR) Office of Senator Sharon
Weston Broome One Way Deliverance Ministries
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church Southern
University Office of Social Research Urban
Restoration Enhancement Corporation Youth Build

RESIDENT SURVEY TEAM MEMBERS:

Irene King, Arlene Mossey, Shirley Patty, Beverly Porch,
Gracie Putman, Rosa Sellers, Jeremy Sterling, Robbin Sterling,
Tommie Sterling, April Stewart, Evelyn Stewart, Carol Thornton,
Lisa Weatherspoon

COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Capital Area Finance Authority Louisiana
Housing Corporation Baton Rouge Area Violence
Elimination (BRAVE) Cox Cable

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM

William Doran, Professional in Residence, LSU School of Architecture
Matthew Paul Kenney, LSU B. Arch Candidate, 2016

ACRONYMS

BCJI - Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Initiative
BRAVE-Baton Rouge Area Violence Elimination
BRCC-Baton Rouge Community College
BREC-Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission
CATS- Capital Area Transit System
CBPR - Community-based participatory research
CDBG - Community Development Block Grant
CIP - Community Improvement Plan
CPD - Crime Prevention District
EBRPHA - East Baton Rouge Public Housing Authority
EZ - Enterprise Zone
HiSET- High School Equivalency Test
LHC—Louisiana Housing Corporation
LIHTC - Low Income Housing Tax Credit
LSU - Louisiana State University
MSW - Master of Social Work
NMTC - New Market Tax Credit
OCD - Baton Rouge Office of Community Development
PUD - Planned Unit Development
RDA - East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority
REAC - Real Estate Assessment Center
TIF - Tax Incremental Financing
UDC - Unified Development Code

CITY OF BATON ROUGE

**PROJECT
FOCUS
AREA**

MISSISSIPPI

SOUTHERN
UNIVERSITY

EXXON
MOBIL

DOWN
TOWN

LSU

CITY
PARK

TOWNE
CENTER

S. CHOCTAW

FLORIDA BLVD

SHERWO O D FO REST

DALLYSTONBLE

STANFORD

COLLEGE DR

LOMP BLVD

I-12

WNET

AIRLINE H

COURSEY

I-110

PLANK RD

I-110

10TH
STAND

PARK

I-10

FLORIDA BLVD

ACADIAN

I-10

BATON ROUGE CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS

Building a Community of Opportunity and Choice

HUD'S CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS INITIATIVE SUPPORTS LOCAL VISIONS FOR HOW TO TRANSFORM HIGH-POVERTY, DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES INTO NEIGHBORHOODS OF OPPORTUNITY. BY WORKING TOGETHER, WITH LOCAL AND STATE PARTNERS WE WILL SHOW WHY NEIGHBORHOODS SHOULD ALWAYS BE DEFINED BY THEIR POTENTIAL - NOT THEIR PROBLEMS. TOGETHER, WE WILL WORK TO ENSURE THAT NO CHILD'S FUTURE IS DETERMINED BY THEIR ZIP CODE AND EXPAND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.

– HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, June 2014



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Melrose East

The Red Stick Project

“Taking the Arts to the Streets”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2013, the City of Baton Rouge's Office of the Mayor and partners including the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority, and Louisiana State University were awarded a 2-year Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant. Choice Neighborhoods is a part of the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which was created to align federal funding streams that invest in transforming neighborhoods of concentrated poverty into neighborhoods of opportunity. The BR Choice initiative targets an approximately 1.6 square mile area of two adjoining neighborhoods at the heart of north Baton Rouge. These interconnected neighborhoods are Smiley Heights (which includes Fairfields) and Melrose East. Ardenwood Village is the public housing community located within the BR Choice area that is targeted for transformation. This neighbor-driven transformation plan includes a summary of the community engagement framework, data collection methods, and goals and strategies identified in each of the key three outcome areas of people, neighborhood, and housing.

OVERVIEW

Over the past several decades, the Melrose East and Smiley Heights neighborhoods, once vibrant and industrious communities, have become areas of deep-rooted violence and chronic crime because of unemployment and growing poverty. Because of the rich history and location of these neighborhoods, Melrose East and Smiley Heights were selected as the BR Choice neighborhood revitalization planning initiative area.

The 2-year BR Choice planning initiative included a series of strategic planning meetings and community events that involved key stakeholders such as elected officials, community and faith-based partners, and neighbors. The ultimate goal of the initiative was to develop a neighborhood level transformation plan to elevate the Smiley Heights and Melrose East community into one of opportunity and choice leading to pathways out of poverty for its residents.

Using a community-engaged research framework, multiple data collection methods were employed to understand the concerns of neighbors related to the living conditions in their neighborhood. Research methods consisted of household level surveying, neighborhood stakeholder surveying (businesses, community service agencies, nonprofit organizations, etc.), focus groups, and listening and visioning sessions with neighbors and community organizations. Data collected were analyzed and interpreted to fully understand the needs, assets, accessibility and gaps in services to inform the development of a comprehensive neighborhood transformation plan.





To create lasting opportunities for neighbors of the BR Choice Community that will enhance their quality of life for generations.

1. Increase the number of early child development and child care options in the neighborhood
2. Successfully increase middle and high school graduation rates among youth in the CHOICE community.
3. Increase parental involvement in the schools of the children who live in the CHOICE community
4. Decrease the number of unsupervised children and youth in the neighborhood
5. Increase the overall health and wellness of the neighbors in the Choice community
6. Increase access to healthy foods, medical, dental, behavioral health, and fitness providers
7. Increase the soft skills, life skills and ultimately job readiness among residents of the CHOICE community
8. Improve economic development in the Choice community
9. Increase the job readiness skills of unemployed and underemployed neighbors in the Choice community
10. Improve rates of enrollment and completion of postsecondary and vocational programs among neighbors
11. Reduce social isolation among senior citizens
12. Increase accessibility to affordable medications

To create an attractive, vibrant, mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhood with access to healthy foods, medical care, quality schools, and neighborhood retail shops.

1. Improve public safety as well as the perception of public safety among neighbors
2. Develop authentic engagement between neighbors and law enforcement
3. Maximize community recreational facilities and opportunities to enhance arts and culture
4. Restore a sense of community history and pride in the BR Choice Neighborhood
5. Establish neighborhood connectivity through an enhanced transportation plan and gateway improvements
6. Increase availability and types of neighborhood businesses
7. Adopt zoning designations that support and reflect ideal characteristics of the Choice community
8. Eliminate vacant lots

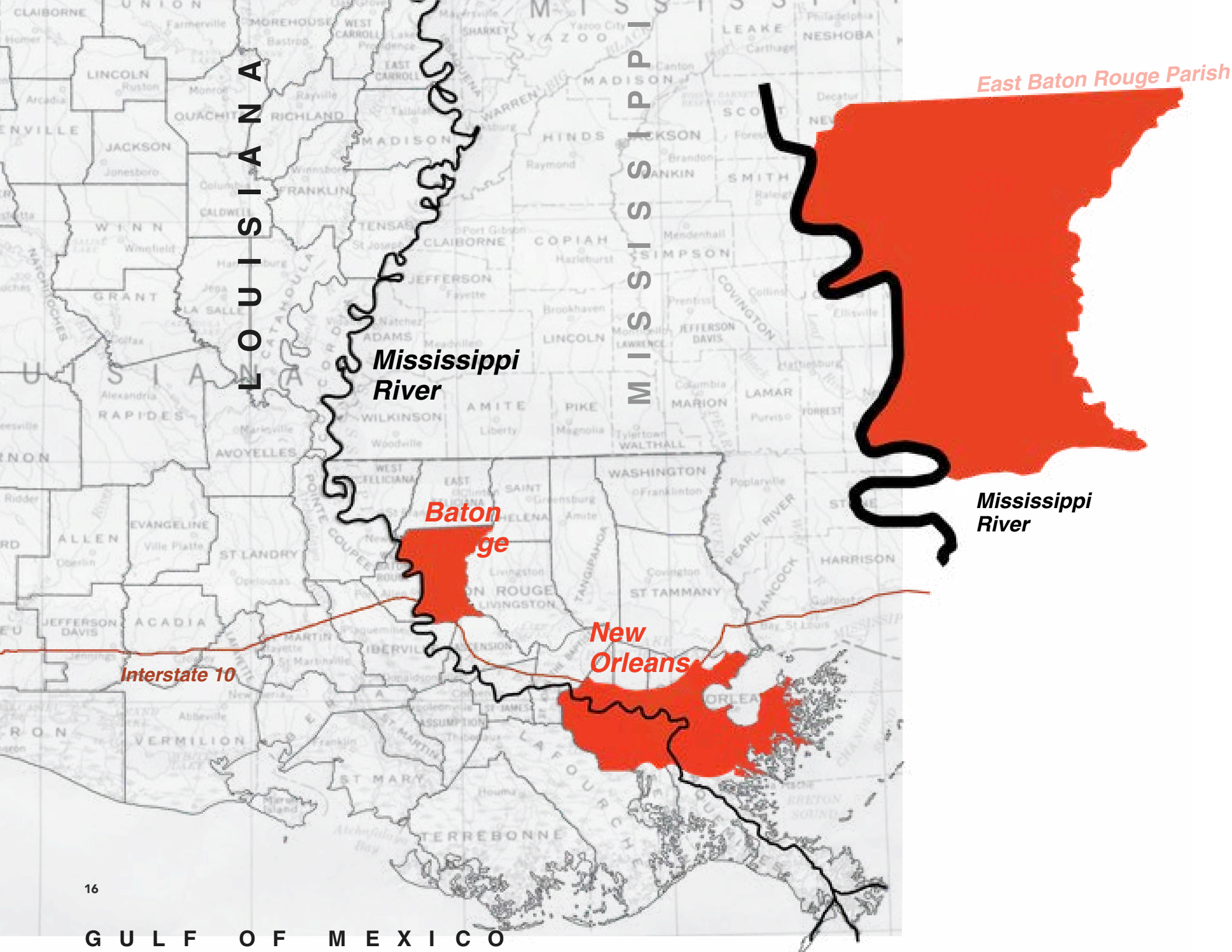


VISION + GOALS

To create a diverse inventory of high-quality and affordable housing options for neighbors of the BR Choice Community.

1. **To create an affordable, high-quality mixed-income environment that promotes diversity**
2. **To create a high-quality diverse housing inventory**
3. **To decrease vacancy rate**
4. **Create a vibrant mixed-used district that will increase the desirability of the Choice area**
5. **To increase the rates of homeownership among public housing residents**

The vision for the Baton Rouge Choice community is to develop a holistic, integrated revitalization plan that transforms Smiley Heights, Melrose East, and Ardenwood Village into a community of opportunity and choice for the people who live there.



East Baton Rouge Parish

Mississippi River

Mississippi River

Baton Rouge

New Orleans

Interstate 10

BATON ROUGE HISTORY

Then and Now

Baton Rouge (BR), nestled on the banks of the Mississippi River north of the Gulf of Mexico, is approximately 80 miles up-river to the northwest of New Orleans. BR, which means Red Stick in French, was discovered in 1699 by French explorer Sieur d'Iberville who named the area after noticing large red poles draped with blood and animal skins. It is believed that these sticks may have been designated boundaries separating the hunting grounds between the Bayou Goula and the Houmas Indian tribes.

Incorporated in 1817, Baton Rouge became the capital city of Louisiana in 1849, and the Old State Capital building was erected a year later. Because of its location on the river, BR thrived on an economy built on the steamboat industry. However, this new market was short lived because of the Civil War. During Reconstruction, the capital city was briefly moved to New Orleans amid political conflict. In 1893, Karl Baedeker called BR a "quaint old place" that boasted over 10,000 people.

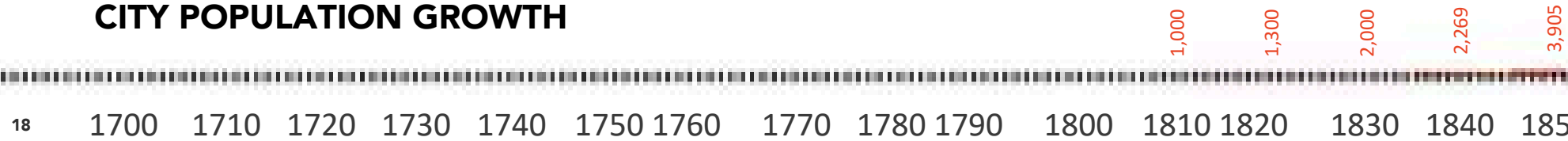
During the early 1900s, BR grew into a major port city experiencing economic booms, starting with sugar, followed by cotton and oil. From the earliest days of the oil boom, BR became a refining and distribution center. Explosive growth in this industry occurred during World War II as the petrochemical plants along the river expanded to support the war efforts.

In 1950, the metropolitan area was defined and consisted of East Baton Rouge Parish, including the incorporated cities of Baker, Central and Zachary. The growing economy influenced the development of housing, commercial and recreational properties as the population began to increase. The Civil Rights Movement marked a significant time in BR when African-Americans began to protest against racial injustice. In 1953, BR was the first city to organize a bus boycott against racial segregation.

Led by local black community leaders, Willie Reed, Reverend Theodore Judson (T. J.) Jemison, and Raymond Scott, the boycott lasted 8 days, and served as an inspiration for the more famous Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. Following this action, students attending Southern University, a historically black college, were arrested after organizing sit-ins causing a protest march to the capital grounds.



CITY POPULATION GROWTH

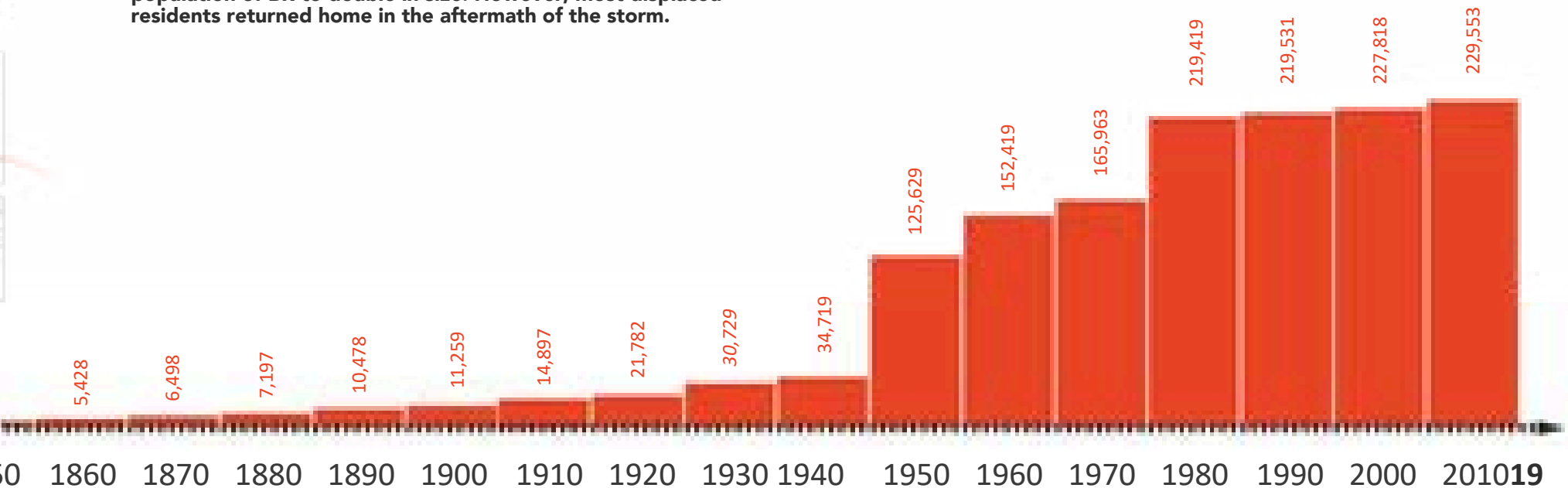


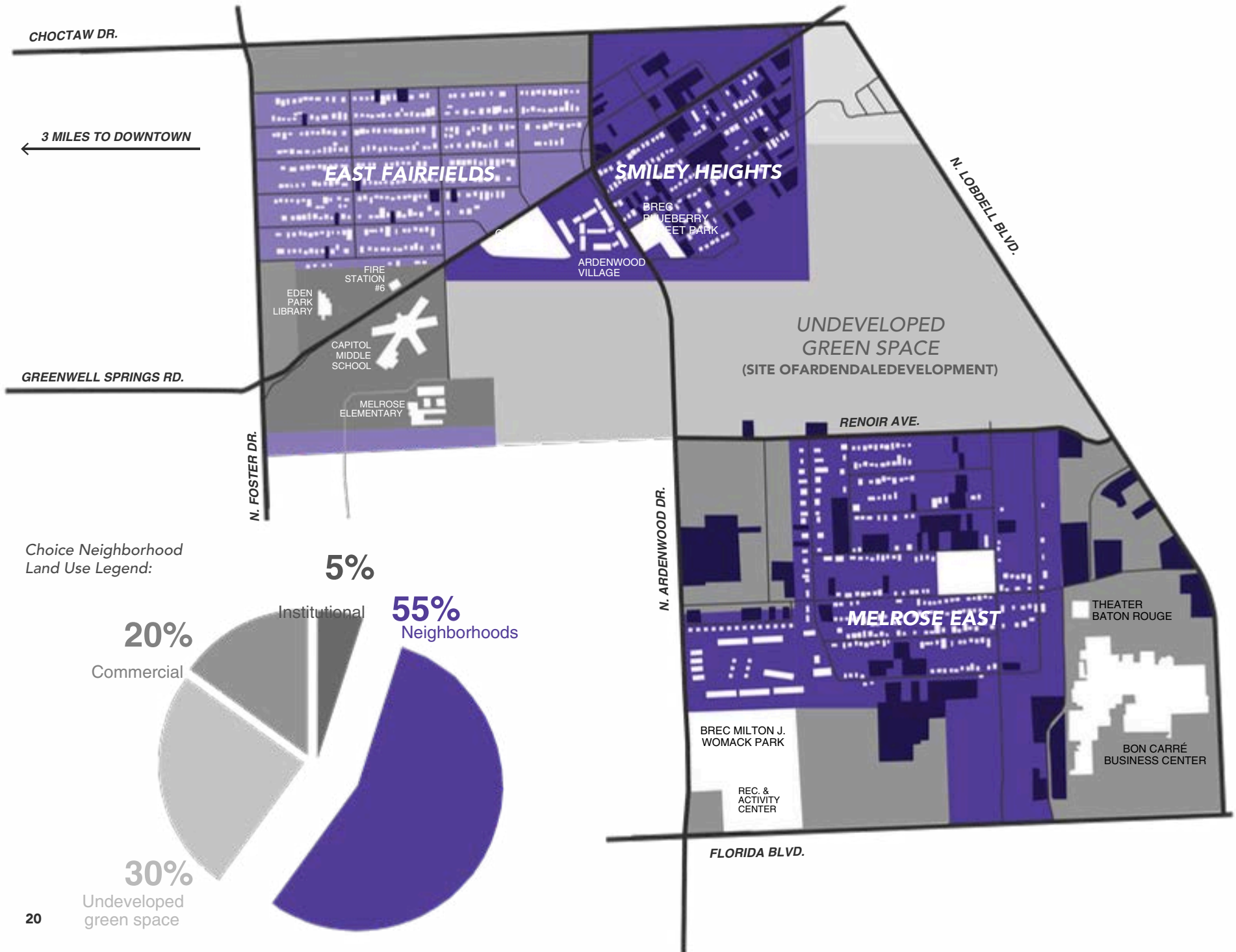
BATON ROUGE GROWTH

Since 1817

In the latter half of the 20th Century, the city experienced a population migration to suburban areas. Nevertheless, BR continues to benefit economically from its natural and industrial resources while keeping in step with the growing demands of technology. Several big named companies including Exxon, Dow and IBM have offices in the area allowing BR to compete with other major cities. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina forced over 200,000 New Orleans residents to the area causing the population of BR to double in size. However, most displaced residents returned home in the aftermath of the storm.

Today, BR comprises 75 square miles and hosts a population of 229,000 residents. East Baton Rouge parish (a geographic unit equivalent to a county in other states) is 472 square miles and contains a population of 440,171 residents-the largest in the state. In the coming years, the City is expected to experience more growth as it capitalizes on increased revenue from the movie industry.





CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS

Then and Now

Smiley Heights/Fairfields and Melrose East comprise the Choice Neighborhoods. This community is bordered by Florida Boulevard (US 190) to the south, Choctaw Drive to the north, Lobdell Boulevard to the east, and North Foster Drive to the west. North Ardenwood Drive is a major street that intersects the neighborhoods. Many African-Americans including well known civil-rights leader Gustav "Gus" Young Jr., are buried in Gilbert Memorial Park Cemetery located on Greenwell Springs Road.

Smiley Heights/ Fairfields and Melrose East neighborhoods were developed in the 1970s in response to housing needs. The first phase of development was completed in the late 1960s with 2 more phases added in early 1970s. The need for these communities was also motivated by the popular Bon Marche Mall that occupied the corner of Lobdell and Florida Boulevards. This major shopping center attracted national retail stores as well as apartment complexes and small businesses causing the job market to further expand. However, the success of the Bon Marche Mall was brief as the Mall of Cortana featuring more retail stores opened less than a mile away. Eventually, residents who could afford to do so traveled out of the Smiley Heights/ Fairfields and Melrose East area to shop. This resulted in disenfranchisement of the area leading to sudden increases in crime and poverty.

In the 1980s, the term "Mall City" became associated with these neighborhoods. Because of high crime rates, a once thriving mixed-income, diverse neighborhood was transformed into low income, distressed properties. As a result, the number of rental properties increased as home owners and small businesses relocated to more viable areas of Baton Rouge.

By the early 1990s, some investors began to restore apartments in the Smiley Heights/Fairfields and Melrose East neighborhoods. Overtime, a gradual improvement occurred as some home and business owners formed partnerships with the Baton Rouge Police Department to address crime. In 1998, the Bon Marche Mall property was renovated into a business and technological area with Cox Communications being its main occupant. Other areas of growth included the Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC), Lewco Industries, and Gerry Lane Chevrolet. Additionally, service providers like Catholic Charities and BREC recreation sites moved into the neighborhood.

Bon Marché Mall circa 1964, photo credits: Bryan Flood (left), Bon Carré Business Center (right)



BON MARCHÉ



"The need for the Smiley Heights and Melrose East communities was motivated by the popular Bon Marché Mall that occupied the corner of Lobdell and Florida Boulevards. The Bon Marché Mall became a major shopping center attracting national retail stores as well as apartment complexes and small businesses that caused the job market to further expand. However, the success of the Bon Marché Mall was short-lived as the Mall of Cortana featuring more retail stores opened less than a mile away."

In 2005, the Bon Marché property was completely redeveloped into a new business complex, the Bon Carré Business Center, a mixed-use development with over 850,000 square-feet of leasable space. To date, the property houses over 30 companies including Cox Communications, URS Corporation, and a regional-scale data center. The center also houses a business incubator program, the Louisiana Technology Park, which was created to provide affordable space and infrastructure for emerging tech companies.

Bon Carré Business Center today, photo credit: Bon Carré Business Center



EAST FAIRFIELDS

SMILEY HEIGHTS

ARDENWOOD VILLAGE

UNDEVELOPED GREEN SPACE
(SITE OF ARDENDALE DEVELOPMENT)



MELROSE ELEMENTARY

CAPITOL MIDDLE SCHOOL

FIRE STATION #6

GILBERT CEMETERY

NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH

BREC BLUEBERRY STREET PARK

PAULSON ST.

SOBERGS ST.

MADISON AVE.

FAIRFIELDS AVE.

JACKSON AVE.

WASHINGTON AVE.

JEFFERSON AVE.

PAULSON ST.

GREENWELL SPRINGS

N. ARDENWOOD DR.

PINO ST.

CONFIDENCE ST.

AUGUSTUS ST.

E. SMILEY AVE.

WILLIAMSON ST.

BLACKBERRY ST.

BLUEBERRY ST.

CALLAHAN ST.

N. ARDENWOOD DR.

ARDENWOOD VILLAGE

Public Housing Units



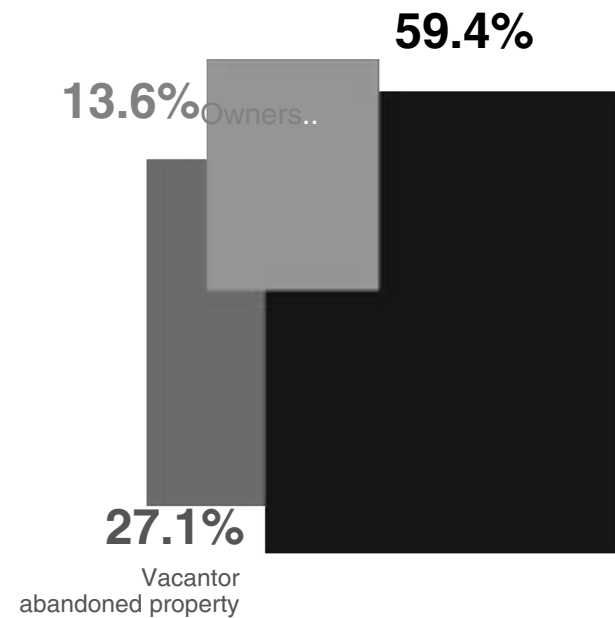
Ardenwood Village is a Section 8 public housing community located at 1957 North Ardenwood Drive in BR. The community was built in July 1971. Ardenwood was modernized in 1995. Currently, the apartment complex consists of 93 living units (20 One-Bedroom, 31 Two-Bedroom, 35 Three Bedroom and 7 Four Bedroom) in a one and two story frame and veneer building. The property is currently 98% occupied.

In 2001, Ardenwood received a 9-year replacement roof, however, the apartment units continue to lack central heating and air. Moreover, window units are in most cases old and in need of repair. To date, there is only one laundry facility on site. In May 2013, a physical needs assessment was completed and recommended \$3 million in needed improvements.

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS¹

- There are 1,997 housing units in the BR Choice Community
- There are 5,466 residents and 2,800 households in the BR Choice Community
- Over half of the single family homes and dwellings with more than one unit were built before 1970's
- The Median Home Value is \$69,250 on average across both census tracts as compared to the Parish at \$166,000
- Over two-thirds of houses are either vacant or occupied by renters
- The renter vacancy rate is 8%
- The Community is three miles from Downtown Baton Rouge

Choice Neighborhood
Housing Tenure:



1,977

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics

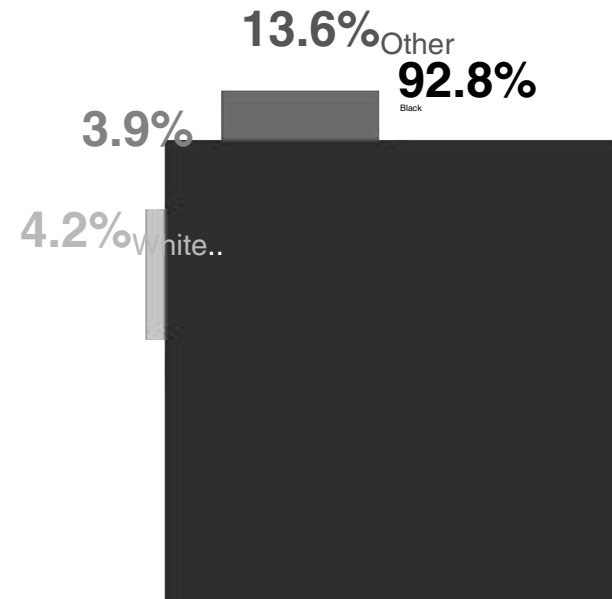
BR CHOICE CHARACTERISTICS

Housing and Demographics

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

The BR Choice neighborhoods cover approximately 922 acres within a 1.24 sq. mile radius. The BR Choice footprint is included in Census tracts 11.04 and 11.03 and Block Group 1. Over the last decade, the BR Choice community grew from approximately 4,826 people in the year 2000 to 5,466 in 2013. This 12.3% overall increase in population was greater than the population growth in East Baton Rouge Parish which was 10% over the same time period.

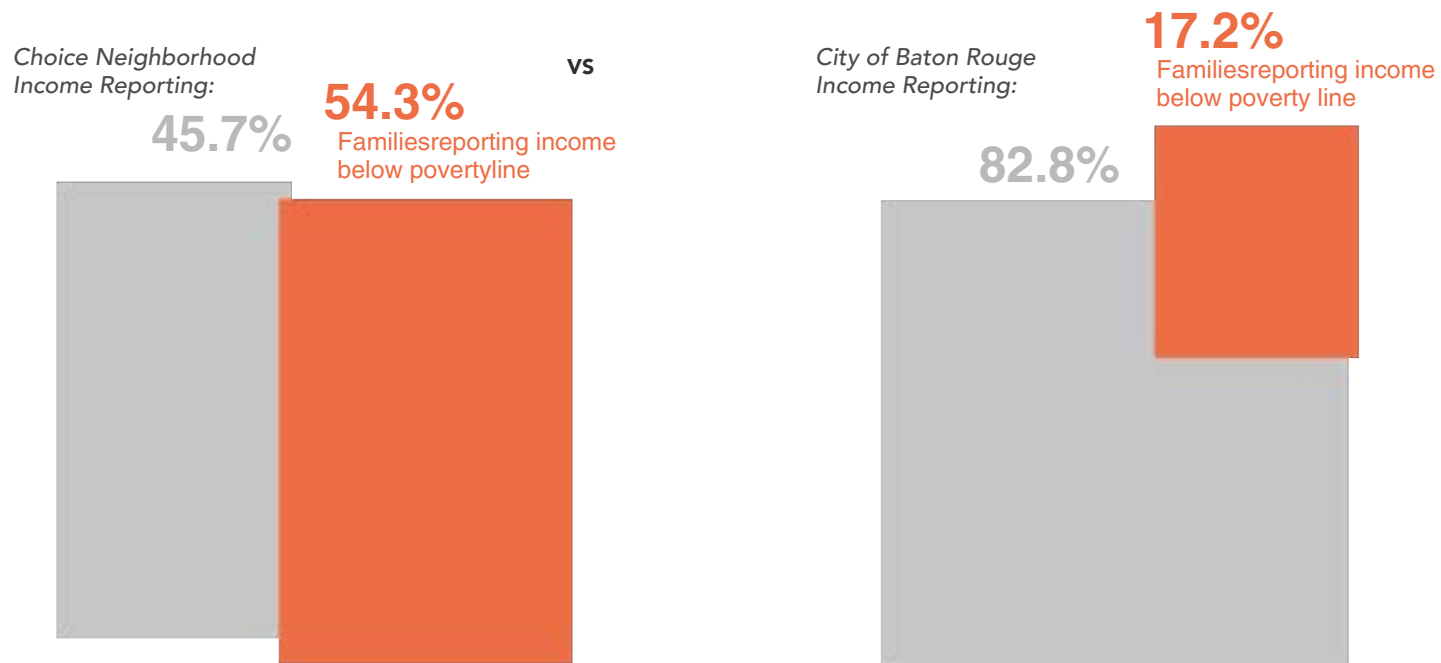
Choice Neighborhood
Population Demographics:



5,466

INCOME CHARACTERISTICS

The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) reported that the average household income of families in the BR Choice community is \$24,543 as compared to \$59,196 in the City of Baton Rouge. Slightly over 54.3% of families reported income below the poverty level as compared to 17.2% in the City of Baton Rouge. An overwhelming majority of children (81.5%) under the age of 18 are reportedly living in poverty as compared to children from the general population (35%).



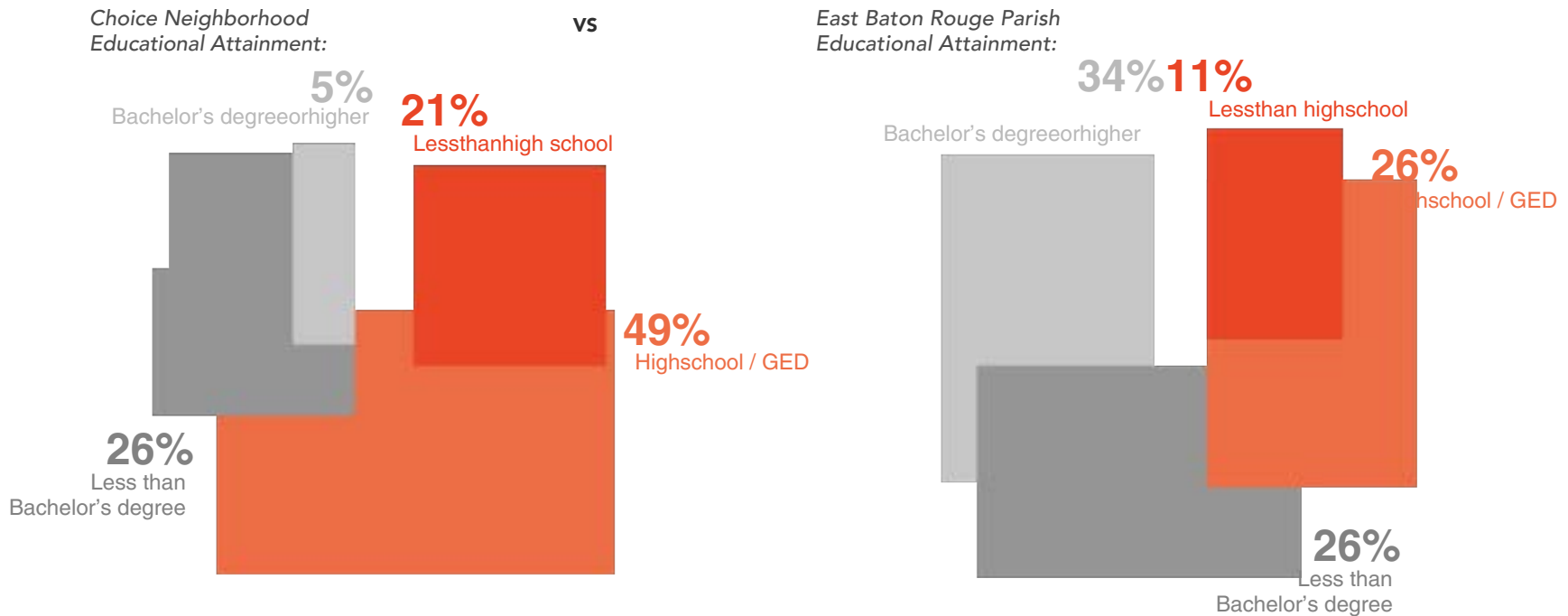
1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics

BR CHOICE CHARACTERISTICS

Income and Employment

EDUCATION CHARACTERISTICS

Findings from the BR Choice household surveying that occurred during the summer 2014 revealed that 70% of the population have earned a high school diploma / GED or less, as compared to less than 40% across the Parish of East Baton Rouge.





*COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT &
DISCOVERY*

ghborhood moods

neighborhood good

Business Meeting

WORK Study

Kids Activities

would make it be

in ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~community~~
from more ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~places~~

be



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DISCOVERY

The BR Choice Initiative targets an approximately 1.6 square mile area of two adjoining neighborhoods in the heart of north Baton Rouge. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), approximately 5,466 people compose the total population of neighbors in the BR Choice neighborhoods. A large majority of the population consists of African Americans or black people (92.8%). Only 4.2% of the total population in the BR Choice neighborhood is Caucasian followed by 3.9% Hispanic or Latino.

Community-based participatory research.

As the LSU research team set out to gather data from neighbors of the BR Choice neighborhoods to develop a truly neighbor-driven plan, they utilized a Community-based participatory research framework (CBRP). This method often leads to meaningful and sustainable community transformation as neighbors and stakeholders are an integral part of every phase of the BR Choice initiative.

The LSU research team also incorporated consensus organizing, appreciative inquiry, and authentic engagement strategies as they worked with neighbors to develop the BR Choice approach and to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their community (Eichler, 2007). These strategies included inviting neighbors to weekly and bi-weekly research team planning meetings, encouraging them to share their input, providing feedback from neighbors at larger partner meetings with key stakeholders, and recruiting neighbors to serve as part of the research team as surveyors in the community.

Neighbors are the experts.

Neighbor surveyors were partnered with undergraduate and graduate student volunteers to administer surveys in the communities and homes of residents. Neighbors were awarded cash incentives for the number of completed surveys.

Neighbor participation was also included on a local radio talk show to inform the community of the surveying efforts and the importance of their participation. As a result of the neighbor inclusion strategies, several neighbors became active and regular participants at our monthly community transformation team meetings.

Photo taken by the LSU Research Team at a community event in a park adjacent to the BR Choice Community. (June 2014)



OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS...

Participation
GROCERY STORE
Workforce Development

apartments 1



APARTMENTS PROVIDE...
tighter community
proximity to

townhomes 2



TOWNHOMES PROVIDE...
Community

detached homes 3



DETACHED HOMES PROVIDE...
ownership
DRIVE

where the heart is.
where there is Family



DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY

Data Collection Activities

1. **Asset Mapping and Windshield Surveying**
2. **Neighborhood-level Focus Groups or “community conversations”**
3. **Household-level surveying**
4. **Listening and Visioning Sessions
(also called Transformation Team Meetings)**

The research strategies employed by the LSU research team included both descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques. A series of initial focus groups were held with neighborhood residents across the BR Choice neighborhoods to understand neighborhood assets, needs, and opportunities, and to devise a framework for community engagement. Multiple surveys were developed for neighborhood residents (community-level and household-level, short- and long-form), law enforcement, community leaders, and other stakeholders to obtain evidence to support the development of this community-driven Transformation Plan. Monthly listening and visioning sessions were conducted to engage neighbors and gather more information about social drivers of crime and strategies to implement community improvements in Smiley Heights and Melrose East.

Asset Mapping

During the summer of 2014, the LSU Research Team trained and supervised LSU MSW student volunteers who conducted community windshield and walking surveys in the BR Choice neighborhood. The students collected data on the physical environment of the businesses, churches, recreation centers, and other assets. Windshield surveying allows researchers to integrate data and photographs in real-time with the master GIS asset map. For each asset, a photograph was taken on a mobile phone, which also captured longitude and latitude coordinates for location and a timestamp. The following information was collected: (1) name of asset, (2) type of asset, (3) the operation status of the asset, (4) upkeep of the physical structure, (5) social activity around asset (e.g., were people visibly gathered there), and (6) observations regarding safety. Excel and ArcGIS software were used to plot these assets, and information on the location of assets was generated from community surveys, the windshield surveys and walking surveys, Google Maps, and Internet sources when an address was needed.



DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY



Focus Groups and Conversations with Neighbors

During the months of April and May of 2014, a total of four neighbor focus groups and four non-profit group interviews were conducted for BR Choice. The neighbor groups included one pilot focus group, one focus group with neighbors in the public housing site of Ardenwood Village, and two additional focus groups in Melrose East and Smiley Heights. Attendance at the groups ranged from three to eleven participants. The non-profit group interviews were conducted with executive representatives of the Louisiana Non-Profit Association (LANO) and three non-profit organizations that provide youth programming and/or housing services to the Choice neighborhood. The purpose of these focus groups and interviews was to collect early data in the following areas: (a) understanding neighbors and neighborhoods; (b) uncovering assets and strengths; (c) identifying areas of need for improvement and current challenges; and (d) gaining insight into approaches for effective engagement.

For the neighborhood profile, neighbors were given a blank map and asked to name their neighborhood and to outline the area of what they consider their neighborhood boundaries. Neighbors were also asked to identify the ways in which they refer to one another and how they preferred to be named (e.g., neighbors, residents, or citizens). Other questions inquired about the greatest strengths and needs of their community and optimal strategies to get people engaged and involved in the

DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY



Community Resident and Stakeholder Surveys

The LSU Community Research Team developed a brief pre-survey for neighbors to complete at focus group meetings. This survey collected participant data regarding their connection to and length of time in the neighborhood, and asked participants to rank potential neighborhood issues based on the importance of the issue, using a continuum of “not important” to “very important.” Neighborhood issues included a) housing; b) jobs; c) health care; d) places to buy food; e) education; f) transportation; g) public safety; h) arts and recreation; i) helping organizations (to support needs of neighbors); j) neighbors working together; and k) children and youth activities. It also allowed neighbors the option of writing in their own ideas concerning neighborhood needs.

In an integrated effort with a related White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Initiative (BCJI) Hope Zone, a neighborhood-level survey was also developed and administered at various public locations across the six Hope Zone neighborhoods which include Melrose East, Smiley Heights, and Ardenwood Village. These locations included public parks, food marts, convenience stores, community centers, churches and gas stations. Data collection occurred over a two-month period in the late summer/early fall of 2014.

The community-level survey utilized a purposive, convenience sample and was administered at places identified by neighbors as high in foot traffic where researchers could reach a large number of residents. The community-level survey is a 25-item interview instrument that took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

This survey included questions that addressed 5 key domains:

1. Access to neighborhood amenities
2. Perceptions of crime activity and behaviors, safety, and possible contributors to crime
3. Perceptions of socio-economic and environmental drivers of crime
4. Social capital, social cohesion, relationships and trust (including relationships with law enforcement)
5. Collective efficacy

A total of 152 neighborhood residents completed this survey.

DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY

A household-level survey was conducted in the neighborhoods of Smiley Heights, Fairfields, and Melrose East, also known as the BR Choice Neighborhood. While the neighborhood-level survey was intended to be a short-form instrument primarily focused on crime and safety concerns, the household-level survey was a deeper dive into various outcome areas impacting quality of life opportunities people (education, health and well-being, workforce development, arts, culture and recreation, and opportunities for youth, for example). The household-level survey instrument was finalized in August 2014, after being vetted and piloted in meetings with neighbors and stakeholders, and launched in September 2014. A census approach was used to survey residents of the public housing community of Ardenwood Village, and a random sample design was used to survey all other households in Smiley Heights, Fairfields and Melrose East. Between the fall of 2014 and early spring of 2015, 130 household-level surveys were completed (49 of which came from the 93 households in Ardenwood Village). The household-level survey is a 192-item interview instrument that took approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete.

Since the spring of 2014, interviews and focus groups have been held with various nonprofit/service providers with impact in the BR Choice neighborhood. Data has been collected to increase knowledge of the network ties and strengths of collaboration between and among service providers, in addition to the scope of services and resources individual providers possess. This data has helped to inform capacity development and strategies for bridging capital, strengthening collaborations and fostering the emergence of a collective impact approach for providers in BR Choice. Key stakeholder surveys were developed for law enforcement, local government and elected officials, non-profits and social service providers, health care providers, for-profit business owners and potential employers, and faith-based leaders. These were completed either in person, on-line, or by mail. Survey completion counts included: 111 law enforcement and public safety officials, 24 cross-sector partners and 14 faith-based entities.

Listening and Visioning Sessions / Transformation Team Meetings

Listening and visioning sessions, also known as transformation team meetings, were monthly meetings in which residents, community stakeholders and cross-sector partners from local government, universities, private entities and non-profit organizations convened to discuss needs, assets and opportunities related to the primary outcome areas: people, neighborhood and housing. These listening and visioning sessions also served to define the vision for neighborhood transformation, organize groups around early wins and implementation strategies, prioritize strategies and build capacity and relationships across the community. As per the community-based model, neighbors were often called upon during these meetings to share their ideas and insights.

Cross-sector partners were also involved in determining the transformation strategies. Neighbors, community leaders, and other cross-sector stakeholders were invited to share concerns, discuss community analysis findings, explore assets and opportunities and articulate their vision for a healthy community. These meetings were held on a monthly basis at different venues in the identified communities. Transformation Team and additional community meetings were advertised via word of mouth, fliers posted at venues in the community, e-mail invitations, and personal phone call invitations for persons with no email address. In all resident survey approaches, residents were invited to get involved with the BR Choice initiative and voluntarily share contact information. This contact information was collected and placed on a master list, and these residents were also invited to meetings through personal emails and phone calls.

DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY



Major Findings

Asset Mapping and Windshield Surveying.

Asset mapping and windshield surveying revealed the following environmental and physical attributes of the BR Choice community:

- Two main outdoor recreational spaces and parks
- A strong presence of faith-based institutions
- Several childcare facilities
- A library

Other findings revealed that crime in the BR CHOICE and BCJI areas accounts for nearly 50% of the City of Baton Rouge's overall crime rate and that a large majority of the crime was committed primarily by youth offenders or in the context of group related violence.

Liabilities in the physical landscape of the neighborhood include a lack of social services and grocery stores, a high number of alcohol outlets, and a significant presence of urban blight, abandoned properties, vacant lots, dilapidated homes and buildings. Our crime maps depicted that crime was higher around the alcohol outlets and major streets in the residential areas that were more densely populated.



Asset map results reveal a lack of grocery stores with healthy foods.

DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY

Neighborhood-level Focus Groups.

Thematic coding from the neighborhood-level focus groups indicated the following. Neighbors was the preferred term. Thus we recommended that “neighbor” is used when referring to people who live in the BR CHOICE neighborhoods. For both Smiley Heights and Melrose East, rebranding the neighborhood’s names was extremely important as the previous names “Old Bird Station” and “Mall City” held negative connotations. Neighbors felt a sense responsibility for bringing change to their own neighborhood instead of waiting for external intervention. Neighbors also perceived that there have been notable improvements in their communities over the last few decades.

Needs and challenges identified included:

- Distrust of law enforcement, local government, churches, media, and elected officials
- Poor access to quality schools
- Youth needing opportunities for employment including summer employment programs
- Lack of businesses and employment opportunities for adults
- Lack of positive influences for youth
- Food deserts and need for community gardens and access to healthy foods
- A reformed public transportation

Major Findings

Public Housing Neighbor Focus Group.

The LSU Research Team had a focus group specifically with adults and children of the Ardenwood Village Public Housing Site. There were four adult participants and 20 youth participants. The majority of the youth participants identified Ardenwood Village apartments as their neighborhood although they live adjacent to the Smiley Heights community. The majority of the youth also felt that their neighborhood was not safe and that the following changes would make their neighborhood safer:

- Gates around the apartment complex with a security guard at the entrance
- Fines for individuals caught with guns
- An increase in police patrol
- Security cameras
- Street lights
- Sidewalks.

Changes that the youths want to see in their neighborhood (public housing site) included getting bigger bedrooms, a pool, and a park on site. A large majority of the youth noted that the park across the street, Blueberry Park located in Smiley Heights, is dangerous and unsafe for children. When asked about the kinds of recreation activities they would like to have access to in their community, youth responses included sports programs, robotics, Karate programs, and tutoring and mentoring programs like Big Buddy.

Photo taken at a focus group September 2015 held at the Ardenwood Village Public housing development.





DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY

The adult participants shared thoughts about services for senior citizens in the community to reduce social isolation as well as changes they would like to see in Ardenwood village and Smiley Heights. One hundred percent of the adult participants stated that the senior citizens needed a senior citizens center in their community that would offer activities such as cooking, field trips, and walking paths. Participants noted that although there is a center for senior citizens in a neighboring community approximately ten miles away, most seniors do not have transportation to access that center and would benefit from one much closer. One participant mentioned the idea of rehabilitating an abandoned house in Smiley Heights into a center for senior citizens. Other participants agreed and thought that idea would help to reduce the social isolation among the senior citizens in the community. When asked what environmental and physical attributes they would like to see added to their neighborhood, the adults, similar to the youth mentioned the addition of sidewalks, street lights, security cameras throughout the neighborhood, new lower speed bumps, school zones with guards to monitor, security gates, and a skate park.

Adult participants were asked to describe training programs that the local Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) could offer that they believe would be beneficial to women in the community. Participants suggested job training programs such as carpentry, basic computer skills training, mechanics training, child care, nursing, and cooking certification programs. Lastly, neighbors were asked to share their thoughts about health and wellness and reasons why so few neighbors utilize the local BREC fitness facility. Participants responded that the fees for membership at the gym were too expensive for most residents and neighbors should have free access. However, participants did mention that the community and partners should have fundraisers and donations to cover fees for the neighbors.

Major Findings

Household-level surveying.

The major findings from the household level surveying as it relates to the four outcome areas included the following:

- Nearly 43% of neighbors felt that they have access to good, quality grocery stores and fresh foods
- 14% of neighbors felt that they have access to family friendly entertainment
- 37.5% of neighbors felt that they have access to public
- 24% of neighbors perceived that they have access to quality and affordable health care services while less than 20% felt that they have access to quality dental care services
- 29% of neighbors perceived that they have access to affordable housing
- Only 8% of neighbors perceived that there are job opportunities for youth
- Less than 20% of neighbors perceived that there were adequate college supports, adult education programs, or job training and readiness programs for adults
- Only 13% of neighbors perceived that they had adequate access to programs and services for senior citizens as opposed to 65% who felt there was not enough support in the neighborhood to assist senior residents.

The two most important issues to the neighbors were having access to good, healthy foods (35%), and having quality education for children/youth (24%). Lastly, nearly 60% of the neighbors reported that they did not like the crime and violence on the streets or poor street lighting in their neighborhood, and 51% reported that they did not like not having a community center in their neighborhood.

DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY



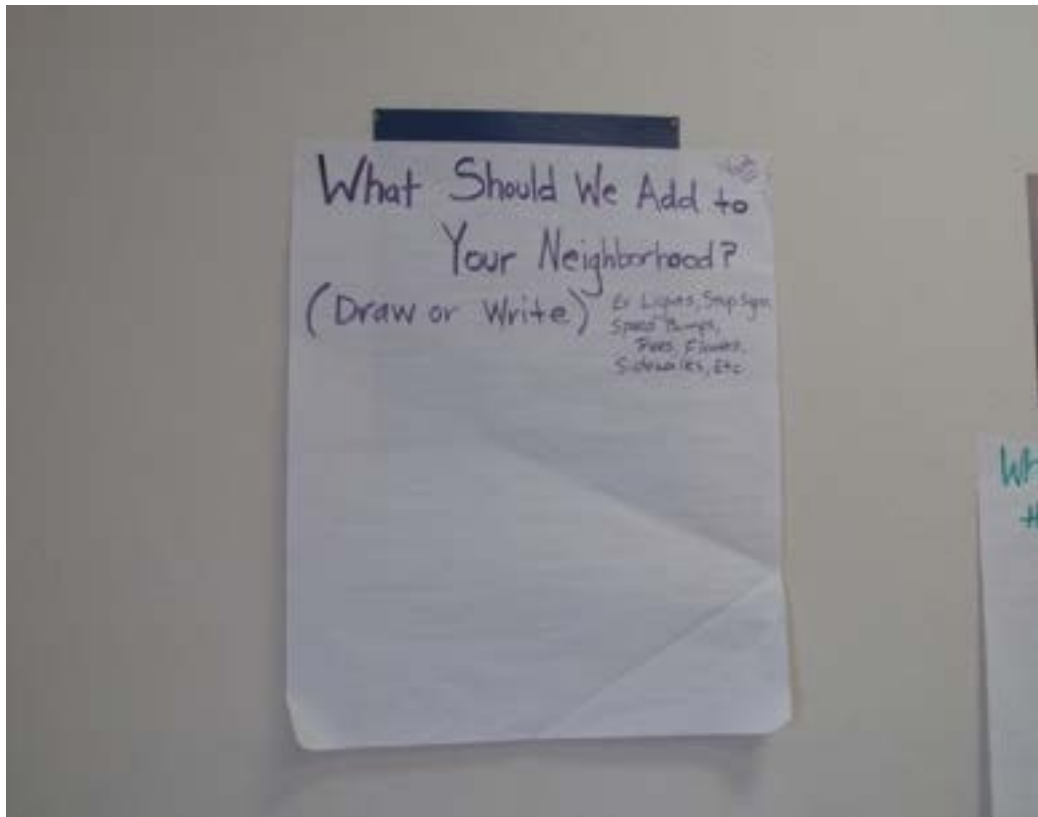
Major Findings

Listening and Visioning Sessions/Transformation Team Meetings

The LSU Research team, Mayor's office, Integral, and other community stakeholders gathered once a month to develop and discuss goals, outcomes, strategies, and partners for the CHOICE transformation plan. Based on the findings of the research phase, four outcome areas related to People were identified as priorities for transformation planning by the community: (a) Early Childhood Development, K-12 Education, Out of School Time Positive Youth Development; (b) Health and Wellness; (c) Adult Education, Job Readiness/Workforce Development, Post-Secondary Education; and (d) Services for Seniors. As the values orientation to this work is community-driven, neighbors were central to the development of the goals, outcomes, and strategies. Although plans will continue to be further refined by the community, the goals, strategies, and partners have been developed and identified by neighbors, partners, and other key stakeholders:



DATA COLLECTION & DISCOVERY



Photos taken at a focus group, September 2015



Outco

- Strategic
- Individual
- Team
- Organizational
- Community

WHAT NEEDS TO ACHIEVE

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary

GONG → (SWELL/Expand/Standard community)

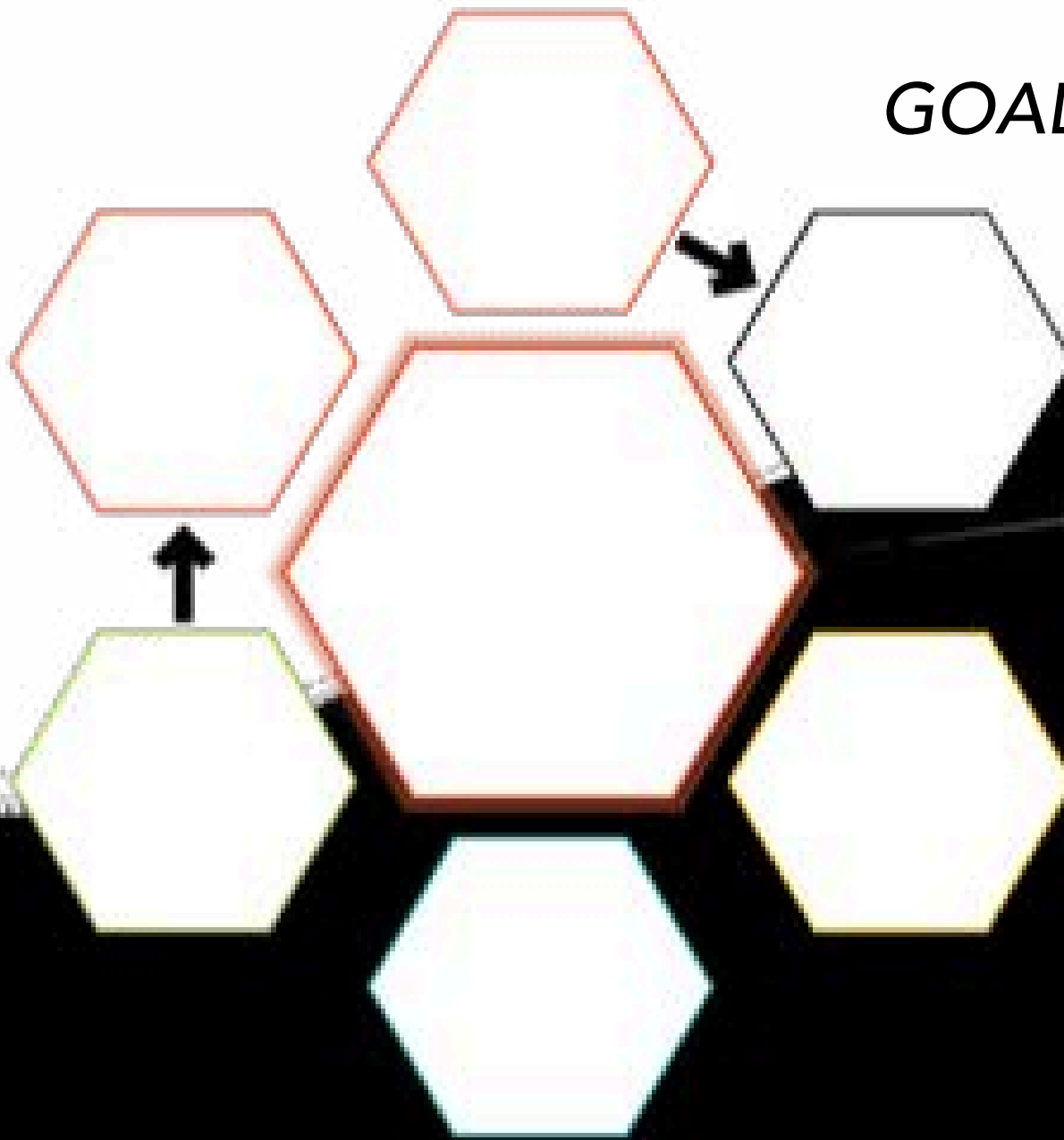
Identify Drive Plan of

- Identify Drive Plan
- Under

WHAT IS SUCCESS

STRATEGIC FUND-RAISING

GOALS & STRATEGIES





OVERVIEW

The *people* section consisted of four main domains:

- 1) **Early Childhood Development, K-12 Education, and Out of School Time Opportunities for Youth**
- 2) **Health and Wellness**
- 3) **Adult Education, Job Readiness/Workforce Development, and Post-Secondary Education**
- 4) **Services for Seniors**

As noted in the community engagement and discovery section, multiple data collection activities were conducted to hear the concerns of neighbors as well as discover their assets and strengths in these outcome areas. Findings from the data analysis were utilized to develop goals and strategies to enhance the quality of life, create opportunities of choice, and ultimately radically transform the lives of the neighbors of the BR Choice community. The following goals and strategies were developed with and for the neighbors of the BR Choice community:

At left: Artists, community leaders, residents worked together to create a series of murals throughout Melrose East.

I. Outcome Area #1: Early Childhood Development, K-12 Education, and Out of School Time Opportunities for Youth

a) **Early Childhood Development.** Neighbors and stakeholders noted the following challenges and concerns in this outcome area: a lack of early child development and child care options in the neighborhood. Neighbors stated, "There are numerous nursery and day care centers in the neighborhood, but the quality of those centers is questionable. There is a need to define standards for quality in day care centers." The neighbors and partners would like to have a quality Head Start Program and a neighborhood charter school that collaborates to ensure that young children are adequately prepared for entering kindergarten.

b) **K-12 Education.** Concerns expressed regarding K-12 education included the following: public schools should strive to be more welcoming to parents, should offer more magnet and honors programs and support for students with special learning needs, and should have more programs to help keep teenage parents in school. They noted that schools should offer opportunities to empower students. The community reported a general lack of parental involvement in their children's education and need for parenting classes and other types of programs that educate parents on the importance of parental involvement and support.



c) **Out of School Time Opportunities for Youth.** A large majority of neighbors shared their thoughts that there are too many unsupervised children and youth as well as problem with illegal drug use among youth in the neighborhoods. They discussed the need for more recreational activities, out of school time support, more caring adults, quality mentoring, and education related to self-esteem, self-care, and interpersonal/relationship skills. Participants mentioned that the LSU dance and music department could be engaged with the community by bringing dance and music into the neighborhood schools and community centers. An LSU professor in the dance department started attending the Transformation Team meetings to explore opportunities. A Youth in the Kitchen program was also a strategy suggested to help kids learn skills that could be transferable into employment as well as teach about healthy

cooking. Additionally, it was mentioned that Hispanic youth tend to feel segregated from other youth, and it was suggested that BREC hire a bi-lingual employee to do neighborhood/youth outreach worker to build trust (BREC trucks were said to resemble border patrol vehicles). A multicultural bash was held at BREC's Saia Park in April of 2015. Residents stated that they would like to see more community events such as this to celebrate cultural diversity in the neighborhoods. It was also suggested a stage be built at one of the BREC parks that could be used for theater performances and children's programs. There is a dance studio in the BR Choice community that can accommodate more children and youth, as well as youth with special needs, such as ADHD. However, there is a need to educate and connect families to this opportunity and other available programs.

II. Outcome Area #2: Health and Wellness

Throughout the discussions regarding health and wellness, several themes emerged: lack of a reliable, timely, and accessible public transit; poor access to healthy, quality foods such as fruits and vegetables; poor access to dental and medical care and behavioral health services; and poor access to fitness centers.

a) Transportation. Neighbors noted that the public transportation system needed improvements. Several stated that, "the transportation system makes accessing resources outside of walking distance difficult." This is reflected in neighbors' desires for amenities either to be located in their neighborhood, or given better transportation options, might be easily accessed outside the neighborhood. In fact, the transportation barriers impact resource access even within the neighborhoods. Although a health clinic is located within the BR Choice neighborhoods, it is located on the periphery and residents have difficulty accessing them if they live on the other side of the neighborhoods. BR Choice is not perceived to be walking or biking friendly.

b) Access to Quality Food/Mobile Market. Neighbors indicated that access to quality and healthy food is a great need. They indicated that a quality affordable grocery store and community gardens would provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The Baton Rouge Mobile Farmers Market services the area (Star Hill Baptist) one day per week from late spring through early fall. Neighbors indicated they would like to have improved access to the mobile farmers market along with a shuttle service to better quality grocery stores.

c) Access to Dental Care/ Adequate Medical Care. Residents in the BR Choice neighborhoods discussed the challenges they face accessing medical, dental, and behavioral healthcare. These challenges are likely to be further exacerbated by the closing of the nearest emergency room (The Baton Rouge General) in July 2015. An LSU Urgent Care Clinic located at the corner of North Foster and Greenwell Springs Road, approximately one mile from the BR Choice neighborhoods, is open from 9 am to 9 pm daily and provides primary, specialty (including diabetes education and nutrition, diabetic foot and wound care, and dermatology), and urgent care services as well as financial assistance. In addition, there is currently one dental care provider in or immediately adjacent to the BR Choice neighborhood that accepts Medicaid patients. However, this dental provider only has a few slots for Medicaid patients which often pose significant challenges to Choice neighborhood residents.

d) Additional WIC Centers. Neighbors in the Choice neighborhoods suggested the need for a Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program in their community. Although the nearest site for the WIC center is located at 4142 Gus Young Avenue (a community directly west of the BR Choice neighborhood), there is often a lack of awareness and lack of access to this WIC Center.

e) **Access to a Local Fitness Center and Wellness Programming at BREC Parks.** The community has indicated a need for more programming at BREC parks and a fitness center for the community. Three BREC Parks, Milton J Womack, Blueberry Street and Saia are located within the BR Choice neighborhood boundaries. Womack Park, located in the Melrose East neighborhood, also serves as the BREC headquarters.

Amenities at Womack include a recreation center with a fitness center, interactive game room with a variety of active games, and meeting rooms. There are also outdoor spaces. Programming at Womack includes Interactive Room Tuesday, Tea Dances, Yoga, and Archery Classes. Amenities at Blueberry Street Park include a playground, an outdoor basketball court, and a recreation center in addition to other treed space. Presently, there is little participation at this facility among neighbors of the Choice community.

Neighbors suggest that the fees are too expensive. Programming at Blueberry includes a weekly art program and monthly pool tournaments. Additionally, due to a need identified by the community, a Playground KIDS afterschool program has been established at Blueberry as a service-learning partnership between LSU and BREC. Youth in the Ardenwood Village Apartments have noted that the Blueberry Park is too dangerous for children. Children living at Ardenwood Village Apartments must cross a busy multiple lane street to access Blueberry Park.

Amenities at Saia Park include a playground, a recreation center, an outdoor basketball court, unlighted tennis courts, and a lighted baseball field in addition to other green space. Weekly programming at Saia includes weekly Kidz in the Kitchen (healthy cooking), DJ 101, Art History, and Positive Teens.

f) **Annual/Semi-annual Resource Fairs.** Neighbors identified lack of knowledge about and access to resources. These resources included traditional health and wellness providers, such as physical and mental health care providers; and agencies that provide services that impact individual and family health and wellbeing, such as banks to replace payday lenders, and programs that can provide assistance to pay for utility bills. In response to this need, the first Smiley Heights/Melrose East/Ardenwood Village Community Resource Fair was held on Feb. 21, 2015, at Saia Park. It was organized by the BR Choice Neighborhood Association (an organization currently being formed by neighbor leaders across Ardenwood Village, Melrose East and Smiley Heights), the BR Choice Neighborhood Initiative, the City of Baton Rouge, and LSU's OSSRD, School of Kinesiology, and School of Social Work.



III. Outcome Area #3: Adult Education, Job Readiness/
Workforce Development, and Post-Secondary
Education

- a) Adult Education. The program to test for a high school equivalency credential (HiSET), formerly the GED program, is no longer considered accessible by residents because HiSET no longer provides transportation. There are no agencies in close proximity to the Choice Neighborhoods that offer the HiSET. However, there is a large majority of neighbors in the community without high school diplomas who could greatly benefit from such services.



b) Job Readiness/Workforce Development. Neighbors reported a need for better transportation and accessibility to job training and employment services in the neighborhoods. There is a need for basic skills training, including computer skills, soft skills and life skills training. A centralized resource center is needed that includes computers to support adult job readiness and job application submissions. Neighbors would like to see lessons on how to use HIRE through EmployBR. HIRE is a program used for employment purposes. Neighbors perceive that little to no resources are available to them that are consistent or helpful in job readiness and workforce development. This suggests a significant lack of service utilization and a serious lack of awareness about the services and opportunities with Employ BR. The neighbors would like to see agencies brought into the neighborhood to provide community programming for adult education and career readiness. Neighbors would like to see a partnership with Capital Area Transit System (CATS) to offer a bus ride fee waiver for neighborhood adults who utilize public transportation to access career readiness training and HiSET programs. A Travel Co-Op has been suggested to sponsor education and employment (specifically with business such as Cortana Mall and Walmart).

c) Postsecondary Education. Neighborhood residents will receive soft skills and life skills training through job readiness curricula and workshops. Once qualified and after obtaining a high school diploma or equivalency, neighbors will receive tuition support to attend the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) educational component through the Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) system, a local postsecondary institution in close proximity to the Choice neighborhoods.



IV. Outcome Area #4: Services for Seniors

Smiley Heights, one of the neighborhoods in the Choice community, has a large population of senior citizens. Several neighbors from this community have participated in the listening and visioning sessions to share their opinions regarding the rise of social isolation among Senior citizens in the Choice Neighborhoods. Neighbors noted that many seniors lack adequate transportation as well as family support. This makes it difficult for seniors in the community to engage in positive activities such as health and wellness, and to have access to quality grocery stores and adequate medical care.

Neighbors also note the financial difficulties of many senior citizens in acquiring their medications. Neighbors and partners suggested the need for a partnership with the Council on Aging (COA) which would help bring in more activities and meal services (Meals on Wheels). Several neighbors suggested the need for a Senior Community Center and Adult Day Center located directly in the Choice community. This would provide senior citizens with opportunities to socialize, get information and services, receive meals, play games, and have other types of social activities and programming. One neighbor from the Smiley Heights community suggested rehabilitating a house in the neighborhood into a Senior Citizens Community Center. This would make the Center easily accessible to the seniors. Other suggestions to create better health and wellness and reduce social isolation among seniors' citizens included the addition of a walking path. Seniors would like to see safe places to walk and exercise around the neighborhood.

OUTCOME AREAS



GOALS



STRATEGIES

Childhood Education

To increase the number of early child development and child care options

**Establish a quality Head Start Program
Establish a neighborhood charter school for elementary age children**

K-12 Education

To successfully increase high school graduation rates among youth in the CHOICE community

To increase parental involvement in the schools of the children who live in the CHOICE community

Attract existing and new quality parenting programs

Establish a neighborhood school with Magnet and honors programs

Develop and/or implement supportive programs in the schools for students with special learning needs and teen parents

Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Youth

To decrease the number of unsupervised children and youth in the neighborhood

Partner with existing agencies to implement dance and music programs

Implement a "Youth in the Kitchen" program

Partner with existing mentor programs to expand the services to those in the Choice community

PEOPLE GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS)

City of Baton Rouge Mayor's Office

Number of schools;

Number and trends in enrollment

Diplomas NOW

Youth Empowerment Program (YEP)

East Baton Rouge Parish School System (EBRPSS)

Increase in graduation rates

Increase in the number of magnet programs in the community and/or the enrollment of youth into these programs in schools outside the community

Number of programs to support special needs children and teen parents

Boys and Girls Club, Big Buddy, LSU, and YMCA

Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES)

Increase in the number of after school recreational programs and out of school time activities for youth

OUTCOME AREAS

GOALS

STRATEGIES

Health and Wellness

To increase the overall health and wellness of the neighbors in the Choice community

Increase access to healthy foods, medical, dental, behavioral health, and fitness providers

Partner with agencies, elected officials, and community leaders that will advocate for an improved public transit system

Partner with Baton Rouge Mobile Farmers Market

Collaborate with the local providers for an affordable fitness center

Establish an accessible WIC center

Establish accessible medical, dental, and behavioral health provider

Adult Education

To improve the educational attainment among neighbors in the Choice community

Establish HiSET providers in the Choice community

Partner with the local Resource center and EmployBR to bring adult education resources into the community

PEOPLE GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Together Baton Rouge
The Baton Rouge Mobile Farmers Market
Better Access to Care Coalition
BREC
BREADA
LSU/SU Ag Center
Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)

Increase in the ratings of neighbors perception of health and wellness indicators on the individual level survey

Increase in the number of WIC centers within the CHOICE framework

Increase in medical, dental, and behavioral health providers

Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC)
St. Vincent de Paul
Glory House
Melrose East Resource Center

Increase the number of adults with a high school equivalency credential, vocational/trade certificates, and higher education degrees

OUTCOME AREAS



GOALS



STRATEGIES

Job Readiness/ Workforce Development

To increase the soft skills, life skills and ultimately job readiness among residents of the CHOICE community

Partner with local organizations to host an annual job fair in the Choice community

Connect potential workers and underemployed workers to Employ BR

Post-Secondary Education

To improve the rates of enrollment and completion of postsecondary and vocational programs among neighbors

Build upon partnerships with BRCC, SU, LSU to provide educational information about available programs

PEOPLE GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Reentry Coalition
EmployBR
Local business owners
City Councilmember

Increase in ratings on indicators of job skills and readiness survey

BRCC
Southern University (SU)
Louisiana State University (LSU)

Increase in the number of adults enrolled in postsecondary programs

Increase in the graduation rates from postsecondary programs

OUTCOME AREAS



Services for Seniors

To reduce social isolation among senior citizens

Establish a Senior Citizen Community Center
Establish or attract existing Adult Day Center
Develop a safe walking path

Provide Meals on Wheels program in community

To increase accessibility to affordable medications

Partner with local agencies and healthcare providers to educate the community of available resources that provide financial assistance with medications

PEOPLE GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Mayor's Office
BR City Council

Improved ratings on perceptions of social cohesion and collective efficacy

Improved perception of activities and programs

Increased number of programs and activities for Senior Citizens

Increase in the number of Day programs available for Seniors

Increase in walking paths

Increase in ratings on the perceived safety of the walking path

Council on Aging

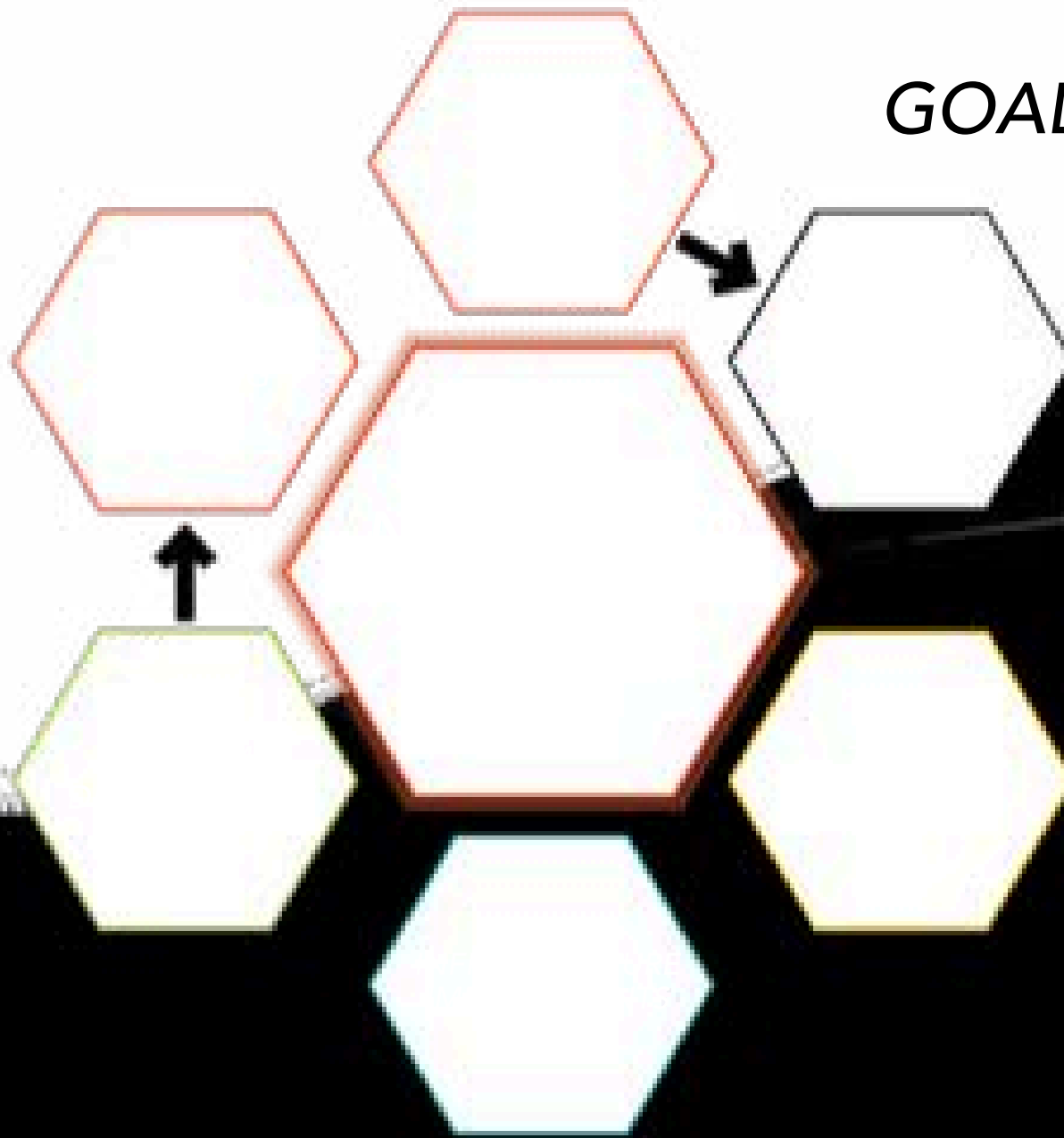
Increase in the number of neighbors who participate in the Meals on Wheels program

Council on Aging
Local Community resource center
State Department of Health and Hospitals

Increase in the number of neighbors who perceive medications as affordable



GOALS & STRATEGIES





A corner store and parking lot in the BR Choice Neighborhood

Ardenwood Village is located at the center of three intersecting neighborhoods: Melrose Place, Melrose East, and Smiley Heights. Melrose Place is a healthy, safe, single family neighborhood with strong property values. On the contrary, Melrose East and Smiley Heights consist largely of blighted properties, vacant lots, and abandoned buildings. Public safety has been noted as a major concern. Key challenges in the BR Choice Neighborhoods were identified through various planning efforts, including resident surveys and interviews, stakeholder focus groups, community activities and events, charrettes, and transformation meetings. Input from the Ardendale Master Plan and Melrose East Community Improvement Plan was also considered. The following were identified as major neighborhood challenges faced by the BR Choice community:

High rates of Class D Apartments and Single Family Homes. The overall rental rate is 86.5% compared to Owner-Occupancy at 13.5%. A large majority of the rental buildings are either boarded up or in code violation. Moreover, over half of the dwellings with more than one unit were built in the 1970s. As a result of the aged properties, the tax digest is not growing, resulting in lack of infrastructure investment.

Current land use supports undesirable dwelling uses. Similar to other low income areas, the BR Choice has a significant amount of small businesses that support negative activities. There are a significant number of alcohol outlets in the Choice community as compared to other neighborhoods.

OVERVIEW

Underutilized community recreation facilities. **Presently, there are only three recreation facilities within a one mile radius of the BR Choice community. Two of these facilities are in dire need of capital improvements. However, because of a recent change in BREC's priorities and lack of public funding, the two neighborhood facilities will likely be overlooked and risk the potential of closure. Although a few years ago, BREC was responsible for the construction of a one million dollar fitness and recreational facility near the BR Choice community, the majority of neighbors are not utilizing the state of the art amenities being offered at the new facility. Focus group findings reveal that some neighbors perceive that the facility "is not for them" while others believe that membership is too costly.**

Public safety and crime prevention. **Crime in the BR Choice community accounts for nearly 50% of the City of Baton Rouge's overall crime rate. Poor street lighting has been documented as a significant contribution to the crime problem. The Melrose East Crime Prevention District (ME CPD) and the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Initiative (BCJI) are just a few programs created to address the high crime rates and public safety issues in the neighborhood. These initiatives will assist local faith-based and community organizations in addressing the root of the issues plaguing the BR Choice community.**

STRATEGIES

The ultimate vision of the BR Choice Neighborhoods is to transform the BR Choice area into a vibrant, mixed-use district with family friendly entertainment, safe parks, quality schools, and local businesses. A large portion of the vision can be achieved by connecting the BR Choice community to the adjacent neighborhoods through efforts such as a bike path that connects neighborhood parks to the Milton BREC facility and Independence Park, collaboration between neighbors and BREC, code enforcement, and investment in mixed use and mixed income communities.

While the private sector will be involved in many aspects of the neighborhood strategies, mutual responsibilities will be shared among the BR Choice neighbors, LHC, City of Baton Rouge, RDA, BRCC, BREC and existing civic and community-based organizations. Other strategies that will be employed to transform the BR Choice Neighborhoods consist of the following five main domains:

- I) Public Safety
- II) Arts and Culture
- III) Infrastructure Improvements and Transportation
- IV) Economic Development
- V) Land Use and Zoning

These goals and strategies were developed with and for the neighbors of the BR Choice community.



Outcome Area #1: Public Safety
Two of the goals identified for the BR Choice neighborhoods include: 1) improving public safety as well the perception of public safety among neighbors and future neighbors, and 2) developing authentic engagement between neighbors and law enforcement. These goals will be accomplished through the following strategies:

a) Implement BCJI initiatives such as the Hope Zone Community Safety Meetings and (BCJI) Blight Abatement Law Clinic.

Other BCJI initiatives include Youth Empowerment Solutions Programs, which are evidence-based programs developed by experts at the University of Michigan, designed to empower at-risk youth to engage in community change; partnerships with Adult Job Readiness Assistance Programs to provide services within the Choice community; Summer Wellness Programs; Blight Legal Clinics and workshops; and Collective Impact Workshops and neighbor capacity building workshops.

b) Incorporate a neighborhood watch program

c) Improve street lighting

d) Install additional fire hydrants

e) To implement Baton Rouge Area Violence Elimination (BRAVE) related activities such as Education, Substance Abuse Treatment, Workforce Development, Mentoring, and Mental Health Counseling



II. Outcome Area #2: Arts and Culture

The goals for the neighborhoods to enhance the arts and culture consist of 1) maximizing community recreational facilities and opportunities to enhance arts and culture and 2) restoring a sense of community history and pride in the BR Choice neighborhoods. These goals will be accomplished through the following strategies:

a) Improve parks and recreation facilities in BR Choice

Blueberry Park, a BREC neighborhood park, is located in Smiley Heights. It is located on a 1.68 acre site that includes an outdoor basketball court and playground. In 2012 BREC invested \$22K in improvements. Those improvements included:

- Additional exterior security lighting
- Rooms inside the center were repurposed for better functionality
- A new entry and hallway were constructed at the recreation center
- Site includes a renovated shelter
- New picnic tables and benches
- Improved site drainage

Saia Park is a BREC neighborhood park with a covered courts located in Melrose East. It is located on a 3.74 acre site and includes a playground, Recreation Center, Outdoor Basketball, Tennis Court (Unlighted), Baseball Field (Lighted). In 2007, BREC invested \$75000 in improvements. Those improvements included:

- Additional security lighting
- Refurbished basketball court
- Renovated restrooms, storage area, and activity rooms

Milton Womack Park: This BREC facility is located 0.3 miles outside of the BR Choice area. The land and building were donated to BREC for administrative offices and park land in 2003. Presently, the building has been completely remodeled and houses BREC Eugene A. Young Administrative Offices. The facility features a community fitness center, Womack Interactive Warehouse, day camp space, adult leisure programming, and a rentable spacious ballroom. The 2007 Investments for this facility included:

- \$335,000 demolition & abatement
- \$6,450,000 building renovations
- \$650,000 park development & site work
- \$15,000 interactive pilot space

CHOCTAW DR.

3 MILES TO DOWNTOWN
←

EAST FAIRFIELDS

SMILEY HEIGHTS

N. LOBDELL BLVD.

BREC BLUEBERRY STREET PARK

ARDENWOOD VILLAGE

EDEN PARK LIBRARY
FIRE STATION #6

CAPITOL MIDDLE SCHOOL

MELROSE ELEMENTARY

UNDEVELOPED GREEN SPACE
(SITE OF ARDENVALE DEVELOPMENT)

GREENWELL SPRINGS RD.

N. FOSTER DR.

RENOIR AVE.

N. ARDENWOOD DR.

BREC SAIIA PARK

MELROSE EAST

THEATER BATON ROUGE

BREC MILTON J. WOMACK PARK

REC. & ACTIVITY CENTER

BON CARRÉ BUSINESS CENTER

FLORIDA BLVD.



Improvements to BREC's Independence Park, L to R: New Iris pavilion at botanical gardens, Iris garden with new arbors and seating, and Phase I jogging and walking trail.

Recreational Facilities within 1.5 mile of the BR Choice community

- **BREC's Independence Community Park includes Improvements such as the construction of the new Liberty Lagoon Family Aquatic Center, a new Iris pavilion with new garden arbors tucked into the Iris Garden, improved parking throughout the park, and a 12 ft. wide, half-mile crushed stone path along Independence Boulevard that will eventually be extended as a 1.3 mile loop around the entire south side of the park.**
- **The new EBRP Main Library now features an outdoor plaza that will serve as an inviting social space and will organize connections to the surrounding library. Within the library, there is a BREC Café and Teaching Garden Building that is connected to BREC Independence Botanical Gardens.**

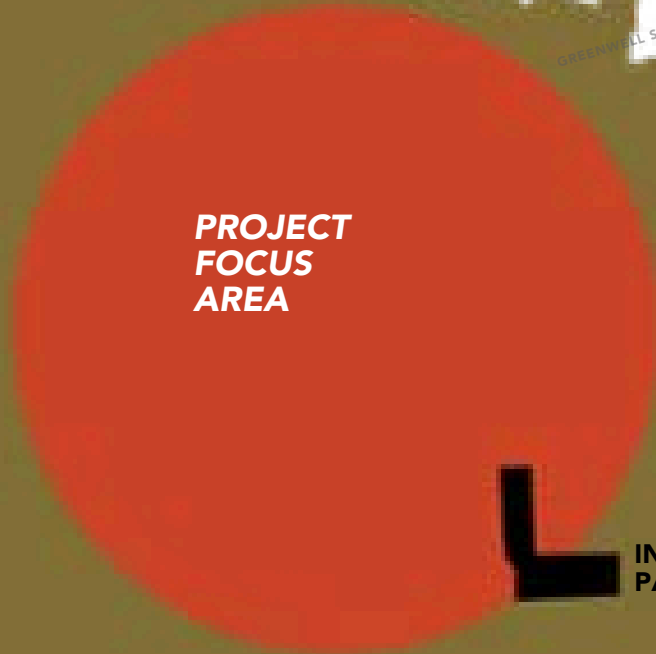
Project Costs for investments in Recreational Facilities

- **\$35,000 Master Plan**
- **\$30,000 Sensory Garden improvements**
- **\$100,000 Iris Garden Pavilion & Arbors**
- **\$20,000 design of spaces with library**
- **\$450,000 Aquatic Center design**
- **\$6,700,000 Aquatic Center construction**
- **\$1,650,000 parking improvements phase I & II**
- **\$1,500,000 library in the park**
- **\$200,000 Phase I trail construction**
- **\$2,000,000 Café and Teaching Garden Building**

BREC and CNI partnership

- **The BREC and CNI team together will initiate a campaign to educate neighborhoods about their local BREC facilities and opportunities to be involved in their specialty recreation programming. BREC and CNI team will hold additional charrettes with BR Choice community to determine best practices and ideas for repositioning Blueberry and Saia Park.**

CITY OF BATON ROUGE



**PROJECT
FOCUS
AREA**

1.5 mi RADIUS



**INDEPENDENCE
PARK**

SOUTHERN
UNIVERSITY

EXXON
MOBIL

MISSISSIPPI

DOWN
TOWN

LSU

85

I-110

SC ENIC HWY.

PLANK RD

I-110

10TH
ST

PARK

I-10

FLORIDA BLVD

CITY PARK

ACADIAN

COLLEGE DR

TOWNE
CENTER

LOUISIANA
BLVD

I-10

DALLASTON

STANFORD

PERKINS

GREENHILL SPRINGS

S. CHOCTAW

FLORIDA BLVD

SHERWOOD REST

I-12

WNET

AIRLINE H

COURSEY



Red Stick Project mural in Melrose East

b) Partner with the Red Stick Project to involve the BR Choice community in the beautification of their community through the arts

Red Stick Project reaches out to empower communities such as Melrose East and Smiley Heights to become involved in their renewal and revitalization by providing creative opportunities to enhance cultural and economic development. These opportunities help brand the community and assist with removing the perception of unsafe neighborhoods. Project activities include the production of community led murals on buildings, crosswalks, and bus shelters. With the support of community stakeholders, experienced teaching artists mentor student artists to positively impact neighborhoods while technology is used to document the progress. The Red Stick Project will be implemented throughout the BR Choice Community.

This initiative has the potential to provide opportunities to bridge the economic development along Government Street, Florida Boulevard and the Choctaw corridor with BR Choice by increasing the aesthetic appeal of commercial property and bus shelters within the Choice neighborhoods.



Ardendale Development site and undeveloped green space beyond.

- c) **Partner with organizations what will provide landscaping and upkeep of the Gilbert Memorial Cemetery and develop a meditation garden**

Other More Specific Strategies for Improvements Include:

- **Reposition distressed neighborhood facilities to enhance neighborhood marketability**
- **Improve BR Choice neighbors' quality of life through enhanced community amenities**
- **Install a nature preserve on Ardendale site**
- **Install a bike path inside the BR Choice community that connects to Independence Park Walking Trail**
- **Coordinate Botanical Gardens Program with Red Stick Project Initiatives**
- **Install block green spaces in appropriate vacant lots**
- **Enhance Saia/Melrose East Community Garden to provide direct access to locally grown fresh produce**

III. Outcome Area #3: Infrastructure Improvements and Transportation

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, transportation can be considered as one of the second largest household expenses after housing costs. HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research, published a guidebook entitled Creating Connected Communities to assist developers, community leaders, and planners in improving transportation connections in impoverished communities. The guidebook states,

By creating connected communities where residents have access to affordable housing and can safely and conveniently meet their daily needs on foot, bicycle, public transit, or in a car, cities can help reduce households' transportation costs, connect workers to jobs, and facilitate upward mobility.

The goals for the neighborhoods to improve the infrastructure and transportation include: 1) establishing neighborhood connectivity through an enhanced transportation plan and gateway improvements, and 2) increasing the availability and types of neighborhood businesses. These goals will be accomplished through the following strategies:

- a) Improve sidewalks, bike lanes, and walkable street designs. This includes pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and facilities, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, street trees, lighting, and bicycle racks, to make walking or bicycling safe and comfortable.
- b) Build a walking and biking path to connect with shopping, services, and facilities and nearby higher education institutions such as BRCC. This serves to better connect neighbors to their destinations. Neighbors and workers can choose to walk or ride a bicycle to access healthy foods, quality services, and other desired amenities.



View along N. Lobdell Ave., near the Ardendale Development site.

- c) **Improve covered bus stops**
- d) **Improve bus stop map availability**
- e) **Conduct neighborhood road repairs**
- f) **Continue to improve the public transit system**
- g) **Improve gateways and nodes at main entry points into the Choice area. Enhancing the gateways will involve strategic investments that build on existing assets while solving many challenges. In addition, a new public street improvement plan will support walkable community.**
- h) **Attract retail development for residents' convenience (for example: shopping, grocery stores, pharmacy, dry cleaners, coffee shop, ice cream shop, juice bar, restaurant, health club/ exercise places, sporting goods, AC repair, bike shop, etc.)**
- i) **To create safe places for people and positive public spaces, including streets, parks, plazas, and campuses of schools and other institutions, that are safe, comfortable, and welcoming. These safe places also build the social cohesion and collective efficacy among neighbors and encourage neighbors to connect with each other and build community.**



Ardendale site under construction in September, 2015

IV. Outcome Area #4: Economic Development

An economically sound community is vital to the success of those who reside within it. This success is based on the existence and state of business and industry within that community. There must be stability and sustainability within the business culture for the local community to grow and flourish. Furthermore, the workforce within the community must be able to meet the needs of the businesses to sustain the economic growth. When these components are lacking, the community and its residents suffer, which is clearly taking place in the BR Choice Neighborhoods.

Many adults within the BR Choice community are facing a significant educational barrier due to a lack of a high school diploma or high school equivalency degree. With the increasing requirement of employers for this credential, individuals must understand they are limited in their potential to advance without it. As we encourage youth to stay in school, we must also encourage adults to return to the task of completing necessary educational goals. BRCC has been a great partner in advancing the economic state of the BR Choice Community. BRCC Workforce Education has helped local residents fulfill many of their personal and professional goals as it relates to industry-leading corporate training and skill-building.

BRCC offers workforce training in the following fields:

- Electrical
- Child Care
- Mobile Crane
- HVAC
- Millwright
- Safety
- Automotive
- Cosmetology
- Culinary Arts
- Heavy Diesel Engine
- Instrumentation
- Non Destructive Testing
- Welding
- Heavy Equipment Operator

Since early 2015, BRCC has begun installing a new, state of the art automotive training center in the BR Choice Community. This facility is located on the southern portion of the Ardendale site and future home of Ardenwood replacement housing. It is estimated that the \$19 million facility will be complete in Fall 2016. In addition, BRCC will construct a Career Academy charter high school and a satellite campus for its digital arts and nursing programs. The additional training programs were created to address the needs of businesses and the unskilled local youth and adults. This partnership is expected to increase the job skills of those living in BR Choice, attract new businesses to invest in the BR Choice corridors, allow locals to work where they live and improve the economy for BR Choice community. Phase II, Career Academy, is scheduled to break ground in 2016 with a 2018 occupancy.



Ardendale site under construction in September, 2015

The Louisiana Enterprise Zone (EZ) Program is a package of tax credits and sales tax rebates available to new businesses and expansions to existing businesses to create new, permanent jobs and employ individuals from targeted groups. The BR Choice community is located within an EZ. The BR Choice CNI Team will work with BRAC to ensure that local and new businesses are aware of the revitalization of BR Choice Community and the incentives available to them. As the existing business and industry grows, new business and industry will have an incentive to move into this area.

The specific goals for the neighborhood to improve the economic growth and development within the BR Choice neighborhood includes 1) increasing opportunities for infrastructure development, 2) increasing the job readiness skills of unemployed and underemployed neighbors in the Choice community, 3) retaining and recruiting businesses, and 4) establishment of CDC in the BR Choice area.

These goals will be accomplished through the following strategies:

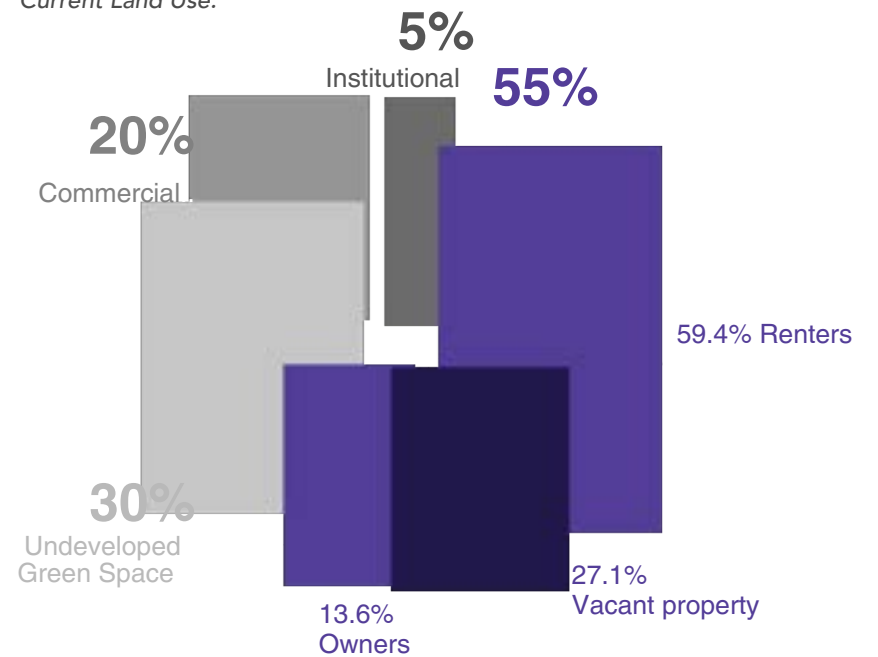
- a) Attract new businesses to relocate to the BR Choice Corridor that will hire skilled and trained individuals from the Choice community
- b) Create support system for entrepreneurial opportunities
- c) Provide neighbors with better access to Employ BR services that offers job readiness curriculum and workshops
- d) Strengthen the cradle to college and career pipeline and increase high school and postsecondary graduation rates

V. Outcome Area #5: Land Use and Zoning

The goals to remove blight and to create curb appeal in the BR Choice neighborhoods include: 1) adopting zoning designations that support and reflect ideal characteristics of the BR Choice community, and 2) eliminating vacant lots. These goals will be accomplished through the following strategies:

- a) Petition and meet with city leaders and councilmembers regarding zoning regulations, non-conforming use regulations, alcohol outlets, and a neighborhood conservation district
- b) Infill development and repurposing of vacant lots

Choice Neighborhood
Current Land Use:





OUTCOME AREAS



GOALS



STRATEGIES

Public Safety

To improve public safety as well as the perception of public safety among current and future neighbors

To develop authentic engagement between neighbors and law enforcement

Implement BCJI initiatives such as Hope Zone Community Safety Meetings and (BCJI) Blight Abatement Law Clinic

Incorporate a neighborhood watch program

Improve street lighting

Install additional fire hydrants

Implement BRAVE related activities

Supplement and not overlap the MECPD:
Melrose East Crime Prevention District

Arts and Culture

To maximize community facilities and opportunities to enhance arts and culture

To restore a sense of community history and pride in the BR Choice Neighborhood

Improve parks / recreation facilities in BR Choice

Build community gardens for the community and by the community

Implementation of Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) Program focused on non-violence, self-identity, and cultural awareness

Partner with organizations that landscape and maintain Gilbert Memorial Cemetery

NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



City of Baton Rouge
BR Police
BR Sheriff's Office
BR District Attorney
LSU, OSSRD
Melrose East Community Association (MECA)

Increase in Home Sales Mixed income rental rates
Neighborhood Pre and Post Survey Results Increase in
neighbor participation in a neighborhood watch Decreased
number of street light complaints in 311 system Number of
neighbors participating in BRAVE and BCJI
activities

BREC
Red Stick Project and LSU student volunteers
EBRPSS

Increased green space areas Number of individuals
participating in arts/culture activities Increase in park and
recreational facility usage Increase in resident participation
in community and arts and
culture events
Number of youth enrolled and completing YES program
Number of community change and improvement events

OUTCOME AREAS

Infrastructure Improvements and Transportation

GOALS

To establish neighborhood connectivity through an enhanced transportation plan and gateway improvements

To increase availability and types of neighborhood businesses and amenities businesses

STRATEGIES

Improve sidewalks and bike lanes

Build a walking and biking path to connect with shopping, services, and facilities and nearby higher education institutions such as BRCC

Improve covered bus stops and bus stop map availability

Conduct neighborhood road repairs

Improve the public transit system

Improve gateways and nodes at main entry points into the BR Choice neighborhoods

Attract retail development for residents' convenience (for example: shopping, grocery stores, pharmacy, dry cleaners, coffee shop, ice cream shop, juice bar, restaurant, health club/exercise places, sporting goods, AC repair, bike shop)

NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Connect Home program
City of Baton Rouge
Capital Area Transportation System [CATS]
FuturEBR (City-Parish Master Plan)

Number of people riding bikes
Improvement in walkability score
Reduction in traffic accidents and violations
Number of businesses and amenities being established in area in area
Number of improved covered bus stops
Number of locations bus stop maps are available
Resident positive feedback on public transit system improvements
Number of new residents and patrons coming to area

OUTCOME AREAS



GOALS



STRATEGIES

Economic Development

Increase opportunities for infrastructure development

Increase the job readiness skills of unemployed and underemployed neighbors in the BR Choice community

Retain and recruit businesses in BR Choice community

Establish CDC in Choice area

Attract new businesses that will hire skilled and trained individuals from the Choice community

Create support system for entrepreneurial opportunities

Provide neighbors with better access to Employ BR services that offers job readiness curriculum and workshops

BRCC School and RDA have a facility under construction that will provide significant economic impact to the BR Choice neighborhood by attracting jobs in the automotive technician and medical services

Land Use and Zoning

To adopt zoning designations that support and reflect ideal characteristics of the BR Choice community

To eliminate vacant lots

Meet with city leaders and councilmembers regarding zoning regulations, non-conforming use regulations, alcohol outlets, and neighborhood conservation district

Infill development and repurposing of vacant lots

Establish a neighborhood conservation district

NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX

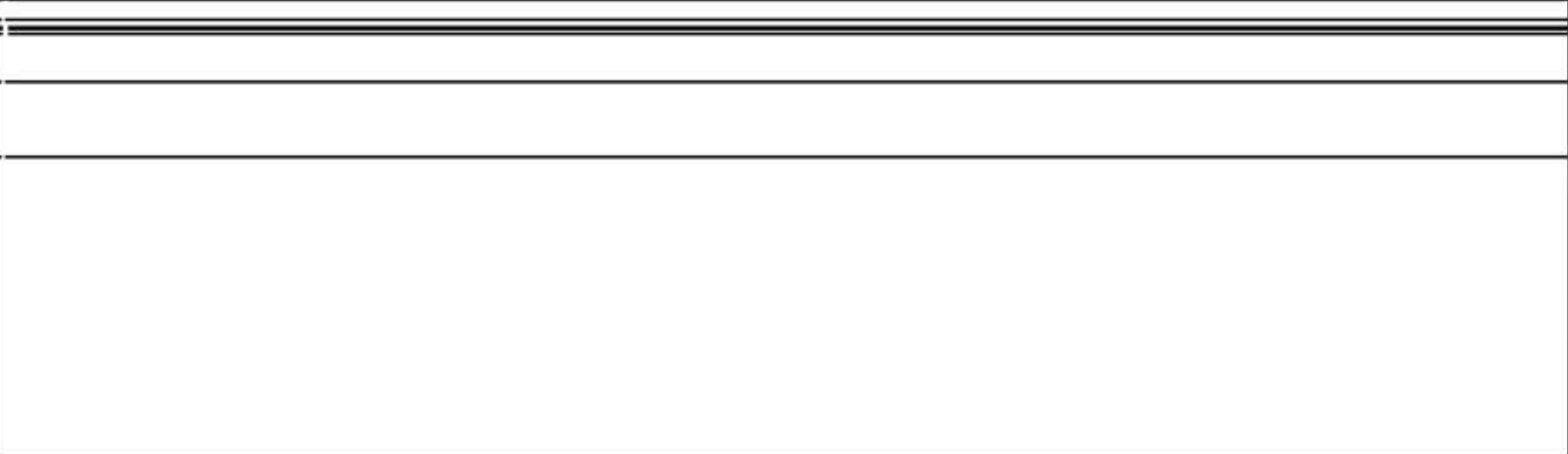


BRCC-Baton Rouge Community College
RDA - East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority

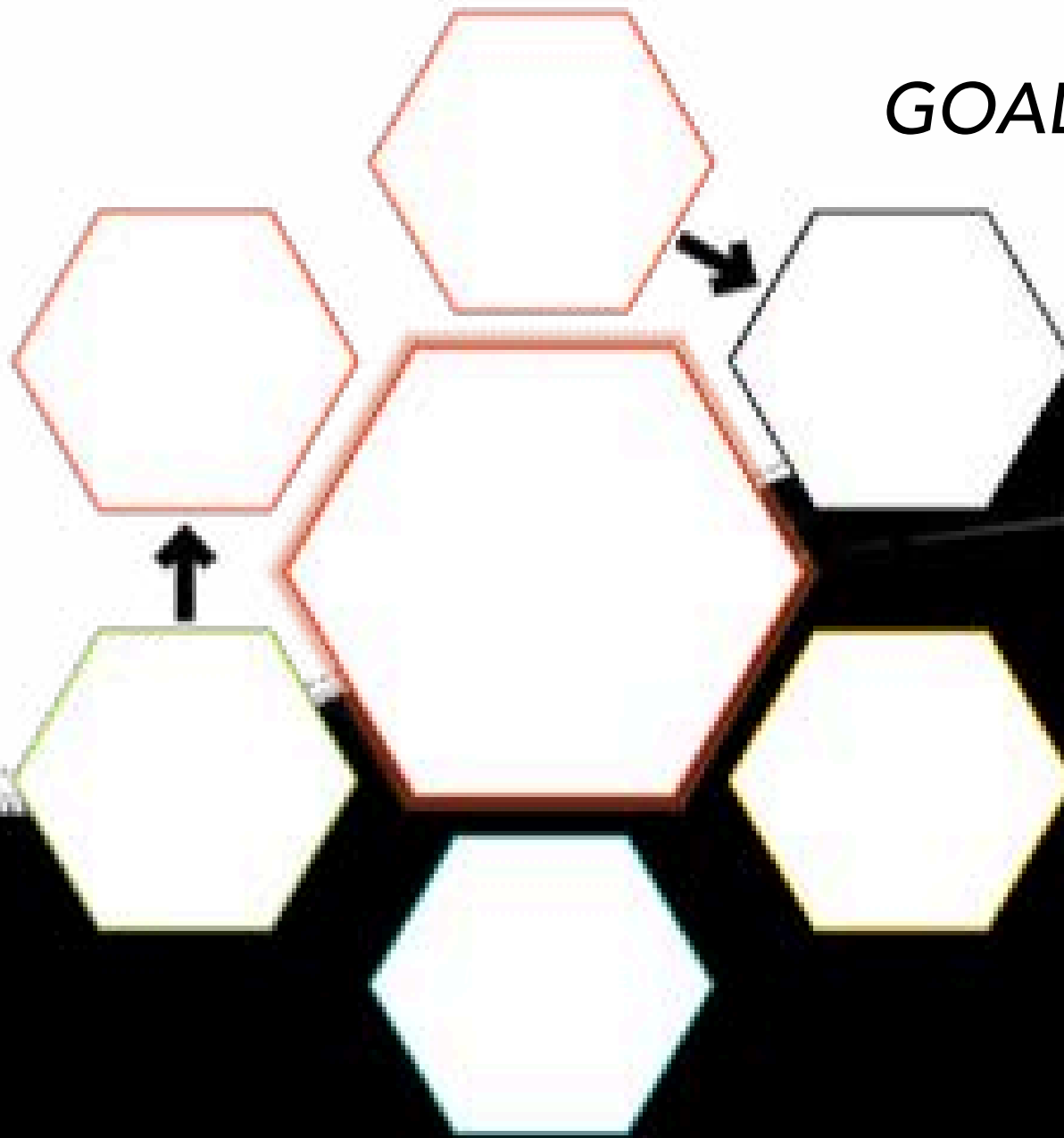
Increase in household incomes measured through Census data
Improvement in 14 year education cycle
Increase in new and established business investment
Increase in number of residents using EMPLOYBR services
Number of entrepreneurial businesses being established in Hope Zone
Increase in residents attending new BRCC complex
Increase in physical and social infrastructure projects

City of Baton Rouge
BR City Council
RDA
Hope Zone/BCJI Blight Law Clinics

Decrease in number of alcohol permits being issued in BR Choice community
Decrease in blighted and vacant properties
Increase in repurposed and infill properties



GOALS & STRATEGIES





A typical multi-family housing development in the BR Choice Neighborhood

Housing assessment

The BR Choice Community can be characterized as a highly impoverished and distressed community. East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority (EBRPHA) provides substantial housing assistance to low income residents in the Melrose East neighborhood. The housing market data indicate that in 2009 Melrose East was predominantly composed of renter-occupied, multi-family units. This represents a significant contrast with the Parish as a whole, which is predominantly composed of owner-occupied, single-family units. The conditions of a large majority of the multi-family housing in the BR Choice neighborhoods are a concern to many residents.

In an effort to make a significant impact on the housing opportunities for residents and attract additional private investment, the housing priorities for the BR Choice community are:

- Address blight, code violation, and clean-up
- Enact strict standards for slum landlords
- Return vacant properties into commerce
- Create infill housing across the planning area
- Replace distressed public and assisted housing into a vibrant mix-income multi-family community
- Create a catalyst for economic development

OVERVIEW

The priorities will be accomplished through the following goals:

GOAL 1 Increase and preserve affordable housing opportunities for low and moderate income households, underserved minority households, and vulnerable households

GOAL 2 Leverage public and private resources to build and establish vibrant mixed-use district

GOAL 3 Recruit section 3 residents and businesses to participate in job training, contract, and employment opportunities

GOAL 4 Implement a housing rehabilitation program such as Operation Restore Pride (Office of the Mayor's housing rehabilitation program)

GOAL 5 Develop design principles for all housing developments to address place-making gateways and streetscape improvements



OPERATION RESTORE PRIDE

The initiative, "Operation Restore Pride" sponsored by Mayor Kip Holden's office, helps beautify neighborhoods and repair blighted properties. The City of Baton Rouge selected Smiley Heights as a 2015 neighborhood to receive rehabilitation support. Police and fire officials also help by installing smoke alarms in homes and monitoring abandoned lots.

In addition to Operating Restore Pride, the City of Baton Rouge has a Housing Rehabilitation Grant Program. The program is designed to assist in efforts by the City to bring housing in EBR Parish up to minimum property standards. A homeowner whose house is in need of repairs may be eligible to receive grant monies. The present maximum grant amount is \$25,000.00. The grant program is administered by the City Parish Office of Community Development (OCD). BR Choice will continue to work with the OCD and the Mayor's office to continue this initiative in Smiley Heights. While stabilizing existing single family housing, BR Choice plans to partner with local single family builders for infill opportunities.

I. Outcome Area #1: Quality and Affordable Housing

The goals identified to create quality and affordable housing are: 1) to create an affordable, high-quality mixed-income environment that promotes diversity, 2) to create a high-quality diverse housing inventory, and 3) to decrease the overall vacancy rate. These goals will be accomplished through the following strategy:

a) Building and establishing Ardenale, a mixed-income development in the BR Choice footprint.

~~The~~ current Mid City District housing demonstrates a support for mixed income housing and de-concentration of pockets of extreme low income residents. The Ardenale neighborhood is currently a vacant 200-acre undeveloped site. The master plan supports 800-1000 units of diversified housing types. The Ardenale site is currently under a wetland mitigation plan that will be complete in Fall 2015. The Melrose East community has several low density, aged multifamily dwellings - occupied and vacant. The Melrose East site is our contingent replacement housing site for Ardenwood Village. There will be a one-to-one replacement of the Ardenwood Village units on the 200-acre, Ardenale site.

Current renters in the BR Choice area spend approximately 39% of their income on housing. From \$8000 - \$19000 pre-taxed, neighbors have roughly \$4000 - \$8000 available for housing and \$4000 - \$12000 available for utilities, child care, healthcare, and other expenses.

The BR Choice area covers 922 acres and 1.24 sq. miles within the Mid City District. Over the last several decades, the community has been and is still regarded as a high crime and impoverished distressed community. Recent revitalization efforts have instilled hope and expectations that the neighborhood can be saved. The Ardenwood Village Housing development will be demolished after the new mixed income development is constructed. The old Ardenwood Village site will be repurposed to support the viability of the new development. EBRPHA will procure an experienced relocation specialist to provide support to the residents before, during and after the relocation. This specialist will work with the residents to develop a responsive relocation plan. During the early stages of creating the plan, an in-depth conversation on qualifying for new housing will be discussed with all Ardenwood Village neighbors. This would include a background check, minimum income requirements, in addition to other specific lease violations items.



Mid City Gardens, an example of high-quality, affordable housing in Baton Rouge

The market supports a demand for a mixture of new and rehabilitated 800-1000 mixed income units in the total BR Choice Community (inclusive of Ardendale and Melrose East). The units will be rented to low and moderate income households and market rate renters. The low income housing will receive either a Section 9 or Section 8 subsidy from EBRPHA. EBRPHA's program supports housing to individuals paying 30% of their median income. The moderate income households will be restricted to individuals earning 60% of the area median income. In order to balance the mix of income type units, BR Choice will follow the minimum IRS Section 42 rule that states that a minimum of 40% of the units financed through Low Income Housing Tax Credits will be rented to individuals making 60% or less of the area median income.

II. Outcome Area #2: Homeownership

The third housing goal is to increase the rates of homeownership among public housing residents. This goal will be accomplished through the following strategy:

- a) Establishment of a homeowner's assistance center that is accessible to neighbors in the BR Choice community

III. Outcome Area #3: Mixed-Use District

The goal identified in this housing domain includes creating a vibrant mixed-used district that will increase the desirability of the Choice area. This goal will be accomplished through the following strategy:

- a) Development of diverse housing options using neighbor informed design principles

The BR Choice Mixed Use Plan will be driven by "Smart Growth" practices. Smart Growth practices refer to building communities with a diversity of housing and transportation near jobs, shops, and schools. This approach supports local economies and protects the environment. Smart Growth builds on the premise that people will choose to live in a neighborhood that is beautiful, safe, affordable and easy to get around. Smart Growth creates healthy communities with strong local businesses. BR Choice will use the practice of Smart Growth to connect housing, businesses, jobs, economic prosperity, transportation, the environment, and healthy communities for neighborhood revitalization.



Typical Baton Rouge bungalow found in the Mid City area, averaging 1,000 square feet

The vision for BR Choice is to create a sense of community where people live, learn, work and play. The goal is to offer public and private open spaces that enhance the character of the community by making physical and visual connections to the culture and natural environment of BR. One way this is achieved is by encouraging the use of native and naturalized plants from the region and using natural processes of the surrounding environment. This not only adds to the visual character of the community, but it alleviates the impact of urban infrastructure on the landscape.

Photo courtesy Alex Rio Brazil, Palmetal, 2009, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Training_meeting_in_a_ecodesign_stainless_steel_company_in_brazil.JPG



IV. Outcome Area #4: Section 3 Program

The last housing goal is to create a framework to ensure Section 3 residents and business leaders participate in the design and construction process. This goal will be accomplished through the following strategy:

- a) Recruit Section 3 residents and businesses to participate in job training, contract, and employment opportunities**

The BR Choice Team understands that the work to be performed under this grant is subject to the requirements of Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, as amended, Section 3. The purpose of Section 3 is to ensure that employment and other economic opportunities generated by HUD assistance or HUD-assisted projects covered by Section 3, shall, to the greatest extent feasible, be directed to low and very low-income persons, particularly persons who are current recipients of HUD assistance for housing.

The housing needs of the neighbors in the BR Choice area are quite apparent. The goals identified above will create a vibrant community that can be a model for future developments.

OUTCOME AREAS



Quality and Affordable Housing

To create an affordable, high-quality mixed-income environment that promotes diversity

**Ardendale mixed income development
Ardenwood Village Redevelopment
Housing Rehabilitation
Operation Restore Pride (City housing rehab program).
Include design principles for all developments to address place-making gateways and streetscape improvements.**

To create a high-quality diverse housing inventory

Implement a housing rehabilitation program

To decrease vacancy rates

**Partner with the Byrne Criminal Justice (BCJI) Blight Abatement Law Clinic
Implement a housing demolition initiative
Implement a vacant and abandoned property registration program
Establish an Infill development program**

HOUSING GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Habitat for Humanity
RDA
EBRPHA

LHC
RDA

Southern University Law School

Census data to measure median gross rent in census tracts.
Reduction in reported code violations.

Reduction in abandoned housing and blight reports.

Increase rate of homeownership in Choice community

OUTCOME AREAS



GOALS



STRATEGIES

Mixed-Use District

Create a vibrant mixed-used district that will increase the desirability of the Choice area

Develop diverse housing options using neighborhood-informed design principles

Attract businesses and investors

Homeownership

To increase the rates of homeownership among public housing residents

Establish a homeowner's assistance center

Section 3

To create a framework to ensure Section 3 resident and business participation in the design and construction process

Recruit Section 3 residents and businesses to participate in job training, contract, and employment opportunities

HOUSING GOALS AND STRATEGIES MATRIX



Increase in EBRPHA REAC Scores
Increase LEED or energy certifications
Reduction in utilities for owner and City Parish

Mid City/UREC: First time homebuyer's program

Increased number of owner occupied properties
Increase in homeownership

Increase in Median Income of Section 3 residents
Increase in number of entrepreneurs in BR Choice community through Section 3 participation.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The overall mission of the BR Choice initiative is to improve the quality of life for neighbors who reside in the community. This will be accomplished by connecting people with sustainable and affordable mixed-income housing in a safe and stable environment and assisting neighbors to meet their needs within the communities. The BR Choice transformation plan is an evidence-informed plan based upon 18 months of research and planning with neighbors and stakeholders. The proposed activities for the first few years will focus on the health, wellness and safety. Some of these activities include the development bike paths, artist crosswalks, and improved lighting. The short term implementation will focus on community engagement, connecting people with resources, workforce development training and employment. Additionally, the first phase of mixed income housing will become available. The plan will be carried out over a period of 10 years and will require the involvement of numerous public and private investors.

Implementation Budget

To ensure successful implementation of the BR Choice plan, The CNI team will work to ensure the following tools are investigated and applied for, if appropriate:

- Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) tax credits
- Federal and State loan and grant programs
- Revenue bond programs,
- Foundation funding,
- State incentive programs.

R• DA Gap Finance -

- o Below-market permanent loan
- o Commercial—permanent loan
- o Rehabilitation of rental properties
- o Land Bank Program
- o Small Business Facade Improvement Grant
- o Tax Increment Financing



- **Louisiana Housing Corporation**
 - **Low Income Energy Assistance Program**
 - **Weatherization Assistance Program**
 - **Multifamily Revenue Bond Finance Program**
 - **Tax-Exempt Revenue Bonds**
 - **Low Income Housing Tax Credits**
- **Baton Rouge Office of Community Development (OCD)**
 - **Housing Rehabilitation Grant Program**
 - **Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program**
 - **Rental Housing Rehabilitation Loans**
 - **Weatherization Program**
 - **Section 108 Loan Guarantee**
- **Community Development Financial Institutions Fund - CDFI**
 - **New Markets Tax Credits (The RDA currently manages this allocation)**
- **Other Funding Opportunities**
 - **Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits**
 - **Louisiana Historic Preservation Tax Credit**
 - **HUD 221 (d) (4) loan program**
 - **HUD 221 (d) (3) loan program (non-profit)**
 - **HUD 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly**

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND EXISTING RESOURCES

There are a significant number of resources and partners currently available or actively supporting the BR Choice community.

Neighborhood Infrastructure Improvements

- **Multi-family Rental Housing Development Project** In 2015, the City of Baton Rouge completed a \$3 million project that provided an additional 405 housing units to the Choice neighborhood. This includes Renaissance Gateway on Ardenwood Drive.
- In 2015, the City of Baton Rouge invested \$1.6 million in pavement improvements in the Choice neighborhood.

Community Gardens

A number of BR neighborhoods and schools have adopted community gardens. The East Baton Rouge Parish School System has collaborated with other organizations to build and sustain public gardens that will create a healthy, nutritious, local food source. A community garden has been placed in the Melrose East subdivision as an effort to provide neighbors with better access to fresh foods.

City Year

CityYear is an AmeriCorps program that unites diverse young leaders for a year of full-time service. City Year AmeriCorps members are trained to work in underserved schools to provide targeted academic and school-wide interventions to help students get on track and stay on track to graduate. They serve as tutors, mentors and role models. City Year volunteers also serve at Capitol Middle School in the Choice Neighborhood.

Diplomas Now

DiplomasNow is a public-private partnership between three major national nonprofits, local school districts and funders. Their mission is to help the toughest middle and high schools in America's largest cities ensure that students graduate ready for college or a career. It is the first fully integrated approach to improve a school's curriculum and instruction as it provides the designated students with effective support at a crucial time. Diplomas Now Baton Rouge is part of the national Diplomas Now program that was implemented at Capitol Middle School, which is located in the Choice neighborhood.

Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) Village

YEP Village is a Youth Empowerment Program comprised of elementary and middle school African-American males from several inner city schools. Funded by the Office of Minority Health, YEP Village aims to prevent the development of violent behavior among high risk youth, thus preventing their progression into the juvenile justice system. YEP promotes positive youth development through the evidence-based intervention, Positive Action. The program also aims to strengthen academic learning with an Academic All-Stars/ Summer Scholars component and to develop pro-social relationships while being engaged in an array of fun activities with an Enrichment component. There is also a family engagement component that promotes family involvement and teaches skills needed to raise children who are at risk of adverse life outcomes. Since the grant award in August 2014, the YEP Village program has served more than 64 young children in the BR Choice neighborhoods with positive action activities and academic support.



Baton Rouge Area Violence Elimination (BRAVE)

The BRAVE program is designed to reduce or eliminate violence among juveniles ages 14-17 in BR by targeting youthful criminal groups and offering an array of social and education alternatives to justice system involvement. BRAVE is based upon "Operation Ceasefire," a program that has proven effective in reducing serious violent crimes in cities across the country. Through collaborative efforts with faith based organizations, LSU, law enforcement, the District Attorney's office and local service providers, BRAVE strives to offer guidance to those in the targeted high crime CHOICE neighborhoods. Youthful residents in the community are eligible to participate in a wide variety of services such as education, substance abuse treatment, workforce development, mentoring, and mental health counseling.

Presently, BRAVE's targeted geographic area is the 70805 zip code which accounts for 13.5 percent of the BR population and is responsible for 30 percent of the city's homicides. Since BRAVE was implemented in June 2012, crime analyses indicate that the annual homicide rate has decreased by 36 percent and monthly homicidal rate has decreased 45 percent. In addition, violent crime rates have also been reduced by 16 percent and property crime rates have decreased by two percent. BRAVE is funded through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

BREDA (Big River Economic and Development)

BREDA is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization that provides access to fresh, healthy foods for everyone, regardless of income level. In 2012, BREDA launched a Red Stick Mobile Farmers Market to serve neighborhoods in North and Old South Baton Rouge because of their limited access to fresh food. With the assistance of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Challenge for a Healthier Louisiana grant, the City acquired and retrofitted a mobile unit to connect more than 61,000 residents with fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers. A partnership with CHOICE initiative would allow the Mobile Farmers Market to serve neighbors in the Choice community

The Melrose East Community Association (MECA)

MECA is a 501(c) 4 charitable and tax-deductible association of residents, business, and property owners in the Melrose East community and the surrounding areas. MECA is led by a Board of Directors that is elected at its annual meeting. The organization's community goals include: reducing the crime rate, cleaning and maintaining local facilities and using existing blight ordinances to clean, clear, and improve existing lots and buildings in the area. These goals are aimed at attracting new business and residents to the community. MECA provides members with an opportunity to make a contribution to their community by assisting with crime prevention, providing security patrols through the Baton Rouge Police Department, assisting in the upkeep of the community with beautification and clean-up projects, and blight elimination. Currently, there is little involvement from the Melrose East community in the MECA activities. One of the goals of the ongoing community development is to bridge the gap between the Melrose East community and MECA.

APPENDICES
