

# CUPA

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College of Urban and Public Affairs

## The Holy Cross Neighborhood: Planning for Community Development

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**COLLEGE OF URBAN AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Holy Cross Neighborhood formed a non-profit entity called the Holy Cross Community Development Corporation (HCCDC). It is composed of community activists and technical advisors. The HCCDC has succeeded in raising over \$500,000 in grants to target housing needs of the lower to middle class residents of Holy Cross. Community participation is required to formulate the direction that the HCCDC will take in order to make the best use of these limited funds. Dr. Mickey Lauria, an academic researcher and experienced guide in issues surrounding housing and community development, was approached by the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association (HCNA) to aid residents in the "process" of making goals and objectives to revitalize their neighborhood (See Appendix A). Dr. Lauria chose to involve the students of his spring 1995 Housing and Community Development course to utilize this unique opportunity as a critical learning activity for students of urban and public affairs. Students spent several weekends compiling a land use data base of Holy Cross which was, in turn, converted to spatially mapped attributes (GIS) by students Wendel Dufour and Patrick Haughey. These maps helped residents to visualize the past and current uses for the land in their neighborhood and to graphically see the changes which have taken place over the last 10 years. The maps were also key to visualizing future land uses as well. Social and economic development strategies were contemplated. The maps were utilized at the first community meeting of March 23, 1995.

The project seemed to be a success for the community as well as for the class. Students and residents worked together in determining the land uses and conditions

of virtually every building in the community. During a community planning session, students were available to answer any questions concerning the process of redevelopment. Additionally, the class held a planning session of its own in order to generate recommendations for the final report. These exercises were invaluable to the students, many of whom had not visited Holy Cross prior to the beginning of the project or participated in community development, especially with a group as dedicated to preserving their community. The exercises were also effective in educating residents on the basics of community-based planning and redevelopment. Residents said they felt armed by the data, report and maps we produced and provided to them, and they felt empowered by the planning process. This report is the culmination of hard work of all the participants. None of this would have been possible without the commitment of community residents, who are ultimately responsible for the redevelopment of Holy Cross.

The following community development planning recommendations were produced by the this process (see Planning Recommendation Maps in Appendix C).

### **NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS AND PRIORITIES**

The Holy Cross Neighborhood Association should have a board meeting to brainstorm goals and objectives for the neighborhood. As a result of this meeting, a survey should be developed and administered to the neighborhood residents to prioritize the suggested goals. After the neighborhood surveys are received, another

HCNA board meeting should be held to interpret the results. Prioritized goals and objectives should be officially adopted by the HCNA board of directors. These prioritized goals and objectives should be used to direct the following strategies (See Action Plan section).

## **1. A Two-pronged Housing Strategy: targeted and dispersed.**

### **The Targets:**

**Forstall and Lizardi street blocks should be targeted by rental rehabilitation and homeowner conversion dollars.** It is important to note that this is the worst area in the neighborhood—in terms of housing conditions—and, at the same time, it is very important because of its neighborhood gateway function and its centrality to all the community development strategies recommended.

**The Flood Street gateway from St. Claude to the neighborhood, particularly around Dauphine Street, is more suited for existing homeowner renovation.**

**The secondary targets recommended are the southeast corner of the neighborhood (the Bienvenue and Douglas Street area) and the northeast corner of the neighborhood near Dauphine Street.** These areas showed slight decline in the 1980-1990 decade and contain a significant but lesser concentration of structurally damaged and blighted/abandoned properties.

### **Dispersion:**

A dispersed approach is necessary to supplement the targeted approach. If all the renovation efforts were concentrated in the target areas, the neighborhood would miss significant opportunities to secure whole blocks, and possibly whole sections of the neighborhood, by renovating one or two structures. The HCCDC should set aside a portion of the renovation dollars (approx. 20 percent), analyze the housing condition map and target specific properties outside their target areas for renovation.

## **2. Transportation, Parking and Streets**

**Extension of the riverfront streetcar through the Holy Cross neighborhood.** The streetcar was considered a strength for promoting tourism and business development. It also would provide another mode of transportation to connect residents to the central business district.

**Improved RTA bus routes into the Holy Cross neighborhood, especially to the northeast corner.**

**Increased parking along and near the St. Claude corridor.**

## **3. Recreation and Green space**

**Steps should be taken to include the levee in the Jean Laffite National Park system to protect it against commercialization and to preserve the green space.** Secondly, a bike path should be developed along the ridge of the levee. This will provide for more varied uses, while not detracting from the current green space.

**Community access to the old St. Maurice Parish gym should be provided and renovation considered.**

**A New Orleans Recreation Department playground and league with a baseball field, basketball courts, and track should be developed.**

**Some blighted structures should be torn down and the lots converted into permanent green space.**

**Community gardens should be located in vacant or blighted/converted lots throughout the neighborhood.**

## **4. Commercial Development**

Two areas within the neighborhood have the potential for increasing commercial development: along St. Claude Avenue and in small designated areas near the levee and River. The development along St. Claude should be primarily small retail businesses; the development along the levee should include office space, enterprises to encourage tourism and maritime-related development.

## **St. Claude Avenue**

**St. Claude Avenue presents opportunities for the development of small, primarily retail businesses.** Certain steps are necessary to encourage business development and to ensure that this business development will enhance the neighborhood. One aspect is the overall beautification of St. Claude.

**Businesses and institutions within the neighborhood should be encouraged to "adopt" a portion of the Avenue and the neutral ground, underwrite the cost of improvements and ensure its long-term maintenance.**

**To attract support for enhancement of the neutral ground and development of the gateways, urban design and landscape plans need to be developed, detailing the proposed improvements.** UNO or the Parkway Partners Program might be able to facilitate the development of these plans.

**Adequate parking must be provided as new businesses are developed.** This could be addressed either through the dedication of some vacant lots for off-street parking or the development of landscaped parking along the neutral ground similar to Harrison Avenue. Given the impact that the Port's plans for improvements of the Industrial Canal and Lock have had on business development in the neighborhood, the Port's mitigation efforts should be directed toward economic development activities and to the renovation of houses that are near St. Claude.

## **Along the Levee**

The River and levee should be utilized by businesses that would serve neighborhood residents. Non-residents (including tourists) should be encouraged to come into the neighborhood. Several ideas include:

- opening a coffee house on either the northwest corner of Forstall or Chartres Streets (Block 119) or on the northeast corner of Forstall at the levee (Block 46);
- opening a bed and breakfast on the southeast corner of Reynes and the levee (Block 47);
- opening a snowball stand toward the levee end of Forstall Street;
- operating a bike and roller skate rental shop near the levee;

- converting the Pilot Houses into museums and/or incorporating them into the Jean Lafitte Park system—some renovation may be necessary for such conversion;
- developing a port or maritime museum between Bienvenue and Alhambra and Flood and St. Maurice (Block 75);
- locating a restaurant or fish and chips business along the River. This restaurant would be located downriver of the Pilot Houses, closer to the Jackson Barracks and might be built on piers into the River;
- encouraging the location of art gallery and studio space in some of the vacant corner stores, with the possibility of developing living space for the artists on the second floor; and
- developing a farmer's market to sell produce grown in community gardens and other local farms.