

9.1/EAST BILOXI NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

Overview

Land Use

East Biloxi is the area of the City that was most damaged by Hurricane Katrina. A large portion of East Biloxi (primarily east of I-110) is within flood hazard areas where floodplain construction requirements and the high cost of insurance have stymied reconstruction efforts, resulting in a predominance of vacant land and buildings. An overview of land use in East Biloxi shows mainly single-family residential land uses in the interior of the peninsula crossed by scattered commercial uses along major corridors, including Caillavet Street, Howard Avenue, Oak Street, and Division Street. Keesler Air Force Base is a large institutional land use that abuts East Biloxi to the west. Existing land uses along the waterfront perimeter of East Biloxi include Casino/Hotel and Industrial/Commercial Seafood. Downtown Biloxi lies within the bounds of East Biloxi but is addressed separately in Chapter 10.

Key Issues

- The high proportion of undeveloped land, vacant land, and vacant buildings is the most salient and urgent land use issue in East Biloxi.
- Hurricane Katrina’s destruction significantly changed East Biloxi’s land use pattern. A comprehensive framework to guide the ongoing redevelopment effort must take into account the need for resilient land uses that can resist future storm threats.
- Casinos rebuilt quickly after the storm. Now there is a need to diversify land uses, offer tourism and entertainment options, and increase open space and recreation on the peninsula. Diversifying and providing new entertainment options will offer a better quality of life for residents and help to establish Biloxi as a premiere destination.

Transportation

Major east-west connections within East Biloxi are Highway 90/Beach Boulevard, Howard Avenue, Division Street, and Bayview Avenue. Among these, Highway 90/Beach Boulevard is the only connection west to West Biloxi and east to Ocean Springs via the Biloxi Bay Bridge. Major north-south connections within East Biloxi are I-110, Caillavet Street, Main Street, and Oak Street, with I-110 providing the only access out of East Biloxi to the north. An active CSX rail line cuts east-west across East Biloxi.

Rebuilding of Biloxi following Katrina is proceeding with pedestrian and bicycle circulation in mind. Most notably for East Biloxi, the new Biloxi Bay Bridge was constructed with a 10-foot pedestrian and bicycle path. Highway 90/Beach Boulevard is being improved with a pedestrian and bicycle path. The Coast Transit Authority (CTA) provides two bus routes in East Biloxi (Route 31 Blue and Route 31 Red) and the “Casino Hopper” route, which connects all of the casinos in East Biloxi. East Biloxi’s water transportation system, which consists of a network of piers, boat ramps, docks, and marinas, was severely impacted by Katrina and is being reconstructed.

Key Issues

- An issue related to the limited number of connections to the peninsula is the lack of a direct north-south connection between Interstate 10 and Highway 90 other than I-110. In addition, east-west connections across the City and the County are limited by various waterways (rivers and bays) and federal land restrictions (Air Force and Navy bases). These constraints affect mobility and emergency evacuation in East Biloxi.
- The pedestrian/bicycle path across the new Biloxi Bay Bridge is heavily used and there is great potential to develop additional pedestrian and bicycle facilities in East Biloxi as an alternative to automobile use.

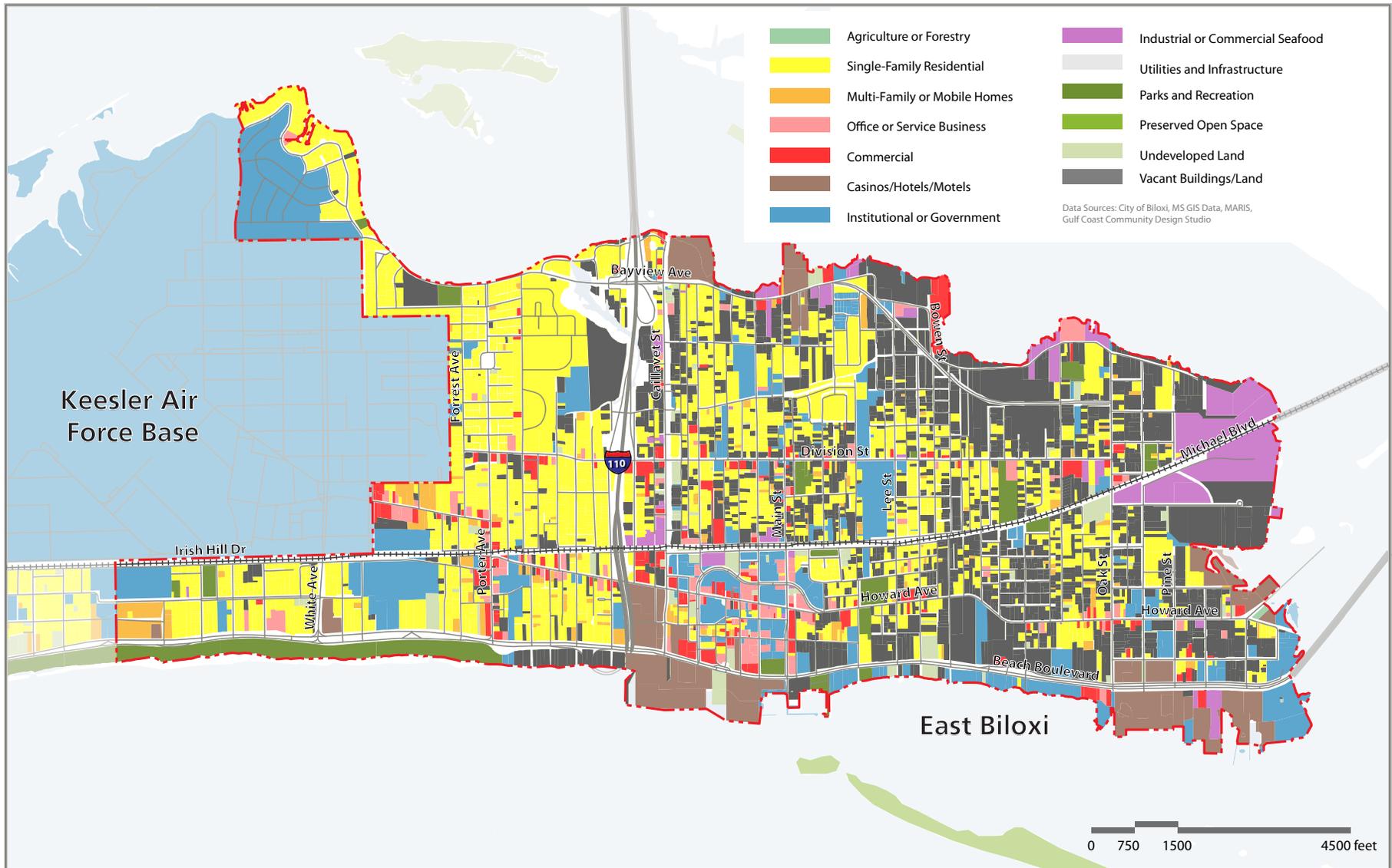


FIGURE 9.1.1/EAST BILOXI EXISTING LAND USE (2008)

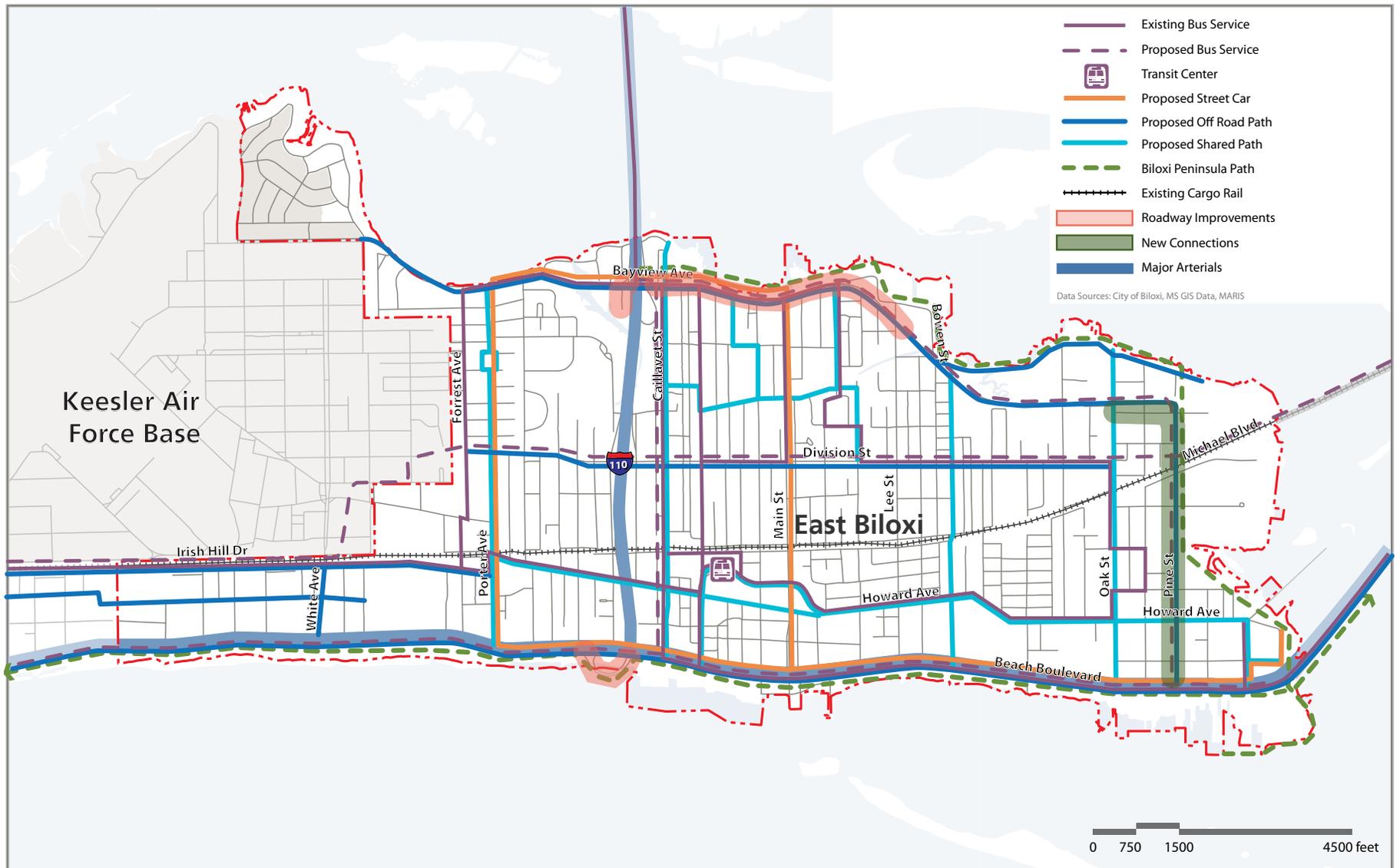


FIGURE 9.1.2/EAST BILOXI EXISTING TRANSPORTATION NETWORK WITH PLANNED/PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources

Water resources—the Mississippi Sound, Biloxi Bay, and the Back Bay of Biloxi—shape East Biloxi’s boundaries and support the local tourism and seafood industries. Most of East Biloxi is located within the 100-year floodplain and much of its terrain is located seven feet or more below the base (100-year) flood elevation as defined by the revised FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Since Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS) has tracked building and vacancy trends in East Biloxi. GCCDS found that of the buildings destroyed or later demolished as a result of Katrina, over 65% were located on land less than 10 feet above sea level.

As a result of East Biloxi’s low-lying topography, tidal marsh areas (freshwater, brackish, saline, and intermediate marsh) occur along its perimeter and in inland depressions. Many of these areas provide habitat for native plants and animals. Live oaks are a particularly important native species and natural resource, adding scenic value and helping to control erosion and stormwater runoff. The Sand Beach Authority/Parkway Commission and the Department of Transportation are currently assessing each live oak tree as part of their ongoing Hurricane Katrina recovery plan. Other important natural resources include the Sand Beach and the offshore Deer Island Coastal Preserve.

The earliest European colonists settled on the peninsula in and around what is now East Biloxi. East Biloxi was the center of Biloxi over the subsequent centuries and as a result has a wealth of historic and cultural resources, including five local historic overlay districts—West Beach, West Central, Down-

town, East Central, and Point Cadet. Of these, West Beach, West Central, and Downtown are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. East Biloxi also contains multiple properties on the National Register. Many of these properties were damaged or destroyed in Hurricane Katrina.

In East Biloxi, a museum district is emerging along Beach Boulevard east of Downtown. Plans for the Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art, the Biloxi Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, the Katrina Museum, and potentially the Mardi Gras Museum are underway at this location. Other cultural landmarks in East Biloxi include the Biloxi Lighthouse, the Saenger Theatre for the Performing Arts, the Biloxi Little Theater, Vieux Marche, and Rue Magnolia. In addition, a number of events celebrating local heritage, culture, and history take place in East Biloxi each year. The Biloxi Seafood Festival and Mardi Gras celebrations are two among these many special events.

Key Issues

- East Biloxi’s water features, such as Sand Beach, Point Cadet, Keegan Inlet, and other tidal inlets and wetlands, are important components of the natural ecology and key to sustaining local identity, heritage, economy, and environmental health.
- Abundant historic resources and Biloxi’s close ties to its past are a major asset important to the quality of life of residents and to the economy. The City has historic preservation standards and regulations in place to protect these important resources.
- The emerging museum district along Highway 90 will expand the cultural experiences available to residents and visitors.

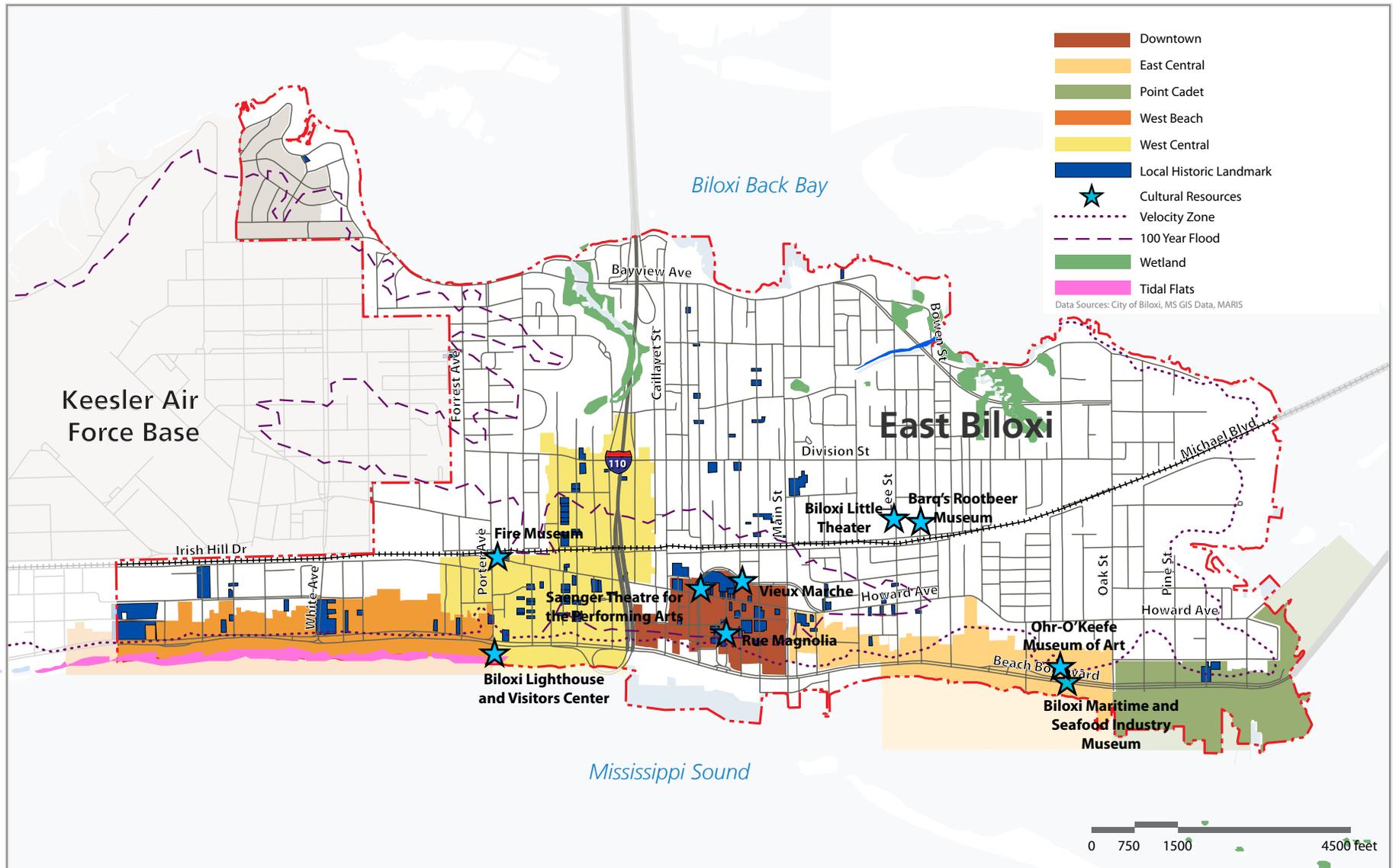


FIGURE 9.1.3/EAST BILOXI NATURAL, HISTORIC, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

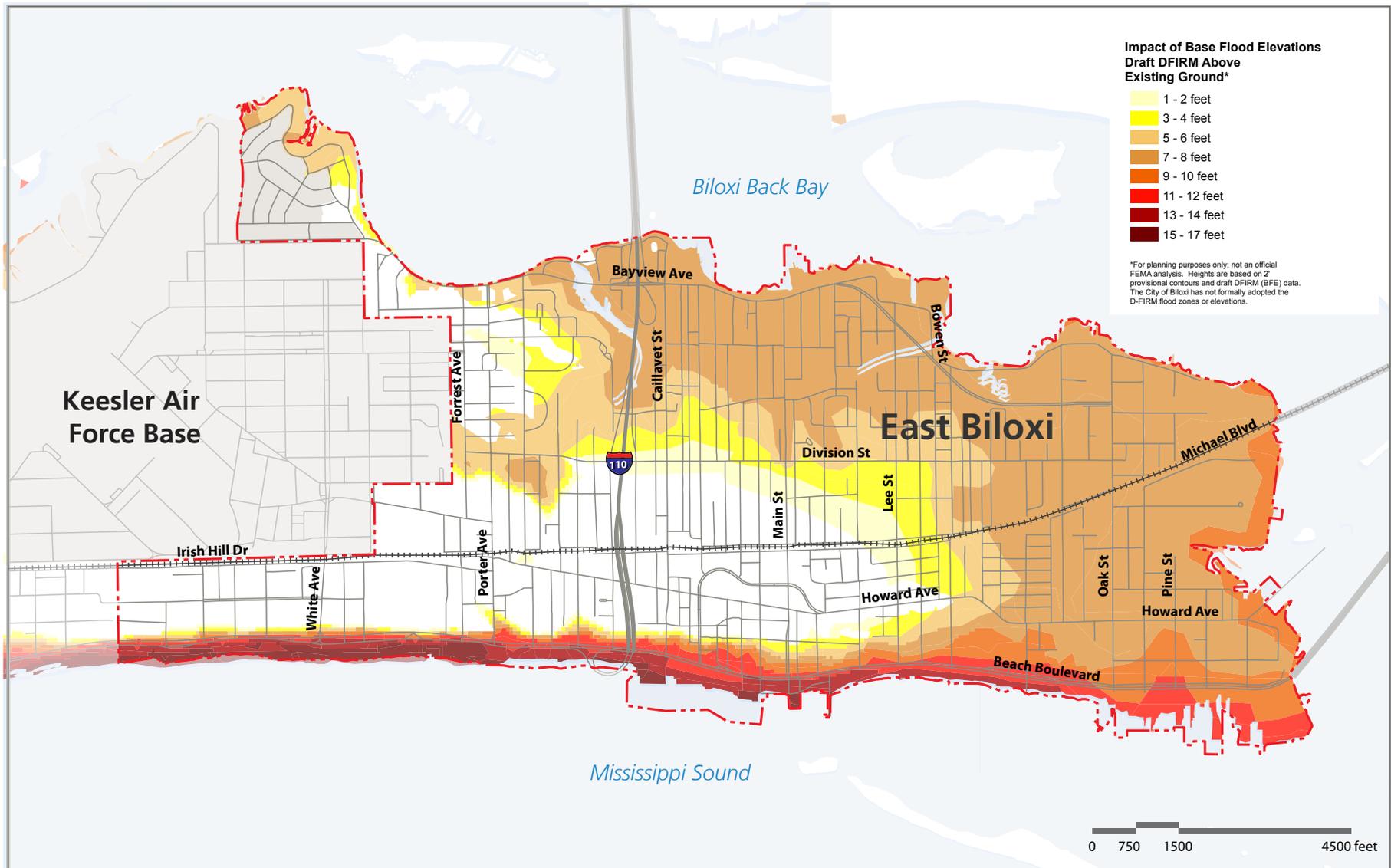


FIGURE 9.1.4/EAST BILOXI BASE FLOOD ELEVATIONS

Community Facilities and Services

The Biloxi Police Department is headquartered in East Biloxi at the Lopez-Quave Public Safety Center, located on Porter Avenue. The Biloxi Fire Department operates three fire districts in East Biloxi (Fire Districts 1, 2, and 3). The major focus of emergency preparedness in Biloxi is to reduce hazards and prepare the City and its residents for future storm and flood risks. This is particularly important in East Biloxi due to its vulnerability to future storms. The Biloxi Regional Medical Center, a 24-hour emergency services and 153-bed acute care facility, is located in the Downtown.

East Biloxi is fully served by an infrastructure network consisting of water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, power and telecommunications systems. These systems, particularly sewer and water lines within the storm surge area, were damaged during Hurricane Katrina and are being reconstructed.

Biloxi's Department of Parks and Recreation and its Ports Division oversee numerous parks and marina facilities in East Biloxi. Town Green is located on the landward side of Beach Boulevard between Lameuse and Main Streets, across from the Biloxi Small Craft Harbor (a public marina operated by the Ports Division). The Sand Beach Trail (proposed by the Comprehensive Plan to be part of a larger Biloxi Peninsula Path) and Biloxi Bay Bridge walkways are two popular pedestrian and bicycle paths in East Biloxi.

Biloxi's public libraries are part of the larger Harrison County system. The East Biloxi Library was irreparably damaged during Hurricane Katrina and has been demolished. It has been replaced by a temporary library on Howard Avenue pending construction of a combined library/civic center. East Biloxi is served by the Biloxi Public School District and is home to three elementary schools and one middle school.

Key Issues

- The City has allocated \$300 million to repair storm-damaged infrastructure systems. In the context of many vacant properties that have been slow to rebuild, the City should strategically focus short-term infrastructure repairs in East Biloxi to support priority development areas.
- The impacts of sanitary sewer and stormwater facilities on water quality and quantity (runoff from developed areas during storms) are issues of concern in East Biloxi given its water resources and vulnerability to flooding. The City is addressing these issues on an ongoing basis through initiatives such as the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and repair or replacement of sewer, water, and storm drainage facilities damaged by Katrina.



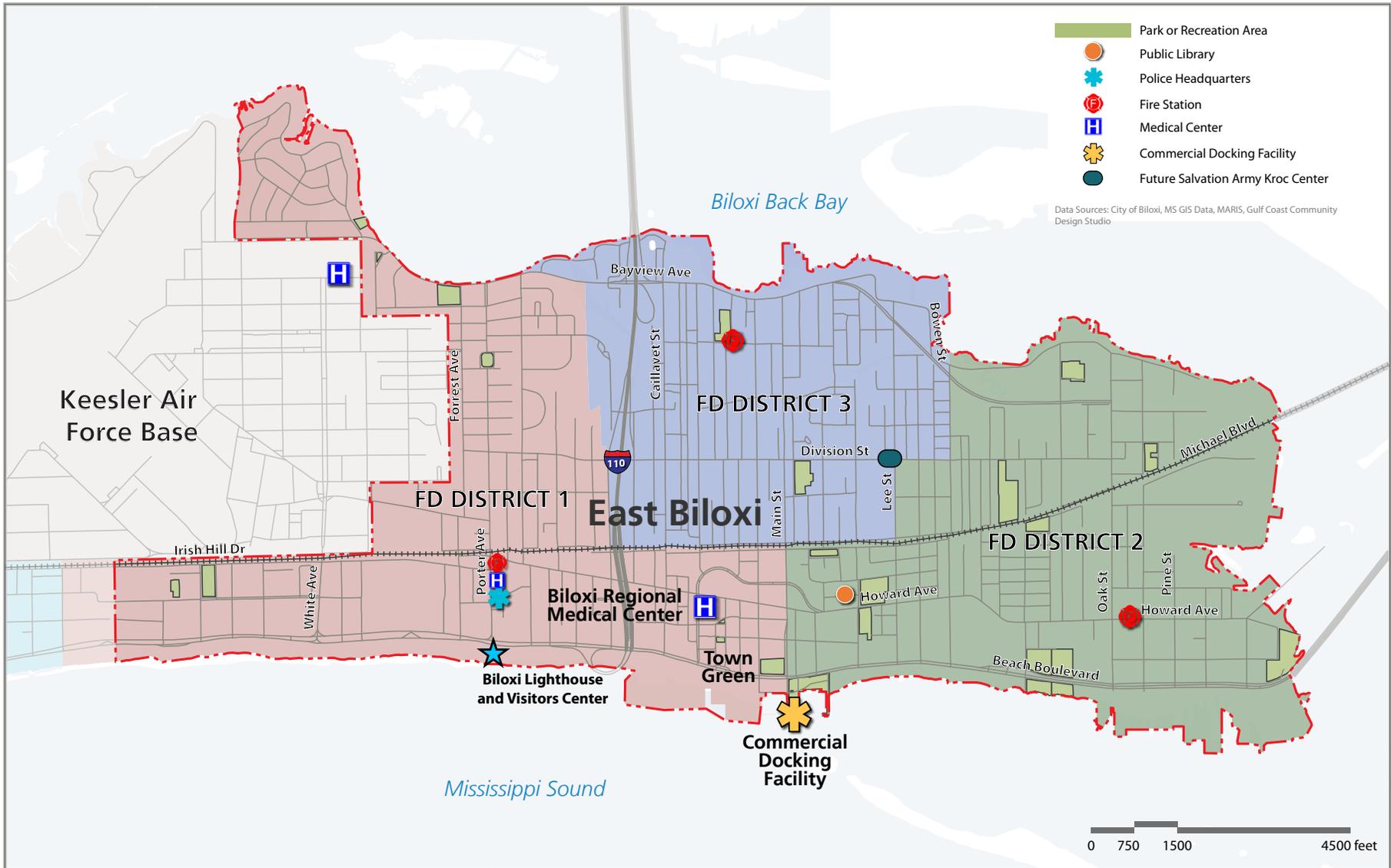


FIGURE 9.1.5/EAST BILOXI COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- Apart from the Sand Beach and Biloxi Bay Bridge walkways, East Biloxi lacks a network of paths, open space connections, or bikeways for public use.
- Biloxi's Public School District is ranked high among other school districts in the State of Mississippi. Challenges facing the school district include the possibility of redistricting to meet shifting population and decreased enrollment in East Biloxi schools. However, East Biloxi residents have identified the elementary schools as an important neighborhood resource.
- Construction of the Salvation Army Kroc Center is anticipated to be completed in late 2010. The new \$14 million facility (located next to the East Biloxi field on Division Street) will provide the community with recreational and performing arts activities, in addition to housing a worship center.

Housing

Approximately 80% of the housing stock in East Biloxi was either destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by Hurricane Katrina. Due to high flood and wind insurance costs, high financing and construction costs, and the implications of the revised base flood elevations, rebuilding has occurred at a slow pace. East Biloxi contains a higher percentage of renter-occupied homes than the City as a whole. In addition, there is an unmet demand for "workforce" housing in East Biloxi to house employees of the casinos, Regional Medical Center, and civil employees of Keesler AFB. Bayview Bayou Auguste, a major HOPE VI neighborhood development, was damaged by Katrina and has been restored but addresses only a portion of the need. Construction of senior housing, condominium homes, and Downtown housing has also been negatively affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Key Issues

- There are multiple obstacles to rebuilding housing in East Biloxi, including the high cost of flood and wind insurance, the revised base flood elevations, financing and construction costs, speculative land prices, and small lot sizes.
- There is a growing shortage of affordable housing options in the region, especially in East Biloxi. As FEMA trailers, MEMA Mississippi Cottages, and funding expire, more residents will be without affordable housing options. There is currently an unmet demand for "workforce" housing. Housing options are essential if the City is to be competitive in the regional economy and attract new residents.
- There is a pressing need for housing in the region as a result of Hurricane Katrina and locating housing in East Biloxi near major employers (e.g., casinos, Keesler AFB) provides significant advantages. However, housing is the land use that



is most vulnerable to catastrophic storm damage because of the threat to the personal safety and property of residents and this issue must be addressed in locating and designing new housing in East Biloxi.

Economic Development

East Biloxi is an economic engine for the City of Biloxi, supporting diverse industry sectors ranging from tourism and gaming to commercial fishing to governmental and institutional uses. All of Biloxi's top ten employers have a presence in or near East Biloxi, including Keesler Air Force Base, the casinos, the Biloxi Regional Medical Center, the Biloxi Public School District, and the City of Biloxi (see Table 8.1 in Chapter 8, Economic Development). Much of the area's economic infrastructure was severely damaged by Katrina and the casinos rebuilt quickly, providing a boon for the City's recovery.

Key Issues

- The key to economic development in East Biloxi is to sustain and grow a diverse economy focused on target industry clusters, including tourism/casinos, the seafood industry, and government/institutions.
- As development occurs, land for open space, public plazas, and other pedestrian amenities should be preserved.
- Minority populations in East Biloxi would benefit from increased access to jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. The Innovation Center in North Biloxi is not easily accessible to residents who lack cars.

East Biloxi Concept

At its core, the concept for East Biloxi is intended to foster a more resilient community, economy, and environment as rebuilding continues in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Katrina devastated East Biloxi and the neighborhood will never be the same as it once was. By acknowledging this basic condition, it is possible to meet needs such as mobility, housing, and economic development in ways that respond to East Biloxi's storm vulnerability.

Resistance to storm damage is a common thread that ties all of the strategies together and must be addressed in all redevelopment activities in East Biloxi. At the same time, the strategies are designed to build on East Biloxi's assets and create synergies by leveraging interrelationships between different initiatives. For example, new workforce housing on the Division Street corridor can benefit from the East Biloxi Transportation Loop, connecting employees to jobs. Strategies to reinforce the waterfront by maintaining and expanding water-dependent uses (e.g., marinas and commercial fishing) will add value for retail and visitor-oriented uses. Multi-modal improvements – for example, improved transit service and the Biloxi Peninsula Path – will connect East Biloxi's various destinations and attractions while making it easier for residents to move about the area.

While the concept map depicts future land use in East Biloxi as a series of generalized colors, the actual pattern of development will be very different. Areas within the 100-year floodplain shown as predominantly residential, for example,

East Biloxi Vision

Create a thriving local community and premiere visitor destination that retains the authentic historic, cultural, and natural character of “Old Biloxi” and is designed to reduce vulnerability to storm damage and the effects of flooding.

may consist of open spaces used for purposes such as neighborhood recreation and urban agriculture, interspersed with compact residential/mixed-use development blocks that incorporate common storm protection techniques. The current trend of rebuilding elevated single-family homes to meet floodplain construction requirements (including elevating first floors above the base flood elevation) will likely continue on scattered lots. Building on the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio's work, creative solutions to problems such as designing the space below the first habitable floor to promote utility and sense of community will be needed.

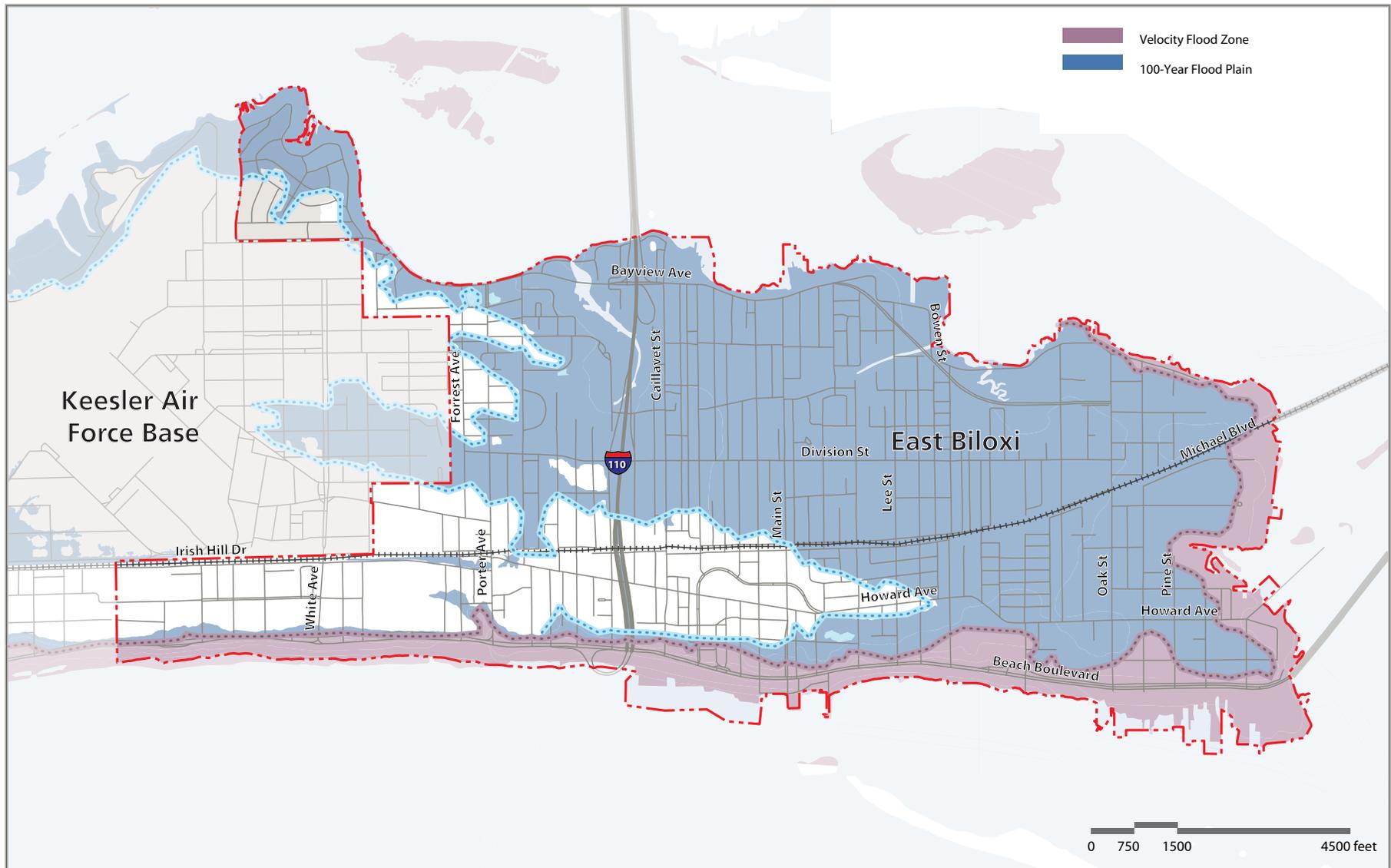


FIGURE 9.1.7/EAST BILOXI FLOODPLAIN



FIGURE 9.1.8/RENDERING OF EAST BILOXI RESILIENT NEIGHBORHOOD CONCEPT

East Biloxi Strategies

Strategy 1

Recreate resilient land use and development patterns in East Biloxi that capitalize on its waterfront and interior residential neighborhoods.

Priority Actions

- Encourage working waterfront development in addition to cultural, recreational and entertainment development in the waterfront district.
- Encourage residential development in interior neighborhoods with a mix of uses and housing types.
- Reduce storm vulnerability through measures at the site (i.e., parcel/building) level and through collective actions (e.g., establishing community open spaces designed to absorb flood water).
- Allow expansion of nonconforming structures in the floodplain if the whole structure is flood-proofed, elevated, or otherwise improved to significantly increase its storm resiliency.
- Provide flexibility in the reconstruction of destroyed or substantially damaged nonconforming structures where the reconstructed structure significantly increases its storm resiliency.
- Provide incentives (e.g., increased building height or expedited review) that will encourage developers to minimize building footprints and maximize open space within floodplain sites.
- Establish transitions and buffers between neighborhood residential and higher density, visitor-oriented uses.

Strategy 2

Establish a continuous public walkway (Peninsula Path) connection around East Biloxi that provides waterfront access and links key destinations, including:

- Lighthouse Park and Visitors Center
- Casinos (Beau Rivage, Boomtown, Grand, Hard Rock, IP, Isle of Capri, Palace)
- Cultural/Museum Center (Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, and the Katrina Museum)
- Biloxi Commercial Docking Facility, Small Craft Harbor and other public marina/boating/fishing facilities (reconstructed and expanded)
- Lighthouse Fishing Docks/Seafood Village (with retail/restaurant uses to create destination)
- Point Cadet (developed as community gathering place and special events venue)
- Harrison Court (west of I-10 off Bayview Ave, potential to redevelop as a park/ballfield)
- Biloxi Bay Bridge (pedestrian/bicycle connection to Ocean Springs)
- Sand Beach (linking to West Biloxi)

Priority Action

- Concentrate initial investment in the Peninsula Path along Beach Boulevard in the vicinity of Downtown Biloxi.
- Support the emerging Lighthouse District and determine the potential for new marina facilities in this area.

Strategy 3

Establish a network of corridors supporting multiple transportation modes (transit, walking, and biking as well as driving) and mixed land uses (commercial, cultural/entertainment, residential, etc.). Key corridors include:

- East Biloxi Transportation Loop (Beach Boulevard, the new Pine Street Extension, Back Bay Boulevard/Bayview Avenue, and Caillavet Street) as a scenic corridor connecting major destinations along the East Biloxi waterfront and linking to the regional network via Highway 90 and I-110
- Oak Street (an International/Mixed-Use District)
- Howard Street (links Downtown to the Oak Street corridor)
- Division Street

Priority Actions

- Complete the East Biloxi Transportation Loop.
- Implement consistent streetscape, multi-modal transportation improvements (sidewalk, bike lanes, transit service and stops) along each corridor.
- Promote consistent character along major corridors (Caillavet Street, Division Street, Oak Street) by applying a Corridor Redevelopment Overlay District. Focus mixed-use development at intersections of major corridors.

Strategy 4

Encourage the rebuilding of existing and construction of new housing with structural requirements and design guidelines intended to minimize storm damage, promote a sense of community, and fit with East Biloxi's traditional architectural character.

Priority Actions

- Develop catalyst sites as identified in The Reviving the Renaissance Plan (10-acre city owned parcel on Howard Avenue, the Harrison Court site, and properties on North Main Street) for neighborhood conservation and housing infill.
- Encourage a variety of housing types for different household types, incomes, and lifestyle needs on a block-by-block basis, including:
 - Single-family detached
 - Single-family attached
 - Garden apartments
 - Larger mixed-use developments
- Design new single-family detached housing within the floodplain, elevated above the flood hazard level, to be architecturally compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
- Encourage development of storm-resistant, multi-family, attached housing with compact footprints in floodplain areas, resulting in more open space.
- Focus workforce housing along Division Street.
- Encourage new streets be designed with sidewalks and curbs and meet ADA accessible standards wherever feasible.



Concept for a Single-family detached house with "break-away room." Credit: WRT

Strategy 5

Incorporate open spaces that perform a variety of functions and benefits (e.g., flood control, water quality treatment, outdoor recreation, scenic quality, local food production, etc.) into East Biloxi's land use and development pattern, for example:

- Wetlands and other areas that are especially vulnerable to flooding
- Neighborhood-serving parks and recreational facilities
- Community gardens, including urban agriculture as a small business activity
- Community gathering places and venues for special events (e.g., Town Green, Point Cadet, Lighthouse Visitors Center)
- Visitor-oriented recreation areas

Priority Actions

- Investigate developing a program to acquire lands from willing owners of properties in flood prone areas with no plans to rebuild.
- Work with landowners to use vacant properties for productive purposes such as community gardens.
- Reinforce open space and recreational features in East Biloxi in conjunction with developing the Biloxi Peninsula Path, including establishment of greenway corridors/connections per the Biloxi Greenways and Trails Plan.
- Consider purchase and set aside of public greenspace and ballpark at Harrison Court.

Strategy 6

Reinforce Downtown as the mixed-use center of activity for the local community, region, and beyond, including connections from East Biloxi's waterfront and neighborhood districts.

Priority Actions

- See Downtown Improvement Strategy (Section 9.5).

Strategy 7

Address the needs of East Biloxi residents for community facilities and services, including:

- A new library/civic center (planned for Howard Avenue)
- Neighborhood parks and playground equipment
- Neighborhood schools
- Community-based policing by the City of Biloxi in partnership with the East Biloxi neighborhood
- Fire and emergency services
- Community-based housing and social support services
- Community centers and educational opportunities to improve quality of life

Priority Actions

- Complete the new library/civic center on Howard Avenue and the new Lighthouse Visitors Center.
- Work with the East Biloxi community to develop neighborhood-serving recreational facilities.
- Maintain and update the City's emergency response and evacuation plan for East Biloxi as the neighborhood redevelops.

Strategy 8

Support the commercial seafood industry through actions such as reserving waterfront land for industry use; maintaining docking, fuel and ice, and other facilities and infrastructure needed to serve the commercial fishing fleet; and developing visitor attractions.

Priority Actions

- Create a “Seafood Village” on Bayview Avenue at Biloxi’s Back Bay.
- Create a visitor destination on Beach Boulevard at the “Museum District” with the construction of the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum.
- Consider a public fish market at the Small Craft Harbor marina across from Town Green.

Strategy 9

Expand economic opportunities for East Biloxi residents through programs such as job training, small business assistance, partnerships with major employers, etc.

Priority Action

- Support establishment by the Innovation Center of a new facility in Downtown Biloxi accessible to East Biloxi residents.

