

SMALL BUSINESS

Chairman: Adele Lyons

The purpose of this committee is to make recommendations that will improve the environment for small business in post-Katrina Biloxi. About four out of every five businesses in Mississippi is a “small business” – a firm with 20 or fewer employees. Yet those small firms provide more than \$4 billion in annual payroll and account for more job gains than any other sector of the state’s economy. Small businesses are more likely to be owned by women or minorities, thus creating greater opportunities for all Mississippians. Biloxi’s city government, casinos, and Keesler Air Force Base list among the city’s largest individual employers, but more of the city’s residents work for a small business than a large one, and those small businesses often provide critical support to the larger firms. Therefore, to revive the Renaissance in Biloxi it is critical for the city to create a healthy environment that encourages small business.

Recommendations

84. *Lobby Congress to seek changes in the HUBZone regulations to have the entire City of Biloxi designated as a HUBZone area. Louisiana Senator Vitter’s office is chairing this initiative. The current HUBZone designated areas in Biloxi are shown above. These areas were the hardest hit by Katrina and will be constrained in future designation by increasing land prices, lack of available housing and building regulatory requirements. Including*



Figure 5

the entire city in the HUBZone will offer the full HUBZone benefits to the entire city. The estimated cost to implement this recommendation is \$5,000.00 or less.

85. *Expand the scope of the new Community Center in East Biloxi to become a multi-purpose, multi-story building to meet many needs of the community. Ideas include the relocation of the downtown library as part of the Community Center building, the inclusion of classrooms for technical and workforce training programs presented by a higher education institution, additional recreational uses, the use of first floor rental retail space. (See Committee Exhibit B) The estimated cost to implement this recommendation is \$20 to 25 million.*
86. *Encourage USM Gulf Coast to investigate the relocation of the campus to the City of Biloxi. This would include the location of 100 to 200 acres of available property to be used for the relocation. The Mississippi Legislature should also be lobbied to allow dormitories for student housing as part of the campus. (See Committee Exhibit C) The estimated cost to implement this recommendation is none other than investigation and discussion of the possibility of this move.*
87. *Develop a plan to upgrade wireless Internet access throughout the City to create "hot spots" for connectivity. (See Committee Exhibit D) The estimated cost to implement this recommendation is \$5 million.*
88. *Develop a commerce park in the northern portion of the City to give businesses location options outside potential flood area. Consider offering this space/land at a reasonable rate to encourage small business growth, development and expansion. The estimated cost to implement is unknown at this time. It would be based on the land selected and number of acres purchased.*

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89. *Provide better communications and distribution of information for small businesses in Biloxi to assure all citizens are aware of the resources are available from various agencies. **The seminars could also include disaster preparation and planning presentations targeted to the small business community. The estimated cost to implement this recommendation is from \$30,000.00 to \$50,000.00 to add additional staff persons to the City's Community Development Department or the Greater Biloxi Economic Development Foundation to serve as community liaisons.***
90. *Investigate and implement grants/tax credits to small companies for employment including hiring and retaining family members as these parties are excluded as part of the Go Zone legislation. (See Committee Exhibit E) **The estimated cost to implement is unknown at this time but would be based on the number of affected companies.***
91. *Adopt a residential and commercial rent stabilization ordinance to offer affordable housing and office space for small businesses.*
92. *Adopt a vacancy fine for commercial locations to encourage property owners to lease or sell available property. (See Committee Exhibit F)*
93. *Monitor legal issues including non-regulation of business insurance, wages paid by FEMA, and unemployment tax rate increases.*
94. *Review and update the City's sign ordinance.*
95. *Encourage diversity of small business in the City of Biloxi and provide assistance to all businesses.*
96. *Revitalize the Vieux Marche area.*

