

# City of Biloxi Downtown Restoration – Public Hearing

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## Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District

**Submitted to:**  
Biloxi City Council  
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\*The following handout is provided to the Biloxi City Council as a summary of work to date and is not the final Downtown Restoration Plan.

## Executive Summary

On April 26, 2017, the City of Biloxi ("City") contracted with SMPDD to complete a Downtown Restoration Plan for the City. The Downtown Restoration Plan is a five-year plan established to respect the history of the downtown area while nurturing the City's future.



MAP OF BILOXI'S DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

The study area for the Downtown Restoration Plan is roughly defined as an area bound on the west by I-110, east by Lee Street, south by the waterfront, and north by all lots bordering the north side of Division Street. The map below demonstrates the geographic area of the main Downtown District for the City of Biloxi; for reference see the other maps in the attached

appendix that go into further detail of the surrounding area that is also discussed with this plan.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT  
IMAGE COLLECTION/BILOXI PUBLIC LIBRARY

sailing and diverse family entertainment venues. The image to the upper left depicts the construction of the original trolley tracks that ran along Howard Avenue while the image to the bottom right depicts a parade of soldiers decades later just a few blocks away.

Previously known as the Seafood Capital of the World and still home to many fishermen and seafood processors, Biloxi has evolved into a regional and national tourist and convention destination with world-class casinos, gourmet restaurants, marinas, deep-sea fishing, golfing,



SOLDIERS MARCHING ON HOWARD AVENUE

In August 1969, Hurricane Camille devastated Biloxi, accelerating the decline of retail businesses downtown that had begun in the early 1960s with the opening of Edgewater Mall in west Biloxi. The City responded by embarking on an Urban Renewal project that changed Howard Avenue from Reynoir Street to Lameuse Street to pedestrian-only foot traffic, renaming it the Vieux Marche mall, and removing almost all residential areas from Downtown Biloxi. The image to the right shows the destruction of roadbed and trolley tracks along Howard Avenue.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE JOE SCHOLTES COLLECTION



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The image to the left shows the finished construction of the Vieux Marche pedestrian mall in the 1970's that completely closed off vehicular traffic. The street failed as a pedestrian "mall" and in the 1990s the City opened it to one-way vehicular traffic, which has also failed to revive businesses.

The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends reversing the damaging effects of the 1970's Urban Renewal project that resulted in numerous storefronts left vacant, confusing one-way streets and non-grid system roadways, and loss of residential units. We recommend that Biloxi cease using the term "Vieux Marche" and refer to the street simply as Howard Avenue. The Downtown Restoration Plan for the City of Biloxi will lay the foundation for the City to restore Downtown Biloxi back to its vibrant and historically authentic self.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT IMAGE COLLECTION/BILOXI PUBLIC LIBRARY

During the first fiscal year of the Downtown Restoration Plan, the primary objective is to restore two-way vehicular traffic to Howard Avenue from Reynoir Street to Lameuse Street, with historically authentic storefronts, which can be seen in the image to the right circa 1966-67. Similar to its layout before Urban Renewal, the road configuration should provide parking along both sides and should balance pedestrian sidewalk access with vehicular access.



HOWARD AVENUE CIRCA 1966 - 1967

The City of Biloxi joins a multitude of other downtown communities that have suffered the damaging effects of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Urban Renewal that saw the dramatic destruction of their downtown infrastructure. A nationwide study performed by the Downtown Fresno Partnership found that public streets converted to open-air pedestrian malls in the United States have an 89% failure rate and that an overwhelming majority have already been converted back to two-way vehicular traffic or otherwise repurposed. The study showed that communities who convert their downtown streets from pedestrian malls or from one-way traffic to two-way vehicular traffic experience the following:

- Improved economic well-being of the downtown district
- Fewer vacant floor spaces
- Improvements in retail sales
- Increased property values
- Increased private investments
- Greater pedestrian traffic
- Greater pedestrian safety.

The Downtown Restoration Plan prioritizes key annual projects by year, spread throughout the five-year plan. The Plan recommends the following key projects to begin in the first fiscal year of the Plan:

- Return two-way vehicular traffic to Howard Avenue (Reynoir St. to redone east intersection with Martin Luther King Blvd.)
- Restoration of Saenger Theatre and Saenger Alley
- Restoration and renovation of the Barq Building to authentic façade and live-work spaces for small businesses and affordable rents
- Public-private partnerships to build camouflaged parking garages in Downtown Biloxi (demonstrated in the image to the right);
- Return Water Street to two-way vehicular traffic;
- Hwy 90 crosswalks at MGM Park and Small Craft Harbor;
- Wi-Fi throughout Downtown District.



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A five-year list of the recommended projects can be found on pages 7-8 below, under the section titled “Downtown Restoration: Five-Year Plan.” Major goals of the Downtown Restoration Plan are to incent

- More multi-use buildings with affordable rents for small retail and tourism-related business
- More residential units, especially in live-work buildings with commercial of first floor and residential on upper floors
- A more walkable, livable, area attractive and affordable to young workers and entrepreneurs
- Safe and friendly streets and public spaces with the look and feel of historic Biloxi with authentic facades and streetscapes
- A variety of food service, retail shopping, art galleries, and entertainment businesses attractive to tourists and area residents
- Spaces that encourage high-tech start-ups and training of high-tech skills
- A dramatic increase in sales and resulting sales tax
- A dramatic increase in good paying job opportunities.

The goals, incentives, tasks, and projects recommended in this plan will improve the quality of life for both Biloxi’s citizens and visitors throughout the City, because implementation of this plan will dramatically increase the City’s tax base in order to better fund public infrastructure, education and amenities through the entire City.

## Introduction



The Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District (“SMPDD”) was established as a private, non-profit corporation to serve as a liaison between local government and the various state, regional and federal agencies involved in economic, community and human development. Established in 1967, SMPDD has extensive expertise in a wide range of regional planning issues, including comprehensive planning, the preparation of federal grant applications and project administration throughout the fifteen county and thirty-eight municipality area of South Mississippi. For over nearly fifty years, SMPDD has maintained a broad network of relationships at the local, regional, state and federal levels.

## Scope of Work

The Scope of Work for the City of Biloxi’s Downtown Restoration Plan performed by SMPDD included the following tasks:

1. Collection and Review of Existing Plans;
2. General Assessment; Consultation with Mayor and His Designees, Consultation with City Council;
3. Goals, Objectives and Priorities; Public Hearing at City Council Meeting;
4. Action Plan and Recommendations;
5. Explore and Identify Potential Funding Streams.

## Methodology

SMPDD first collected all existing and previous plans created on behalf of the City of Biloxi; these plans date back to the late 1960’s. Then the Downtown Restoration Team, made of Mayor Gilich, City employees, Biloxi citizens, consultants, and SMPDD staff, worked together to define and prioritize the projects, incentives and opportunities in the plan that will stimulate the full restoration of Downtown Biloxi. The Downtown Restoration Team consulted with the Biloxi City Council at its meeting on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, to present the status of the plan and receive input from the City Council and the public. SMPDD then conducted a survey to garner a sample of opinions from those located along Howard Avenue from Reynoir Street to Lameuse Street. The overwhelming majority of those surveyed support the restoration of Howard Avenue to two-way vehicular traffic. The Mayor and City Council will hold a public hearing on the plan at the City Council meeting on July 18, 2017. After the hearing, SMPDD will review the input from the hearing and finalize the plan for presentation to the Mayor and Council in early August 2017.

## Downtown Restoration: Five-Year Plan Timetable

SMPDD has created a five-year plan and timetable for the restoration of Downtown Biloxi by gaining vital information through meetings with the Biloxi City Council, the Downtown Restoration Planning Team, and the public.

City of Biloxi Downtown Restoration Timeline	
Year(s)	Brief Description
2017 - 2018	Return Howard Avenue (Reynoir to redone MLK east intersection) to two-way vehicular traffic.
2017 - 2022	Create Downtown TIF District and Downtown 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate District; establish grant/loan program for façade and building restorations on Howard Avenue on condition of lower rental rates for new businesses.
2017 - 2018	Complete restoration of the Saenger Theatre and Saenger Alley.
2017 - 2018	Restoration of the Barq Building on Howard Avenue to become a multi-use building and incent live, work, small business uses.
2017 - 2018	Implement a small business grant/loan program for the Division Street Historic District Restoration; the focus will be on the intersection of Division St. and Main St.
2017 - 2018	Hwy 90 crosswalks at MGM Park and Small Craft Harbor.
2017 - 2018	Enhance the Biloxi Farmers Market area and orient it to Howard Avenue for pedestrian entrance.
2017 - 2020	Public-private partnerships to build three, camouflaged parking garages with facades and spaces for commercial on first floor and residential above. Potential locations include: old federal building parking lot; existing parking lot north and east of Saenger; between Magnolia and Ohr south of Howard.
2018 - 2019	Return Water Street to two-way vehicular traffic.
2018 - 2019	Sound and visual barriers for Merit Hospital at Rue Magnolia.
2018 - 2022	Implement a small business grant/loan program for the Division Street Historic District Restoration; the focus will be Division St. from Lee St. to Bohn St.
2019 - 2020	Return Rue Magnolia between Howard Ave. and MLK Blvd. to two-way vehicular traffic.
2019 - 2020	Update Rue Magnolia between Howard Ave. and Hwy 90
2019 - 2020	Enhance Rue Magnolia Park
2020 - 2021	Update and enhance Rue Magnolia Welcome Plaza
2020 - 2021	Waterfront boardwalks from Small Craft Harbor to Biloxi Lighthouse.
2021 - 2022	Enhance Howard Ave. from Porter Ave. to Oak Street

\*Timeline continued on the following page.

City of Biloxi Downtown Restoration Timeline	
Year(s)	Brief Description
2017 - 2022	Enhance Wi-Fi throughout the Downtown District.
2017 - 2022	Lighting, underground utilities for all of the Downtown District.
2017 - 2022	Implement a solution for the homeless population; Homeless Transition Center.
2017 - 2022	Enhance all streets in grid south of Division St. from I-110 to Lee Street.
2017 - 2022	Increase and update way finding/signage throughout the Downtown District.
2017 - 2022	Create a furnishings plan to be used in the Downtown District.
2017 - 2022	Thirty-year tree planting and native flowers restoration plan for Downtown District.
2017 - 2022	Update the roadway striping throughout the entire Downtown District.

**TABLE 1: CITY OF BILOXI – FIVE-YEAR DOWNTOWN RESTORATION TIMELINE**

\*The items in the above timeline are based on a fiscal-year-timeframe for the City of Biloxi. Some items in the above table are multi-year or overlapping projects and are reflected as such.



## Downtown Restoration: FY 2017 – 2018

The table below depicts certain prioritized projects that are recommended to occur or begin during FY 2017 – 2018. As seen towards the forgoing Timeline, there are other initiatives that are recommended to begin in FY 2017 and will continue during the remainder of the five-year timeframe.

City of Biloxi – Fiscal Year 2017 2018 Downtown Restoration Budget	
Project Estimate	Project Description
\$1,000,000 - \$1,500,000.00*	Return Howard Avenue (Reynoir to MLK east intersection) to two-way vehicular traffic.
TBD	Create Downtown TIF District and Downtown 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate District; establish grant/loan program for façade and building restorations on Howard Avenue on condition of lower rental rates for new businesses.
\$1,500,000.00*	Complete exterior restoration of the Saenger Theatre and Saenger Alley.
TBD	Restoration of the Barq Building on Howard Avenue to become a multi-use building and incent affordable live, work, small business uses.
TBD	Implement a small business grant/loan program for the Division Street Historic District.
TBD	Begin public private partnership for camouflaged parking garages with commercial on street side.
TBD	Hwy 90 crosswalks at MGM Park and Small Craft Harbor.
TBD	Enhance the Biloxi Farmers Market area oriented to Howard Avenue.

**TABLE 1: CITY OF BILOXI – FY 2017 – 2018 DOWNTOWN RESTORATION BUDGET**

\*The above figures are estimates and will vary depending on the project bidding and approval of the Biloxi City Council.

## **Return Howard Avenue (Reynoir to MLK Blvd. east of intersection) to two-way vehicular traffic.**

Year: 2017-2018

Paramount to the Downtown Restoration Plan is reinstating two-way traffic along Howard Avenue from Reynoir Street to beyond Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Approximately 114 parking spaces can be provided along this section of downtown through a mixture of angled and parallel stalls.

The Downtown Restoration Planning Team recommends that the City reconfigure the intersection of Howard Avenue and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to a more standard 4-way intersection (to line up with Dukate) or to a roundabout. The current layout routes westbound Howard Avenue traffic to the north along Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, essentially creating a one-way street (eastbound) along Howard Avenue between Main Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

In an effort to provide continuity along Howard Avenue, the City should mill and overlay Howard Avenue from Lameuse to the east intersection with Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and ensure existing sidewalks are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

A preliminary construction estimate is approximately \$1 million to \$1.5 million (depending on which items above are considered) and could be completed in 6 months or less. This cost could increase depending on any special design considerations selected by the City (i.e. brick for roadways, sidewalks, or crosswalks; expedited construction schedules; additional lighting, etc.)

Pickering Engineering provides the rendering on the following page. The rendering depicts Howard Avenue from Reynoir Street to Lameuse Street and incorporates the reintroduction of two-way vehicular traffic to the area. Of note from the rendering are the numerous parking spaces made available throughout this region with approximately 114 parking spaces available from Reynoir Street to Lameuse Street.

Funding is available from the City's 2017 G.O. Bond.



**Create Downtown TIF District and Downtown 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate District; establish grant/loan program for façade and building restorations on Howard Avenue on condition of lower rental rates for new businesses.**

The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends incentives for current and new businesses in the Downtown District, to recruit and retain businesses. The Plan recommends that the city create a new Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District for Downtown Biloxi, in order to assist in financing proposed projects, based on the increments in ad valorem tax revenues that will be generated by proposed projects and from growth already occurring in the Downtown District. Likewise, the Plan recommends the City create a 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate District for the Downtown to incent tourism-related businesses.

The Plan recommends the City establish a building façade and restoration grant/loan program that could be funded through available federal, state and local grant and loan programs, for which the City should immediately apply and through TIF bonds and 70% Sales Tax Rebates. The building façade and restoration program would incent existing or new property owners in the Downtown District to create historically authentic facades and live-work spaces at affordable rates. Similar programs have found great success along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

**Complete exterior restoration of the Saenger Theatre and Saenger Alley.**



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT IMAGE COLLECTION/BILOXI PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Saenger Theatre was constructed in 1929 and became a city building in 1975. Crucial to the restoration of Downtown Biloxi is the complete restoration of the exterior and interior of the Saenger Theatre and Saenger Alley in FY 17-18, which will improve the quality of life of Biloxians and increase the number of visitors to the City. The image to the left depicts the Saenger Theatre in the late 1970's. Funds are available from CDBG, MDAH grants and the City 2017 G.O. Bond.

**Restoration and renovation of the Barq Building on Howard Avenue to become a multi-use building and to incent live, work opportunities and small business uses.**

The Downtown Restoration Team recommends a program to incent restoration and renovation of the Barq Building. The Barq Building represents a significant opportunity to become the new standard for historic renovations for mixed-use in Downtown Biloxi that incorporates both residential and commercial uses that are affordable and attractive to young entrepreneurs.



PHOTO FROM THE GOLLOTT LYONS REAL ESTATE LISTING ON LOOPNET

This project could be financed through a public-private partnership combination of private investment, TIF bonds, 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate, federal and state grant/loan programs, and the City's Economic Development Security Fund.

**Implement a small business grant/loan program for the Division Street Historic District from Bohn Street to Lee Street.**

The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends that the City establish in FY 17-18 a small business grant/loan program for the Division Street Historic District from Bohn Street to Lee Street, to assist in the recruitment and retention of small businesses in the Division Street Historic District. This program could be financed through a public-private partnership combination of private investment, TIF bonds, 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate, federal and state grant/loan programs, and the City's Economic Development Security Fund.

**Sound and visual barriers for Merit Hospital facing Rue Magnolia. New commercial building at Merit's interface with Howard Avenue.**

In order to reinstate a safe, walkable, authentic and enjoyable Downtown Biloxi it is important to consider the cosmetic exterior of existing buildings and the effects of noise and other nuisances. For example, certain noise and visual intrusions emanate from the Merit Health build and its associated equipment at Rue Magnolia and at Howard Avenue. The images below provide a visual of the existing conditions on the exterior of the hospital. The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends visual and sound barriers to buffer such visual and noise impacts. The Plan also recommends the City incent a multiuse building on the north edge of the Merit Health property along Howard Avenue. This program could be financed through a public-private partnership combination of private investment, TIF bonds, 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate, and federal and state grant/loan programs.



*The image to the left shows Merit Hospital from Rue Magnolia.*

*The image to the bottom right shows a windshield view of Merit Health from Howard Avenue.*



**Enhance the Biloxi Farmers Market area orient it to Howard Avenue for a pedestrian entrance and sidewalk cafe.**



THE BILOXI FARMERS MARKET

Currently the Biloxi Farmers Market resides under the I-110 overpass with nothing protecting the customers or those selling at the market from outside elements except for the overpass. The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends enhancement to the Biloxi Farmers Market to

increase the pedestrian attractiveness to this area. The Plan recommends an open-air place for an individual to sit and have a cup of coffee and enjoy the scene. The Plan recommends the market be reoriented towards Howard Avenue by incorporating a pedestrian entrance, sidewalk café and, semi-permanent awnings. This project could be funded by TIF bonds, 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate, or by the City's Economic Development Security Fund.

**Public-private partnerships to build three, camouflaged parking facilities with authentic commercial building facades and spaces for retail on first floor.**

The Downtown Restoration Plan recommends public-private partnerships to fund and construct three camouflaged parking facilities to accommodate the Downtown District. The parking facilities would have authentic facades and spaces for retail and commercial businesses on the first floor and possibly higher floors. Potential locations for the parking facilities include: the old federal building parking lot; current lot north and east of the Saenger Theatre; and between Rue Magnolia and Ohr Street, south of Howard Avenue. The image to the right is an example of a camouflaged parking facility in Charleston, South Carolina. These projects could be financed through a public-private partnership combination of private investment, TIF bonds, 70% Tourism Sales Tax Rebate, federal and state grant/loan programs, parking garage revenue bonds, and the City's Economic Development Security Fund.



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## Attachments

### Maps of Biloxi Downtown Restoration Districts

Figure 1 - Downtown District

Figure 2 - Division Street West

Figure 3 - Howard Avenue East

Figure 4 - Howard Avenue West



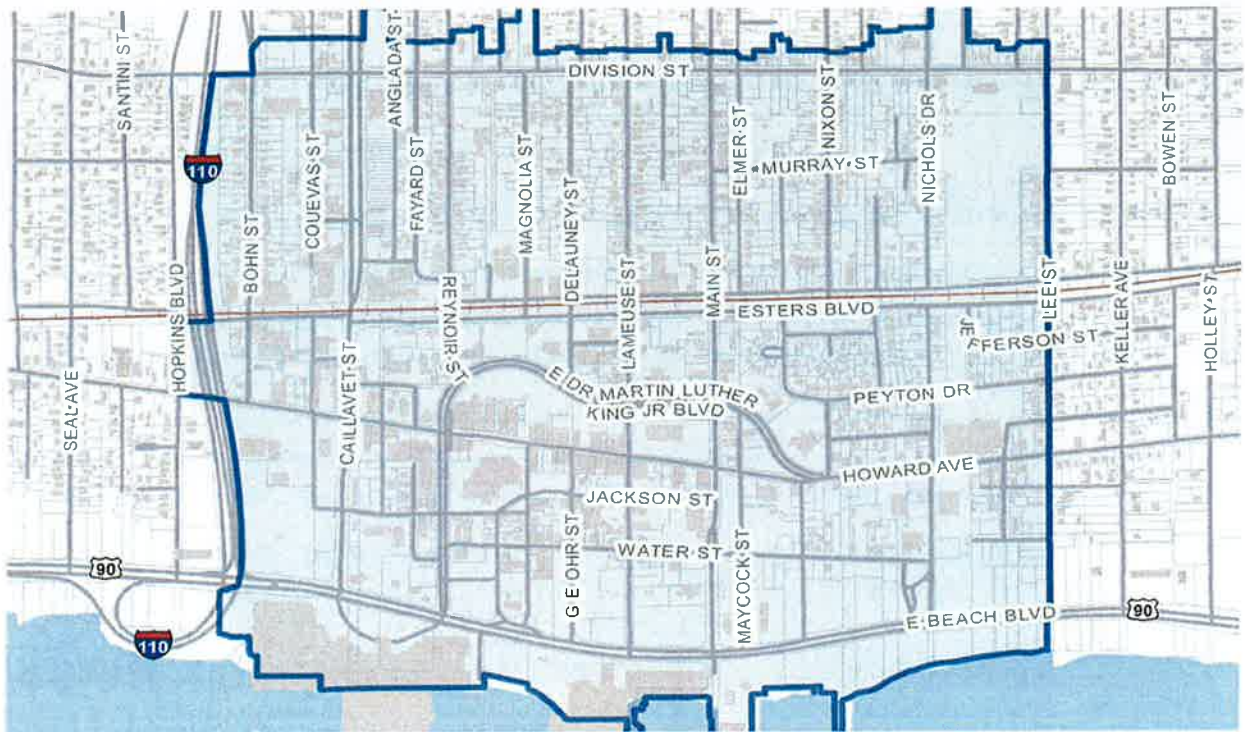


FIGURE 1 – CITY OF BILOXI – DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

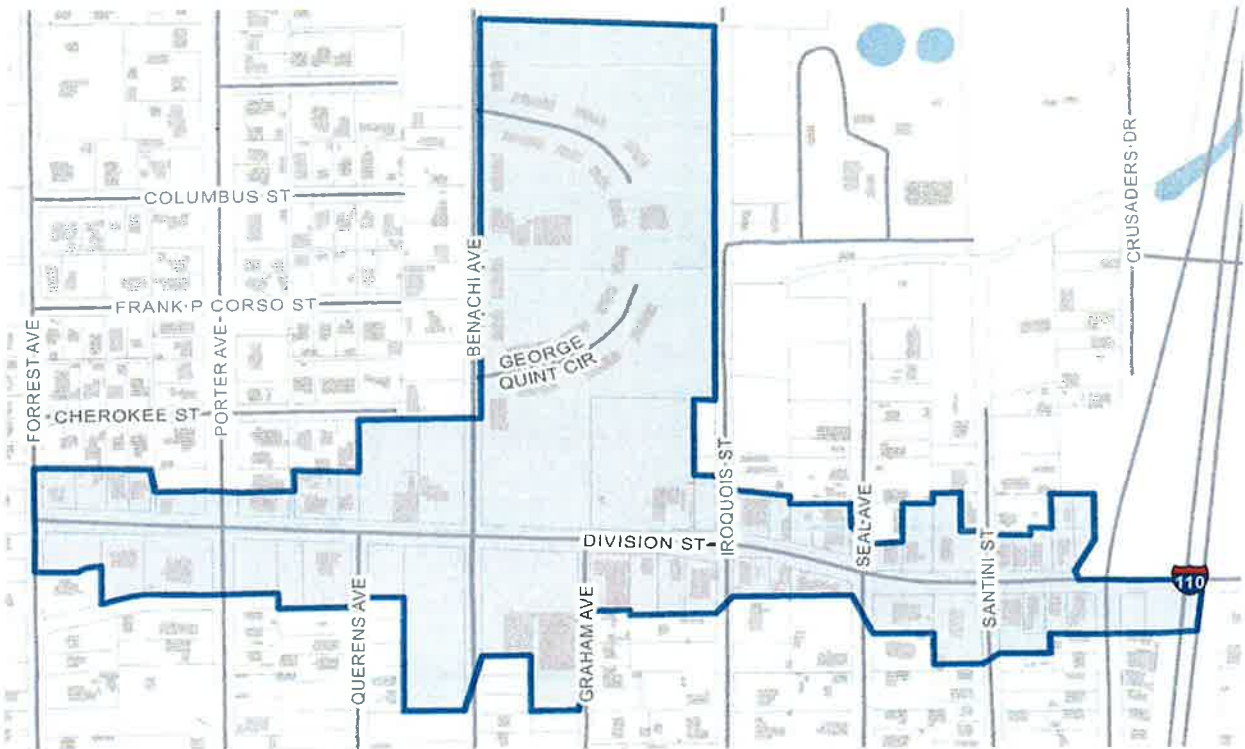


FIGURE 2 – CITY OF BILOXI – DIVISION STREET WEST

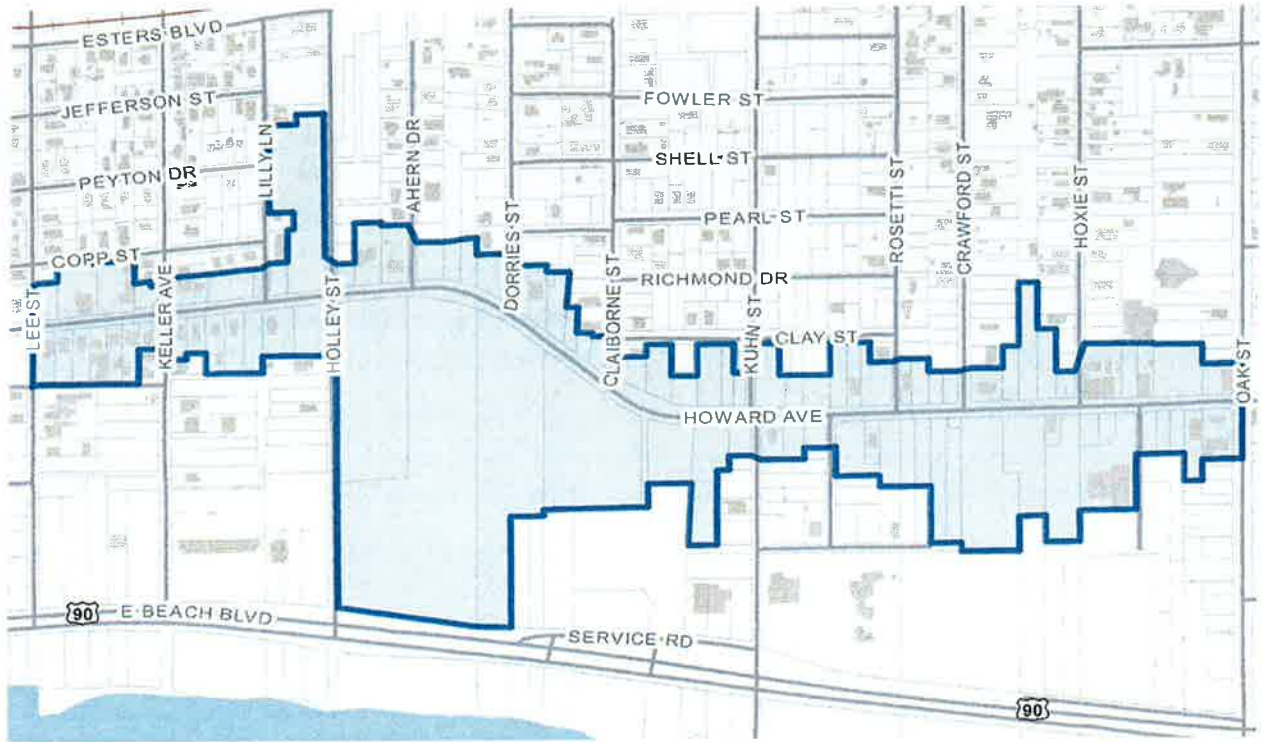


FIGURE 3 – CITY OF BILOXI – HOWARD AVENUE EAST

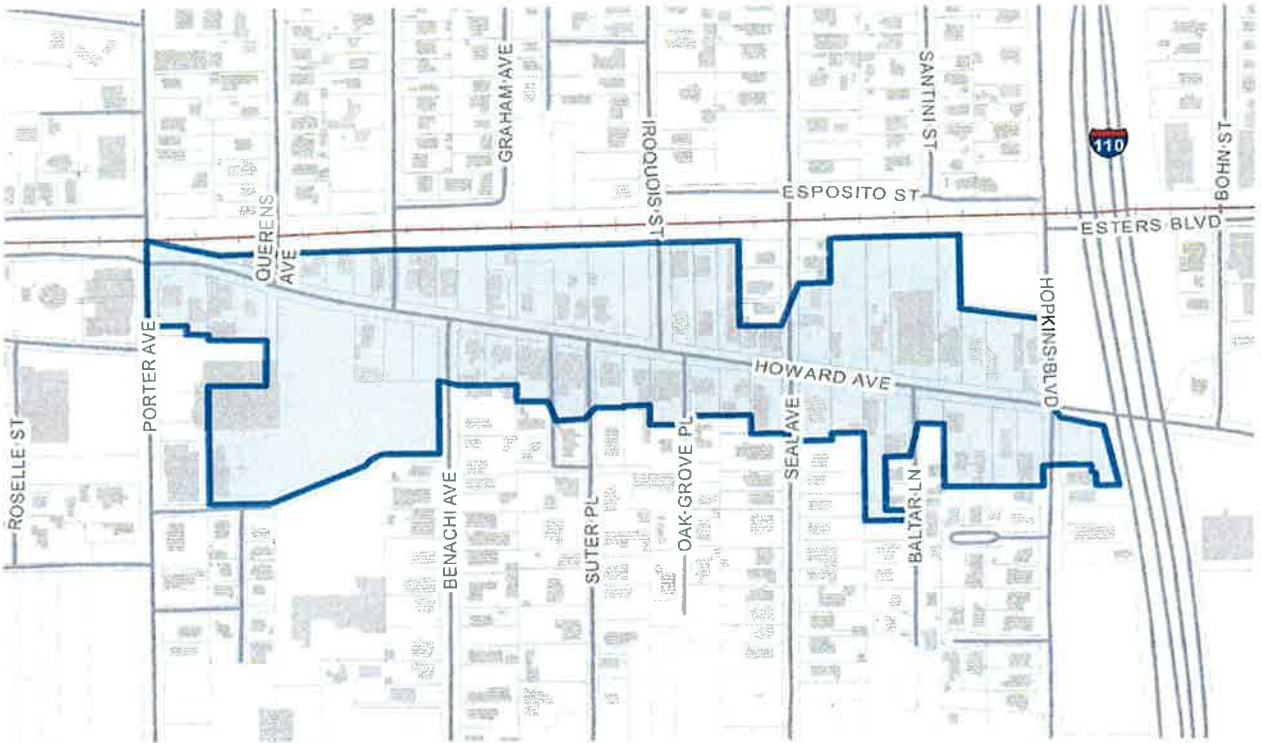


FIGURE 4 – CITY OF BILOXI – HOWARD AVENUE WEST