

INTRODUCTION

The Biloxi Waterfront Master Plan is a cooperative venture of the City of Biloxi, the Biloxi Port Commission, and the Greater Biloxi Economic Development Foundation, with management and coordination provided by the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District. Acting on behalf of the three sponsors, the District secured a coastal management grant from the Bureau of Marine Resources, Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation, to prepare a long-range plan and development program for the Biloxi Waterfront. The planning process cost approximately \$160,000, including substantial in-kind contributions of local staff time and facilities.

As stated in the District's original proposal to the Bureau of Marine Resources, "the purpose of the study is to identify generally the potentials for development, redevelopment, preservation or protection of the Biloxi waterfront and near areas and to suggest a strategy for public and private investment in these areas over the next ten to twenty years. Special focus will be given to the Point Cadet and Rhodes Point areas. The end product of this effort will be a master plan and development strategy synthesized from relevant planning studies concerning the Biloxi Waterfront."

Studies reviewed during the year-long planning process have included:

Development Histories and Trend Analyses

- Inventories of Historical, Architectural and Cultural Interests
- Demographic Analysis and Forecasts
- Market and Feasibility Research
- Surveys of Public Attitudes and Perceived Needs
- Land Use Plans and Capital Improvement Programs
- Preliminary Engineering Reports and Cost Estimates
- Investigations of Potential Environmental Impact and Proposed Mitigation Measures

Relevant information from these reports have been synthesized into specific development plans and programs. These analyses and proposals are organized within the plan document according to the following chapter format:

- 1) Groundwork - study background and local perceptions;
- 2) Inventory - geographic, historical, cultural and socio-economic analyses;
- 3) Concepts - long range, conceptual plans;
- 4) Strategy - investment strategies, public improvement programs and management proposals; and
- 5) Appendices - environmental impact analysis, market research, proposed regulatory policies, and public comments.

The first two chapters set the stage for plan recommendations with introductory information and resource, trend and needs analysis. The "concepts" chapter graphically depicts long-range proposals for redevelopment in strategic waterfront locations. The fourth chapter, "strategy", outlines a general program for plan implementation over the near, middle and long terms.

The more technical and/or detailed reports and documentation generated as part of the planning process are attached as appendices.

The planning process was directed by the Waterfront Executive Committee composed of the mayor, a port commissioner, and the president of the development foundation. The "in-kind" planning staff was comprised of professionals from various city departments, the port, the development foundation, the chamber of commerce and other interested agencies. The Executive Committee, through a highly competitive selection process, also enlisted the services of several consulting firms experienced in waterfront development to assist with preliminary engineering, urban design, market research and environmental analysis.

To ensure that the plan represents a consensus of opinions and attitudes within the community, a Waterfront Policy Council, comprised by representatives of the various interest groups which may be affected by the plan, was loosely structured to encourage optimal citizen involvement. Plan elements were presented to this group at five public forums to solicit reactions and recommendations.

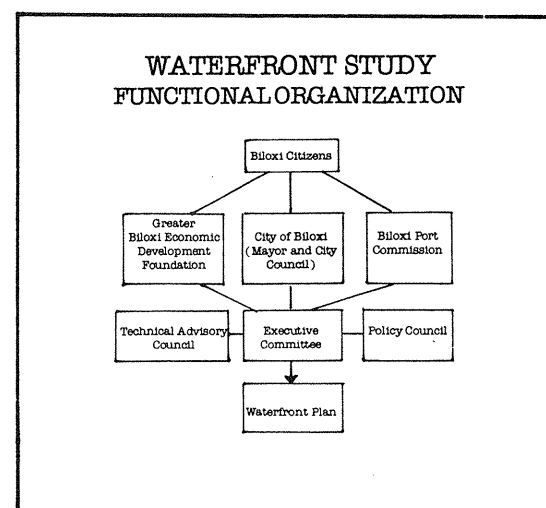
A Waterfront Technical Advisory Council also represented about thirty local, state and federal agencies with professional expertise in planning, development, regulation and financing. This group has helped to keep the plan realistic, technically feasible, and environmentally sensitive.

The planning process has drawn upon local culture, history, economy and political structure to proposed waterfront plans that are unique to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Some of the major proposals include a festival market; planned, mixed-use redevelopment; improved public access through waterfront walkways, piers and recreation areas; museums and displays of traditional waterfront; and expanded marina facilities for commercial vessels, pleasure craft and visiting boats.

The plan's development programs focus on leveraging as much private investment as possible through improvements to existing public facilities, and also through the provision of available financial resources and technical assistance to businesses that need to locate in selected waterfront areas. (There currently appears to be considerable investor interest along the waterfront, both locally and regionally.) In addition, the prospects for possible federal assistance, as well as the opportunities for local creative (non-tax) financing are identified.

Although considerable information is depicted in this Master Plan, it is not a means to address all ends. It is not a "cure-all to end all ills." The waterfront plan is a general, "broad-brush" attempt to initiate an on-going, rational process of waterfront renewal within Biloxi. Planning should be viewed as a continuous process, and not as a specific set of documents or studies. The broad-based, locally-controlled process established to develop this plan must be continued for the comprehensive recommendations of the plan to have any pragmatic impact.

The plan is but a recommended set of guidelines designed to aid in realistic and flexible implementation of the planning process. The people of Biloxi—not the plan—must drive the process.



groundwork



groundwork (ground'wûrk') n. A foundation; basis; preliminary work.