

## **Meeting Minutes for Community Meeting on the St. Bernard Avenue Plan on Wednesday, March 27**

On March 27th at 6PM, the student team hosted a community meeting open to the public. 56 community members signed in, although a few more arrived late or left early. We estimate roughly 70 people attended in total. Channel 6 (the local NBC affiliate) News was also present.

As people arrived, we asked them to take part in a few mapping activities. The following cultural landmarks and historic sites identified were: Saint Augustine, Corpus Christi Church, Fulton Insurance, Autocrat Club, Sacred Heart Church, and Circle Foods. The businesses most frequented by our participants include: Prime Example, Walgreens, Buttermilk Drop, and the Autocrat Club. Other noted businesses were Triangle Deli, Manchu Food Store, Hunan Wok, Seal's Class Act, St. Bernard Beauty Supply, Danny's Seafood, Circle H Meat Market, The Wisdom, Bertha's Place, Poor Boys, The Goat, Sidney's Saloon, King's Supermarket, and Corpus Christi. When asked where they gather with friends, family, or neighbors, participants indicated Corpus Christi Church, Buttermilk Drop, Nora Navra Library, The Autocrat Club, Hunter's Field, Sidney's Saloon, Poorboys. Someone also noted the Sausage Factory, and that it will return in 2020.

We presented our research and findings so far, then asked people to help us prioritize potential areas of focus on a handout sheet. We received 18 completed handouts. For people's first priority, the top area of focus was Support Existing and Emerging Businesses (33.33%), with Reclaim Community Land, Expand Affordable Housing, and Protect Community Health as runners up (11.11% for each), and Invest in Public Infrastructure and Transportation Services also mentioned (5.56%). For scheduling future meetings, weeknights after 5 p.m. emerged as the clear best option (61.11%). We feel it is important that these results be taken in conjunction with broad themes from conversations, as these handouts represent only a small portion of those who attended the meeting.

After giving people time to review and fill out the handout, we broke the group down into six smaller groups to facilitate discussion for about 30 minutes, before coming back together and reporting out what each group discussed.

What we heard from community members present is that we should not be looking at St. Bernard Avenue as only a commercial corridor; any plan should include the residential and cultural aspects of the neighborhood as well as the commercial. The culture in particular should be highlighted and maintained, particularly as new residents are welcomed in, and the rich cultural history should be passed on to both newcomers and the younger generation.

We also heard that affordability is a major concern, both for housing and for business owners and for business types. This included concerns over rising rents, barriers to home ownership, the impact of short term rentals (which residents stated are less regulated in the 7th Ward than they are in some other neighborhoods) on the housing market, and rising property taxes as issues which are displacing current residents. There was a call to help develop local businesses

and generate local employment to keep the wealth generated in the 7th Ward, and to make sure that businesses introduced offer products and services which local residents can afford.

We heard a lot about stormwater management as an issue; there are several areas of standing water that remain after every rain event, and there are concerns about what another flood like the one that impacted Circle Foods would have on businesses and residents.

We heard a lot about improving walkability; that many local residents might not have cars and also how dangerous crossing some of the streets are. Improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, more traffic and street lighting were all suggested.

We heard a lot about reclaiming vacant land to create more parks and also to create community gardens. Creating these places would also help create more of a sense of community. Participants felt strongly that there are not enough spaces in general for youth and elderly residents to spend time; suggestions included a youth center and an elderly center, more youth programming at times of day appropriate for children, and skill-building programs or job opportunities unemployed men in the 18-45 demographic. One participant also suggested educating formerly incarcerated residents that they could have their conviction removed from their record after 10 years, to help with getting jobs. Some residents also suggested putting a park near the Library (e.g., at the Liberty bank site) to integrate different community sites. Also missing from the corridor are health clinics, banks, child care, and access to fresh or healthy food.

We heard about the importance of financial literacy, both for business owners and entrepreneurs as well as residents. Many lots have disputed ownership due to unclear succession, which lead to many family homes being lost. Seniors need help understanding how rising tax assessments can be dealt with. Unclear succession may be at the root of some of the vacancies, while others owe a significant amount of debt or in taxes, and other owners are sitting on the land waiting for land prices to rise.

Something else we heard about was improving the image of the district, in order to make it a place people want to invest in. This includes removal or renovation of abandoned buildings along the corridor. It was also suggested that the corridor could use a business association.

One group talked about the population loss in the seventh ward being a key driver to the loss of some businesses, and wanting to reverse that trend.

In terms of job training, we heard people wanting to ensure that it was geared to well paying jobs, and that there should be more job opportunities along St. Bernard for unemployed residents (e.g., construction apprenticeship programs).

Finally people wanted a means of staying connected and receiving information; one suggestion was a local community paper. Some community members also suggested neighborhood walks and community policing to improve feelings of public safety.

As anticipated, there are clear needs and desires for attention to all of these areas of focus. We feel it will be crucial to note in our final report that all of these subjects received support, even as we pursue one or a few more narrowly. The community meeting discussions suggested that affordability, ownership, and infrastructure might be major priorities. The survey responses suggested that small business support, ownership, and infrastructure might be major priorities.

## **Minutes of Meeting with Stakeholders for St. Bernard Avenue Plan on Friday, March 29**

### Attendees:

- Brenda, NORA
- Seth Knudson, NORA
- Lionel Scott, AP Tureaud Neighborhood Improvement Association [an association of 1]
- Jeff Schwartz, Broad Street Community Connections
- RoseAngel Taylor, NewCorp
- Will Bowling, St. Bernard Avenue Resident
- Abby King, Pretty Blue House LLC
- Neel, Pretty Blue House LLC
- Morgan Clevenger, Fairgrounds Triangle Neighborhood Association
- Todd Higgins, Black Men of Labor
- Asali DeVan Ecclesiastes, Claiborne Neighborhood Improvement Association

### Minutes

The team from MIT delivered its presentation on our findings so far, and then opened the meeting up for discussion with stakeholders. During the discussion portion of the meeting, the following topics were discussed:

- Recognizing that St. Bernard Avenue is not just a commercial corridor, but a mixed use corridor with many residential establishments.
- The importance of ensuring that our work reflects the culture of St. Bernard throughout.
- Concerns about displacement of businesses and residents, and the importance of affordable housing. We will look further into examples of cases where areas developed without fueling displacement.
- The importance of collaborating closely with stakeholders and sharing information, to avoid duplicating stakeholders' work and to maximize the value of our plan for St. Bernard.
- The extent to which the city will support development on St. Bernard Avenue, and the importance of accounting for youth on St. Bernard Avenue.
- Potential uses of the plan after MIT finishes its work on the plan in May.
- Potential areas of focus for the remainder of the project. Among our six options for focus areas going forward, stakeholders expressed the most support for affordable housing, supporting small and existing businesses, and investing in infrastructure improvements and mobility services (the other options being community land reclamation; developing job opportunities; and protecting community health). We also discussed the [new housing ordinance](#) in New Orleans, and the importance of supporting both renters and homeowners on St. Bernard.
- Use of parks and green spaces along St. Bernard. Stakeholders discussed the need for more parks and green spaces in the community, and potential projects on Hunter's Field.