

February 2005



*Envision Gulf Shores*

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opportunity • collaboration • future



# *Envision Gulf Shores*

A VISIONARY PLAN  
FOR THE COMMUNITY OF GULF SHORES, ALABAMA

FEBRUARY 2005





## CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR GULF SHORES

*Gulf Shores is a community poised for change. Over the years, it has experienced periods of both rapid and gradual change transforming from a once sleepy beach hamlet into a bustling vacation destination. In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan, a Category 3 hurricane, made landfall with maximum sustained winds near 130 mph. The Gulf spilled across the island, transporting massive amounts of sand landward, undermining buildings and roads, and opening new island breaches. Breaking waves leveled dunes and battered structures.*

Elected officials, local businesses and residents of Gulf Shores responded to the devastation Ivan left behind. There was determination, optimism and a strong desire to rebuild the community into a special place; a place at once unique and interesting.

In November 2004, Jordan, Jones & Goulding (JJG) was commissioned to guide the City of Gulf Shores through a visioning process. The aim was to help the City and its residents articulate their future, identifying tools needed to realize their future. The study focused on the beach area and Gulf Place, and the unique challenges found there.

Throughout the *Envision Gulf Shores* process, over 400 individuals came together to identify characteristics that define their ideal community. The preferences expressed by the Gulf Shores community can be distilled into seven simple goals:

- > Economic vitality
- > Less traffic

- > More open and common community space
- > A friendlier place for pedestrians and cyclists
- > An aesthetically pleasing and dynamic town center
- > A respect for the City's heritage and local flavor
- > A good place for families

While many of those elements are missing today, the wisdom of the people of Gulf Shores has prevailed. They understand that people behave differently in a new environment. In a pedestrian-friendly community, more people are likely to walk than drive. More people will frequent a town center that is safe, beautiful, relaxing and filled with activity. They understand that merchants and businesses want to be part of a special place. They understand that

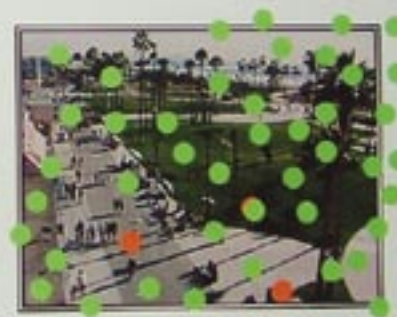
making special places requires people, public officials and private businesses to work together. They understand that with leadership, collaboration and patience, Gulf Shores *can be* a place people want to be.

That is the inspiration behind *Envision Gulf Shores*. Read this new plan... embrace it... and make it yours.





The community participated in several exercises rating photographs on how appropriate they were for the beach area. Placing green dots on favorites and orange dots on least favorites, participants voted for pictures with a strong pedestrian orientation, interesting architecture and comfortable surroundings.



# HEARING THE VOICE OF GULF SHORES

“When over 400 concerned stakeholders come together to create a better community,



something great is bound to happen.”

—Ellen Keys, Director of Community Development at Jordan, Jones & Goulding

*“We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone... And whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.”* – Justice Sandra Day O’Connor

*Envision Gulf Shores*, the public participation process for the Gulf Shores *Visionary Plan*, not only provided opportunities for citizen input, but also generated dialogue, enthusiasm and excitement for the future of the community. The public involvement strategy was grounded in the notion that to empower citizens, they had to be provided specific, relevant facts and information. By doing so, they could provide meaningful input gained through a thorough understanding of the issues, options and choices facing them. The process was designed not to tell people what their future should be like, but rather to listen to how people wanted to live and then help them achieve that vision.

#### HAVING THEIR SAY...

The meeting process held in conjunction with the development of the *Visionary Plan* included a series of meetings open to the public at large, and a series of focus groups and interviews. The public meetings included a Community Kick-off, a four-day Community Design Workshop and an Open House of the draft *Visionary Plan*. A diverse group of business owners, residents and officials attended each event. Sessions included both

stakeholder education and involvement in laying the framework for the future of Gulf Shores. The citizens of Gulf Shores began to understand the various strengths of their existing environment, allowing them to form opinions about areas for improvement and their vision of future growth and redevelopment.

Various tools and exercises were used throughout the community involvement process. Those activities, combined with facilitated and spirited discussion, enabled participants to find consensus around common themes. During interactive design sessions, the community worked with a team of experts to create solutions for issues within their community. Issues identified included land use, traffic congestion, walkability, tourism and urban design. During a map exercise, participants placed arrow stickers on a map of the United States, pointing out their favorite beach area. This led to an informative discussion of those beach towns, revealing several themes and lessons for the redevelopment of Gulf Shores. After the Visioning Workshop, participants were given disposable cameras and asked to photograph the good, the bad and ugly in Gulf Shores. The resulting 300 photographs created a framework of community assets and liabilities for the *Envision Gulf Shores* plan.

# WHAT IS THE DNA OF GULF SHORES?



*As more and more high-rise buildings are constructed along our beaches, residents of Gulf Shores and similar coastal communities have begun to question the changes: “Where did that come from?” “Why there?” “What will be next?” “What will this do to our quality of life?” “Where are we headed in the future?” “What will happen to the beach when all the houses are gone and nothing is left but high-rises?”*

## HOW BIG CAN GULF SHORES GET?

To determine how large a tree will grow, it is necessary to look at the tree’s DNA. The zoning ordinance and development regulations act as the City’s DNA. They determine the height, density, usability and location of future development in Gulf Shores and most other communities spread along the Gulf Coast.

Property along the beach is subject to the City of Gulf Shores Zoning Ordinance. The beachfront area on both sides of West Beach Boulevard (Highway 182), between West 11<sup>th</sup> Street and the Gulf State Park, is divided into four zoning districts. Those districts allow residential condominiums, hotels and motels, as well as a range of commercial businesses and entertainment attractions for tourists. Beachfront communities along the Gulf of Mexico – Orange Beach, Pensacola, Fort

Walton Beach, Destin and many others – are currently undergoing changes within their communities. The buildings shown in the photograph above are typical of what the current zoning allows.

Gulf Shores’ beachfront area, aside from about eight acres of public land near Gulf Place, is zoned for 200-foot-tall buildings with 42 units per acre. Property owners on both sides of West Beach Boulevard have the right to sell their land and houses to developers. The developers can then build a continuous corridor of 20-story buildings, such as that shown in the figure at right. One of the most common complaints among community residents concerns the existing “concrete wall” of high-rise condominiums. Current zoning allows a developer to build significantly taller buildings on both sides of the highway, creating a “concrete canyon.”



To accommodate the forecasted level of traffic, the community would need to dramatically widen its major highways and build several additional bridges over the intra-coastal waterway. The public cost would be enormous.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR QUALITY OF LIFE IN GULF SHORES?**

The City of Gulf Shores commissioned a study in 2004 by the WilsonMiller Company to answer questions concerning infrastructure impacts within the community. They calculated the amount of development that could legally occur under “maximum build-out” of the beachfront from West 11<sup>th</sup> Street to Gulf State Park under the current zoning ordinance. They then estimated the demands that the resulting development would place on roads, the water system, sewerage system and solid waste system.

The study identified 831 parcels and 310 acres of land specifically zoned for beachfront lodging and commercial development at a maximum of 42 units per acre. If the zoned property reached its maximum potential, more than 12,600 residential units (hotels, condominiums, time-shares and apartments), and over 800,000 square feet of commercial and retail space would exist along this beachfront area. That is roughly the equivalent of taking all of the condominium and commercial development in Orange Beach and Fort Morgan and adding it to Gulf Shores.

The WilsonMiller study went on to evaluate the effects on the City’s traffic, water supply, sewerage system and solid waste disposal. It found that demand placed on all of these systems would double or quadruple, straining them near or beyond their maximum capacity.

Traffic congestion would be the greatest concern. Traffic on Highway 59 approaching the beach would increase from an average of some 26,100 cars per day (in 2002) to approximately 90,000 cars per day. Traffic on Highway 182 (West Beach Boulevard) would grow

from a 2002 average of 11,720 cars per day to over 75,000 cars per day.

Such traffic volume is beyond the theoretical capacity of those two highways. If traffic levels of service were graded from A (best conditions) to F (worst conditions), the traffic along both highways in Gulf Shores would almost double the theoretical capacity of the current roadways, earning even worse than “F,” if that were possible.

**WHAT SHOULD WE DO?**

Growth can be a good thing. It can add tax value and new faces that help build capacity and increase the quality of life in a community. When properly managed, quality of life grows along with new places to live, work, shop and play. With moderate growth, the utilization of a community’s streets, parks and water supply increases to a point of greater efficiency. However, after that certain point, the growth reaches its maximum capacity for expansion and the overall quality of life starts to decline. The decline might initially go unnoticed, but it can then drop precipitously, having a large impact on the community and its citizens.

The current allowable build-out capacity for the Gulf Shores community would damage the quality of life for existing residents and tourists. To accommodate the forecasted level of traffic, the community would need to dramatically widen its major highways and build several additional bridges over the intra-coastal waterway. The public cost would be enormous. Aside from that, fewer tourists would want to visit a Gulf Shores carved apart by arterial highways.

The *Visionary Plan* recommends a different approach.

	In 2002	Under Current Maximum Build-Out
Highway 59		90,000 CARS PER DAY
Highway 182		75,000 CARS PER DAY





## THE VISIONARY PLAN

*The Visionary Plan charts a new future for the beach area of Gulf Shores. In response to the future predicted by the build-out study, the community had no choice. This plan was designed by the residents and stakeholders of Gulf Shores through an intense public involvement process. A wide range of participants – residents, City officials and staff, snowbirds, business leaders, urban planners, landscape architects, developers, entrepreneurs, real estate brokers, tourists, teenagers, newcomers and old-timers – came together at a series of interactive meetings, workshops and interviews to design a better future for the beach area. The planning process was guided by one important question: “How do we make Gulf Shores a better place?”*

## CREATE AN IDENTIFIABLE PLACE IN THE HEART OF GULF SHORES

### A NEW HEART

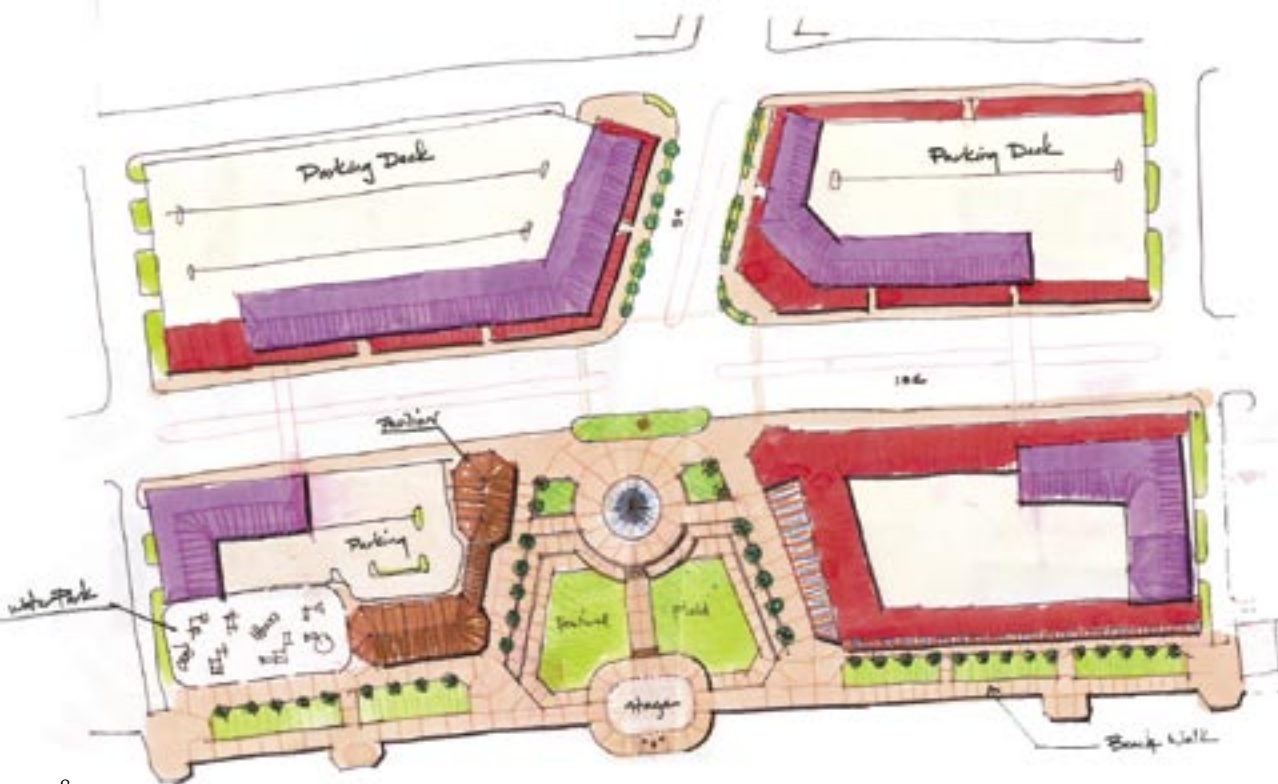
Author Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, California, her childhood home, that “there is no there, there.” With nearly universal agreement, the stakeholders of Gulf Shores agree that the community lacks an identifiable heart or center of activity. Nowhere in Gulf Shores does one say “I’m here” or “I have arrived.” Gulf Place, also called Main Beach, is an Ivan-ravaged mixture of public and private property: an abandoned hotel, damaged public facilities and a vacant lot where one of Gulf Shores’ oldest beach houses was recently lost to Hurricane Ivan. The *Visionary Plan* charts a new and dramatically different future for Gulf Place as the future heart of Gulf Shores.

### A CENTRAL PLACE

After a lengthy car ride to Gulf Shores, many visitors view reaching the traffic light at the Highway 59/182 intersection as a highly symbolic moment. Being able to see the beach from that light, as citizen John Governale phrased it, is “priceless.” The *Conceptual Plan* illustrated below not only preserves, but expands that view. Through a land swap, each of the parties will maintain the same acreage and Gulf frontage, but the public land will be consolidated in the center of Gulf Place. This opens up the central area of Gulf Shores for civic uses such as a plaza and green, a stage and an interactive fountain for children to play in and everyone to wash-off sand.



In a Community Preference Survey, *Envision Gulf Shores* workshop participants favored this plaza (below).





A favorite example of a promenade chosen by *Envision Gulf Shores* workshop participants



proposed plan

**A PROMENADE**

Along the beach frontage, the boardwalk will be redesigned and improved. It will be widened, landscaped and designed into a pedestrian promenade rather than a surface parking lot. On the north side, the boardwalk area will be lined with kiosks, vendors, patio dining and a shade pavilion – everything geared to meeting the needs of the beachcomber. In the future, the promenade could be lengthened in each direction by several miles, stretching the length of Gulf Shores’ beach area.

**A DESIGN WITH THE FESTIVAL IN MIND**

The redesigned Gulf Beach will serve as the perfect stage for taking the Shrimp Festival to the next level. The design will accommodate vendors and artists, as well as provide the stage for live entertainment. Beyond the Shrimp Festival, Gulf Place becomes the place for a host of public events for residents and tourists such as the high school band and graduation, ballet and dance recitals, live music on summer evenings and New Year celebrations.



existing

## The Key Chase

*“All around the mulberry bush,  
the monkey chased the weasel...”*

Have you ever taken a trip “all around the mulberry bush”? Some say that if you have ever rented a condominium in Orange Beach from a company headquartered in Gulf Shores, then you probably have!

It works like this. You find the condo in the newspaper or through a Web site, and you make a reservation. When you arrive at the beach, tired and ready to go inside to unpack and cool-off, you discover that you have to drive all the way to the company’s office in Gulf Shores to pick up your key. (Round trip = 19 miles!) Once done, you drive back to your condo in Orange Beach on a heavily congested road on what turns out to have been one of the worst traffic days of the year. By the time you unlock the door and step inside, you’re ready to collapse!

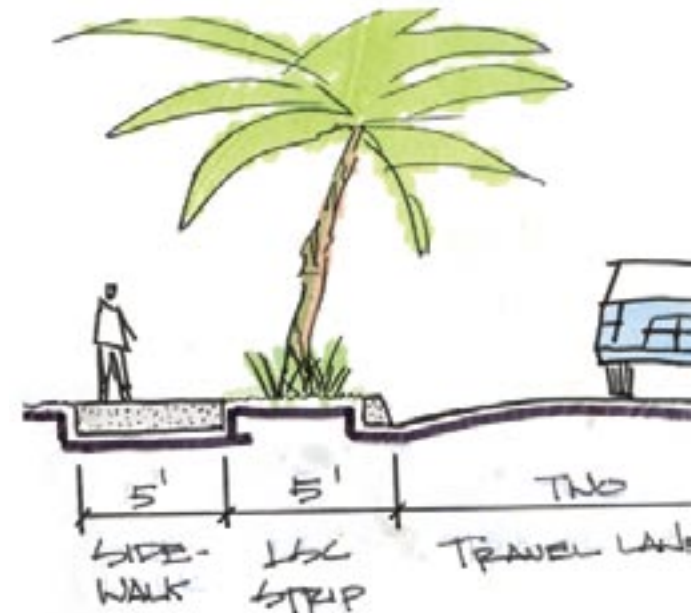
On the way home, the saga is repeated. You put the kids in the hot car and drive from Orange Beach to Gulf Shores to return the key. This time, it is the hottest time of the day, a car is stalled on Highway 189, and you have to run a stoplight in order to turn the key in on time! To make matters worse, you were planning to go home on the Foley Beach Express, and you have been traveling backwards! Now there is *no way* you are going to fight your way back there. Instead, you wind up slugging it out on the bumper-to-bumper grind home on Highway 59.

It is no wonder our roads are so congested. It is time to ask the Chamber of Commerce in Orange Beach and Gulf Shores to work out satellite key pick-up and drop-off at several convenient locations near the condos. They could send a courier twice a day to carry all keys to the corporate office instead of sending each renter on a 19-mile chase “all around the mulberry bush.” ■

## IMPLEMENT A SMART PARKING STRATEGY

Gulf Place has a parking problem: There simply are not enough spaces available. A typical summer day-tripper has a hard time finding a place to park. With the population growth in south Baldwin County and along the intracoastal waterway, the day-trip demand placed on the beaches of Gulf Shores will increase dramatically. Among the most widely endorsed recommendations, Gulf Place should be largely vacated of parking and new parking decks should be constructed on the north side of Highway 182. The decks, illustrated in the *Concept Plan*, could easily double or triple the amount of parking available to the public, depending on their height. The plan for Gulf Place incorporates a small amount of ground-level parking to remain on the south side of Highway 182, but it will be screened by retail, restaurants or other establishments. Much of this parking will be geared toward handicapped persons and deliveries.

A favorite example of a parking garage chosen by *Envision Gulf Shores* workshop participants



## REDUCE TRAFFIC CONGESTION THROUGH THE “T” INTERSECTION OF HIGHWAYS 59 AND 182

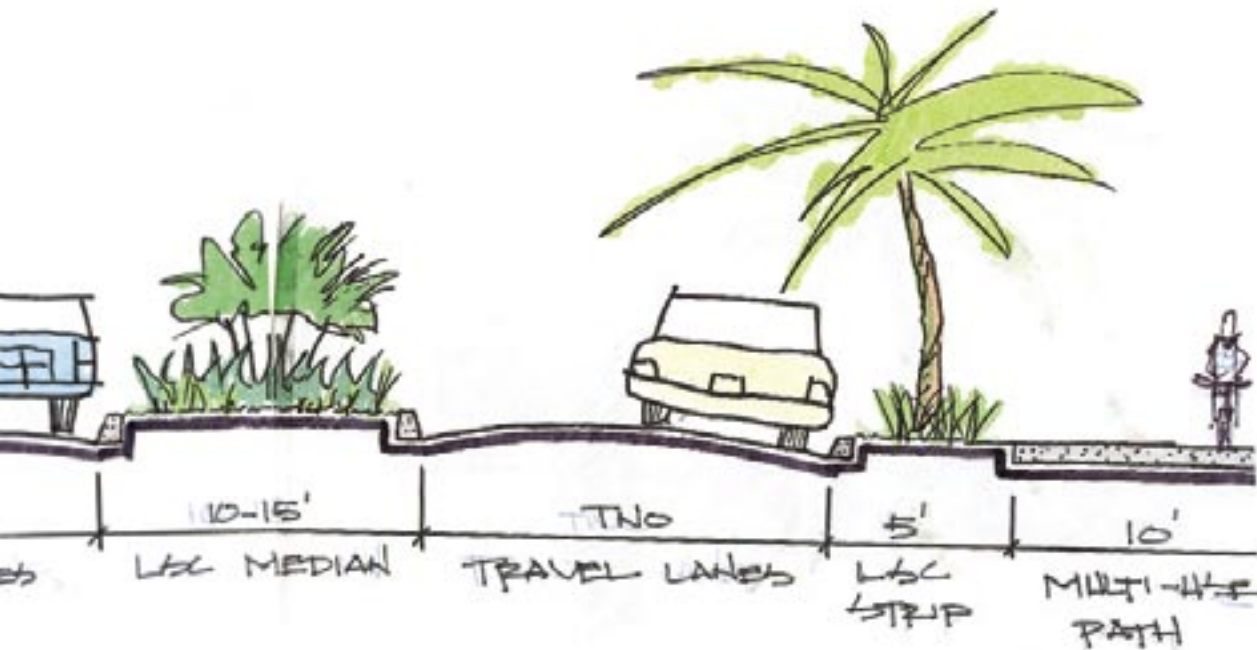
Traffic congestion is the beach area’s greatest and most difficult challenge. Despite the severity of congestion during peak season, few stakeholders support widening Highways 59 or 182. Rather, there is broad support for a multi-pronged strategy, illustrated in the *Conceptual Transportation Plan* (see pages 18 - 19), that includes:

- Relocating Highway 182 to the periphery of the Walking District
- Redesigning the new intersection of Highways 59 and 182 (presently Highway 59 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue) for improved efficiency
- Managing travel demand through a community-wide initiative
- Creating a safe and attractive environment for bicycles and pedestrians to reduce the need for motor vehicles
- Mixing land uses such as condos, hotels, shop-

ping and restaurants to ensure shorter, more walkable trips

- Deter cruising by providing an appealing place for young people to gather and through enforcement of no-cruising zones
- Increase awareness of the Foley-Beach Express through better signage and advertising

This approach acknowledges that there will always be a traffic jam on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Failure to do so would require new bridges to be built over the intracoastal waterway and the widening of most major roads, including Highways 59 and 182. The public cost would be enormous and the redevelopment would spoil the possibility of creating a pedestrian-friendly Walking District in the heart of Gulf Shores. The goal of this plan is to create a more livable environment by relieving traffic congestion while improving the community’s overall quality of life.



## Trips to Nowhere

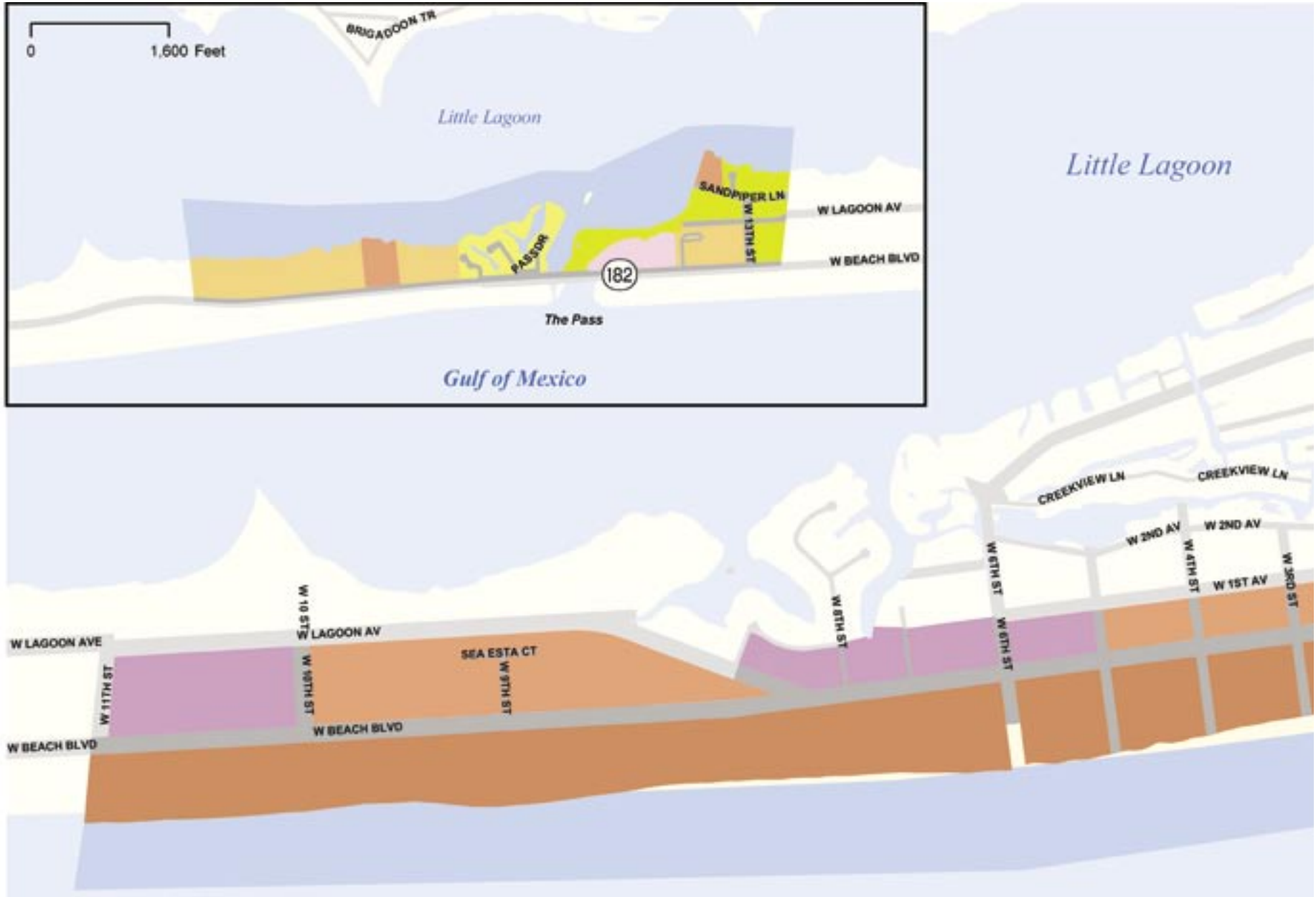
“Jeannie, I’m bored.” “What d’ya want to do, Ted?” “I don’t know, Jeannie. What do you want to do?” “I don’t know, Ted. Let’s go for a ride somewhere.”

**Sound familiar?** Local teenagers often feel restless and boxed-in. Sometimes they end up cruising the beach to look for friends, to look for something – *anything at all* – to do because they are bored.

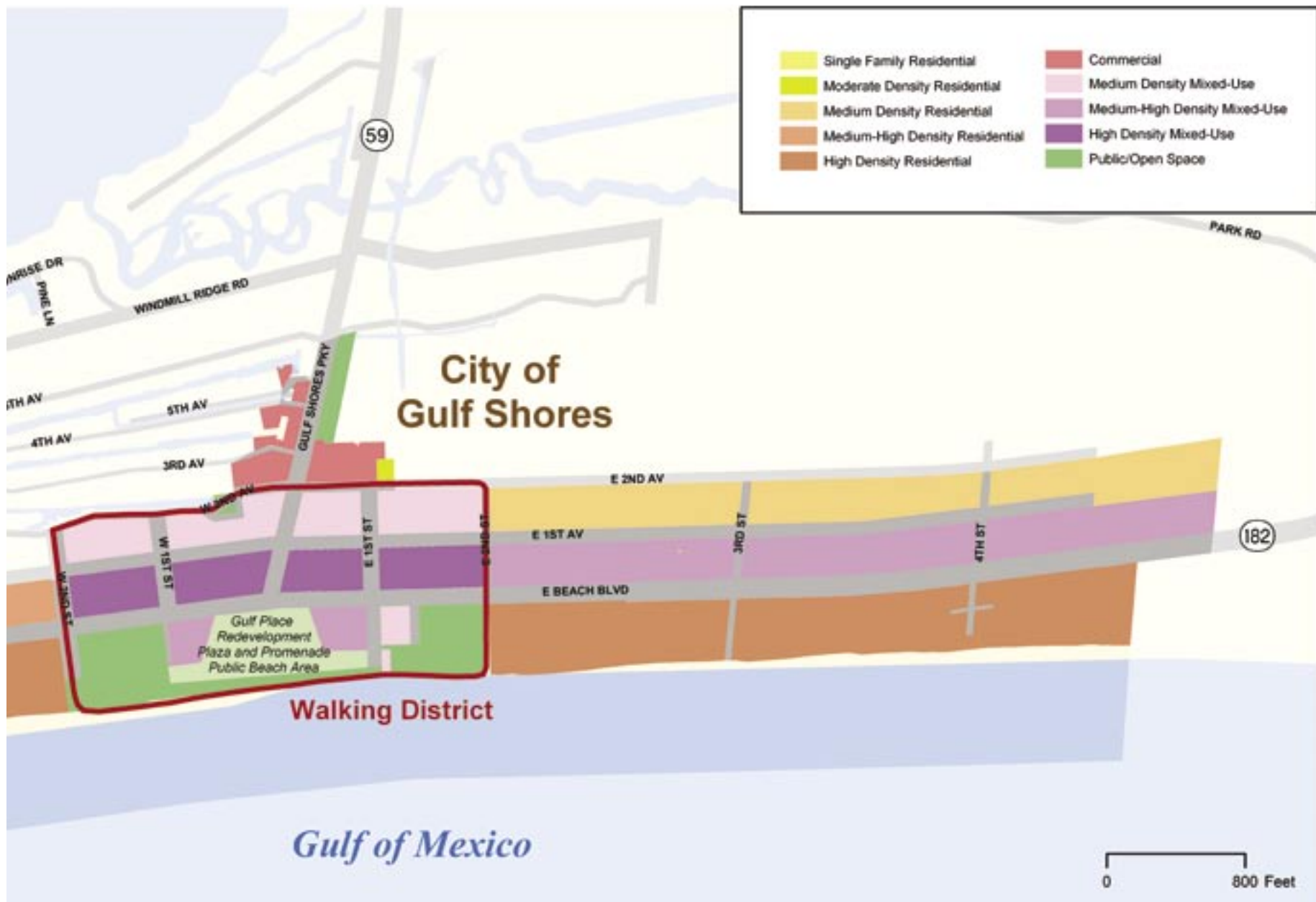
In the process of entertaining themselves, young people, unfortunately, may be cruising us into traffic snarls and themselves into automobile accidents or even worse street problems. The root cause is typical of teenagers everywhere – nowhere to go! So, they make trips to nowhere!

### What should the City of Gulf Shores do?

1. Add more lanes to its already congested streets. Not a good idea.
2. Post beach roads with signs that indicate cruising is outlawed in the community of Gulf Shores. No, police in Gulf Shores have more important things to do than arrest teenagers for cruising.
3. Incorporate teen-friendly places, such as water parks or skate parks, in the Gulf Shores area. **Yes!** Teenagers need active diversions geared to their age group if they are to get off the roads and out of their cars. ■



## CONCEPTUAL FUTURE LAND USE PLAN



## CREATE A “WALKING DISTRICT” SURROUNDING GULF PLACE THAT IS SAFE AND COMFORTABLE FOR PEDESTRIANS

The redevelopment of Gulf Place alone cannot accomplish the community’s goal of creating a “Walking District” (see the *Conceptual Future Land Use Plan* on pages 12-13). To truly be considered a district, it must extend several blocks in each direction from the “T” intersection. The community envisions an intimate area of shops and restaurants that is safe and comfortable for pedestrians. Extending the recommended redevelopment effort in Gulf Place into the nearby blocks is, in fact, essential to the success of Gulf Place. It will create the size and critical mass of attractions necessary to keep the district thriving.

### A BETTER WAY TO GET AROUND

Many changes are envisioned for the district. Among the most critical is moving the through-traffic to the edge of the district on the relocated Highway 182. In the Walking District, new wide and gracious sidewalks and streetscapes are needed and should step-up to meet the buildings and storefronts elevated above the flood zone. Street trees, landscaping, benches and bike racks would line the streets. Everything possible would be done to make walking the safest, most convenient and attractive way of getting around within the district.



### A PARK-ONCE ENVIRONMENT

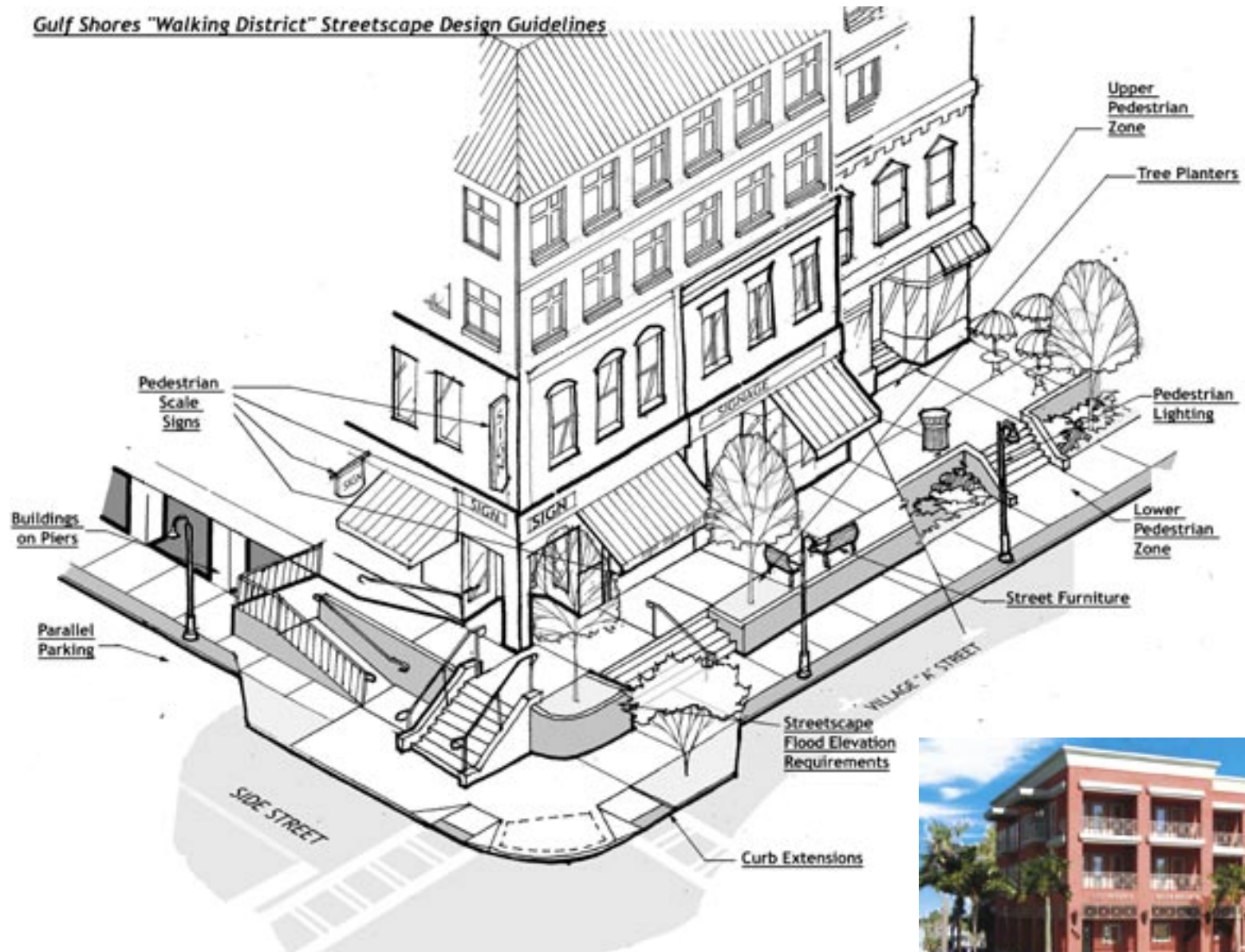
Providing ample parking is critical for the attractiveness of the Walking District to both visitors and prospective retailers. Parking would be coordinated between providers with the goal of creating a “park-once” environment. Vehicle parking would be located centrally in a combination of public and private parking facilities. For those who drive to the Walking District, they could park once, and spend the entire day visiting the beach, shopping, eating, enjoying a concert at Gulf Place, and never need to get back into their cars to drive.



the proposed plan

existing

***Gulf Shores "Walking District" Streetscape Design Guidelines***



**INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SAFE AND COMFORTABLE MOBILITY BY MEANS OTHER THAN CARS**

Outside of the Walking District, a desire remains for safe alternatives to driving. To achieve this goal, there are land-use and urban design recommendations for making trips shorter and more convenient, in addition to providing the infrastructure to make them safer.

To help make trips shorter, the plan identifies several locations within the beach area, but outside of the Walking District, for moderate amounts of mixed-use development. These predominately residential areas would include a judicious balance of retail and restaurants aimed at meeting the daily needs of visitors and tourists, but they should not compete with Gulf Place and the Walking District as the heart of the community. Also recommended for these areas is a set of design criteria, requiring non-residential developments to be attractive and oriented toward pedestrians and bicyclists. By creating a series of smaller commercial areas, many needs could be met through a short walking or biking trip.

In addition to the series of mixed-use areas, the *Visionary Plan* recommends a suite of improvements aimed at making it easier to walk or bike around the beach



area. The *Transportation Plan* (see pages 18-19) illustrates a network of sidewalks, bike lanes and off-street multi-use paths. The plan identifies locations for improved, more visible crosswalks, and new pedestrian-activated traffic signals are recommended at all

public beach access points. The plan recommends traffic-calming measures in several locations within the beach area, including a striking roundabout at the intersection of West Lagoon Avenue and Highway 182. Among the most exciting of these improvements is a multi-use path separated from the street and running the length of the beach area from Gulf State Park to beyond Lagoon Pass. At Lagoon Pass a new bridge for the trail would be installed, and the trail could pass underneath the bridge to access a new boardwalk along the Lagoon.

**REINTRODUCE TRANSIT SERVICE**

The *Visionary Plan* recommends reintroducing transit to Gulf Shores as a long-range project. As the community redevelops according to this plan, mixing uses, investing in sidewalks, calming traffic and, most importantly, creating a central destination, it will become increasingly feasible for transit. A combination of trolleys, water taxis and passenger ferry service is recommended.

**IMPROVE BEACH ACCESS FOR LOCALS AND DAY-TRIPPERS**

Many locals are frustrated at the inaccessibility of their beaches during the summer months. For residents within walking distance of the beach, the scarcity of public access points is the main issue. For everyone else, the key is parking. The *Visionary Plan* details the following workable strategy for addressing both issues:

- Increase parking at Gulf Place (the main beach) by two to three times its current level
- Create new public access points in areas where public access is sparse
- Create an incentive for Gulf-front developers to provide public access across their property to the Gulf and public parking

Additionally, the existing public beach access points need enhanced public facilities such as showers and restrooms, improved signage and wayfinding, and a thematic design common to all the public beach access points.



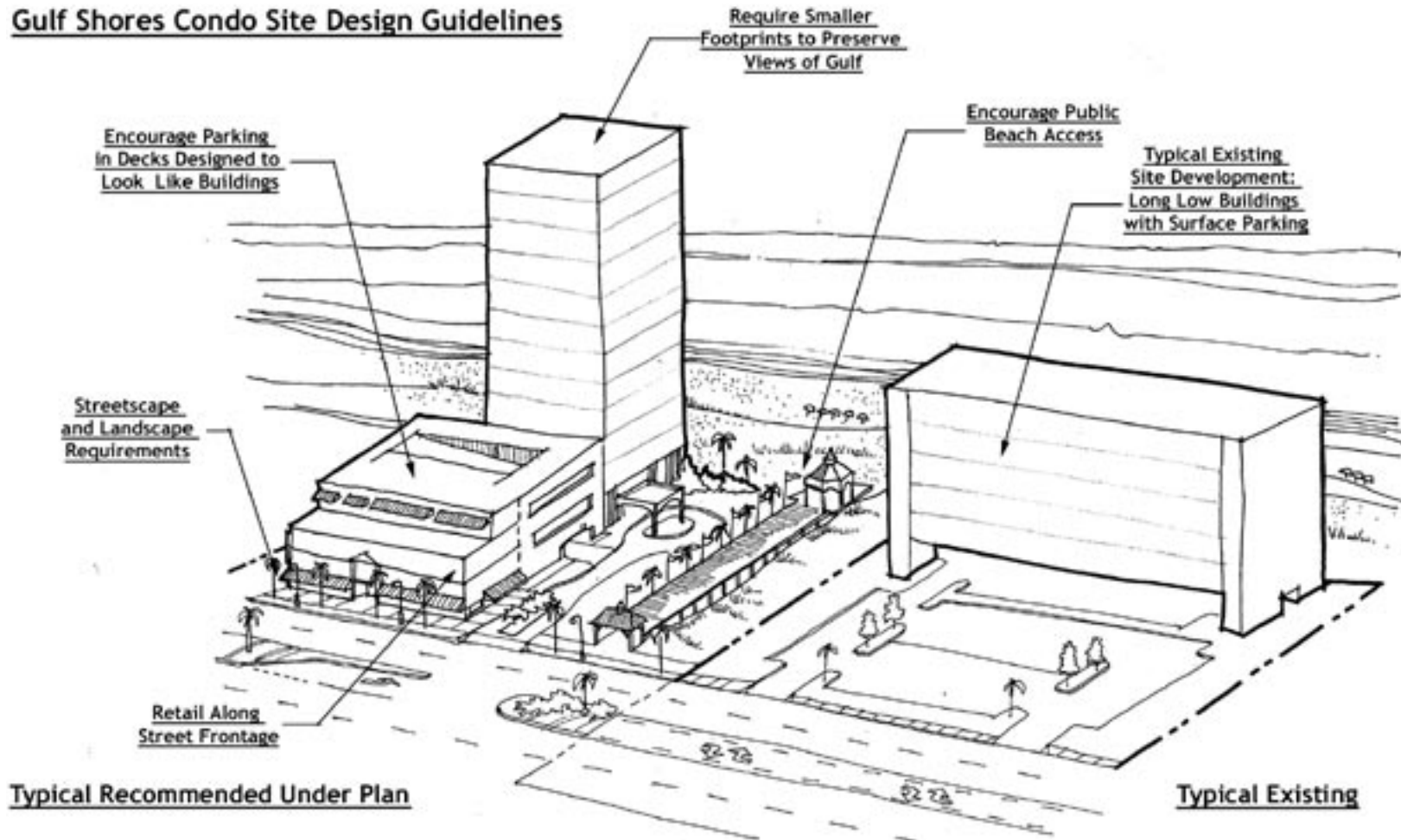
## GULF-FRONT DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD BALANCE THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS, TOURISTS, LANDOWNERS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The *Visionary Plan* creates a strategy for balancing these disparate needs. In preparing this strategy, the City's consultant met individually with developers and landowners, conducted focus groups with developers and tourism specialists, and worked on the issue extensively with the public during community meetings and workshops.

The process was designed to identify points of consensus and points of contention and, through a series of prioritization exercises, identify a set of trade-offs that could be incorporated into the zoning regulations. At the heart of the matter lies the fact that everyone wants to see Gulf Shores become a better place.

The illustration below compares a typical condominium development with one that incorporates many recommendations of the *Visionary Plan*. Both have the same density.

### Gulf Shores Condo Site Design Guidelines





### CONCEPTUAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN



## CONTINUE TO SERVE AS A PREMIER FAMILY VACATION DESTINATION

One of Gulf Shores' greatest assets is its ability to attract tourists. The community is very family-oriented and meets the needs of families of all shapes and sizes. The marketing arms for the City and the local tourism industry have worked hard to build this reputation for Gulf Shores. Maintaining the family-friendly nature of Gulf Shores is a clear priority for the community's stakeholders. The following strategies will help Gulf Shores remain family-friendly for years to come:

- Promoting and maintaining family-oriented attractions, including restaurants, shops and activities
- Creating multi-generational events and venues in close proximity
- Creating and maintaining family-oriented events, such as the Shrimp Festival
- Developing and maintaining a clean, attractive street and sidewalk environment

## ENSURE THAT THE HEART OF GULF SHORES MEETS THE NEEDS OF LOCALS AND VISITORS

Many tourists and locals cite the lack of entertainment facilities as one of the community's shortcomings. The redevelopment of Gulf Place and the Walking District presents a special opportunity to consider entertainment and its incorporation into the plan. Some of the entertainment and attractions recommended for inclusion within the Walking District or at Gulf Place include:

- Outdoor amphitheater/plaza
- Various shops and restaurants
- Outdoor cafés with views of the beach or the play area for young children
- Interactive fountains
- Skateboard park
- Sea kayak and sailing rentals and lessons

## PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESSES AND RESTAURANTS

A host of locally owned restaurants and businesses are among the community's favorite places. As the beach area changes over the coming years, it is vital to promote and support these local assets. The community must ensure that local policy and regulations foster the local entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, all commercial activities at Gulf Place and in the Walking District should be supported strategically by a merchant's association: a business-funded group formed to promote the area to locals and tourists.

## PROTECT DEVELOPMENT AND PEOPLE FROM FUTURE HURRICANES

Hurricanes will continue to ravage Gulf Shores. Many old-timers can remember the devastation caused by Hurricane Frederick and, more recently, Hurricanes Opal and Ivan. Working to protect the community from future storm losses, both the loss of life and material damage, is an important goal of the Gulf Shores community.

In recent years, Gulf Shores strengthened its development codes to require more flood and wind-resistant structures. Most of the buildings built to these new standards suffered little damage from Hurricane Ivan.

The community needs to be able to safely evacuate the area in the event of another hurricane. If Gulf Shores were to build out according to its maximum allowable density, traffic congestion would be so severe that there is a serious concern as to whether or not the community could safely evacuate in advance of a storm. The community needs to re-evaluate its development regulations in light of the current transportation network and adjust accordingly.

In addition to strong development codes, the community can mitigate against future flood and storm

surge losses by re-establishing its primary dune line. A community's primary dune line can prevent flooding and storm surge damage by actually blocking the incoming tide. A well-established line of primary dunes can withstand over a dozen feet of storm surge. In all but the most severe hurricanes, the dune line can save a community millions of dollars in sand screening, road repairs and infrastructure damage. The ongoing renourishment project will create a small "starter" dune line, approximately six feet tall. If left untrammelled, dunes will build over time. The community can also accelerate their development through the use of fencing and plantings.





**A New Perspective for Gulf Place**

The *Visionary Plan's* strategy balances the private property rights of existing landowners with the desires of the community. Taller buildings are moved away from the center, where a new gateway to the Gulf is created. Kiosks, vendors and patio dining, along with a suite of new public amenities, surround the amphitheater and park, and along the promenade. Public parking is tucked out of sight behind buildings.



## SPECIFIC PROJECTS EMBEDDED IN THE *VISIONARY PLAN*

### LAND-USE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Redevelop Gulf Place as the identifiable heart of Gulf Shores
2. Amend the zoning ordinances and land-use plan to allow implementation
3. Partner with Gulf-front developers to preserve the view of the Gulf from Beach Boulevard
4. Revise condominium standards to add value for residents and the development community

### ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

1. Re-route Highway 182 along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to improve efficiency and eliminate congestion in the Walking District
2. Narrow Beach Boulevard and Gulf Shores Parkway within the Walking District
3. Slow traffic speed on Windmill Ridge Road to 25 mph
4. Install a roundabout at the intersection of Beach Boulevard and Lagoon Avenue to calm traffic and serve as a gateway

### HURRICANE MITIGATION

1. Enforce strict construction codes and zoning regulations
2. Restore the primary dune line

### PARKING AND BEACH ACCESS

1. Construct two public parking decks on the north side of Beach Boulevard within the Walking District
2. Partner with Gulf-front developers to expand public access and public parking

### SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS

1. Construct an off-street, multi-use trail along:
  - Beach Boulevard between Gulf State Park and The Pass into Little Lagoon, including a new pedestrian bridge over The Pass
  - East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (the new Highway 182) beside the wetland
2. Construct a nature trail or boardwalk along Little Lagoon, connecting the public parking area at The Pass with West Lagoon Avenue
3. Construct on-street bike lanes on West Lagoon Avenue and on Beach Boulevard within the Walking District
4. Install or widen sidewalks along:
  - All streets within the Walking District
  - East 4<sup>th</sup> Street
  - East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
  - West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
  - West 4<sup>th</sup> Street

- East and West 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue
  - Windmill Ridge Road
  - West Lagoon Avenue
5. Install highly visible crosswalks and pedestrian-activated traffic signals at Beach Boulevard, in addition to:
    - East 4<sup>th</sup> Street
    - The new intersection with Highway 182
    - East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street
    - Midblock between East 2<sup>nd</sup> and East 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets
    - West Lagoon Avenue
    - West 9<sup>th</sup> Street
    - West 10<sup>th</sup> Street
    - All future public beach access points

### DEVELOP A COORDINATED TRANSIT NETWORK, INCLUDING:

1. Trolley service along Beach Boulevard and Highway 59
2. Local water taxi service along the intracoastal waterway
3. Passenger ferry service between downtown Mobile and the intracoastal waterway

“...Pleasure Island leaders have a choice in the wake of Hurricane Ivan. They can let development go on, uncontrolled and unplanned, or they can do just as the City of Gulf Shores is doing: Acknowledge the reality of how valuable waterfront real estate has become, take control of the future, and make their community better for residents, developers and visitors alike.”

From *The Mobile Register*, Sunday, January 16, 2005



## LOCAL CONTACTS

**Mayor Billy Duke**  
(251) 968-1124

**Steve Foote, AICP**  
**Planning Director**  
(251) 968-1150

## PLACEMAKING RESOURCES

**The Urban Land Institute**  
[www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)

**Sustainable Communities Network**  
[www.sustainable.org](http://www.sustainable.org)

**International City Management Association**  
[www.icma.org](http://www.icma.org)

**Local Government Commission**  
[www.lgc.org](http://www.lgc.org)

**Citizen Planner Institute**  
[www.citizenplanner.com](http://www.citizenplanner.com)

**Lincoln Institute of Land Policy**  
[www.lincolninst.edu](http://www.lincolninst.edu)

**The Smart Growth Network**  
[www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org)

## THIS PLAN CANNOT IMPLEMENT ITSELF

The City of Gulf Shores is part of a quiet transformation occurring in many communities across America. The City and its residents are embracing a new way of thinking and a new way of addressing their future. The collaborative efforts of the City’s elected officials and staff, businesses, developers and neighborhoods have brought a fresh perspective to the future of Gulf Shores and a common commitment to improve it.

Individuals are more likely to invest and stay in a community that is worth caring about – a place with a strong and appealing local identity, an ambiance of belonging and a sense of place. Now that a plan has been drawn for walkable streets, exciting shopping and dining, beautiful common space and, at last, a “here, here” for Gulf Shores, another much larger commitment is needed — the will and the means to implement the plan.

The City of Gulf Shores cannot implement this plan alone. Key to the City’s success will be its ability to build strategic partnerships and alliances. In many ways, the community collaboration of the *Envision Gulf Shores* process is only the first form of collaboration needed to make this plan a reality.

Other levels of participation are necessary to provide resources and support for financing, management and policy-making. For example, rules can and must change. Developers and businesses must recognize the notion of the “common good” and be open to compromise and negotiation. Citizens must stay engaged. The residents of Gulf Shores, along with their government, have the ability to frame issues, assume leadership, champion initiatives and implement unique, workable solutions to future challenges.

A host of resources, some of which are listed at left, are available to assist local communities in the realization of their visions. Many urban visionaries have observed that great places are created at the point of implementation, one small act at a time, by a multitude of individuals. As planner Charles Bohl commented, “Placemaking is much like making a motion picture, it requires the special orchestration of the specialized talents and skills of many people, and of many economic and design elements, all of which must work together to create a successful production.”



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