



## 2010 IDA Downtown Achievement Awards

Category: Planning

The Greening of Downtown Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### PROJECT SUMMARY

Downtown Baton Rouge's Central Green initiative is an exciting and innovative new approach to downtown development. As the first phase of the Plan Baton Rouge II Master Plan, which was completed in the fall of 2009 and approved by City Parish Planning Commission earlier this year, the Central Green initiative calls for the comprehensive greening of the city's core. Through the development of new parklands, the replacement of hardscapes with lush green landscapes, and the planting of hundreds of new trees, Downtown Baton Rouge is being transformed from a harsh concrete jungle into a rich urban forest.

The Central Green initiative focuses on three major greening projects, which are now underway including:

- **North Boulevard Town Square-** The Town Square is a \$7.2 million development that will transform the disjointed area between North Boulevard and River Road into a center where the city's cultural and civic amenities come together for all to use and enjoy. While the area is currently unusable with virtually no tree cover to protect visitors from the relentless Louisiana heat, it will soon become the city's primary public gathering space with more than an acre of open green space, café seating and a media tower equipped with large format screens and a state-of-the art sound system. The project was developed with sustainable development standards in mind. The Town Square also includes water features to naturally cool the landscape and a bio-retention water system, which collects, filters and productively uses storm water, rather than allowing it to be wasted by simply draining off of buildings and pavings. Funding and design of the project are complete. Construction will begin in October 2010.
- **Galvez Plaza-** The redesign of Galvez Plaza calls for the development of a permanent stage and first class outdoor entertainment venue. Located in the heart of the Downtown Arts & Entertainment District, this signature landmark and corresponding landscape will serve as a vital corridor connecting many of the civic and cultural attractions that downtown has to offer such as the Shaw Center for the Arts, Louisiana Art & Science Museum and many others. With a \$2 million construction budget that's funded through a creative mix of state sales taxes and rebate funds, groundbreaking will begin in the next 60 to 90 days. The project is scheduled for completion by the fall of 2011.
- **Downtown Greenway-** The Downtown Greenway is a 2.75-mile pedestrian and cycling corridor that will feature lighting, landscaping, signage and public art. By connecting greenspaces and cultural attractions over a large geographic area, the greenway expands the boundaries of downtown and unites the area with its surrounding inner-city neighborhoods and destination parks. This will connect thousands of residents who live along the greenway and have a visual impact on more than 100,000 people who will soon experience artistic gateways as they enter downtown Baton Rouge everyday. This unique project will also transform undesirable spaces, such as areas underneath the interstate overpass, into inviting places that stimulate the senses with visual and performing arts. With the primary goal of sparking investment and redevelopment in blighted areas along the multi- use corridor, the greenway project also incorporates a public art program that will focus on the authentic history, folklore, traditions, and cultural resources of the region. The Downtown Greenway consists of four different phases with varying costs and amenities. The total project cost is estimated to be between \$7.6 million and \$13 million. Phased construction and implementation of the greenway will begin as funding becomes available.





## INNOVATION

The Plan Baton Rouge II Master Plan and Central Green initiative demonstrate the city's commitment to revitalizing the downtown core, providing passive and active recreational activities for citizens, and promoting redevelopment in inner-city neighborhoods around the downtown area. While many communities try to buffer their revitalization projects from less desirable areas, the Central Green initiative seeks to make the most out of the city's diversity by reconnecting downtown with its surrounding neighborhoods and working to spark public and private investments throughout. Because of the city's commitment to environmental stewardship, the plan also focuses on dramatically expanding public greenspace and encouraging more sustainable development throughout the downtown area from buildings to landscapes. This innovative and culturally inspired approach to comprehensive greening promises to transform and redefine downtown Baton Rouge.

## DIVERSITY & REPRESENTATION

Partnerships are at the heart of nearly all successful initiatives. Accordingly, the overwhelming success of Downtown Baton Rouge's Central Green initiative is a result of the broad and diverse groups that came together to support its development. More than 40 different government agencies, businesses and civic/community organizations, contributed to the Plan Baton Rouge II Master Plan and the Central Green initiative. Some of these included the Mayor's Office, Downtown Development District, East Baton Rouge Parish Metropolitan Council, Downtown Business Association, Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Center for Planning Excellence, the Recreation & Park Commission, numerous state government entities, two public universities and several local neighborhood associations. Through this comprehensive community outreach effort, which incorporated thousands of residents, and business, civic and community leaders, planners sought to unlock the strengths inherent in the economic and cultural diversity that defines the Baton Rouge region. The result was the development of an ambitious Master Plan and innovative Central Green initiative that have already exceeded expectations.

## REPLICATION

While the Central Green initiative and its strategies are specific to downtown Baton Rouge, the planning process behind its creation could be easily replicated in other communities across the country. Development of the Plan Baton Rouge II Master Plan and Central Green initiative followed standard planning practices with an eye toward advancing environmental stewardship, adding open space, maximize public access to the riverfront and, of course, encouraging economic development.

## OUTCOME

Many direct and indirect impacts from Downtown Baton Rouge's Central Green initiative are still being realized. Soon, thousands of citizens will have access to numerous greenways and open spaces in and around the downtown area. In the meantime, this comprehensive greening initiative has already sparked significant interest and excitement from downtown's private sector partners. Over the last year, they have invested more than \$250 million in new planning and development projects throughout the area, and we expect those investments to continue growing far into the future.

## CONCLUSION

Having addressed many obstacles and challenges in the planning and development phases of the Central Green initiative, Baton Rouge is now well on its way to becoming the next great American city, known for its unique, thriving and sustainable downtown community.

