

Africatown Neighborhood Plan

City of Mobile, Alabama

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Introduction

The Africatown Neighborhood Plan was prepared during the Summer of 2015 under the direction of the City of Mobile Community and Housing Development Department and a steering committee of Africatown residents and community stakeholders. The plan sets out a unified vision for the long-term revitalization of the community.

Purpose of the Plan

This plan, in addition to capturing a community-based vision, provides an overall strategy for improving the Africatown community in ways that will encourage sustained reinvestment, enhance economic opportunity and provide a better quality of life for residents. The plan does not seek to reinvent Africatown but instead describes a consensus vision that takes advantage of the community's unique assets.

Achieving the community's vision will require a holistic, coordinated effort by public and private partners. The Africatown Neighborhood Plan provides the basis for coordination between current and future partners to assure that the efforts of each are supported—not compromised—by the acts of others.

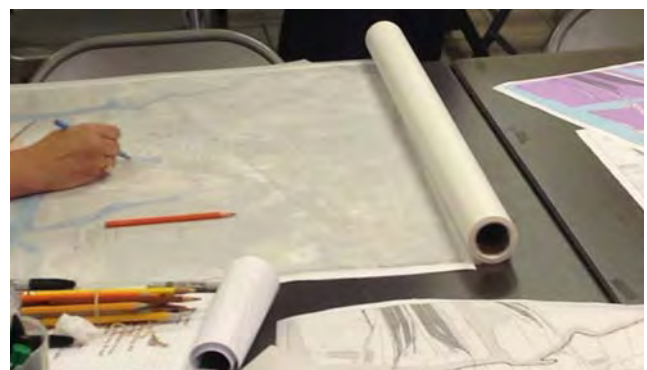
The City of Mobile and a nonprofit community-based organization will be key players in implementing this plan. For the City the plan acts as an extension of the citywide Map for Mobile planning effort and provides guidance on land use policy, community development initiatives, and capital improvements that will create a

stronger foundation for privately led revitalization. Similarly, the plan identifies efforts to be carried out by a lead community organization and supporting public and private nonprofit organizations.

Process

The plan was developed over the course of several months under the guidance of a local Steering Committee and staff of several city departments. The process began in June 2015 with an evaluation of existing conditions. Monthly public meetings were held at the Hope Community Center to engage residents, property owners and other stakeholders in a discussion about the future.

Community Meeting #1 This meeting gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their community and list the assets, issues and outside forces affecting Africatown. Participants envisioned the future of Africatown and described key features of that vision.



Planning and Design Workshop The planning team held an interactive work session with residents, property owners and other stakeholders to delve further into the comments and visions voiced in the previous community meeting. In particular participants discussed the community’s historic features and opportunities to improve connectivity and develop a sustainable tourism program.

Community Meeting #2 The planning team reviewed input from the first community meeting and findings from the community assessment. Initial recommendations on land use, connectivity, tourism, and housing development were presented. Participants discussed social, economic and quality of life issues.

Community Meeting #3 The planning team presented five key points that would form the basis of the plan as well as key recommendations within each. Participants discussed the role of the City and other partners in implementing the plan. Individually and in groups, meeting participants identified their priorities for the plan.

On its completion the draft plan was presented to the community and representatives of the City Council and Mobile Planning Commission. The plan was finalized and submitted for adoption by the Planning Commission.

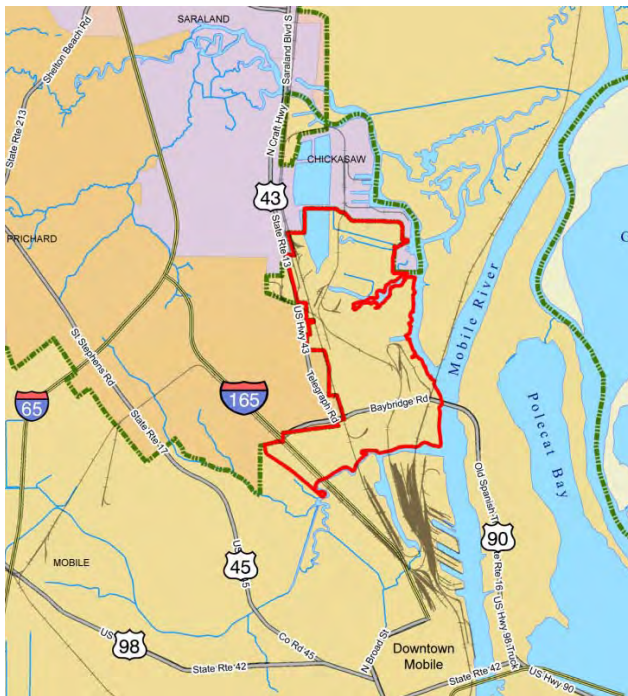


Figure 1: Location Map Community Profile

History of Africatown

A group of West Africans arrived in Mobile on the last documented slave ship to reach the United States and ultimately settled in the area now known as Africatown.

In July 1860 the Clotilda sailed secretly into Mobile Bay with 110 men, women, and children hailing from Yoruba, Atakora, Nupe and Dendi. Most of the group had been captured in present day Benin. The international slave trade had been made illegal in the United States in 1808. Fearing they would be caught, the captain transferred the slaves to a riverboat and burned and sunk the Clotilda in Big Bayou Canot.

After their arrival in Mobile about 25 slaves were sold upriver. Timothy Meaher, who had arranged the illegal expedition, and his family kept 60 slaves. After the end of the Civil War, those formerly enslaved on a plantation in Clarke County joined their fellow West Africans in the Plateau area. Local legend has it that the Clotilda Africans joined a community of Moors, who had settled in the area. Unable to afford passage back to Africa, they remained in Mobile and founded African Town, the first town established and controlled by Africans in the United States.

Working in local shipyards and mills, they saved money to buy land including some from their former owners. African Town originally included a 50-acre community in the Plateau area and a smaller one, Lewis Quarters, which consisted of seven acres over a mile to the west of the larger settlement. Lewis Quarters was named after one of its founders, Charlie Lewis. The settlers appointed Peter Lee as their chief and established a governmental system based on African law.

The residents of African Town built the first school in the area. In 1872 they built Old Landmark Baptist Church, which is now Union Missionary Baptist Church. While the community retained much of their West African culture, construction of the church signaled the conversion to Christianity of many of the Africans. They were a tight-knit community known for sharing and helping one another but reportedly had tense relations with both whites and African Americans and so largely kept to themselves.

Cudjo Lewis, who was nineteen when he boarded the Clotilda, is one of the most renowned of Africatown’s original settlers. He rang the bell at Old Landmark Baptist Church, worked as a shinglemaker and shared the story of the Clotilda Africans with journalists, writers and historians. Having died in 1935 at the age of 94, Lewis was the last known African-born slave in the United States and the only one to have been captured on film.

Sources: *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, *Dreams of Africa in Alabama* (Diouf), *The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Making of Africatown*, *USA: Spirit of Our Ancestors* (Robertson).

Community Profile

Africatown, an African-American community of national historic significance, is located three miles north of Downtown Mobile. The community was settled in the 1860s by West Africans who were brought to the United States by would-be slave traders long after the practice had been outlawed in 1808. Settling in an isolated location along the Mobile River, they retained their African customs and language for decades. Refer to sidebar for more information.



Cudjo Lewis was the last surviving member of the West Africans, brought over on the *Clotilda*, who settled Africatown.

Africatown consists of several distinct neighborhoods including: Plateau, Magazine Point, Kelly Hills, Happy Hills, and Lewis Quarters. It is bounded on the east by the Mobile River, with Chickasaw Creek and Hog Bayou to the north and Three Mile Creek to the south. West of Africatown is the City of Prichard and Interstate 165.

According to the US Census, in 2010 Africatown had a population of 1881, of which 98% were African American. Africatown is situated in Census Tracts 38 and 12 but only accounts for a small portion of either of the two geographically large Census Tracts. Census population estimates are an aggregate of the individual blocks contained in the planning area.

Natural Conditions

Three Mile Creek and Chickasaw Creek flow into the Mobile River immediately east of Africatown. Hog Bayou lies along Chickasaw Creek, which flows southward into the Mobile River within the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, the largest river delta in Alabama and the second largest in the United States. The Mobile, Tensaw, Apalachee, Middle, Blakely and Spanish Rivers flow into the Delta, which was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1974, reflecting its historic and ecological diversity.

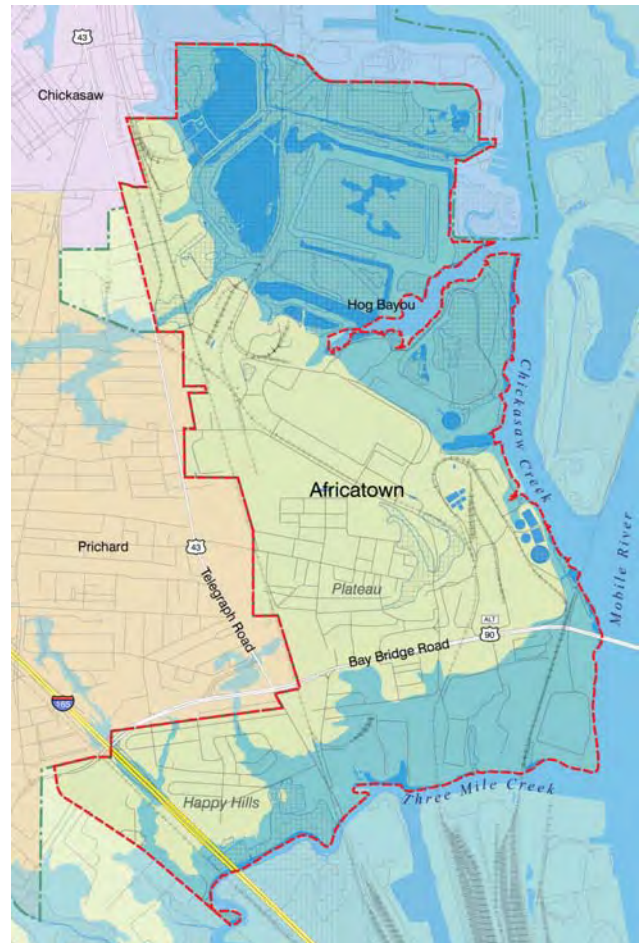


Figure 2 Hydrology

Three Mile Creek served as the City's drinking water supply until the 1940s when it was recognized that a larger supply was needed. As Mobile became more intensely developed, urban runoff endangered water quality of the creek. Efforts are currently underway to restore water quality and develop a 12-mile greenway system along the creek. The City of Mobile recently received a grant from the US Department of the Interior to fund the first .75 miles of the trail.

There are substantial floodplain areas including along Chickasaw Creek and Hog Bayou to the north and along Three Mile Creek to the south (see Figure 2). These include areas designated as Zones A, AE and X under the National Flood Insurance Program. Zones A and AE are commonly referred to as the 100-year floodplain. These areas have a 1% chance of flooding every year. Zone X, commonly referred to as the 500-year floodplain, has a 0.2% chance of flooding each year.

Floodplain areas to the north are predominantly natural or have been developed for land-intensive industrial uses. Flood-prone areas along Three Mile Creek have been developed for industrial, heavy commercial and residential uses. Low-lying portions of the now-vacant Josephine Allen public housing site are within the 100-year floodplain. Residential areas within the 100-year floodplain are located mostly in the area of Chin Street east of Telegraph Road. The easternmost portions of the Africatown/Plateau Historic Cemetery also fall within the 100-year floodplain.

Development Conditions

Africatown is very accessible to greater Mobile. Major roads in the area include Bay Bridge Road (US 90), Telegraph Road (US 43) and Interstate 165, which connects Prichard, Africatown and Downtown Mobile to Interstate 65. Despite this, Africatown’s residential areas are relatively isolated. The primary road system instead favors through traffic and access to industrial areas. Reconstruction of the Cochrane Bridge and Bay Bridge Road in the 1980s had a significant impact on the community, creating a pronounced physical division between the Plateau and Magazine Point neighborhoods. Two major rail lines cross through Africatown, the Alabama and Gulf Coast Railway to the west and the CSX Railroad to the east.

With interstate, river and rail access, the area has seen considerable industrial development with the largest industries locating along the river. Lumber and other industries have also located along Three Mile Creek to the south. Altogether industrial uses make up over half of the property in the planning area.

Despite the area’s accessibility there are virtually no non-industrial businesses in Africatown. Several commercial buildings in the community are vacant.

Residential areas are predominantly single-family detached homes. The now-vacant Josephine Allen public housing complex represented the only notable

multifamily housing in Africatown. Some duplexes are also present, particularly in the Plateau neighborhood.

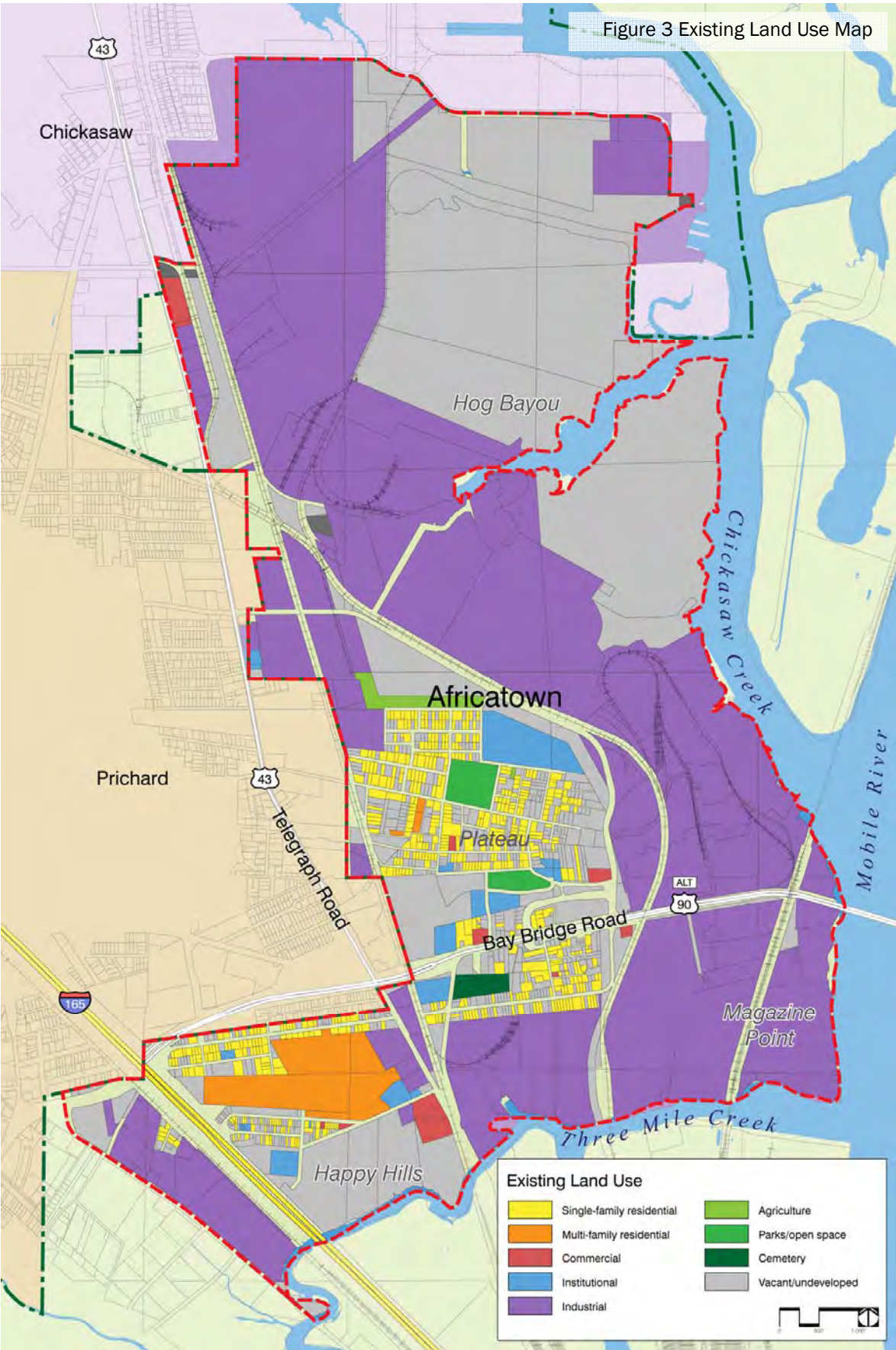


Former Josephine Allen public housing in Happy Hills neighborhood

Institutional uses include the Mobile County Training School and several local churches. Two park and recreational facilities are located in Plateau: Kidd Park and the Robert Hope Community Center.

Land uses are shown in Figure 3.

Land Use	Parcels	Acres	Percentage
Industrial	138	987.4 ac	52.7%
Single Family Residential	535	80.2 ac	4.3%
Multifamily Residential	8	43.2 ac	2.3%
Commercial	11	12.2 ac	0.7%
Institutional	21	32.2 ac	1.7%
Open Space	2	11.7 ac	0.6%
Cemetery	2	4.6 ac	0.2%
Agriculture	2	7.1 ac	0.4%
Transportation & Utilities	10	11.1 ac	0.6%
Vacant	558	683.8 ac	36.5%
Unknown	1	0.4 ac	0.0%
TOTAL	1288	1873.9 ac	100%



Visioning

At the community kickoff meeting on June 25, 2015 meeting participants were asked a variety of questions to understand their concerns and visions for the community.

Assets	What are the physical characteristics of Africatown that <i>meet or exceed your own personal standards?</i>	Sacred Cows	What are the <i>sacred cows</i> in Africatown—the places or things that we'd better not suggest to get rid of or change too much?
History Historic homes Simplicity Residents/neighbors Youth Culture Location	Access to the River Delta Community of "legends" Cemetery Churches Mobile County Training School Parks	Mobile County Training School Churches Cemetery Parks	Good neighbors Community Center Historic buildings, homes
Issues	What are the physical characteristics of Africatown that are <i>not up to your personal standards?</i>	Visioning Pt. 1 What is <i>missing today</i> from Africatown that is in your vision for the community 10 or 15 years from now?	
Industrial encroachment, pollution, hazardous chemicals Drugs Lack of police protection, surveillance Vacant lots and buildings Blighted properties, maintenance, accountability Limited access and circulation Failing school School not growing	No stores Condition of Lewis Quarters No Welcome Center Condition of streets, street signs, sidewalks Outdated maps Conditions of school and parks Traffic, speeding on Bay Bridge Rd. Zoning Water quality (eg. Three Mile Creek)	Youth involvement Gateway to Africatown Welcome Center/Museum Well-maintained cemetery Interpretive signage/markers No more blight Private community More welcoming environment Respect for education More investor and city support More safety, less crime	
Outside Forces	What are the major <i>outside forces</i> that have an impact on life in Africatown, for better or worse?	Visioning Pt. 2 What change or accomplishment would make you say " <i>Wow! I can't believe _____ in Africatown!</i> "?	
Big businesses/industrial encroachment State Docks Chemicals, pollution	Zoning Disappearance of artifacts, visitors Future property buyers, developers Absentee landlords	Africatown is a tourist destination, a gateway/hub to African American history Tourist attractions Historic reenactments, youth involvement Greater recognition of Cudjoe Lewis Community growth Better landscaping, property maintenance	

Neighborhood Development Strategy

GOAL 1

Achieve Critical Mass

An important measure of neighborhood stability is the community's ability to attract private investment that fulfills the long-term needs and desires of its residents. Lower income communities are typically underserved by private investment in businesses and quality housing. Demographic characteristics, such as the number of households and household incomes, are important criteria for retail development. Another factor is how the area is perceived by potential investors and the larger community. These perceptions are influenced by physical blight, crime rates, and other potentially stigmatizing factors. To overcome these limitations it is necessary for the City, nonprofits and other supporters to invest in strategic projects that help to achieve "critical mass" and jump start reinvestment in Africatown. Critical mass is difficult to quantify but key components in achieving it are residential growth and physical improvements that have a high visual impact on those visiting or passing through the community. To have the strongest, initial impact, public and private investments should be concentrated in one or a few conspicuous locations rather than scattered across a large area.



Birdseye view of intersection of Tin Top Lane and Bay Bridge Road

Enhance public and private properties with high visibility

This would include streetscape enhancements on Bay Bridge Road and Telegraph Road as well as beautification efforts on properties fronting these roads. Enhancement projects on Bay Bridge and Telegraph Roads—trees and other landscape plantings, lighting, removal of obsolete driveways and related improvements—would require cooperation with the

ALDOT as well as the City of Prichard for the portions of those in Prichard city limits. Such projects should take into consideration opportunities to improve bicycle and pedestrian access in accordance with the Major Street Plan and the recommendations of this plan.

The City should work with property owners along these corridors to encourage improvements to buildings and premises, including potential funding assistance. Creation of overlay design standards through City zoning would assure future private development contributes to the beautification of these corridors.

Enhance gateways

The primary gateway and entry corridor into Africatown is Bay Bridge Road and the Cochrane-Africatown USA Bridge. In coordination with streetscape improvements, gateway enhancements—wayfinding signage, landscaping and other improvements—at the intersection of Tin Top and Bay Bridge Roads will help create an attractive identity and entranceway for the community. Secondary gateways include the entrance into the Happy Hills neighborhood along Bay Bridge Road and the Paper Mill Road/Telegraph Road intersection, both of which are in Prichard city limits. See also Figure 4.



The Cochrane Africatown USA Bridge built in 1990 is a major gateway into the community

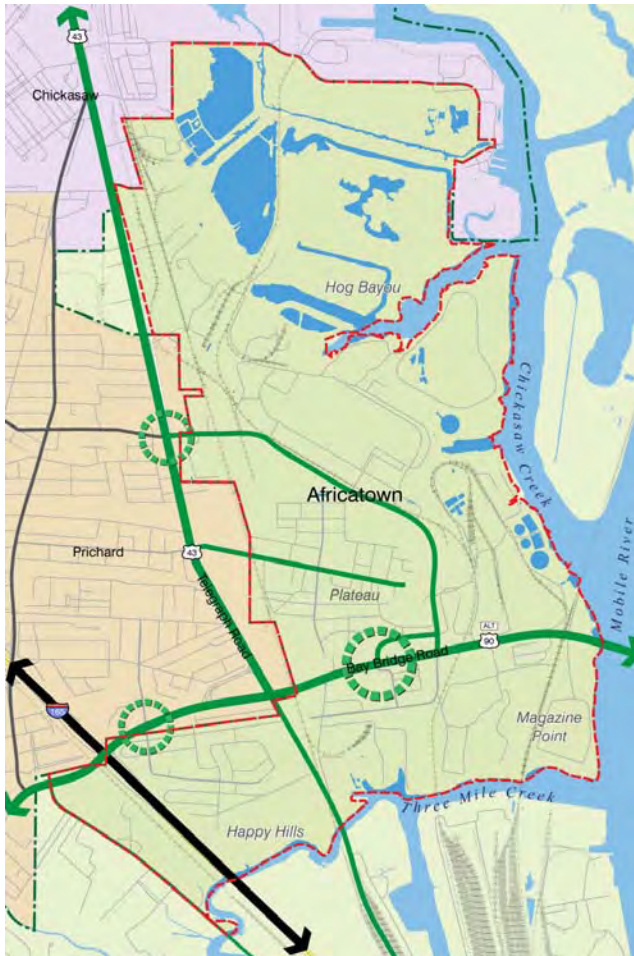


Figure 4: Gateways and Image Corridors

Develop new housing in strategic locations

Quality, affordable housing in the Africatown community is needed. New housing development in the Plateau neighborhood on available property near Bay Bridge Road would help strengthen the Africatown housing market, add to the residential population and compliment efforts to improve the image of the community. This recommended project is discussed further on page 11.

Wayfinding

Installing wayfinding signage along Interstate 165 and other major roads will increase local awareness of Africatown while helping tourists and other visitors to find their way to important destinations in the area, such as the proposed Africatown history center.

Wayfinding signage is separate from but should be planned to work together with historic trail signage and interpretive markers. The primary intent of wayfinding signage is to provide direction to travelers at decision points along primary routes. The Africatown historic district is eligible for brown guide signs on I-165. Standard green directional signs on I-165, today, point visitors to I-10, Bay Bridge Road, and even Downtown Prichard.

As travelers merge onto Bay Bridge Road from I-165, current signs point only to the State Docks Truck Control. However, a green directional sign was installed on Bay Bridge Road eastbound before the Bay Bridge Cutoff Road intersection announcing Africatown’s now-removed visitors’ center. Along Bay Bridge Road and other major roads, vehicular wayfinding signs should direct travelers to destinations such as the Mobile County Training School, Plateau Cemetery and future history center. Smaller, pedestrian signs can also be installed along bicycle and pedestrian routes. Wayfinding signage can be designed uniquely to the area or part of a citywide wayfinding sign program.



Wayfinding signage in Downtown Mobile

GOAL 2

Halt Blight & Neighborhood Decline

Physical blight is both a cause and a result of neighborhood decline. When homes and businesses become vacant as a result of economic decline in a community, the buildings which previously housed those functions are often neglected and deteriorate physically over time. In some cases buildings are converted to less desirable uses. These changes have a ripple effect on the surrounding community, depreciating property values and discouraging reinvestment. In Africatown it is widely perceived that outside forces have contributed to the neighborhood's decline, including the extensive development of industrial facilities that now encircle the community and transportation improvements that have favored through traffic over local access and mobility. To reverse these trends, there must be a concerted effort to secure, maintain and return abandoned property to productive uses and to assure that future city and state decisions place a value on and protect the community from unintended consequences.

Demolish structures severely dilapidated homes

Based upon a visual survey, there appear to be a number of severely dilapidated homes in each of Africatown's neighborhoods. Severely dilapidated homes are those for which the costs to renovate them outweigh the costs of building a new comparable home. Signs of severe dilapidation include sagging or noticeably damaged roofs, wood rot, cracks in foundations and masonry walls, and exterior walls out of plumb. An existing housing inventory should be prepared by the City to identify such structures and, barring any historic significance, schedule them for demolition.

Acquire vacant, blighted and tax delinquent properties

Through the City's Neighborhood Renewal Program and/or a community organization, vacant, blighted and tax delinquent residential properties should be acquired for reuse either for new development or for a side lot program. Through a municipal land bank program, title to vacant and tax delinquent properties can be cleared in larger numbers and city liens forgiven or reduced to put properties back to productive use and blighting conditions eliminated.

Convey vacant parcels to resident owners as part of "side lot" program

As an alternative to acquiring and conveying vacant properties for infill development, a land bank program

can also offer them to existing homeowners to expand their existing properties. This could be a very desirable option for homeowners with very small lots, particularly those without functional rear yards. Side lot programs eliminate blight of vacant, overgrown lots by putting them back into responsible hands, reducing the burden on the City or land bank program of maintaining them.



Figure 5: Vacant and Undeveloped Land

Use vacant lots for gardens and urban agriculture

Some vacant properties may be retained by the City or the community development organization for urban agriculture, art, or gardens. Sites for these purposes should be carefully selected with long-term maintenance and access in mind, as well as whether the function could become disruptive to neighbors. There should also be an understanding with the community regarding the permanence of these activities. Some sites may be best used for farming or gardening on only a temporary basis until opportunities for housing or other development emerge. The Nature Conservancy of Alabama has recently focused on conservation in urban areas through similar strategies and may be a partner in this effort.

Raising produce would not only put abandoned property back into a productive use, it increases community access to fresh, healthy food, which then can support creation of a seasonal or annual market. An agriculture program in Africatown could also bring back crops indigenous to the area.

Implement City programs to preserve historic resources

A large portion of the Plateau community was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2012. While this assures review of federally-funded projects touching the district, it has no effect on other types of development. In many cases municipalities designate local historic preservation districts to enable regulatory controls that protect historic areas from incompatible development. However, this may not be the best alternative to preserve and protect Africatown's historic character. These designations tend to come with rigorous design standards that could financially burden reinvestment in Africatown's historic areas. As an alternative, a less rigorous, historic conservation program may be more desirable to protect the community from incompatible development while facilitating renovation of existing homes and new construction.

Avoid further industrial encroachment

Africatown is virtually surrounded by heavy industrial uses particularly along the Mobile River side. Lumber facilities and other industries line Three Mile Creek, Telegraph Road and Conception Street Road as well. The homes in Lewis Quarters are surrounded by industries and Interstate 165 and, despite Lewis Quarters' historic significance to Africatown, the area is zoned for industrial development.

While proximity to industries offers convenient job opportunities for residents, community property values have undoubtedly been impacted by decades of industrial development and the visual, environmental and traffic impacts that have come with it. While the core of the community has been protected by maintaining residential zoning in the face of proposals for more heavy commercial and industrial development in the area, requests to rezone vacant properties along the edges of the community are likely to continue. (The Land Use Plan contained in this document provides policy guidance to the Mobile Planning Commission and City Council to respond appropriately to future rezoning requests in the larger context of the revitalization of the community.

Where opportunities emerge existing industrial zoning on currently residential, vacant or undevelopable property (i.e., wetland areas) that does not conform to the Land Use Plan should be adjusted. Such changes can be made possible through acquisition, exchanges and other negotiations with owners.

Reduce neighborhood isolation from City

Because of its location and other physical circumstances, much of Africatown is isolated from the larger City of Mobile. In fact, in community meetings, residents noted they had as strong a day-to-day connection with Prichard as Mobile. Residents shop and work in Prichard and Chickasaw as much as they do in Mobile, their children go to schools in Prichard. And while the original settlers of Africatown saw benefits from their separation, the people of today's community yearn for a stronger connection to their mother city. Increased connections can come in different forms, such as better physical links (attractive, well-maintained streets and sidewalks, bicycle routes, greenways) and services (transit, public works, police protection, etc.). The open and constructive dialogue that has been created through this planning effort, guided by the Community and Housing Development Department, should continue and address gaps, both perceived and real, in the City's connection with Africatown.

Encourage improvements on industrial properties

City and community leaders should organize ongoing meetings with representatives of the Port Authority, Chamber of Commerce and area industries to develop stronger relations between these neighbors and pursue efforts that are mutually beneficial. One such endeavor is a clean-up and beautification project along Africatown's major corridors and areas where the residential community and local industries face one another: landscaping and other beautification improvements on industrial frontages; cleaning up overgrown, vacant properties; repainting and similar improvements to homes and community buildings; and ultimately landscaping and other streetscape improvements on area roads.

Ideally, a strong relationship between industry representatives and Africatown's community leaders would allow the two groups to resolve issues productively with or without the City as arbiter.

GOAL 3

Provide Quality, Affordable Housing

There has been little residential investment in the Africatown community in the last several decades other than by individual property owners. This is likely due to a combination of reasons including its relative isolation from other parts of Mobile, a lack of convenient businesses and services, and industrial development that essentially surrounds the community. Residents have also noted concerns about building requirements that have made it impractical to tear down and rebuild homes. Rather than maintaining or growing a stable housing stock, the housing inventory and population in Africatown has dwindled. By stabilizing the community, stopping blight and improving outside perceptions, opportunities to develop new housing in Africatown will improve. In the short term, housing investments by an Africatown community development organization, possibly in coordination with the City and/or Mobile Housing Board, should be pursued to catalyze residential growth. Public and nonprofit/philanthropic housing development should assure both quality and affordability so that each new investment sets the bar for follow-on residential growth. Initial investments should be pursued in strategic locations and at a scale to support “critical mass.”

Construct affordable housing development

The City should help the community form and train a community development organization with the capacity to carry out or partner with others to carry out the recommendations of this plan. With strategic City support—especially early on—such an organization would be able to pursue housing development in Africatown. A high priority and achievable goal is a senior housing complex utilizing layered financing including housing tax credits and HOME funds. This housing development would fill a real need in the community providing quality, affordable housing for older residents who may be increasingly less able or less interested in maintaining their own homes. Such a development would likely consist of 2 story elevator-assisted buildings, one-story attached homes (townhomes) or a combination of the two. In the right location, this development would help improve the community’s image and create critical mass. See Figure 7 for housing development concept.

Develop “infill” single-family housing

Another important housing development strategy is to put new homes on vacant lots throughout the

community. To have the strongest positive impact, clusters of vacant lots in central locations should be pursued early on in phases. A scattered approach—a handful of new houses spread out across a large area—is often more difficult to execute and will have less of an impact. A great benefit of new home construction is the ability to manage costs while providing modern, efficient building shells, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, and appliances that keep down monthly utility costs—which can be as important to working class families as mortgage bills.

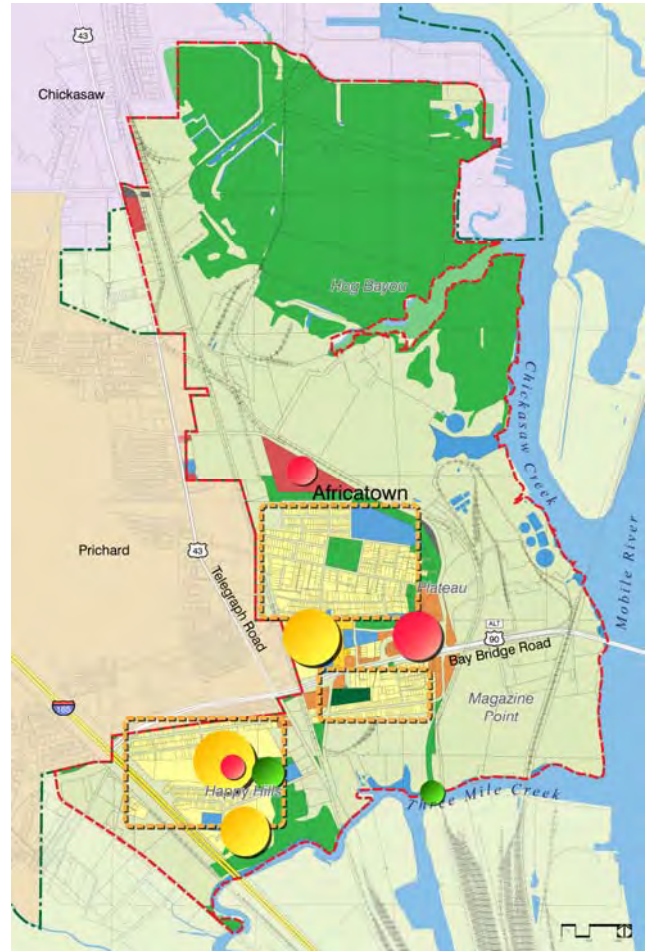


Figure 6: Development Opportunities. Housing rehabilitation and infill development should be pursued in Happy Hills, Plateau and Magazine Point. More concentrated housing development is possible on vacant land in Plateau and Happy Hills. New housing development will increase opportunities for local business development, which can occur around Tin Top Lane. The redevelopment of Josephine Allen homes can accommodate new housing, businesses and park space. Vacant land along Paper Mill Road north of Plateau could be developed for offices and other commercial uses.

There is a significant amount of vacant residential land in the Magazine Point neighborhood. Lotting—many lots

do not have public street access and several undevelopable, remnant lots were created along Bay Bridge Road when it was widened—and floodplain issues undoubtedly contribute to the lack of investment in the area. Correcting lot issues would be simplified by the City, community development organization, or developer acquiring and resubdividing these vacant areas with a new street layout. The current number of individual owners may make it too difficult to do otherwise.

New flood mapping from FEMA is expected in 2016 that may provide some relief in Magazine Point. The City should study the update floodplain mapping on that release and evaluate opportunities for housing development and possible flood mitigation.

Develop master plan for former-Josephine Allen Homes site

One concept for redeveloping the vacant Josephine Allen Homes site was developed for and is presented in this plan (see Figure 8). The concept includes a mixed-density (multifamily, attached and detached housing) residential development clustered around a new, mixed-use neighborhood center and park space. A new entrance into the Happy Hills neighborhood at the existing signalized intersection of US 43 and Bay Bridge Road would provide a level of direct access needed for any level of commercial development within the site. However, creating that entrance would require the removal of some existing homes on Semler and Chin Streets. But these could be moved to nearby vacant lots rather than demolished. The concept plan reuses most of the underlying road system and infrastructure in place today. The southeast corner of the site, which falls in a designated floodplain, is proposed as a park space connecting into the town center. Further study of the site, market and other conditions, potential partnerships and funding should be addressed through a detailed master plan. Connecting the site to Three Mile Creek through or by acquisition of vacant land south of Stimrad Road could provide a unique amenity for the project that would pique development interests.

Redevelop severely-dilapidated single-family homes

Homes identified to be severely-dilapidated should be demolished either by the City or a community development organization and the lots they are located on placed in a land bank program for future housing development where consistent with the Land Use Plan.

Rehabilitate viable, existing housing

Homes in need of interior and/or exterior repairs, but excluding those deemed severely dilapidated, may be renovated by homeowners through funding programs available from the City of Mobile Community and Housing Development department or potentially by a community development organization. Vacant homes may be acquired by the community development organization, renovated and either sold or rented. Older homes will likely benefit from improvements that make them more energy efficient to reduce ongoing utility costs for owners.

In addition to potential assistance from a community development organization or the City, local churches and other philanthropic groups, possibly in partnership, can create an ongoing “adopt-a-block” program to assist homeowners with minor repair needs and property upkeep.

Assure reasonable flexibility in zoning and building codes

Because Africatown’s housing areas developed over a long period of time, many lots were created and houses built prior to the application of zoning, subdivision and building regulations by the City. Also, the community had developed for almost 90 years by the time it was annexed into the City and fell under city regulations.

While many characteristics may be “grandfathered” when existing homes are renovated, when homes are demolished, redevelopment on these lots must conform to City requirements. This can be an issue for lots that do not meet zoning requirements. When homes are removed, a combination of zoning and building code requirements may make it impossible to rebuild on existing foundations.

City zoning and building inspections staff should take into consideration these issues and look for opportunities to provide flexibility either through interpretation or modification of zoning and building code requirements so that housing development is not unnecessarily burdened. However, safety, the primary reason for building regulations, must be assured in all cases. It would also be helpful for City staff to meet with the community and provide information on how zoning and building code requirements that apply to renovation and redevelopment.

Plateau Development Opportunities

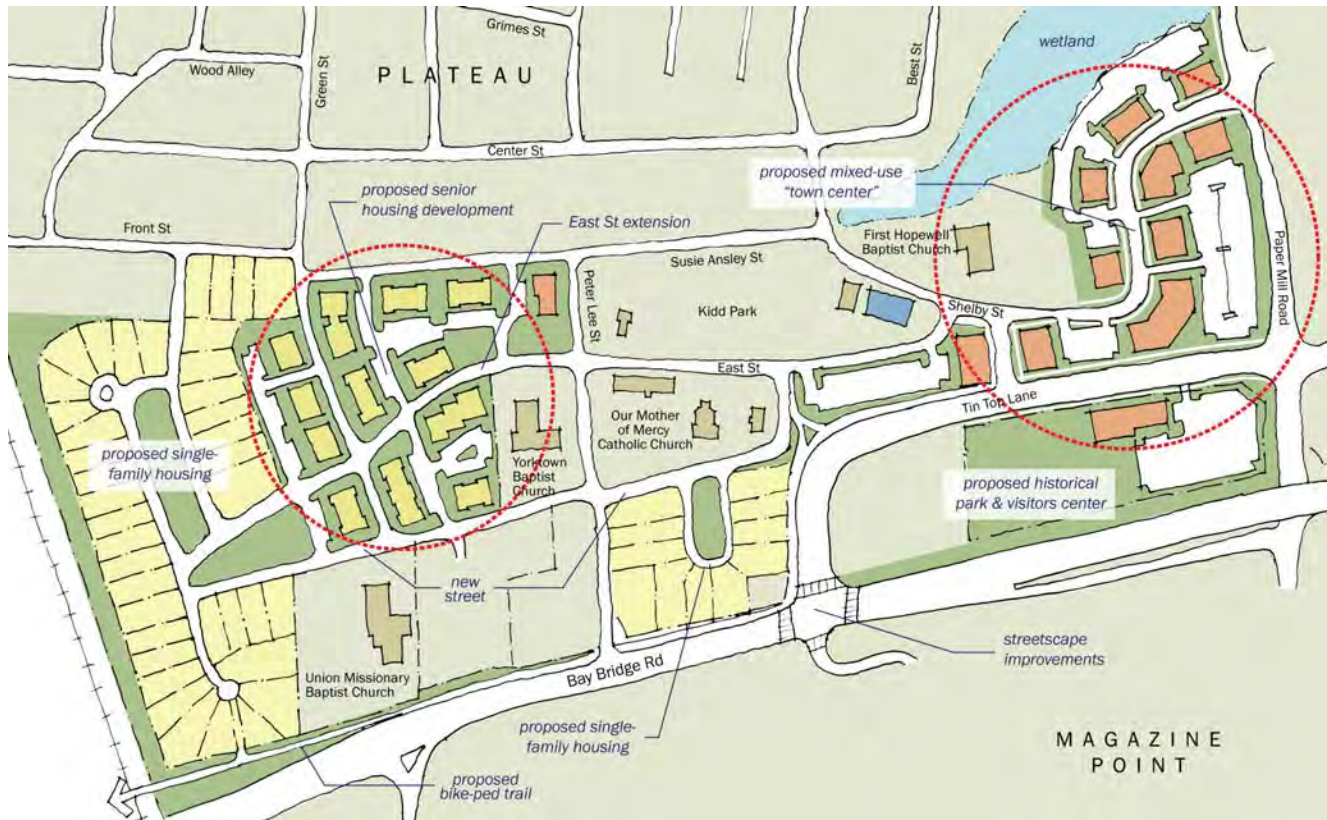


Figure 7: Development Opportunities, Plateau

The concept above illustrates residential and other development opportunities in the Plateau neighborhood that take advantage of vacant and underutilized land.

A senior housing component—that may be developed using housing tax credits—is shown near Yorktown Baptist Church. This might include two- or three-story apartment type buildings, single-story townhomes, or a combination of the two. Extension of existing and new streets will also allow development of new single-family housing on the western edge of Plateau. A natural green space serves as a buffer from the nearby rail line. Additional single-family homes may be developed between Peter Lee Street and Tin Top Lane with all of the new homes facing a new internal street and green space.

Also shown are opportunities for mixed-use/commercial development and an Africatown history center and park on the east side of Plateau. This alternate site for the history center offers easy access from Bay Bridge Road, proximity to businesses that may develop in the proposed “town center,” and connectivity to Magazine Point (and possibly Three Mile Creek) under Bay Bridge Road.

The mixed-use town center is intended for development of retail, dining and other businesses in a compact, walkable environment. Rather than limiting commercial development to properties fronting Paper Mill Road, an extension of Shelby Street captures a larger area for new development. A farmer’s market or similar venue for selling locally-grown produce could be located in this area either temporarily or permanently.



Creek.

Happy Hills Development Opportunities

The illustration below shows a mixed-use redevelopment opportunity on the site of the now-vacant Josephine Allen Homes site owned by the Mobile Housing Board.

Most of the existing street layout is retained and reused. Floodplain areas are used as open space amenities and housing at the perimeter of the site is redeveloped for new single-family homes to provide a mix of incomes and blend the redevelopment into the adjacent neighborhood.

A new street entrance at the existing signalized intersection along Bay Bridge Road will increase access and would help in the development of businesses to serve the surrounding Happy Hills neighborhood. A new entrance would require the re-location of some existing homes and collaboration with the City of Prichard.

Redevelopment of Josephine Allen and improved access into Happy Hills will also improve prospects for redevelopment of industrial properties along Three Mile



Figure 8: Josephine Allen redevelopment concept

Magazine Point Development Opportunities

To make more land available for development in Magazine Point requires the extension or addition of streets so that all lots will have street and emergency access. Many existing lots have little or no access to public streets, some due to changes that occurred with widening of Bay Bridge Road. Combining undeveloped lots in the northeast corner of the neighborhood could make deeper lots available for commercial or mixed-use development. The ultimate layout of streets and lots will be influenced by topography and updated floodplain boundaries, a primary constraint to residential investment in the area.

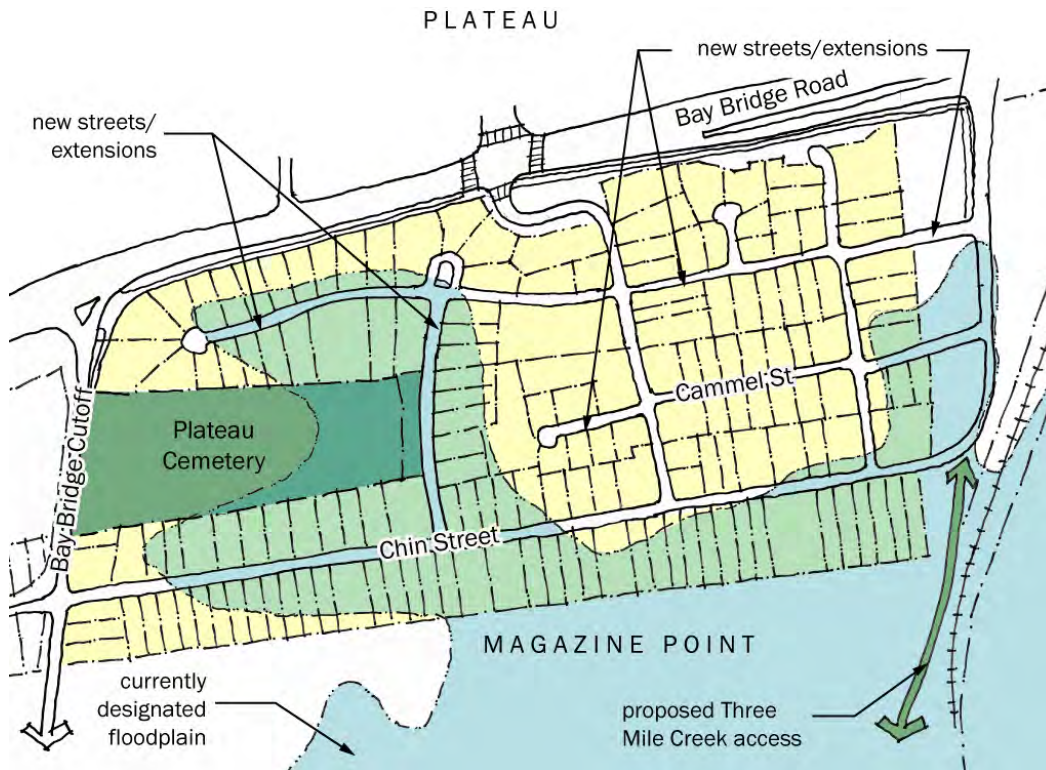
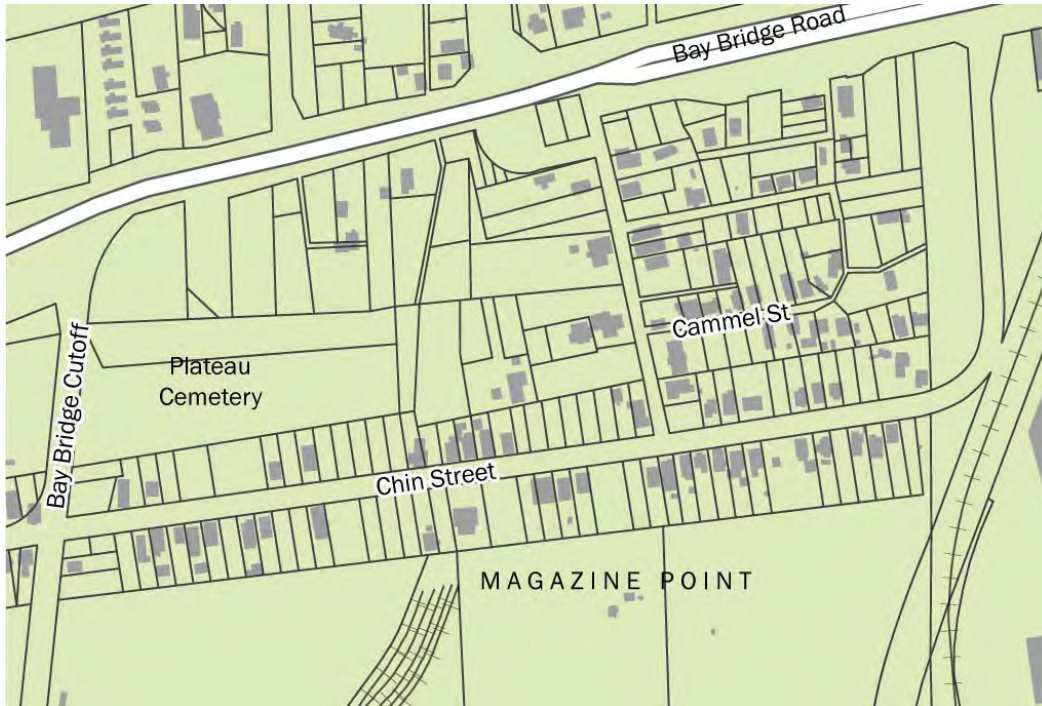


Figure 9: Residential re-lotting concept, Magazine Point.

GOAL 4

Capture Africatown's Historic & Natural Values

Africatown has a unique and important story that must have an opportunity to be told, not just within Mobile but to a global audience. It is a place-based story and so the place itself is important to telling the story. Obviously many changes have occurred in the 150-year old community. While progress comes with sacrifice in all historic communities, change has been dramatic in Africatown and the community has not benefited proportionately from the economic progress that has come from the sacrifices the community has made. In recent years community stakeholders have pursued creation of a permanent visitor's center and program to celebrate the area's history. The natural and historical significance of places like Plateau, Magazine Point, Lewis Quarters, the Mobile River and Hog Bayou represent opportunities to expand Mobile's tourism economy and, at the same time, improve quality of life in Africatown.



An old rail right-of-way, to left of existing rail line, may provide an access from Chin Street to Three Mile Creek.

Provide public access to area waterways

Throughout the planning process residents spoke of their desire to once again have access to the water as the community once did. A possible access to Three Mile Creek from (east) Chin Street along an abandoned railroad right-of-way should be further evaluated by the

City in coordination with the right-of-way holder. If feasible, this access point could be connected not only to the Magazine Point neighborhood but also Plateau by way of bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Paper Mill Road. Plateau residents could reach Three Mile Creek by going under Bay Bridge rather than crossing the busy roadway. Another option might be available on the now dormant creosote plant property east of the proposed route. In conjunction with reinvestment in that property, it may be possible for the City to acquire an easement or right-of-way that could be used as an access point to the creek and proposed greenway.

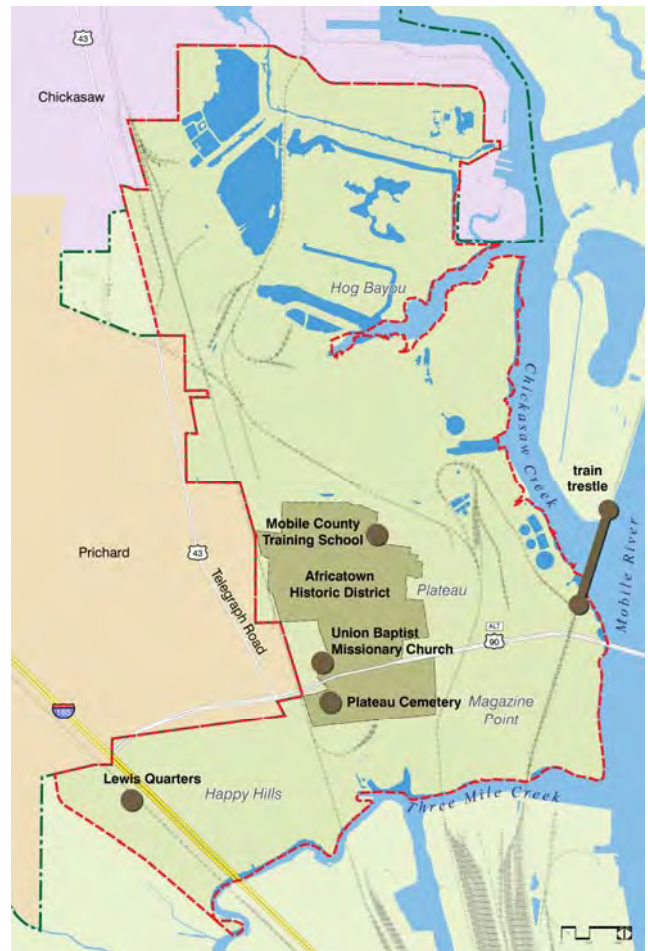


Figure 10: National historic district and historic sites

Connect Africatown to Three Mile Creek greenway

The City is currently designing the first segment of a 12-mile greenway along Three Mile Creek. A physical connection (as described above) should be secured by the City, through negotiation with property owners, as the greenway is extended over the coming years toward Africatown and the river.

Retain Hog Bayou area in predominantly natural state

The Hog Bayou area is a large wetland complex along Chickasaw Creek closely tied to the history of Africatown. Though much of the area is zoned for industrial development, natural conditions and federal environmental restrictions make it very inappropriate, if not infeasible, for the bayou to be used for many industrial purposes. Nonetheless, several properties have been or are currently used for a variety of industrial purposes. Development that alters or displaces wetlands, under federal law, must mitigate those impacts. ADEM and other agencies should monitor activities in these areas to assure they are not in violation, intentionally or otherwise, of applicable laws.

Efforts should be made to afford some public access to the bayou and Chickasaw Creek, where reasonable in the context of existing industrial activities. For as yet undeveloped properties it may be easier to create public access that can be planned and coordinated with future use or reuse of such sites.

Establish a heritage tourism program

A community development organization, in partnership with the City, the Historic Development Commission, Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau and others should develop a plan for a heritage tourism program that tells the nationally-significant story of the Clotilda and the settlement of Africatown. A program in Africatown should be tied in with historic, ecological and convention tourism, particularly the Mobile African-American Heritage Trail, to maximize mutual benefits.

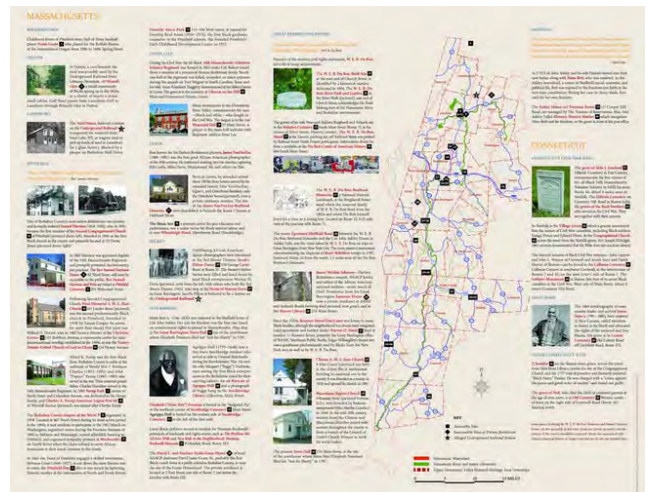
Because many of the sites associated with the Africatown story have changed significantly over the last century and a half—or are no longer publicly accessible—it will be difficult to connect visitors to some of the more interesting and important locations in Africatown's story, as would be done in a typical trail program. However, interpretive markers should be designed and installed in accessible locations such as the cemetery and Union Baptist Missionary Church and Mobile County Training School. The trail can be made interactive through smart phone technology to give tourists a more robust experience, giving access to audio and video materials as they reach markers. A history center and park, described below, would help to supplement the parts of the story that cannot be reached physically.

During community meetings, residents suggested several interesting possibilities for a tourism program

including historic re-enactments and finding and raising the remains of the Clotilda. These could be very powerful components of the tourism program.



Interpretive markers help visitors understand the importance of specific sites to the overall historic narrative of a community. These can be especially important when, as in the case of Africatown, original structures and sites have changed considerably over time.



Maps and brochures can be important elements in a heritage tourism program even in an age of digital technology.

The historic district and important destinations within the tourist program should be included within the wayfinding signage system recommended under **Goal 1: Achieve Critical Mass.**

Construct an Africatown history center and park

In the short term, a temporary location should be acquired—possibly a church or a vacant building in a central location—to house a small, but functional visitor center/museum.

Two possible locations have been identified for the development of a permanent history center to serve as the nucleus of an Africatown tourism program. These include the site along Bay Bridge Cutoff Road across from the Africatown cemetery, where many of the community's original settlers as well as Buffalo Soldiers are buried. Another potential location is in the mixed-use area (shown in Figure 7 Development Opportunities, Plateau) on the southeast corner of Plateau. The benefit of the Bay Bridge Cutoff Road is that it is already under community control. The selling point of the Plateau site is its ability to be connected with and support future business development. It would also be in a location where visitors could walk or ride a bike under rather than cross Bay Bridge Road to get to tourist destinations in Magazine Point, including the cemetery and Three Mile Creek.

Encourage water-based eco- and heritage tourism

Africatown's history is closely tied to the river, creeks and bayous of northwest Mobile. And, because important locations that are a part of the story cannot be reached on land today, water-based tours could offer a more complete tourism experience. There are existing boat tours that operate along the Mobile River. Incorporating Africatown historic narratives and information on the ecological uniqueness on the unique Delta habitats would create a larger potential audience for boat tour operators and complement a heritage trail and other tourism offerings.

Evaluate opportunities for a nature preserve/state park

In recent years a plan was prepared by Auburn University recommending the development of a major preserve along the Mobile River near Africatown. The creation of a state or natural preserve would be a great benefit to tourism in Mobile and historic and ecotourism activities proposed in Africatown. The Auburn plan should be evaluated again in the context of developing a more comprehensive network of tourism activities along the river, including those in Africatown.

Case Study: Mud Island, Memphis TN

The Mud Island River Park may be a good model for a museum and historical park for Africatown's proposed tourism program. The park includes a museum with a full-sized replica of an historic steamboat and a scale model of the Mississippi River sculpted into the site. Cities and towns with historical information are included along the interactive water feature.



GOAL 5

Improve Economic Opportunity, Quality of Life

One in three households in Africatown and adjacent neighborhoods* have incomes below the poverty level. Families that experience intergenerational poverty struggle to achieve a better quality of life and greater economic status for a multitude of reasons. And, each such family tends to face multiple challenges in helping their children emerge out of poverty. Local governments, nonprofit organizations and philanthropic foundations have seen successes in recent years helping families in low income neighborhoods achieve economically through coordinated and comprehensive approaches that address housing, education and community wellness issues that are place-specific. The City of Mobile, the Mobile Community Action Partnership, churches and other public and private partners offer various services to assist families and individuals in Africatown. A community-based organization can help increase coordination among these groups and raise awareness and access to available services to improve the lives of residents.

*Estimate from 2009-2013 American Community Survey for Mobile County Census Tract 12 Block Group 1 and Census Tract 38 Block Group 1.

Support development of local businesses and services

In community meetings, residents reminisced about Africatown's heyday when jobs were plentiful and local businesses met the day-to-day needs of the community. Some even remembered the movie theater in Plateau. Many believed these local businesses started drying up about the same time that International Paper shut down its facility on the east side of Plateau. But today the fact is residents must patronize businesses in other parts of the metro area because there are virtually none in Africatown.

The City assists with entrepreneurial business development through the Business Innovation Center, which is a partnership with Mobile County and the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce. Information about federal, state and local business incentives should be shared with interested audiences as part of business development effort in Africatown. The city and private partners may further such efforts by providing space for a small business incubator. Cities have had varied experiences with business incubators and these should be researched to identify an appropriate model for use in Africatown. Recently, retail development organizations have been using "pop-up shops" to

feature start-up retail businesses in temporary spaces, with the intent of marketing them and growing them into sustainable 'brick and mortar' stores.

Facilitating local business development and recruitment of businesses into Africatown will provide much needed business services (that contribute to local tax revenues) and provide job opportunities for residents. Business recruitment efforts can tout the area's accessibility, traffic counts on Bay Bridge Road, the number of industrial workers in the area on a daily basis in addition to the pent up demand among residents for convenient retail and services.

Assure access to health care and social services

Quality of life manifests in different ways. Most of the following efforts to improve the lives of residents will likely be taken on by nonprofit organizations with support, where appropriate, from the City and other public agencies. While there are a number of health care and nonprofit social service agencies, most are located far from Africatown. Building awareness of these resources may be an important step in helping more residents take advantage of them.

Healthcare. There are several free and affordable health care clinics in Prichard and Mobile including a school-based health center at the Mobile County Training School. Community clinics offer low cost primary and preventative health services, including dental and vision care. Some clinics offer transportation for doctor appointments.

Public and private agencies can help inform residents of available quality, affordable healthcare services in the surrounding community as well as rideshare and paratransit programs that can provide transportation to medical facilities.

Monthly health screenings for children and older residents can be provided through mobile programs supported by the county health department. Ultimately, development of an urgent or primary care facility serving north Mobile and the Prichard area should be pursued collaboratively by both communities.

Mobile Area Health Clinics

Dumas Wesley Community Center
126 Mobile Street

Franklin Primary Health Care
1303 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Ave, 553 Dauphin St,
1201 Springhill Ave and 1055 Dauphin St

Victory Health Partners
3750 Professional Pkwy

Mobile County Health Department
251 N Bayou St

Family Health Alabama
248 Cox St

USA Center for Women's Health
1610 Center Street

Maysville Medical Center
1956 Duval Street

Fresh food access has already begun, to some extent, through efforts to create and tend a community garden in north Plateau. Urban agriculture has become a popular movement in American cities for a variety of reasons, including reducing food deserts and increased interest in organic and fresh foods. Expansion of community gardening in Africatown, a seasonal farmer's market, and truck-based mobile markets all can help increase access to affordable, fresh and healthy food especially for residents with limited transportation means. City regulations should be evaluated to assure urban agriculture and mobile markets are appropriately accommodated.

Where there may be concern over soil contamination, such as from past or present industries in the area, food crops may still be grown in raised beds separated by a fabric barrier and fresh topsoil. In any case, soils should be tested to determine if there is any contamination and if so, its extent, remedies and best practices with regard to raised bed gardening.

Community education programs include financial, parenting and family, nutrition and other educational services to strengthen low-income families. Financial education programs help families manage their finances by providing instruction on banking and savings accounts, car and home purchases, investments, and tax programs. Parenting and family education provides instruction to create stable, nurturing family environments for children, including programs specifically designed for young parents and

single parents. Nutrition programs emphasize the importance of healthy food choices, particularly for growing children, whose early development and school achievement can be negatively impacted by poor nutrition.

Improve public safety

Reducing crime and improving public safety, both real and perceived, are essential to improving the lives of current residents and creating a more hospitable environment for investment. Mobile police and emergency service providers should meet with residents to discuss issues and identify ways that relationships and services can be improved.

Community policing program. Community policing is an approach to improving public safety that relies on collaboration between local police departments and the community. These programs can take on different shapes based upon the specific needs of the community but all typically emphasize proactive problem-solving, as opposed to reacting to crime only after it occurs. Relationships between residents and law enforcement agencies should be strengthened, given Africatown's relative isolation.

Citizen patrol programs can be used as part of community policing efforts but their success depends on the training and level of commitment of volunteers from the neighborhood.

Utilizing input from residents, business and property owners in addition to historical records, the Police Department can identify crime hot spots and develop proactive strategies to reduce crime in areas where criminal activity appears to be clustered. Hot spot policing has been found to be effective in small areas without displacing criminal activity to other locations. CPTED principles (see *Design for Safety and Security*, p. 25) can also be useful in making hot spots less accommodating to would-be criminals; for example by improving lighting, restricting access; and increasing legitimate activity.

Code Enforcement. Vacant and abandoned properties tend to attract criminal activity because they are unattended, which, for would-be criminals, reduces their risk of being noticed. This also can be the case for buildings and properties that are only occupied at certain times, particularly when they are not well-maintained. This is related to the "broken windows" theory, which suggests that places where broken windows (and other maintenance issues) go unrepaired

reflect a lack of concern, which encourages vandalism and other petty crimes. Continued deterioration can attract more serious criminal behavior while also increasing the chances of building safety issues. To address these problems, an aggressive code enforcement program should be launched by the City.

Code enforcement activities encourage property owners to maintain property and buildings in a safe orderly condition by setting financial penalties for violations that go uncorrected. Absentee owners are a common problem for code enforcement activities because penalties and abatement costs incurred by the city go unpaid. These usually become liens on the property. Heavily dilapidated buildings may be condemned and demolished by the City, which can result in a demolition lien. Nuisance abatement and demolition liens, if unpaid, can become a constraint to reinvestment by a new owner. Given that reinvestment is an essential aim of this plan, the City should have an appropriate policy to waive or reduce liens when abandoned properties are acquired for reinvestment.

While it is important that a long-term plan be created for the redevelopment of the Josephine Allen public housing complex, the derelict site is a magnet for criminal activity and the vacant structures should be demolished sooner rather than later. Until the site is eventually redeveloped, the vacant site can be used as a passive open space.

Develop a Strong Cradle-to-Career Educational Network

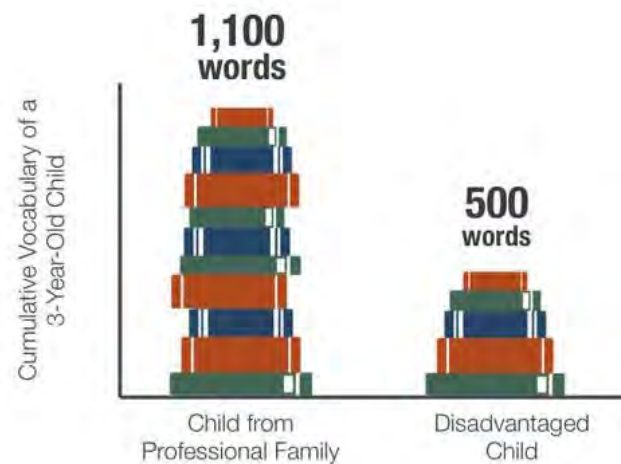
Child development and education increase the ability of children to succeed economically later in life. Research indicates that children in low-income families experience developmental difficulties at a higher rate than children in families with higher incomes. These challenges directly affect their performance in school and increase in intensity the longer their families experience poverty.

Based on 2014 and 2015 ACT Aspire data from Mobile County Schools, testing scores in elementary schools serving Africatown are lower than county averages, which are generally on par with state scores. ACT Aspire testing began in 2014 and the data reviewed included grades 3-5. Because Africatown children attend multiple elementary schools alongside children from other parts of Mobile and from Prichard, it was not possible within the scope of this plan to isolate and compare their scores against those from higher income areas. However, available data indicates a noticeable

difference in student performance between Africatown-serving schools and others in the County in grades 3-5.

Student performance should be monitored to confirm whether or not there is an “education gap”. Should such a gap be found, strengthening early learning programs and other educational strategies should be pursued. Support from the Mobile Area Education Foundation, the business community and other private and nonprofit groups will be helpful in pursuing such education initiatives.

Early Learning. Nationally, one-third of children in low-income communities enter kindergarten behind their peers. This indicates that the education gap becomes noticeable even before children enter elementary school. Nationally, early learning programs and education-focused family support services are being used to address these issues. Locally, Mobile Community Action Partnership administers a Head Start program that serves 1,500 low income children ages 3-5 in the Mobile area, including at Ella Grant Elementary School.



Between 18 and 36 months, children in working class and low-income families tend to develop a more limited vocabulary than those in higher income families. Researchers suggest this affects educational and economic achievement later in life. These findings have led to increased focus on early learning programs and parenting education programs to assure children have a strong foundation entering school and eventually the work force. Image source: heckmanequation.org

Participation in Head Start and Early Head Start programs should be encouraged and existing programs enhanced and expanded through public and nonprofit agencies. Development of a private, nonprofit early learning center located in Africatown could complement existing public programs. City and community leaders

should partner with local and national foundations to evaluate the need and feasibility of this endeavor.

Public schools serving Africatown are within the Mobile County School system. Children in kindergarten through fifth grade are zoned for Whitley, Howard or Grant Elementary School. Middle school children (grades 6-8) attend Mobile County Training School in Plateau. High school students (grades 9-12) attend Vigor High School. Pursuant to recent legislation enabling the creation of charter schools in Alabama, the Mobile County School System opted to become an authorizing body for the potential development of charter schools. There are numerous parochial and other private schools in the Mobile area.

As has been done in Mobile County, communities across the country are providing alternative curriculums for students based around career interests. The intent of these programs is to better prepare high school students to meet the challenges of our changing economy. The career academy model, which was originally created forty years ago, accommodates students intending to enter the workforce on graduation and those bound for college. The business community can support such a curriculum through internships and workplace learning. These efforts have included focused improvements, often supported by philanthropic organizations and other private partners, to develop “feeder programs” for high school career or signature academies. Recently Vigor High School incorporated an information technologies academy and an academy of humanities and public services. To strengthen these programs, a supporting feeder program of middle and elementary schools should be pursued to offer Africatown’s school age children improved public educational programs in the community.

Not only would strengthening early learning programs and public schools serving Africatown benefit area families, these efforts would also help to make Africatown a more attractive community for new families.

Mentoring, Parental Involvement and Extracurricular Activities. Children, particularly those with working parents, need a safe, supportive environment in the hours after school and during summer breaks. For working parents, the need for after-school programs is a practical one—for child care. Extracurricular programs administered through public schools, churches, and private organizations like Boys & Girls Clubs of America

provide those nurturing environments for children. Participation in these programs helps children develop interpersonal skills and gain a sense of accomplishment while staying “off the streets” and “out of trouble.” But for children in low income families, extracurricular activities can be too costly or too far away.

Africatown Public Schools

- Ella Grant Elementary School. Located just over one mile from west side of Africatown in nearby Prichard, Grant Elementary serves only a small portion of Africatown west of I-165 (primarily Lewis Quarters). Grant has an enrollment of about 380 students. GreatSchools.com ranking = 5 out of 10.
- Whitley Elementary School. Located in Prichard about ½ mile from Africatown, Whitley serves students living in the Plateau and Magazine neighborhoods and has an enrollment of about 320 students. A new school building was opened in 2013. GreatSchools.com ranking = 3 out of 10.
- Florence Howard Elementary School. Located in Mobile about two miles from Africatown, Howard serves students living in the Happy Hills neighborhood and has an enrollment of about 500 students. GreatSchools.com ranking = 2 out of 10.
- Mobile County Training Middle School. Located in the Plateau neighborhood, the historic Mobile County Training School was built originally in 1880 on land purchased and donated by the settlers of Africatown. In 1910 it became the first publicly accredited school in Mobile County. In the early 1970s it was converted from a high school (serving grades 7-12) to a middle school. In 2011 the county school system moved the alternative school to MCTS. In 2015 it was listed as a “failing school” by the Alabama Department of Education. GreatSchools.com ranking = 1 out of 10.
- Vigor High School. Located roughly one mile from Africatown in nearby Prichard, Vigor High School has an enrollment of approximately 820 students. GreatSchools.com ranking = 4 out of 10.

Extracurricular programs can include youth mentoring programs, in which children receive guidance from adult mentors such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, 100 Black Men and similar nonprofit and church-based programs. Mentoring programs help children avoid risky behavior, grow in confidence and perform better in school. Fitting with Africatown’s reputation for neighbors looking after one another, community elders have been developing an informal mentoring program. Such efforts should continue and be supported and expanded by social service agencies.

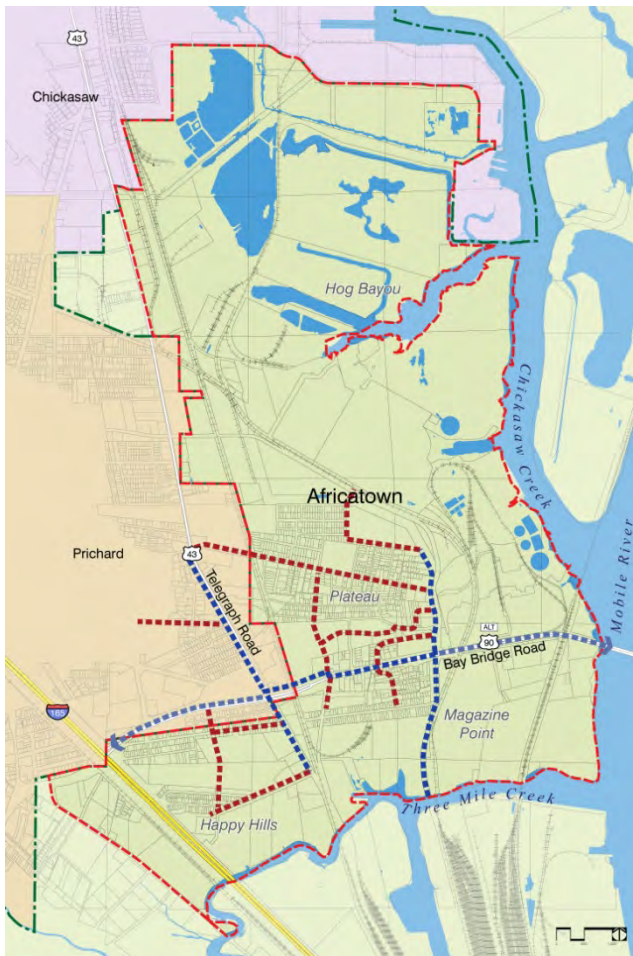


Figure 10: Bicycle-Pedestrian Concept

Improve pedestrian and bicycle access and mobility

Through changes in infrastructure and development over time, Africatown’s neighborhoods have become more and more fragmented. It is unpleasant, difficult and in some cases unsafe to walk or ride a bicycle between Plateau, Happy Hills and Magazine Point. To create safer access for residents between neighborhoods, churches, schools, parks and (future) business areas, strategically located sidewalk and multipurpose trail projects (shown as red and blue dashed lines respectively in Figure 10) should be implemented. These include:

- A multipurpose path connecting Happy Hills to Plateau and Magazine Point constructed along Telegraph Road then eastward at-grade on (what appears to have been) a bridge abutment over the railroad on the north side of Bay Bridge Road; this would allow a more direct connection than the existing sidewalk on the Bay Bridge Road bridge over the railroad/Telegraph Road and offer the flexibility to accommodate bikes and pedestrians



A multipurpose trail could connect Happy Hills to Plateau by way of Telegraph Road under Bay Bridge Road then crossing over the railroad using an original bridge abutment on the north side of Bay Bridge Road.

- Pedestrian and bicycle path along Paper Mill Road extending south from Plateau toward Three Mile Creek where, south of Chin Street, may be able to utilize a former railroad right-of-way to connect directly to the creek; depending on right-of-way limitations, the path may alternate between a (combined) multipurpose path parallel to the road or a sidewalk and on-street bike lane or shared lane (note: bike lanes on Paper Mill could be created by reconfiguring Paper Mill Road from a four-lane to three-lane cross section
- Wider sidewalks along Bay Bridge Road with stronger separation from traffic; right-of-way and other constraints permitting, a multipurpose trail that accommodates pedestrians and bicyclists should be considered (note: Bay Bridge Road is identified in the countywide bicycle and pedestrian master plan). See Figure 11.



Existing sidewalk along Bay Bridge Road

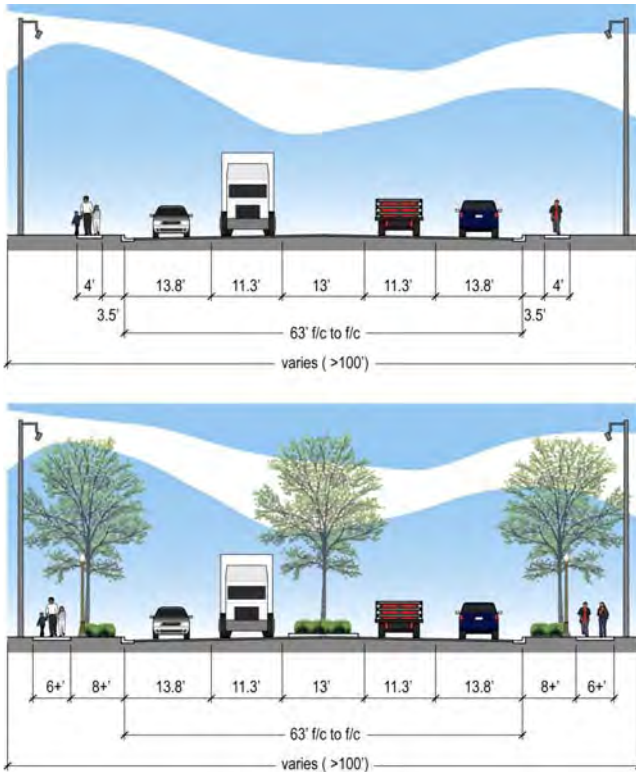


Figure 11: Existing and proposed cross-sections of Bay Bridge Road revealing how the corridor could be made more attractive and pedestrian-friendly through sidewalk improvements, landscaping and pedestrian-scale lighting. Landscaped median would be located between center turn lanes where possible. Trees within the right-of-way must meet ALDOT standards.

- Strategic sidewalk improvements connecting residential areas in Happy Hills, Plateau and Magazine Point to multipurpose paths on major roads and to important destinations within each neighborhood

Enhance Robert Hope Community Center and Park

The Robert Hope Community Center is an important facility for Africatown residents. It offers after-school and summer programs for children. Without a public library nearby, the computer room is another feature important to the community. The aging center is in need of renovation, which would offer the opportunity to expand and improve programs that are vital to residents. A wifi hotspot or wifi zone created as a part of technology improvements in the community center would be an important boost for the area. Specific funding may be available for such technology upgrades through federal and private philanthropic sources.

The park space at the Community Center is underdeveloped and could be improved to accommodate a variety of recreational uses, in addition

to the existing playground and two baseball fields. The baseball fields could be enhanced with bleachers, dugouts, and field improvements. Improvements to the park should include trees and other landscaping and perimeter lighting. Other amenities might include pavilions, benches, walking paths and possibly a bandstand or similar facility for staging community events.

Protect residents from displacement

If successful, implementation of this plan will eventually raise property values in Africatown, which will then increase the property taxes landowners must pay. Increased property taxes not only affect homeowners, they can also result in rent increases for others. For some current residents, these added costs may become an economic burden that forces them to relocate. To avoid displacement, the city can place a cap on property taxes as has been done in some large cities in the US to maintain housing affordability.

Land Use Plan

The following land use plan results from analysis of existing land uses, environmental conditions, available infrastructure, existing zoning, the community vision and development principles described in the Neighborhood Development Strategy.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use map (see Figure 12) illustrates *generally* how different parts of Africatown should function and relate to one another. It portrays a pattern of various activity centers, their relationships with each other and with residential areas. The essential functions of the community—its various neighborhoods, institutions, business and industrial areas, parks and natural areas—are presented in the Future Land Use map. The land use categories indicated on the map *are not to be interpreted as zoning districts*, but rather as guidelines indicating desirable land use patterns for the community's continued development. The map is intended to:

- Avoid and resolve land use conflicts
- Identify and support desirable land use patterns
- Forecast infrastructure needs
- Provide a foundation for zoning

The designation of land uses on the Future Land Use map should not be interpreted to propose, approve, deny nor preclude any specific action without full consideration of all policies, principles, standards or intentions expressed in this plan document and its implementing regulations.

Land Use and Development Principles

Like should face like. Changes in land use should occur along alleys or rear lot lines so that one kind of use, such as housing, faces the same across a street. Major physical barriers like railroads and wide open space corridors are also appropriate locations for land use changes.

Focus development toward activity centers and corridors. The mix of uses and intensity of development should be greatest around accessible “centers” or along important “corridors”. Further from these nodes of activity, the mix and intensity of development should decrease.

Buildings should front on and be oriented toward streets. Properly sited buildings create a harmonious, walkable environment. Off-street parking should not be located between the fronts of buildings and the street, particularly in residential and local business areas. Buildings should have entrances that face the street.

Provide buffers between incompatible uses. Buffers between incompatible uses typically include a setback (bufferyard), landscaping and/or a fence or wall. Buffers lessen nuisances (light, noise, etc.) that might otherwise infringe on the enjoyment and value of neighboring properties.

Land Use Types and Characteristics

Parks and Open Space uses include public and privately held open space and recreation uses, natural areas, community gardens and urban agriculture, parks and greenways.

Wetland complexes fall within this category and include areas that have already been developed or zoned for other uses. Non-recreational uses may be appropriate provided they entail minimal impact on the land in accordance with applicable wetland regulations.

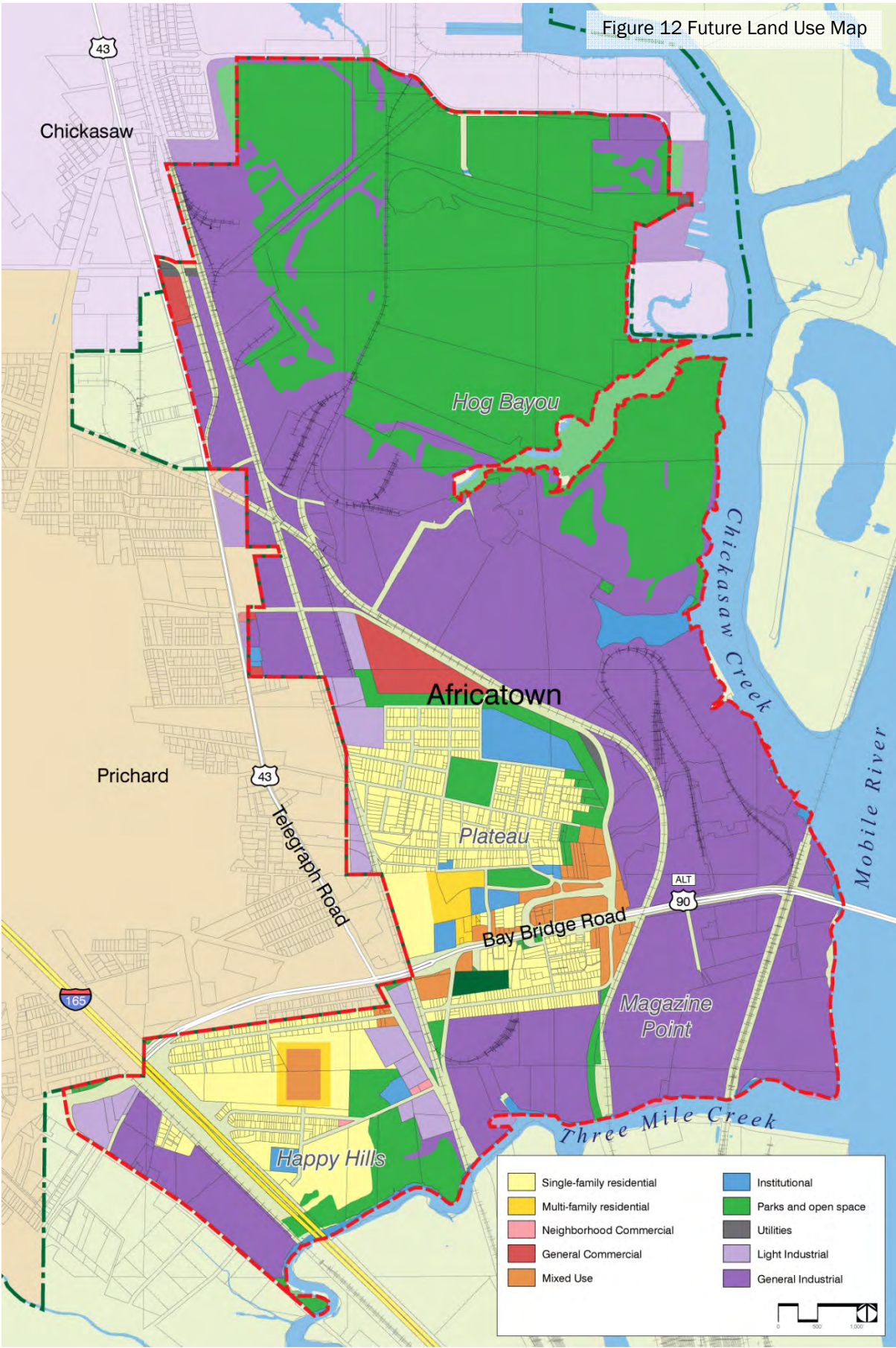
Medium Density Residential uses are single family detached, semi-attached and duplex housing on moderately sized lots (4-8 homes per acre).

High Density Residential uses are single family attached (townhouses) and multifamily housing (more than 8 units per acre) designated in central, highly accessible locations often adjacent to mixed use and commercial areas. These uses provide a logical transition between activity centers and medium density residential uses beyond.

Neighborhood Commercial uses include retail, personal services, offices and other enclosed commercial uses limited in size to assure compatibility with adjacent residential development.

General Commercial uses include a variety of retail, dining, and personal service establishments, offices, gas stations, and other enclosed commercial uses. Commercial uses that are larger than would be appropriate or that generate levels of traffic that would be undesirable in a more central neighborhood location are also included. These uses may be developed as part of large commercial centers or individually.

Figure 12 Future Land Use Map



Mixed-Use areas include retail, personal services, office, dining and entertainment, lodging, recreation, multifamily dwellings (especially in upper stories) and institutional uses, all of which may be mixed horizontally or vertically. These areas should be highly walkable and easily accessible from surrounding residential areas.

Guidelines for Mixed-use Areas

- Retail, dining, personal services and entertainment uses should be at street level in central, prominent locations; office uses should flank retail. Residential uses should be in upper stories or at the edges of the mixed-use area.
- Buildings typically should not exceed three stories. Adjacent buildings should be compatible, though not necessarily the same, in size and configuration.
- Larger buildings should have varied rooflines.
- For walkability, buildings should face the street and be placed near the sidewalk, with off-street parking situated to the sides and rear.
- Street intersections are important locations for development and are appropriate for taller buildings.
- Driveways and loading areas should be placed away from intersections.
- Streets should include wide sidewalks, street trees, on-street parking, pedestrian-scale lighting, seating and trash receptacles. Provided adequate right-of-way width, on-street parking should be included.
- Building-mounted signs, including blade signs, are encouraged. Freestanding signs are less appropriate in mixed-use areas, but if permitted should generally not be taller than six feet.

Institutional uses indicated on the Future Land Use Map represent locations of existing public and private institutions, i.e., churches, schools, and government offices and facilities. For the purposes of this plan future institutional uses are appropriate in other land use areas as the need for such facilities arises. Generally, institutional uses are most appropriate within or at the edges of commercial and mixed-use areas. On residential blocks, institutional uses may be appropriate on corners but are less appropriate at mid-block.

Light Industrial uses include offices, research and development parks, call centers, and light industrial complexes. Generally, manufacturing uses are not desired though some light manufacturing facilities may be appropriate. Because these uses tend to have a large number of employees and generate high traffic

counts during the day, they should be accessible from major roads to avoid burdening local residential streets.

General Industrial uses include a variety of industrial facilities, including manufacturing uses, many of which generate smoke, dust, noise and similar nuisances to residential and mixed-use areas. As with Restricted Industrial uses, these facilities require access to major roads.

Design for Safety and Security

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be used in the design of new development to create a physical environment that discourages would-be criminals. Implementation of these standards, which can be done in part through zoning and design standards, will support community policing and other public safety initiatives.

Natural Surveillance deters crime by increasing opportunities for people to observe (consciously or not) activity in public or semipublic spaces where crime may occur. Increased visibility, often referred to as “eyes on the street,” increases risks for potential criminals. Examples: front porches, windows that face the street, open spaces that are visible from the street and neighboring buildings.

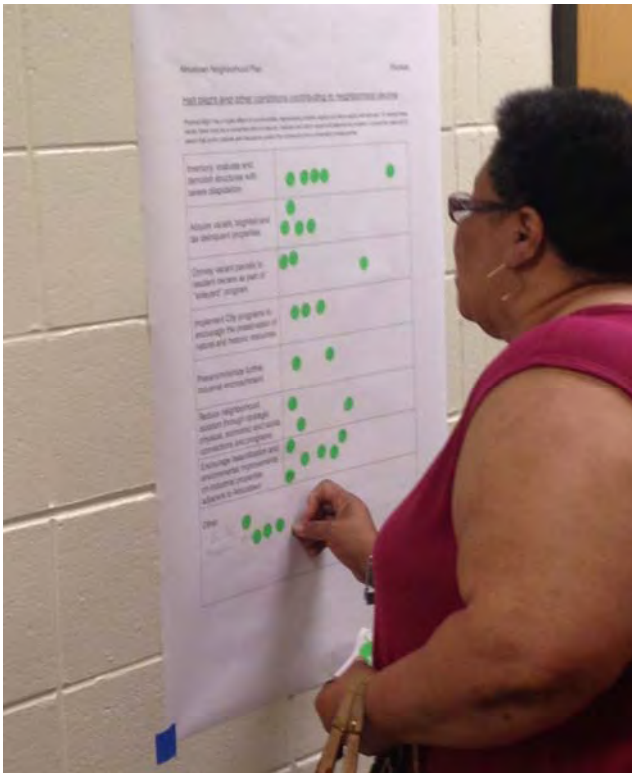
Territorial Reinforcement deters crime by emphasizing ownership, occupancy, and control over property. It includes frequency of maintenance and promoting continuous activity to discourage would-be trespassers. Abandoned properties are magnets for undesirable activity. Buildings and properties, even if vacant, should be regularly tended to (i.e., broken windows get repaired, grass is cut regularly, and litter is removed).

Access Control focuses on the management of access between public and private space, such as locating entrances where they are easily surveillable and limiting the size or number of entrances and exits. It also includes the use of appropriately designed fences, gates, and other barriers.

Implementation

The sustained revitalization of Africatown will require a committed, holistic effort—the problems present in the community today did not happen overnight and it will take time and persistence to overcome them. The causes of community issues are also complicated and must be addressed from many different perspectives to have lasting effect. With only limited resources, public and private partners must act collaboratively and strategically. They must pool their resources to accomplish larger tasks and invest carefully, focusing funds into efforts and projects that are likely to have a ripple effect, creating positive change beyond the physical boundaries of a single investment.

Implementation of the plan will also require building capacity among nonprofit and community organizations for them to be more effective in their own missions as well as in taking actions in support of this plan. In some cases this may require re-organization. This may entail the dissolution or combining of some groups or the creation of new ones.



During a community meeting on September 3, 2105 residents identified their top priorities for the community plan.

Resources and Tools

Local funding will be limited. Not only will public agencies and their community partners need to act strategically—setting priorities and implementing the plan incrementally as funding allows, it will also be necessary to find and leverage outside funding. The following are some of the funding sources and tools that can be brought to bear in implementing the plan.

Federal and State Programs

The federal government has many programs and funding sources that may be tapped to support revitalization, including the recently created Promise Zone initiative, which is a collaborative program involving the Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Justice and Agriculture. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 created new types of tax-exempt and qualified tax credit bonds that may be used by local governments in designated Recovery Zones. Both FEMA and the US Army Corps of Engineers have programs available to assist with flood mitigation efforts, including funding to acquire private property in flood prone areas.

The City of Mobile is an “entitlement community” and receives annual grants from HUD’s CDBG program. The Entitlement Communities program provides funding that can be used for projects and programs to improve living conditions and economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income communities. The New Market Tax Credits program administered by the Department of the Treasury is another source of funds for development projects in low-income communities.

Transportation funds. Through the Mobile Metropolitan Planning Organization federal and state transportation funds may be obtained to assist with street construction and improvements, streetscape and bicycle-pedestrian enhancements and off-street trails. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) offers funding that can be used for development of recreational trails.

Housing funds. Through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development there are federal and state funding sources available to help public and private housing developers build quality affordable housing.

These include Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), Community Development block Grant (CDBG) and HOME funds, among others. The Alabama Housing Finance Authority

disburses LIHTC and other funding resources annually through competitive and non-competitive processes. The City can help increase the competitiveness of AHFA applications by providing local HOME fund matches to priority projects.

Funding assistance is available through ADECA to improve energy efficiency of existing homes and reduce utilities costs for low-income households. These improvements have high-up front costs but can be important long-term savings for families.

Redevelopment District

Redevelopment districts are areas designated by local ordinance in accordance with Section 24-3 of the Alabama State Code, which provides city governments and housing authorities specific powers to support redevelopment and reduce blight, including the acquisition and conveyance of property for affordable housing and other public purposes. The designation of a redevelopment district can also be of benefit in seeking funds from state and federal agencies.

Private and Nonprofit Housing Developers

Local nonprofit Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs) and regional and national development companies build workforce and affordable housing. Several private housing developers are active in Alabama who work with CHDOs and public housing authorities to assist those organizations in planning, acquiring funding assistance and building affordable housing.

Land Banking

There are tax delinquent, vacant and abandoned properties in Africatown, many with title and lean issues that deter private investors. The City may acquire tax delinquent properties through the Alabama Department of Revenue and provide marketable title to properties with complex liens and ownership histories.

Community Organizations

There are several private foundations and nonprofit organizations active in Mobile that may participate in the revitalization process such as Mobile Community Action, United Saints for Education and the Center for Fair Housing.

Churches and other faith-based groups can be a valuable resource. They run community outreach programs where volunteers do cleanup and repair work in neighborhoods. Programs organized among congregations across the city can leverage greater

access to donated materials and labor. Churches can also partner with the City and other organizations.

Private Funding

Philanthropic foundations, endowments and banks offer funding resources to public and nonprofit agencies. Local banks provide funding for revitalization efforts through their Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) programs. National and local foundations, such as the Surdna, Charles Stewart Mott, John S. and James L. Knight, and Kresge Foundations and the Community Foundation of South Alabama provide grants to social service programs, arts and cultural activities and development projects.

Historic Preservation Tax Credits

Federal income tax credits have been available for renovation of historic buildings since 1986. The State of Alabama provides tax credits for renovating income-producing properties. It may be possible to combine state preservation tax credits with other funding assistance, such as CDBG funds, to make rehabilitation of modest homes more financially feasible.

Local Development Regulations

The City's zoning ordinance is used to implement land use planning policies. The zoning ordinance should be reviewed for consistency with this plan and modifications made to better support new investment while assuring protection for existing housing investments. City staff should review the City's subdivision regulations to consider options for reducing fees and streamlining review procedures for resubdivisions that may be necessary to improve lotting in several areas in the community.

Implementation Matrix

The following matrix documents the strategies and actions proposed in the plan together with recommendations on timing, potential funding sources and likely lead and supporting partners. Recommended lead partners are indicated in bold.

It is important to acknowledge that the revitalization process is a long-term effort and that change will be incremental. This requires patience and persistence, both from residents yearning for change and those who have taken on the responsibility to make changes happen.

Priorities have been assigned representing a synthesis of the community's priorities, availability of funding,

partnership expectations and other factors. Short term actions represent those efforts that: 1) should happen right away, 2) will be low cost and easy to accomplish or 3) are part of a larger strategy and need to be initiated soon in order for other components of the strategy to be completed in a timely manner later. Short term actions should be initiated and in process within the first three or so years. Medium-term (under way or complete within 6 years) and long-term actions (more than 6 years out) are those that will take longer or will be more expensive to accomplish or are considered to be somewhat less urgent in nature.

Priorities

During the final community workshop, residents participated in table exercises to discuss plan objectives and identify those most important to them in stabilizing and improving the community. Following the group priorities exercise, residents were able to vote individually for their priorities. The following efforts emerged as being among the top priorities for community participants:

- Local business development
- Job creation
- Community clean-up and beautification
- Housing
- History and tourism
- Park improvements at Hope Community Center



Early wins are important. Even very small projects that can be accomplished early on will generate excitement in the community, build hope and maintain trust in the community that private and public partners are committed. They can also indicate to funders that local partners are able to work together successfully. Each year there should be some visible accomplishment to maintain enthusiasm for the long term endeavor of revitalizing Africatown.

Resources are organizations, information or funding sources that can be used to implement a plan action. The resources listed are not intended to be exhaustive but to provide examples of programs and funds commonly used to support the corresponding actions.

Refer to the Glossary for a definition of the acronyms used in the matrix.

	Action	Partners	Resources	Notes
Immediate Actions (first year)	Establish community development organization	City		re-form Mobilization Project group
	Provide training to community development organization	City, CFH, MCA		continue to provide training annually or semi-annually
	Convene meetings to recruit other public and private partners, create formal partnership	City, CDO, CFH, MCA		
	Develop 3-5 year strategic/work plan for revitalization partnership	partnership		
	Prepare housing inventory to identify viable/nonviable homes	City		
	Create multi-partner land acquisition strategy	partnership		update semi-annually
	Begin acquisition and title clearing activities for specific projects	City, CDO, others		
	Launch right-of-way clean-up program to improve appearance of major road and gateway areas	City, CDO, churches		
	Provide information/training to homeowners on available housing rehabilitation programs	City		continue on annual/semi-annual basis
	Hold community meetings with police, fire departments	CDO, MPD, MFD		continue on annual/semi-annual basis
Short-Term Actions 1-3 years)	Provide informational materials to residents on healthcare services and transportation assistance	City, MCHD, CDO		
	Develop preliminary plans/costs and seek grant funds for streetscape/gateway improvements on Bay Bridge Road	City, ALDOT		
	Partner with health department to initiate regular mobile health screenings	City, CDO, MCHD	CDC, USDHHS	

	Action	Partners	Resources	Notes
Short-Term Actions 1-3 years)	Acquire land, seek developer and initiate affordable/senior housing project	City, CDO	LIHTC (AHFA), HOME	
	Solicit Redevelopment Master Plan for Josephine Allen	MHB, City, CDO	HUD, Section 811	
	Launch beautification program in partnership with area industries	City, CDO, COC	private funding	
	Evaluate potential for Vigor High School feeder program	MCPSS, City of Mobile, City of Prichard		
	Secure easement/right-of-way or other public access to Three Mile Creek, Chickasaw Creek, Mobile River	City, CDO	LWCF	
	Begin demolition of severely dilapidated homes	City and/or CDO		
	Demolish vacant buildings on Josephine Allen site	City, MHB	HUD	
	Partner with City of Prichard to begin recruitment of healthcare provider in north Mobile area	City, MCDH, USA		
	Develop detailed plan for heritage tourism program with tourism consultant	HDC, CDO, COC	NPS, NRCS, NEH, NEA, ASCA	
	Evaluate floodplain designations and mitigation opportunities	City, FEMA		
	Review and update city regulations	City		
	Prepare wayfinding signage plan	City, CDO		coordinate with heritage tourism plan
	Increase access to fresh foods through mobile market, farmer's market	City, CDO, BIC	CDC, USDHHS, USDA, VAC	

	Action	Partners	Resources	Notes
	Identify and improve vacant lots for community gardening, agriculture and/or public art	CDO	NCA	
Mid-Term Actions (4-6 years)	Develop historic trail with interpretive markers in accessible locations	CDO, City, COC, MBCVB, ATD, MCTS	NPS, NRCS, NEH, NEA, ASCA, ATD	
	Install wayfinding signage on major streets and directional signage on I-165	City, CDO, ALDOT	NEA	
	Implement historic preservation program/conservation district	City, CDO	NPS/AHC	
	Build public access to Three Mile Creek	City	NRCS, ADECA	
	Develop preliminary plans/costs and seek grant funds for streetscape improvements on Paper Mill Rd	City		
	Develop preliminary plans and seek funds for sidewalk improvements on local streets	City		
	Renovate Hope Community Center and park	City	LWCF, ADECA, private foundations	
	Develop plans, bid and construct sidewalk improvements on local streets	City		
	Develop final plans, bid and construct streetscape enhancements on Bay Bridge Rd	City	ALDOT, MPO	
	Develop final plans, bid and construct streetscape enhancements on Paper Mill Road	City	ALDOT, MPO	
Long-term Actions (7-10 years)	Build Africatown museum and historical park	CDO, City, COC, MBCVB, MCTS	NPS, NEA, ASCA	
	Redevelop Josephine Allen site for mixed-use, mixed-housing	MHB or developer	LIHTC or HUD (Choice?) funding	City participation with infrastructure changes

Implementation Glossary

ACF	Administration for Children and Families, USDHHS	MBCVB	Mobile Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau
ADECA	Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs	MCA	Mobile Community Action, Inc.
AHC	Alabama Historical Commission	MCHD	Mobile County Health Department
AHFA	Alabama Housing Finance Authority	MCPSS	Mobile County Public School System
ALDOR	Alabama Department of Revenue	MFD	Mobile Fire-Rescue Department
ALDOT	Alabama Department of Transportation	MHB	Mobile Housing Board
ATD	Alabama Tourism Department	MPD	Mobile Police Department
BBBS	Big Brothers Big Sisters, South Alabama	MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization, Mobile
BIC	Business Innovation Center	NCA	Nature Conservancy of Alabama
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant	NMTC	New Market Tax Credits
CDC	Centers for Disease Control	NSP	Neighborhood Stabilization Program, HUD
CDO	community development organization	RLF	Revolving Loan Fund
CFH	Center for Fair Housing, South Alabama	RTP	Recreational Trails Program
CHIP	Children's Health Insurance Program	SBA	United States Small Business Administration
COC	Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce	SARPC	South Alabama Regional Planning Commission
CSBG	Community Service Block Grant	USA	University of South Alabama
EIDA	Economic and Industrial Development Agency, Alabama	USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency	USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency	USDE	United States Department of Education
HDC	Historic Development Commission, Mobile	USDHHS	United States Department of Health and Human Services
HOME	HOME Investment Partnerships Program, HUD	VAC	VOICES for Alabama's Children
HTPCP	Healthy Tomorrows Partnership for Children Program, USDHHS	VOA	Volunteers for America
HUD	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development		
LIHTC	Low Income Housing Tax Credits		
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund		
MCTS	Mobile County Training School Alumni		

