**Summary**

**Retrofitting New Orleans Suburbs Workshop**

**Guest Presenter: Ellen Dunham-Jones**

**March 5, 2015**

**Welcome and Opening Remarks- Sean Bruno, Board Member, East NOLA Business Development District (East NOLA BDD)**

* Welcomed a cross section of 40 community leaders to examine and discuss East NOLA in the context of how suburbs across the U.S. are being “retrofitted” as more economically vibrant, distinctive, people-centered and sustainable places.
* Introduced East New Orleans Business Development District is a 501 c 3 business-civic coalition dedicated to building a vibrant business climate in East NOLA that grows jobs, investment and a high quality of life. Key projects include advancing: (1) corridor beautification; (2) catalytic retail and commercial projects; and (3)marketing of East NOLA for business investment
* East NOLA offers important assets to build one of the most vital, distinctive and livable communities in this growth corridor with: (1) 76,000 residents making East NOLA the 7th largest community in LA; (2)30% of residents have incomes of $60,000 or more; (3) an industrial hub of global aerospace, technology, manufacturing and port-related firms; (4) some of the best schools in the region; (5) new retail that is generating strong sales growth; and (6) over $200 million of public investment in the Lake Forest/Read Boulevard corridor.
* Workshop provides a unique opportunity to reflect on our assets, and like many other community across the U.S., leverage them to drive economic transformation
* Councilman James Gray, District E, and Mario Garner, President and CEO of New Orleans East Hospital welcomed the group and expressed their support of the workshop

**Introductions and Overview of Workshop- Barbara Johnson, Executive Director, East NOLA BDD**

* Thanked the sponsors for supporting the March 5 Workshop: East NOLA BDD, Regional Planning Commission and Liberty Bank; recognized audience special guests
* Reviewed agenda and purpose of the Workshop:(1) build awareness of the development potential of the neighborhood around the NOE hospital; (2) discuss development principles for the area; and, (3) identify next steps in moving forward on a “retrofitting strategy for the community”

**Briefing: East New Orleans “Town Center” Development Concept**

**Henry Hanisee, AIA, Manning Architects**

**Aron Chang, Waggonner Ball Architects**

* Explained that Manning Architects in partnership with Eskew, Dumez and Ripple Architects were commissioned by the NOE Hospital Service District to develop the proposed Hospital Campus Plan and “Town Center” design concept. Manning Architects also designed the state of the art NOE hospital, in partnership with Eskew, Dumez and Ripple Architects
* The proposed “Livable Health and Wellness Campus” includes:
  + Three distinct districts with a total 125,000 of retail and office space; 60 units of residential; and people- centered courtyards, playgrounds and water front promenade
  + Expansion sites for hospital and parking garage are planned
* “Town Center” Neighborhood Strategy that engenders the “New Orleans Experience”
  + Proposes a compact, walkable, people and transit-oriented hub of multiple destinations including shopping and entertainment, recreation, health and wellness activities, residential, office, schools and churches, much of which already exists in the area
  + Precedents include: Women’s Hospital and Baton Rouge General in Baton Rouge, as well as Magazine Street, Oak Street and Mid-City Marketplace
* Water management practices, developed by Waggonner and Ball, as part of a regional Urban Water Plan, have been incorporated into the Town Center.
  + Implementation of proposed water projects would position East NOLA as a model for sustainability and revitalization, addressing flooding, drainage and subsidence issues while increasing land values, recreational opportunities and commercial activities around enhanced waterways, wetlands and lakes
  + Specific projects include an enhanced Citrus Canal and other drainage canals, bio swales along Lake Forest, retention ponds and more use of pervious surface materials

**Retrofitting Suburbs: Trends and Case Studies-Ellen Dunham-Jones**

**Professor of Architecture and Urban Design, Georgia Tech**

* Economic and demographic shifts creating major vacancies and decline in suburbs: (1) 1/3 of malls are dead or dying; (2) 300 million square feet of vacant big box space in U.S.; (3) 16-24% vacancies in suburban office parks
* 3 types of suburban “retrofitting” strategies to address dead spaces: (1) Re-inhabitation; (2) Redevelopment; and(3)Re-greening
* Unintended consequences of suburbanization are creating issues that impact quality of life in suburbs: (1) public health and aging;(2) sustainability and resilience; (3)traffic and auto-dependence; (4) poverty and equity; and (5) affordability
* Market drivers that are creating dying suburban spaces:
  + Demographic shifts
    - Suburbs build for families but 2/3’s of suburban households do not children
    - Millennials want wifi, nightlife and connections more than cars
    - 58% of 65+ want walkable urbanism(Pew-2014)
  + Metro areas expanding to 1st ring suburbs—Developers flocking to perimeters
    - Over 50% of developments in suburbs are “walkable urban places”
    - 60% of demand for housing will be in “urbanized suburbs” for a generation
* Walkable urban places (Walk-Ups)--Commanding price premiums of 40% to 100% increase over market rates
* Auto Dependency—Retrofitting Challenge and Solutions
* Walkability and Multi-modal Systems
* Transit-oriented development
* Road Diets
* Street networks
* Parking Districts
* Car Sharing
* Improves Public Health Outcomes
  + Increase physical activity and walkability
  + Safer streets
  + Reduced exposure to toxic emissions
  + Increased access to healthcare and healthy food
  + Retrofitting for an aging population
* Social Engagement- “Third spaces” where people socialize in communities in demand including millennials and empty nesters
* Equity and Affordability
  + Connecting affordable transportation and affordable housing is strategic and impactful
  + Transit is poised to eclipse schools as #1 indicator of property values. Communities that have both will be the winners in terms of market demand
* Jobs
  + Attract and retain 25-34 year olds
  + Update office parks with mixed uses and housing
  + Reinhabit, redevelop or regreen the white elephants
* Water
  + Improve Water Quality-reconstruct wetlands; clean and control runoff
  + Too much water- regreen flood plains, blue/green infrastructure; pervious surface
* Looking Ahead-Implementation Considerations
  + Realistic market study assessing latent demand is needed
  + Remove regulatory hurdles(zoning and public works standards) and incentivize preferred development patterns
  + Consider establishing a Business/Community Improvement District
  + Prepare to negotiate public-private partnerships looking at tax revenue/acre
  + Consider anticipatory retrofit and other phasing strategies
  + Communities that provide great transit and great schools will be winners
  + Connecting affordable housing to affordable transportation key to participation and growth of economy

**Group Feedback**

**Group 1: Design- Specific Sites, Open Space and Other Design Elements**

**Overall:** Open, child-friendly/communal space for multi-family

**Retail**

* Align entrance/ access points to proposed Lake Forest shopping center with hospital and park
* Encourage frontage of retail along Lake Forest Boulevard
* Establish tier of scales(
  + Larger big box retail located closer to I-10; smaller retail closer to Lake Forest

**Parking for retail**

* Location—Discussed parallel parking along Lake Forest Blvd. Interior of site with parking close to retail
* Create pervious surfaces

**Lake Forest Boulevard-Should be a walkable safe street**

* Future main entrance into Louisiana Nature Center to be off of Lake Forest Blvd.

**Encourages Walkability**

**Supports Green Heart- Open Space and Water**

**Major factor: Retail goods and services drives design**

**Working Group 2: Regulatory /Public Space**

**What works about design?**

* Incorporation of water/regreening(re-bluing)where built environment is not necessary
* Filling vacant buildings
* Working with water-bringing asset based thinking to storm water infrastructure
* Improved connections to Joe Brown Park
* Town Center Retrofit, especially with medical services anchor at center
* Leaving open space and the possibility for options
* Proposed density and mixed use

**What does not work about the design?**

* The feeling that this is a 2007 conversation
* Disliked not having good numbers, analysis and demographics on subject area for a breakout
* Financing expectations for proposed intensity of development
* Anti-automobile
* No examples by presenters of communities not growing

**Issues:**

* Compatibility and intensity to adjacent areas
* Existing and new Zoning not supporting Town Center concept. Needed:
  + Planning Unit Development Zoning, or
  + New Town Center Zoning

**Next Steps**

* Master Plan Update/Land Use Plan Update
* New Urban Approach
* Retail, Retail, Retail (Services)

**Group 3: Design- Systems of Public Spaces, Networks, Connections**

**Systems of Social Capital**

* Sci Academy, Carver, Abramson Schools
* Greater St. Stephens, Household of Faith
* Lowe’s, NOE Hospital, CVS, Liberty Bank, Library

**Connections**

* Good Example: Lake Forest Estates to Library walking path and streetscape improvements
  + Read-Crowder Express
  + Lake Forest Express
* Missing connections:
  + No walking paths on Lake Forest between Read and Crowder
  + No feeder connections from school to hospital; fragmented parking

**Next Steps:**

* Extend street grid---better sidewalks
  + Continue pedestrian access from residential to commercial
* Extend Read Crowder Express

**Community Space**

* Create garden along canals
* Institute Adopt-a Median(Parkway and Parks)

**Group 4: Market Analysis/Financing**

**Market Feasibility and retail analysis needed**

(Rooftops, demographics, drive-to)

**Financing Mechanism Options:**

* Tax Increment Financing(TIF)
* Business Improvement District
* RTA transit related financing
* Public Private Partnerships (P3’s)
* HUD/DOT/EPA

**Who Pays for It? Which organization to lead and implement?**

**Recommendation:**

* Expand core neighborhood to Bundy
* Canals as blue way and development driver