

Jefferson EDGE 2020 Strategic Implementation Plan: Beautification

In the face of a wide range of quality of life concerns in Jefferson Parish, aesthetic issues are typically relegated to a kind of second class status. There are a number of reasons, however, why beautifying Jefferson Parish rises to the level of a “major” quality of life issue. First of all, aesthetics play a tremendous role in influencing individuals’ impression of a community. While an aging, lackluster aesthetic environment is a sign of a community that is stagnating, an aesthetically appealing environment offers tangible evidence of a community’s overall desirability. Secondly, aesthetics are not just a symptom of prosperity. Research suggests that an attractive built environment actually serves as a catalyst for reinvestment. Across the country, the older, established communities that have prospered as they have aged tend to be those that offer a unique “sense of place” and an attractive physical environment. The third and final reason why beautification is so important is that tangible improvements in aesthetics can be realized in a relatively short period of time. If major beautification initiatives are implemented, a more attractive Jefferson Parish is not a likely outcome; it is a guaranteed outcome and one that could potentially be realized in as few as three to five years. Given the present concern about the loss of middle class residents from Jefferson, beautification is relatively unique among quality of life issues in its potential to yield immediate, tangible, noticeable results.

An Aesthetic Overview of Jefferson Parish

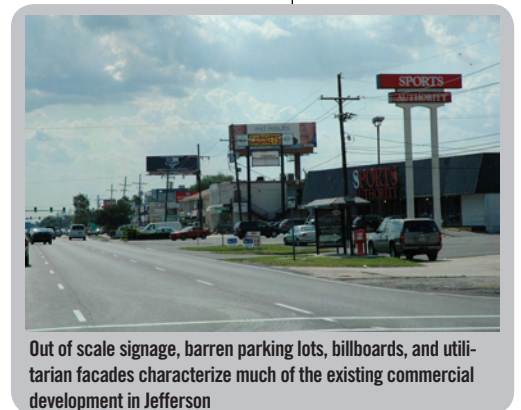
The present aesthetic environment in Jefferson Parish is frequently overlooked and even occasionally maligned by its own residents. A sentiment that is sometimes overheard is that Jefferson Parish has always been, and will always be, what it currently is: a suburban community with a utilitarian physical environment. This mischaracterization helps to perpetuate a kind of indifference about beautification efforts. In reality, Jefferson has many attractive features including tree-lined residential neighborhoods, impeccably maintained parks and playgrounds, and several signature aesthetic amenities, such as Lafreniere Park and the linear bikeways along the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain.

Negative impressions about the aesthetics of Jefferson Parish stem primarily from one feature: the appearance of the Parish’s main thoroughfares. Throughout the Parish, the major roads are characterized by out of scale signage, wide expanses of parking lots, insufficient tree cover, a maze of above ground power lines, and open drainage canals. There is little about the Parish’s boulevards that suggests a dynamic, prosperous community. Conversely, the major thoroughfares look and feel like outdated vestiges from the 1960’s. Given all of the good aesthetic characteristics in Jefferson Parish and given the overall vitality of the community, Jefferson needs and deserves much more from its signature boulevards. An ambitious, holistic effort to address the full range of aesthetic deficiencies along the major boulevards must therefore be the focus of future beautification efforts.

Beautification Efforts Underway

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in making Jefferson Parish more beautiful, an interest that has manifested itself in a number of public and privately driven initiatives including:

- Grassroots landscaping efforts, including tree planting along major roadways and the provision of matching funds to improve the appearance of subdivision entrances
- Enhanced Parish code enforcement through stronger ordinances and penalties, the establishment of an Environmental Court, and periodic code “sweeps” in targeted areas
- Several signature streetscaping initiatives including landscaping and public art on Veterans Boulevard and the installation of welcome signage at key entrance points
- Improved maintenance of major roadways as a result of improved grass cutting, the filling and re-grading of medians, and stepped up litter abatement efforts
- A number of more stringent zoning regulations that are mandating higher standards in new development and that are preserving the unique character of certain neighborhoods



Out of scale signage, barren parking lots, billboards, and utilitarian facades characterize much of the existing commercial development in Jefferson

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Beautification Action Items

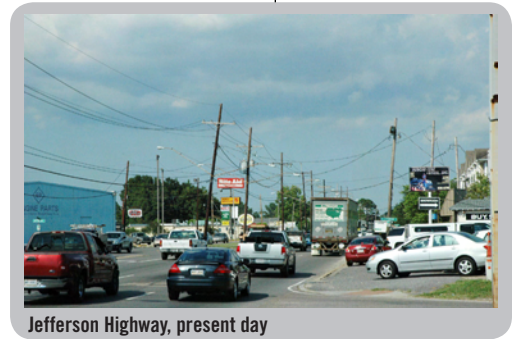
For as wide ranging as recent beautification efforts have been, further action items and an entirely new scale of beautification initiatives are needed. If Jefferson is to offer a physical environment that is competitive with other communities, that is a catalyst for reinvestment, and that attracts a new generation of residents and businesses, the Parish's mandate is to "think big." Due to their prominence and their many aesthetic shortcomings, Jefferson's boulevards must be the cornerstone of this effort. The recommended action items are as follows:

1. **Implement a comprehensive "boulevards initiative" to systematically upgrade the major thoroughfares in Jefferson Parish.** This action item includes a number of detailed sub-items including:
 - a. The development of a detailed financing and phasing schedule
 - b. Infrastructure improvements including addressing power lines, open canals, and landscaping
 - c. A gateway improvement program with a principal emphasis on the egress from the airport into Jefferson Parish
 - d. A matching grant program to fund landscape improvements to older commercial properties
 - e. A design and engineering competition to devise interim aesthetic improvements to open drainage canals
 - f. Landscape improvements to the major utility infrastructure throughout the Parish, such as electrical substations
2. **Significantly enhance both the content and the enforcement of the Parish's land use policies and regulations.** This action item includes a number of detailed sub-items including:
 - a. The addition of an urban design element to the Envision Jefferson 2020 Comprehensive Plan
 - b. A comprehensively rewritten zoning ordinance
 - c. Interim regulatory changes to Parish codes and land use regulations
 - d. Improved enforcement of existing zoning regulations
3. **Increase community awareness of beautification efforts and elicit further community involvement.** This action item includes two detailed sub-items including:
 - a. Lasting public partnerships with civic groups and other non-profits to plant additional trees in residential neighborhoods
 - b. A public outreach campaign to inform residents of on-going beautification initiatives
4. **Provide additional public art installations throughout Jefferson Parish.** This action item includes two detailed sub-items including:
 - a. A new, formal program for incorporating public art into public works projects
 - b. The installation of decorative lighting on the widened Huey P. Long Bridge

Conclusion

Jefferson has many positives to build upon. From well maintained public parks to appealing residential neighborhoods to extensive community involvement, the foundation for building a more attractive Parish is in place. What is needed is a new, more comprehensive, more ambitious approach to improving Jefferson's built environment with a particular emphasis on the major thoroughfares. The implementation of this plan will utterly transform the appearance of the Parish, thereby attracting reinvestment, strengthening neighborhoods, and drawing a new generation of families and businesses to the community.

A full version of this report is available on the internet at www.jedco.org



Jefferson Highway, present day



Jefferson Highway, without above ground utilities and large signage and with additional street trees

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