



The Bord Du Lac Marina is under construction.

On the waterfront

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LAKE CHARLES BEGINS AMBITIOUS REHAB OF LAKEFRONT, DOWNTOWN >> by MUKUL VERMA

In its downtown, Lake Charles built a civic center. Poor decision, as the center and its vast parking lots consumed desirable lakefront and all but killed activity in the area.

In June, the city began to reverse decades of downtown flubs, starting an ambitious program to charge up the city center and the lakefront by executing an Andres Duany plan funded by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation through hurricane relief

grants after Rita.

Lake Charles broke ground on two projects worth \$5.3 million, using a combination of tax money from bonds and federal grants for hurricane recovery to do so. The city has \$18 million in total bond money for downtown redevelopment, and leaders will tap \$14 million more in federal and state grants for additional projects there, says Lori Marinovich, who oversees downtown work.



The Lake Charles waterfront is getting a promenade.



After remaking Ryan Street, the city will work back to the waterfront.



With the first two projects, downtown Lake Charles will get a new lakefront marina and a promenade. Construction has begun on the undertakings, which spring from a design by New Urbanist planner Duany that has been updated with an implementation scheme by Moore Planning Group.

Duany's original plan saw the waterfront as a walkable area of cafes, restaurants, clubs. The

“It’s very exciting being in Lake Charles these days.”

—LORI MARINOVICH

Moore, who adds his firm is “leading a great team of people to take the (Duany) vision and turn it into reality.”

Under construction now is a \$3.6 million lake-

civic center parking lots would be replaced with hotels. Greenspace would be added and the street grid reconnected.

“Their lakefront, the natural asset there in everyone’s mind has never been captured for its fullest value,” says Patrick

front promenade that includes a 60-foot walkway, enhanced decorative lighting, benches, trees and other landscaping. The promenade will provide more amenities for annual festivals and events and be an incentive for private development. The proj-

Charles area,” says Marinovich.

The amphitheater and adjacent park are being reconfigured as well.

Moving inland, the city is remaking about 12 blocks of Ryan Street. From there, Moore says the aim is to stitch together the streets between Ryan and the lakefront to activate more of downtown.

The second phase will begin with Ryan Street, a main focus of the downtown, much as Third Street is to Baton Rouge. Traffic calming—techniques to slow motoring—will make the street safer for pedestrians. The streetscape will be improved with decorative paving.

Moore says the reinvention of Ryan has three purposes—make the street safer, walkable and beautiful. “Those three equal economic development.”

Unfortunately, private investment probably won’t come quickly. Marinovich says the economy’s struggles have generally put investment interest on hold, including negotiations

with a hotel developer.

She’s countering the slowdown by seeking smaller projects for downtown. “We are rethinking and redesigning based on today’s economic conditions. We might do some incremental development instead of a big master plan of 65 acres.”

“Yet,” adds Marinovich, “It’s very exciting being in Lake Charles these days.” •



Planning meeting with Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach.

ect is scheduled to be completed in May 2010.

Also under construction is a \$1.7 million floating marina and docking facility near the convention center. The Bord Du Lac Marina will have 50 boat slips and accommodate vessels as large as 80 feet. The facility will include dockside electricity and water for transient, short-term use.

Marinovich says the marina will let boaters on the Intracoastal Waterway dock in downtown, creating a unique destination not seen between Houston and Mobile. With future development, boaters could tie on to the dock and dine at lakeside restaurants. The marina is to be finished by March 2010.

“The marina project is going to be really one of the first projects to draw new visitors to the Lake