

2026 West Bank Resilient Community Overlay

Summary of Findings

July 2026

Presented to:



Ascension Parish Planning Department

Presented by:

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Introduction

The purpose of the Resilient Community Overlay District is to establish a regulatory framework that can accommodate anticipated growth while maintaining development quality and protecting the existing rural character to the extent possible. Historically, this area has seen limited growth due to population decline. However, recent large-scale investments in the nearby industrial overlay have resulted in the need for coordinated land use planning and regulation. The intent of the Resilient Community Overlay is to prioritize residential development as the primary use, recognizing that commercial growth will follow population and economic growth.

The Parish's current zoning districts may not fully address the unique development conditions emerging within the unincorporated areas of the West Bank, with respect to residential housing density and infrastructure coordination. In response to the changing conditions, the Parish is evaluating whether an incentive-based overlay district could provide additional flexibility for residential developments while ensuring that new growth occurs in a coordinated manner.

Consistent with the recommendations of the adopted 2025 West Bank Small Area Plan, the overlay prioritizes residential development, specifically single family, as the primary land use focus to support anticipated housing demand and establish a stable base for future commercial services. Rather than reducing development standards, the overlay is intended to open mechanisms that allow additional development flexibility in exchange for enhanced site design, resiliency measures, open space, landscaping, infrastructure coordination, and more pragmatic parking requirements.

The small area planning process also identified strong community support for preserving the rural character of the West Bank, including open space, natural drainage features, agricultural landscapes, and lower-intensity development patterns in appropriate areas. The overlay framework contains a mechanism to guide development in a way that preserves significant open space through conservation subdivision design principles. These principles are also identified in the 2019 Parish Master Land Use Plan.

The West Bank Overlay is designed as a 3-tiered framework to address varying development patterns and community priorities identified throughout the planning and stakeholder engagement process. These 3 tiers include:

Tier 1: Residential Growth is intended to support housing choice and enhance development quality near existing infrastructure, employment centers, and neighborhoods. The incentives are optional for a developer/landowner.

Tier 2: Commercial is intended to guide commercial and mixed-use development along the new Highway 3127 corridor. This tier emphasizes coordinated access management, landscaping, site design, and infrastructure planning to support orderly growth and minimize impacts on adjacent residential areas. The incentives would be optional for a developer; the design elements are mandatory.

Tier 3: Conservation Subdivision District is intended to preserve the rural character and natural landscape of the West Bank by encouraging flexibility in lot configuration and subdivision layout while preserving 50-60% of the development as perpetual open space. This is an optional tool for a developer/landowner.

Relationship to Underlying Zoning

The overlay will function as an additional layer of development standards, and voluntary incentives applied over existing base zoning districts. Except where specifically modified by the overlay, all underlying zoning district regulations, permitted uses, and development standards of the Unified Land Development Code will remain in effect. The following uses shall be prohibited within the overlay:

- Heavy industrial uses
- New billboards
- New mobile home recreational vehicle districts

Stakeholder Input

Stakeholder input was a critical component of data collection and analysis for the development of this overlay. While the adopted 2025 West Bank Small Area Plan established the community's shared vision and priorities, input from the development community is equally important, as these stakeholders will be on the front line of constructing housing and commercial sites. Through focus group sessions and a targeted survey, feedback from developers and design professionals provided insight into the market conditions and regulatory constraints hindering development on the West Bank.

Survey Insights

A stakeholder survey was distributed to local developers with experience building in Ascension Parish. The Growth Coalition of Greater Baton Rouge was contacted, and their association assisted in disseminating the survey to their members who build in Ascension Parish. The full survey results are in Attachment A.

A clear majority of survey respondents identified single-family housing as having the greatest potential for development with mixed-used followed close behind. When asked about community features and landscaped buffers, developers were amenable to incorporating design elements and community benefits into developments.

One of the strongest and most actionable findings within the survey was **support for increased residential density of 4-7 units per acre**. Currently, the residential zoning districts contain a housing density gap between MU2 (maximum 4 units per acre) and MU (minimum 8 units per acre). Further review of the Land Development Code shows a language mismatch with the residential zoning districts with a “low intensity” RM Zone of 3 units per acre labeled as a “medium intensity” district. The table below shows the existing residential zoning districts and their density caps:

Zoning District	Code	Primary Land Use	Density Cap	Minimum Lot Size	Actual Density
Conservation	C	Residential and Open Space	1 unit/ 1 acre	43,560	Correct
Conservation 5	C5	Open space and Residential	1 unit/ 5 acre	217,800	Correct
Rural	R	Residential	1 unit/ .5 acre	20,000	Correct
Medium Intensity Residential	RM	Residential	3 units/ 1 acre	16,000 open ditch 10,500 curb gutter	2.72 units/acre 4.15 units /acre
Mixed Use 2 Corridor	MU2	Residential and Commercial Near Neighborhoods	4 units/ 1 acre	7,200	6 units/acre
Mixed Use Corridor	MU	Residential and Commercial on Major Roads	8-20 units/1 acre <i>Depends on building type</i>	7,200	6 units/acre

Using additional street section standards, and minimum lot size are complicating the subdivision design issue in Ascension Parish and creating substantially lower density than the stated zoning district density caps. Medium Density comparisons of peer local jurisdictions are shown in the table below. These peer jurisdictions will either use units per acre, or minimum lot size.

	Ascension	Donaldsonville	St Tammany	St Charles	East Baton Rouge
Medium Density	RM 3 units/acre	R-1 7,200 min lot (6 units/acre)	S-2 7,500 min lot	R-1 6,000 min lot	A2.7 7.3 units /acre
	MU2 4 units/acre	R-2 5,000 min lot (8.7 units/acre)			A2.6 11.5 units/acre
	MU 8-20 units/acre				

Comparing these peer jurisdictions indicates that residential densities between **4 and 7 dwelling units per acre** are common in surrounding areas. These density ranges are frequently paired with design standards, open space requirements, buffering, and/or a site plan review process to maintain development quality and compatibility.

Focus Group Feedback

The focus group consisted of a diverse group of stakeholders representing local government, the development community, engineering and design professionals, business interests, and property owners with an interest in the future growth and development of the West Bank. Feedback at the Focus Group meeting 1,2,3, and targeted interviews highlighted ongoing challenges related to infrastructure availability, regulatory uncertainty, and development costs. These insights suggest that successful implementation of the overlay will depend less on complex incentive structures and more on addressing fundamental barriers to development, including conflicting density limitations, infrastructure constraints, and process inefficiencies.

Focus Group #1 There was a strong consensus for increasing residential density in certain areas to expand housing choice and account for residential growth. A major barrier to residential development is the high cost of land, much of which is controlled by a small number of owners with large parcels. Both developers and community members noted that current per-acre asking prices are more consistent with industrial land values than residential development. Developers did suggest that a high-quality

Planned Unit Development could be feasible on the West Bank if infrastructure could be coordinated through partnerships with local governing bodies.

Focus Group #2 These discussions revolved on creating a predictable and economically feasible framework for future development on the West Bank. Participants emphasized that infrastructure costs such as traffic improvements, drainage, and utilities, should not place an unreasonable burden on individual developers, particularly when impact fees and other funding mechanisms exist. There was considerable discussion about Community Development Districts, Tax Increment Financing, developer agreements, and utility districts as future infrastructure funding tools. The group also discussed long-term land use and development patterns, including conservation subdivisions, manufactured/modular housing, and using existing traffic studies along with traffic impact fees to mitigate traffic impacts.

Focus Group #3 This discussion centered on identifying practical, high impact, commercial corridor design standards that could be incorporated into the West Bank Overlay. Feedback from the group emphasized that new regulations should improve the appearance and function of commercial development while remaining economically feasible for a rural, lower-income area. Participants were asked whether better commercial design could be achieved through modest changes such as improved site planning rather than costly architectural requirements. The group's answer to the core question "Can the West Bank incorporate higher design standards," is basically: yes. The design standards should be predictable and not applied the same way to every commercial corridor segment. The proposed commercial design standards included site layout, access management, signage, landscaping, and lighting as the most effective areas for commercial corridor improvements.

Overlay Best Management Practices & Models

According to the American Planning Association and its Planning Advisory Service (PAS) report, a zoning overlay district works best when it is tailored to community, clearly justified, legally defensible, and easy to administer. The table below is a snapshot of other communities who have incentive and/or design overlay districts:

Overlay	Place	Promotes	Link
Greater Hidden Hills Overlay	DeKalb County, GA	Promotes mixed use, housing, conservation and open space	https://engagedekalb.dekalbcountyga.gov/greater-hidden-hills-overlay-study

Gateway Overlay	Mandeville, LA	Softens highway-commercial conditions and improves the public realm	https://www.cityofmandeville.com/planning/page/planning-zoning-and-land-use-information
Bluebonnet Overlay District	St George/Baton Rouge, LA	Strengthens physical and economic character of the neighborhood	https://www.brla.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2272/Chapter-10---Overlay-Districts-PDF

These model overlays vary significantly in purpose, scale, development intensity, and regulatory structure. As such, they reflect the unique growth patterns and community priorities of their respective jurisdictions. While no single overlay reviewed serves as a direct model for the West Bank, individual components were analyzed to determine whether certain elements could be adapted to support the goals identified in the West Bank Small Area Plan. Attention was given to density flexibility, community benefit trade-offs, and long-term quality standards.

Residential Incentives & Community Benefit

The proposed residential area of the overlay is structured as a voluntary, incentive-based framework intended to provide flexibility for property owners/developers and additional housing choices on the West Bank. Regional detention was identified as a major infrastructure need for development coordination. Without regional detention, future developments could lose 30% - 50% of the buildable area to scattered, individual detention ponds.

Findings: Rather than reducing development standards, the overlay should be designed to provide increased density incentives in exchange for measurable community benefits, outlined below.

Incentives:

- Increased density to 5 units per acre with implementation of one level 1 community benefit
- Increased density to 6 units per acre when implementing all level 1 community benefits

- Increased density to 7 units per acre when implementing all level 1 community benefits and one level 2 community benefit

Community Benefits:

- Increased open space level 1
- Landscaped buffers or street trees level 1
- Selection of 5 design elements from list level 1
- Regional detention level 2
- Developer installed, oversized main sewer trunk level 2
- 55+ age restricted community level 2

Conservation/Cluster Subdivisions

This residential development type has been identified as an action item in both the 2025 West Bank Small Area Plan and the Parish's 2019 Master Land Use Plan. Within the guiding principles of the 2019 plan, it states to allow clustering units on tracts that maintain permanent open space on remaining land area. APA cluster and conservation subdivision guidance explains how this type of development reduces construction and long-term maintenance costs by shortening streets and utility lines, while preserving significant open spaces.

Findings: Current market conditions may not support conservation subdivision development without clustering and being able to provide housing at different price points and sizes. As such, the conservation subdivisions will be voluntary and offer density incentives when connected to centralized sewers.

Traffic Study

Stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the uncertainty associated with Traffic Impact Studies within the Parish. Participants in the focus group noted that studies create additional project risk when impacts identified through the study then become a basis for project denial rather than mitigation through the required fees.

Findings: The West Bank Overlay should allow a modified traffic study, matching the DOTD requirements of one study at 100 trips per peak hour or greater. Should the developer desire to pay 100% of the calculated traffic impact fee in lieu of the 35% fees on the West Bank, traffic studies within the overlay should be eliminated altogether. Traffic impact fees should be due at the issuance of an occupancy permit. Currently, traffic impact fees are due at building permit issuance.

Commercial Corridors

The Highway 3127 Corridor strategy for the overlay will be to concentrate commercial activity at nodes, rather than allowing continuous strip development through the entirety of the new Highway 3127 Extension. The focus group was aligned that not all the Highway 3127 will function the same way. Some areas, particularly the proposed intersections connecting to Donaldsonville, should be retail/residential serving, while areas closer to the Sunshine bridge, and the industrial overlay will naturally support light industrial/heavy commercial uses.

Findings: The corridor will need a sub-area with proper transition where retail, multi-family, and lower intensity uses step down into residential areas. Screening, landscaping, signage control, and lighting design were ideal commercial design elements. Regional detention coordination was mentioned as a priority.

Parking

The American Planning Association (APA) recognizes shared parking as a best practice for commercial areas as it allows multiple uses to share the same parking supply, reducing the total number of parking spaces needed while continuing to accommodate anticipated demand. This approach makes more efficient use of land, lowers development costs, and supports compact, walkable development. The APA also notes that excessive parking increases impervious surface area, contributing to polluted stormwater runoff, while an oversupply of parking encourages additional automobile use and associated air pollution. Keeping in mind, the capital region is an air quality attainment area, and the Parish's one size formula for commercial land use parking requirements are excessive for retail and office uses, while underserving other commercial uses such as restaurants.

Findings: Replace the blanket commercial 1spot/250 square feet with ITE parking ratios, add shared-parking lease agreements, allow an administrative 20% parking reduction, and set a parking maximum at **125% of the minimum** with additional landscaping requirements.

References

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Spivak, J. (2022, June 1). A business case for dropping parking minimums. *Planning*. American Planning Association. <https://www.planning.org/planning/2022/spring/a-business-case-for-dropping-parking-minimums/>

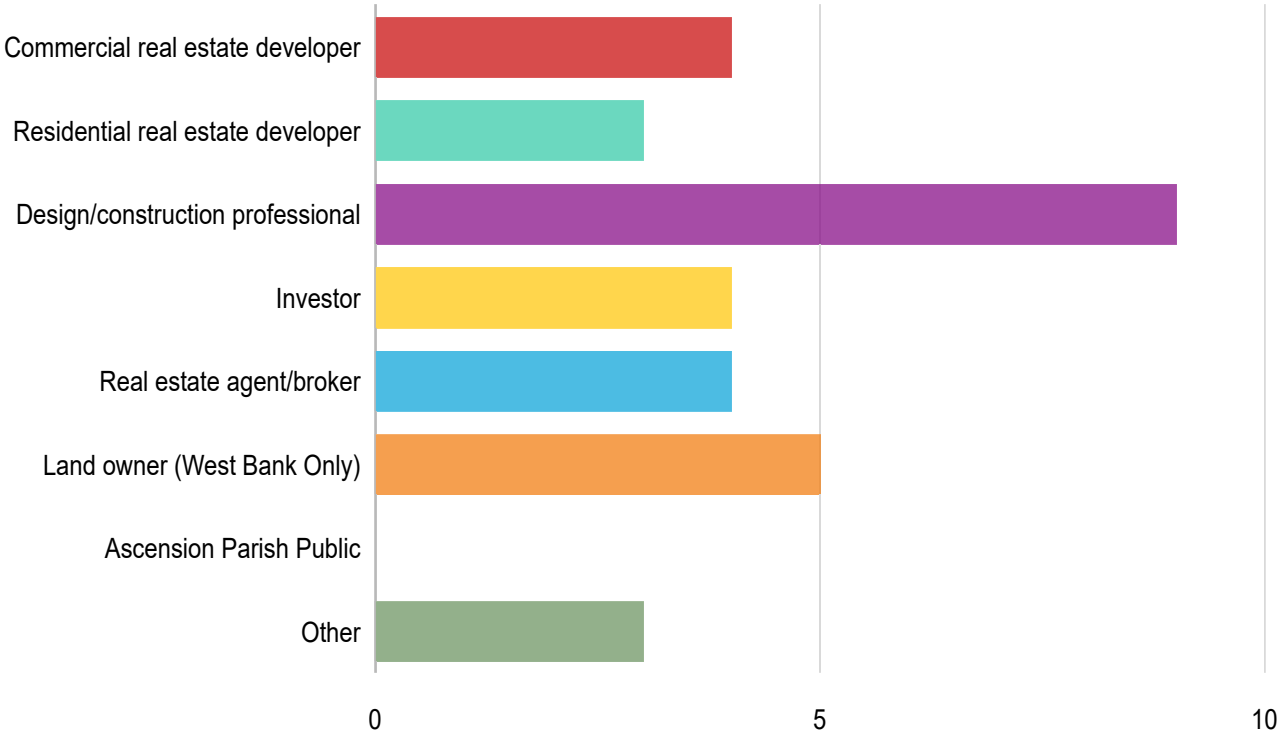
Appendix

Survey Results



Ascension Parish West Bank Developer Survey

1.Which of the following would best characterize yourself? *



Response

Count

Home Builders Association

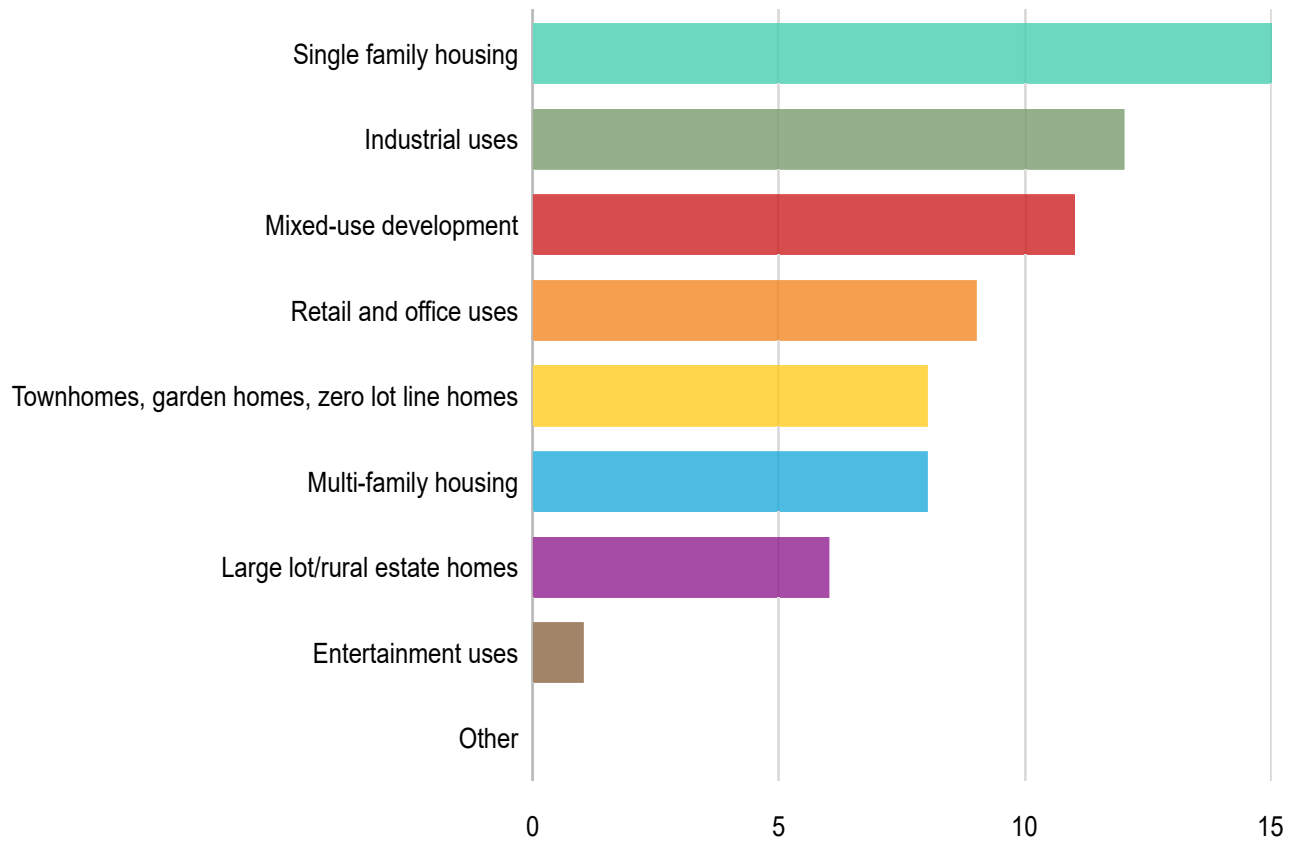
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Insurance Broker

1

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

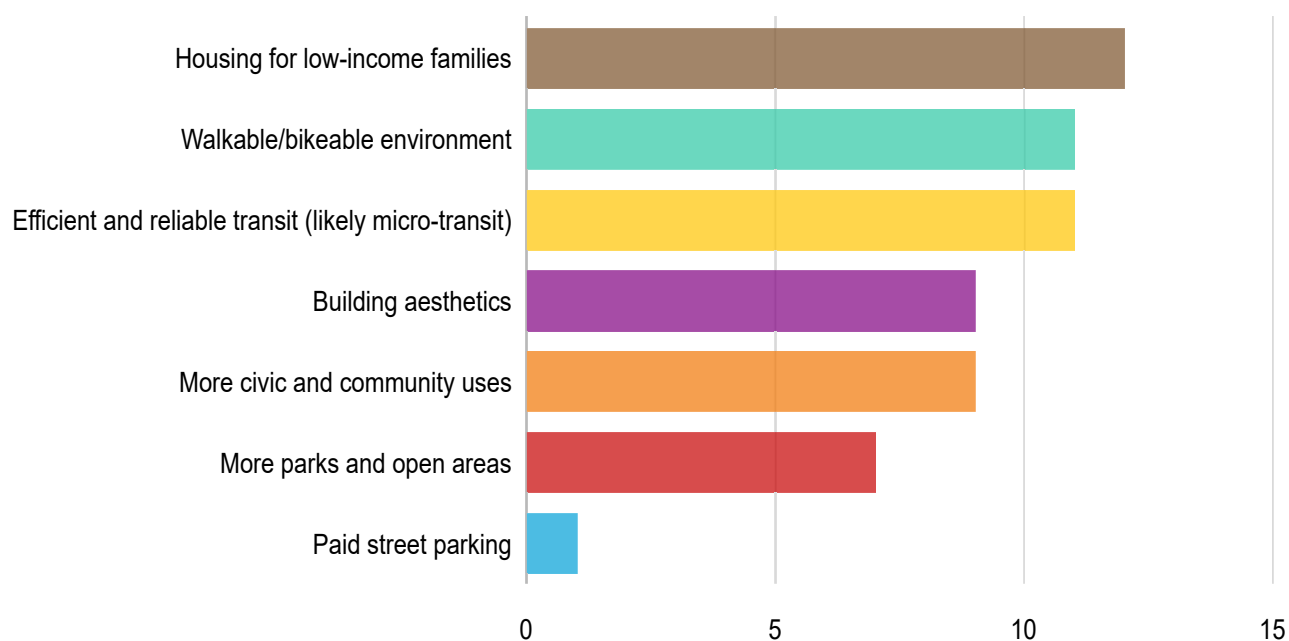
In your opinion, what types of development would have the greatest potential on the greatest potential on the West Bank? *



Answers	Count	Percentage
Single family housing	15	68.18%
Industrial uses	12	54.55%
Mixed-use development	11	50%
Retail and office uses	9	40.91%
Townhomes, garden homes, zero lot line homes	8	36.36%
Multi-family housing	8	36.36%
Large lot/rural estate homes	6	27.27%
Entertainment uses	1	4.55%
Other	0	0%

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

What community features would have the greatest potential on the West Bank? *



Answers

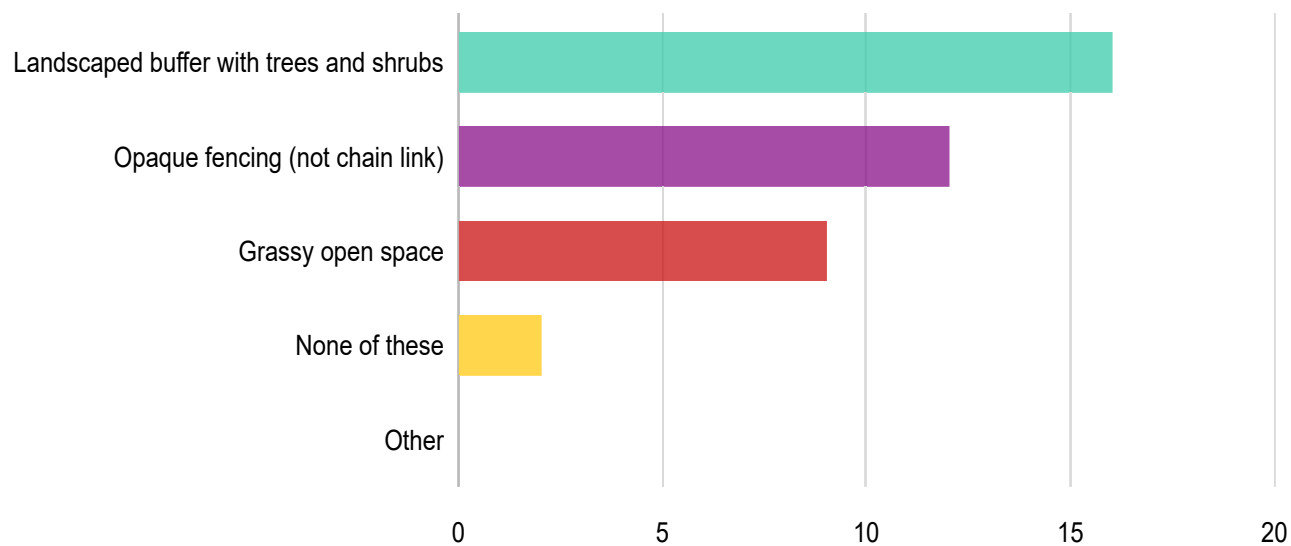
Count

Percentage

Housing for low-income families	12	54.55%
Walkable/bikeable environment	11	50%
Efficient and reliable transit (likely micro-transit)	11	50%
Building aesthetics	9	40.91%
More civic and community uses	9	40.91%
More parks and open areas	7	31.82%
Paid street parking	1	4.55%

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

Currently, the Ascension Parish code requires land use buffer zones between residential and heavy industrial uses. Do you think other buffers could be supported? *

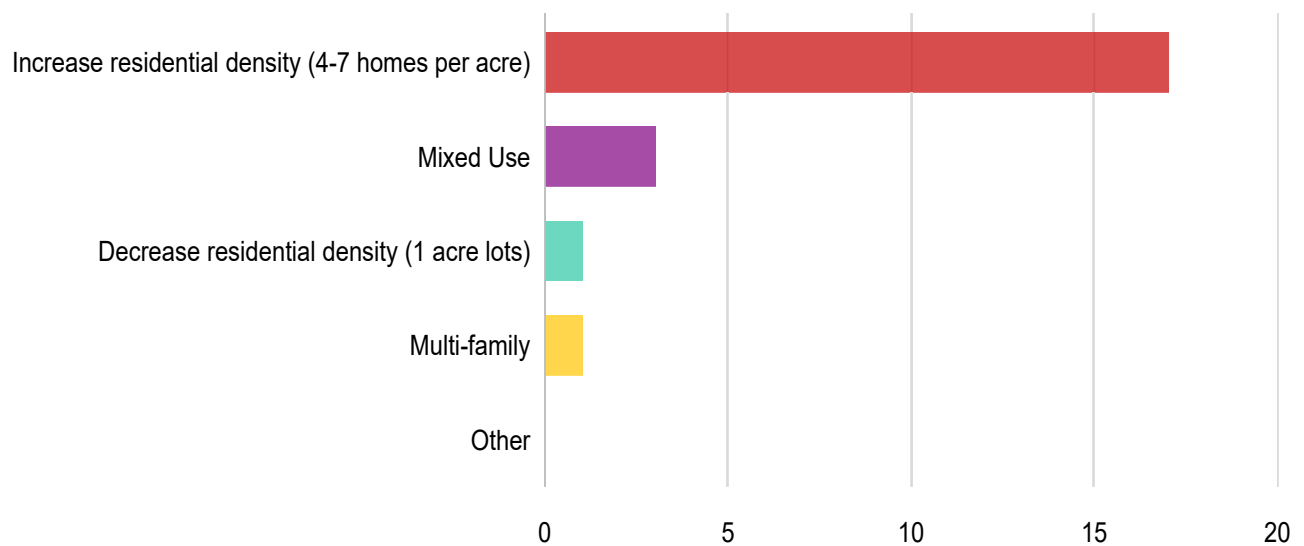


Answers	Count	Percentage
Landscaped buffer with trees and shrubs	16	72.73%
Opaque fencing (not chain link)	12	54.55%
Grassy open space	9	40.91%
None of these	2	9.09%
Other	0	0%

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

Could a new residential zoning uses, specific to the West Bank, catalyze residential development?

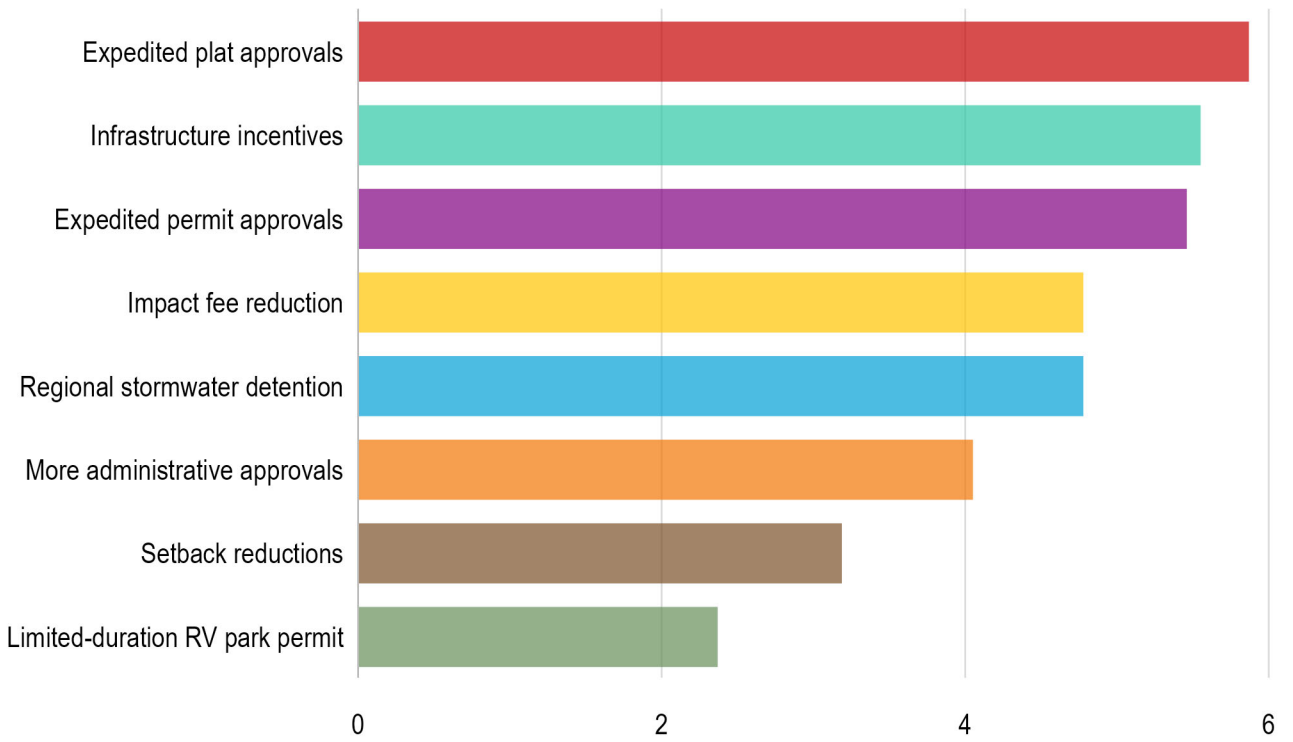
*



Answers	Count	Percentage
Increase residential density (4-7 homes per acre)	17	77.27%
Mixed Use	3	13.64%
Decrease residential density (1 acre lots)	1	4.55%
Multi-family	1	4.55%
Other	0	0%

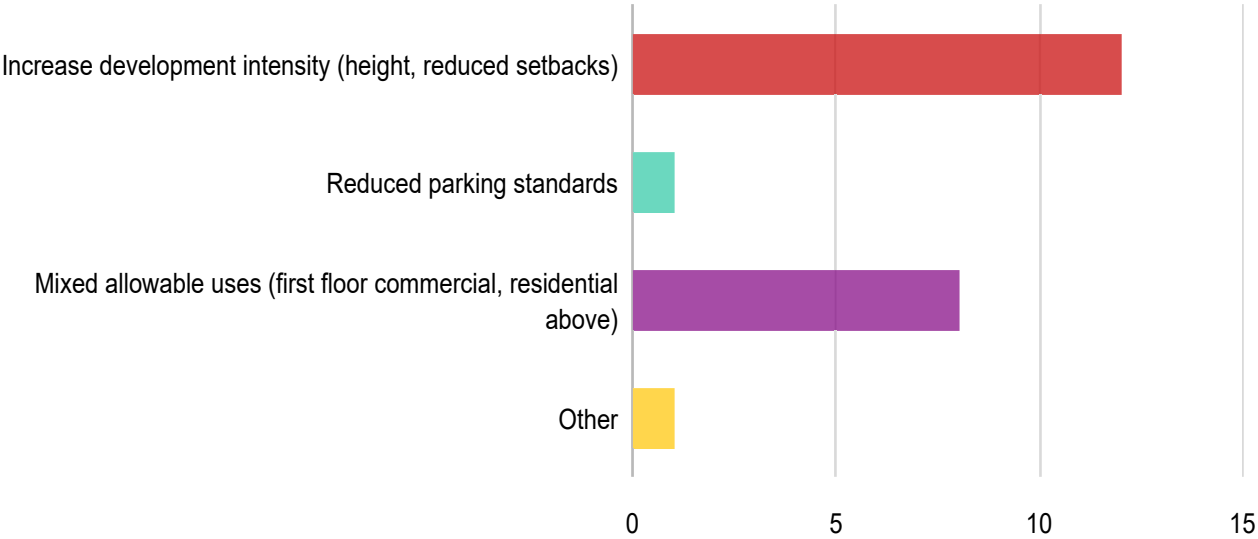
Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

What development incentives could the Parish provide that would promote development on the West Bank?



Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

Could new non-residential zoning uses specific to the West Bank catalyze non-residential development?



Response

Count

More rooftops allows for greater service businesses.

1

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

Are there any other specific development incentives or development code changes not listed above that you recommend for the West Bank?

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Count

Approvals for items requiring public hearings should be based on the code alone. If staff certifies that the code is met, then the approvals should be a formality. Allowing neighbors to stop development because they don't like it is not a valid reason. The code is written to protect the public health, safety and welfare. If the code is met, development should be approved.

1

Ascension Parish should formalize a Local Hire Compliance Score tied to ITEP renewal. At the 5-year renewal stage, the Parish's Local ITEP Committee would evaluate and publish each facility's record of hiring Ascension Parish residents for construction and permanent positions, using it as a factor in the committee's renewal recommendation. No new legislation is required. This creates accountability for local hiring without imposing quotas or conflicting with state incentive structures, and given the scale of employment anticipated at RiverPlex, even small improvements in local hire rates would retain millions in wages within the Parish.

1

Having more industrial zoned land. This is what will drive the Westbank Tax dollars and create a stable work force on the Westbank. There needs to be more support from the community as this is what drives economic development & creates a sense of community.

1

I think the biggest thing to help spur single family residential development on the Westbank will be to relax the code minimum standards for streets and sidewalks. Also allow smaller lots and higher densities to lure developers in with the potential for greater profit margins.

1

Incentives for tourism-related improvements.

1

Increase density and relax the street standards.

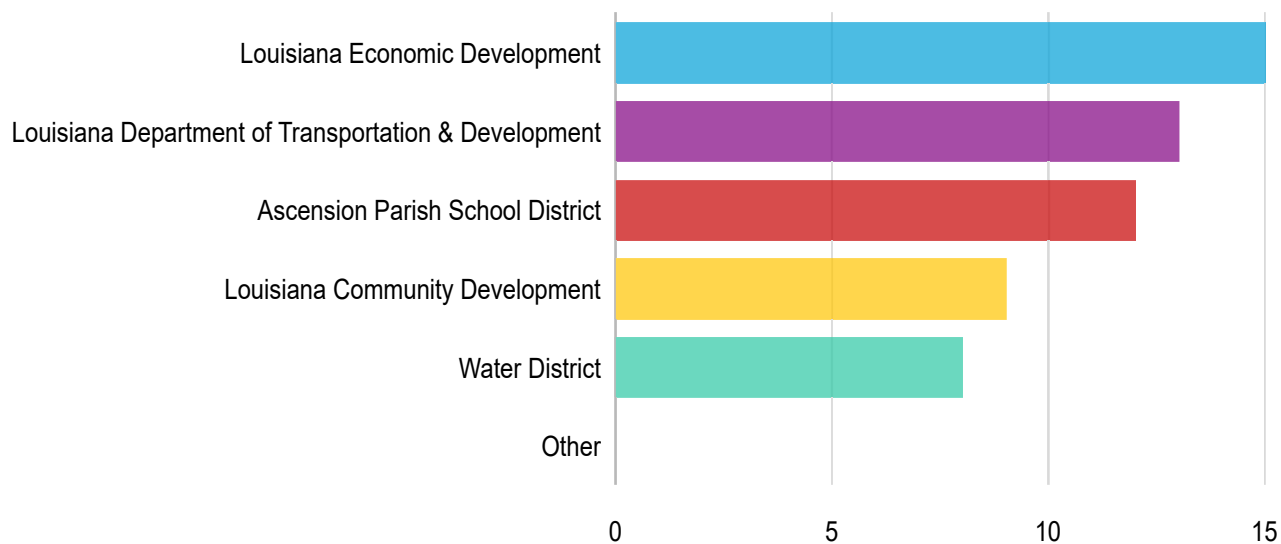
1

Tax breaks for residents moving to the area to encourage population growth on the west bank. Incentives that can help downtown Donaldsonville and the West Bank school system capitalize on this opportunity to become the gem of the West Bank again. If you fix the schools, people will move there; it is the same reason Ascension has grown so much over the last 10 years.

1

Answered: 7 Skipped: 15

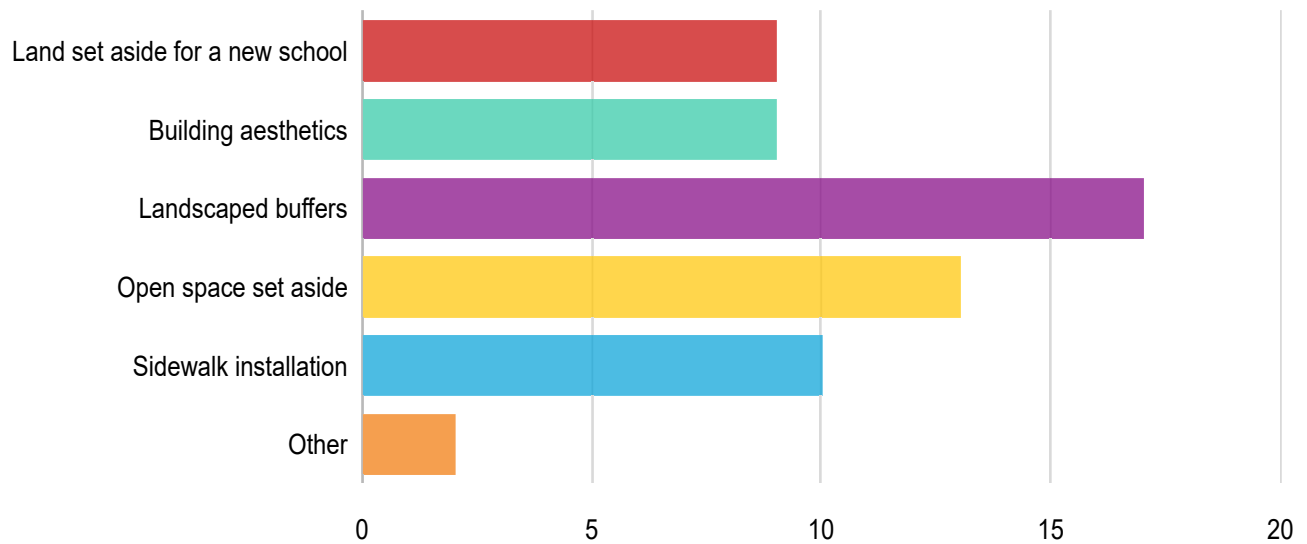
What other agencies could provide incentives or other activities that would promote development on the West Bank?



Answers	Count	Percentage
Louisiana Economic Development	15	68.18%
Louisiana Department of Transportation & Development	13	59.09%
Ascension Parish School District	12	54.55%
Louisiana Community Development	9	40.91%
Water District	8	36.36%
Other	0	0%

Answered: 21 Skipped: 1

If the proposed overlay were to give developers a density incentive, what trade-off's could be utilized?



Response	Count
increasing lot depth giving a larger back yard	1
Instead of a universal density incentive, couldn't a planned development be utilized? It's 2026, sidewalks should be standard in a new development, not a trade-off.	1

Answered: 22 Skipped: 0

What other improvements or challenges do you see in developing on the West Bank?

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Count

Just some personal ideas & things I have heard from citizens & landowners over recent years regarding the Donaldsonville area: A Rouzan/Conway style dev. with garden/townhomes in one section & larger sized lots with block streets similar to those in the Lemann Addition of Donaldsonville being extended would be great for the outskirts of the Uptown area. Going south of town along highways 1 & 308 large lot/estate homes are favored by residents. Coming into town along hwy 3089 a 1-3 street starter home community ranging from 250-300 would be supported. As far as commercial dev. revitalization of the Downtown Development District & the historic structures being put back into commerce would be a great first start. Another grocery store & a mental health facility are both desperately needed. The main hurdle is the residents/landowners. Work with the chamber or DDC to organize a roundtable with developers, citizens, politicians, etc. so they work with you vs against you.	1
Lack of services for families for convenience as compared to east bank	1
Rooftops are needed to bring in commercial development and services that the area needs. Allowing higher density in areas will help speed up commercial development and bring grocery stores and other critical businesses in the area. Plants are needing housing space and they don't know where employees will live. Allowing higher density can be offset by building aesthetics such as not allowing vinyl on buildings or restricting it from being used where it faces the public right of way. Other aesthetic considerations could be requiring multiple floor plans/front elevations be required for single family development to prevent the same exact building from being constructed over and over. Another suggestion would be set a maximum % of buildings that can have the same front elevation in the development. These simple aesthetic requirements, paired with higher density allowances will promote affordable homes being built for families and also create neighborhoods that people want to live in.	1
Sewer, Water, Gas supply	1
That overlay needs more industrial zoning, more single family residential zoning with a higher density component. It also needs to decrease the amount of mixed use. The rv park zoning also needs to be increased or at least needs to be monitored and observed. The short term renting is not a negative.	1
The biggest challenge facing developers on the Westbank is available property not controlled by the one or two large landowners that surround Donaldsonville.	1
The biggest improvement you can make is to the schools. If you are able to get the West Bank schools into the top 10 in the state, then the plan will work.	1
The pushback from the Ascension zoning board, permitting process is ridiculous, detention pond requirements to allow for a master detention.	1

This unincorporated plan really needs to be thought out as a full west bank plan including the city of donaldsonville. Timing is a challenge- there should not be a rush to relax codes or develop when demand is not there. The vision framework should be established and upheld through a 10-15 year plan.

Answered: 9 Skipped: 13