Proposed Comprehensive Plan

CITY OF BELLAIRE

INTRODUCTION

This Comprehensive Plan is written as a policy document for the City of Bellaire to follow in establishing guidelines for the concerns and priorities of the Planning and Zoning Commission and Council of the City of Bellaire. It is supported with data and information contained in the Comprehensive Plan Report and Options Committee Study, and other source material, each previously done for the City, and is to establish said guidelines with conclusions drawn from these studies. It is our intent that this Comprehensive Plan be reviewed every two years, along with an updated Comprehensive Plan Report and additional Options Committee studies that may be completed from time to time as additional supporting data.

The Comprehensive Plan Map, attached hereto, is intended to reflect a general land use plan to be achieved by the City of Bellaire. The other maps accompanying this Report are maps indicating only what is the existing land use, and are not intended to portray any specific land use plan for the future. This Plan is to be used as a guide and background for making whatever changes may be determined from time to time by the respective legislative body which may be occupying office. The specific subject matters addressed in this Comprehensive Plan are those which are considered to be of particularly strong concern at this time, and consist of (1) neighborhoods, (2) traffic and transportation, (3) utilities, (4) downtown development concerns, and (5) density, open space, and growth.

1. NEIGHBORHOODS

There is a very deep concern that the residential areas of Bellaire maintain their existing integrity and existing overall density condtitions. If the density conditions in the residential areas are to be changed, the areas are to be made less dense than they currently exist in the neighborhood areas, rather than denser, with possible exceptions in designated "buffer" zones.

There appears to be certain physical boundary lines delineating the neighborhoods of Bellaire, consisting primarily of four quadrants, divided by the Interstate Loop 610 and Bellaire Boulevard. Since the number of vehicles traveling in these two traffic arteries is particularly high, it is felt that "buffering techniques" along these traffic arteries to protect the residential areas from the fumes, litter, dirt, and noise normally incident to these traffic volumes is very important. "Buffering techniques", as used in this Plan, means any type of insulating device to encourage the least possible effect from adverse conditions on the adjacent residential areas. There is also concern that buffering techniques should be applied around the Central Business District adjacent to the residential districts. It is thought that boundaries of the residential areas, whether by the use of buffering techniques or various

methods of fencing or landscaping, should be very distinctly established to prevent any encroachment of adverse conditions into the existing neighborhood areas.

The buffering techniques considered to be desirable to maintain this residential integrity along the 610 Loop in areas north of Bellaire Boulevard consist of high density residential buffers (no greater than ten dwelling units per acre in density) and low-rise office buildings. These structures, although buffers themselves, should be buffered from the adjacent residential areas through the use of green areas, parks, adequate setback controls, and various methods of traffic control to keep their generated traffic volumes out of the adjacent residential neighborhoods. These buffering techniques are particularly important in considering the transitional areas and undeveloped areas north of Bellaire Boulevard along the east side of the Loop. The neighborhood areas along the Loop south of Bellaire Boulevard and north of Bissonnet on the west side of the Loop have maintained their integrity and value so well that any change in these areas is not considered desirable. Buffering techniques in these areas should consist of physical barriers placed between the service road and the main lanes of IH-610 and changes in the street circulation patterns.

The most desirable buffering techniques along Bellaire Boulevard are considered to be large lot zoning, large setback requirements, and some higher density residential (no greater than ten dwelling units per acre in density) on the north side of the Boulevard east of the Loop and west of Newcastle, where certain attached single-family residential zoning districts have already been constructed and/or platted. There is a current environment of large houses and churches along the Boulevard which is very desirable, and high priority should be given to perpetuate this environment.

The Central Business District (CBD) boundaries are also a major concern. There should be absolute boundaries established for this area. The Buffering techniques applicable to this area should be explored in a detailed study of the downtown area discussed in a subsequent section of this Plan. Nevertheless, existing residential boundaries should not be changed, and should be "firmed up" to eliminate the chance of spreading of the CBD into the adjacent residential areas. Buffering of all residential areas should be strongly encouraged.

Townhouse buffers deleted

2. TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

Traffic has probably generated more concern than any other element of the Comprehensive Plan. Most of the existing concerns focus at the increase in automobile traffic and the resulting loss of neighborhood integrity.

It is important to recognize that a major portion of the problem in the transporation area has its source in the existing and future development of the adjacent traffic generating elements in Houston which encourage traffic to come into the boundaries of Bellaire. There are a number of areas in Bellaire where "shortcut" capabilities exist from major arteries through residential areas of Bellaire and create internal

traffic congestion, which is not conducive to the neighborhood quality the City needs to preserve. It is imperative that the neighborhood areas be preserved, and that traffic be impeded through all neighborhood areas, except for that traffic generated by residents, guests, and service vehicles. The termination and rerouting of certain streets (pursuant to traffic proposals by the City's traffic engineering consultants) to prevent free flow of traffic through the neighborhood areas is a good recommendation to effectively impede this traffic flow. In addition, certain modifications should be made to the major thoroughfare system to encourage safer and free flow of traffic through the City.

Since major improvements to Gulfton, west of Bellaire, are on the City of Houston's major thoroughfare plans, it is proposed that Fournace Place should be extended and developed as a minor thoroughfare through the City of Bellaire to direct traffic off of Bissonnet Street and divert it to Fournace Place, adjoining Gulfton, when improvements to Gulfton are completed.

Bissonnet, on the other hand, is not considered very desirable as a high traffic volume street because of the condition of the street. Bissonnet is not on any major improvement plans for the area of Houston contiguous to the City of Bellaire, and because of the angle at which it crosses the City, it creates a traffic hazard from traffic exiting or emerging from the cross streets, and it has a very undesirable intersection with Bellaire Boulevard. It is therefore recommended that the Bellaire/Bissonnet intersection be modified as discussed under Section 5.2 of this Comprehensive Plan. Also, Bissonnet subdivides neighborhoods and creates irregular shaped land areas which have limited value for either commercial or residential use. It is therefore proposed that Bissonnet be narrowed in some segments and designated as a collector street, that provision be made for the additon of sidewalks and bikeways, and that the landscape environment be upgraded and increased. It is felt that if Fournace can be developed to divert the traffic in a better pattern than Bissonnet, it should be used to lower the traffic volume on Bissonnet as much as possible by interconnection with Bissonnet and being developed as a 4-lane minor thoroughfare as recommended above.

Rewritten - Bissonnet closing deleted

The same concern is expressed for Newcastle Street. It is proposed that Newcastle not be upgraded to handle any more traffic than it currently handles, and the existing right-of-way be used to devolop a linear park/bikeway route, leaving Newcastle as a collector street.

In order to prevent an undesirable increase in through traffic from the north of Bellaire's city limits, between the IH-610 Loop and the East City limits, it is proposed that the existing streets that give access to this area be either terminated or controlled in some manner to insure the integrity of this neighborhood area while providing for the necessary circulation of its residents.

added

2.1 Interconnection

To promote interconnection of the four quadrants of the City, a system of bike trails safe school routes and sidewalks should be further developed through the City, as well as linear parks and open spaces, which

would make it more conducive to alternative residential traffic modes other than automobiles. It is also felt that the use of buses could be encouraged by the construction of shelters at bus stops in the City of Bellaire and clear identification of bus routes through the City and bus stop locations generally.

2.2 New Development

The major concern for any new development in the City of Bellaire is that the traffic generated by such development should not cause traffic on Bellaire's thoroughfares to exceed the traffic Level of Service "C", as defined in the Comprehensive Traffic Engineering Survey and Study for the City of Bellaire. (1977) It is suggested that as part of the environmental assessment form that a traffic analysis must be done indicating the traffic Level of Service "C" would not be exceeded if the proposed new development is to take place. Both on-site and off-site improvements considered necessary to achieve this level of service should be mandated as an integral part of the proposal.

3. UTILITIES

3.1 Water

Totally Rewritten "Excess Capacities" deleted

Bellaire has a ground water source that is fully adequate for a low density, non-industrial community. Surface water allocation is estimated to be available in 2020. However, Bellaire's ground water withdrawal is subject to control by the Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District, and surface water at a reasonable cost may not become available for many years. It is recommended that a "bank" concept be adopted for budgeting water for new developments. Teh feasibility of recycling water should be explored and an effort should be made to reduce the loss of water through leakage.

Bellaire's water wells are old and of questionable dependability, but with the additon of a planned high production well, the planned additional above ground level storage, and the continuing program of line replacement to improve pressure, the system should be fully adequate to meet the City's requirements. Water lines should be sized to assure adequate pressure for all areas of the City and proper interconnection of well sites.

3.2 Sewer

The new sewer plant, with a designed capacity of 4.5 million gallons per day, is fully adequate for Bellaire's anticipated needs, but the collection system is badly deteriorated in some areas and the volume of storm water entering the system is in excess of acceptable levels. A sewer line rehabilitation program needs to be implemented. Future development should be limited to those areas where the existing sewer lines have sufficient capacity during normal wet weather flow and to other areas where the developer will reduce storm water infiltration by an amount at least equal to the effluent generated by his development. A "bank" concept should be adopted for budgeting a fair allocation of capacity to undeveloped or underdeveloped areas.

As with traffic concerns, both off-site and on-site improvements necessary to service any new development should be an integral part of any future development proposals, and the application of a "bank" concept of measuring consumption against the capacity currently in existence is strongly endorsed.

3.3 Storm Water

Totally Rewritten

Though major improvements have been made in the storm sewer system over the years, some small areas of the City still suffer from excessive street flooding so drainage improvement programs need to be continued. Storm water detention should be required of all new development to avoid creating new drainage problems and as an example to other cities in our area which collectively contribute to the drainage problems of Harris County. The likelihood that a portion of Bellaire will soon be included in the 100-year flood plain of Braes Bayou should be considered in any future land use planning of the affected area.

3.4 Assessment

The primary concern affecting utility capacity should be reflected by a change in the environmental assessment forms required for new construction. The amount of water and sewer capacity expected to be used by any new project should be monitored to make as little impact on our excess capacity as possible. All new development should exhibit that they are using the most efficient design and installing the most efficient facilities available so there is no waste of our utility capacity.

In addition, all new development should include design criteria for storm water management techniques, particularly on-site detention, that will reduce or eliminate the existing street ponding and flooding adjacent to the site and within the City of Bellaire in general that exists during heavy rains.

4. DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

Downtown Bellaire has received less attention than it needs in order to insure its survival and create a "commercial neighborhood" that is an asset to the City of Bellaire. In fact, downtown Bellaire is probably the poorest planned, least convenient, and most visually unattractive part of the City of Bellaire. An interrelationship of economic viability, efficient circulation, landscaping, physical design, visual image, land use control, and redevelopment strategies need to be considered. Transportation and circulation is considered to be the major problem in the downtown area.

There is a definite need for: (1) closing certain streets to create a pedestrian environment, (2) sign control, (3) paving, (4) curbing, (5) sidewalks for pedestrian traffic, (6) redefinition of certain street patterns, (7) underground utilities, (8) landscaping, (9) more distinct definition of the boundaries of the downtown area and aggregation of compatible land uses, and (10) development of viable buffering techniques.

Recongnizing that there are certain deficiencies in the existing zoning ordinance that perhaps create an overregulation of the downtown area which has hindered some incentive for commercial growth, it is recommended that one large Planned Redevelopment District (PRD) be created as shown on the Comprehensive Plan map, so that the downtown merchants, land owners, and the Chamber of Commerce will have a greater incentive to cooperate in making the central business district (CBD) a more attractive place to shop. The City should encourage redevelopment through a number of different promotional campaigns to develop a theme or image for downtown Bellaire.

However, the goals and objectives sought to be achieved can only by achieved through active participation by the merchants and land owners. If, for whatever reason, they do not feel like they wish to upgrade the quality of the existing downtown environment, the City should not hesitate to seek outside help for redevelopment, even if it means using their powers of eminent domain or other avenues of police power they may have at their disposal.

5. DENSITY, OPEN SPACE AND GROWTH

It cannot be overemphasized that the primary concern for the City of Bellaire is neighborhood preservation in order to provide the necessary accessibility, size, configuration, and buffering for a viable neighborhood environment. To keep density more stable in the City, it is thought that downzoning certain areas to lower density residential is more desirable than rezoning any existing residential areas to a more dense use. It has already been previously expressed that there should be four items added to the environmental assessment form for new development to be built in Bellaire: (1) the amount of water intended to be used, (2) the amount of sanitary sewer and storm water expected to be generated, (3) a traffic study indicating traffic Level of Service "C" will not be exceeded by the proposed development, and (4) storm water detention techniques. All of these criteria should be considered of primary importance in growth control, and in lowering the impact on the residential areas of the City.

There are particular areas of commercial land development along Bissonnet, which are considered "strip" commercial, which may be converted to lower density or higher density residential use, which would more effectively buffer the homes around these commercial areas and upgrade the cluttered effect of development in these areas.

deleted as well as certain areas around the CBD which are currently unplanned commercial entities

There are also certain areas that are zoned for higher density residential that are currently occupied by single-family detached residences. Keeping some of these areas detached residential, instead of anticipating a later development to higher residential density, is felt to be a better approach for maintaining a lower density pattern.

added

The Comprehensive Plan map proposes a general land use pattern intended to accomplish the above objectives. Three general categories of residential density are used: (1) lower density residential (approximately two dwelling units per acre), (2) medium density residential (approximately four dwelling

units per acre), and (3) higher density residential (approximately ten dwelling units per acre or higher if multi-family is to be considered).

There has been a great amount of concern with respect to high-rise office building development along the 610 Loop. While this type of development in itself should not be considered bad, there should be a very great emphasis given to insulating the residential areas around it. The preceding recommendation that such development only be considered in light of the City's existing utility and traffic capacities indicate that the development of these office structures along the Loop should be carefully monitored to preserve as much open space and air circulation as possible. It is felt that a lower building with less open space is more desirable than a taller building with more open space, provided that adequate setbacks are established from residential areas.

deleted: "high rise or low rise" ... "shorter"

5.1 Parks and Open Space

There has also been an increasing concern over the construction and development of parks and open space in the City. Of particular concern are the four quadrants referenced earlier as being divided by Bellaire Boulevard and 610 Loop. It is felt that each of these four quadrants should have a central park center where citizens could use the park facilities and park equipment without having to leave their particular neighborhood. There are, additionally, certain areas where linear parks would be very desirable for space currently not in use, particularly areas along Newcastle and small pocket parks that are on the Loop. A linear park should be developed as a landscaped right-of-way containing pedestrian/bikeway facilities and covered bus stops where applicable. A minimum twenty feet in width should be provided, with the landscaping designed to buffer the pedestrian/bikeway from the roadway and to buffer the abutting property from the linear park. It is also felt that there should be a certain amount of park space retained out of every new development being built in Bellaire.

added

In order to provide ample amounts of parks in the City of Bellaire, a specific goal of one acre of park space per 250 people is proposed. The Comprehensive Plan map shows this as a total of 76.036 acres, based on a total population of 20,000 people. The map further defines this proposal by quadrants, as discussed above, based on the 1970 census distribution of population. It is expected that the proposed higher density land use in the northeast quadrant could cause both the population and the proposed park area to increase in the future. Moreover, it is recommended that the City explore the possible use of existing school sites and utility rights-of-way for additional recreational open space usage.

Concern over other community facilities was not expressly considered in this Plan except for the proposal to relocate the existing City Hall complex in order to expand the open space and recreational use of Bellaire Park.

The Comprehensive Plan map shows several major areas of concern which should be dealt with specifically to effect an increase in residential integrity and achieve the density control criteria set out herein. The specific short-term objectives will be taken up in three broad categories in coordination with the Options Committee studies, which are: (1) Central Business District, (2) neighborhoods, and (3) 610 Loop corridor.

deleted FAR restrictions

5.2 Central Business District

The currently existing "Open Space" requirements, coupled with the existing development in the Central Business District, create a difficult problem for development and redevelopment in the downtown Bellaire area. For instance, if an existing land owner wants to improve his property, he finds that his existing development may not comply with the open space requirements and therefore cannot improve his property without some drastic changes in the structure or the land plan of his development. To provide an incentive to remodeling and redevelopment of the downtown area, it is proposed that the downtown area currently zoned "LR" and part of the area zoned "C" be aggregated into one large Planned Redevelopment District (PRD) as described above. This district would have minimum, but acceptable, open space ratios, with the only other density limitation being a two and one-half story height limit. [This district could be subdivided into smaller Redevelopment districts once logical groupings or planning areas have been established and agreed upon by the entire district as proposed. An overall site plan should be required for each area so formed and related to the entire PRD so that each of the Downtown Development Concerns stated above can be coordinated. In providing guidelines for development, traffic and circulation would be considered as being of primary importance, with parking facilities, open space areas and sign control also given major attention. Buffering of the adjacent residential areas should be considered an essential ingredient of any proposal.

Rewritten "Spruce ST." Rezoning deleted.

It is further proposed that Bissonnet Street not cross Bellaire Boulevard, but instead allow westbound traffic from Bissonnet to merge with the westbound traffic on Bellaire Boulevard, and the eastbound traffic on Bissonnet merge with the eastbound traffic on Bellaire Boulevard. This street arrangement should create better traffic circulation both in and around the Central Business District.] It is further proposed that certain other street arrangements, mentioned earlier in this Plan, also be made to further promote the free circulation of traffic and pedestrian mobility in the downtown business area. [Any street arrangement proposed as part of the Planned Redevelopment District site plan should create more parking area and better traffic circulation than currently exists in the CBD, as well as amphasize pedestrian circulation and associated amenities.]

added

5.3 Neighborhoods

There are only two major distinctions in the neighborhood areas that will be mentioned as specific changes and alternatives suggested by the Comprehensive Plan. The first involves the redevelopment of the retail districts fronting on Bissonnet Street east of the existing PD-3. It is anticipated that this area will be changed to a higher density residential designation between PD-3 and just west of Newcastle. The area east of Newcastle would be a Planned Development-Retail district, as shown on the Comprehensive Plan Map. This is done in anticipation of the lowering of the traffic onto Bissonnet Street and the increase of traffic on Fournace Place in conjunction with other proposals made in this Comprehensive Plan. The residential development of this area would help maintain the integrity of this single-family residential neighborhood, and the area which is anticipated will be developed along the east side of the currently existing PD-3 district.

The other significant change in the neighborhood area would be the Bissonnet frontage between Third Street and First Street west of the 610 Loop corridor. It is anticipated that this area will become a medium density residential zone in anticipation of the narrowing of Bissonnet Street. This would permit the development of a linear park on the Bissonnet right-of-way and eliminate some of the traffic hazards created by the current large flow of traffic on Bissonnet. It is anticipated that this will help restore some of the integrity of the residential neighborhoods which currently exist north and south of Bissonnet. This action would eliminate speculation that this area would eventually go "commercial" and eliminate the possible deterioration of the currently existing residential area.

The other changes in the neighborhoods consist of lowering the density of certain areas from higher density residential to medium density residential because of existing capacities of utility lines and because of the desire to encourage the development, remodeling, and redevelopment of certain residential areas of the city into a lower density, single-family detached residential environment.

5.4 610 Loop Corridor

The 610 Loop corridor area has been a subject of great controversy because of the high-density development currently nearing completion in that location. Specifically, as set out in this Density, Open Space, and Growth section of this Comprehensive Plan, traffic and transportation are our major concerns in controlling the growth and density along the 610 Loop corridor. Correspondingly, certain specific changes are suggested in the existing zoning pattern along the 610 Loop corridor. It is proposed that the currently existing PD-1 be divided so that only the first 225 feet along the east side of the feeder road would be designated as PD-Office. Again, this is to provide an incentive for someone to propose a planned development arrangement to that strip of property fronting on the freeway, such that it would buffer the areas behind it from the freeway adversities, yet still be developed to the highest and best use that would remain an asset to the City of Bellaire. The criteria for the PD district would probably concern itself most with the buffering of the adjacent residential area and low-rise commercial structures. However, the low-rise commercial structures are not to include retail or shopping center type development, since they tend to generate a more continuous traffic flow. The remainder of the existing PD-1 area to the east would be designated as a Planned Development-Medium Density Residential district to coordinate its development with the medium density housing that currently exists around it. This particular site (PD-1) does not have any immediate access to the ramp system for the 610 Loop and is not considered a desirable location for a high density traffic generating type development, particularly in light of the large acreage north of the PD-1, which may develop into a higher-density use and over which the City of Bellaire has no control.

It is proposed that the existing PD-3 district be changed to a "PD" district with emphasis on office development in the front of the property on the east side of the West Loop and on the north side of Bissonnet, with residential development on the east side of the tract with frontage on Fournace Place, Bissonnet, and Avenue B. The ratio of this development should be established in percentage figures so that flexibility and density

control can be obtained without creating guidelines that are too restrictive to be realistic. It is anticipated that 40 percent of the property could be developed for medium to high-density commercial use, 40 percent for residential use, and 20 percent for open space and park area. It is anticipated that the park areas would be located on the northeast or southeast corner of the existing PD-3 site. Emphasis in creating this PD district would be in buffering the surrounding residential areas and maintaining all the traffic generating commercial development on the Loop, with additional emphasis on traffic controls, such that traffic generated by this commercial facility would not funnel back into the residential areas.

The single family residential areas in the southeast corner of Bissonnet and the 610 Loop and the residential area currently zoned PD-5(O) should remain medium density residential. Since these areas are currently developed as detached single family residences, remodeling and continued use of the residences is considered a much better use than encouraging their decay by an anticipated changing land use.

Pursuant to a recommendation made earlier by the Planning and Zoning Commission, it is anticipated that PD-6(O) should be designated a higher-density residential district, because of developmental difficulties currently existing in PD-6(O) and coordination with the adjacent residential area to the north of PD-6(O). PD-5(O), because of its existing housing, is proposed to be converted back to a medium density residential district as stated above to promote redevelopment and remodeling of the homes in the area and promote a more stable neighborhood environment for that residential area. It is proposed for PD-7(O) to be changed to simply be "PD" with emphasis on maintaining the quality and integrity of the adjacent residential area. Anything developed in PD-7(O) would back up directly to the back yards of a number of homes which are currently deed restricted and whose current land use designation could not be reasonably changed. Further criteria for the development of this PD would be traffic control and keeping the traffic out of the residential area adjacent to it, both from First Street, Linden, and Laurel Streets.

It is further proposed that the existing ORP and O districts along the Loop be changed to "PD", so that adequate controls could be placed on these districts for any further development or redevelopment that may take place in these districts.

added

In conclusion, serious effort should be put into exploring various buffering techniques along the entire length of the IH-610 Loop in the City of Bellaire. Also, the proposed U-turns at Bissonnet and the Loop and the proposed ramp modifications should be reviewed in light of the needs of the citizens of Bellaire, and mechanisms of implementation of the above proposals be explored with the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation as well as the present and future owners and developers of commercial property abutting the IH-610 Loop.

6. PROCEDURAL MECHANISMS

After the Comprehensive Plan is adopted by City Council, it will be necessary to begin proceedings to initiate the changes contemplated herein. To effect the Comprehensive Plan, it is proposed that the Planning and

Zoning Commission impose a "pending" status for all areas which would need to be rezoned to comply with the Comprehensive Plan. No zoning changes will be allowed, and no building permits would be issued for any of the "pending" areas until they are rezoned in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.

It is anticipated that all recommendations for zoning changes will be made as soon as possible by the Planning and Zoning Commission. There will be multiple changes where practicable. The changes involving "PD" designations, which require extensive guidelines and coordination, will probably come after some of the more fundamental changes in the residential areas.