



I. Summary

In April 2020, The Board of Commissioners for the Port of New Orleans (Port NOLA) officially adopted the Port Inner Harbor Economic Revitalization Plan (PIER Plan), a vision for 1,000 acres of Port owned industrial real estate that integrates maritime and logistics needs, and represents a partnership between Port NOLA, the City of New Orleans, and key community stakeholders. The PIER Plan is the culmination of a three-year collaborative effort utilizing a \$200,000 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) grant and leveraged additional funding for implementation. Collaboration among a range of stakeholders, partners and community members from the beginning helped ensure buy-in and planning success. By combining the ideas and feedback of current industrial tenants, educational and nonprofit organizations, government agencies, neighborhood associations and business organizations, the PIER Plan encompasses community needs and capacity into a vision for future development for regional benefits. The result is an economic vision for the Inner Harbor corridor that will pave the way for new jobs, and catalyze area business development by growing commerce and industrial viability.

II. Goals and Objectives

As a landlord port and property manager, Port NOLA plans, builds, maintains and supports the infrastructure that supports economic opportunities related to trade and commerce. Together with tenants, operators and partners, Port NOLA's collective strength as an economic catalyst drives global trade and builds local prosperity. This PIER Plan and its focus on the Inner Harbor is a guide for the Port's short, medium and long-term goals toward that prosperity.

The PIER Plan goal was to identify a path for revitalization of the Port's economically declining Inner Harbor, a manmade shipping canal that stretches from the Mississippi River between the Bywater and Lower 9th Ward/Holy Cross neighborhoods, north to Lake Pontchartrain, splitting the

Pontchartrain Park and Pines Village neighborhoods, and houses approximately 1,000 acres of port-owned maritime industrial properties. The proposal to EPA presented a detailed list of activities, outputs and outcomes, which served as our initial goals and objectives. The project also required maintaining an updated Workplan, which evolved to track project changes and seven distinct tasks over the course of the three-year planning project, described more fully in section III.B below.

PIER Plan goals were established early and included input from our Key Partners and Stakeholder Panel:

1. **Design and build catalyst projects** to drive investment in Inner Harbor infrastructure that supports the Port's economic mission and retains flexibility to meet future shipping and industry needs.
2. **Foster new opportunities in targeted sectors and develop strategic regional partnerships** to establish a pipeline for market and vision-aligned tenants.
3. **Remove barriers to redevelopment** through collaboration to assess and remediate potential contamination along the Inner Harbor and enhance access and mobility options.
4. **Leverage resources** from the City and other entities to engage surrounding communities and identify off-port



Figure 1. Inner Harbor property lease-terms and vacancies.

development and workforce strategies to benefit the Port operations and neighboring stakeholders.

Throughout the process, the PIER Plan considered the local economy, environment and community's existing conditions and needs for a meaningful land use vision and practical recommendations for implementation, with design guidelines providing visual enhancement strategies. With an analysis of current conditions, the PIER Plan identified target industries that would thrive within available real estate footprints and considered the existing local workforce and future workforce development opportunities. With commitments to the PIER Plan and in collaboration with the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), Port NOLA utilized EPA Brownfields Coalition Assessment funding to conduct 16 Phase I Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) and three Phase II ESAs to date on PIER Plan properties in order to remove real and/or perceived concerns of historic environmental hazards on the sites, improving site marketability as ready for development.

III. Discussion

Through innovative funding from EPA and in partnership with several local stakeholders, Port NOLA met its goal for collaborative revitalization planning of the Inner Harbor, while addressing infrastructure, environmental and community challenges to redevelopment the underutilized and blighted properties.

A. Background

The Port of New Orleans' Inner Harbor Industrial Canal (IHNC or Inner Harbor) properties are an underutilized industrial real estate asset with the potential for revitalization and prospect to create economic opportunity in an underserved area. Construction of the IHNC was completed in 1923 by the Port of New Orleans as a shipping canal connecting the Mississippi River south of the city with Lake Pontchartrain to the north of the city. The IHNC eventually became a link in the Gulf

Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), the inland waterway stretching along the Gulf of Mexico from Texas to Florida. The Inner Harbor has had boons and busts through its nearly 100-year history, with peak productivity at the dawn of the shipping container era with the first container yard on the IHNC opening in 1973.

By the 1980s, Port NOLA's IHNC's container yard was state of the art, though container volume growth began to tax capacity. Due to changing trends in shipping, compounded by natural disasters, the Inner Harbor experienced declining economic and physical conditions from the mid-1990s on. In 2004, container operations moved to the Mississippi River Nashville/Napoleon Container Complex. The closing of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) following Hurricane Katrina further restricted deep draft shipping access, preventing approximately twenty Inner Harbor tenants from returning, further advancing vacancy and blight on the corridor. Properties and infrastructure had deteriorated and Port NOLA needed a strategy for revitalization.

As the owner and agency responsible for the construction of the IHNC and maritime industrial real estate development, Port NOLA works to provide opportunities for the surrounding area. Although the IHNC divided neighborhoods and precipitated mega-block housing projects, for decades, industry along the IHNC and the surrounding area grew and provided abundant local jobs allowing neighborhoods surrounding the Inner Harbor to grow as well. Nine neighborhoods within a one-mile radius were identified in Port NOLA's BFAWP proposal as the *target area neighborhoods*.

When EPA released the Request for Proposals for the Brownfields Area-Wide Planning grant during the summer of 2016, Port NOLA's environmental department recognized an opportunity to initiate a comprehensive planning process to uplift the 1000-acre maritime industrial area properties and incorporate input from surrounding economically depressed neighborhood residents. The planning project was completed over the course of three years, allowing Port NOLA

to leverage approximately \$600,000 of additional EPA funding through partnerships with the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) for voluntary phase I and phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs), to clear properties of environmental concerns and encourage redevelopment and revitalization of the Inner Harbor.

B. Objectives and Methodology

To reach our objectives to (1) obtain EPA grant funding for the planning project and (2) implement a workable plan for revitalization, Port NOLA began with a commitment to foster meaningful partnerships. During the grant application process, extensive background research on the area's history and current demographics further demonstrated the value of a revitalization plan. Identifying key partners in our proposal was an important step, and given the need, gaining support was easy. The following partners each played a key role in the PIER Plan's success:

Fulfilling the vision for the Inner Harbor District will be a long-term, multi-partner process, not an overnight change — and will require a comprehensive, sustained effort — not a silver bullet strategy.

- *City of New Orleans Office of Resilience & Sustainability*: The City assisted in the planning process related to city jurisdiction, city infrastructure, neighborhood engagement, city housing plans and economic development priorities.
- *Regional Planning Commission (RPC)*: As the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the RPC and Port NOLA have a long history of working together to address transportation, development and environmental issues. The RPC provided technical assistance related to transportation infrastructure and Brownfield assessment and redevelopment (including environmental assessment of key sites as funding permits).
- *Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ)*: This non-profit organization partnered with the Port by engaging target area neighborhoods and communicating environmental justice priorities.

- *Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ):* As the state regulatory agency, LDEQ provided technical assistance and support for permitting and compliance needs.

The following tasks were completed according to Port NOLA’s detailed workplan, which was continuously updated throughout the project:

Task 1. Cooperative Agreement Oversight

Port NOLA attended BFAWP training in Philadelphia, PA at the start of the grant period, two EPA National Brownfields Conferences in Pittsburgh, PA and Los Angeles, CA and two EPA Region 6 Brownfields Conferences in Dallas, TX for appropriate grant administration, consultant procurement, and grantee training requirements.

Task 2. Stakeholder Mapping & Community Outreach Planning

Extensive stakeholder mapping identified the best organizations and representatives to serve on a stakeholder panel for the project. Stakeholders included representatives from local and state government agencies, local business organizations, current IHNC port tenants, area neighborhood associations, and non-governmental organizations. The panel met throughout the project and guided the direction and outcomes of the PIER Plan.



Figure 2. PIER Plan Stakeholder Group mapping by sector.

Task 3. Existing Conditions Research and Documentation

The project consultant researched each of the PIER Plan properties and developed environmental summaries that were then used to further investigate issues through Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs). The consultants also used real estate market data to evaluate the best redevelopment options for the corridor.

Task 4. Community Engagement: Visioning

Visioning charrettes were hosted through existing community events, where Port NOLA provided the initial findings from Task 3 and worked with the public at multiple events to map and track priorities for redevelopment and identify barriers for redevelopment. This task helped map a future vision for short- and long-term redevelopment goals.



Figure 3. PIER Plan visioning participation summary and timeline.

Task 5. Catalyst/Site Reuse and Redevelopment Planning

Catalyst sites were identified for the BFAWP proposal, as part of the plan to catalyze redevelopment for the corridor. We utilized existing conditions research and visioning input to develop initial site specific strategies at two catalyst sites. Port NOLA, RPC and LDEQ applied for an EPA Brownfields Coalition assessment grant to conduct Phase I and Phase II ESAs on these catalyst sites as well as additional priority sites were identified through the previous tasks and planning.

Task 6. Community Planning: Priorities and Implementation Strategies

Port NOLA worked with key partners to facilitate four planning forums with the stakeholder panel, in which the draft data from the PIER Plan and visioning was presented to the Stakeholder Panel for initial input and guidance.

Task 7. Develop Draft and Final PIER Plan Document

The first complete draft was developed and presented to the PIER Plan Key Partner and Stakeholder Panel, and posted for comment on portnola.com on February 7, 2020, with a commitment to accept comments for 30 days. With feedback from the community, Port NOLA extended the comment period until March 20, 2020, and held an additional public meeting on March 12, 2020 in the Port's auditorium and via a Zoom Conference link. Through March and April 2020 Port NOLA compiled and incorporated comments as possible, to release the final draft for Key Partners and the EPA Project Officer for any final comments on April 20, 2020. The final PIER Plan was adopted by the Board of Commissioners on April 23, 2020.

PIER Plan District Vision and Implementation

With implementation of the PIER Plan, the Inner Harbor has the prospective to realize its potential as an economic catalyst for the region. The Inner Harbor District Vision was a major portion in the PIER Plan that allows others to synergistically build on new opportunities. The districts were created with consideration of current operations, stakeholder input, IHNC geography and analysis of future market data.



Figure 4. PIER Plan District Vision, culminating the planning process.

Since the creation of this District Vision, Port NOLA uses this vision map to consider the best placement for new and future business developments on the Inner Harbor. While building meaningful partnerships throughout the PIER Plan process, Port NOLA has been able to utilize creative resources for plan implementation and specific site plans.

For example, in December 2019, an undergraduate planning class at the University of Southern California (USC) produced a site plan for a proposed mixed-use recreational site at the north end of the IHNC in the Maritime Recreational

Campus, which included a maritime training center, boat launch, marina, restaurant and retail space, and an educational facility/museum. This site is currently occupied by a construction company under a short-term lease, but this plan may be considered for future developments.



Figure 5. USC proposed mixed-use recreational site plan design.

Most recently, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Louisiana Chapter's Real Estate Diversity Initiative (REDI) hosted a class that focused on one of the Port's Catalyst sites at the Florida Avenue Turning Basin that has shown to be a challenging site for redevelopment. The REDI participants formed two teams that presented two development proposals to the port and were rated by the Port's Real Estate Director and other developer-industry senior professionals. This property has been vacant and blighted for over a decade, and is located in the area defined in the PIER Plan for Transitional Port Uses, which may provide for some public access related to maritime commerce.

Finally, a site on the east side of the IHNC in the PIER Plan's Eastern Cargo Campus recently began an expansion of an existing refrigerated warehouse, or cold storage facility. In 2020, the tenant partnered with Port NOLA on a \$42 million expansion that will increase the capacity for the export of poultry and other meat products from the United States. The expansion is expected to directly create 50 new permanent maritime and warehousing jobs. The expansion aligns with the PIER Plan's Eastern Cargo Campus vision. Construction of the expansion is currently underway.

C. How the project fulfills the Award Criteria

1. *Benefits to Environmental Quality, Beautification and Community Involvement*

Through the development of the PIER Plan and working with our RPC and LDEQ partners, Port NOLA identified areas where environmental contamination and blight are limiting redevelopment. A cohesive Inner Harbor District Vision provides synergies for businesses, with the potential to alleviate area blight and provide career opportunities for nearby community residents. Adopting the PIER Plan is a first step toward lowering barriers that have hindered maritime industrial development of the Inner Harbor in recent decades. By focusing on data of market analytics and being responsive to stakeholders, Port NOLA aims to create a district that will support growing cargo and logistics needs for regional freight-based development, in order to prioritize limited resources to spur future investments.

2. *Independent Involvement and Effort*

Port NOLA engaged a wide range of stakeholders while working independently to write and implement PIER Plan objectives and EPA's BF AWP directives over the course of three years. This was particularly important for Port NOLA to fulfill its industrial planning needs, while engaging stakeholders to understand how to make the broadest reach for holistic area-wide improvements. The PIER Plan has allowed Port NOLA to focus on the future development of the Inner Harbor while providing a plan for growth of economic opportunities for the area.

3. Creativity

Utilization of a BFAWP for a port district was not EPA's typical planning project, as most projects were for revitalization planning for downtowns or other smaller non-port business areas. This unique project allowed Port NOLA to develop its own brownfields program to systematically identify environmental and redevelopment concerns. The project also opened the Port to many stakeholders that previously had not been reached. Because of the new partnerships and innovative ideas from outside stakeholders, for the first time Port NOLA



Figure 6. Gathering input at a community engagement event.

was able to create innovative design guidelines for wayfinding, landmarks and landscaping, and considered industrial place-making strategies for a cohesive business/industrial district that would be more attractive to prospective tenants.

4. Results

The Port published and officially adopted the Port Inner Harbor Economic Revitalization Plan in April 2020. The collaborative planning process solidified our Inner Harbor tenant relationships and strengthened partnerships across other governmental agencies, non-profits, business organizations and with local neighborhood associations. With its partners, RPC and LDEQ, 16 Phase I ESAs and three Phase II ESAs have been completed in the project area, and removed barriers for future developments. The Port's planning investment in this project and commitment to removing environmental barriers has already encouraged reinvestment in the area, thus reducing blight and creating opportunities. Additionally, due to the success of the Brownfields Coalition Grant

assessments conducted under the PIER Plan umbrella, Port NOLA and RPC are looking at submitting a proposal for further assessment funding in connection with another area where future Port planning development is underway.

5. *Cost Effectiveness*

This grant-funded planning project was extremely cost-effective, as we leveraged funds and scoped a project that delivered multiple benefits, including a catalog of existing environmental conditions, a forward-looking plan, and fostered stronger community relationships. The initial \$200,000 planning grant (\$147,000 utilized for a planning consultant, \$39,972 grant-funded staff time, \$5,654 conference travel, and \$7374 in printing and supplies), was supplemented by \$600,000 in assessment funds with EPA Brownfields Assessments, and additional leveraged funds from Port tenant investments to catalyze infrastructure improvements and provide area jobs.



Figure 7. Consultants conducting a Phase II ESA at a PIER Plan catalyst site.

6. *Port Industry Transferability*

While the EPA no longer offers Brownfields Area-Wide Planning grants, creating a revitalization plan for a depressed areas is a tool that can be used anywhere. Partnerships with local planning commissions and state environmental agencies can be utilized to pursue assessment funding for Brownfields Coalition Grants to provide assessments on blighted properties that may have historic contamination. This process has shown to be beneficial to the Inner Harbor businesses and local residents by initiating revitalization, identifying challenges and pursuing redevelopment.