



Canal Street Study

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS *City Planning Commission*

October 23, 2018



Motion M-18-200

- Summarize previous studies on the improvement of Canal Street between Claiborne Avenue and the Mississippi River; and
- Analyze new aspects of such, including but not limited to
 - Key recommendations and barriers to implementation
 - Gaps in knowledge and resources
 - Opportunity sites for commercial or residential use
 - Incentives for use of upper floors while discouraging demolitions of historic structures
 - Examination of Short Term Rentals as a way to encourage revitalization of upper floors
 - Recommendations for regulatory or policy initiatives to restore Canal Street as a key destination within the City



Photo credit: John N Teunisson 1906

Study Boundaries (Motion M-18-200)



MISSISSIPPI
RIVER

Contents of Study

- Canal St. Background and Planning History
- Existing Conditions
 - Land uses
 - Building permits
 - Notable projects
- Summary Table of Key Recommendations from Past Studies
- Public Comment
- Analysis of Barriers to Implementation and Best Practices
- Opportunity Sites in the Study Area
- Recommendations



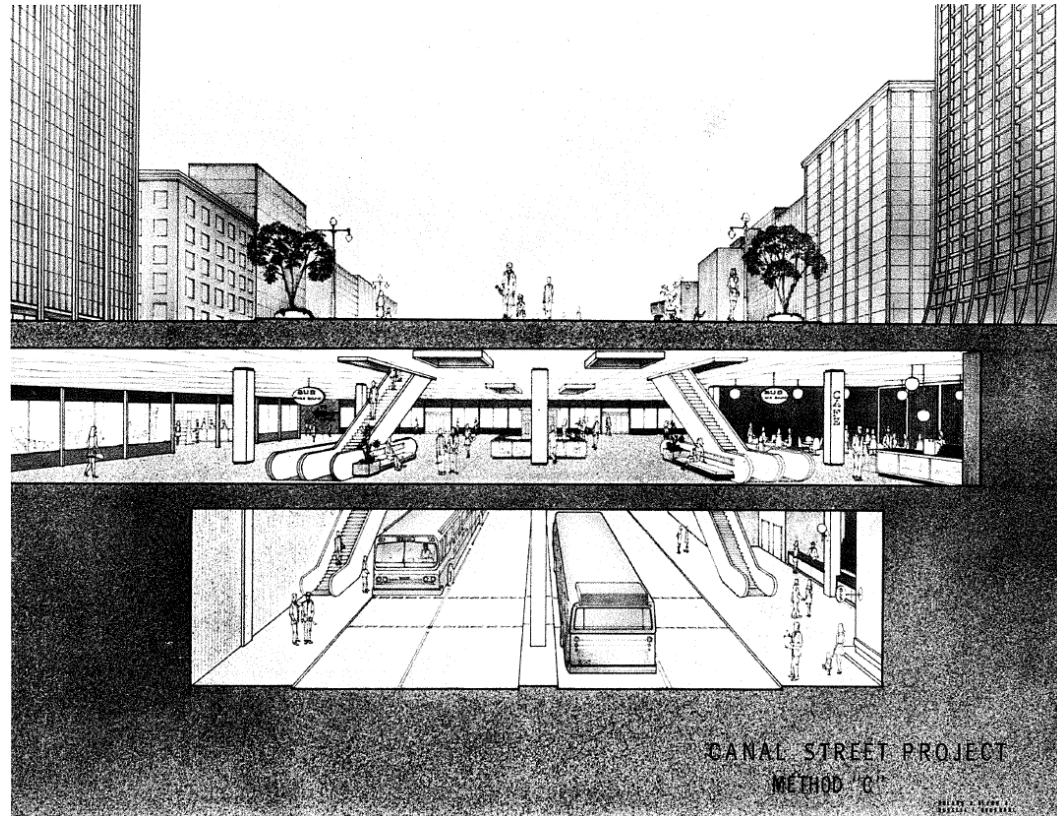
History of Canal Street

- Canal Street was originally the common ground between the French Quarter and Faubourg St. Marie
- Retailers relocated to Canal Street from Chartres and Royal Streets
- Canal Street provided more room for expansion and for the needs of large, dry-goods stores
- Served as retail destination for the region until mid-1900s with the growth of suburban communities and shopping centers



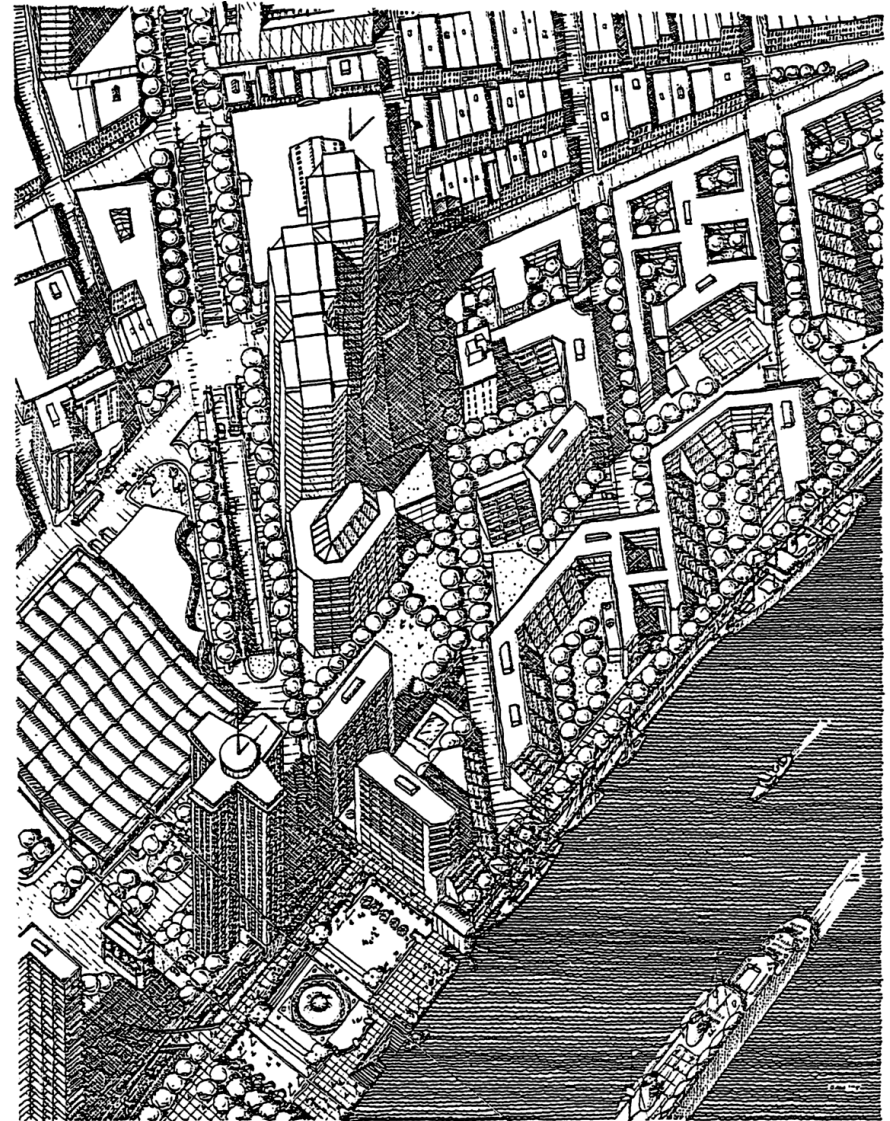
Summary of Past Planning Efforts

- Early plans focused on how Canal Street could compete with suburban shopping centers:
 - Convenient parking and location
 - Climate-controlled shopping environment
- Suburbanization was an unknown phenomenon at the time
- Recommendations focused on providing more capacity to roadways, more parking, and streetscape improvements



Summary of Past Planning Efforts

- By the late 1980s, the department stores and shops were closing.
- With the closing of shops, upper floor space was also vacated, as many upper floors contained offices, workshops and showrooms for ground floor uses.
- Serious planning for upper floor uses began in the 1990s along with retail recruitment efforts.
- Acres of Diamonds studies explored way to combine upper floors of multiple buildings to help meet fire safety codes.



THE RIVERFRONT AT CANAL STREET – NEW ORLEANS YEAR 2000

Planning Efforts 2000 to present

2009
New Orleans Mobility
and Parking Study

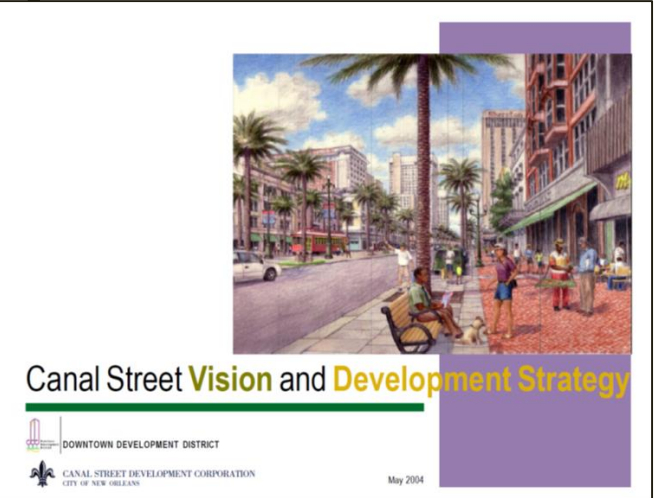
2014
Pedestrian Safety
Action Plan

2017
Refined CBD Height Plan
&
Riverfront Master Plan

2007 Unified New Orleans Plan

2004
Canal Street Vision and Development
Strategy

2013
Canal Street Retail
Market Analysis



2010
Plan for the 21st
Century: New
Orleans 2030



2004 Canal Street Vision and Development Strategy



- Most recent comprehensive planning effort for Canal Street
 - Retail
 - Upper Floor Occupancy
 - Placemaking
 - Transportation
 - Organizational Structure
 - Opportunity Sites
- Topics provide the structure of the staff's analysis and recommendations in the Canal Street study

Key Recommendations from Past Planning

Recommendation		Action Item	Status
1	Retail	1.1 Centralized Retail Management Program	In Progress
2	Upper Floor Occupancy	2.1 Building Code Amendments	Not Started
		2.2 Examination of Upper Floor Suitability	In Progress
		2.3 Commercial Short Term Rentals	In Progress
		2.4 Transfer of Development Rights	Not Started
3	Placemaking	3.1 Pedestrian Amenities Improvements	Ongoing
		3.2 Theater District/ Entertainment Center	In Progress
4	Transportation	4.1 Curb Use Modification	Not Started
		4.2 Pedestrian Safety Action Plan Implementation	In Progress
		4.3 Improvements to Bicycle Infrastructure	In Progress
		4.4 RTA Strategic Mobility Plan Implementation	In Progress
5	Management	5.1 Establish Management Entity Specifically for Canal Street	Not Started

Current Conditions

- Land Use Survey

- Retail continues to be predominant use
- Vacant ground floors were second largest use category



- Building Permit Data

- Mostly renovations
- Five new construction permits



Notable Recent Projects

Upper Canal Street

- The Governor's House
- Canal Crossing
- Jung Hotel



Lower Canal Street

- Hostelling International
- Hard Rock Hotel and Residences
- Four Seasons
- Sazerac House



Retail Analysis

- DDD plays major role in attracting retailers to Canal Street and the entire CBD.
- 2004 Retail Strategy divided Canal Street into four target areas:
 - MS River to St. Charles Avenue/Royal Street: Upscale to High-End
 - St. Charles Ave./Royal St. to Roosevelt Way/Burgundy St: shopping catering to residents
 - Roosevelt Way/Burgundy St. to Saratoga St./Crozat St.: Theater-art District supportive uses
 - Saratoga Street/Crozat St. to Claiborne Ave: Convenience shopping, large-format stores
- 2004 strategy was supplemented by a 2007 study of the 700 to 900 blocks of Canal Street, and a 2013 market analysis that studied the feasibility of a large-format store on Upper Canal Street



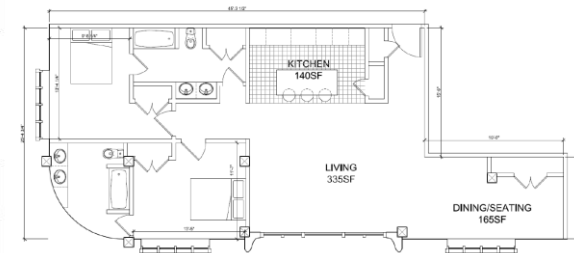
Retail Recommendations

- Focus on retail recruitment: promotional materials, tenant spaces, success stories, and incentives available to businesses
- Update retail strategy: strategy was developed in 2004, and should be updated to reflect changes in national trends.

Topic		Action Item		Recommendations	
1	Retail	1.1	Centralized Retail Management Program	1.1.1	Continue to recruit retailers by making contacts with local and national businesses and through the development of promotional materials that highlight the potential on Canal Street and success stories, inform them of available tenant spaces, and list of incentives that is accessible and predictable.
				1.1.2	Consider developing a comprehensive update to the 2004 retail strategy that considers the current market on Canal Street and the significant changes in nation retail trends.

Upper Floor Occupancy Analysis

- Building Code issues remain problematic for the rehabilitation and occupancy of upper floors on Canal Street because it often requires installation of second means of egress
- Past studies have recommended pursuing amendments to building code, similar to the New Jersey sub-code that allows for structures to be rehabilitated as long as they do not result in the building being less safe.
- Consolidation of upper floors is also viable method for rehabilitating upper floor spaces. This was explored in detail in the 1994 Acres of Diamonds study.
- DDD continues to work with property owners to explore possible combinations of buildings.



Upper Floor Occupancy Analysis

- Short Term Rentals also provide an opportunity for the renovation of upper floors, and several projects are currently have been completed or are under review by City agencies
- The 2018 Short Term Rental Study recommended that Canal Street from the MS River to Rampart Street be exempt from a proposed Commercial Short Term Rental limit of 25% of individual buildings.
- Staff believed that short term rental are a use that could incentivize the renovation of these long vacant spaces

623 Canal Street



1016 Canal Street



Upper Floor Occupancy Analysis

- Past studies also recommended transfer of development rights tool to help incentivize the maintenance of historic structures and rehabilitation of upper floors
- Would allow property owners to sell unused developments rights to a receiving site that needs them in exchange for investing these earnings into the historic structure.
- Former CZO had a transfer of development rights provision, but it was never used. Many larger downtown structures used other bonuses available at the time. Additionally, height was limited to 70 ft.
- New CZO limits most historic structures to 120 ft.



Upper Floor Occupancy Recommendations

- Explore creative solutions to address limitations imposed by building code requirements, including possible amendments and the consolidation of upper floors
- Create other incentives like allowing Commercial STRs in upper floors without limit on Canal Street between MS River and Rampart and developing a Transfer of Development Rights tool.

Topic		Action Item		Recommendations	
2	Upper Floor Occupancy	2.1	Building Code Amendments	2.1.1	Begin conversations with building code officials and local architects to determine if amendment to fire safety code would benefit the rehabilitation of the upper floors of Canal Street and other areas in the city and state that have the same challenges.
		2.2	Examination of Upper Floor Suitability	2.2.1	Continue to provide pre-development support for Canal Street property owners which develop the vision for upper floor renovations and consolidation, and provides property owners with concrete paths towards upper floor occupancy.
		2.3	Commercial Short Term Rentals	2.3.1	Allow Commercial Short Term Rentals in the upper floors of buildings with frontage on Canal Street between the Mississippi River and Rampart Street without a cap on the percentage of the structure they can occupy.
		2.4	Transfer of Development Rights	2.4.1	Develop a Transfer of Development Rights tool within the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance that allows Canal Street property owners to gain value from unused developable area in exchange for the renovation and maintenance of the historic structures.

Placemaking Findings

- Past plans have consistently emphasized the importance of the physical character of the public and private space on Canal St.
- Canal Street streetscape has been enhanced in recent years through new sidewalk treatments, street furniture, landscaping, and curb extensions
- Building facades have been restored with the assistance of the DDD's façade grant programs.
- Theater district has been mostly restored with the return of the Saenger, Joy, and Orpheum Theaters. Loew's State Palace Theater is currently in the process of being redeveloped.



Placemaking Analysis

- Staff analysis included case studies of the Champs-Elysees in Paris, Times Square in New York City, and Fayetteville Street in Raleigh, NC.
- All case studies agree on consistent set of overarching principles:
 - Encourage walkability
 - Proliferate multi-modal forms of transportation
 - Create consistent landscaping, lighting, seating, and wayfinding
 - Preserve historic architecture and character of districts



Placemaking Recommendations

Topic		Action Item		Recommendations	
3	Placemaking	3.1	Pedestrian Amenities Improvements	3.1.1	Demarcate outdoor seating and other uses that business can claim in the public right-of-way and create a set of design and use standards (such as planter barriers, exterior lighting, maintenance agreements, etc.) around them so that they do not create further congestion in pedestrian zones but rather create positive experiences
				3.1.2	Codify and demarcate specific areas for pop-up cafes and shops, galleries, and mobile vendors to activate more isolated parts of the retail corridor, especially in the short-term.
				3.1.3	Promote the installation of awnings, canopies, balconies, and galleries at locations where they are architecturally appropriate. These weather protection devices enhance the pedestrian experience by providing protection from the sun and rain. They also break up the expansiveness the Canal Street right-of-way, making it feel like a more compact and walkable environment. Balconies and galleries benefit the property owner by creating additional usable space, which could incentivize the use and renovation of upper floors.
				3.1.4	Additional streetscape improvements that build upon existing improvements and further enhance the public realm, including improved wayfinding, and additional lighting and public seating. Installations should compliment the historic character of the buildings and the energy of the lights, signs, and street life. Seating can have power, charging and broadcast infrastructure embedded to improve pedestrian and worker experience.
				3.1.5	Large planters and other landscaping interventions. Explore conversion of underutilized portions of right-of-way into green infrastructure or pocket park amenities
				3.1.6	Infrastructure for potential festivals on the street (that work in tandem with parades)
				3.1.7	Partnerships with local artist groups to brand districts with significant public art and monumentation
		3.2	Theater District/ Entertainment Center	3.2.1	Supplement existing zoning regulations to promote live entertainment venues and other appropriate uses that support an active Theater District. This could be done through changes to base zoning district regulations or through the adoption of an arts and culture overlay zoning district similar to ones that exist in other historic corridors
				3.2.2	Create additional special events on Canal Street, which would be marketed and managed by a public entity or main street organization.

Transportation Analysis

- Transportation issues along lower Canal Street are well documented, and include the misuse of freight and passenger zones, and the blocking of travel lanes by buses and delivery trucks
- DPW and DDD are finalizing a study now that will make recommendations for the reallocation of curb zones and a greater focus on enforcement.
- Currently 2 freight zones total on Canal Street between the MS River and Rampart St.
- 2004 Canal Street Study recommended reducing the street to two travel lanes in each direction, and developing a shared freight and passenger zone along the curb and outer lane.



Transportation Analysis

- Pedestrian improvements are being installed in accordance with the 2014 Pedestrian Safety Action Plan.
- Bicycling is being promoted by a 90-day demonstration project called Connect the Crescent with a connection to the ferry terminal and a number of protected crossings of Canal Street.
- 2017 RTA Strategic Mobility Plan recommends that a new downtown transit center be established between 2023 and 2027. Construction of a new Canal Street ferry terminal is being considered now.



Transportation Recommendations

Topic		Action Item		Recommendations	
4	Transportation	4.1	Curb Use Modification	4.1.1	Implement the enforcement and curb use re-allocation recommendations of the 2018 CBD Curb Use Study to resolve issues with the misuse of freight and passenger zones and the blocking of travel lanes.
				4.1.2	If curb use issues are not resolved by the recommendations of the 2018 Curb Use Study, consider performing a 90-day demonstration of a shared use lane between Peters and Rampart Streets that dedicates two lanes to through travel and the current outer lane lane and curb space to shared passenger and freight activities.
		4.2	Pedestrian Safety Action Plan Implementation	4.2.1	Neutral ground landscaping/buffers, such as planters or other installations, should be expanded and to discourage pedestrians crossing midblock.
				4.2.2	Canal and Peters Intersection - The right turn lane from South Peters Street onto Canal Street going toward the river could be removed, eliminating the small pedestrian island and creating a larger pedestrian space in front of the heavily pedestrian trafficked Harrah's Casino.
				4.2.3	Prohibit right turns on red lights throughout the corridor.
		4.3	Improvements to Bicycle Infrastructure	4.3.1	Support initiatives like Connect the Crescent, and make temporary demonstration permanent if successful.
				4.3.2	Install additional bicycle racks along Canal Street.
		4.4	RTA Strategic Mobility Plan Implementation	4.4.1	Support the Regional Transit Authority is determining the appropriate location for a new downtown transit center after the Comprehensive Operations Assessment and Network Redesign have been completed.
				4.4.2	Off-board fare collection for all Canal Street streetcar stops and informational/wayfinding signage – The Canal streetcar lines are often plagued by long lines of passengers waiting to board and riders that are uninformed on how and/or where to board the streetcar. Off-board fare collection and increased signage will help improve upon this daily issue.
				4.4.3	Remove excess streetcar stops along Canal Street – There are currently streetcar stops at nearly every block along Canal Street between the river and South Claiborne, while most of the blockfaces along the street measure approximately 330 feet. By removing excess stops the Canal streetcar line could greatly increase headway along the busy corridor.
				4.4.4	Explore option for a CBD circulator that would connect major destinations to Canal Street – A CBD circulator (or shuttle) has been recommended by almost every study that has been done on Canal Street. The circulator would help visitors and locals alike travel between the many destinations around the area with greater ease and efficiency when compared to a city bus or taxi service.

Organizational Structure Findings

- Multiple governmental agencies are tasked with managing and improving Canal St:
 - DDD
 - French Quarter Management District
 - City of New Orleans
 - Regional Transit Authority
- None are focused exclusively on Canal St.
- 2004 Canal Street Study also identified numerous public entities with multiple overlapping interests as problematic.
- Past plans and stakeholder meetings also recommended stronger emphasis on quality of life issues.

Organizational Structure Recommendations

- Consolidated promotion and management of Canal Street
- Re-establish NOPD Canal Street Enhancement Unit, expanded camera coverage

Topic		Action Item		Recommendations
5	Management	5.1	Establish Management Entity Specifically for Canal Street	5.1.1 Consolidate management of public-sector efforts into a single entity and promote Canal Street through a "main street" organization as part of an existing public sector entity or a new, stand-alone organization.
		5.2	Strong Focus on Quality of Life Issues	5.2.1 Re-establish NOPD's Canal Street Enhancement Unit, full security camera coverage along Canal Street, and stronger focus on issues impacting the quality of life on Canal Street including panhandling, cleanliness of sidewalks, and property maintenance.

Opportunity Sites

15 Sites from 2004 Canal Street Study, including

- Upper Canal Street: Vacant parcels and large surface parking lots
 - Canal Crossing
 - Spirit of Charity Innovation District
- Loew's State Palace Theater
- 400 block of Canal (Sanlin block)
- 1000 block of Canal Street
- Iberville Redevelopment



Study Conclusions

- Staff's review of past plans and meetings with stakeholders helped identify key themes and recommendations, most of which have been recommended in various plans
- An comprehensive update to the Canal Street retail strategy could help build upon the DDD's efforts to attract tenants, and provide insight into new trends
- Enhanced retail mix and increased upper floor occupancy should be mutually supportive, as the use of upper floors creates and improved market for retailers.
- Small investments to the streetscape itself could provide a better pedestrian environment and more seating, and relieve issues with the misuse of curb spaces.
- The common thread is the consolidated management and attention of an entity that can address the retail mix, upper floor coordination, transportation issues and management, cleanliness, and vagrancy.

NEXT STEPS

- City Planning Commission to forward study to City Council by November 1st
- City Council may choose to hold a public hearing, though it is not required
- Many recommendations in this study would require enhanced prioritization of resources to Canal Street, and would not require further action by the City Planning Commission
- Any changes to the CZO require a text amendment which involves a separate public hearing process by the City Planning Commission and City Council



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