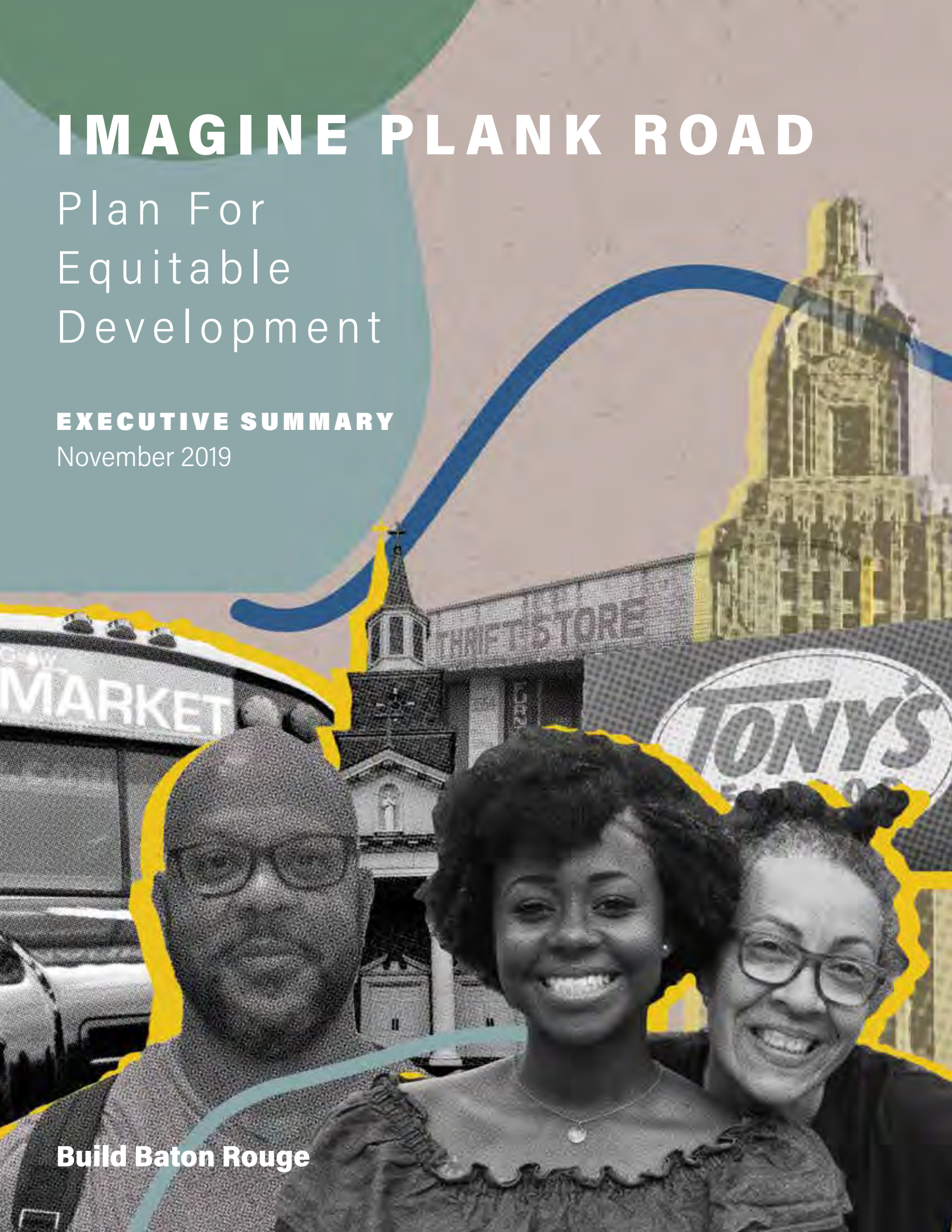


IMAGINE PLANK ROAD

Plan For
Equitable
Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 2019



Build Baton Rouge

INTRODUCTION

Imagine Plank Road: Plan for Equitable Development is an initiative of Build Baton Rouge (BBR), whose mission is to bring people and resources together to promote equitable investment, innovative development, and thriving communities across all of Baton Rouge.

This planning effort is part of a larger, coordinated focus on Plank Road, consisting of planning to introduce bus rapid transit (BRT) service connecting North Baton Rouge to Downtown and LSU, and the land banking of adjudicated and blighted parcels to support catalytic development projects. These efforts represent an unprecedented level of investment targeting some of Baton Rouge's most disinvested neighborhoods.

The Plan is the culmination of several months of intense engagement of people of all ages and backgrounds who hold a stake in the Plank Road Corridor. It contains findings from analysis of deep-seated socioeconomic and physical challenges, and of greater significance, the community's unique strengths and assets: a strong sense of civic pride, cultural identity, and entrepreneurial spirit. It lays out a broad-based and inclusive vision for the Corridor.

Finally, it offers a roadmap to address land, economic and community development that equitably responds to the needs of the adjacent neighborhoods and the broader Baton Rouge metropolitan area. This framework serves as a

guide to public entities, businesses, residents, property owners, foundations, and nonprofit organizations to work together to build healthy, prosperous and resilient neighborhoods in North Baton Rouge.

HISTORY OF PLANK ROAD

Plank Road and its surrounding areas, even before the first wooden planks were laid down to construct the road in 1850, have been the site for various economic, social, and ecological shifts in Baton Rouge. Plank Road has been shaped by historic events and forces such as slavery, the petrochemical industry, and the Civil Rights movement.

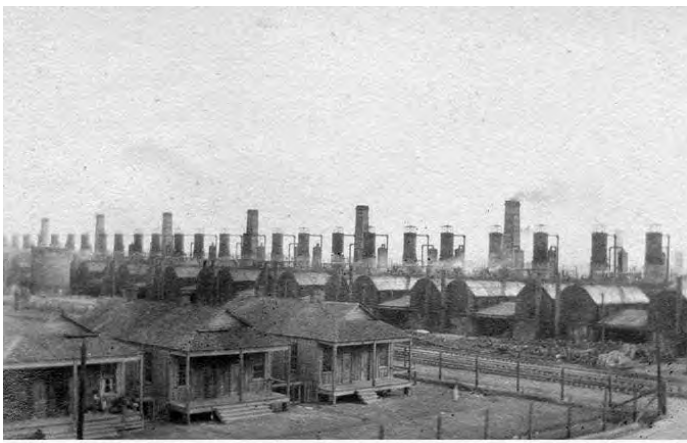
Plank Road was built by enslaved people to connect Baton Rouge to a train depot north of the city in Clinton, Louisiana. In 1909, Standard Oil, the forerunner to ExxonMobil, converted 225 acres north of downtown and on the banks of the Mississippi River into what was billed as "the largest oil refinery in the world." Plank Road was only several blocks east of the new plant, and it quickly saw the development of residential neighborhoods for Standard Oil's White working class workforce. Plank developed into a commercial corridor supporting those neighborhoods.

As Baton Rouge's population exploded during the 1940's and 1950's, Plank Road's significance grew. It was the northern terminus of the city's first expressway and destinations like the Regina Theater and Delmont Village Shopping Center became fixtures in mid-century Baton Rouge. By the 1970's Tony's Seafood and Krispy Kreme drew patrons from across the metropolitan region. As neighborhoods like Southern Heights and Glen Oaks developed on the northern end of the Corridor, Plank grew into a modern commercial corridor frequented by everyone across the city's racial and spatial divides.

As these urban developments unfolded, Baton Rouge also witnessed the growth of a vocal, persistent, and well-organized civil rights movement. The 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott was the first organized bus boycott of the Civil Rights Era and the forerunner to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Following the Supreme Court's 1954

decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed racial segregation in schools, a lawsuit challenging ongoing segregation in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System was filed in 1956. In 1981, a federal court ordered immediate integration through busing. Waves of White flight followed.

Baton Rouge settled its desegregation lawsuit in 2003, making it one of the longest school desegregation battles in the country. By then, significant flight and blight had transformed Plank Road. Infrastructure decay and abandonment marred a streetscape that was once a thriving commercial corridor. While it remains a frequently traveled north-south route for automobile transport and has the city's second highest transit ridership, its neglected buildings and forgotten neighborhoods underscore the need for revitalization and equitable redevelopment.



STANDARD OIL REFINERY, 1914

SOURCE: EBR PARISH LIBRARY DIGITAL ARCHIVE

COMMUNITY VOICES

Inclusive and meaningful public participation has been essential to the development of this Plan's vision and priorities. Throughout the planning process, BBR informed and educated Corridor residents and businesses of the planning process and collected their ideas, hopes and concerns through numerous methods. These included:

- A visioning survey prompting respondents to share their favorite memory of Plank Road, their favorite place, and what they imagine Plank Road should have in the future.
- Several fun and engaging events, including a trolley tour of the corridor called "Walk the Plank"; a food truck "roundup" featuring local food vendors, entertainment and community conversations; and a street festival held in conjunction with a corridor clean-up organized by The Walls Project.
- A community roundtable held in conjunction with an information session for the Roof Reset program.
- BBR's team of trained community ambassadors - people who live and work in the Corridor - spread the word of input opportunities through in-person engagement.

Along the way, BBR and consultant staff met individual with dozens of Corridor stakeholders, from the nonprofit, philanthropic, transportation, recreation, education, planning, public health, economic development, real estate, and housing sectors.

BBR also convened a Steering Committee comprised of nonprofit and public agency partners several times throughout the course of the process to advise BBR staff and consultants on the development of the Plan's strategies and specific recommendations.

Through compilation of the ideas, aspirations and memories collected, several priorities emerged:

- Attracting and growing Black business-owners
- Tackling blight, vacancy and maintenance of public and private property
- Introducing more quality shopping options
- Providing attractive, accessible places to gather and recreate
- Preserving community culture

THE VISION

The Plank Road Corridor is a **thriving, socially diverse, and walkable** network of neighborhoods anchored by **strong local businesses, quality housing, and resilient infrastructure.**

Vision: multi-cultural
activities - African
roots - food/Black
cultural healthy food - spices
- cultural clothing stores
- shopping centers - high quality
merchandise (not just cheap)
- more options for KIDS



PLAN FRAMEWORK

The wide socioeconomic disparities that exist on the Plank Road Corridor today require planners, policymakers, and builders to take into account the impact of well-intentioned projects in the area.

The ambitious Vision for **Imagine Plank Road** cannot be achieved without first acknowledging the vibrant culture and institutions which exist on the Corridor today, while also reckoning with the history and continued reality of de facto segregation and its consequences in the parish.

The Plan's framework aims to guide decision-makers as they consider the allocation of funding for projects and programs and adoption of new policies. It seeks to answer the question: **"Given past injustices and existing assets, what benchmarks must be met?"**

Successful and equitable reinvestment in the Plank Road Corridor will require the strategic application of a range of funding and implementation tools, from entirely public to entirely private financing and execution. The strategies recommended include projects (such as constructing or renovating buildings), programs (such as the funding of business, training, housing, or social assistance services that provides necessary resources for area residents and workers), or local policies to bring about desired outcomes.

Guiding values identified by Build Baton Rouge; stakeholder and community input; and the Plan's Vision Statement shaped the five Benchmarks for Equitable Development to gauge the impact of the Plan's recommended strategies. Each proposed strategy fulfills one or more of the five benchmarks.

GUIDING VALUES FOR THE PLANK ROAD EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Values identified by stakeholders in the planning process:

- Equity
- Culture
- Health
- Empowerment

Build Baton Rouge Key Values:

- Accountability
- Equity
- Community collaboration
- Innovation
- Inclusion
- Service



Cultural
Expression

Equity Benchmark 1

Strengthens Plank Road's role as a place for **cultural expression** for Black communities.



Commerce &
Jobs

Equity Benchmark 2

Empowers North Baton Rouge residents to participate in **commerce and jobs**.



Community
Wealth

Equity Benchmark 3

Protects and grows **community wealth**, especially as Plank Road receives public and private investments.



Transportation
Options

Equity Benchmark 4

Connects more people to opportunity through enhanced **transportation options**.



Health &
Safety

Equity Benchmark 5

Advances community **health, safety and resilience**.

CATALYTIC, TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

CATS and the City-Parish are poised to make a \$40 million investment into fast, frequent, and reliable public transit service. Bus rapid transit (BRT) will connect the Plank Road Corridor to Mid City, Downtown, the Water Campus, Old South Baton Rouge, and the LSU campus. This construction project and BRT's sustained operation are central to the plan for equitable Corridor redevelopment.

CATS anticipates daily ridership will increase by 39%, from 800 riders on Route 41 to over 1,100, and that safety improvements will lower traffic crashes by over 500 over a 20-year period.

As of this report's writing, the City-Parish and CATS are awaiting a decision from the USDOT to award a requested \$15 million Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant.

The Plan proposes seven catalytic, transit-oriented development projects to anchor the corridor's reinvestment. These projects seek to combine creative funding sources, innovative partnerships, and land-banked properties to demonstrate public-sector leadership in reinvesting in the Plank Road Corridor. Each project meets numerous Equity Benchmarks, whether through providing high-quality, mixed-income housing, public space, small business development opportunities, or needed retail offerings.



SOURCE: PLANK-NICHOLSON BUS RAPID TRANSIT 2019 BUILD GRANT APPLICATION



Catalytic Development Food Hub

Located one block from the intersection with Mohican Street, the Plank Road Food Hub is envisioned as a mixed-use site with a grocery, pharmacy, residential units, and space for local food entrepreneurs. Build Baton Rouge currently owns the majority of the proposed site.

The proposed design includes new construction of a three-story structure fronting Plank Road beside the restoration of a currently vacant, historic storefront structure at the corner of Weller Avenue—the 1930 Roppoloville building.

This project would be adjacent to an existing CATS bus stop and could also accommodate the planned Mohican Street BRT stop, making the retail easily accessible to transit riders.



Commerce &
Jobs



Community
Wealth



Transportation
Options



Catalytic Development Civic Center

A signature transit-oriented civic center is proposed for the site across the street from the Food Hub. Currently a vacant parking lot and abandoned building, this site would provide 22,000 square feet of multiuse space that could accommodate government or public university functions, such as offices, social services, conference facilities, classrooms, or a public library. Consistent with the Food Hub, the Plank Road Civic Center would be oriented toward pedestrians and transit riders on Plank Road, with parking driveways located on side streets.



Cultural
Expression



Transportation
Options



Catalytic Development

Build Baton Rouge Office, Childhood Learning and Housing



Community
Wealth



Transportation
Options

Build Baton Rouge has acquired the properties fronting Plank Road between Oswego and Calumet Streets, two blocks distance from the planned BRT station at Winbourne Avenue.

Proposed uses for site are office space for Build Baton Rouge, which would be located on the ground floor alongside a location for a YWCA early childhood learning center. Mixed-income housing would occupy the building's second floor.



Catalytic Development Essential Human Services and Mixed Use Development

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul owns and operates a thrift store, student uniform program, and a men's shelter on several parcels facing Plank Road between Iroquois Street and Duke Street. Build Baton Rouge owns properties adjacent to St. Vincent de Paul's. A public/private partnership between it and BBR would leverage BBR's financial resources and redevelopment expertise to strengthen the capacity and reach of the Society, as well as improve the appearance of these two blocks of Plank Road, located just one block from the prominent intersection with Choctaw Drive.

As a highly-visible site with access to two major thoroughfares located closer to Mid-City and downtown than most of the Corridor, the block at the northwest corner of Choctaw Drive holds

potential for large-scale redevelopment. BBR lacks control of the site and so rather than prescribing a specific development, this Plan offers a vision that is consistent with the community's priorities and developments proposed in previous sites.



Commerce &
Jobs



Transportation
Options



Cultural
Expression



Community
Wealth



Catalytic Development

Pocket Park & Pop-up Retail



The Plank Road “EcoPark” (PREP) concept will combine two needs: community green space and climate mitigation. The park will incorporate community-based designs and mitigate flooding, increase park access, and improve health outcomes.

The image below shows an imagined pop-up retail space to test and feature some of the most promising enterprises as part of the strategy to increase Black-owned small businesses on Plank Road.



PROGRAMS & POLICIES

In addition to development projects, BBR and its many partners, including the City-Parish, DOTD, Capital Region Planning Commission, CATS, Southern University, LSU, and numerous nonprofit organizations and public institutions, must collaborate to fund existing and new programs and adopt and implement new neighborhood-level and parish-wide policies to achieve this Plan's vision. Among these programs and policies are:

Benchmark 1: Cultural Expression

- Develop cultural design standards and guidelines
- Create a Plank Road public art plan
- Establish an overlay district along Plank Road

Benchmark 2: Commerce & Jobs

- Increase funding and capacity for micro-lending and affordable lease programs for local entrepreneurs
- Require businesses on the Corridor to hire locally
- Facilitate the establishment of a business alliance along the Corridor
- Increase access to broadband internet service

Benchmark 3: Community Wealth

- Expand home repair by incorporating a loan repayment or forgiveness program
- Assist homebuyers by increasing funding for or establishing new programs
- Design and implement repair programs for small landlords that include affordability requirements
- Create a community land trust (CLT)
- Provide community-based and community-led development training

Benchmark 4: Enhanced Connectivity

- Encourage accessible transit-oriented development (TOD)
- Re-connect the street grid interrupted by Interstate 110 at the origin of Plank Road, creating a signature gateway to the Corridor

Benchmark 5: Health & Safety

- Develop a public space plan to provide quality programming, improve existing spaces and the network of green and open spaces, and promote healthy lifestyles
- Incentivize installation of green infrastructure

Imagine Plank Road would not be possible without our generous sponsors and the many people who generously contributed their time, expertise, and passion to this project.

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