COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT HUB

A Study of the Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland Communities

Fred Carl Jr. Small Town Center—2022
Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou, Mississippi

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FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER

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PROJECT SUMMARY

PROJECT BRIEF

The primary purpose of this project is to create a regional hub of opportunity consisting of the three delta communities of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou. The hub of opportunity will facilitate partnerships, address community specific needs and gaps, and allow the communities to build off one another's successes to create a stronger local and regional economy. An ancillary goal of the project is to create a replicable framework based on this initial project that will be used to expand this concept to other delta communities. This project will foster partnerships that enhance the preservation of the community's unique Delta heritage and will create links between people and institutions that will actively promote the improvement, protection and advancement of the participating communities. The framework will have a strong focus on sustainable economic growth, and by coming together, these communities can build upon their individual strengths to create a hub that will provide both regional and local success.

This project builds on the research previously done by the Small Town Center (STC) in creating regional hubs of opportunity focused on health, literacy, and the built environment. The STC and Mississippi Main Street collaborated on the design of this project and have also involved the Main Street Organization of Cleveland in the planning of this pilot project, which we hope to replicate in other delta communities in the coming years. This project addresses a need for economic and community building resources in small delta communities by creating inter-municipality cooperation and partnership building, focusing on the identification of regional assets, the identification of specific needs and gaps in services, and through the proposal of a solution to best align the community's physical, cultural, human infrastructures.

This project will have significant economic, cultural, and social impacts to the participating hub communities when achieved. It will provide opportunities for growth for local businesses and arts and cultural organizations through the fostering of partnerships. This project will also have an impact on the growth of both local and regional economic sustainability through the reduction of overlapping resources and the sharing of local assets.

PROBLEM IDENTIFIED

Small towns in the delta are inextricably linked through culture, infrastructure, and community resources, however our Center is seeing a trend of decline in many rural delta communities due to a host of factors. Research shows that rural communities have been slower to rebound from the recession than metropolitan areas, as indicated by the 2019 ACS data which shows that the poverty rate in rural Mississippi is 22.5% versus 16.1% in urban areas. A 2019 National Governors' Association report found that although many rural communities, such as those in Mississippi, have unique cultures and histories, they struggle to thrive due to issues related to loss of industry, outmigration of young and skilled workforce participants, rising poverty rates, barriers to health care, educational attainment gaps, as well as physical and digital infrastructure needs. The COVID pandemic has only exacerbated these struggles and created further gaps and barriers.

Furthermore, it is no longer feasible for every small town to support essential community facilities and community services such as a health care clinic, grocery store, broadband networks, educational programming, or other social services. Today, these are viewed as luxuries, not necessities, because many small towns no longer have them. As a result, many communities have developed a regional reliance on goods and services through neighboring communities. One community may have a grocery store, another community may have a health clinic; yet all of these communities are interdependent. Their economies have shifted to a model of regional dependence as a means of survival. This regional approach to community survival is one that will continue to sustain our small towns and frames the basis for our regionally-focused hub program.

TRI-REGION OVERVIEW

The communities of Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland are linked by Highway 61 along a roughly 10 mile stretch. Despite their proximities, the communities vary in terms of demographics, amenities, and tourism. All communities have a rich history, food culture, and opportunity for taking advantage of their bayous.

Strengths

- Some arts and culture in the area is already cross promoted via the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Cleveland.
- There is a strong food culture in the area. All three communities have local restaurants.
- Mound Bayou and Cleveland both have very strong historically focused community organizations.
- Team Cleveland recently installed wayfinding signage in Cleveland.
- Historic buildings and structures are located in all three communities.
- All three communities have bayous that bisect their communities and provide opportunities for a blue-way or "waterfront" recreational/natural development.
- The area has many assets in terms of Higher Education – and education is valued within the community.
- Walkable and bikeable communities – flat topography, small towns, infrastructure in Cleveland.
- Cleveland Hospital and the Delta Heath Center in Mound Bayou
- The Pottery Arts in Merigold and Mound Bayou are well known statewide.

Barriers

- Education system in Mound Bayou lags behind Cleveland and Merigold.
- The library was closed in Mound Bayou.
- There was a school closure in Mound Bayou.
- Lack of website (or online presence) for both Merigold and Mound Bayou.
- Empty storefronts in Mound Bayou + Merigold.
- Bayous are in need of cleanup.
- Sidewalks and bike infrastructure needed or in need of repair.
- Potential housing needs – particularly for young families.

Opportunities for Collaboration

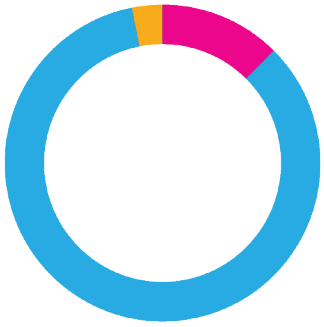
- The communities are located very close together – there is an opportunity for a connecting bike trail that builds off the one established in Cleveland between all three communities that would promote health and tourism and capitalize upon the area's natural resources. *(N Bayou Road would easily connect Cleveland and Merigold)*.
- The Bolivar County Historical Society's museum's committee has a goal of building a network between museums and individuals interested in supporting the missions of the various museums through the Mississippi Delta.
- Opportunity to expand upon the wayfinding signage in Cleveland to create a regional or county wide wayfinding network.
- There is potential for more workforce training and educational partnerships.
- Delta State, regional community colleges, Bolivar County Community Action Agency.
- There are opportunities for more diversified industry – particularly in the sectors associated with Delta State. "Commercial aviation, geospatial and outdoor recreation are few of the unique departments and the careers associated with those programs offer recruitment opportunities." – from the Cleveland-Bolivar Strategic Plan
- There is an opportunity for increased Entrepreneur training and support or a Maker Space which supports small businesses and creatives.
- Because Team Cleveland (Cleveland Main Street) is under the Cleveland-Bolivar Chamber of Commerce, there is opportunity to expand Main Street efforts or trainings to other communities.
- The closed JFK Memorial High School in Mound Bayou is a historic building with lots of opportunity for reuse.

DEMOGRAPHICS

MOUND BAYOU, MERIGOLD, CLEVELAND

MOUND BAYOU
MERIGOLD
CLEVELAND

POPULATION



1,714
429
11,627 total: 13,770

MEDIAN AGE

29.1
40.3
34.2

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$21,622
$43,667
$35,278

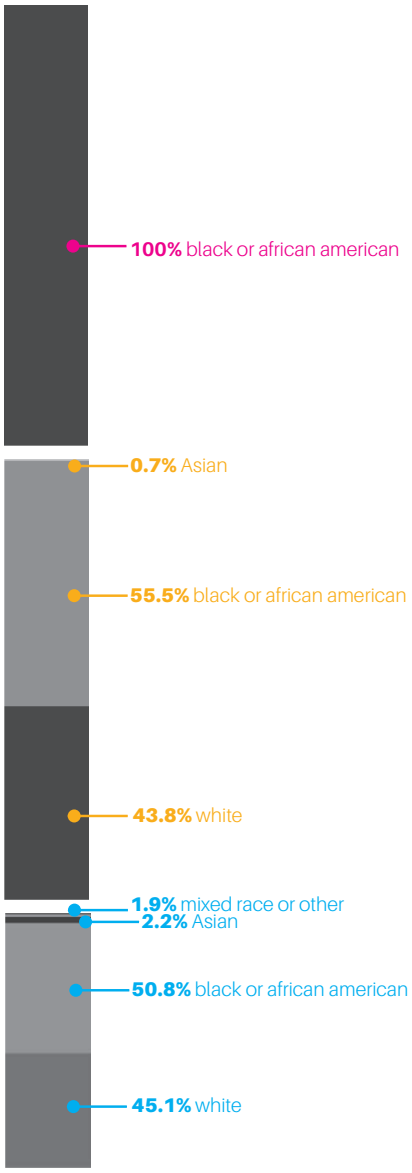
VETERANS:

2.4%
6.4%
4.9%

POVERTY RATE

47.7%
13.1%
27.7%

RACE



AVERAGE COMMUTE (in minutes)

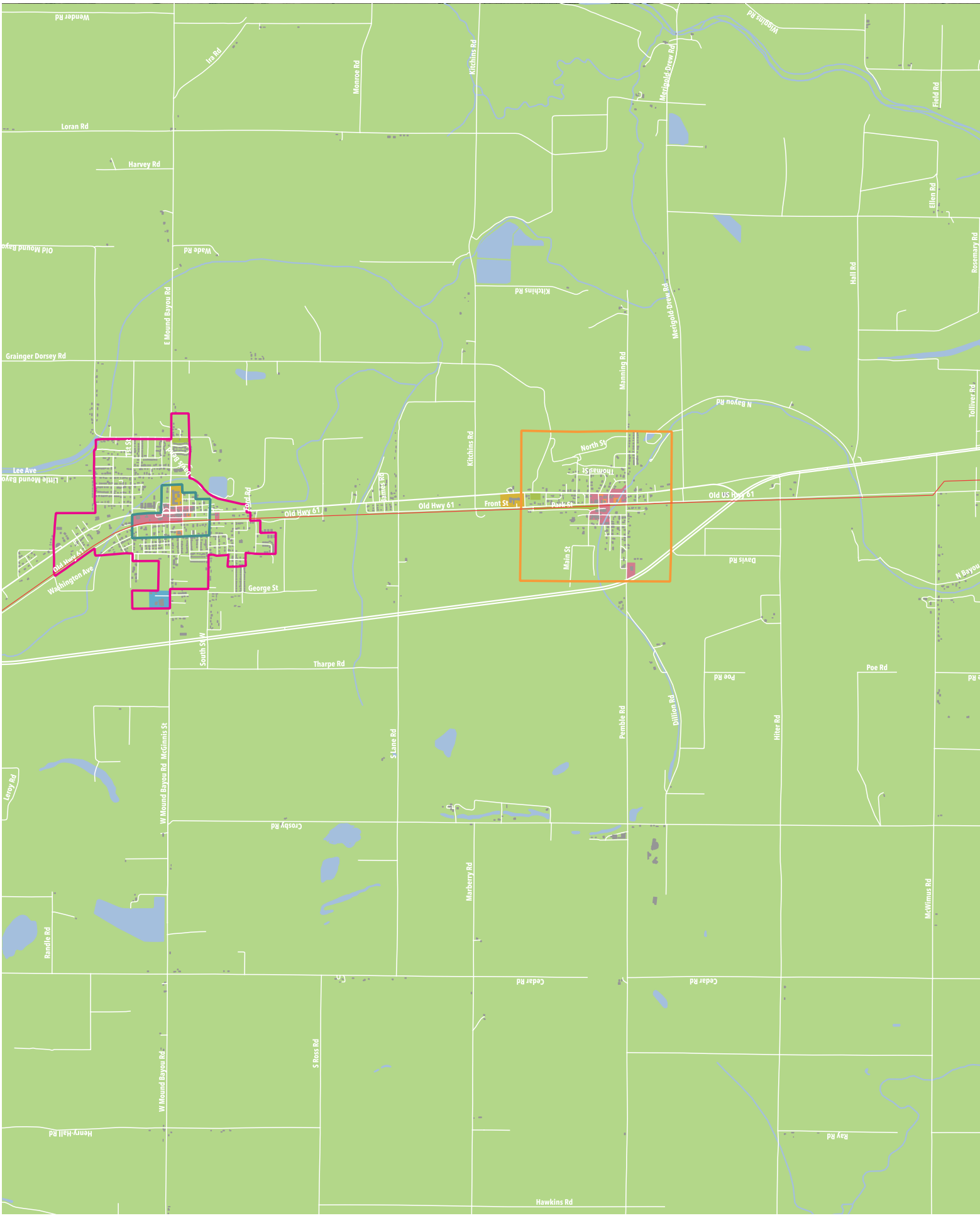
19.5
25.3
15.8

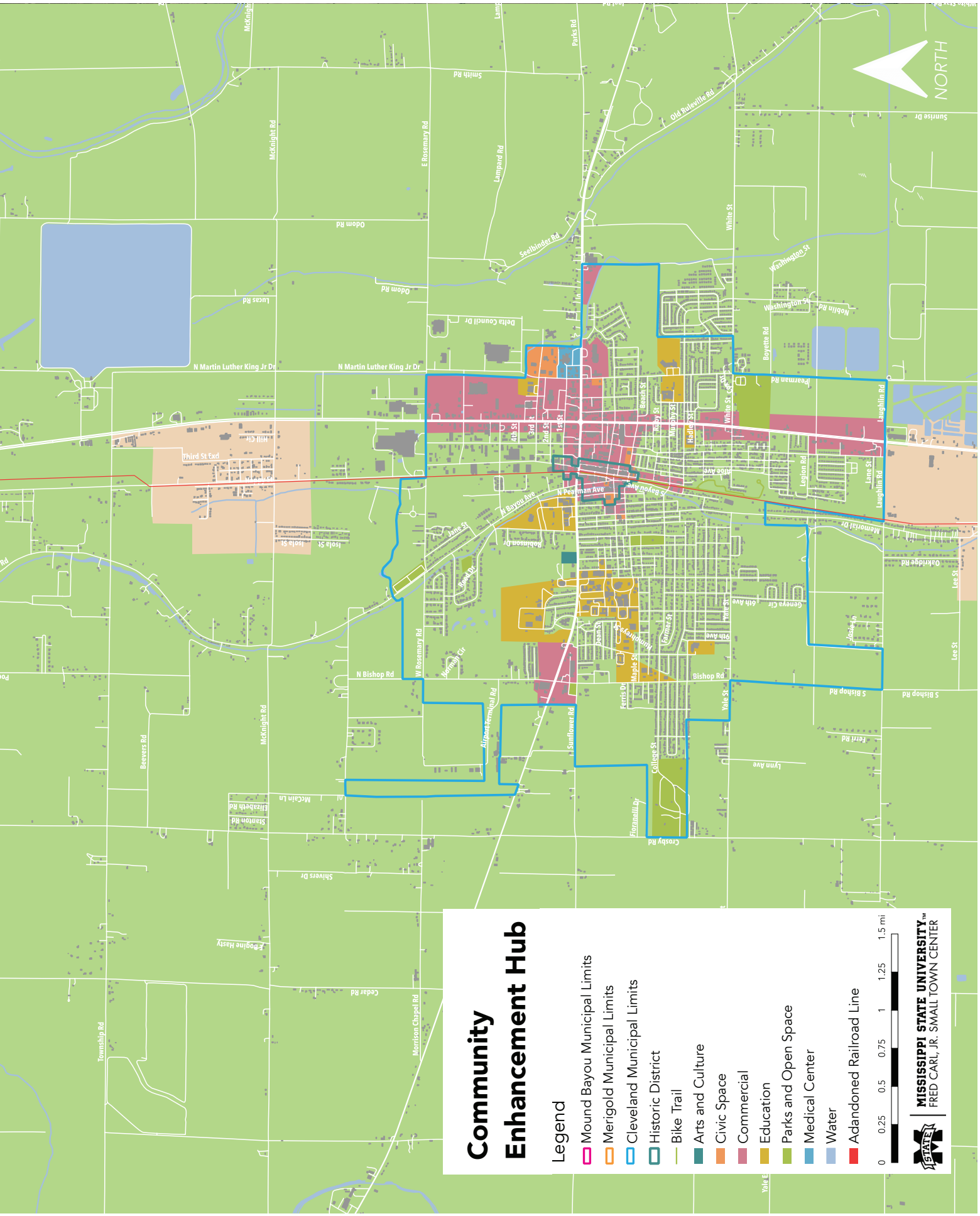
EDUCATION LEVEL (Bachelors or Higher)

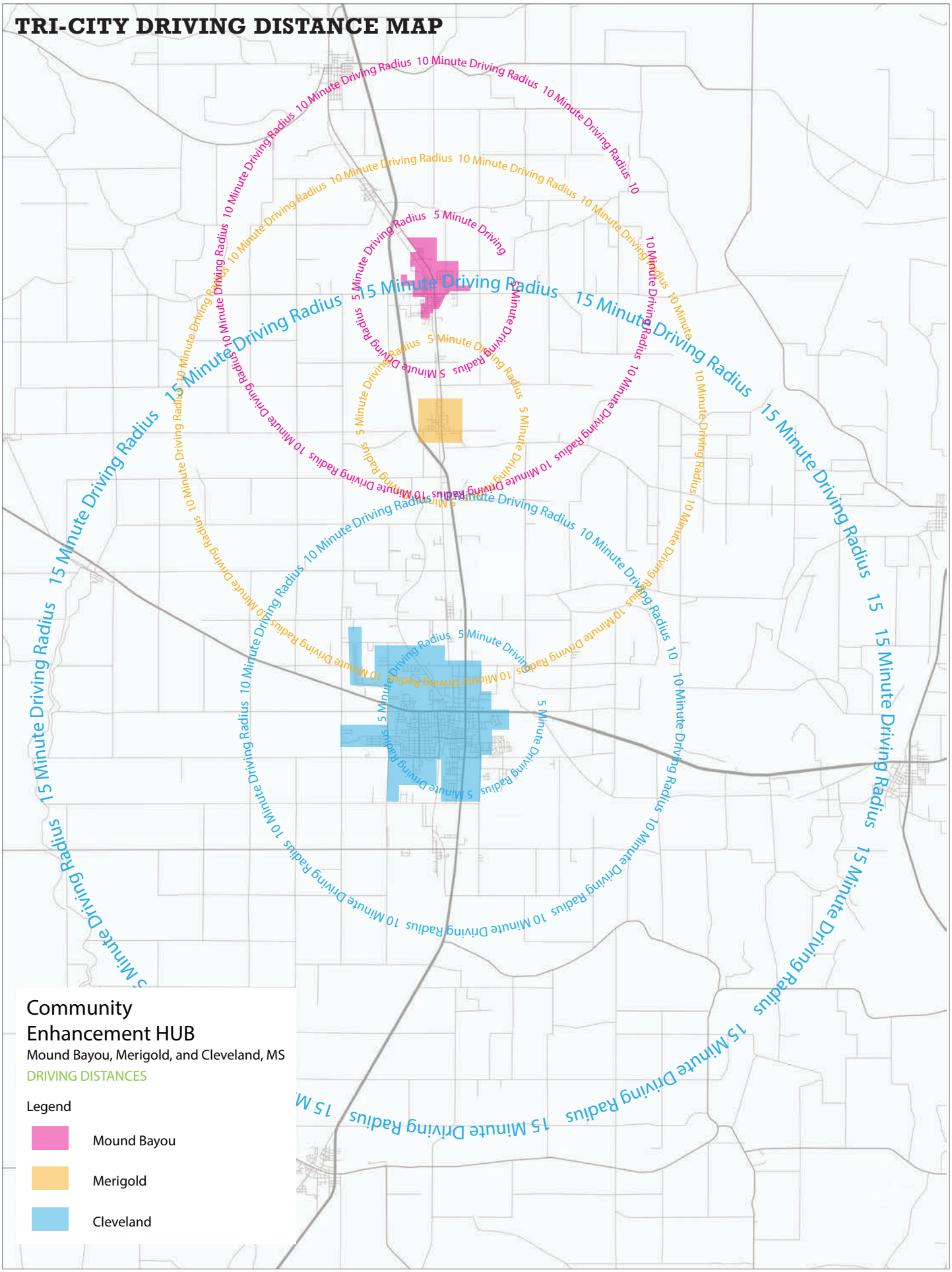
27.7%
25.7%
15.8

EDUCATION LEVEL (High school or higher)

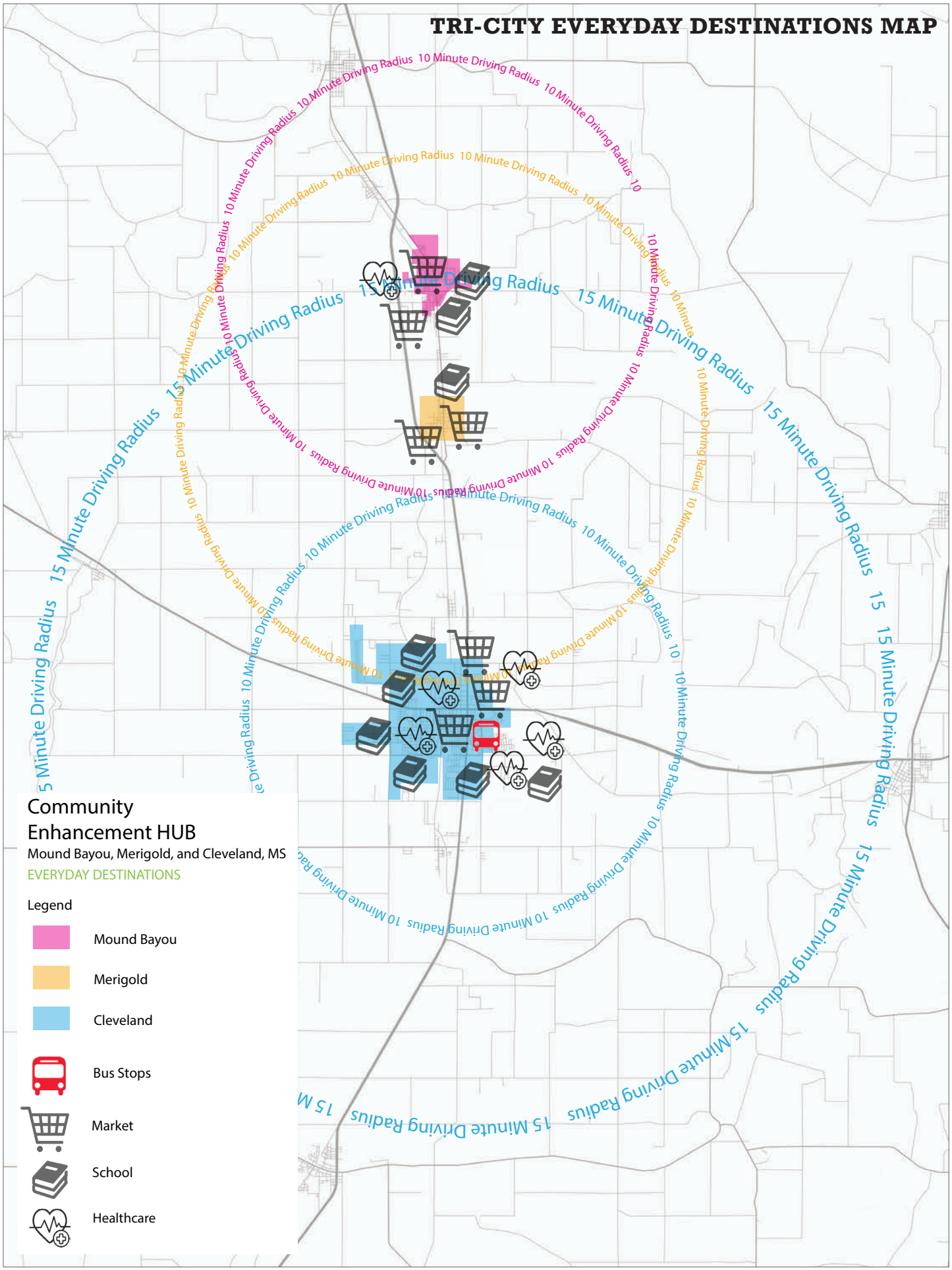
83.1%
90.2%
80.6%


Wender Rd
Ira Rd
Monroe Rd
Kitchins Rd
Meriglold-Drew Rd
Wigglits Rd
Field Rd
Loran Rd
Harvey Rd
Ellen Rd
Old Mound Bayou
Wade Rd
E Mound Bayou Rd
Kitchins Rd
Meriglold-Drew Rd
Half Rd
Rosemary Rd
Grainger Dorsey Rd
Manning Rd
N Bayou Rd
Tolliver Rd
Lee Ave
Little Mound Bayou
Kitchins Rd
North St
Thomas St
Old Hwy 61
Front St
Park St
Old US Hwy 61
Davis Rd
Main St
Washington Ave
George St
South St W
Tharpe Rd
Poe Rd
Pemble Rd
Dillion Rd
Hiter Rd
McGinnis St
W Mound Bayou Rd
S Lane Rd
Leroy Rd
Crosby Rd
Marberry Rd
McWimus Rd
Randle Rd
Cedar Rd
S Ross Rd
Henry Hall Rd
Ray Rd
Hawkins Rd

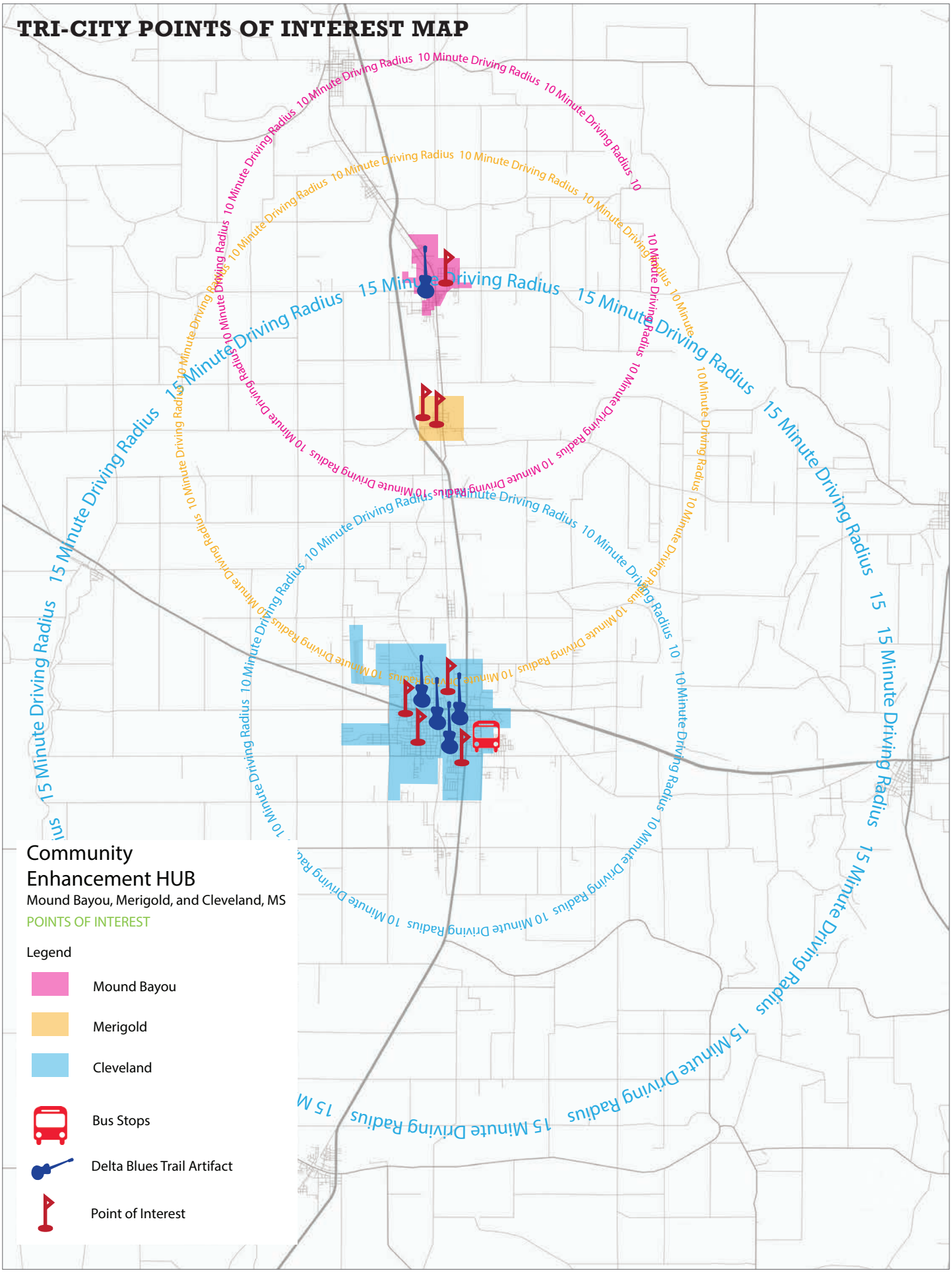

Community Enhancement Hub
Legend
Mound Bayou Municipal Limits
Merigold Municipal Limits
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Historic District
Bike Trail
Arts and Culture
Civic Space
Commercial
Education
Parks and Open Space
Medical Center
Water
Adandoned Railroad Line
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 mi
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER
NORTH
N Martin Luther King Jr Dr
N Bayou Ave
N Pearman Ave
S Bayou Ave
Bishop Rd
N Bishop Rd
S Bishop Rd
Old Ruleville Rd
Seelbinder Rd
Washington St
Pearman Rd
Laughlin Rd
Memorial Dr
Third St Exd
Hill Cir
Isola St
Jane St
Robinson Dr
Road Dr
W Rosemary Rd
Airport Terminal Rd
Sunflower Rd
Maple St
Ferris Dr
College St
Crosby Rd
Yale St
Lynn Ave
Ferri Rd
Lee St
Oakridge Rd
Legion Rd
Lane St
Boyette Rd
White St
Beach St
Hadley St
Murphy St
Farmer St
Dean St
Humphreys St
Geneva Cir
6th Ave
9th Ave
Sunrise Dr
Nobilin Rd
Lucas Rd
Odom Rd
Delta Council Dr
Smith Rd
Parks Rd
Lampard Rd
E Rosemary Rd
McKnight Rd
Beevers Rd
McCain Ln
Elizabeth Rd
Stanton Rd
Shivers Dr
E Pogue Hasty
Cedar Rd
Morrison Chapel Rd
Township Rd
Yale E


TRI-CITY DRIVING DISTANCE MAP
5 Minute Driving Radius
10 Minute Driving Radius
15 Minute Driving Radius
Community
Enhancement HUB
Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland, MS
DRIVING DISTANCES
Legend
Mound Bayou
Merigold
Cleveland

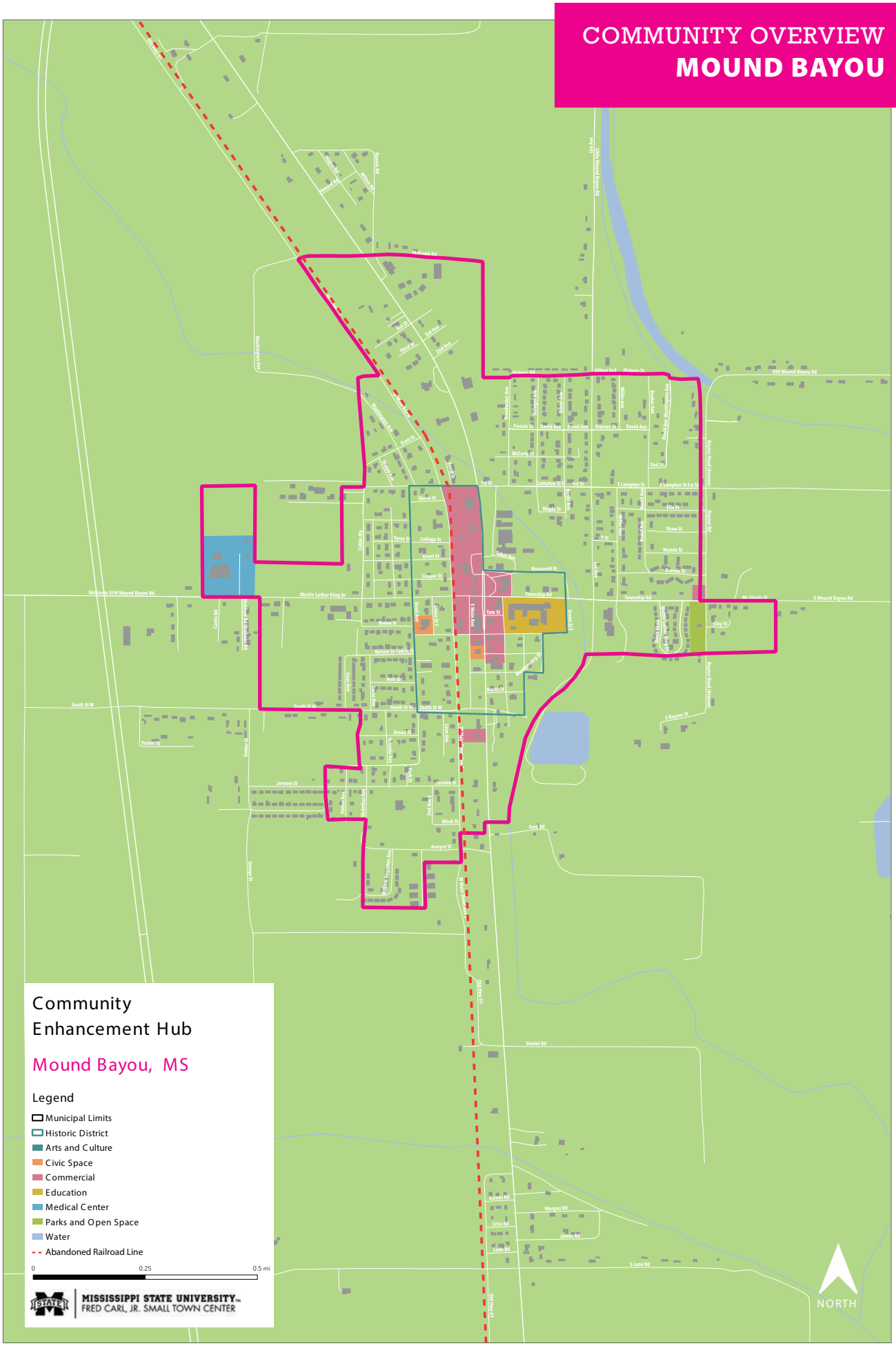
TRI-CITY EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS MAP



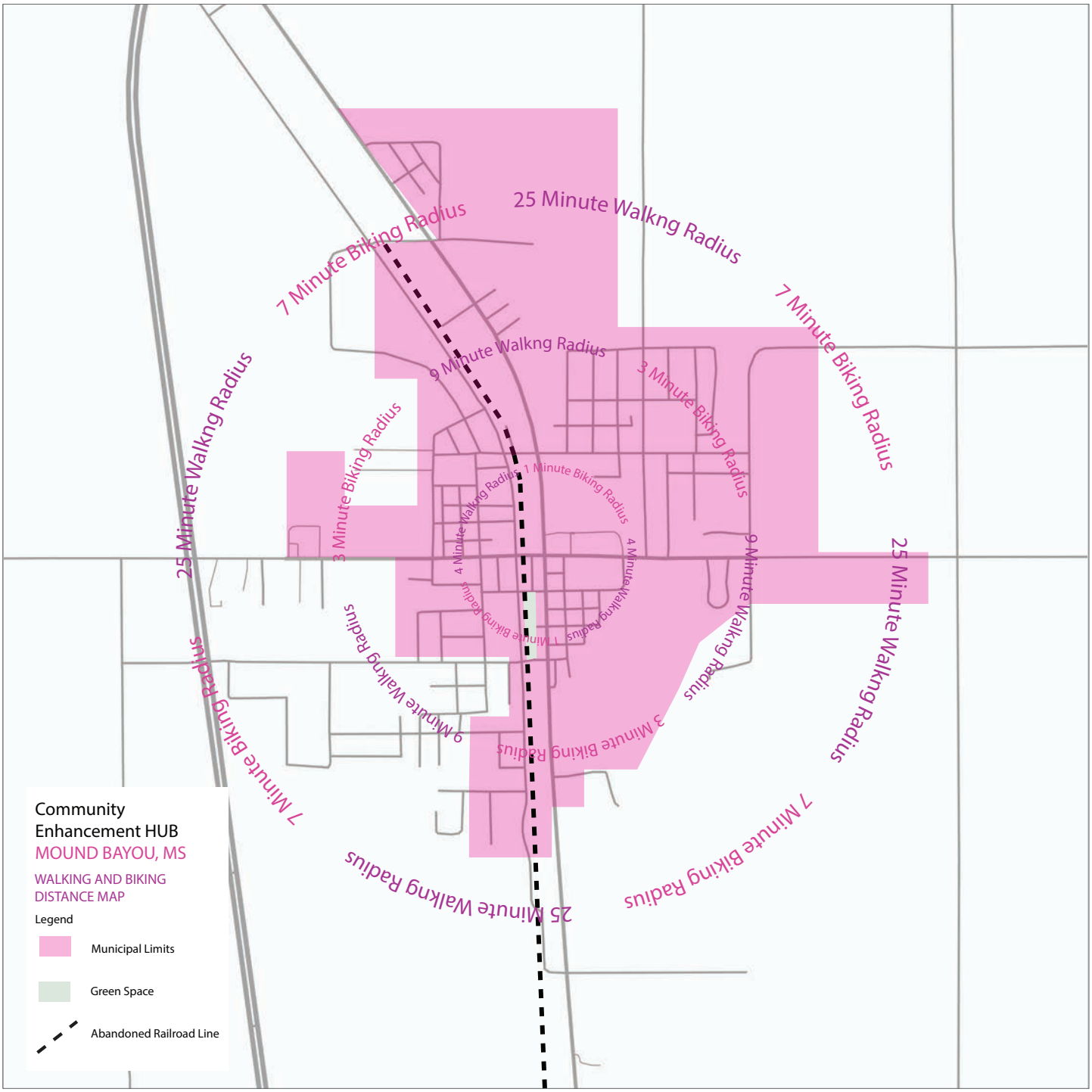
TRI-CITY POINTS OF INTEREST MAP



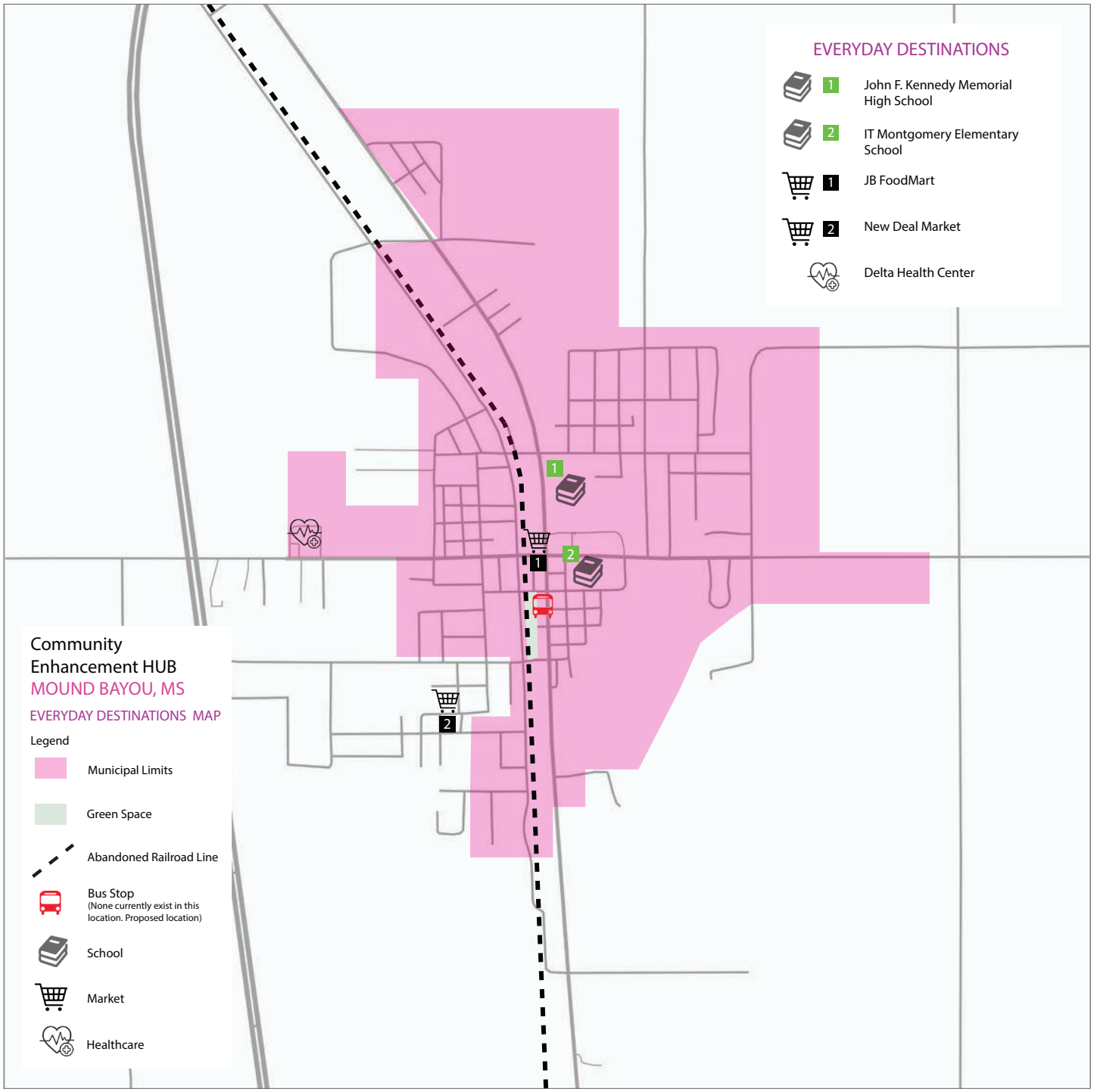
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW
MOUND BAYOU



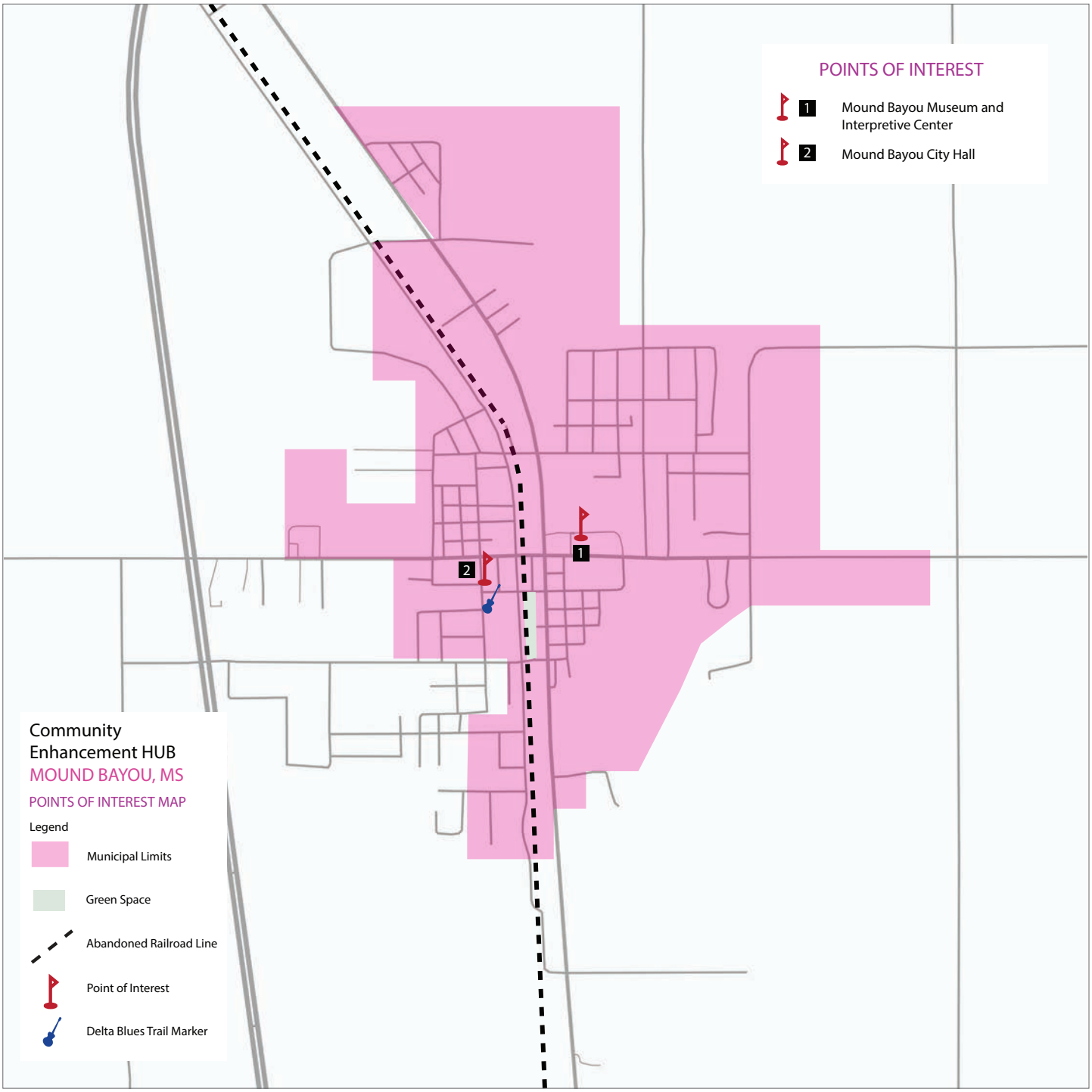
MOUND BAYOU WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE MAP



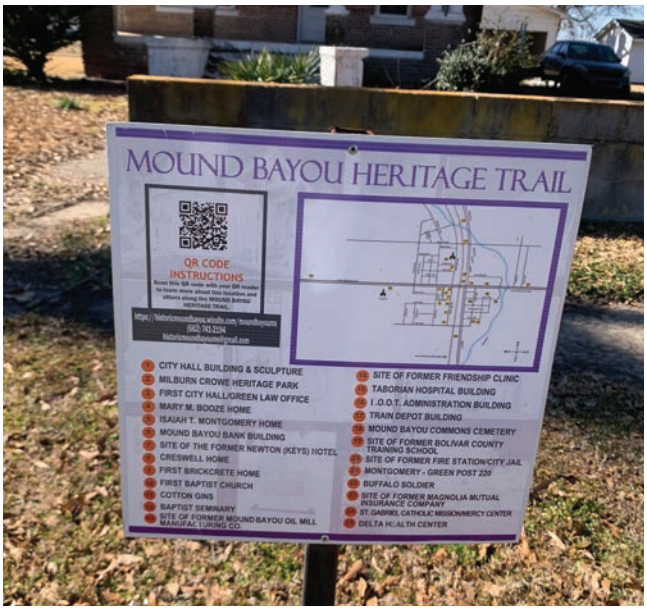
MOUND BAYOU EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS MAP



MOUND BAYOU POINTS OF INTEREST MAP



Mound Bayou has a heritage trail with multiple historically significant sites, accessible via signage at the City Hall and also through a QR code.



The Booze Home, pictured here, is part of Mound Bayou's Heritage Trail.

Entry Signage in Mound Bayou

Exit Signage in Mound Bayou

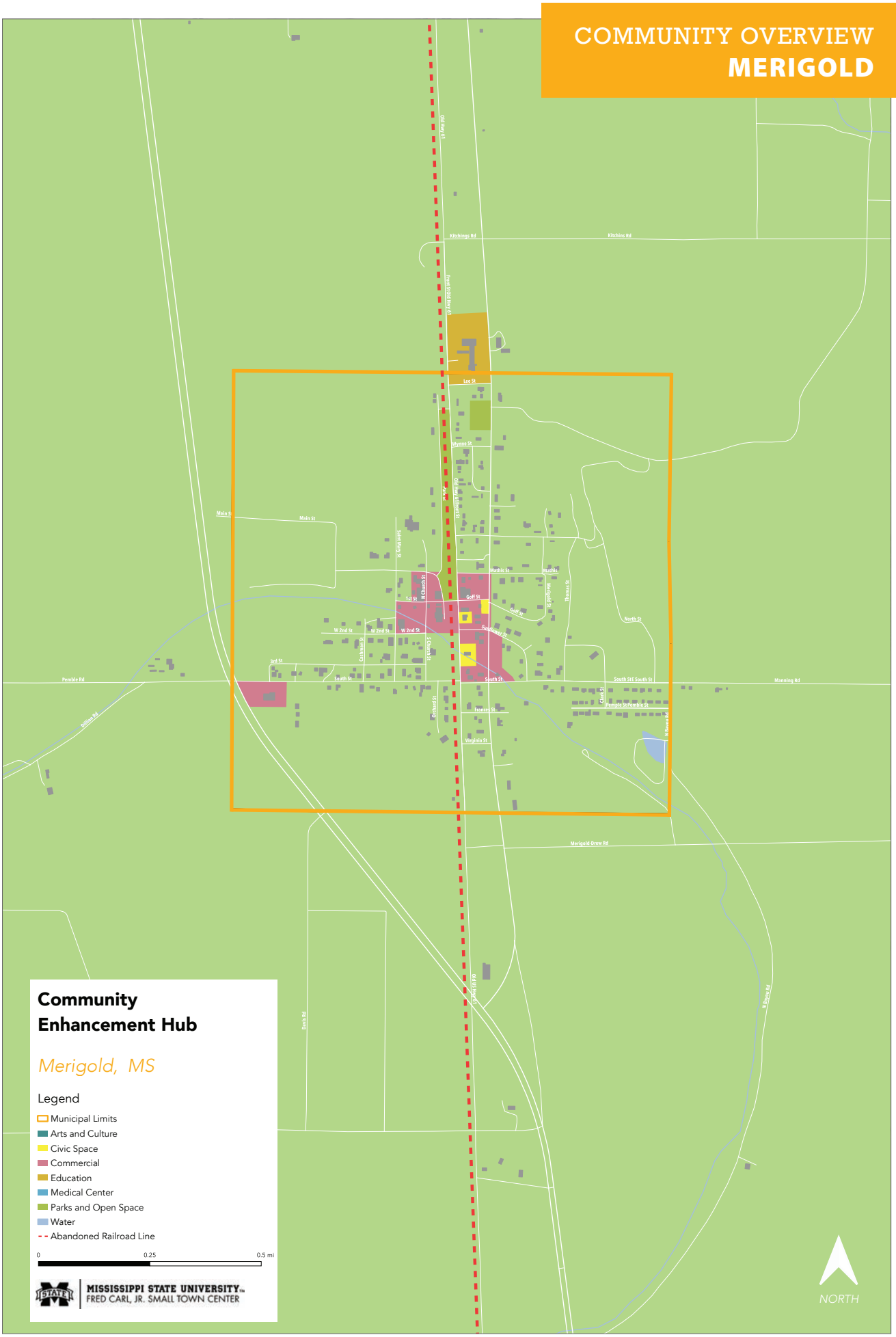
MOUND BAYOU

A typical Mound Bayou neighborhood consists of single family homes and areas of open land.

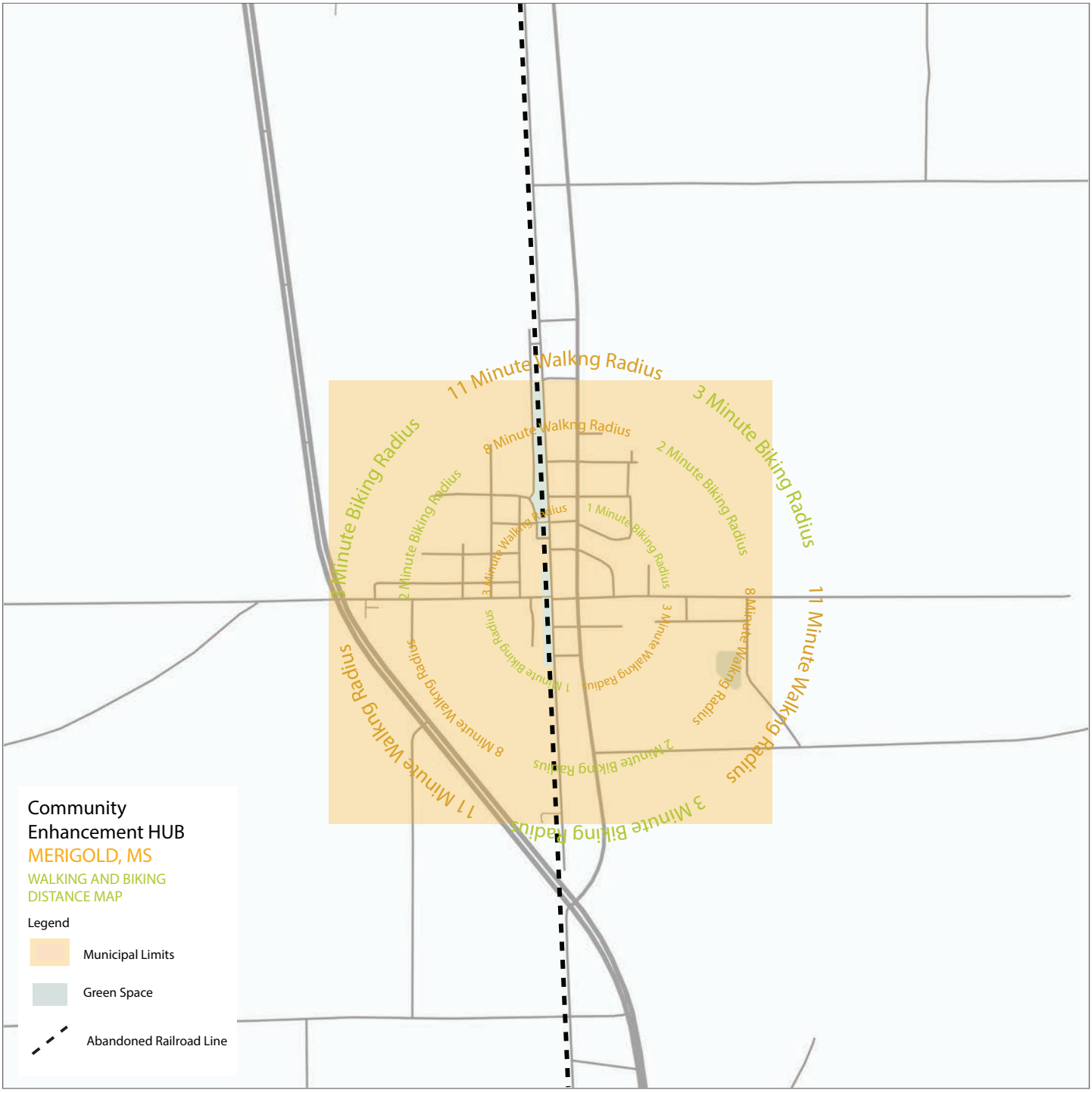
The Delta Health Center is a non-profit organization that is located in Mound Bayou, where it opened its doors in 1965.

The water tower in Mound Bayou features the town's logo of two men, based on the founders of the city.

The Isaiah T. Montgomery House, pictured here, is part of Mound Bayou's Heritage Trail.


Community
Enhancement Hub
Merigold, MS
Legend
Municipal Limits
Arts and Culture
Civic Space
Commercial
Education
Medical Center
Parks and Open Space
Water
Abandoned Railroad Line
0
0.25
0.5 mi
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER
NORTH
Kitchings Rd
Main St
Lee St
Wynne St
Goff St
Mathis St
North St
South St
Pemble Rd
Manning Rd
Merigold-Drew Rd
Virginia St
Frances St
Old Hwy 61
Dinks Rd
Dillon Rd
N Bayou Rd

MERIGOLD WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE MAP



MERIGOLD EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS MAP

MERIGOLD POINTS OF INTEREST MAP

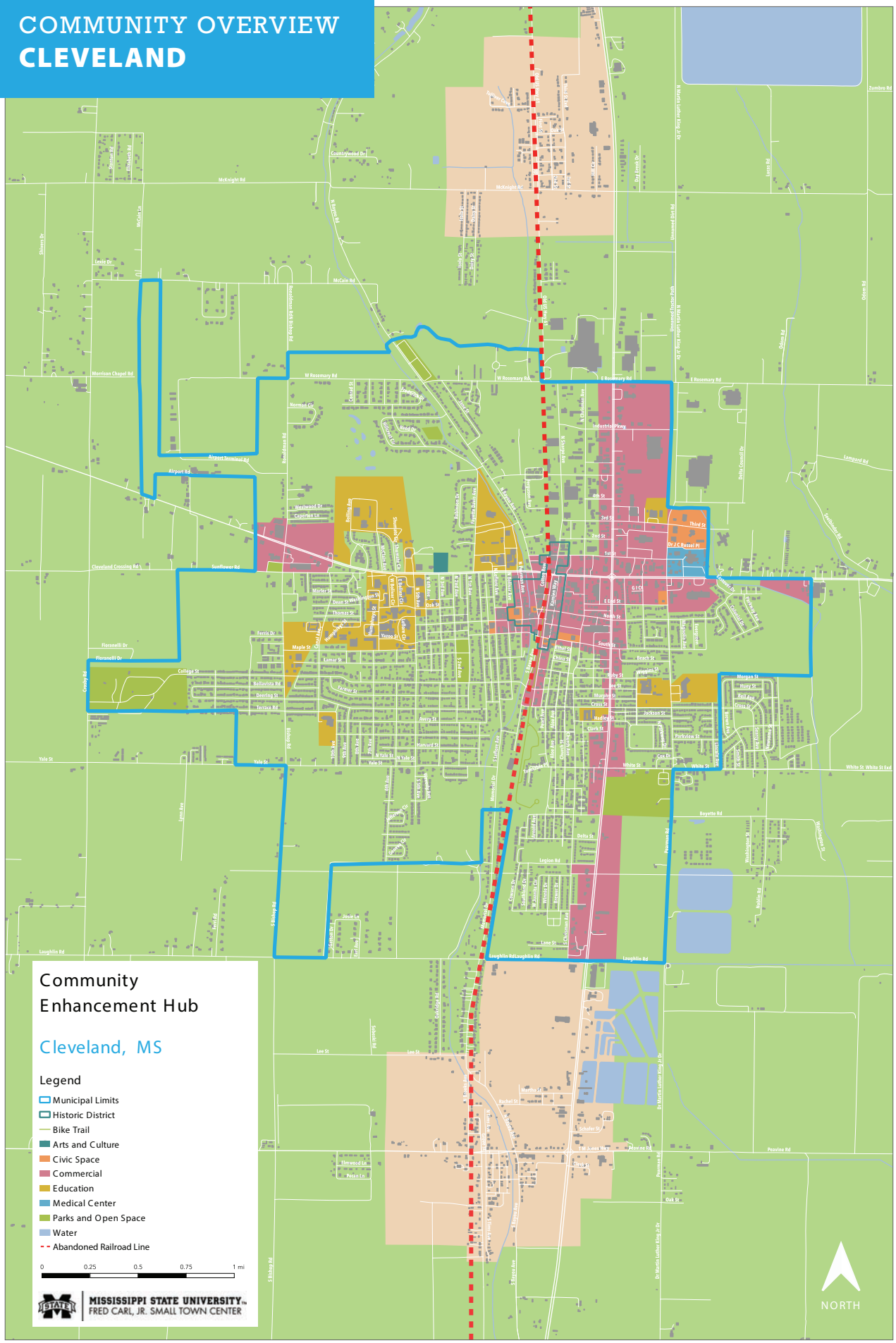
McCarty Pottery is world famous, and its gallery in Merigold has become a tourist destination.

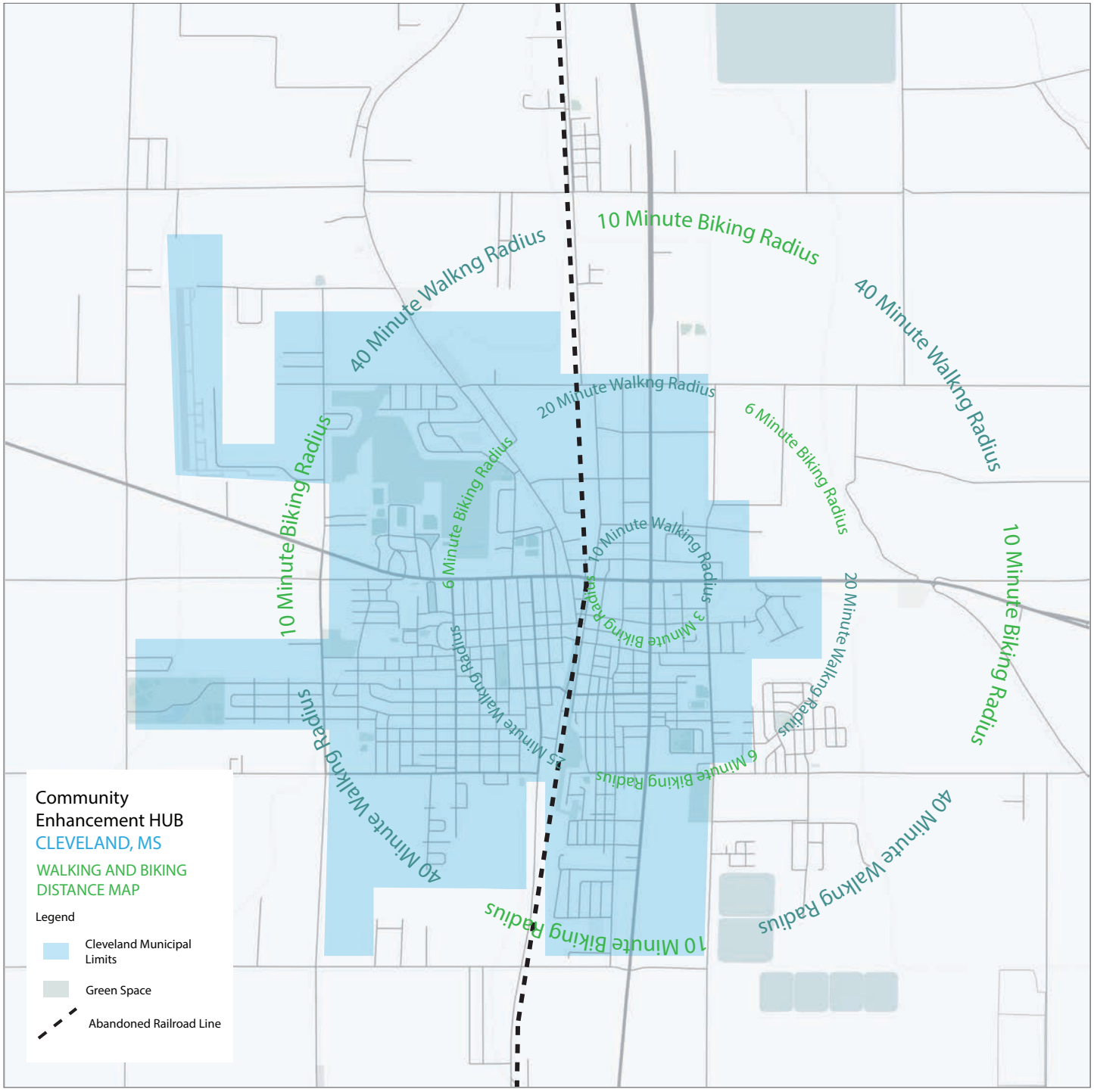
Merigold City Hall

Hey Joe's in Merigold is a sister restaurant to the Hey Joe's in Cleveland. The building sits near the open field of the existing rail bed and features a mural, lighting, and outdoor seating.

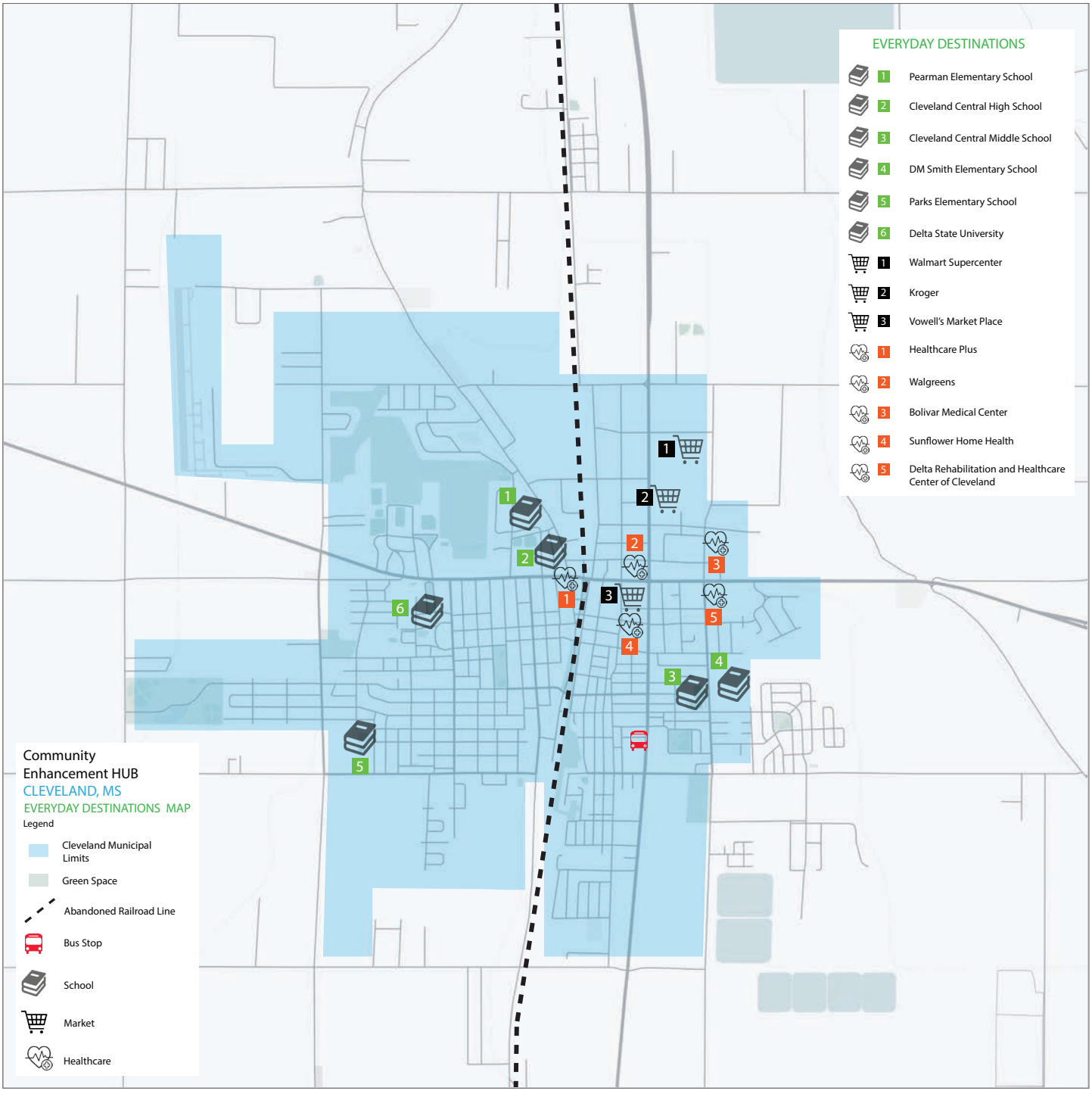
Hey Joe's has become a local favorite for food, beer, and music in both Merigold and Cleveland.

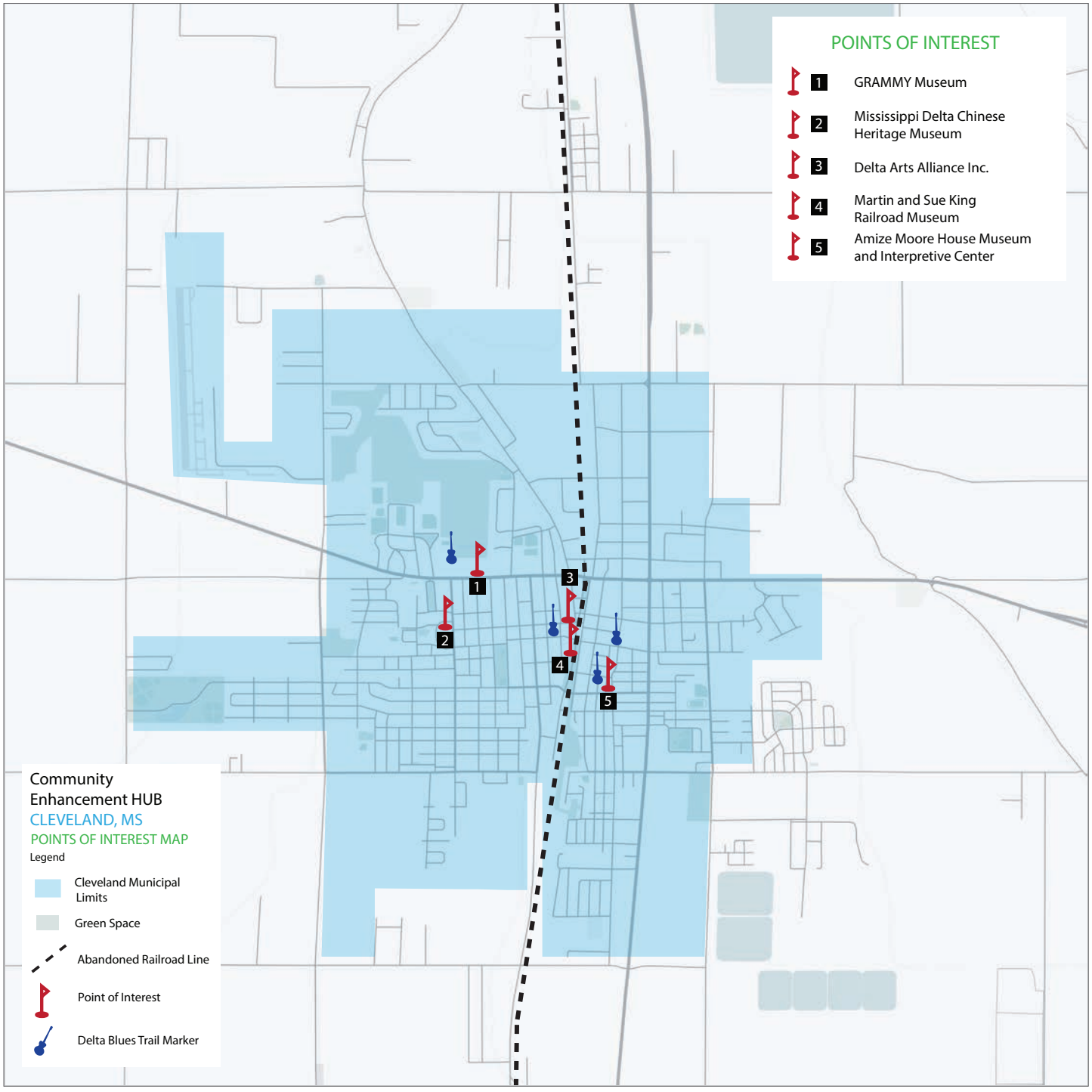
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW
CLEVELAND




10 Minute Biking Radius
40 Minute Walkng Radius
40 Minute Walkng Radius
20 Minute Walkng Radius
6 Minute Biking Radius
10 Minute Biking Radius
6 Minute Biking Radius
10 Minute Walking Radius
10 Minute Biking Radius
20 Minute Walking Radius
5 Minute Biking Radius
15 Minute Walking Radius
6 Minute Biking Radius
40 Minute Walking Radius
40 Minute Walking Radius
10 Minute Biking Radius
Community
Enhancement HUB
CLEVELAND, MS
WALKING AND BIKING
DISTANCE MAP
Legend
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Green Space
Abandoned Railroad Line

CLEVELAND EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS MAP




POINTS OF INTEREST
1 GRAMMY Museum
2 Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum
3 Delta Arts Alliance Inc.
4 Martin and Sue King Railroad Museum
5 Amize Moore House Museum and Interpretive Center
Community Enhancement HUB
CLEVELAND, MS
POINTS OF INTEREST MAP
Legend
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Green Space
Abandoned Railroad Line
Point of Interest
Delta Blues Trail Marker

CLEVELAND

A storefront in Cleveland

Downtown Cleveland

Sculpture in Downtown Cleveland

A trail on the old railroad bed in Downtown Cleveland

The Cotton House, a luxury boutique hotel in Downtown Cleveland

A downtown street with parking in downtown Cleveland

A mural inside Zoe's Coffee Company in downtown Cleveland

A sidewalk and storefront in Downtown Cleveland

PROBLEM SUMMARY
GAPS IN TRANSIT

While the communities of Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland are all connected by Highway 61, making it easy for those with automobiles to access the communities' shared amenities, a need to make the amenities accessible to those without automobiles remains a problem. Public transit programs are available throughout the delta but are underutilized due to lack of knowledge of their existence and their range of services. Additionally, our Center has seen a rise in the use of cycling as transit for those who cannot afford a vehicle, but this opportunity has not evolved in these three towns. While these communities are spread across a mere 10 miles, which is accessible via bicycle, currently there is not a safe route to foster a cycling transit way of life. The gaps in education about public transit and the lack of a safe cycling route hinders the residents of the communities of Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland in accessing all the resources and amenitites available to them.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. EXPANSION OF PUBLIC TRANSIT

The expansion of public transit in the tri-city region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou is the first step toward creating a community enhancement hub. At the basic level, expanding public transit in the region entails enhancing existing bus stops and installing additional bus stops along the existing public transit routes. Ideally, these bus stops would be equipped with physical shelters, informational signage, and bicycle-supporting infrastructure such as bike racks to connect the transit system to other areas within the region. The images and maps on the following pages show the proposed expansion of the exisiting public transit system as well as precedents for effective bus stops.

BENEFITS

There are many benefits to having physical bus shelters with overhead coverage, seating, informational signage, and bike racks.

Most importantly, designated bus shelters make public transit safer, more comfortable, and more functional for its users by providing a clear space in which to wait for, load onto, and unload from transit vehicles. Bus shelters also increase the overall visibility of the transit system, informing the public of the exisitence of a transit system just by calling their attention to the physical space of the bus stop. On a related note, the design of bus shelters can reinforce a city's architectural style and provide visual interest along streets.

The inclusion of informational signage at bus stops and within bus shelters is also essential. Signage makes traveling by public transit easier and more accessible to those who may be visiting town or who are new to using public transit. Clearly branded signage can also contribute to a city or region's architectural character and branding, creating a cohesive experience throughout the transit system.

Additionally, including bike racks at bus stops even further expands the transit system, making it accessible to those who may not be within walking distance of a bus stop. Providing bicycle infrastructure at bus stops also allows people to access transit without the use of an additional vehicle.

Our center met with Antoinette Gray of Delta Rides located in Clarksdale. Notes from that meeting can be found in the Appendix.

Delta Rides is a network of non-profit organizations that provide transportation services within the Mississippi Delta region. While many of these organizations provide special services for seniors, persons with disabilities or Medicaid clients, they also provide general public transit services that are available to anyone.

The only bus stop shelter in the three communities of Mound Bayou, Merigold, and Cleveland, is found in Cleveland. The other communities receive bus pick-ups but do not have a shelter at their pick-up locations.

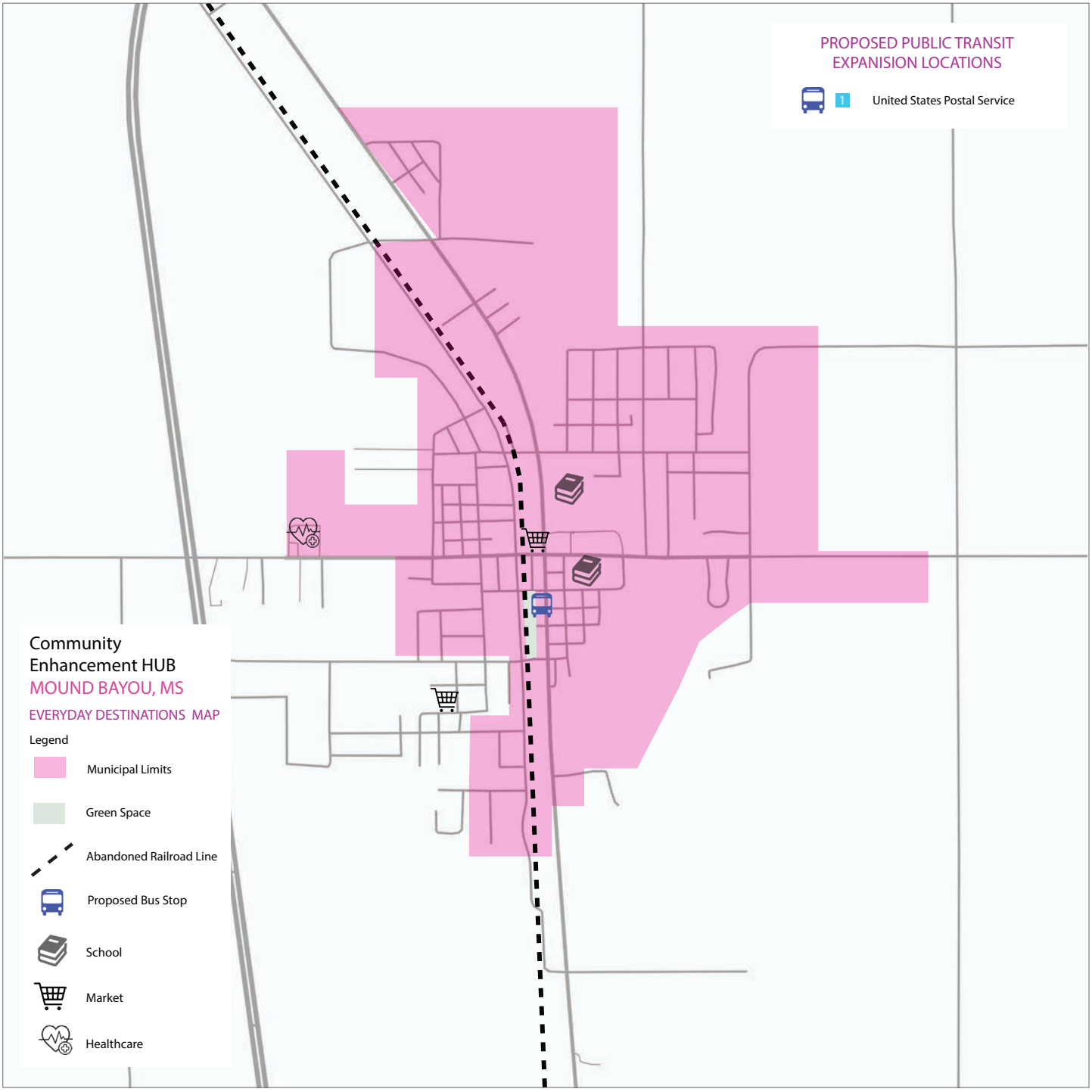
Bus stop shelter with a multple-bike bike rack

Bus stop shelter with signage and a bike rack

Bus stop shelter

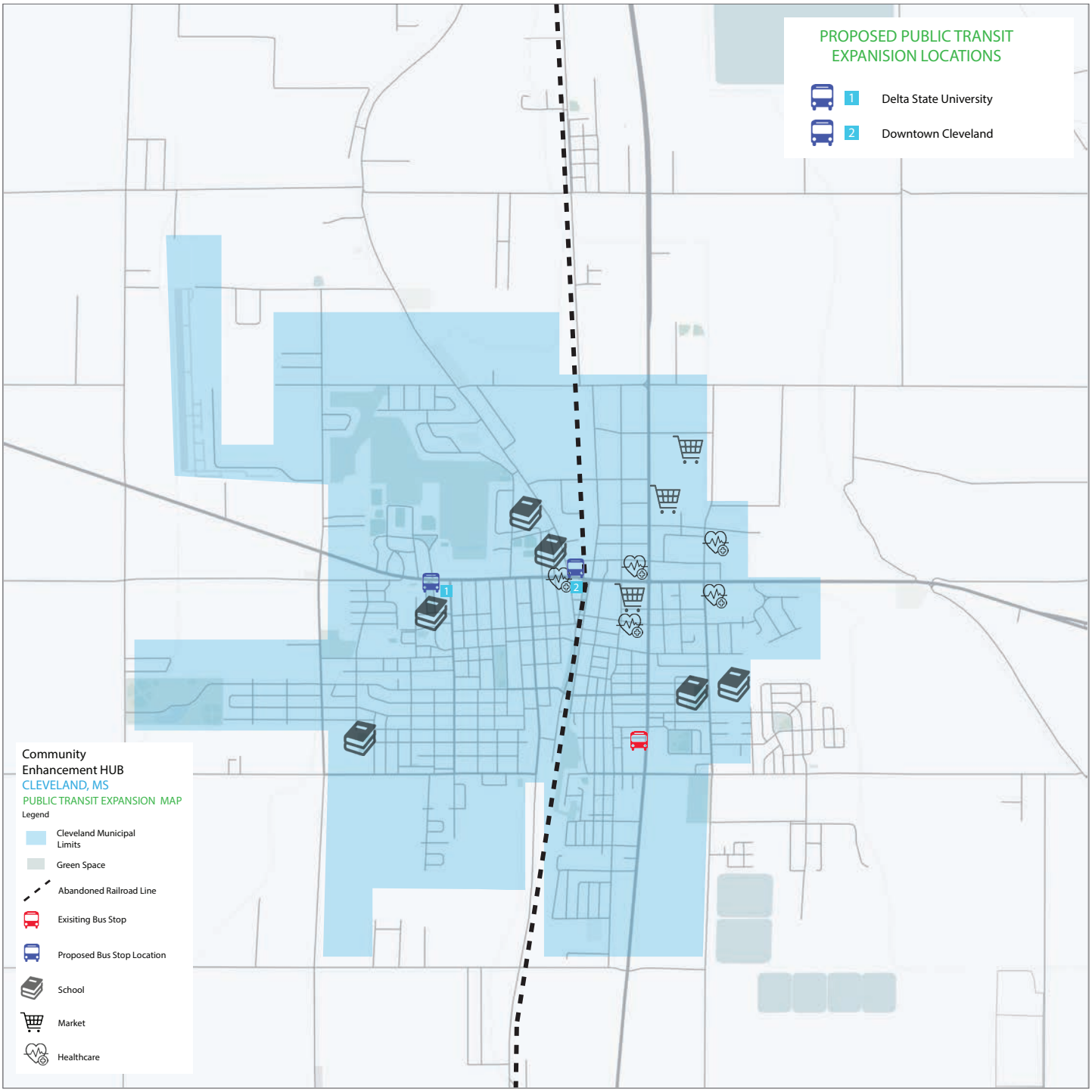
Bus stop shelter with informational signage

PROPOSED TRANSIT LOCATIONS IN MOUND BAYOU



PROPOSED TRANSIT LOCATIONS IN MERIGOLD

PROPOSED TRANSIT LOCATIONS IN CLEVELAND



2. RAILS-TO-TRAILS

Rails-to-trails projects have been implemented throughout the United States as a way to turn underutilized linear corridors of land into space for pedestrian and bicycle transit and recreation. The rails-to-trails project proposed for the tri-city region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou intends to utilize the defunct Y&MV railroad corridor as a pedestrian and bicycle corridor connecting all three towns, thus further expanding the communities' opporunities to use walking and cycling as transit within the region.

BENEFITS

Rails-to-trail projects have been found to have several benefits to the communities and regions through which they pass. Rails-to-trails projects have a positive impact on:

HEALTH
Rails-to-trails projects encourage physical activity by providing a safe and attractive environment in which to walk, bike, and engage in other kinds of outdoor physical activity. Providing users with a connection to nature during their daily bicycle commute or evening walk also has positive effects on mental health.

TRANSPORTATION/LIVABILITY
Rails-to-trails projects provide a safe corridor for non-vehicular travel, connecting communities to everyday destinations via walking and biking as their mode of transportation. Additionally, these trails can connect people to transit stops, allowing them to walk or bike to access public transit to get to their final destination.

CONSERVATION/ENVIRONMENT
Linear greenways such as rails-to-trails projects inevitably result in the preservation of the natural environment around them. These green corridors then, as a result, link together fragmented habitats.

ECONOMY/REVITALIZATION
Rails-to-trails projects attract a significant amount of daily visitors, be those visitors locals or tourists to the trail. This influx of foot traffic catalyzes new businesses to pop up along the trail. Also, as mentioned, rails-to-trails projects promote recreational tourism, attracting visitors not only to the trail but to the communities located along it.

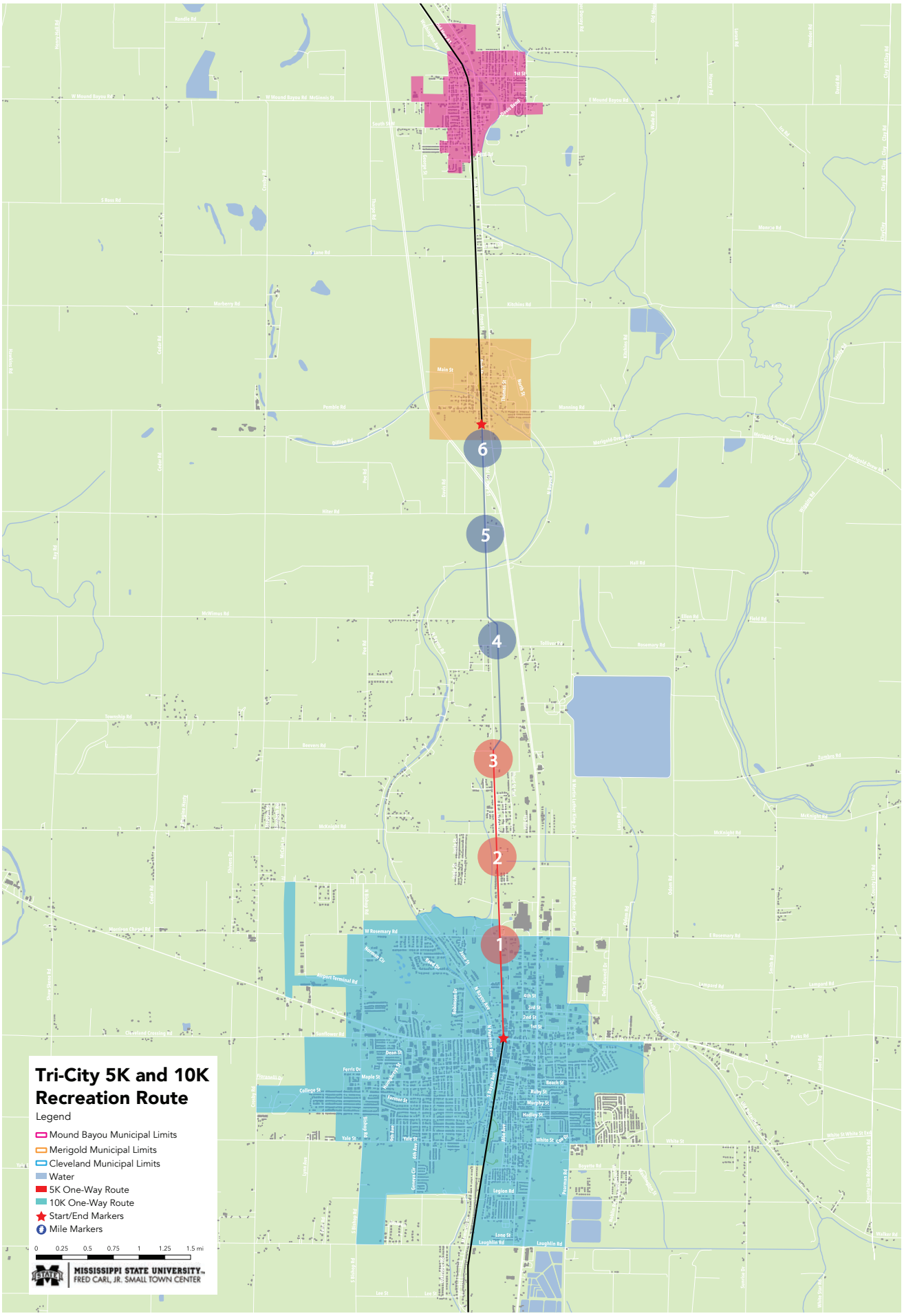
HISTORIC PRESERVATION/COMMUNITY IDENTITY
Rails-to-trails projects help to preserve communities' histories by highlighting the history of the railroad and thus the history of the community through which it ran. Additionally, these trails give communities a landmark in which to gather and take pride.

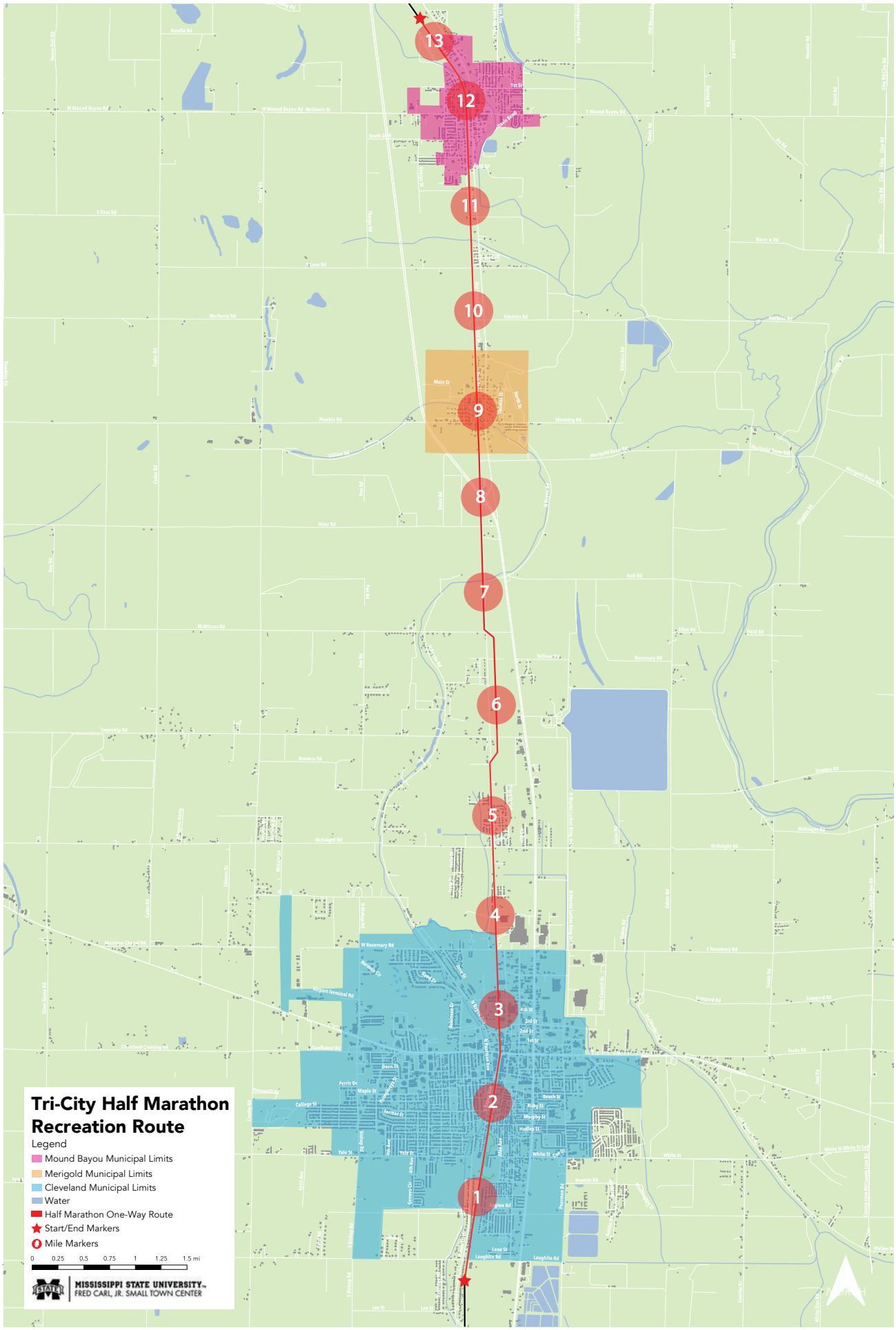
A plaza along the Tanglefoot Trail in New Albany, MS

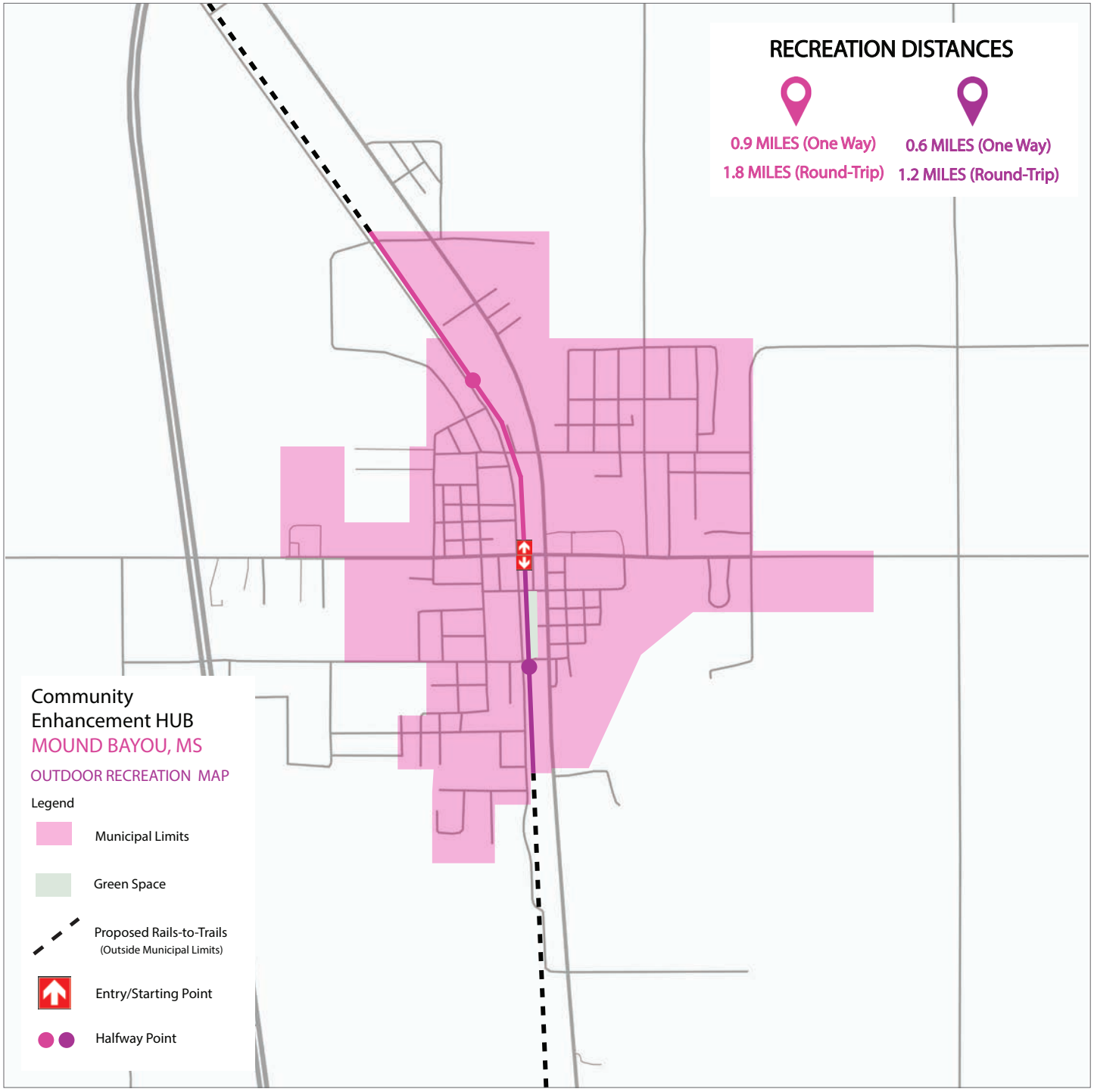
A mile marker along the Tanglefoot Trail

Trailhead signage for the Longleaf Trace in Prentiss, MS

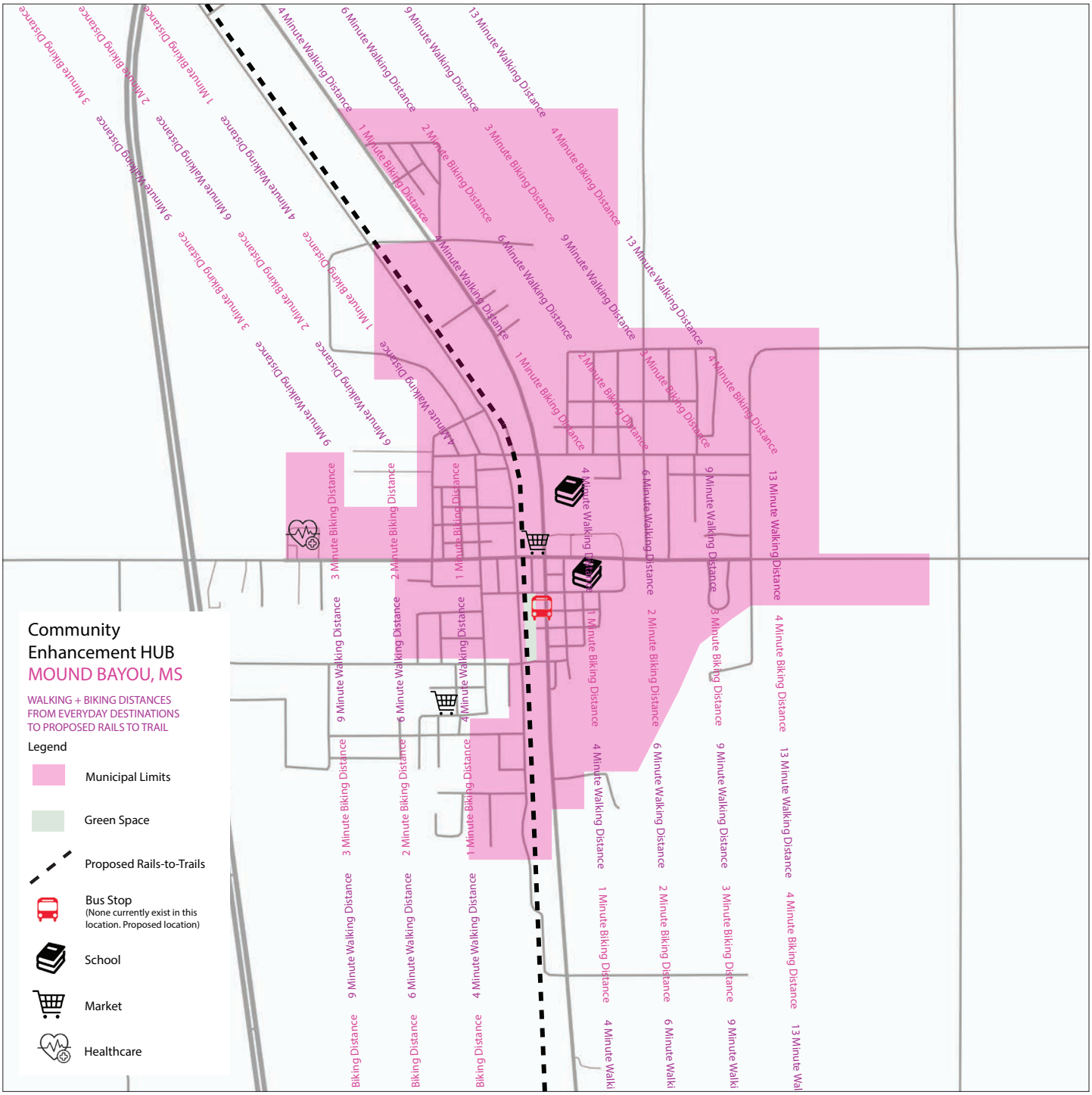
A cyclist enjoying the straight shots of Longleaf Trace


Tri-City 5K and 10K Recreation Route
Legend
Mound Bayou Municipal Limits
Merigold Municipal Limits
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Water
5K One-Way Route
10K One-Way Route
Start/End Markers
Mile Markers
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 mi
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER
1
2
3
4
5
6

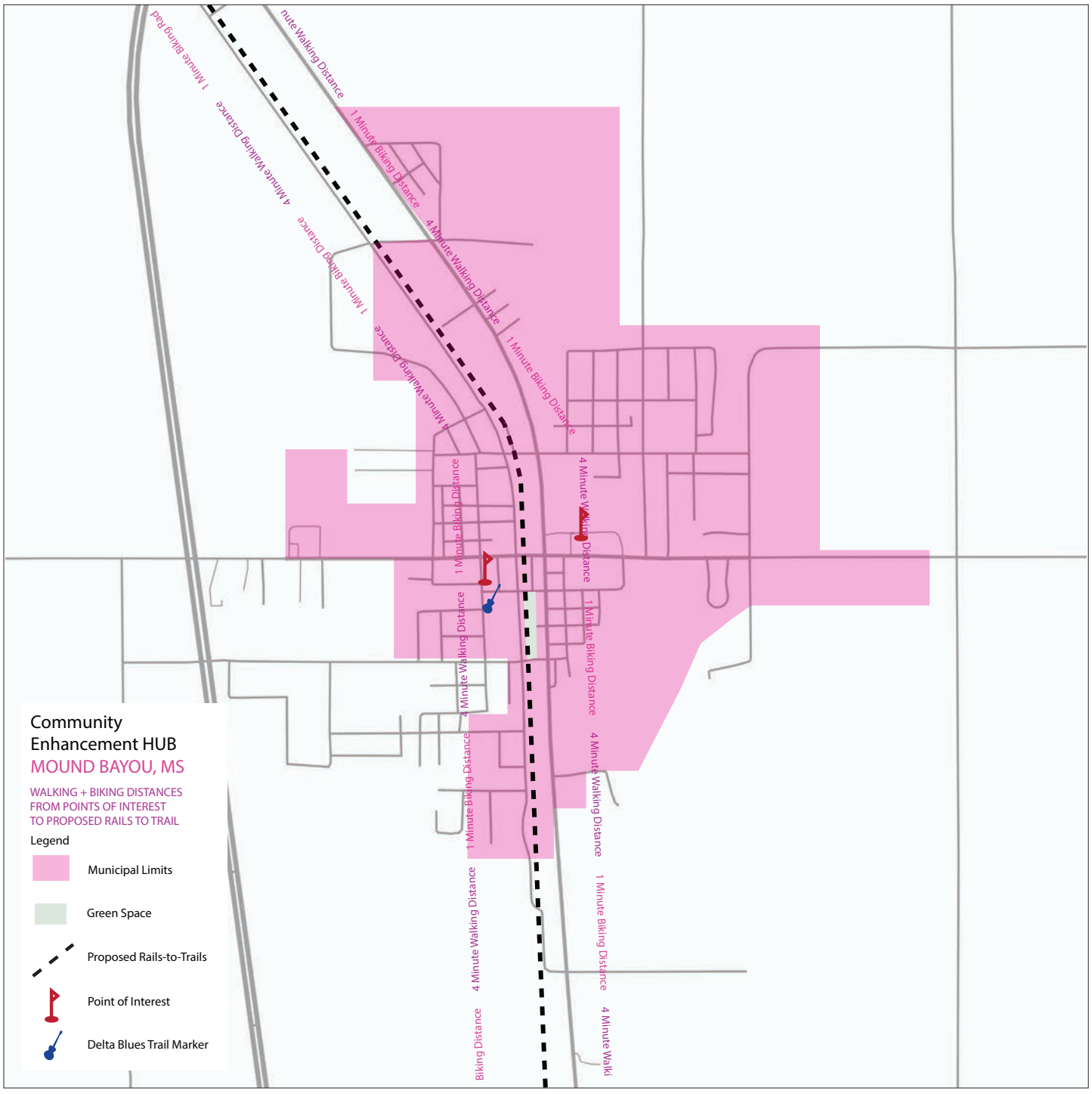

13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
Tri-City Half Marathon Recreation Route
Legend
Mound Bayou Municipal Limits
Merigold Municipal Limits
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Water
Half Marathon One-Way Route
Start/End Markers
Mile Markers
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 mi
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
FRED CARL, JR. SMALL TOWN CENTER


RECREATION DISTANCES
0.9 MILES (One Way)
1.8 MILES (Round-Trip)
0.6 MILES (One Way)
1.2 MILES (Round-Trip)
Community
Enhancement HUB
MOUND BAYOU, MS
OUTDOOR RECREATION MAP
Legend
Municipal Limits
Green Space
Proposed Rails-to-Trails
(Outside Municipal Limits)
Entry/Starting Point
Halfway Point

WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS

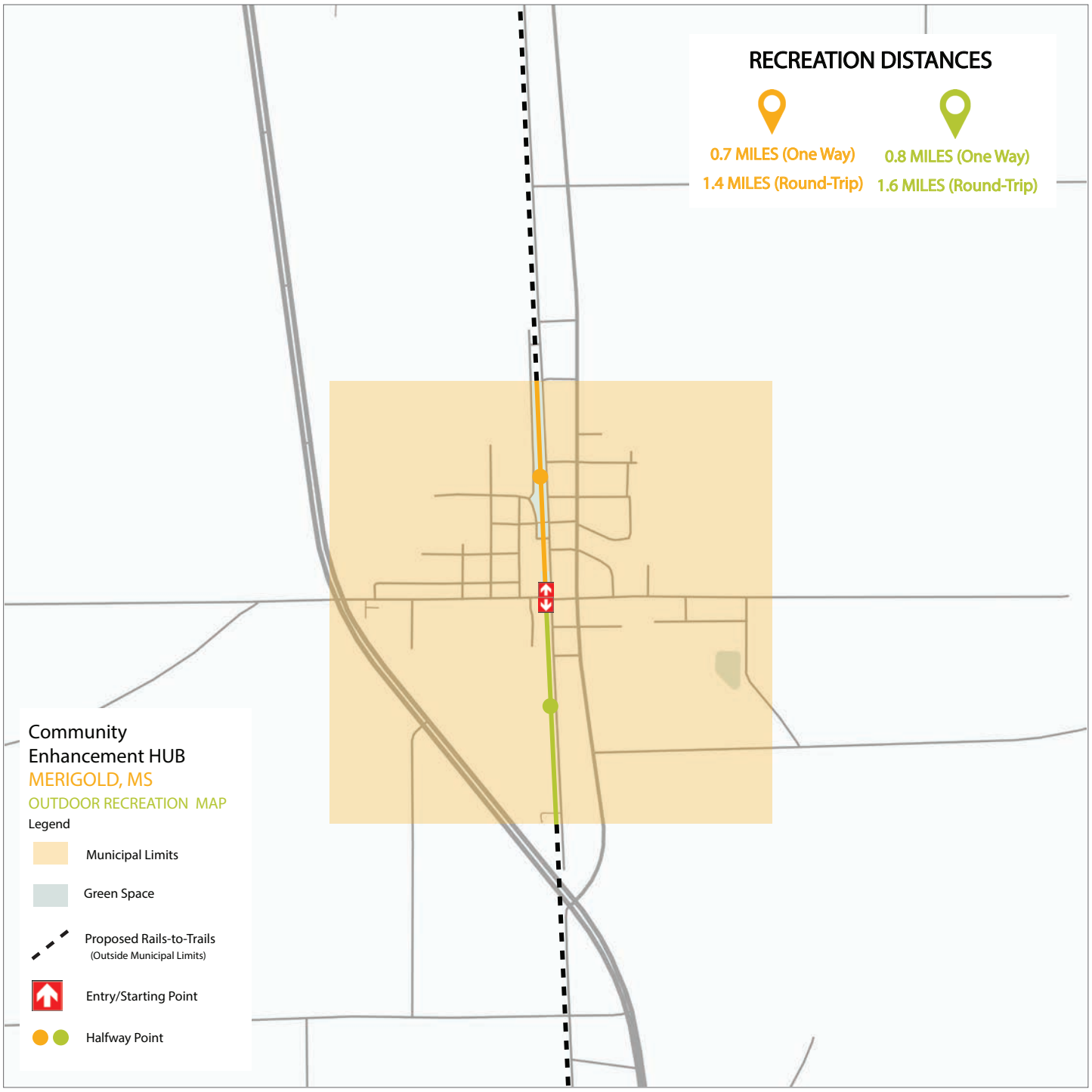


WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO POINTS OF INTEREST

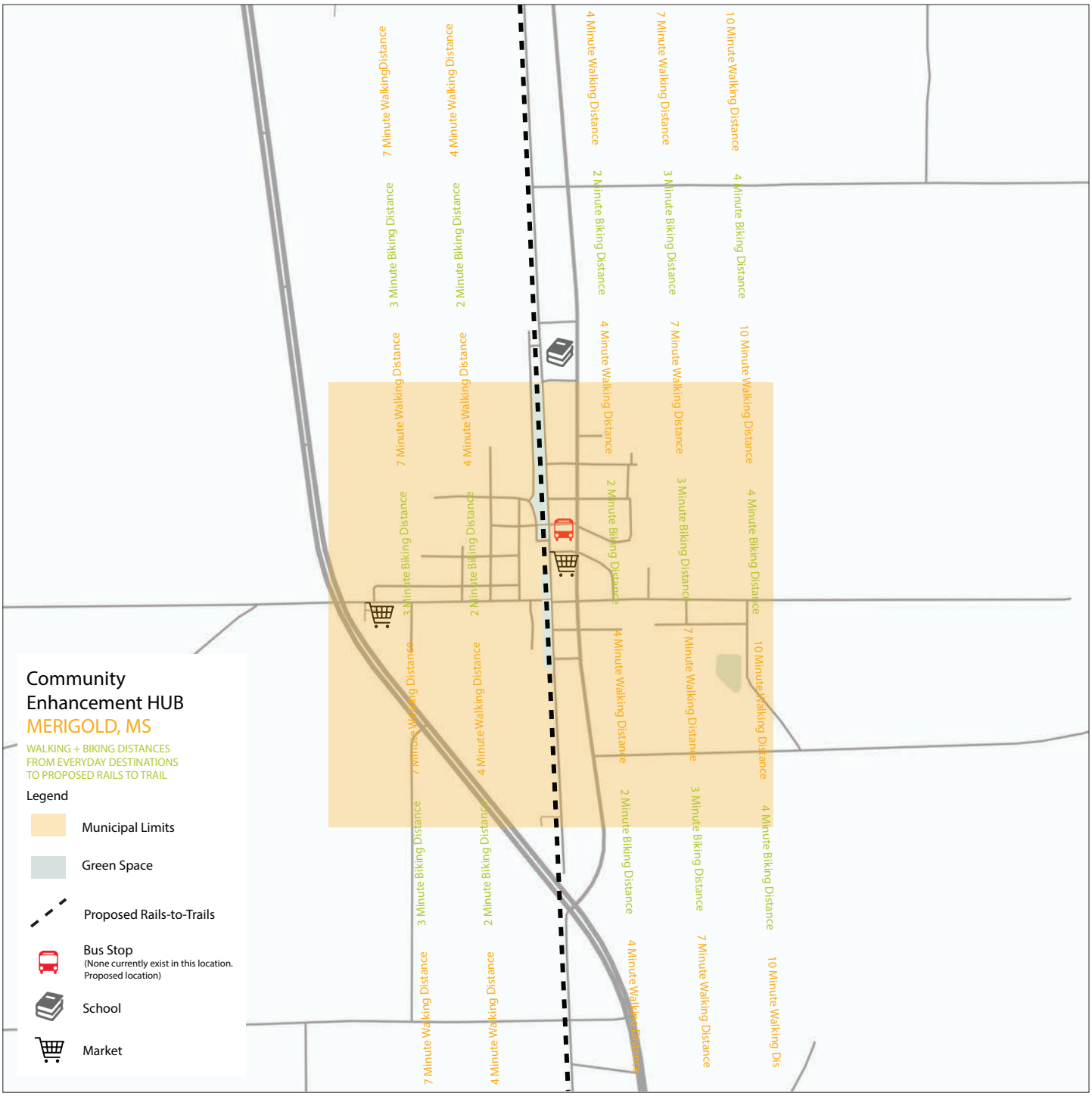


IMAGES OF RAIL BED IN MOUND BAYOU

The rail bed in Mound Bayou exists in three conditions: top left, brush and foliage, top right, open field, and bottom left, with a building atop. The conditions in the top photos easily lend themselves to the implementation of a rails-to-trails project. The condition in the bottom photo can be remedied by routing the new trail around any private land of which the rail bed crosses.


RECREATION DISTANCES
0.7 MILES (One Way)
1.4 MILES (Round-Trip)
0.8 MILES (One Way)
1.6 MILES (Round-Trip)
Community
Enhancement HUB
MERIGOLD, MS
OUTDOOR RECREATION MAP
Legend
Municipal Limits
Green Space
Proposed Rails-to-Trails
(Outside Municipal Limits)
Entry/Starting Point
Halfway Point

WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS



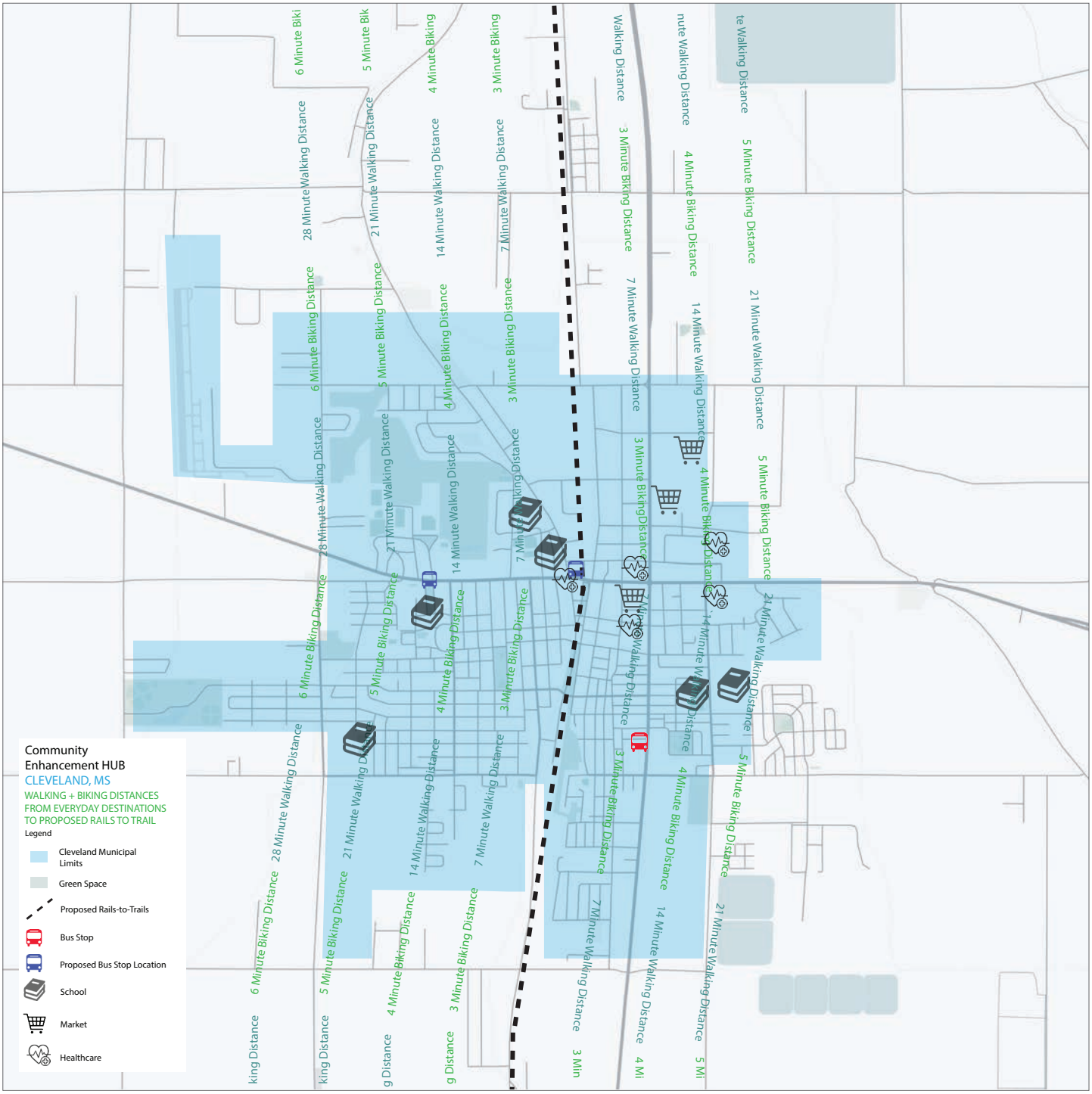
WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO POINTS OF INTEREST

IMAGES OF RAIL BED IN MERIGOLD

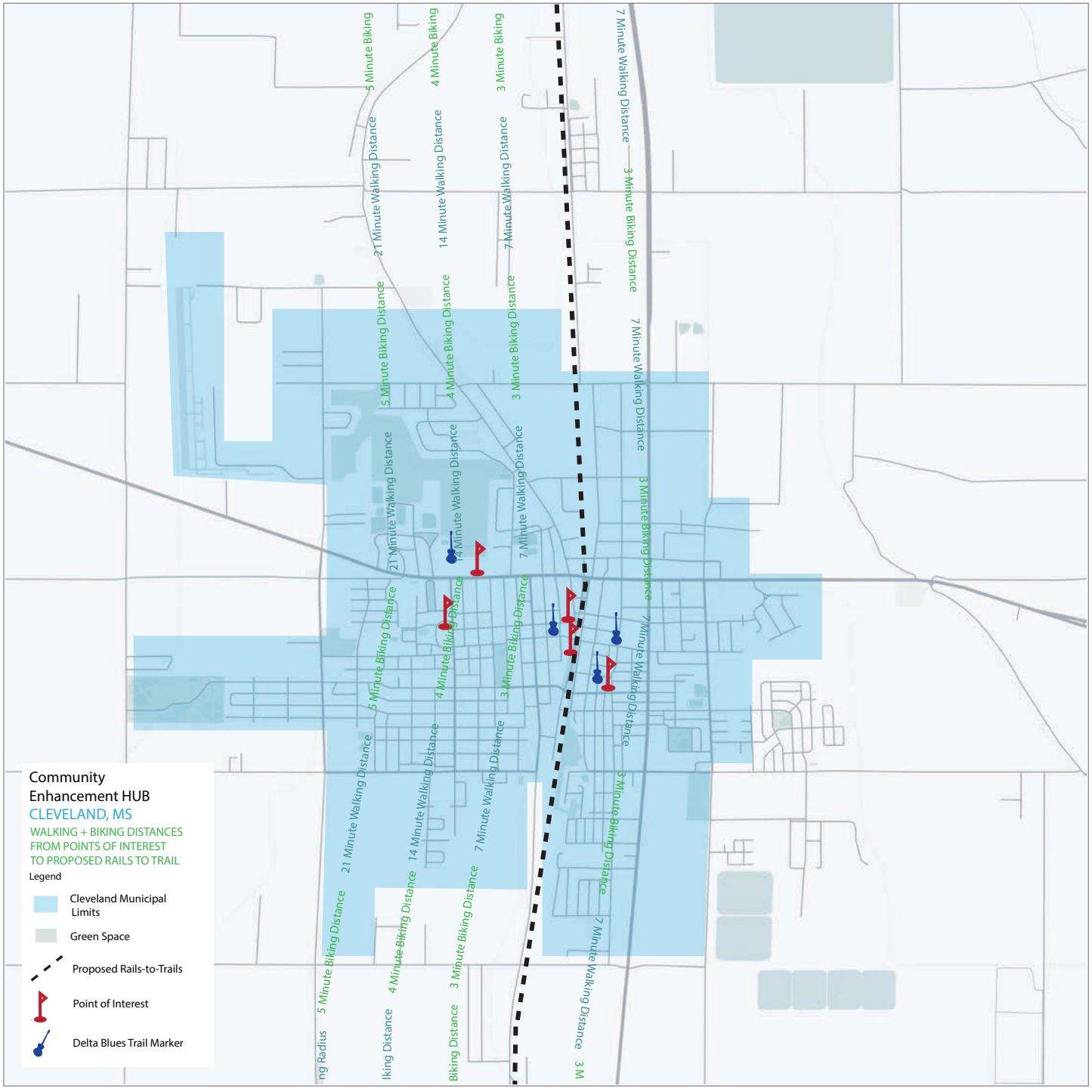
The rail bed in Mound Bayou exists in two conditions: top left and right, open field surrounded by trees, and bottom left, brush and foliage. The conditions in these photos easily lend themselves to the implementation of a rails-to-trails project.

RECREATION DISTANCES
1.0 MILES (One Way)
2.0 MILES (Round-Trip)
1.25 MILES (One Way)
3.5 MILES (Round-Trip)
Community
Enhancement HUB
CLEVELAND, MS
OUTDOOR RECREATION MAP
Legend
Cleveland Municipal Limits
Green Space
Abandoned Railroad Line
Entry/Starting Point
Halfway Point

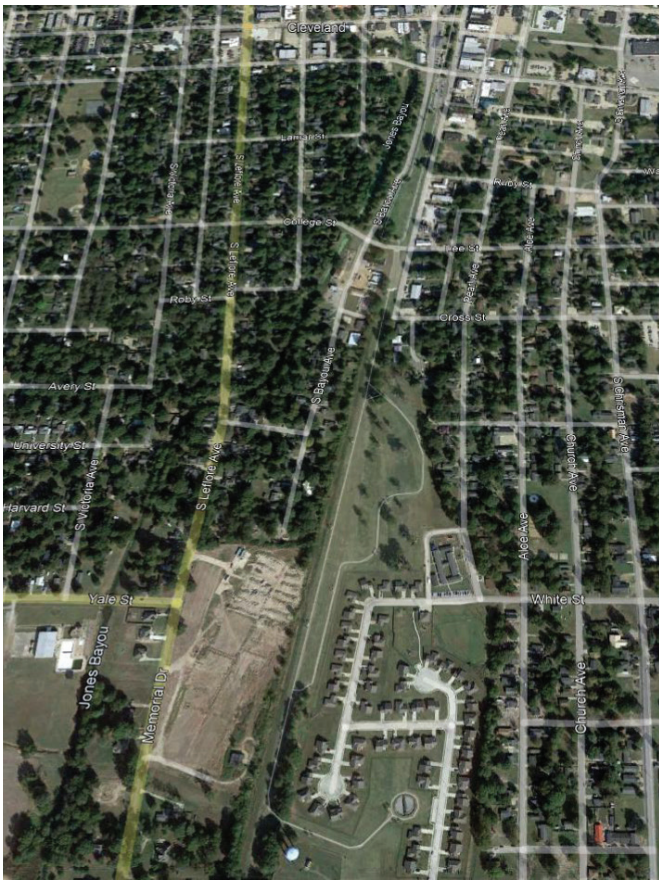
WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS



WALKING AND BIKING DISTANCE FROM PROPOSED TRAIL TO POINTS OF INTEREST



IMAGES OF RAIL BED IN CLEVELAND



The rail bed in Cleveland has mostly been converted into a trail already. Top left and right, part of the trail goes through downtown and provides access to shops and restaurants. Bottom left, part of the trail has been made into a walking track and provides a space for outdoor recreation.

3. WAYFINDING + EDUCATION

Wayfinding signage is crucial to any trail and/or transit system. The wayfiding solutions proposed for the tri-city region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou are meant to highlight points of interest, provide directions to everyday destinations, and provide information on transit locations and destinations in each community. Wayfinding thus becomes the link between transit and trail, streamlining travel throughout the region by easing the transitions between driving, biking, walking, and using transit.

BENEFITS

Of course, wayfinding signage makes navigating through a town easier. However, clear and consistent wayfinding signage can have many additional benefits.

First and foremost, wayfinding signage improves traffic flow by reducing in-transit confusion. It also eases the transitions between car, pedestrian, and transit circulation. Beyond this, wayfinding signage can increase the visibility of less-prominent destinations within a community. It can also increase safety for all travelers along a roadway or on trails as it reduces the need to navigate via cell phone.

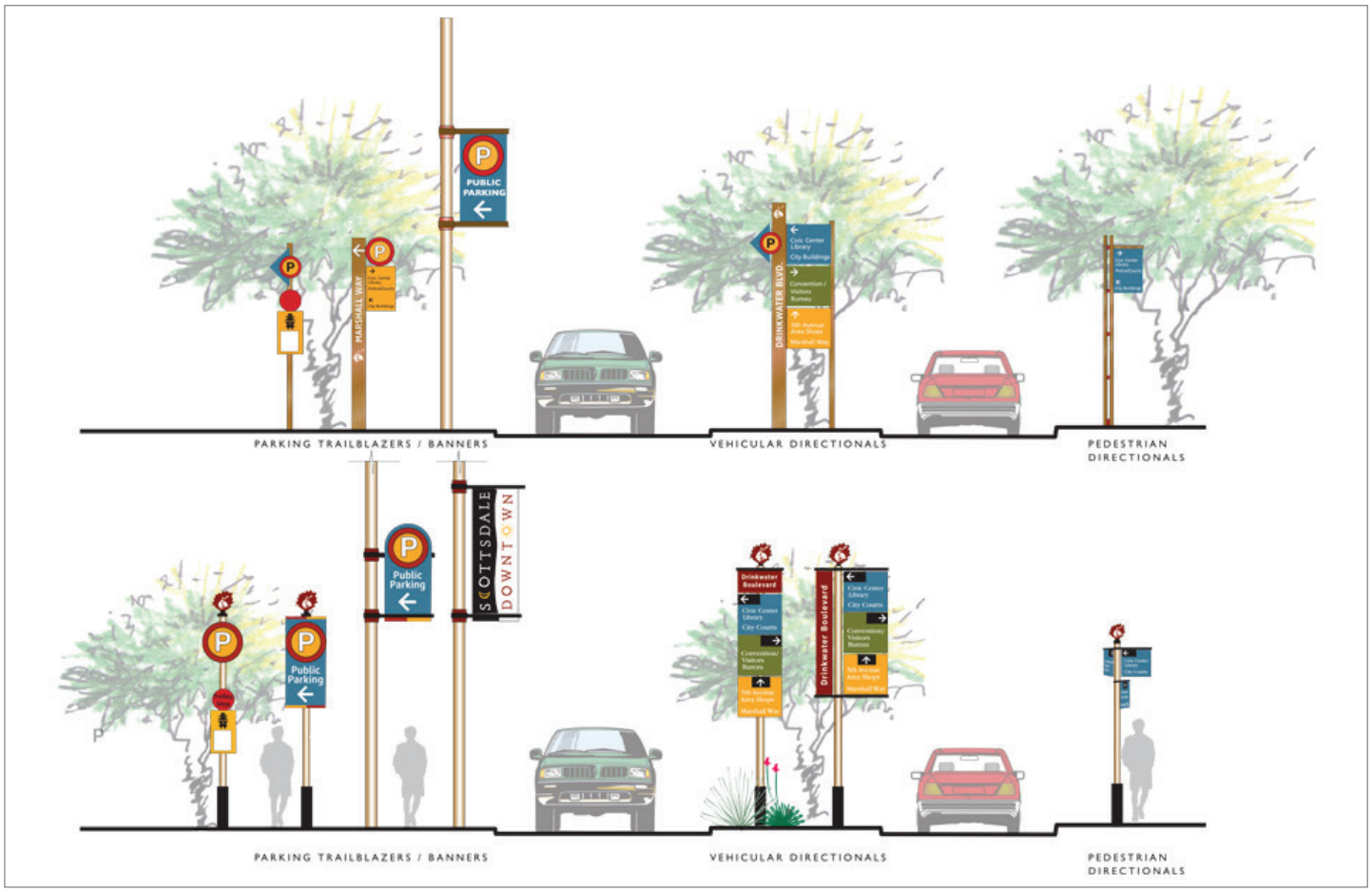
Wayfinding signage can also have aesthetic benefitis. The design and branding of wayfinding signage can reinforce a community's history and architectural character. Having a consistent design for wayfinding signage also reduces visual clutter along streets, improving navigation for all travelers. As an added bonus, wayfinding signage in prominent places – such as at particularly busy intersections or at entrances to parks or important buildings -- can even function as art and centerpieces within the landscape.

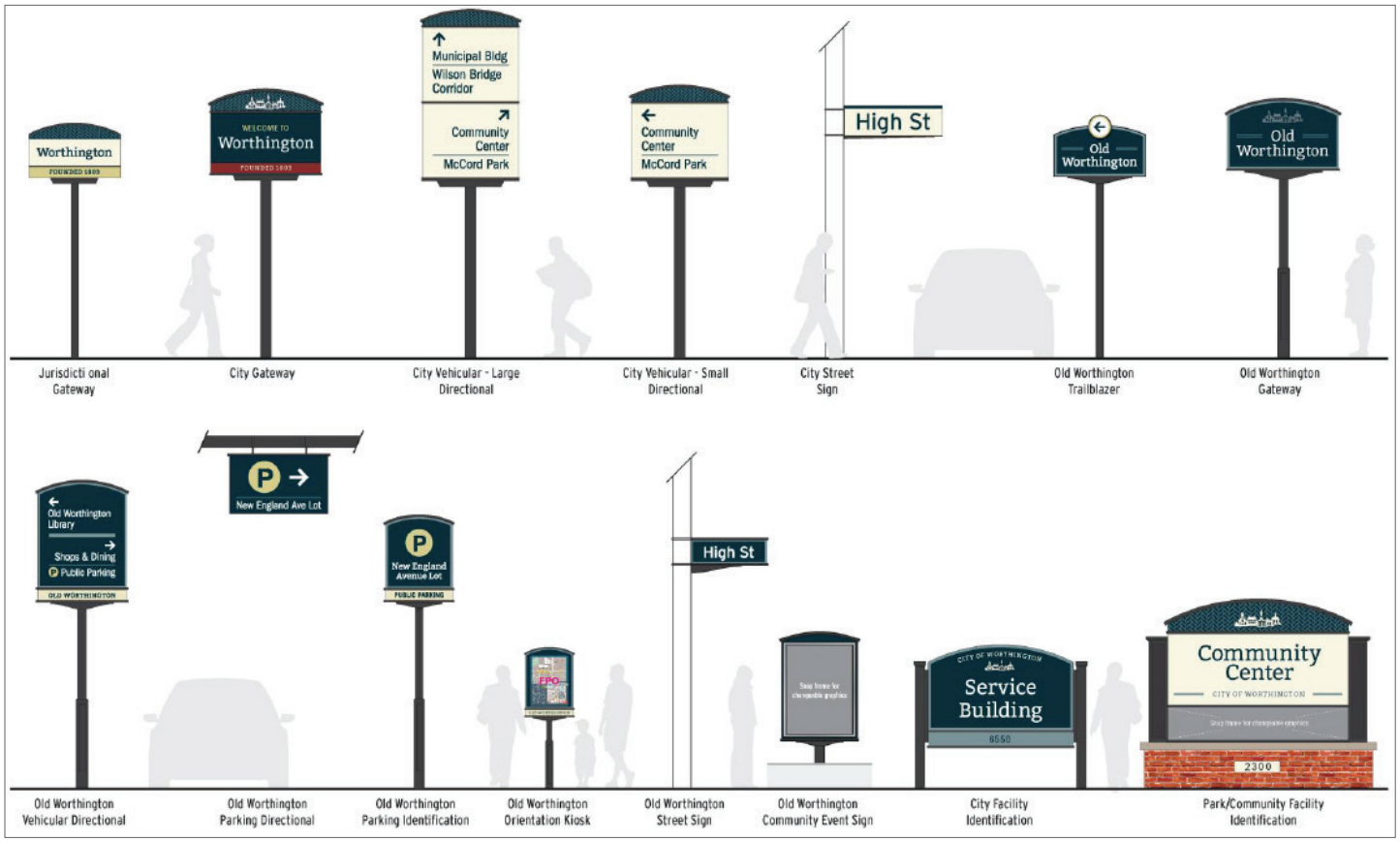
The front of the welcome sign in Mound Bayou

The back of the welcome sign in Mound Bayou

A sign on the town hall in Merigold

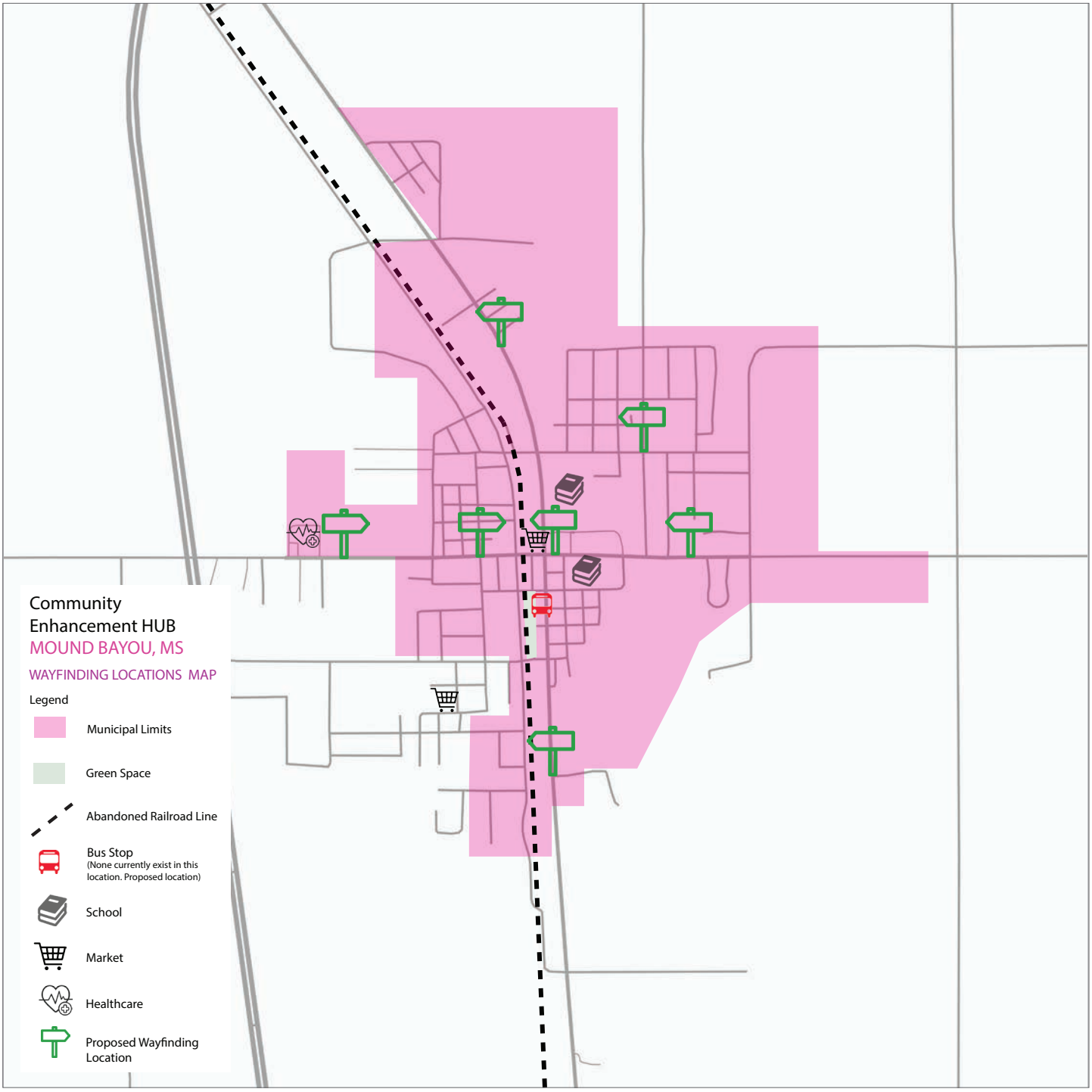
The welcome sign in Cleveland





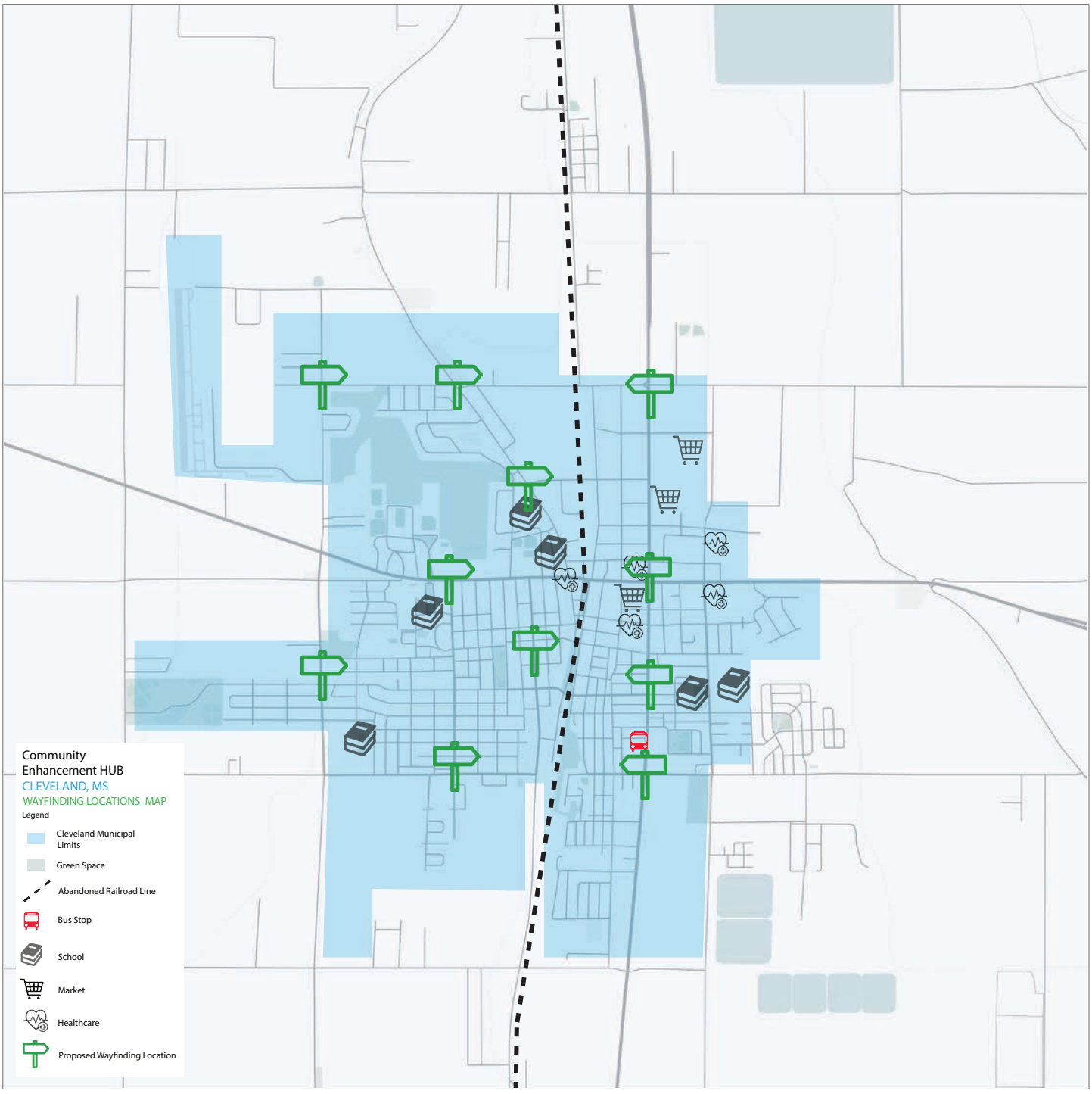
Wayfinding Signage Precedents at Vehicular and Pedestrian Scales

PROPOSED WAYFINDING LOCATIONS IN MOUND BAYOU



PROPOSED WAYFINDING LOCATIONS IN MERIGOLD

PROPOSED WAYFINDING LOCATIONS IN CLEVELAND



IMPLEMENTATION

JUSTIFICATION FOR PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The creation of a community enhancement hub in the tri-city region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou requires three intertwined solutions:

1. EXPANSION OF PUBLIC TRANSIT
2. RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONVERSION PROJECT
3. WAYFINDING AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE

These three solutions will all work together to create a more connected and enriched inter-city region. Firstly, the expansion of public transit will simplify travel between the three cities of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou, creating enhanced connectivity within the region. Second, a rails-to-trails project would expand transit outward from major vehicular corridors, allowing residents not only to access transit via pedestrian trails, but also to travel entirely by foot or bike to their everyday destinations. Additionally, a rails-to-trails conversion would serve to enrich the region with a new cultural amenity to attract recreational tourism. Lastly, wayfinding signage will tie these transit and pedestrian systems together, creating a consistent brand for the region in addition to making the expanded transit and pedestrian systems safer and easier to use and navigate.

Implementing these three solutions will establish a hub of community enhancement within the tri-city region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou.

TRANSIT IMPLEMENTATION

Expansion of existing transit in the tri-community region of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou involves the establishment of new transit stops and the construction of improved transit shelters and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure.

Funding and assistance for public transit infrastructure are offered by many state and federal agencies, including the Mississippi Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Mississippi Development Authority, and the Federal Transit Administration, among others. Additional funding can be acquired through fundraising of private donations.

RAILS-TO-TRAILS IMPLEMENTATION

Once the potential rails-to-trails location has been identified and legally secured as abandoned, the implementation process can begin. This involves building the trail and installing amenities such as signage, parking, bathrooms, benches, and other things.

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (railstotrails.org) provides links to many funding and implementation resources for rails-to-trails projects. Some funding resources that may be of interest in the Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou region include:

- The Equitable Park Funding Hub
- Transportation Alternatives
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ)
- Associated Transit Improvements

Funding and assistance for rails-to-trails conversions are offered by many state and federal agencies, including the Mississippi Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Mississippi Development Authority, and the Mississippi Department of Wildife, Fisheries, and Parks, among others. Additional funding can also be acquired through fundraising of private donations.

During or before the construction process, it is recommended to establish a "friends of the trail" governing board for long-term trail management and fundraising to support the trail.

WAYFINDING IMPLEMENTATION

Wayfinding should be designed to be consistent between communities within a region that is linked by a trail and/or transit system. Wayfinding implementation must involve all community development entities - both within and between communities and the county - to develop a singular brand for each community or trail system while maintaining individual identities. The following checklist, while presented in a city-specific way, provides guidance for the process of establishing a consistently-branded signage system.

HOW TO: A City Branding Checklist
Source: *id8agency.com/city-branding/*

Step 1 – Establish the City's Value Proposition
The essential element of any city branding campaign is the value proposition, a succinct statement that establishes the Why and the benefit - A statement that clearly communicates the benefits customers receive by giving you their business.

Step 2 – Be Authentic
Don't try to promote who you want to be or even the one aspect of the city that you like best. Be honest and open about who you are. Failure to be authentic in your advertisements will result in a poor client experience and will ruin your reputation you are trying to build.

Step 3 – Focus on A Single Reason to Visit
To build a city brand that resonates with customers, you need to focus on one single reason to visit. What aspect of the visit will provide the most benefit for your audience?

Step 4 – Redefine Public Spaces
Take advantage of the brand you are building for your city and create public spaces that reinforce why they are visiting your city. Use these areas to promote the culture, increase economic connections, or interact with a natural part of the town.

Step 5 – Deliver the Experience from Your Brand Promise
A city brand is like every other brand. Consumers trust you because your brand represents a promise. As long as you stay true to your brand and always deliver on your brand promise, customers and clients will remain loyal.

Step 6 – Include the City's Residents
Building a brand requires a "buy-in" from everyone involved. This includes all residents and business owners of the city. Hold meetings and release flyers to keep everyone up to date on what is going on with the new city brand. During the meeting make sure everyone has a chance to be heard and ask questions.

Step 7 – Support Your City Brand with A Cross-Channel Strategy
To organically increase the reach and impact of your city's brand you will need to offer physical products and interactive attractions. Setup cutouts around the town for photo opportunities that can be shared on social media. And, every store visitors go into should have city merchandise. You will want to offer physical products like T-shirts, coffee mugs, and hoodies.

APPENDIX

RURAL RAILS-TO-TRAILS CASE STUDIES

The following case studies highlight existing rails-to-trails projects in rural areas. These cases exemplify how rural rails-to-trails projects can utilize the natural and built environments of the regions in which they are developed.

Longleaf Trace | Forrest, Jefferson Davis, and Lamar Counties | Mississippi

The Longleaf Trace is a 44-mile rails-to-trails conversion located in Mississippi's Pine Belt region and completed in 2000. The asphalt trail was converted from an abandoned section of the Mississippi Central Railroad. It runs through Forrest, Jefferson Davis, and Lamar Counties, passing through five communities: Hattiesburg, Sumrall, Bassfield, Prentiss, and Carson. The trail is open to pedestrians and cyclists, and it has a separate dirt equestrian trail that runs parallel to the asphalt trail for 24 miles.

The Longleaf Trace provides several essential amenities in addition to the trail itself. These amenities include eight trails stops (called "stations") with parking and restrooms, three campsites, two canteens, and mile markers and other wayfinding signage.

The majority of the Longleaf Trace winds through the region's quintessential piney woods, wetlands, and alongside small lakes. Where the trail passes through towns, travelers can find "spurs" that easily lead them to lodging, dining, and shopping. These spurs encourage visitors to contribute to local economies, and as a result they facilitate the opening of new businesses along and close to the trail.

The Longleaf Trace project was completed with the help of funding from the Mississippi Department of Transportation and private donations.

Tanglefoot Trail | Chickasaw, Pontotoc, and Union Counties | Mississippi

The Tanglefoot Trail is a 43.6-mile rails-to-trails conversion located in the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area and completed in 2013. The concrete trail was constructed in the right-of-way of a section of the defunct Gulf & Ship Island Railroad. It runs through Chicksaw, Pontotoc and Union Counties, passing through seven communities: Houston, New Houlka, Algoma, Pontotoc, Ecru, Ingomar, and New Albany. The trail is open to pedestrians and cyclists.

In addition to the trail surface itself, the Tanglefoot Trail has several essential amenities. These amenities include seven parking areas with restroom facilities, consistent mile markers and other wayfinding signage, and four "whistle stops" (visitor's centers) along the trail.

Where the trail passes through one of the towns, visitors may find plazas with shade, seating, and even public art. Outside of the towns, the trail winds through farm fields, forests, meadows, and wetlands, highlighting both the history of the region and the natural environments that can be found locally.

While lodging, campsites, and other establishments are not actually part of the trail itself, there are many options for places to stay, eat, and shop along the Tanglefoot Trail. The trail management board provides maps and other resources to guide trail users to hotels, campsites, restaurants, and stores, encouraging visitors to the trail to put money into the region's local economies.

The Tanglefoot Trail project was completed with the help of funding from the Mississippi Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Mississippi Development Authority, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundations, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks, and private donations.

COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT HUB: RESEARCH

Cleveland, Merigold, Mound Bayou

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Although the cities of Merigold and Mound Bayou are the same size, Mound Bayou is much more populated. Cleveland and Merigold have similar racial makeups, while Mound Bayou is completely African American. Mound Bayou has a lower Median Household Income and a much higher poverty rate than the other cities in the hub.

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
Population	11,627	429	1,714
Median Age	34.2	40.3	29.1
Veterans	4.9%	6.4%	2.4%

Population by Race

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
White	45.1%	43.8%	0.0%
Black or African American	50.8%	55.5%	100.0%
American Indian an Alaska Native	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Asian	2.2%	0.7%	0.0%
Other	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Two or More Races	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%

Income and Population

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
Median Household Income	$35,278	$43,667	$21,622
Poverty Rate	27.7%	13.1%	47.7%

BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY

Businesses and Commute Times

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
Total businesses	1,178	Data not available	Data not available
Total retail sales (in thousands)	$303,506	Data not available	Data not available
Average Commute to Work	15.8 minutes	25.3 minutes	19.5 minutes

Within Bolivar County, the largest employers are in the Manufacturing and Education sectors.

Largest Employers in Bolivar County

Employer	Number of Employees	Type of Business
Baxter Healthcare	750	Manufacturing; Pharmaceuticals
Delta State University	600	Higher Education
Cleveland School District	584	Education
Bolivar Medical Center	430	Hospital
Faurecia Automotive Seating	360	Manufacturing; Automotive
Bolivar County Community Action Agency	230	Various programs; including Head Start
JANTRAN	240	River Barging
Jimmy Sanders, Inc.	240	Agricultural Seeds and Chemicals
Cives Steel	145	Fabricated Structural Steel
Needle Specialty Products	138	Manufacturing; Medical Devices
PharMEDium Services	138	Pharmaceuticals

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Two school districts serve the Community Enhancement Hub (CEH) region: Cleveland School District and North Bolivar Consolidated School District.

Cleveland School District | https://www.cleveland.k12.ms.us/domain/1039

The Cleveland School District is responsible for six elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and two specialty schools (Cleveland Career Development and Technology Center and the Walter Robinson Achievement Center). In 2020, the school district had 216 teachers on staff. The Mississippi Department of Education rated this school district with a grade C for 2017-18 and 2019-20.

North Bolivar Consolidated School District | https://www.nbcsd.k12.ms.us/

The North Bolivar School District and the Mound Bayou School District were consolidated in 2014 to form the North Bolivar Consolidated School District. The central office for this district is located in Mound Bayou. The Mound Bayou High School (John F. Kennedy HS) closed in 2018. In 2019, the school district had 76 teachers on staff. The Mississippi Department of Education rated this school district with a grade F for 2017-18.

Delta State University

Delta State University's campus is located in Cleveland, to the west of the downtown historic district. DSU has over 3,000 students enrolled at its campus, and provides a number of arts and cultural opportunities to the CEH region.

Educational Attainment

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	33.3%	25.7%	21.7%
High School Graduate or Higher	80.6%	90.2%	83.1%

"Mound Bayou is up in the one percent of the communities in America with the number of advanced degrees per capita" – Will Jacks, Program Manager for the MDNHA at the Delta Center for Culture and Learning (http://www.mississippifolklife.org/articles/a-place-apart-mound-bayou)

CIVIC SERVICES

Each city within the CEH has civic services such as a town hall, police, and a post office. Volunteer Fire departments serve Mound Bayou and Merigold.

Bolivar County is run by a Board of Supervisors. Mound Bayou is located within District 3, Merigold is withing District 4, and Cleveland lies within Districts 2, 4, and 5.

The Bolivar County Library System serves the CEH and has Libraries in all three communities. The Robinson-Carpenter Library in Cleveland is the main branch. The Thelma Rayner Memorial Library serves Merigold. The Mound Bayou Public Library has recently been closed indefinitely.

Bolivar County provides a number of agencies and services to the CEH, such as the Bolivar County Community Action Agency, Inc. is a non-profit who carries out Community Action Programs through grants from MS DHS, US Health and Human Services, the MS Department of Educations, and other agencies. They run the Head Start programs, provide weatherization assistance, and run the Delta Workforce Investment Area Out of School Program which

provides youth ages 16-21 assistance in overcoming employment barriers through basic education skills. https://bccaainc.org/

Bolivar County also provides assistance to the community through other agencies such as the Veterans Office, the Bolivar Medical Foundation, the Council on Aging, Family and Children Services, the Literary Council, and Mental Health.

While Cleveland has a very strong and user-friendly website, Merigold and Mound Bayou do not have websites for their civic services.

The Cleveland Heritage Commission serves to enforce the city's historic preservation ordinance that was adopted in 1995. This nine person commission provides design review services, public awareness and education, preservation planning and research.

The Cleveland Beautification Commission is comprised of the Public Works Director, the Street Superintendent, and the Director of Community Development as well as nine community members. It serves to improve the city's aesthetic appeal through the maintenance of a robust tree canopy, plantings and shrubbery, and signage. It also takes on other beautification projects within city parks, the downtown district, and other public spaces.

ARTS AND CULTURE

There are numerous arts and culture sites within the CEH. Merigold and Mound Bayou are well known for their local pottery. Cleveland has a number of museums including the Grammy Museum, the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum, and a Railroad Museum.

Cleveland and Mound Bayou both have **designated historic districts** which cover their downtowns business districts and some residential areas. Mound Bayou has two historic markers, one Blues Trail Marker, and one Mississippi Freedom Trail marker. A blues trail marker honoring Po Monkey's Lounge sits to the west of Merigold. Cleveland has 12 historic markers, one Freedom Trail Marker, and four Blues Trail markers.

Cleveland has the following permits online that promote arts and culture within its city:

- Mobile Food Permit Application
- Block Part Application

Cleveland has an online permitting system for the organization of Block Parties – defined as a party organized by residents of a neighborhood, limited to a city block, in which the street is closed off and participants eat, socialize, entertain, ect.
https://www.cityofclevelandms.com/176/Block-Parties

The **Delta Arts Alliance** is a nonprofit located in Cleveland that "serves as a bridge to connect diverse cultures through their contributions to the arts, to create a common vision, and to develop strategies for making the arts a more prominent part of daily life."
https://www.deltaartsalliance.org/

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

All three CEH communities have bayous running through their downtown areas. Cleveland has capitalized on this and has built a walking and biking trail along the bayou in its downtown.

Cleveland has a number of public parks that are well maintained by the city's parks and recreation department. Merigold has no public parks or trails. Mound Bayou has a public park that is in need or an upgrade with is located near their public housing. The Richard Coleman Recreation Park and Lake is located outside of Mound Bayou to the west.

HEALTH

Bolivar County provides some health services to the CEH communities through the Bolivar County Health Department. WIC Centers serving the CEH region are located in Cleveland and Rosedale. The Bolivar Medical Center is a large hospital located in Cleveland which serves the surrounding areas. The Delta Health Center provides medical services to the residents of Mound Bayou.

Disability Information

	Cleveland	Merigold	Mound Bayou
Disabled Population	18.9%	16.1%	20.2%
Most Common type of Disability	Ambulatory (11.7%)	Ambulatory (11.7%)	Ambulatory (12.2%)

ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

BOLIVAR COUNTY

The **Cleveland and Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce** serves the entire CEH region and provides business and industrial development support to its members. Team Cleveland is an umbrella of the Chamber.

- https://clevelandmschamber.com/
- See pages 14-16 for Stakeholder Input for the Economic Development Strategic Plan (revised in Aug 2020)
- https://clevelandmschamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Cleveland-Bolivar-Strategic-Plan-08.27.2020.pdf

The **Bolivar County Community Action Agenc**y is governed by an executive director as well as a board of director consisting of elected public officials, representatives of the low-income, and representatives of the private sector. The organization provides a variety of services: preschool childcare, a senior companion program, transitional and homeless shelter, a homeless prevention rapid-rehousing program, an adolescent opportunity program, a GED program, utility and rental assistance and education assistance.
https://bccaainc.org/

The **North Bolivar Development Cooperative** is a registered non-profit with located in Mound Bayou. Organization associated with the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives.

The **Bolivar County Historical Society** promotes awareness of the significance of events in Bolivar County from the county's organization through the present. It is recognized by the MDAH. It has several committees of note: cemeteries committee, historic sites committee, museum committee, program committee and publications committee.
https://bolivarcohs.wordpress.com/

CLEVELAND

Team Cleveland Main Street is an affiliate of the Mississippi Main Street Program. It is under the umbrella of the Cleveland Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce and was organized in 1990. Team Cleveland focuses specifically on promoting and revitalizing all of the business districts within Cleveland. It also has a program that provides $500 matching Facade Grants to local businesses.

- https://www.clevelandmainstreet.com/

The **Delta Arts Alliance** is a nonprofit located in Cleveland that serves as a bridge to connect diverse cultures through their contributions to the arts, to create a common vision, and to develop strategies for making the arts a more prominent part of daily life. From what I can tell most of their work focused within Cleveland itself, but draws artists from around the delta.
https://www.deltaartsalliance.org/

The **Cleveland Music Foundation** is a non-profit who runs the GRAMMY Museum. Their mission is to provide unique learning opportunities base on the enduring legacies of all forms of music; the entire creative and technological processes of recording; and the history of the GRAMMY Awards with a focus on the continuing achievements of Mississippians.

The **Center for Community and Economic Development** is a part of the Delta State University and has a goal of "Building and Empowering Relationships that Strengthen Communities". It runs the Breast Education and Early-Detection Project, the Business Assistance Center, the Delta Educational Opportunity Center, and the Local Government Leadership Institute.
http://www.deltastate.edu/cced/

Churches

Many of Places of Worship

- Baptist
- Episcopal
- Methodist
- AME
- Church of God
- Catholic
- Presbyterian
- Jewish Temple

Student Groups

- Wesley Foundation
- Baptist Student Union
- Canterbury (Episcopal)

MERIGOLD

Stakeholders might be able to provide more information on active organizations within Merigold.

Registered Non-profit within Merigold

- Drew Garden Club
- Hayes Cooper Boosters (school fundraising)
- Miracles of Grace Foundation
- National Council of Negro Women
- Newer New Hope MB Church
- Spirit Xplosion Foundation (music org)
- Sunflower Church of the Nazarene

Churches

- Merigold Baptist Church
- Lampton Chapel

MOUND BAYOU

The **Mound Bayou Civic Club** has a goal of community improvement, capacity building and N.E.C. Received an MDNHA grant in 2020 for the purpose of creating a public museum that tells the cultural history of Mound Bayou.

The **Historic Mound Bayou Foundation** has collaborated with the AARP Mississippi to fund twenty-five of the more recent heritages markers in the area.

The **Mound Bayou Community Development Corporation** has a goal of economic development within Mound Bayou

The **Mound Bayou Housing and Development Corporation** provides low-cost temporary housing for residents within Mound Bayou.

The **Mound Bayou Housing Authority Residence Council** provides youth development programs.

The **Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance** is founded by Rev. Darryl Johnson (who operates Walk of Faith Ministries) and was created to "bring awareness about the significance of these towns and preserve for future generations the contributions of people of African descent."

Local newsletter: **Did You Know?** edited by Haneefah Muhammad.

Other Registered Non-profit within Mound Bayou:

- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority
    - AKA's philanthropic focuses include: Women's Healthcare and Wellness, Economic Legacy Building, and the Arts.
      https://aka1908.com/programs/program-initiatives
- American Legion
- Bolivar County Baptist Association
- Bolivar County Long-term Disaster Recovery Committee

- Bolivar County Re-Con League (community coalitions)
- Delta Health Center
- Eagle Music and Media Academy (specialized education institution)
- Eddie Johnson and Family Foundation (scholarships + financial aid)
- Ed Shaddais Counseling Center Corp (youth development programs)
- First Christian Church
- Gateway to Heaven Ministries Outreach
- Harvey M Jackson Community Learning Academy NFP (education)
- Heart 2 Heart Personal Care (services to promote the independence of specific pops)
- Historic Mound Bayou Foundation
- International Order of Twelve in Mississippi
- Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church of Mound Bayou
- JFK United
- Knights and Daughters of Tabor
- Lampton Street Church of Christ Inc
- Most Worshipful Stringer Free and Accepted Masons
- Mound Bayou Movement (Cultural, Ethnic Awareness) - @moundbayou on twitter "an organization created to support the revitalization of Mound Bayou, utilizing God's directions and presence".
- Mound Bayou's Civic Club (Community Improvement, Capacity Building, N.E.C.)
- National Council of Negro Women
- New Direction Outreach (mental health association, multipurpose)
- North Bolivar County Development Corporation
- PM Smith Memorial Scholarship Fund
- Potters House (Children's Youth Services)
- PTA Mississippi Congress (educational org)
- St. Gabriel-Mercy Center (Human Services, multipurpose and other N.E.C)
- Sweet Potato Growers Community Development Corporation (Human Services Org)
- Taborain Urgent Care Project
- The Kemetic Institute of Mound Bayou
- The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged Housing Services for Mississippi
- Voices for Education
- Walk of Faith Church Mound Bayou
- Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc
    - ZPhiB's philanthropic focuses include: Elder Care and a number of Women's Community Health focuses including Premature Awareness and Breast Cancer
    - https://zphib1920.org/national-programs/

Churches

- Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church
- Bethel African Methodist Baptist Church
- First Baptist Church – Rev. Earl Hall pastor of First Baptist Church and executive director of Mound Bayou Housing Authority (working on a doctorate in educational leadership)
- Beautiful New Hope Church
- Living Healthcare Abundant
- Sisters of Mercy

- St. Gabriel Mercy Center
- St. Mark Church of God
- Urban Life Center
- Walk of Faith Covenant Church – Rev. Darryl Johnson operates (CEO) of Walk of Faith

Ministries and operates an adult day care, personal care service, and a flower shop all in Mound Bayou. He also founded the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance.

- Lampton Street Church-Christ
- House of Prayer

GOVERNMENTAL ANALYSIS

BOLIVAR COUNTY

Bolivar County is governed by a Board of Supervisors who represent 5 districts within the county. Other elected officials that serve Bolivar County include those that serve the judiciary system: chancery clerk, circuit clerk, county attorney, district attorney, justice court judges, circuit court judges, chancery court judge, county/youth court judge). Other elected officials include: county coroner, the election commissioners, constables, sheriff, and the tax assessor.

The County does have an adopted land use map available on their website. The Board of Supervisors adopted Subdivision Regulations in 2001, and a Land Use Development Code was adopted in 2008.

Bolivar County also has numerous agencies of the board that serve the entire county.

- Bolivar Medical Foundation
- Community Action Program
- Council on Aging
- Economic Assistance
- Extension Services
- E-911
- Family and Children Services
- Library
- Literary Council
- Mental Health
- Planning Commission
- Port Commission
- USDA Service Center
- Veteran's Office

The **Bolivar County Soil and Water Conservation District** is a subdivision of state government that is responsible for conserving natural resources within the county. It works to carry out a cooperative program to conserve, improve and wisely use the land and its related natural resources for the long-term benefits for all urban and rural citizens.

CLEVELAND, MS

Cleveland is governed by a Mayor and Board of Aldermen. The city also has the following Boards and Commissions which make recommendations and run certain aspects of Cleveland's government.

- The **Cleveland Airport Commission** was created to advise and make recommendations to the **City Board of Alderme**n regarding the activities of the Cleveland Municipal Airport.
- The **Cleveland Beautification Commission** works to improve the city's aesthetic appeal through plantings and shrubbery, signage, maintenance of a robust tree canopy and other beautification projects in city parks, the downtown area, and other public spaces.
- The **Cleveland Contractor Licensing Board** was created to regulate the licensing of plumbers, gas pipe fitters, electricians, mechanical contractors, and lawn irrigation contractors preforming work within the corporate limits of Cleveland.
- The **Cleveland Election** is responsible for administering all city elections and for purging the election rolls.
- The **Heritage Commission's** main goal is to administer the Historic Preservation Ordinance through design review, public education and awareness, preservation planning, and research.
- The **Cleveland Planning Commission** makes recommendations to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen in regard to the City of Cleveland Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code.

Cleveland has an adopted comprehensive plan and zoning map available on its websites. Both residential and commercial permits as well as a guide on how to use them are easily available online.

The **Cleveland Railroad Museum** is operated by the city and has a goal to preserve and promote the history and the culture of the railroad and its impact of the establishment, growth, and development of Cleveland, Bolivar County, and the Delta Region.

MERIGOLD, MS

Merigold is governed by a Mayor and Board of Aldermen.

MOUND BAYOU, MS

Mound Bayou is governed by a Mayor and Board of Aldermen.

GAP ANALYSIS - PRELIMINARY

IDENTIFY STRENGTHS, BARRIERS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

Strengths

- Some arts and culture in the area is already cross promoted via the Chamber of Commerce and Visit Cleveland.
- There is a strong food culture in the area. All three communities have local restaurants.
- Mound Bayou and Cleveland both have very strong historically focused community organizations.
- Team Cleveland recently installed wayfinding signage in Cleveland.

- Historic buildings and structures are located in all three communities.
- All three communities have bayous that bisect their communities and provide opportunities for a blue-way or "waterfront" recreational/natural development.
- The area has many assets in terms of Higher Education – and education is valued within the community.
- Walkable and bikeable communities – flat topography, small towns, infrastructure in Cleveland.
- Cleveland Hospital and the Delta Heath Center in Mound Bayou
- The Pottery Arts in Merigold and Mound Bayou are well known statewide.

Barriers

- Education system in Mound Bayou lags behind Cleveland and Merigold.
- The library was closed in Mound Bayou.
- School closure in Mound Bayou.
- Lack of website (or online presence) for both Merigold and Mound Bayou.
- Empty storefronts in Mound Bayou + Merigold.
- Bayous are in need of cleanup.
- Sidewalks and bike infrastructure needed or in need of repair.
- Potential housing needs – particularly for young families.

Opportunities for Collaboration

- The communities are located very close together – there is an opportunity for a connecting bike trail that builds off the one established in Cleveland between all three communities that would promote health and tourism and capitalize upon the area's natural resources. (N Bayou Road would easily connect Cleveland and Merigold).
- The Bolivar County Historical Society's museum's committee has a goal of building a network between museums and individuals interested in supporting the missions of the various museums through the Mississippi Delta.
- Opportunity to expand upon the wayfinding signage in Cleveland to create a regional or county wide wayfinding network.
- There is potential for more workforce training and educational partnerships.
    - Delta State, regional community colleges, Bolivar County Community Action Agency.
- There are opportunities for more diversified industry – particularly in the sectors associated with Delta State. "Commercial aviation, geospatial and outdoor recreation are few of the unique departments and the careers associated with those programs offer recruitment opportunities." – from the Cleveland-Bolivar Strategic Plan
- There is an opportunity for increased Entrepreneur training and support or a Maker Space which supports small businesses and creatives.
- Because Team Cleveland (Cleveland Main Street) is under the Cleveland-Bolivar Chamber of Commerce, there is opportunity to expand Main Street efforts or trainings to other communities.
- The closed JFK Memorial High School in Mound Bayou is a historic building with lots of opportunity for reuse.

DATA SOURCES:

US Census Bureau

- https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2814260
- https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2846720
- https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2849320

Mississippi Department of Education

- https://www.cleveland.k12.ms.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=4356&dataid=5667&FileName=CSD%20Report%20Card%2017-18.pdf
- https://msrc.mdek12.org/pdf/ESSADistrictReportCardPdf?EntityID=0617-000&SchoolYear=2018

Cleveland Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce

- https://clevelandmschamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Cleveland-Profile.pdf

Mississippi Markers

- https://www.mississippimarkers.com/bolivar-county.html

MDAH

- https://www.mdah.ms.gov/historic-preservation/buildings/national-register

Tax Exempt Organizations

- https://www.taxexemptworld.com/organizations/bolivar-county-ms-mississippi.asp

Mound Bayou History

- http://www.mississippifolklife.org/articles/a-place-apart-mound-bayou
- https://static1.squarespace.com/static/551b6cffe4b04e2cba1e2b00/t/588fce42bebafbb40f740010/1485819464519/MoundBayou.pdf

Directory of CoOps

- http://www.mississippiassociation.coop/directory-of-coops/

DARTS MEETING MINUTES

Cleveland, Merigold, Mound Bayou Community Enhancement Hub

DARTS Meeting Minutes

Location: Clarksdale, MS Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center

Date: February 9, 2022

Time: 11:00 am-12:40 pm

Attendees: Antoinette Gray-Brown, DARTS Transit Director, Delta Rides Chairperson, agray@aehchc.org

Fran Pharis, Architect, Small Town Center

Summary: Delta Rides serves the 20 counties in the Delta and is the result of a federally mandated coordination of transportation services, public, private, and non-profit. Delta Area Rural Transit System (DARTS) is one agency of 17 that works as part of the Delta Rides group. DARTS started as a service for Aaron A Henry Community Health Services to provide rides for physicians' appointments. Once the federal mandate came along, and coordination became required to receive federal funding (5310 for transit, 5311 for elderly, etc.), DARTS expanded to include rides for other purposes: rides to casinos, rides for mentally challenged (Sephora), Medicaid broker, and others. DARTS serves the counties of Coahoma, Quitman, Panola, Tate, Desoto, and Tunica (North Delta).

Delta Rides meets every 4th Thursday from 10:30-11:30 to discuss gaps in transit and what resources and needs each agency has. DARTS is one of, if not the, only agency that provides maintenance and minor repairs for the fleets of the Delta Rides groups. Other shared resources among the Delta Rides agencies include vehicle sharing; marketing services; and technological services (not all agencies are transit providers). Bolivar County offers a "call center" for Delta Rides to transfer questions or requests for rides to appropriate agencies, but there is not really a true call center. DARTS gets a lot of calls directly. There is a 1-800 number established, but no designated Delta Rides staff.

There is a gap in that there is not one phone number that riders can call. Antoinette's vision is for a true call center – a one stop shop for information to help get clients on the correct and most efficient (for them and the agency) path for their transit needs.

Another gap is in-city pick-up and related infrastructure. Currently there are buses that ride up and down HWY 61. There used to be feeder buses that would meet the main bus at HWY 61 but it proved to be cost-prohibitive (a bus picking up one rider in a town to meet the main bus). Buses in the downtown areas of most cities in the Delta have a hard time navigating the city streets (no curb cuts/places to pull over, no pick-up shelters, no bus shelters).

The three main goals of Delta Rides, established during consistent monthly meetings, are marketing, technology, and driver recruitment and training. Marketing is underway in the form of rebranding as well as a new Facebook page for education,

announcements, and events. The goal is eventually to have ride information updated regularly on Facebook or an all-inclusive website. This bleeds into the technology goal, which also houses a desire to include wifi, outlets, and other amenities for the fleets of the agencies. The need for driver recruitment, the third goal, is pressing. Currently DARTS picks up 25-35 clients daily to transport them to health services under the Medicaid contracts. If they had enough drivers, that number would be closer to 55-65 to fulfill all the requests. Because DARTS is directly contracted with Medicaid, they cannot subcontract rides with other agencies. DARTS contracts to drive clients from their homes to doctors' appointments, sometimes to Memphis, Southaven, Oxford, Tupelo, Arkansas.

Yet another gap is having set schedules and pick-up locations. If someone wants a ride to a casino for work but must catch a ride to the pick-up location for the casino bus, that employee must start traveling hours before their shift. The transition of vehicle to vehicle, especially between different agencies, creates a gap in opportunity.

A hub would be beneficial in each county or area, a centralized pick-up location within walking distance to most riders. The hub, which may include a bus shelter, a shaded seating area, a safe spot for buses to pull over and for riders to wait, information kiosk with schedule or QR code to access information digitally, would enable a county-to-county transit system for all agencies to use.

Antoinette mentioned that using transit as a public amenity is not the culture around here. Some assume they have a personal taxi service to get from point A to point B, but do not realize the driver will have to pick up others on the way. Others simply do not know that this amenity exists. Delta Rides participates in several education events: National Transit Community Day in which it requires every agency to get out into the community and teach people about transit opportunities and the Annual Regional Group Workshop in which it meets with other regional transit groups to determine best practices.

Multiple studies have been done on the transit gaps in the Delta. DOT has done a study on 1-69, which was planned to link Tunica casinos to I-55. Other studies have been done and may be worth researching.

DARTS does not serve the communities of Cleveland, Merigold, and Mound Bayou, but does work with Bolivar County Council on Aging (BCCOA) under the Delta Rides umbrella.

Next steps would be to talk with someone with BCCOA and determine immediate gaps in our communities.

GENERAL TRIP MINUTES

Cleveland, Merigold, Mound Bayou Community Enhancement Hub

General Visit Notes

Location: Cleveland, Merigold, Mound Bayou

Dates: February 8-9, 2022

Time: N/A

Attendees: Fran Pharis, Architect, Small Town Center

Summary: In speaking with locals, no Ubers or Lyfts exist in Cleveland, but there is one taxi. People seem to walk everywhere. One local I spoke to lives in Cleveland, but his wife works in Merigold. He and his wife used to live in Merigold, and he gets the sense that most people living in Merigold work in Cleveland. He suspects this is due to real estate costs.

Spoke with a friend who works in economic development, she also used to be involved with Your Town Alabama. We discussed the rails-to-trails concept and establishing a century length trail utilizing the rail bed where able and including low traffic roads. The Delta is flat and is perfect for long cycling events. This event could easily be linked to the Blues Trail.

CLEVELAND, MS

1. **DELTA AREA RURAL TRANSIT SYSTEM (DARTS) (662) 624-5907**

Services - Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center, Inc. | aehchc.org

a. Operates 46 multi-passenger vehicles Monday- Friday that connect people with promising jobs, training opportunities, shopping centers, childcare centers, and human services agencies in Coahoma, DeSoto, Quitman, Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate, and Tunica Counties.

b. DARTS offers Dial-a-Ride service in Coahoma, Quitman, Tallahatchie, Tate, Panola, Desote and Tunica Counties. A 24-hour advance reservation is required. Fares vary with distance but are approximately:

Within City - $3-4 (one-way) plus $1 per extra stop

Within County - $7 (one-way)

Between Counties - Based on distance - these services will be coordinated between Delta Rides projects.

i. Growth has been contributed to by:

1. The expansion of the regional job market and the increased need for affordable employment transportation.
2. The proactive coordination of services with employment agencies, local employers, human service agencies, and potential customers.
3. The aggressive efforts to gain capital and operating funds from various organizations such as the Mississippi Department of Transportation and other local municipalities.

2. **BOLIVAR COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING, INC. (866) 562-6074**

Bolivar County Council On Aging, Inc. - Home | bccoatransit.org

a. A public non-profit 501(c)3 established to ensure that everyone has access to safe, reliable, efficient, and cost-effective transportation in the Mississippi Delta with a fleet that ranges from 6 to 25 passenger vehicles, including ADA accessible vehicles.

b. BCCOA operates several bus routes from Boliver and Sunflower counties to the Casino Strip employment area in Robinsonville. Buses serve three shifts at the Casinos: morning (7-8 a.m.), mid-day (3-4 p.m.) and late night (11 p.m.). Bus routes include:

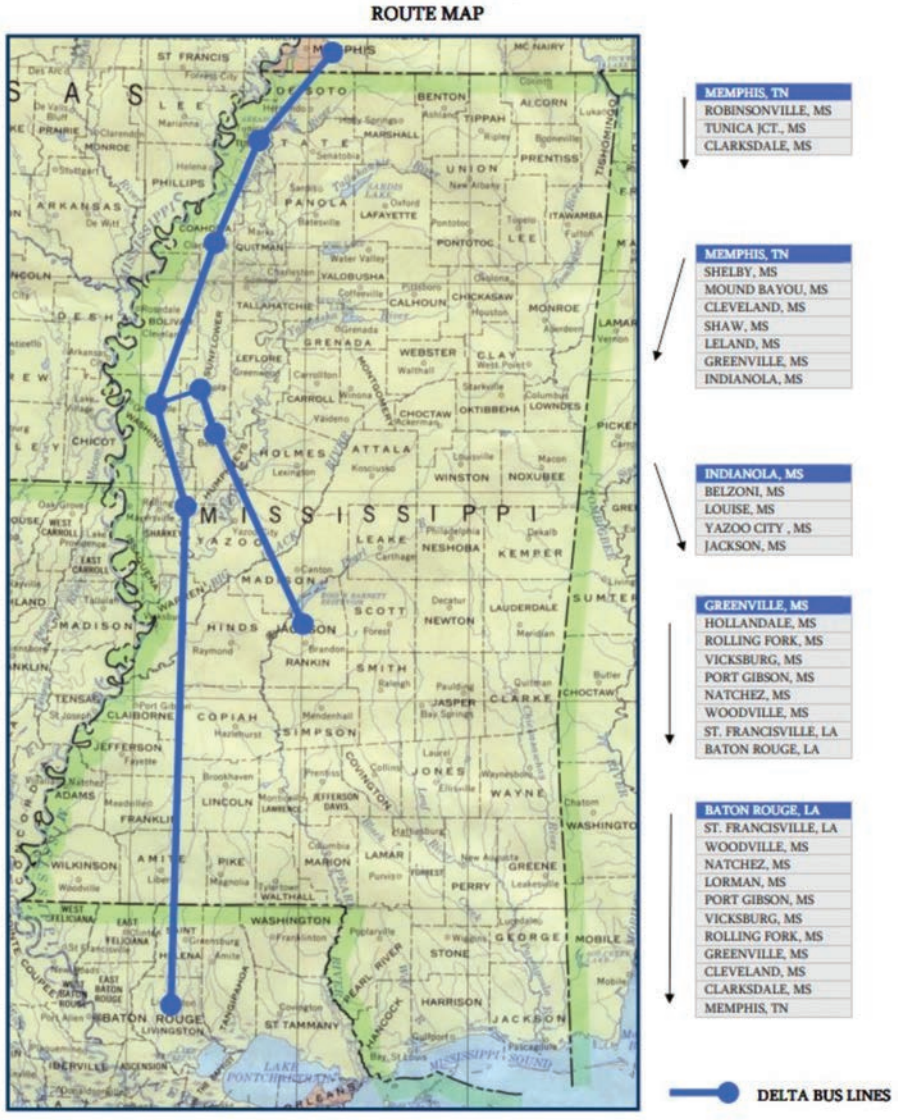
East Bolivar to Casino Strip - Bus stops in Cleveland, Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville and Shelby

Sunflower County to Casino Strip - Bus stops in Drew and Shelby

c. BCCOA provides employment transportation from Cleveland to the Mississippi Department of Corrections at Parchman. Buses arrive at Parchman at 7:50 a.m. and leave shortfly after 5:00 p.m. Bus stops are located in Cleveland, Renova, Merigold, Mound Bayou, Winstonville and Shelby.

3. DELTA BUS LINE (662) 627-7893

Services - Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center, Inc. | aehchc.org



4. CAB MCCAIN (662) 588-2564

Available 24/7

Airport transport, group events, ridesharing, long & short distance, day tours, night out, cooperate events, door to door service

5. UBERX

Uber Estimate - Get a Price Estimate in Your City | Uber

Estimated fare to Merigold: $14.03

Estimated fare to Mound Bayou: $18.83

6. LYFT

Lyft estimate from Cleveland to Merigold, Oxford, MS (2021-11-18)

lyftrideestimate.com

Estimated fare to Merigold:	*Estimated fare to Mound Bayou:*
$15-$18 (Regular)	*$18-$21 (Regular)*
$20-$25 (XL)	*$28-$32 (XL)*

MERIGOLD, MS

1. **BOLIVAR COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING, INC.** **(866) 562-6074**

2. **UBERX**

   Uber Estimate - Get a Price Estimate in Your City | Uber

   Estimated fare to Cleveland: $16.65

   Estimated fare to Mound Bayou: $8.96

3. **LYFT**

   Lyft estimate from Merigold to Cleveland, Oxford, MS (2021-11-18)

   lyftrideestimate.com

   Estimated fare to Cleveland:

   $15-$18 (Regular)

   $24-$28 (XL)

   Estimated fare to Mound Bayou:

   $10-$12 (Regular)

   $12-$15 (XL)

MOUND BAYOU, MS

1. **BOLIVAR COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING, INC.** **(866) 562-6074**

2. **UBERX**

   Uber Estimate - Get a Price Estimate in Your City | Uber

   Estimated fare to Cleveland: $21.47

   Estimated fare to Merigold: $8.96

3. **LYFT**

   Lyft estimate from Mound Bayou to Cleveland, Oxford, MS (2021-11-18)

   lyftrideestimate.com

   Estimated fare to Cleveland:

   $18-$21 (Regular)

   $30-$35 (XL)

   Estimated fare to Merigold:

   $9-$12 (Regular)

   $15-$18 (XL)

Bridging Brown County Case Study

Connecting Communities and Finding a Future

Summary and Background

Communities in the rural Midwest typically understand that they must evolve wisely to adapt to changes in agriculture-based economies, to globalization, and deal with demands on local government. However, traditional allegiances to home town—and even rivalries among towns—may not serve that goal.

Can traditionally disconnected communities be convinced to communicate, collaborate and solve unique issues facing rural communities? In Brown County, Minnesota, the community developed an organization committed to creating active citizen leaders and to connecting people and resources throughout the county. This organization, *Bridging Brown County (BBC)* has found a way to bridge cities and towns of different sizes and characters, link rural and urban interests, and create a vision for all of Brown County that will take them into the future.

Key Terms:

- ✔ **Leadership**
- ✔ **Civic Engagement Capacity**
- ✔ **Collaboration**
- ✔ **Networking**
- ✔ **Community Vitality**
- ✔ **Social Capital**

Brown County Demographics (2000)

County Population: 26,911
Largest City: New Ulm, pop. 13,594
Land area: 610.9 sq. mi.
Industries providing employment:
Manufacturing (23.4%),
Educational, health and social services (20.1%),
Retail trade (11.3%).
Median household income: $39,800

"Many of us think of our 'community' as only the town in which we live. But we also belong to a larger rural community: the community formed by all residents of Brown County. We are a neighborhood of communities that share common challenges and opportunities."

~ Katie Rasmussen

University of Minnesota Extension Service

History

A convergence of events and conversations highlighted to Katie Rasmussen, University of Minnesota Extension Educator, that "something wasn't working" among the towns in Brown County.

First, in 1998 a tornado caused severe damage in parts of the county. As Katie assisted groups and coordinated volunteers to assist in field clean up efforts in the communities of Hanska and Comfrey, she learned that many Brown County residents did not even know that Comfrey was located in Brown County!

Later, Katie dealt with a county fair board issue. People from the west side of the county were concerned that the board recruited only members from New Ulm—the largest city in the county. Meanwhile, she received a request from the fair board for recommendations of individuals from the west side of the county who might be interested in sitting on the board.

And then, a business owner from Springfield noted that no businesses from Springfield advertised in the *Brown County Reminder* (the county-wide newspaper.) Investigating this, Katie learned that a request for business addresses had been sent to Springfield City Hall, which replied with a letter saying that Springfield businesses only advertised in their local newspaper.

This convergence of events led Katie Rasmussen to convene an informal meeting of five individuals involved in the events to discuss the east/west and urban/rural divide. The group agreed that the divide was a problem, and discussed what they as individuals from different sides of the county envisioned as a different future for their communities and for the county as a whole.

This small group decided to share their vision with others. They recruited additional members by sponsoring a county-wide workshop supported by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation called "Working Collaboratively." The purpose of the workshop was to: 1) identify common issues or concerns in the county, and 2) explore future interest in developing a program that would create bridges across the towns of Brown County. Seventy-five (75) people attended, and over two-thirds identified a "top concern" that communication issues weakened relationships among the communities in Brown County. It was clear that a program to bring leaders of the communities could be successful.

The Organization

The vision of a connected county became an Extension educational program that later became an organization called *Bridging Brown County.* The BBC program involves representatives from the communities, private and public organizations, businesses, education, media, youth, retired citizens, elected officials from county, cities, school districts and townships and legislators. As of 2006, the organization has involved over 600 people, and has dramatically improved connections and shared vision throughout the county.

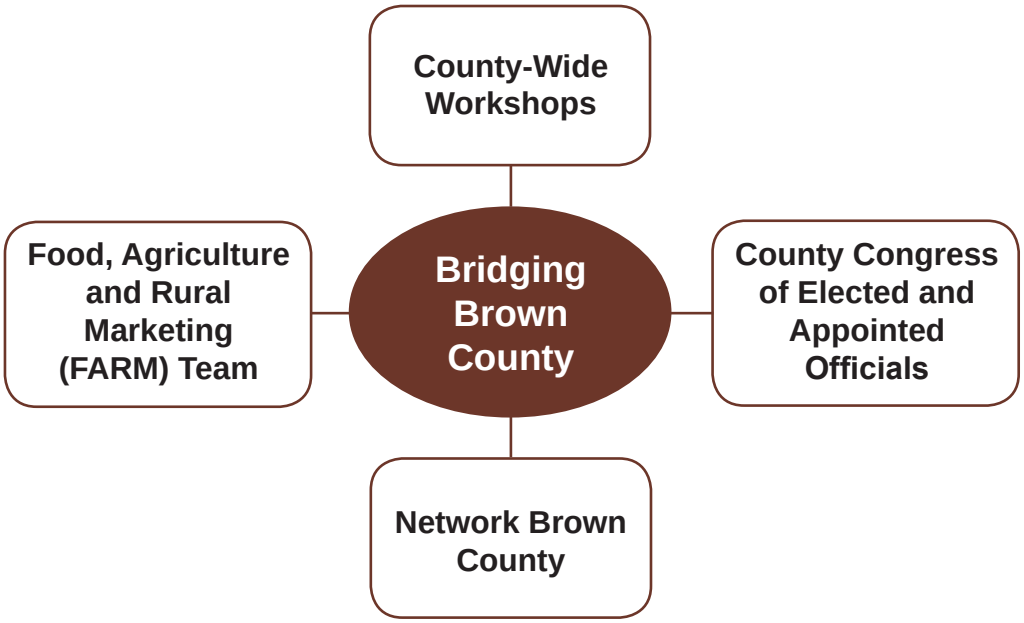
Bridging Brown County is led by a twelve-person board of directors selected to represent all geographical areas of the county. They meet regularly to share information, plan and implement the organization's many activities, identify issues and discuss future goals. The board is deliberate about having a diverse membership. When new associates are selected, age, gender, occupation and other connections are considered.

The goals of Bridging Brown County are:

1. To foster better communication among communities.
2. To raise awareness of the interdependency among communities.
3. To promote the county area's quality of life.
4. To support economic development throughout the county.
5. To nurture and support individual community traditions.

Program Components

Bridging Brown County's activities fulfill its mission: strengthening the Brown County community by bridging relationships of understanding and communication.



Strategy 1: Community Workshops

Community workshops are a cornerstone offering of Bridging Brown County. Workshops engage and educate citizens on a wide variety of issues. They provide knowledge that builds community capacity while they promote discussion, networking, sharing of resources and exchange between leaders and citizens. The table below provides a sampling of workshops in the Bridging Brown County Program.

Table 1. Sampling of workshop topics in Brown County

Workshop	Purpose
Looking Into the Future: Preparing for a Changing Workforce in Brown County	To consider how future trends will affect the county in the areas of housing, health care, education and agriculture.
Building Bridges in 'Rurban' Communities	Citizens explored how connections between rural and urban communities could create a more vital county.
From the Ground Up: Growing Local Products, Improving Local Economies and building Local Support	Issues discussed were the impact of buying local food and the challenges of local producers and consumers. A "food fair" followed the workshop to allow networking between producers and consumers.

The workshops result in more clarity about the county's issues and needs, expanded personal and professional networks and an increase in other countywide efforts. Evaluations showed that 89% of participants thought workshops helped the county identify and address issues.

Strategy 2: The County Congress of Elected and Appointed Officials

At the very first workshop, someone suggested that BBC gather all elected leaders for a forum. This was accomplished in May 2000—the first of many "Congress of Elected and Appointed Officials". Representatives from the county, cities, school districts and township associations were invited to discuss key issues affecting Brown County with local legislators.

The first event was a huge success. Twenty-eight officials and all five legislators that represented the county attended. The overwhelming consensus was that forums should be held quarterly so that officials can discuss issues of common concern. Since then, the participant list has expanded. It now includes the county administrator, the county board chairperson, city managers, city council chairpersons, mayors, city clerks, superintendents, school board chairpersons, youth representatives, township officers, Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors, economic development directors, local legislators, staff of congressional representatives and Bridging Brown County members.

Typically, thirty participants attend the forums. Forums in January and June provide a dialogue with the county's legislators before and after the year's legislative session. Forums in March and September provide knowledge and resources to address countywide issues.

Topics of past County Congress forums include:

- ✔ Legislative updates
- ✔ Identification of key issues to create a county wide legislative platform
- ✔ Demographic changes and their effect on the workforce
- ✔ Recruiting employees and retaining residents
- ✔ Economic development efforts in local communities
- ✔ Presentations by representatives of key organizations in the area such as the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, Region Nine and the Minnesota Valley Council of Governments
- ✔ Changing technology and the impact on workforce, education, housing and public services.

"Bridging Brown County has broken down barriers and taken away some of the competitiveness among communities. It also helps representatives of the various government units better understand each other's spending needs and financial challenges."

~ City Council President

The County Congress helped officials consider the perspectives of other jurisdictions, facilitated the sharing of important information and, ultimately, created a unified County agenda on legislative issues. Participants feel the program has increased community connectedness, created stronger relationships among officials and increased understanding across the county about current political issues, opportunities and challenges.

At least one citizen of Brown County believes that local government is more productive and responsive because of the County Congress. Officials involved feel they are now more progressive in looking to the future, better at networking to share recourses and find solutions and more knowledgeable about Brown County.

Results of the County Congress include:

- ✔ City managers meet monthly to discuss common issues
- ✔ City EDA directors collaborated on a JOBZ application for the county
- ✔ An all-Sleepy Eye Schools Committee was created to identify opportunities to work together
- ✔ The county board has voted in support of community specific projects (a city bike trail, use of the county dredge for a city lake)
- ✔ The county continues to fund the Bridging Brown County program despite a tight county budget

"We're developing a deeper understanding and empathy for the needs of other organizations and finding where we can partner together."

~ School Superintendent

Strategy 3: Network Brown County

Network Brown County is a leadership education program that brings together groups of 15–20 Brown County residents from a variety of communities and backgrounds for nine one-day sessions. Participants meet new people, discover new places in the county, gain personal and community leadership skills, build networks, broaden their knowledge of community resources and services and increase understanding and awareness of issues facing the county.

Beyond leadership education, the program offers visits to make more residents aware of some of the economic drivers of the county. Some of the businesses toured for the session in Brown County included Delmonte Foods, AMPI butter plant, Christensen Farms, Fredin Brothers Beef, Heartland CoOp, dairy operations, a turkey farm, and a tree nursery. Participants also are given materials from such agricultural groups as MN Soybean Growers, MN Corn Growers, MN Farm Bureau, Brown County Dairy Association, U of MN Extension Service, and others.

Strategy 4: The Food, Agriculture and Rural Marketing (FARM) Team

At a Blandin Foundation community leadership training that BBC brought to the area, participants were asked to identify an asset in the community that could be tapped to promote economic development. Agriculture was selected because it was an asset that had touched the lives of all the team members. The team set out to increase opportunities for local food producers to market their products and increase consumer awareness of the benefits of purchasing local products.

The activities of the FARM team are likely to increase revenue for farms on the team while they provide a higher profile for Brown County entrepreneurism.

- ✔ A marketing study of thirty producers and 300 commercial and residential consumers identified challenges and opportunities.
- ✔ A marketing brochure and web site listed local producers and farmers markets.
- ✔ *Ground to Gourmet* is an opportunity for community members to sample products from local producers in gourmet cooking and network with local producers. Ground to Gourmet has participated in 14 area community events.
- ✔ More than twenty young people marketed products at local farmers markets.
- ✔ An online farmers market is being created.

If Brown County households spent just $10 per month on local foods, $100,000 would stay in their local economy!

Other Bridging Brown County Activities

Bridging Brown County is involved in a number of other activities around the county:

- ✔ They supported the Brown County 150th Anniversary Task Force.
- ✔ They distributed over 1200 brochures marketing Brown County's quality of life.
- ✔ They promote countywide tourism.
- ✔ They maintain a website featuring Bridging Brown County activities and links to communities, schools, and resources.
- ✔ They've ushered in the Blandin Foundation's Community Leadership Programs.
- ✔ They produce semiannual newsletter covering Bridging Brown County events and providing information on collaboration and community building.

The Organization's Resources

A key element of the success Bridging Brown County is the large number of collaborative partnerships it has created among levels of government, the private sector, non-profits and individuals. The University of Minnesota Extension Service played a key role by providing educational workshops and training. The Blandin Foundation training has been essential to building the leadership capacity of Brown County citizens to assist in getting Bridging Brown County programs off the ground.

Support for Bridging Brown County

- ✔ Membership and tuition fees
- ✔ Funding from local governments – counties, townships and municipalities
- ✔ Grants for FARM Team projects
- ✔ Grant dollars for BBC projects
- ✔ Blandin leadership training (value of over $80,000)
- ✔ Volunteers – over 800 hours of work towards the organizations mission ($137,000 value to the county)
- ✔ Donations of goods & services
- ✔ Fundraising events

Funding is always an issue in sustaining such grassroots efforts. BBC generates its yearly budget every year through contributions from local governments, grants, and in-kind donations. **(See above)** In 2003, they added an annual fundraising dinner to the funding effort. This has become a special way to raise $5 – 10,000 by creating an event that brings the entire county together for fun. The dinner features locally grown foods, local chefs and celebrity waiters and waitresses (who serve as elected officials and business people during the day.) A tip competition among the celebrity waiters and waitresses add a lot of fun. They get tips by pulling pranks on tables—for example, stealing silverware and making guests pay to get it back. In turn, tables pay the celebrities for special favors and embarrassing performances.

Bridging Brown County Events Timeline

1999

April 29, 1999 – First Meeting

Propose mission, vision and goals; Work on funding and program ideas.

Bridging Brown County name selected

2000

First County-wide Workshop – "Working Collaboratively"

First County Congress of Elected and Appointed Officials – Legislative Update w/ local senators and representatives

Strategic Planning Session

2001

County Congress – Created County wide Legislative Platform

Web page up and running.

Workshop – "Dealing with Community Change"

2002

First Class attends Blandin Community Leadership Program

Workshop – "Preparing for a Changing Workforce"

2003

Initial 501c3 process and preparation of articles of incorporation

First class participates in Network Brown County Program

FARM Team starts work

2004

Certificate of Incorporation issued, Bylaws and Articles approved

Workshop – "Building Bridges in Urban Communities"

Program Assistant hired

First BBC Newsletter

Second class participates in Network Brown County

First annual fundraiser dinner

The event also has an auction of gift baskets which feature items donated from each of the communities. Two local groups provide musical entertainment for the guests throughout the evening. About 100 people are served at this annual event including the celebrity wait staff and musical guests.

Outcomes and Impacts

Evaluation of the leadership education activities in the program are evaluated by using the University of Missouri's Community Leadership Survey. The evaluation has shown that participants found that participants in the program:

- ✔ Scored high on the factors of civic engagement and shared future/purpose
- ✔ Experienced personal growth and a greater sense of being able to make a difference
- ✔ Obtained greater knowledge of needs, resources and policies in their community
- ✔ Felt better working together toward shared visions and purpose
- ✔ 44% took on an active role in at least one new organization
- ✔ 15% increase in leadership positions in their community

Specifically, participants report that, as a result of the program they

- ✔ Know the steps needed to obtain broad-based support
- ✔ Understand the importance of building agreement
- ✔ Have knowledge of local, county, and state resources
- ✔ Feel they have a good understanding of public issues
- ✔ Have a sense of mission
- ✔ Understand how new ideas are adopted
- ✔ Consider themselves to be well qualified for public issues
- ✔ Regard change as a source of vitality
- ✔ Move out of their comfort zone
- ✔ Aim to improve consensus-building skills
- ✔ Articulate a convincing vision of future of community
- ✔ Seek out different perspectives
- ✔ Use their leadership skills in different situations
- ✔ Improved their public speaking skills
- ✔ Know how to assess and tackle problems
- ✔ Have a strong sense of community ownership

Those involved in Bridging Brown County have observed that the real impact of the program as striving to improve the communication within the county. It is helping people to step outside of their box and get involved with their community. Many participants shared that they are proud of what the program has done for the county and proud to be part of it.

Direct results of the new community connections can be visibly seen throughout the community.

- ✔ The Brown County Historical Society and Veterans Services united to create a **WWII exhibit** that honors the entire county and attracts visitors.
- ✔ ProKinship and 4-H partnered to create **summer youth programming.**
- ✔ The community rallied to **donate furniture** to the Schoenstatt Retreat Center.
- ✔ In Springfield, a **youth mentoring program** started that engaged the entire county to work with youth.

These results, along with joint marketing efforts in business and joint decision-making in government, show the tangible results of five people gathering to solve a problem in 2002.

The Future: Facing Challenges and Keeping the Vision

While Bridging Brown County is an immensely successful program, it is not without challenges that must be overcome to maintain the vitality of the program.

- ✔ ***Resources:*** As of late, many government entities and non-profit organizations have experienced stagnant resource flows. This has greatly impacted Bridging Brown County in the amount of resources dedicated to the activities of the organization.
- ✔ ***Time:*** Time, whether that of volunteers or elected officials, is very precious and affects participation in Bridging Brown County events.
- ✔ ***Demographics:*** Demographic changes are presenting a specific challenge to Bridging Brown County since most of the traditional leaders in the community are baby boomers who are less likely to place high priority on long-term volunteer commitments.
- ✔ ***Awareness:*** Despite the success of the program, raising awareness of its offerings and benefits is still a challenge for the organization.
- ✔ ***U of MN Extension:*** Changes in the University of Minnesota Extension Services have reduced the amount of coordination time directed to Bridging Brown County. These lost resources stimulated more local volunteer time and the hiring of a part-time staff member.
- ✔ ***Staying within mission:*** As with any organization with a loosely defined mission of improving communication and leadership in the county, Bridging Brown County must be careful only to take on activities which it is capable of managing. It is tempting for outside entities to try to direct the activities and resources of the organization for alternate purposes.

Bridging Brown County has worked as a non-profit organization with established visions and goals.

Our Future Vision for Bridging Brown County:

- ✔ A group that is well known to all communities … that any community feels free to use as a contact point
- ✔ A group that continues to be a conduit for springing ideas and merging concepts. An incubator for collaborative projects
- ✔ In 2010, BBC will be a one stop shop for leadership, community projects and one voice speaking for the entire county with input from a cross section of its citizens
- ✔ Developing leaders throughout the county communities that always look how to collaborate with the other communities
- ✔ Provides a forum for discussion of issues that affect multiple communities or multiple sectors
- ✔ Hub for information exchange and collaboration
- ✔ Resource of diverse information, people, go to for ideas
- ✔ BBC will be a support group, a resource group, with a large membership
- ✔ The organization that elected leaders look to get the input from both citizens and government entities
- ✔ BBC will have become a model that is replicated by others.

"With redistricting and reduced representation in many rural areas, it's more important than ever for an entire county to set priorities and speak with a unified voice on legislative issues."

~ State Senator Dennis Frederickson

Future Goals:

- ✔ Foster a collaborative group each year
- ✔ Launch a massive campaign for citizens to learn about the organization (i.e. host community coffees, advertising, radio spots, create a BBC voice)
- ✔ Start a Network Brown County for youth
- ✔ Focus on increasing interest and quality in the County Congress of Elected and Appointed Officials
- ✔ Promote Brown County Tourism
- ✔ Project to support local businesses
- ✔ Expand the County Congress to the general public
- ✔ Farm Team creates an on-line purchasing

Bridging Brown County

Conclusion and Advice to Communities

Community members involved in Bridging Brown County believe that several elements have made the initiative successful. They point to how a need in the community was identified and a solution was created. In the early stages, movers and shakers in Brown County were identified and involved in the organization, but so were ordinary citizens. Bridging Brown County generated enthusiasm from the group's activities. Community members also point to the importance of having someone whose job it was to keep the organization going. Despite a great deal of community support, having someone constantly tending to the organizational needs and keeping the group focus and moving toward their goals was vital to the rapid growth and viability of the organization. This function was filled by Extension, but could be done by any local coordinator or organization in other communities.

Bridging Brown County is an initiative that has united a county, created a shared vision, nurtured leadership, encouraged communication and enhanced the resources of individual communities. The creators and supporters of Bridging Brown County have shown that creativity, resourcefulness and collaboration go a long way in developing a cohesive community. While there are still challenges ahead, Bridging Brown County has impressive plans for expansion and exciting goals for future activities to serve the needs of Brown County.

Those involved with Bridging Brown County note that the program was a cost effective way to put together forums, programs and opportunities that benefited the whole county. Their advice to a community attempting to build a similar program would be:

- ✔ "Take it step by step and not stretch resources too thin."
- ✔ "Don't take on every request, focus on the key goal and get your mission statement out there."
- ✔ "Look at values and goals…"
- ✔ "It is important to invest in your community."

For educational programming on these subjects, contact Extension and visit us at: www.extension.umn.edu/community.

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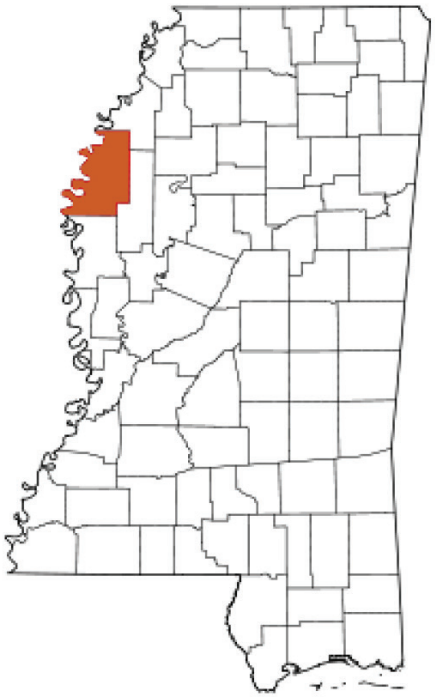
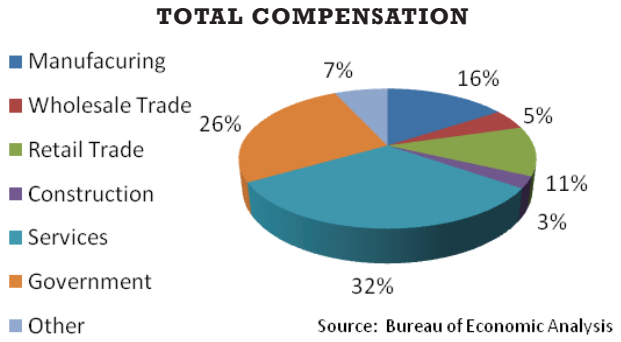
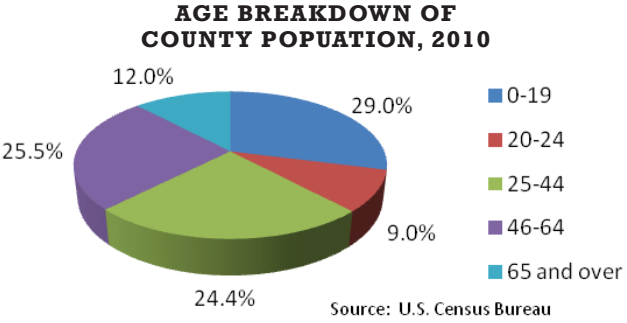
Bridging Brown County

BOLIVAR COUNTY PROFILE





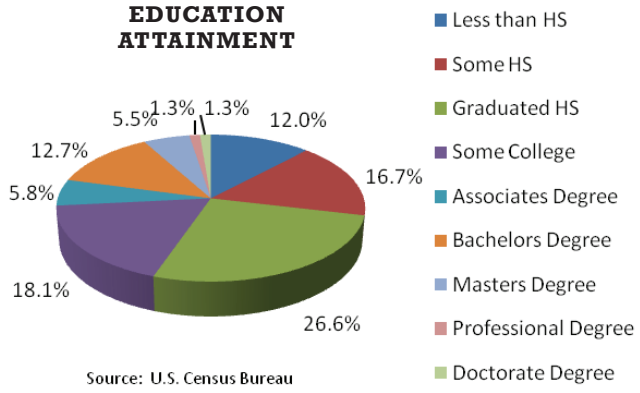


DISTANCE FROM CLEVELAND

Select Cities	Distance	
Atlanta, Georgia	424 miles	648 km
Chicago, illinois	642 miles	1,035 km
Dallas, Texas	429 miles	692 km
Jackson, Mississippi	121 miles	195 km
Memphis, Tennessee	110 miles	177 km
New Orleans, Louisiana	317 miles	511 km

POPULATION

Area	1990	2000	2005	2010
Cleveland	15,370	13,841	12,818	12,334
Bolivar County	41,836	40,633	38,641	34,145



LARGEST EMPLOYERS IN BOLIVAR COUNTY

Employer	Number of Employees	Type of Business
Baxter Healthcare	750	Manufacturing; Pharmaceuticals
Delta State University	600	Higher Education
Cleveland School District	584	Education
Bolivar Medical Center	430	Hospital
Faurecia Automotive Seating	360	Manufacturing; Automotive
Bolivar County Community Action Agency	230	Various programs; including Head Start
JANTRAN	240	River Barging
Jimmy Sanders, Inc.	240	Agricultural Seeds and Chemicals
Cives Steel	145	Fabricated Structural Steel
Needle Specialty Products	138	Manufacturing; Medical Devices
PharMEDium Services	138	Pharmaceuticals

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