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## Students' plans for Biloxi unveiled

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BILOXI -- "Innovative" and "refreshing" were some of the words heard to describe the new plans for East Biloxi; others who attended Tuesday's meeting said they just want residents back instead of a golf course and more casinos.

Students from Mississippi State University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology presented their proposals for rebuilding the northeast corner of the Back Bay and Point Cadet at the Salvation Army dome. The project they'd worked on since January explained how maximizing wetlands and bayous and minimizing development in those areas will benefit the city.

"We didn't necessarily say 'don't build'

" in certain low-lying areas, said MIT graduate student Molly Mowery. Their intent is for the city to look at these areas and consider leaving them undeveloped.

One of the most innovative of the students' ideas is to move the connector road from the proposed locations on Pine or Oak Street east to the waterfront. This final link of the loop around East Biloxi they termed "Casino Boulevard," and said it would follow the waterfront then turn west of Palace Casino before connecting to U.S. 90.

"Part of the reason to create this loop connector is to give access to casinos," said MIT student Kathleen Ziegenfuss. The elevated road would be built to the same level as elevated entrances to proposed casinos in that area and provide space underneath for parking. A Ferris wheel and a natural beach between the road and the water would to "provide relief from the buildings and density," said Ziegenfuss, along with a mini-golf course, driving range and open space to the west of the casinos.

"It's the type of space that could be looked after by the casinos as opposed to the city," she said.

They also looked at whether the location of the waterfront road would have an impact on the 800-foot rule for onshore casinos. "Our understanding is any right of way that you create, road or public access, would be excluded," Ziegenfuss said.

There are also plans for a grocery store, and a mixture of affordable multifamily housing and upscale waterfront homes.

"I think it's a great effort," said Biloxi resident Mike Hutter, although he would like to see cooperation between the students and the groups planning to develop commercial areas on Pine and Oak Streets.

Councilman Bill Stallworth liked the idea of moving the road to the east and making it a scenic boulevard. "This becomes a place for residents and tourists alike. The challenge is to get something going."

With the students' design, "The waterfront belongs to the public," said David Hardy of Guild Hardy Architects. The students looked at other plans and brought a fresh approach, he said. "I'm thoroughly impressed," and he would like to see some of their plans included in Biloxi's comprehensive plan. "It would be a true loss to not take advantage of it."

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**Plan highlights**

Connect opportunities along the waterfront by sharing amenities and access.

Increase housing for both local and seasonal residents.

Ensure successful economic future for working waterfront.

Develop walking, jogging and biking trails.

Link bayous to existing elementary schools.

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