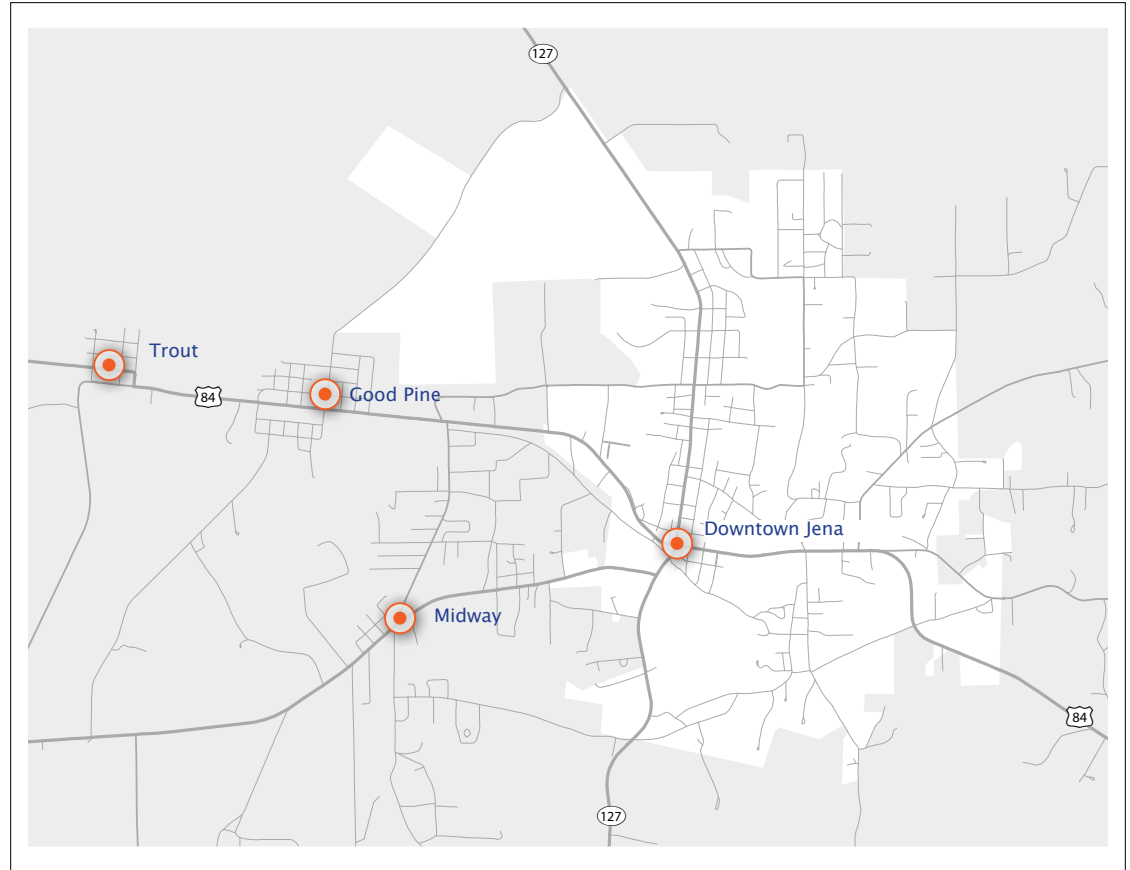
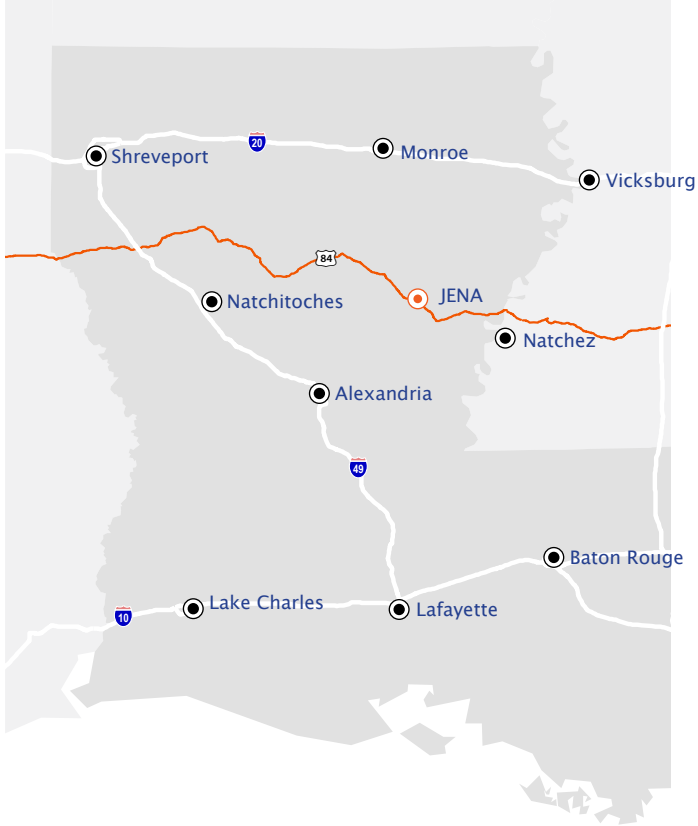




# 1. History and Context

Context Maps: Jena, Louisiana and surrounding communities.



## Introduction

The Town of Jena, the seat of LaSalle Parish, is a community of over 3,000 residents located in Central Louisiana one hour northeast of Alexandria and one hour south of Monroe. Like other towns in the region, Jena was an agrarian community which grew up on timber harvesting and then shifted to oil and gas production in the 1920's.

Recent growth in the region has been significant. Jena has experienced spillover growth from Alexandria and Monroe and many residents continue to work in these places. Jena is a community with great opportunity—the oil and gas industry in the area is growing, Highway 84 is anticipated to be widened to four lanes, and the unemployment rate remains one of the lowest in the state. The expansion of Highway 84 into a four-lane road will increase the area's evacuation capacity by providing a parallel roadway to the Interstate system. The expanded roadway will be a challenge during construction, but will provide a significant opportunity for additional commercial and industrial growth, along with the accompanying residential growth.

Like many rural Louisiana communities, Jena currently has no official plan to guide future growth. Therefore, Town leaders have decided to create a town wide plan that can be used to guide future development and foster economic growth.

This town wide plan is a blueprint for how Jena will change and grow over time. The plan is intended to be both aspirational and inspirational, describing what Jena hopes to become as the Town moves into the 21st century. The plan is intended to inspire residents and business owners to get involved in this process, working together rather than at cross purposes, setting the tone for attracting new development, offering a higher level of predictability for landowners, and greater level of protection for residents.

Jena residents helped guide the development of this plan, and it reflects their local knowledge, expertise, and vision for the future of their Town. The plan uses illustrations, pictures and maps to lay out the future. The plan, in itself, is not regulatory. Fundamentally, it is a guide for future decision

making, providing elected officials with direction as they make future decisions.

Before the project began, Town representatives formulated the following planning goals:

- Maintain small town and rural character;
- Identify the appropriate type and form of infill for downtown;
- Determine the future alignment of Highway 84;
- Preserve the natural environment, link community open spaces;
- Promote mixed income and mixed housing opportunities;
- Create a physical planning framework to guide future growth; and
- Provide a vision that the community can achieve.

## The Past

In century's past, the landscape around present-day Jena was thick with Long Leaf Pine trees, its soil enriched by streams which crisscrossed the land. Horse trails known as bridle paths were part of a vast trading network linking Native American settlements further east and west.

The Caddo, a Native American group, lived in the French Forks community in the early 1800's and hunted turkey and deer in the pine hills. The Caddo did not have a strong presence in the area and were soon eclipsed by the Choctaw Indians and other settlers.

In 1797, a family by the name of Hemphill was granted a large, irregularly shaped parcel by the Spanish governor. Strangely, the family never took control of the land, but the area was named after them anyway, alternately called Hemphill Creek, Hemp Creek, or Hemp's Creek. In 1802, an entrepreneur named Matthew Stone claimed the land, either by purchasing it or appropriating it. Stone began a successful real estate business in Hemp's Creek, selling land and attracting businesses to service the growing population. The people who

settled in the region were known as the Bible Readers and also as the Piney Woods Dwellers.

In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase added a vast and mostly uncharted territory to the United States and increasing numbers of white settlers began crossing the Mississippi River in search of lands to claim as their own.

The Choctaw arrived in the region in the 1820's, having been forced from their lands in Mississippi by a treaty. In 1832, another treaty began the Trail of Tears, a policy forcing the Choctaw and other tribes from the Southeast all the way to Oklahoma. On their march westward, Chief Lefleurs and a few other leaders split off from their group with a band of about 200, evading authorities and settling just to the west of present-day Jena, a sparsely populated area at the time. The Choctaw traded with the settlers, but remained largely separate from others in the community. They were known for their baskets, made from switch cane and dyed with bright colors.



Corner Oak Street and First Street, circa 1920s.



Corner of First Street and Oak Street, circa 1930's. Corner Drug Store in the foreground, Post Office located behind.



Corner of First Street and Oak Street, circa 1930's. Corner drug store location now occupied by Jena Pharmacy. Bank of Jena shown across the street, one of few buildings from this era still standing.



Street work in Jena, early 1900's.



First Street, 1914. Wright's General Store is visible at left, and the Bank of Jena, founded in 1906, is visible to the right.



LaSalle Courthouse, shortly after its completion following the division of Catahoula Parish in 1910.

Settlers in the area spent much of their time farming. They raised cows and hogs, maintained fruit trees, grew sweet potatoes, sugar cane, beans, peas, and other produce. They received a modest income from their cattle and from the sale of cotton. Families bought and traded for the items which they couldn't produce themselves. In the 1850's, Benjamin Baker constructed a water mill on Hemp's Creek about three miles south of present-day Jena. The mill was set up to make corn meal and gin cotton.

In addition to farming and tending livestock, there were three other occupations available in the early 1800's—logging, stave making, and delivering pine knots to steamboat landings.

By 1850, some logging operations had begun around Catahoula Lake and its feeder streams. Logging was a specialized enterprise with some men felling the trees, others clearing out hauling lanes, and others hauling timbers to a place with good stream access so they could be rolled down to the water.

In 1871, the Post Office Department requested the elimination of "creek" or "bayou" from the names of all post offices. A visitor from Jena, Illinois suggested renaming Hemp's Creek after his hometown. The idea was accepted and Hemp's Creek was officially rechristened "Jena." Jena incorporated as a town in 1906.

William Buchanan had made a fortune from timber operations in Arkansas when he shifted his interests to rail construction. Buchanan upgraded and added rail lines to service his timber operations, eventually completing the Louisiana & Arkansas Rail system connecting Hope, Arkansas to Shreveport, Louisiana. The first train arrived in Jena in 1903, and the Jena depot was completed in 1904.

Around the same time, Buchanan expanded his timber operations in North Central Louisiana, eventually opening six sawmills in the state. In the Jena area, the Trout Lumber Company was established in 1904, followed by Good Pine, and Tall Timber, all west of Jena along the rail line and Highway 84. These mills offered relatively high wages of \$1.50



Looking South on 2nd Street to intersection with Highway 84 in downtown.



Downtown Jena, looking west on Highway 84. Men are standing in front of present day Honeycutt Drug Store.



Hotel Melba and Bill's Cafe in downtown Jena

to \$1.75 per day, which attracted able-bodied men throughout the region. Sawmill workers lived in company houses, paying \$6-8 per month for their board. In addition, the company ran a commissary, where workers could buy food and other items, often for inflated prices.

The sawmills and railroad worked in tandem to produce and ship massive amounts of lumber. Meanwhile, family farms struggled and sawmills eagerly bought up surrounding properties. An ad valorem tax passed by the Louisiana legislature made it more profitable to clear cut the land, leading to the removal of Long Leaf Pine forests.



Aerial photo of Trout Creek Lumber Company in full production.

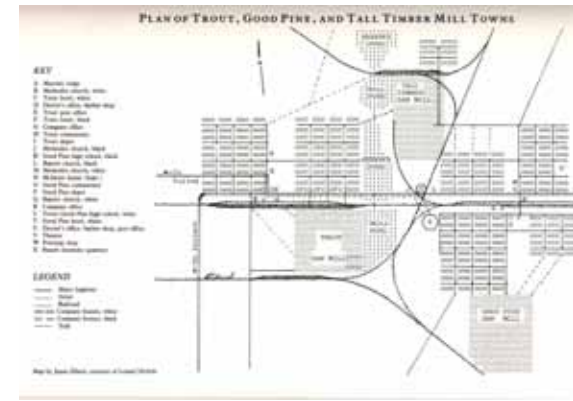
In 1910, Catahoula Parish was divided in two. The western portion became LaSalle and the eastern half remained Catahoula. Reasons for the division included the large size of the original parish, inconvenience for western residents in reaching the parish seat at Harrisonburg, as well as perceived differences in the interests of the hilly western region versus the river-rich eastern region.

In 1920, Lula V. Coleman was appointed Mayor of Jena, the first woman in the state to hold this office. By the mid 1920's, supplies of wood from the region's forests were nearly exhausted, and timber barons sold their land to entrepreneurs searching



Good Pine Lumber Company's headquarters and mill, circa 1920's, the current site of the LaSalle Parish Museum.

for oil. Foremost among them was H.L. Hunt, who spearheaded operations in Tullos and Olla following the discovery of oil north of Tullos in 1925. Hunt came from the Texarkana region and brought several staff members with him. As the oil and gas business grew, Hunt became a major employer in the parish. The oil industry has continued production to this day, making it an industry of lasting importance to the region.



Historic plan for Trout and Good Pine. Taken from "Southern Timberman: the Legacy of William Buchanan," by Archer Mayor.

## Previous and Ongoing Planning Efforts

In January 2007, the Town utilized the services of Doug Reed and Gary Hilderbrand from Reed Hilderbrand and Kurt Culbertson from Design Workshop to draft a series of recommendations that would help set the framework for future town wide planning efforts. The team of consultants worked with the Mayor and group of stakeholders during a three-day workshop to prepare the plan. The result of their efforts was “Planning for Smart Growth,” a report setting future guidelines for growth and preservation in the community. Several recommendations from the report have been further explored in this plan:

- Downtown and the expansion and realignment of Highway 84;
- Housing patterns and opportunities; and
- Acquisition of open space with the goal of a contiguous network of greenways.

Over the past several years, state and federal agencies have collaborated on planning for the expansion of Highway 84, which currently runs

through downtown Jena. Highway 84 is part of a major transportation route called the El Camino East/West Corridor that runs across the entire southern United States, from El Paso, Texas at the U.S./Mexico border to Brunswick, Georgia on the Atlantic coast. Over the years, numerous towns and communities have formed along this route. Since the construction of the Interstate system in the 1960’s, these communities have seen a decline in population and economic activity. Consequently, a five state commission was formed in an attempt to reverse this trend by developing the entire El Camino East/West Corridor into a higher speed, four lane facility. To date, approximately 75% of the route has either been four-laned or has designated funding for construction of a four-lane roadway.

In Louisiana, the El Camino East/West Corridor begins at the Texas state Line on LA 6, and follows LA 6 to Clarence. From Clarence, the El Camino Corridor follows Highway 84 through Winnfield, Tullos, Jena, Jonesville, Ferriday and on to the Mississippi state line at Vidalia.

The consulting firm of Shaw Environmental has been hired by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of a four-lane facility from LA 772 through downtown Jena to the Hair Creek bridge. Four possible alignments have been determined and are currently in the environmental analysis and feasibility stage.

