

The Leaf and Bouie River Development District

Where the seventy acres sit inside the District boundary established by Mississippi House Bill 1649 (2020).

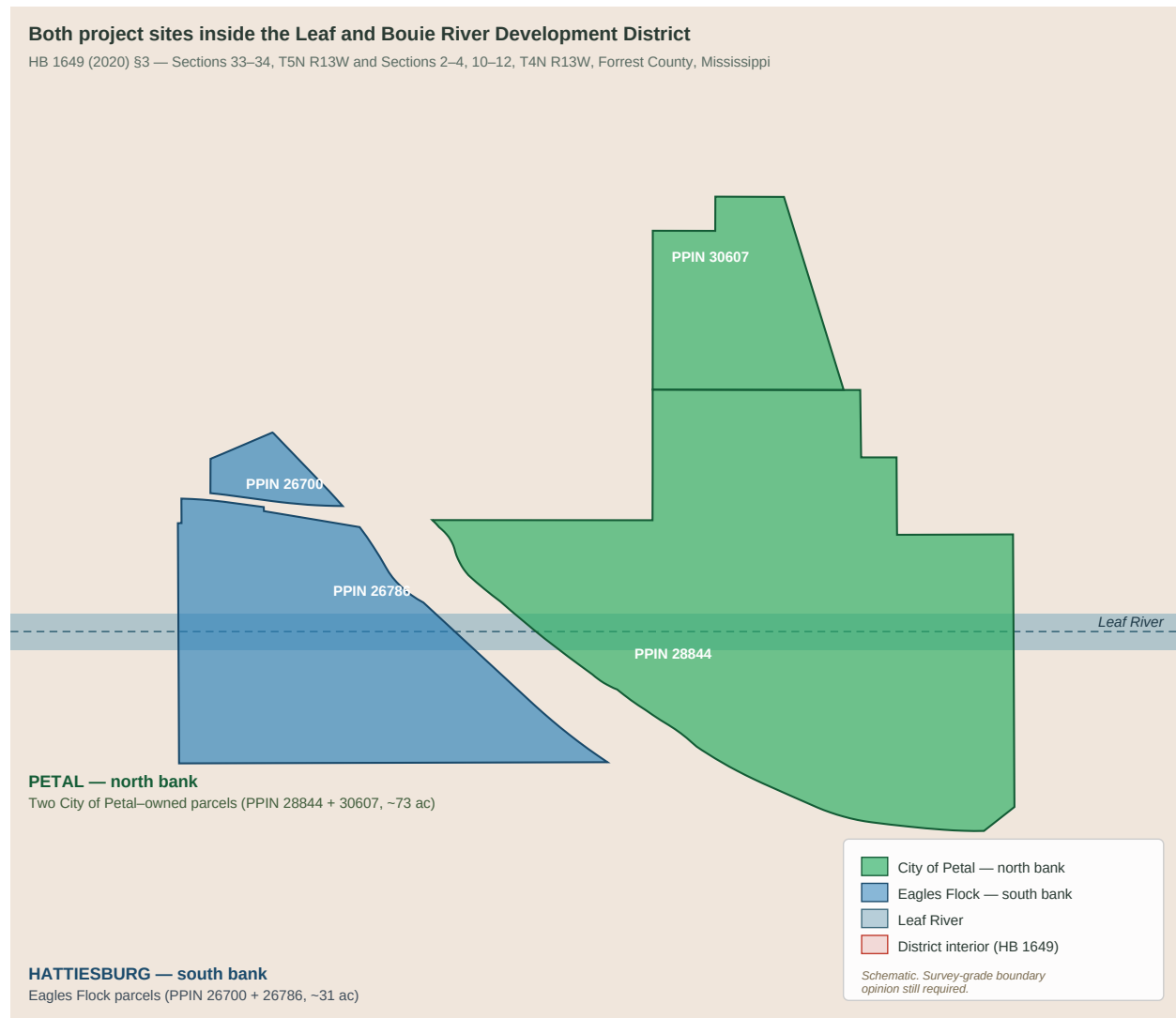


Figure 1. Site-level check. Both project sites lie inside the Leaf and Bouie River Development District as defined by HB 1649 §3 (Sections 33–34, T5N R13W and Sections 2–4, 10–12, T4N R13W, Forrest County). The Petal-side parcels (PPIN 28844 and 30607, ~73 acres, north bank) are the Gardens at Petal site. The Hattiesburg-side parcels (PPIN 26700 and 26786, ~31 acres, south bank) are Eagles Flock. The red wash indicates the District interior. Schematic only — a survey-grade boundary opinion from a Mississippi-licensed surveyor is still required.

What the District Is and How It Works

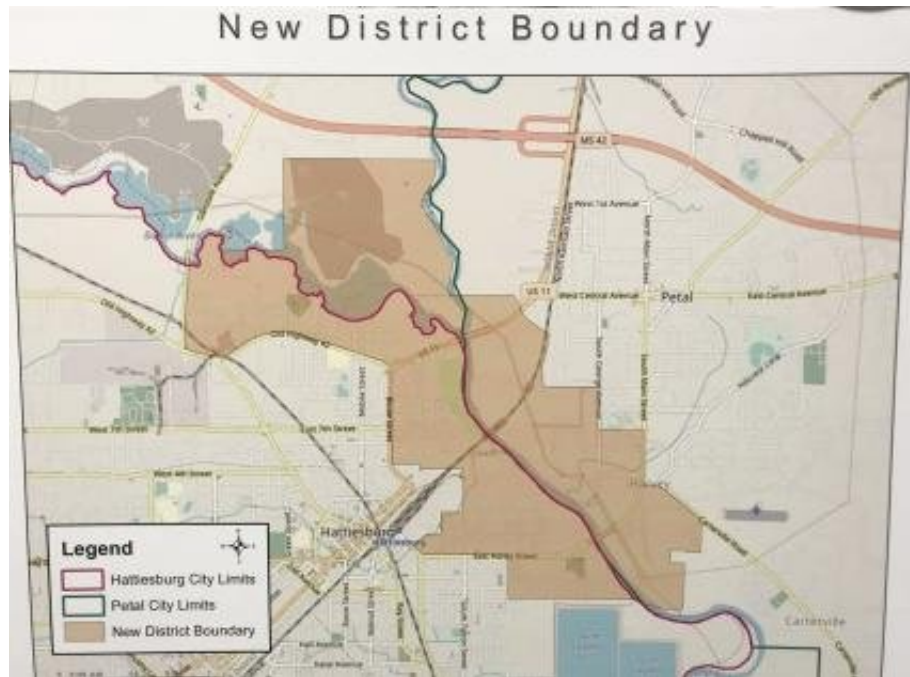


Figure 2. Published district boundary map circulated by the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal (source: Hub City Spokes). Red-orange outline shows the District covering both cities and adjacent Forrest County land along the Leaf and Bouie River corridor.

1. What the District is

The Leaf and Bouie River Development District is a Mississippi public-finance instrument created by **House Bill 1649 of the 2020 Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature**. The bill was introduced by the Forrest County legislative delegation and passed both chambers in the 2020 session. The Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal and the Forrest County Board of Supervisors were each authorized to adopt the District by order entered on their respective minutes. They did so in 2020, and the District has been in place since.

In plain terms: the District is a cooperative funding mechanism that lets Hattiesburg, Petal, and Forrest County share in the redevelopment of the Leaf River and Bouie River corridor where the two cities meet. It is not a separate taxing authority in its own right. It is a structure under which the three member authorities can each elect, year by year, to redirect a portion of the ad valorem (property) tax they already collect from inside the District back into the District for redevelopment.

2. Member authorities and governance

Per HB 1649 §4, the District is governed by three delegates from each member authority, with one vote each:

- The Mayor of the City of Hattiesburg (or designee)
- The Mayor of the City of Petal (or designee)
- The Chair of the Forrest County Board of Supervisors (or designee)

Decisions about the use of shared resources collected from inside the District are made by these delegates collectively. The District may receive and expend revenues from any source — private investment, federal and state grants, and revenues generated within its boundaries.

3. The funding mechanism — what HB 1649 actually authorizes

Section 2(3) of HB 1649 contains the operational language. Verbatim from the bill as passed:

"The City of Hattiesburg, the City of Petal, and Forrest County is authorized, in their discretion, to divert a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of ad valorem taxes collected from within the boundaries of the District with the option of contributing up to one hundred percent (100%) of ad valorem, sales tax or other taxes collected from within the boundaries of the District as determined annually by each member authority... Proceeds of the collections from within the boundaries of the District shall not be considered by each member authority as general fund revenues, but shall be dedicated solely for the purpose of the redevelopment of the District. These funds shall be used for the recreation, infrastructure, planning and other investments that enhance the economic viability and quality of life of those areas within the boundaries of the District."

Three points worth noting:

- **Minimum 15%, ceiling 100%.** Each member authority decides its own contribution rate annually. The 15% is a floor. They can go up to 100% of ad valorem — and the language extends to sales tax and other taxes — if they choose.
- **Not general revenue.** Whatever is collected and contributed inside the District is fenced from each member authority's general fund and dedicated to redevelopment within the District.

- **Allowed uses are broad.** Recreation, infrastructure, planning, and other investments that enhance economic viability and quality of life. A botanical garden, canopy streets, a parallel pier, stormwater infrastructure, a flood-warning system, and a walkable village center all fit cleanly inside that list.

4. The boundaries — where the District is

Section 3 of HB 1649 sets out the boundary by metes and bounds. The District covers parts of:

- Sections 33 and 34 of Township 5 North, Range 13 West, and
- Sections 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, and 12 of Township 4 North, Range 13 West,
- all in Forrest County, Mississippi.

In practical terms, this is the Leaf River / Bouie River corridor where the two cities meet — the stretch that includes Hattiesburg's existing Bouie riverfront and the Petal riverfront directly across from it, plus adjacent county land.

The southern boundary line, which is the most relevant constraint for site-level checks, follows section lines through Section 11 (T4N R13W) and adjacent sections. Specifically, the metes-and-bounds description anchors on the "North Line of the South Half of the South Half of Section 11" as the southern District line in that area.

5. Where The Gardens at Petal sit inside the District

The proposed seventy-acre Gardens at Petal site is on the **Petal side of the Leaf River**, immediately across from the Hattiesburg-side parcels (the Eagles Flock site, PPIN 26786 and 26700) that have been independently confirmed as inside the District in earlier mapping work. The Petal site is on Petal-owned riverfront land within the same corridor and section grid that HB 1649 defines as the District.

That confirmation is illustrated in two figures retained in the project file:

- A **published district boundary map** circulated by the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal (source: Hub City Spokes), showing the District outlined in red-orange across both cities and adjacent Forrest County land.
- A **site-level boundary check** at Section 11, T4N R13W, showing the District's southern line and the parcels on both banks lying north of it.

A formal survey and a written boundary opinion from a Mississippi-licensed surveyor are still needed to memorialize the Petal-side parcels' exact relationship to the §3 metes-and-bounds line. The ordinary expectation, given the parcels' location on the Petal riverfront within the named sections, is inclusion. Section 5 below describes the practical effect either way.

6. What this means for the project

The four-layer financing structure described on petal.nsgia.com is built around the District as its first layer:

- **The District (existing).** As the seventy acres develop and the parcels' assessed value rises from raw-land to developed-residential, the ad valorem revenue inside the District rises with it. The three member authorities can each elect, annually, to divert from 15% up to 100% of that uplift back into the District — to fund the streets, the stormwater system, the parallel pier, the public garden, and other infrastructure that supports the redevelopment.

- **Master Homeowners Association.** Resident dues for residential common-area operations.
- **Friends of The Gardens Endowment.** An independent 501(c)(3) for the botanical garden, on the Crosby Arboretum / Shangri La pattern.
- **Garden operating revenue.** Admissions, events, programs, plant sales, plus tourism dollars to the village merchants.

The District is not a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district in the technical sense — it does not by itself bond against future tax revenue. It is a **cooperative tax-diversion authority**. The mechanical effect is similar at the project level: a portion of the ad valorem uplift produced by redeveloping land inside the District is reinvested into the District rather than absorbed into the cities' and county's general funds.

7. Sources

- Mississippi House Bill 1649 of the 2020 Regular Session, as introduced and as passed. Source: Mississippi Legislature, Bill Status System.

- As passed:
<https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2020/html/HB/1600-1699/HB1649PS.htm> - As introduced: <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2020/html/HB/1600-1699/HB1649IN.htm>
 - PDF: <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2020/pdf/HB/1600-1699/HB1649PS.pdf>

- *"Hattiesburg, Petal and Forrest Co. approved to move forward with river district,"* WDAM-TV, 16 July 2020. Quoting Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker: *"We want both sides of the river to be an economically viable destination. We both have a shared interest in what happens either on the Hattiesburg side and the Petal side."*
- Published district boundary map circulated by the Cities of Hattiesburg and Petal, originally reported via Hub City Spokes.
- Section-level boundary check from the BLM National PLSS CadNSDI section geometry and HB 1649 §3 metes-and-bounds description.

8. What still needs to be done

- A licensed Mississippi surveyor's written boundary opinion confirming the Petal seventy-acre parcels lie within the District as defined in HB 1649 §3.
- Formal letters from each member authority (Hattiesburg, Petal, Forrest County) stating the contribution percentage they intend to apply to the District for the next fiscal year.
- A licensed appraiser's opinion of post-development assessed value, and an assessor confirmation on millage and assessment ratios, to convert the District's structural authority into actual dollar projections.

Prepared for the petal.nsgia.com reference library. This document summarizes a state law and prior public reporting; it is not itself legal or financial advice. Quotations from HB 1649 are taken from the bill as it appears on the Mississippi Legislature's public Bill Status System.
