



PORT LAVACA PARKS & RECREATION MASTER PLAN

MAY 2026

CITY OF PORT LAVACA, TEXAS

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Welcome To

INTRODUCTION + PLAN CONTEXT

The Port Lavaca Parks and Recreation Master Plan serves as a comprehensive guide for shaping the future of the city's parks, recreation, and trails. Initiated in May 2024, this Plan provides direction for future improvements, investments, and budgetary decisions to ensure long-term success. This document outlines a vision for a well-connected, accessible, and sustainable parks and recreation system.

As Port Lavaca's needs evolve, the City must take a proactive approach to its parks and recreation planning. This plan ensures that Port Lavaca's park system continues to meet current demands while positioning the community for a vibrant, resilient future.



PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

GUIDING PORT LAVACA...

This plan prioritizes placemaking strategies in parks that support quality of life, economic vitality, and fiscal responsibility. By enhancing public spaces, expanding programmatic offerings, and cultivating vibrant events, Port Lavaca will strengthen the local sense of place. Additionally, prioritizing coastal preservation efforts ensures the natural beauty of Port Lavaca will be enjoyed for generations to come.

Port Lavaca's current Parks and Recreation System includes pocket parks, community parks, trails, and public facilities. Through strategic investment and collaboration, Port Lavaca is building a parks system that reflects its values—supporting a high quality of life, celebrating natural beauty, and creating inclusive spaces for the whole community.

The primary objectives of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan are to:

- Enhance the quality of life for all current and future residents by providing exceptional recreational opportunities and green spaces.
- Preserve and protect the natural landscape, while expanding accessibility and building community resilience.
- Expand connectivity and access through trails and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Encourage economic growth through recreational tourism, public-private partnerships, and innovative funding strategies.
- Strengthen community identity and vitality through high-quality park programming and special events.



PLAN ALIGNMENT WITH REGIONAL + STATE PRIORITIES

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

The Port Lavaca Parks and Recreation Master Plan aligns with key priorities outlined in several Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) strategic documents.

The 2024 TPWD Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan provides statewide goals for park expansion, ecological conservation, and sustainable development, while the TPWD R3 Strategic Plan emphasizes public engagement, accessibility, and community-led recreation programs to increase outdoor participation.

Research from TPWD economic and ecological reports highlights the role of parks and trails in boosting local economies, improving public health, and enhancing climate resilience, reinforcing the need for nature-based tourism and conservation strategies. Additionally, TPWD grant program guidelines outline funding opportunities for parks and trails, recommending sustainability measures, connectivity enhancements, and conservation easements to maximize eligibility.

A thorough review of TPWD plans, studies, and information resulted in the following summary of TPWD priorities, which can be integrated into this Parks and Recreation Master Plan, to align Port Lavaca for future funding and support through TPWD:

1. Conservation and Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Resources

TPWD Goal: Protect, restore, and manage Texas' land, water, and wildlife to ensure long-term environmental and recreational sustainability. Key strategies for Port Lavaca include:

- With Texas' population projected to grow to 50 million by 2050, cities must proactively plan to preserve open space and balance development with conservation efforts.
- Prioritize parkland acquisition in ecologically significant landscapes, wildlife corridors, and floodplains.
- Ensure that development projects incorporate low-impact design, permeable surfaces, and native vegetation to mitigate environmental impacts.
- Protect historic sites, integrate interpretive signage, and create educational programming that highlights Port Lavaca's coastal heritage and history.
- Preserve coastal habitat and incorporate stormwater management solutions to prevent flooding or coastal erosion.

2. Increasing Public Access and Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

TPWD Goal: Ensure that all Texans have equitable access to outdoor spaces and recreation. Key Strategies for Port Lavaca include:

- TPWD prioritizes regional connectivity—Port Lavaca should extend trail networks to provide pedestrian access to schools, neighborhoods, and parks.
- Prioritize universal design to make parks, playgrounds, and trails accessible for people of all ages and abilities (including ADA accessibility).
- Promote Outdoor Recreation for all Ages by creating multi-generational play areas (fitness zones, senior walking loops, interactive play features) and developing nature-based recreation areas (including wildlife observation sites and water recreation access).
- Incorporate water-based recreation (such as boating, paddling, and fishing access points) into park planning and trailheads if/where possible.

CONTEXT / EXISTING CONDITIONS

COMMUNITY SUMMARY

Port Lavaca City, TX
Geography: Place

11,335	-0.46%	2.70	83.7	38.0	\$64,069	\$135,484	\$196,908	23.6%	59.0%	17.4%
Population Total	Population Growth	Average HH Size	Diversity Index	Median Age	Median HH Income	Median Home Value	Median Net Worth	Age <18	Age 18-64	Age 65+



19.3%
Services

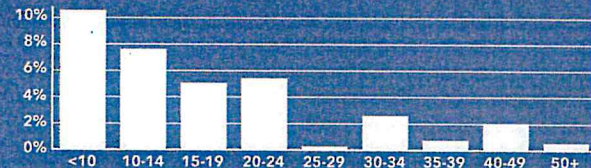


35.9%
Blue Collar

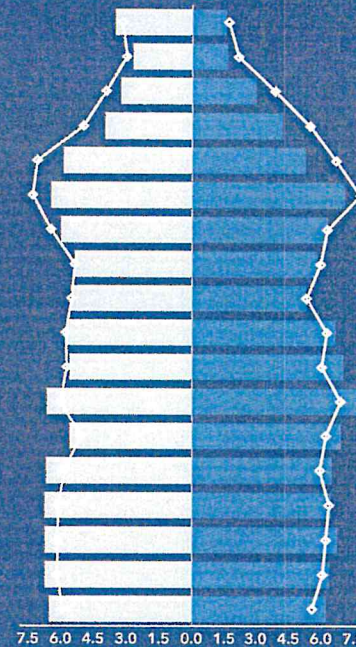


44.8%
White Collar

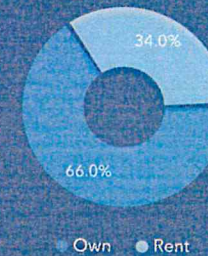
Mortgage as Percent of Salary



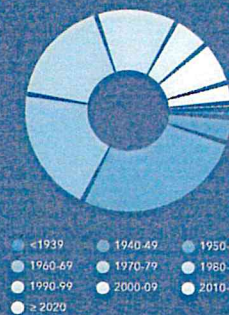
Age Profile: 5 Year Increments



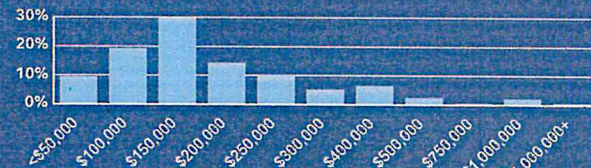
Home Ownership



Housing: Year Built



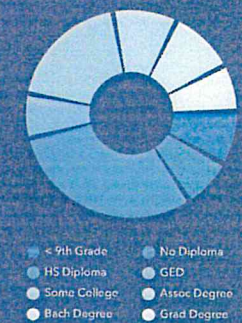
Home Value



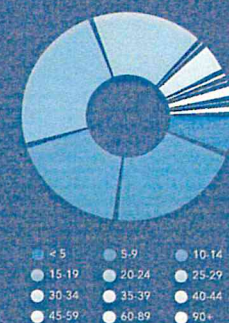
Household Income



Educational Attainment



Commute Time: Minutes



Source: This Infographic contains data provided by Esri (2024), ACS (2018-2022).

Dots show comparison to

Calhoun County

© 2025 Esri



TAPESTRY SEGMENTATION


The Fabric of America's Neighborhoods


Tapestry LifeMode				
	Households	HHs %	% US HHs	Index
Affluent Estates (L1)	0	0.00%	10.11%	0
Upscale Avenues (L2)	0	0.00%	5.50%	0
Uptown Individuals (L3)	0	0.00%	3.91%	0
Family Landscapes (L4)	0	0.00%	7.91%	0
GenXurban (L5)	377	9.21%	11.14%	83
Cozy Country Living (L6)	1,972	48.16%	11.81%	408
Sprouting Explorers (L7)	1,177	28.74%	7.53%	382
Middle Ground (L8)	399	9.74%	10.81%	90
Senior Styles (L9)	0	0.00%	5.79%	0
Rustic Outposts (L10)	170	4.15%	7.94%	52
Midtown Singles (L11)	0	0.00%	6.24%	0
Hometown (L12)	0	0.00%	5.88%	0
Next Wave (L13)	0	0.00%	3.88%	0
Scholars and Patriots (L14)	0	0.00%	1.57%	0

Key Facts


\$135,484
Median Home Value


\$64,069
Median HH Income


16.1%
No High School Diploma


37.3%
High School Graduate

2.1
Home Value to Income Ratio

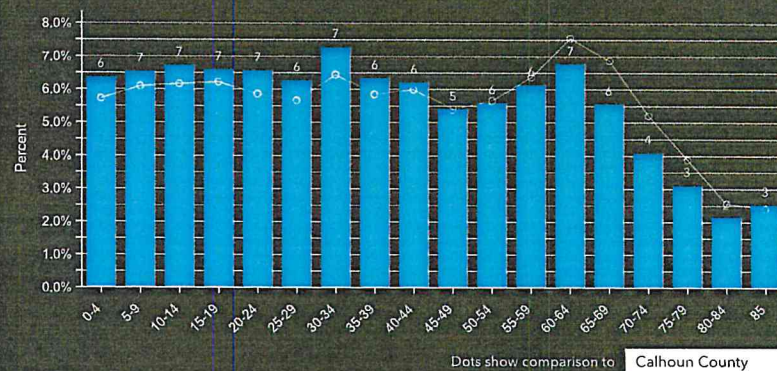
38.0
Median Age

4,095
Households

29.1%
Some College/
Associate's Degree

17.5%
Bachelor's/Grad/
Prof Degree

Age Profile



2024 Households by income (Esri)

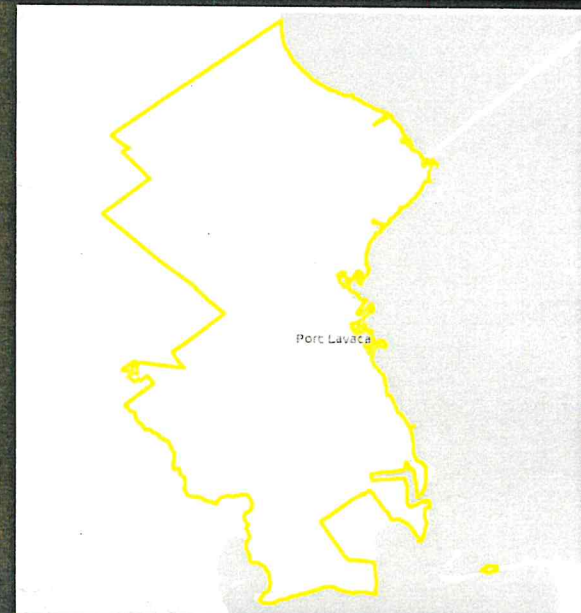
The largest group: \$50,000 - \$74,999 (23.4%)

The smallest group: \$15,000 - \$24,999 (4.8%)

Indicator ▲	Value	Diff
<\$15,000	8.6%	-0.7%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	4.8%	-0.2%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	7.7%	-0.3%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	13.3%	-0.6%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	23.4%	+3.8%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	13.4%	+2.6%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	13.8%	+2.1%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	7.0%	+0.6%
\$200,000+	7.9%	+0.9%

Bars show deviation from Calhoun County

Education



Tapestry segments

	6A Green Acres 1,074 households	26.7% of Households	▼
	7D Forging Opportunity 771 households	18.8% of Households	▼
	6B Salt of the Earth 522 households	12.7% of Households	▼

Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri (2024).
© 2025 Esri



PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

STAKEHOLDER + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

During this process a Public Workshop was held to obtain vital community feedback and direction for the development of its content. The event was held on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at the Bauer Community Center from 6:00 to 8:00 PM in a come-and-go format.

Approximately 50 community members attended and contributed to meaningful, collaborative discussion at the feedback stations available for community input. With lively conversation and active participation in the stations, this feedback shaped the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The goals of the Workshop were to:

- Familiarize the community with park master planning basics
- Inform the community about the current Parks and Recreation System
- Understand the public's perspectives on the current System
- Collect feedback to begin determining the community's vision for the Parks and Recreation System

Stations were set up throughout the Community Center and ranged from informational to interactive for residents of all ages. Members of the LJA Planning Team also were available throughout the event to answer questions from and spark discussion among community members.



Key Themes

- Recreation (36 percent): Provide fun and engaging opportunities for enjoyment, sightseeing, and/or fitness
- Design (20 percent): Enhance public spaces to encourage social interaction and beauty through high quality design to the places that make the City unique: 20 percent
- Nature (18 percent): Design spaces that protect sensitive or important natural areas and features, and integrate low impact / "green" practices

Additionally, community members appreciate larger parks with a range of amenities, such as Lighthouse Beach and Chocolate Bayou Park. Residents enjoy the wide, well-lit sidewalks of Bayfront Peninsula Park.

Common community desires identified across all activities and boards include:

- Additional shade trees or structures within existing parks
- Community recreational center with amenities for all age groups, such as sports courts or a public pool
- More community events and programs, such as movies in the park, live music, Christmas lights, First Friday art walks, etc.
- Rentals for kayaks, canoes, paddle boats, etc. near the water
- Walking, running, and bicycle trails within parks and neighborhoods
- Splash pads for younger children
- Free access to Lighthouse Beach for Port Lavaca residents

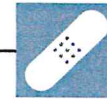


COMMUNITY SWOT ANALYSIS



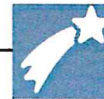
STRENGTHS

- Coastline access, especially the proximity of downtown Port Lavaca to the water
- High-quality playgrounds, walking trails, and splashpads at parks
- Quantity, size, and distribution of existing parks



WEAKNESSES

- Lack of shade trees and structures, limiting summertime enjoyment of parks and playgrounds
- Lack of continuous, connected, and level trails, sidewalks, and safe pedestrian areas
- No indoor recreational center
- Limited maintenance for park facilities, especially restrooms



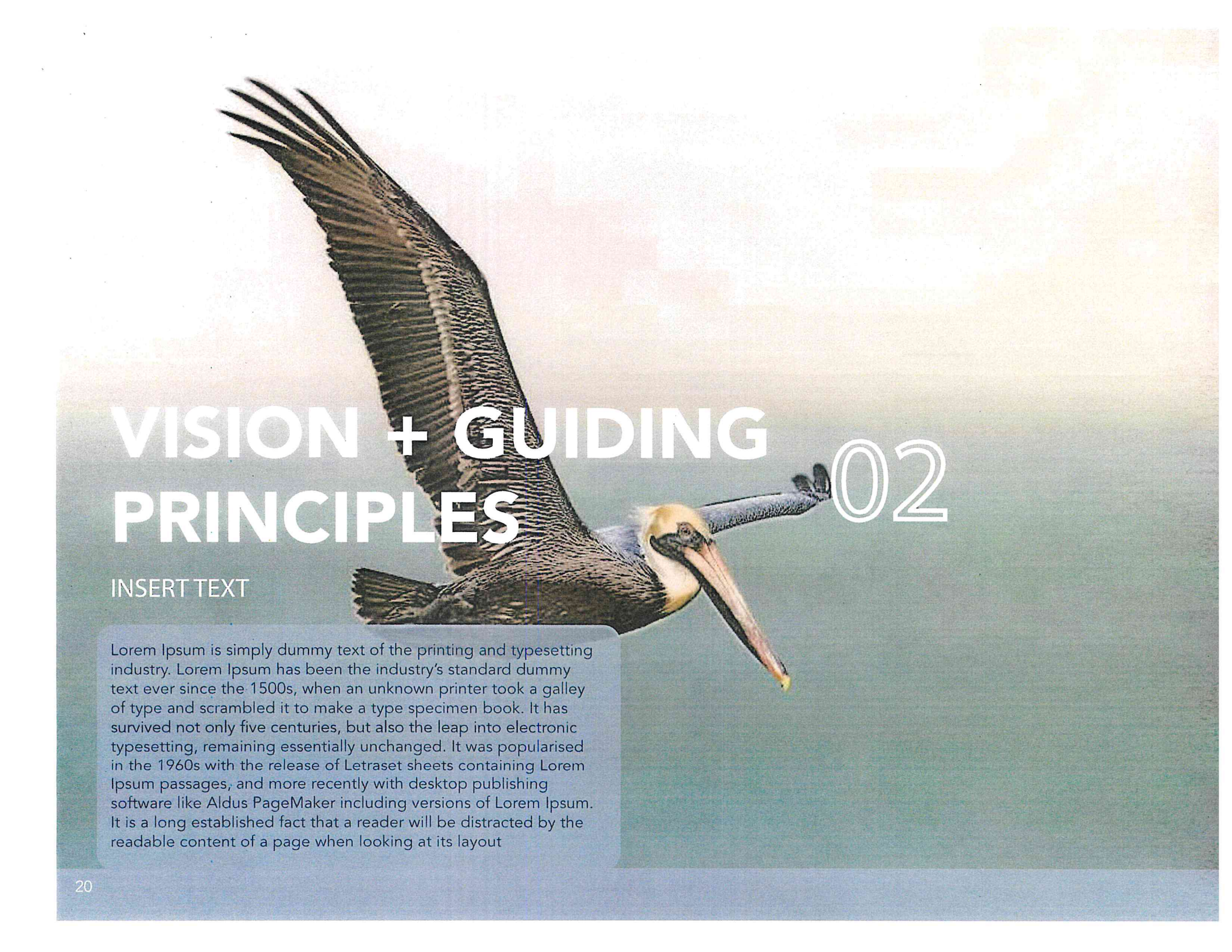
OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand trails and sidewalks, linking parks to schools, the library, and other destinations.
- Develop an indoor recreation center, dog park, and more green spaces.
- Host more community events and explore partnerships for funding.
- Offer more sports facilities like tennis, pickleball, volleyball, etc.
- Promote Port Lavaca's parks as ecotourism destinations



CHALLENGES/THREATS

- Limited funding and infrastructure constraints.
- Population decline leading to economic vulnerability and limited resources
- Natural hazards, including sea-level rise, storm surges, and hurricanes

A large pelican is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a background of a sunset sky with soft, warm colors. The bird is positioned diagonally across the frame, from the upper left towards the lower right. Its head is turned back, and its long, dark beak is prominent. The wings show detailed feather patterns.

VISION + GUIDING PRINCIPLES 02

INSERT TEXT

Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text of the printing and typesetting industry. Lorem Ipsum has been the industry's standard dummy text ever since the 1500s, when an unknown printer took a galley of type and scrambled it to make a type specimen book. It has survived not only five centuries, but also the leap into electronic typesetting, remaining essentially unchanged. It was popularised in the 1960s with the release of Letraset sheets containing Lorem Ipsum passages, and more recently with desktop publishing software like Aldus PageMaker including versions of Lorem Ipsum. It is a long established fact that a reader will be distracted by the readable content of a page when looking at its layout



EXISTING SYSTEM CONDITIONS

03

INSERT TEXT

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LEVEL OF SERVICE

Parks, Facilities, and Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides benchmarking data. Provided below are some key findings from the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review and are utilized here to evaluate Port Lavaca's existing offerings.

NRPA emphasizes that optimal parkland acreage and some of the items listed below can vary based on specific community needs, population density, and local priorities. Therefore, while the benchmarks offer a reference point, Port Lavaca should assess its unique demographic and geographic factors to determine the appropriate features that best serve the residents.

Insert Existing Park Service Map



Walking Distance

Given how extreme Texas summers are, half a mile is generally considered the outer limit of what most people are willing to walk to access a park. It takes roughly 7 to 10 minutes to walk half a mile at a brisk pace or 12 to 15 minutes at a leisurely pace.

As part of Port Lavaca's 2016 Comprehensive Plan efforts, a geographic analysis was conducted using existing public parks (shown in green) and adjacent parks located near the city limits (shown in dark green). A 0.5-mile service buffer, representing a typical walkable distance, was applied around each park (displayed in light green) to identify areas with reasonable pedestrian access. Areas falling outside of this buffer were mapped as service gaps and are illustrated in light brown. These underserved areas highlight key opportunities for future park development. Overall, the analysis reveals a citywide need for expanded park access to ensure all residents are within a short walk of a neighborhood park.

When calculating walking distance LOS via City-owned parks only, there are large pockets of the City that are not serviced by a walkable park, particularly in northwest and southern Port Lavaca. When, accounting for public park facilities of any kind, such as school playgrounds, the coverage area increases significantly. Many of the underserved areas according to this metric are also less developed, but coverage will be an important consideration if these areas become denser in the future.

CURRENT + PLANNED INVENTORY

Parks, Facilities, and Recreation

The City of Port Lavaca owns and maintains eight public parks within its city limits:

- City (Tilley) Park
- Lighthouse Beach Park
- Wilson Park
- Bayfront Peninsula Park
- George Adams Park
- Claret Crossing Park
- Brookhollow Estates Park (Butterfly Park)
- Fay Bauer Sterling Park

Port Lavaca residents also enjoy the County-operated Little Chocolate Bayou Park and Bauer Community Center. Little Chocolate Bayou Park features a 1.7-mile loop trail and a recently installed playscape structure. The Calhoun County Library System, anchored by the Calhoun County Public Library in Port Lavaca, serves over 20,000 citizens of Calhoun County, located in South Texas.

Additionally, the Calhoun County YMCA offers a pool, health and wellness services, youth sports opportunities, and on-site childcare. Calhoun County Senior Citizens Association, Inc. (CCSCA) provides hot meals, health services, and opportunities for connection for Port Lavaca's senior population out of its Heritage Center.

With the exception of the Claret Crossing pocket park, all city-owned parks have been designated to receive improvements within the next five years in the 2025 Capital Improvement Plan, ranging from new shade structures to pickleball courts.

Nearby (<20-minutes by car) parks that provide extensive recreational areas to Port Lavaca residents include Six Mile Park and Magnolia Beach Park.

Would we rather have a matrix with the parks/features or a 1/2 page devoted to each park?

Insert map of all park locations



Blue Zones

Blue Zones refer to regions of the world where people consistently live longer, healthier lives—often surpassing 100 years of age. The Blue Zones Project, based on research by Dan Buettner, has distilled common characteristics of these regions into lifestyle principles that can be applied to community design and public health planning. For parks and recreation systems, integrating Blue Zone principles means creating environments that promote natural movement, social connection, and stress reduction.

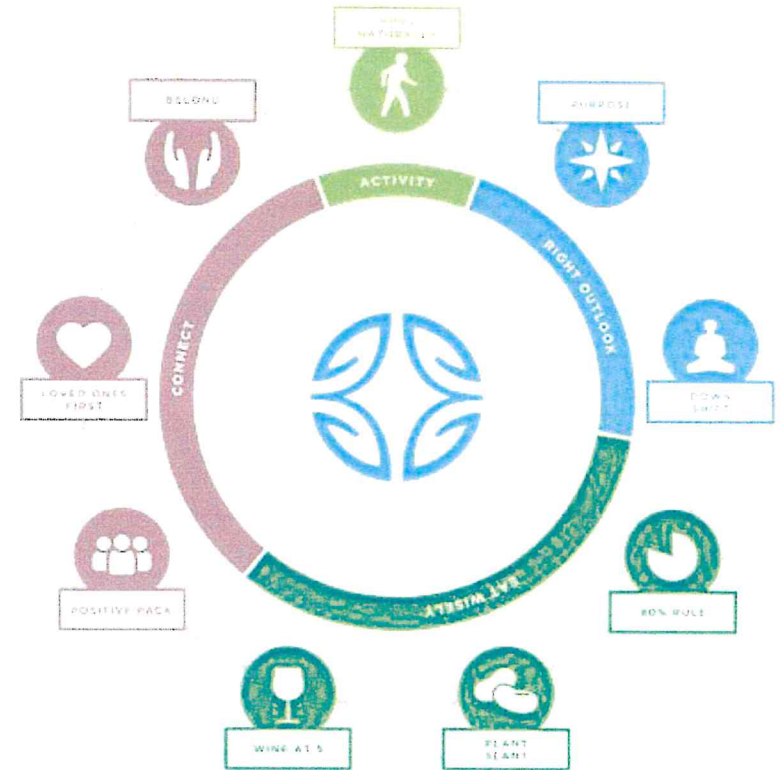
Even relatively simple park elements, like shaded benches or shared community gardens, can align parks with public health goals.

Here's how Port Lavaca's parks can incorporate the Blue Zones philosophy into its Parks and Recreation system:

- Design environments that encourage walking, biking, and other forms of physical activity.
- Provide spaces for community engagement, social gatherings, and shared experiences, which are crucial for mental and emotional well-being.
- Offer activities like yoga, tai chi, and meditation in parks to help residents manage stress and anxiety, according to a National Recreation and Park Association article.
- Establish a community garden or food forest
- Host farmers' markets that feature fresh local produce at affordable prices
- Offer physical fitness and nutrition programs at parks

Blue Zones and Community Engagement:

The Blue Zones Project recognizes the importance of community involvement in creating healthy environments. By partnering with local



organizations, Blue Zones initiatives can encourage residents to utilize parks and participate in activities that promote well-being. For example, the Hop-a-Park Challenge sponsored by the Blue Zones Project encourages people to explore and enjoy city parks.

Maker & Innovation Spaces

Maker and innovation spaces within park systems are creative, hands-on environments where community members gather to build, learn, and invent. These spaces may include outdoor classrooms, mobile tool libraries, STEAM-focused play areas, or workshops with 3D printers, woodworking tools, or art supplies. While traditionally located in libraries or schools, integrating them into parks brings new energy to public spaces and engages youth, families, and entrepreneurs in meaningful, skill-building activities.

For communities like Port Lavaca, incorporating maker spaces into parks expands the role of recreation from purely leisure to include economic development, workforce readiness, and intergenerational learning. These spaces can host DIY workshops, robotics clubs, gardening classes, or craft markets, blending creative placemaking with educational programming. This approach fosters community resilience by offering low-barrier access to skills training and innovation.

Strategies:

- Incorporate interactive public art, outdoor play labs, or mobile maker spaces into parks, focusing on locations with youth access. There are opportunities to partner with local libraries and schools to share the cost/maintenance burden of the equipment.
- San Antonio's Hemisfair Park features a hands-on outdoor play areas that incorporate science and fine motor skills
- Brownsville's library system offers a makerspace service for community members to utilize 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines, etc.
- Cedar Park as well

Sources:

- Better Block Foundation
- Project for Public Spaces

Libraries

Partnerships between parks departments and public libraries combine the strengths of both institutions to expand access to learning, wellness, and community engagement. These collaborations often involve co-hosted programs (like summer reading in the park), mobile library services at park events, shared public facilities, or even co-located buildings. For cities like Port Lavaca, aligning parks and libraries enhances the value of each without duplicating infrastructure—especially important in smaller communities with limited resources.

The Calhoun County Library System serves over 20,000 citizens of Calhoun County, and its main branch is the Calhoun County Public Library in Port Lavaca. Though not directly adjacent to any City-owned parks, this library is just .5 miles from Bayfront Peninsula Park and 1 mile from City (Tilley) Park. This physical proximity encourages collaboration between library and park professionals.

Calhoun County library already offers a variety of regular events and programs, many of which could be (re)located to a nearby park.

Additional collaborative program offerings include:

- Storytime in the Park
- Community Garden located on library property
- Walking trail featuring favorite childhood literary characters

PROSPERITY

REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES

Property, sales, and hotel tax are the primary source of revenue for most local governments, including Port Lavaca.

Parks and recreational spaces can yield significant economic benefits for communities like Port Lavaca. In 2021, NRPA reported that local public park and recreation agencies across the United States generated more than \$200 billion in economic activity and supported over 1 million jobs. Beyond direct economic contributions, the presence of parks increases nearby property values by upwards of 20%, benefiting both homeowners and tax revenues.

Physical activity associated with access to parks improves public health outcomes, reducing health care costs. Communities with ample green spaces see decreased rates of chronic disease, translating to significant medical cost savings.

According to a 2020 survey, 94% of Americans support their local government investing in infrastructure that promotes economic activity in their community. Parks attract tourism, which stimulates the local economy through increased hospitality and retail spending. Port Lavaca's prime location on Lavaca Bay places it in a prime position to capitalize on water-based recreational offerings and coastal ecotourism, including birdwatching and fishing.

Rentals

Parks frequently offer amenities like community centers, sports fields, picnic areas, and pavilions that can be rented for various occasions, including events, parties, weddings, sports tournaments, and other gatherings.

To begin, consider renting the following:

- Facilities: Renting buildings, rooms, sports fields, and picnic areas can raise capital.
- Parking Lots and Streets: Many events need space like parking lots, such as churches, schools, and non-profits looking for outdoor gathering space.
- Equipment: Rent out tennis rackets, basketballs, pickleball paddles, and more!





Program Fees

Parks and recreation departments can generate extra income through recreation programs and classes. Parks departments often already offer programs and activities, including sports leagues, fitness classes, art workshops, and summer camps. By implementing registration or participation fees for these programs, parks and recreation departments can contribute to their revenue generation efforts.

Special Events & Concessions

Hosting special events such as concerts, festivals, farmers' markets, or holiday celebrations within park areas can draw in visitors and generate income through various means, including ticket sales, fees, sponsorships, and concession stands.

Parks can lease out spaces to vendors offering food and beverage services, equipment rentals, or other recreational services. Collecting a percentage of their sales or charging rent for the use of park facilities can provide a steady stream of revenue.

Sponsorships & Advertising

Parks and recreation departments can generate revenue by leveraging advertising and sponsorship agreements. Partnering with local businesses, corporations, or nonprofit organizations to sponsor park initiatives, events, or facilities can generate additional revenue. In exchange, sponsors may receive acknowledgment and branding opportunities.

Additionally, selling advertising space or showcasing sponsored signage within parks is another way to generate income. Departments can display advertisements in parks, sports fields, department websites, digital screens within facilities, catalogs, brochures, newsletters, and program registration software.

Tax-Related Revenue

Parks and recreation departments can generate revenue through taxes because the public is generally more inclined to vote in favor of such initiatives.

Here are some methods that parks and recreation departments employ to increase their revenue through taxes:

Property Tax Revenue

By collaborating with local officials and raising awareness among the public about the value of parks and recreational opportunities, departments can gain public support for property taxes.

Park Impact Fees

Developers get charged park impact fees to offset the costs of new parks and recreational facilities in newly developed areas. As new residents move into these areas, maintenance expenses of parks will increase. Departments can establish specific fees to address these expenses.

Landscape Lighting District

By establishing a landscape lighting district, parks and recreation departments can generate revenue specifically dedicated to covering the costs of installing and maintaining lighting in parks and other public spaces.

Community Facility District

Parks and recreation departments can impose fees to help finance any construction, operation, and maintenance.



NATURE TOURISM

- Tourism generates 2.6 million jobs in the region.
- Wildlife tourism generates over \$19 billion in annual spending.
- Wildlife tourism generates over \$5 billion annually in federal, state and local tax revenues.
- Over 1,100 guide and outfitter entities and 11,000 lodging and dining establishments generate business for one another.
- Wildlife tourism businesses rely on healthy coastal environments

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Topics to cover:

- Efficient locations
- Administration
- Parkland Dedication Fee
- Smith Harbor
- Master planned communities
- Tournaments
- Ecotourism
- Community Events; Main Street
- Rails to Trails
- Farm to Table

PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

STAKEHOLDER + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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TRAILS

06

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As Port Lavaca's needs evolve, the City must take a proactive approach to its parks and recreation planning. This plan ensures that Port Lavaca's park system continues to meet current demands while positioning the community for a vibrant, resilient future.



PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

Currently, Port Lavaca lacks sufficient sidewalk and trail infrastructure, limiting safe, non-vehicular mobility throughout the city.

Future investments can focus on shared-use paths, trails, and greenways that link key destinations while enhancing economic development through trail-adjacent businesses. Demand for eco-tourism, especially birding and fishing, will expand as Port Lavaca establishes itself as an outdoor recreational hub, attracting visitors and further supporting the local economy.

To meet future demand, Port Lavaca must expand its sidewalk infrastructure, develop multi-use trails, and enhance regional connectivity. Investing in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will improve mobility, increase property values, and enhance the overall quality of life for residents.

SIDEWALK PLAN

