



PROGRAMS & PLACEMAKING 04



Port Lavaca Pier with Proposed Improvements (Port Lavaca Downtown Waterfront Master Plan)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on elements of the parks, recreation, and trails system that occur within the parks and trails themselves, specifically events, recreation programming, and placemaking. It addresses how these spaces can be activated beyond their physical infrastructure to create social, cultural, and economic value for the community.

Events, programs, and placemaking initiatives transform parks from passive open spaces into active community assets. Well-designed programs support public health, youth development, social connection, and environmental stewardship, while also strengthening community identity and local pride. Even modest programs, such as seasonal events, volunteer days, or partnerships with local organizations can increase park usage, improve safety through regular activity, and demonstrate measurable return on investment for residents.

Some of the topics discussed herein are not currently provided as a service by the City due to limited staffing, funding, and operational capacity. Sustained investment is required to plan, deliver, and maintain high-quality programming and events. These topics are included to outline best practices, partnership opportunities, and phased implementation strategies so that, should there be sufficient community support and available resources in the future, the City has a clear and practical roadmap for expansion.

KEY FEEDBACK

- » Strong interest in rentals for kayaks, canoes, paddle boats, etc. near the water
- » Community/recreation center with indoor facilities and multi-generational amenities/programs, such as sports courts and pool
- » Community events, such as live music or movies in the park;
- » Development of league sports through a future Parks Department
- » Recreation-focused private businesses provided activities like paintball/airsoft, ropes courses, and BMX
- » Boat ramps are popular, but more for fishing than sailing or general boating

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



QUALITY OF LIFE: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL CURRENT AND FUTURE RESIDENTS BY PROVIDING EXCEPTIONAL RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND GREEN SPACES.

- » Introduction of a community recreation center
- » Introduction of league play, youth sports, and in-park community programs
- » Recreational facilities that go beyond sports



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE AND BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

- » Community events that celebrate and give back to Port Lavaca's coastal resources
- » Public spaces that can withstand Texas summers and hurricane season



EQUITABLE ACCESS: EXPAND ACCESS, CONNECTIVITY, AND ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH MULTI-MODAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

- » Public spaces that are accessible and enjoyable for all residents, year-round



ECONOMIC VITALITY: ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH RECREATIONAL TOURISM, PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS, AND INNOVATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES.

- » Public spaces with amenities and flexibility to support crowds and a range of events
- » Vibrant calendar of events year-round for residents and visitors alike



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND VITALITY THROUGH HIGH-QUALITY PARK PROGRAMMING AND SPECIAL EVENTS.

- » Deliberate use of placemaking principles to design public spaces



PROGRAM MANAGEMENT:

Within the context of a parks and recreation department, program management is the strategic oversight of diverse activities (sports, events, classes) to meet community needs, ensuring efficient use of resources (staff, budget, facilities) to achieve organizational goals like public engagement and well-being. Program management requires planning, execution, budgeting, evaluation, and alignment with departmental mission.

This section reviews common service offerings of parks and recreation departments, recognizing that such offerings are currently not feasible. Through the 2000s, Port Lavaca City had a standalone Parks and Recreation department, but the Director position was never backfilled when the then-director left. The department was rolled into Public Works, where it remains. Public Works maintains the parks, while the YMCA provides pool access to residents through an agreement with the City.

RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Port Lavaca does not currently offer indoor recreation or recreational programming within the parks. While the existing, relatively robust park system has been manageable for the Public Works department and allocated park staff, it is likely that the system could better serve residents in a standalone capacity. With the caveat that the City of Port Lavaca can realistically only provide so many services without indoor recreation and the resources of a standalone parks-first department, this section will review the City's core program areas, service format, program inventory, program distribution, and age segmentation.

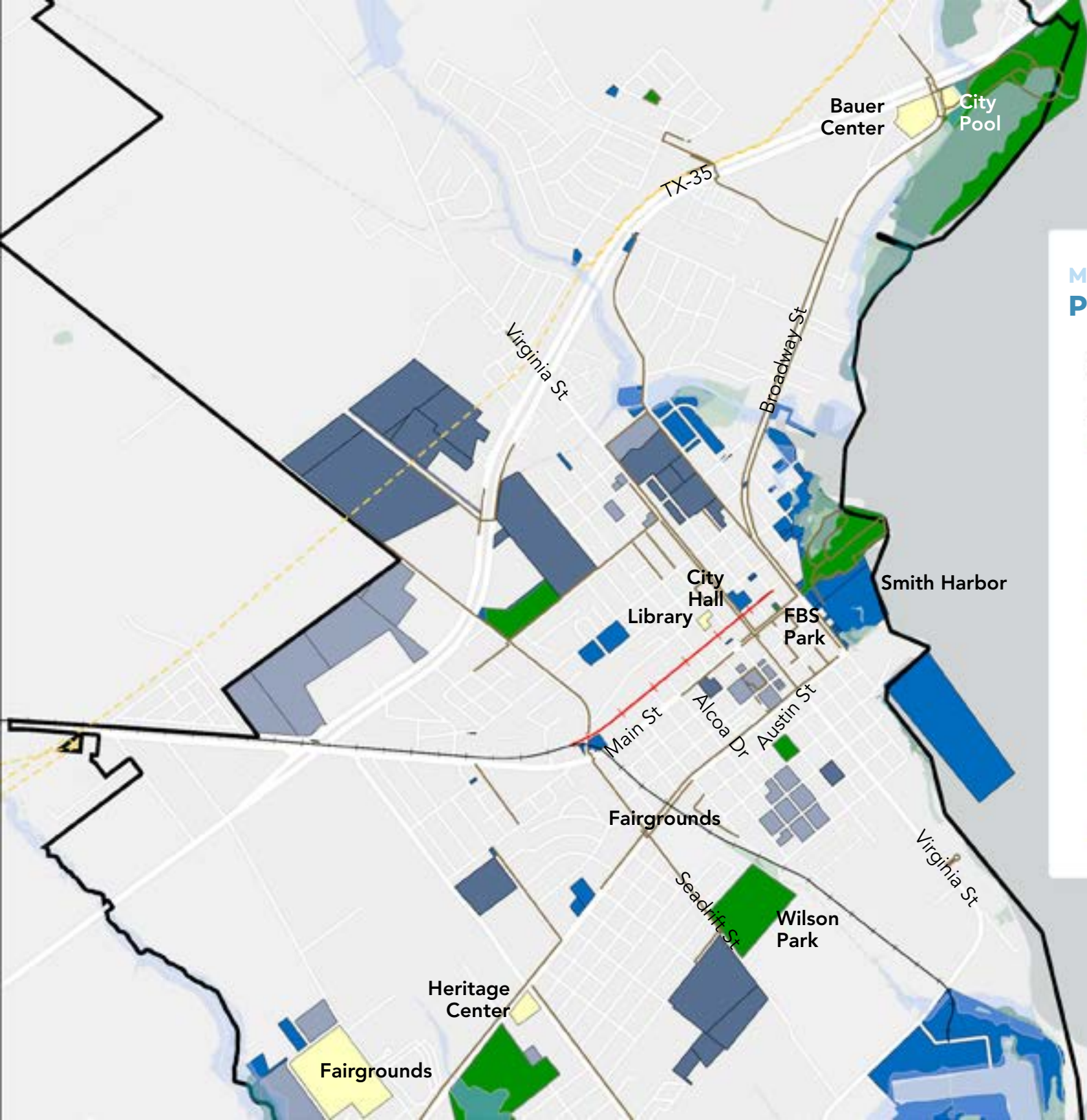


RECREATION LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS)

Nationally, parks agencies offer a median of 250 programs annually, while communities smaller than 20,000 offer 45. Of these, 83% are fee-based. The vast majority of these programs (91%) are themed special events, such as movies or concerts in the park, cultural events, or holiday festivities.

Other common programs include social recreation events (88%), team sports (86%), health and wellness education (82%), and fitness classes (82%). There are several types of programs focused specifically on children, older adults, and people with disabilities. Of agencies serving communities of less than 20,000 residents, 93% offer a youth summer camp, 85% provide older adult programs, 85% offer programs for people with disabilities, and 82% provide teen programs.

Most park agencies offer indoor recreation centers (63%) and community centers (60%). Just over half provide permanent or semi-permanent restrooms (52%), and two in five agencies offer performance amphitheaters (43%) and senior centers (41%). Approximately one-third of agencies offer a nature center (35%) or aquatic center



MAP 7: PUBLIC SPACES

- Port Lavaca City Limits
- Active RR
- Inactive RR
- Wetlands
- Floodplain
- Salt Marshes
- Existing Parks
- Public Facilities
- ISD Owned Parcels
- City Owned Parcels
- County Owned Parcels
- Existing Trails
- Electric Power Transmission Lines



INDOOR RECREATION

Indoor recreation refers to physical, social, and wellness activities held in indoor public facilities such as recreation centers, gymnasiums, fitness studios, or multi-purpose halls. These spaces allow parks departments to offer year-round programming regardless of weather conditions - critical in Texas communities where heat, storms, or flooding can limit outdoor use. Indoor recreational programming can include sports leagues, dance and fitness classes, senior activities, arts and crafts, youth camps, and community events. Recreation centers also play a vital role in climate resilience by offering a safe, conditioned space for cooling/warming stations, storm shelters, or disaster recovery zones as a resilience hub.

Although there is broad, stated community interest in expanded indoor recreation opportunities, Port Lavaca voters have historically been reluctant to approve bond-funded initiatives, creating uncertainty around the feasibility of a new, City-led recreation facility.

It is worth noting that city-sponsored indoor recreation centers remain common in communities of Port Lavaca's size and peer context; however, until residents indicate a willingness to fund a formal recreation center, strengthening and expanding the City's partnership with the YMCA represents a practical interim solution to meet indoor recreation needs.

There is no universal standard for the size of a community center, as the appropriate square footage depends heavily on the specific needs and desired programming of the local population. For a city of 12,000 people, the size could range from as little as 12,000 square feet for a basic facility to a much larger center if it includes extensive recreational amenities like gymnasiums and pools. The size and scale of a community center should be determined through a comprehensive needs assessment.

According to NRPA, Americans are increasingly seeking expanded services, amenities, and programs on top of traditional community/recreation center offerings like gyms, out-of-school kids programming, and aquatics.

These expanding expectations include:

- » Healthy living classes (51%)
- » Programming for older adults (46%)
- » Nature-based activities (45%)
- » Access to computers and the internet (43%)
- » Inclusive facilities for all needs and abilities (41%)
- » Health clinics and services (38%)

PROGRAMS INVENTORY

The following is a list of major program categories that park and recreation agencies throughout the country commonly provide. This list helps identify common program areas not offered by the City. Items in **blue** are provided by the City, while *italicized* items are provided by a different public entity - most often Calhoun County via the Calhoun County Library(*), Fairgrounds, or the YMCA.

- » Active Adult Programs*
- » Aquatics
- » Arts
- » Before/After School
- » **Biking**
- » **Birdwatching**
- » Child Care
- » Child Programs*
- » Cooking
- » Dance
- » Day/School Break Camps
- » Disc Golf
- » Esports
- » Early Childhood /Preschool
- » **Environmental/Nature**
- » Extreme Sports
- » Fitness
- » Golf
- » Gymnastics/Tumbling
- » *Historical Programs*
- » Horseback Riding
- » Ice Skating/Hockey
- » *Language Arts/Foreign Language**
- » *Lifelong Learning**
- » Martial Arts
- » Music
- » Open Gym
- » Outdoor Adventure
- » **Pickleball***
- » *Seniors*
- » **Special/Community Events**
- » Specialty Camps
- » Sports
- » STEM/STEAM Summer Camps (Daylong)
- » Sustainability/Green
- » *Teen Programs**
- » Tennis
- » Theatre/Acting
- » Therapeutic Recreation

CALHOUN COUNTY LIBRARY

The Calhoun County Library System serves over 20,000 citizens, 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.

THE HERITAGE CENTER

The Heritage Center is operated by The Calhoun County Senior Citizens Association. Sixty-nine percent of the senior citizens in Calhoun county are low income and forty-eight percent are minorities. Without the services provided by this organization would be unable to exist independently on their fixed income.



EMERGING TRENDS

LEVERAGING ASSETS

Underutilized land or properties, with the right private partner, can make excellent candidates for amenities like indoor climbing walls, paintball parks, and BMX tracks. These amenities are likely more risk than the City cares to be liable for - but these attractions could generate jobs and tax revenue while also providing more activities for teens and possibly attracting regional tourists.



Paintball Outdoor Amenity



Bike Park



Indoor Rock Climbing Amenity



Kids Indoor Play Area

MAKERSPACES

A makerspace is a public space that is home to all types of tools from carpentry equipment and ceramics materials, to media studios and robotics labs. Each makerspace offers unique tools and materials to suit the needs of its particular community. Makerspaces are hubs of education: they will offer classes and have staff on hand to help patrons learn to use the equipment offered. An important feature of makerspaces is that they are accessible to any community member that is interested in participating. 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.



ESPORTS

Esports is a term used to describe organized, competitive video gaming. Esports are typically player vs player games, played in a league or tournament structure. Similar to regular, professional sports teams, esports is also a spectator event.

Esports reaches more viewers than all other major sports leagues, with the exception of the NFL. Twitch, which is owned by Amazon and is the leading streaming service for esports, also averages around 15 million daily viewers. Esports are increasingly part of parks and recreation programs, with many cities nationwide integrating gaming into their services to foster community, collaboration, and skill development. Departments, from small towns to major cities like Philadelphia, Dallas, and Aurora, are offering dedicated gaming spaces, consoles, and tournaments.

According to the National Alliance for Youth Sports Poll, 70 percent of kids stop participating in traditional sports, such as little leagues and recreational teams, by the age of 13. Likewise, 90 percent of 12-17-year-olds participate in playing video games. Gaming is a hobby that sticks with youth throughout the majority of their life.

More than 1,200 high schools and 300 colleges now have programs, many of which also often provide academic support. Through these programs, teens can begin to learn career paths they could take within esports — going pro is not the only avenue. Team management, event production, broadcasting and even sports health all fall within the realm of esports. Via connecting with local colleges and high schools, park and recreation agencies can begin to foster 'esports ecosystems' in their community. Scholarships could be awarded for winning leagues, and departments can find ways to engage their community via the varsity programs these schools may offer.



ESPORTS VS. VIDEO GAMES

Esports are a competitive, team activity meant to be played in leagues. Therefore, it is imperative that any future program be differentiated by:

- » Video games that match what is being played at the competitive level
- » Coaching and mentorship by individuals who are gamers
- » In-person facilities that allow youth to congregate and socialize
- » Dedicated spaces and facilities

SECTION STRATEGIES

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

- » Work with City Council to initiate the process of establishing a recreation element to the Parks Department with a dedicated Parks Director
- » Budget for a director level hire.
- » Update the City website better to connect users to County- and TPW-managed facilities
- » Update the City website to better showcase the City's parks including new photography, consistent naming and addressing, sort functionality, and all reservation/cost information and links
- » Incorporate QR codes for reporting issues, providing maps, and sharing safety tips.
- » Implement asset management software to track condition, repairs, and lifecycle replacement schedules.

INDOOR RECREATION & RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- » Identify expanded partnership opportunities with the YMCA, such as swim lessons and aquatic safety
- » Explore partnership opportunities to use vacant public property for semi-permanent uses like bouldering/climbing, paintball, or airsoft.
- » Coordinate with Calhoun County ISD and Calhoun County Library to explore esports,
- » Fill in programmatic gaps for adult fitness and wellness, nature, aquatic, and inclusive and adaptive program areas.
- » Establish partnerships with churches, private rec centers, and other entities with indoor recreation facilities, youth sports, after-school/daycare, and seniors events on their grounds; to spread awareness of the facilities and provide access for residents at a fraction of the cost of a flagship recreation center.
- » Commission a Community Center Master Plan that provides an initial feasibility study and design program.
- » Any feasibility study should evaluate potential partnerships with Calhoun County
- » Incorporate features that can allow this facility to act as an emergency shelter during severe weather events.
- » Include commercial kitchen equipment in recreational centers; this opens potential to utilize space as a resilience hub during disaster events or to earn revenue by renting out space for events.
- » Co-locate indoor recreation space with libraries, public health clinics, or parks/trail networks to increase benefits.
- » In coordination with the EDC, conduct a STEM feasibility study focused on Esports and Makerspaces



SECTION STRATEGIES (CONT.)

LEVERAGING ASSETS

- » Issue an open call to local landowners to explore interest in establishing a private paintball, airsoft, high ropes, or dirtbike park
- » In coordination with the Parks Board, TIRZ Board and/or Port Lavaca Economic Development Corporation, establish a small business grant and support program that could:
 - » Partially fund site assessments or designs for prospective sites
 - » Contribute to basic renovations or site improvements
 - » Provide advertising and promotion
 - » Negotiate for voluntary public park areas, trail easements, or coastline dedication

MAKER SPACES

- » Identify existing makers, hobbyists, clubs, schools, libraries, and small manufacturers
- » Bring together potential partners: libraries, schools, community colleges, economic development staff, nonprofits, and local makers.
- » Start small and flexible: community centers, park buildings, recreation facilities, or shared library space.
- » Confirm basic requirements: power, ventilation, storage, safety, ADA access, and insurance.
- » Design for adaptability rather than permanence in the initial phase
- » Launch Core, Low-Barrier Programming by beginning with introductory and inclusive offerings:
 - » Open lab hours
 - » Basic workshops (e.g., crafts, woodworking, digital fabrication)
 - » Youth and teen programs
 - » Keep costs low or free to build participation and trust.
 - » Prioritize learning and community-building over advanced equipment at first.
 - » Host maker meetups, demonstrations, and showcases.
 - » Tour an existing makerspace, such as The MakerBarn in Magnolia or the jaX lab at TAMU Victoria



PLACEMAKING

This section addresses elements of placemaking that apply to Port Lavaca's parks and trails. Placemaking is a collaborative process of transforming public spaces into vibrant, community-focused destinations by leveraging local assets, culture, and potential, making them healthier, happier, and more engaging places for people to live, work, and play, often involving grassroots efforts and community input.

Placemaking focuses on the human experience in shared areas, enhancing social connection, community identity, and well-being through thoughtful design and programming. At its core, placemaking is:

- » **COMMUNITY-DRIVEN:** It emphasizes public participation, using residents' knowledge to create spaces that truly serve their needs and reflect their vision.
- » **PEOPLE-CENTERED:** The goal is to create spaces designed for people, not just cars or buildings, fostering human interaction and comfort.
- » **MULTI-FACETED:** It combines urban design, public art, programming, and cultural elements, from large-scale projects to small, tactical interventions like pop-up parks or painted crosswalks.
- » **ASSET-FOCUSED:** It builds on a community's unique strengths, history, and natural features to create a strong sense of place and identity.



SOCIABILITY, USES, & ACTIVITIES

ALL AGES & ABILITIES

Nearly 30 percent of Americans have a disability of some kind, be it physical or mental. As a key means to exercise, play, and nature, it is critical that the Parks and Recreation System be designed for every single resident and visitor to Port Lavaca. Accessible parks and trails for all ages and abilities are designed to be inclusive, ensuring that people with disabilities, seniors, young children, and individuals with limited mobility or sensory challenges can fully use and enjoy park amenities. Accessibility includes physical features (like ADA-compliant paths, ramps, and playgrounds), as well as sensory, cognitive, and social components, such as wayfinding signage, shaded seating, and quiet zones. For communities like Port Lavaca, which serve a diverse population including aging adults and families with young children, prioritizing accessibility is key to equity and public health.

For more information, visit [NRPA Parks for Inclusion Program](#).



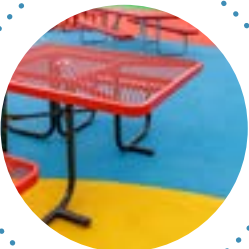
MENTAL CHALLENGES



ACCESSIBLE SURFACES AND STRUCTURES



MULTI-SENSORY



ACCESSIBLE AMENITIES



PHYSICAL CHALLENGES



FLEXIBLE AND FORGIVING IN USE



SPECIAL EVENTS

Parks and recreational spaces 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.

The most successful tourism destinations are places that first become great places for residents. By investing in connected parks, trails, waterfront spaces, and authentic recreational experiences, Port Lavaca can strengthen its position as a premier Gulf Coast recreation and nature tourism destination while enhancing daily life for the people who call it home.

Port Lavaca's greatest tourism asset is not a single attraction, it's the combination of coastal landscapes, waterfront access, birding opportunities, trails, fishing, parks, and community character. Recreational tourism should therefore focus on creating a seamless network of experiences that encourage visitors to explore the waterfront, attend events, access nature, and support local businesses. The result is a strategy where investments in parks, trails, waterfronts, and placemaking accomplish multiple goals simultaneously.

RECREATIONAL TOURISM

BUILD FOR RESIDENTS, TOURISTS WILL FOLLOW

Successful destinations are places where people genuinely want to live, walk, gather, and spend time. Walkable districts, active public spaces, local businesses, shade, trails, and community gathering areas serve residents while simultaneously making the city more attractive to visitors.

CREATE EXPERIENCES, NOT JUST FACILITIES

Visitors are drawn to memorable experiences and authentic connections rather than isolated attractions. Places become successful when they offer opportunities for gathering, exploration, and discovery.

- » Birdwatching
- » Fishing tournaments
- » Paddling adventures
- » Environmental education
- » Nature-based recreation
- » Waterfront festivals



Fishing Event- Adobe Stock

RECREATIONAL TOURISM (Cont.)

RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE IS TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Sidewalks, bike paths, gathering spaces, and public amenities are economic development investments because they encourage people to stay longer and spend more money locally. These amenities enhance recreation opportunities for residents while strengthening Port Lavaca's identity as a Gulf Coast outdoor recreation destination:

- » Bayfront trails and waterfront promenades
- » Paddling routes and kayak launches
- » Wildlife observation areas
- » Fishing access points
- » Regional trail connections

STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DESTINATIONS

Successful tourism destinations are interconnected rather than isolated. Visitors enjoy exploring multiple destinations through comfortable walking, cycling, and trail networks.

- » Waterfront trail systems
- » Connections between parks and neighborhoods
- » Regional trail opportunities
- » Downtown-to-waterfront linkages
- » Connections to future regional recreation destinations

SMALL IMPROVEMENTS CAN GENERATE BIG RETURNS

Implementing focused, incremental improvements that can be tested, refined, and expanded over time rather than relying solely on large capital projects.

These relatively modest investments can improve visitor experiences quickly while building momentum toward larger long-term projects:

- » Enhanced directional signage
- » Interpretive birding and ecology panels
- » Trail markers and mileage signage
- » Kayak rental partnerships
- » Temporary event activations
- » Pop-up waterfront programming
- » Public art installations
- » Seasonal recreational events



ONGOING & PLANNED SPECIAL EVENTS

Public spaces are the heartbeat of a vibrant and thriving community, and in Port Lavaca, parks play a central role in bringing people together for connection, celebration, and everyday enjoyment. Port Lavaca hosts a variety of annual events that energize the City and generate revenue.

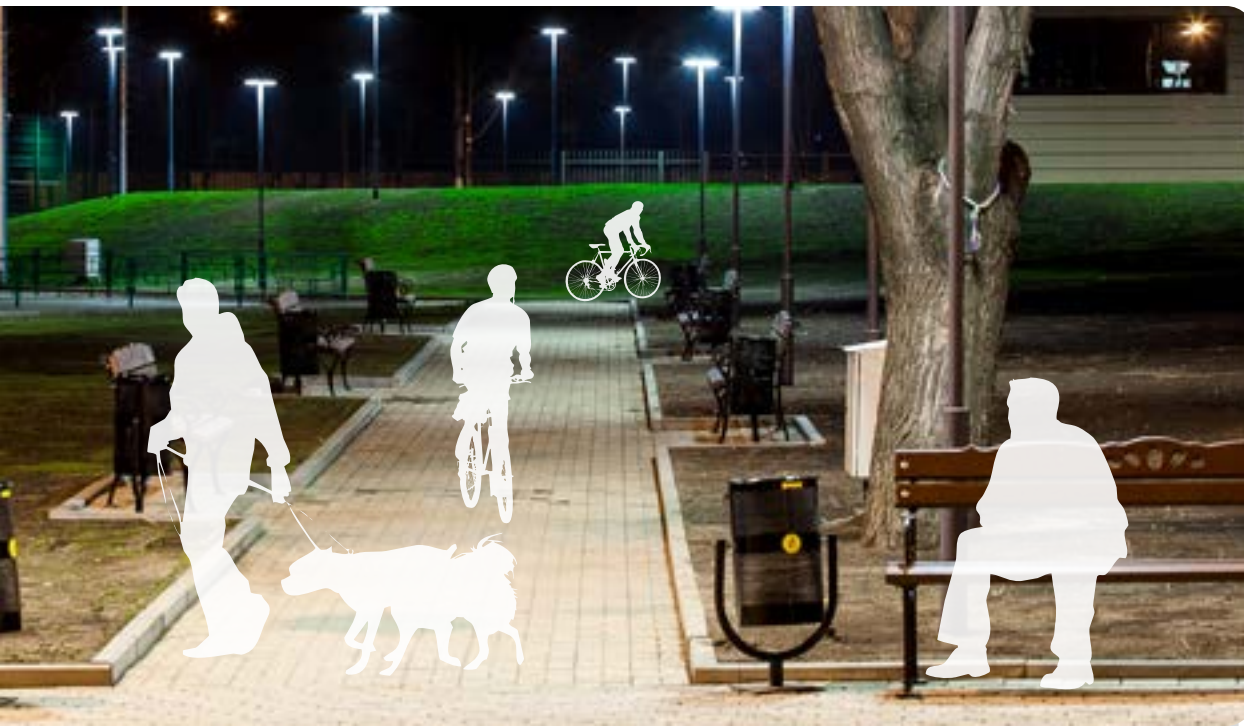


COMFORT & IMAGE

SAFETY

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is the use of smart design to make spaces safer and more welcoming, focusing on natural surveillance (clear sightlines), natural access control (defined entrances), territorial reinforcement (sense of ownership), activity support (encouraging use), and excellent maintenance.

- » Define formal entry points and boundaries with signage or design features.
- » Consolidate informal trails by converting into formal paths or decommissioning with vegetation or barriers.
- » Install low-cost guidance elements (bollards, fencing, landscaping) and utilize controlled vehicle access protocols, such as lockable gates or collapsible bollards for after-hours security and event management.
- » Place benches and gathering areas so they are visible from main circulation routes
- » Install dark sky-friendly lighting along high-use corridors, parking lots, and pavilions
- » Identify high incident location and create a rapid-response protocol (24–72 hours) for graffiti, vandalism, and damaged infrastructure.
- » Evaluate public Wi-Fi hotspots in major destinations to support real-time communication.
- » Work with neighborhood associations to conduct periodic “walk audits”



FURNITURE, SHADE, & COOLING

Street and trail furniture are crucial in parks and recreation planning for placemaking by enhancing safety, fostering social interaction, promoting sustainability, guiding movement, and creating a strong sense of place and beauty, transforming functional spaces into vibrant community assets that encourage physical activity and belonging through elements like comfortable seating, bike racks, waste bins, and art.

High temperatures and intense sunlight are common challenges that can significantly impact the enjoyment and safety of public parks and recreation spaces. Thoughtful planning for heat is essential to protect residents' health. Prolonged exposure to heat can increase the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke, especially among vulnerable groups such as children and seniors. To mitigate these risks, the City should

- » Plant shade trees throughout playgrounds and walkways
- » Continue installing shaded picnic pavilions and seating areas
- » Use heat-reflective and permeable materials for paths and playground surfaces
- » Incorporate water features such as splash pads or misting stations
- » Ensuring that drinking fountains are readily available
- » Utilize heat safety signage or adjust operating hours during extreme heat events

By prioritizing these elements in parks and recreation planning, Port Lavaca can create more comfortable, welcoming spaces while supporting public health and encouraging year-round outdoor activity, even in the face of rising temperatures.

TREES

As Port Lavaca continues to evolve, the need to protect and expand its tree canopy, green spaces, and natural systems becomes increasingly important. With population and household growth expected over the next several years, expanding development brings new challenges, particularly around preserving the city's coastal prairie landscape and managing environmental impacts. Trees and open space play a critical role in reducing heat, improving air quality, and supporting stormwater management. Restoring riparian corridors along creeks and drainage areas helps prevent flooding, improves water quality, and preserves the region's natural character.

Current national trends show an increasing preference for nature-based recreation and shaded outdoor areas, especially among older adults. With nearly one in five residents over the age of 65, the City should prioritize accessible green infrastructure—such as shaded walking trails, seating areas, and native gardens—that support passive recreation and aging in place. Expanding tree canopy and park access doesn't just support health and livability—it also boosts economic value, with homes near green spaces often experiencing higher property values and greater curb appeal.

To meet future needs, Port Lavaca should continue investing in tree planting, riparian restoration, and the integration of natural features into its parks and trails. As demand for outdoor recreation grows, these efforts will help strengthen the city's resilience, foster a stronger local economy, and ensure that Port Lavaca remains a healthy, beautiful, and connected community for generations to come.



SUGGESTED PLANTS & SHADE TREES



LIVE OAK



AUTOGRAPH TREE



WAX MYRTLE



MEXICAN OLIVE TREE



TEXAS SAGE



MEXICAN FAN PALM

SECTION STRATEGIES

SOCIABILITY, USES, & ACTIVITIES

- » Integrate universal design standards into all park infrastructure, including piers, boat launches, and playgrounds
- » Create flexible indoor and outdoor recreation areas for fitness, wellness, and community programs.
- » Design multi-generational recreation areas, including:
 - » Playgrounds, splash pads, and skate plazas/features.
 - » Fitness stations, jogging trails, and sports courts.
 - » Shaded seating, accessible pathways, and low-impact exercise zones.
- » Conduct an ADA assessment to determine what types of retrofits can improve ADA accessibility.
- » Support local businesses through vendor opportunities, pop-up markets, and collaborations with restaurants, breweries, and artisans.
- » Foster public-private partnerships to expand event funding, sponsorships, and programming.
- » Activate underutilized spaces with such as food truck courts, live performance spaces, and seasonal/temporary pop-ups/installations
- » Install multi-use features (e.g., lawn areas, flexible shade shelters, portable seating) to support varied community events.
- » Create small activity nodes every ½–1 mile along long trails to encourage continuous circulation.
- » Encourage third-parties (youth groups, nonprofits, businesses) to host activities through simplified permitting and low-cost use agreements.
- » Coordinate with schools and youth organizations to host stewardship and environmental learning days.
- » Develop an “Adopt-a-Park” program inviting neighborhoods, businesses, and volunteers to provide support and monitoring.
- » Enhance/evaluate the rotating seasonal event schedule, ensuring at least one major community event per quarter
- » Develop partnerships with local schools and organizations to host a youth-focused gathering or event.
- » Develop partnerships with local organizations to host a senior-focused gathering or event.
- » Provide affordable vendor spaces at community events, allowing local entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services.
- » Increase marketing and promotion of programs and special events
- » Create and launch a Block Party Trailer that can be rented for neighborhood events
- » Launch a collaboration with the School District to link student volunteers, who need community volunteer hours, with the City’s events team to provide outreach assistance, setup, cleanup, and event staffing.
- » Implement a “Patio Night Series” featuring live music, art walks, and open-air dining experiences and invite indoor dining facilities to activate parking spaces outside their business
- » Develop a promotional campaign with digital marketing, social media highlights, and printed event guides.
- » Commission a tourism strategic plan to:
 - » Identify resources and assets needed to support special events, including public and private spaces
 - » Review and prioritize the next round of long-term improvements from the Waterfront Master Plan
 - » Identify the public and private spaces needed to support special events
 - » Determine use needs for future parks while they are still in the Level 1
- » Formulate and launch a recreation focused campaign to attract snowbirds, partners, vendors, sponsors, and new development

COMFORT & IMAGE

- » Define formal entry points and boundaries with signage, gateway elements, or design features.
- » Consolidate informal trails by converting into formal paths or decommissioning with vegetation or barriers.
- » Install low-cost guidance elements (bollards, fencing, landscaping) and utilize controlled vehicle access protocols, such as lockable gates or collapsible bollards for after-hours security and event management.
- » Place benches and gathering areas so they are visible from main circulation routes
- » Install dark sky-friend lighting along high-use corridors, parking lots, and pavilions
- » Identify high incident location and create a rapid-response protocol (24–72 hours) for graffiti, vandalism, and damaged infrastructure.
- » Evaluate public Wi-Fi hotspots in major destinations to support real-time communication.
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- » Plant shade trees throughout playgrounds and walkways
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- » Use heat-reflective and permeable materials for paths and playground surfaces
- » Incorporate water features such as splash pads or misting stations
- » Ensuring that drinking fountains are readily available
- » Utilize heat safety signage or adjust operating hours during extreme heat events



CHAPTER RECAP

This chapter focuses on elements of the parks, recreation, and trails system that occur within the parks and trails themselves, specifically events, recreation programming, and placemaking. It addresses how these spaces can be activated beyond their physical infrastructure to create social, cultural, and economic value for the community.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS



SUMMARY OF PROGRAMMING & PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES



QUALITY OF LIFE: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL CURRENT AND FUTURE RESIDENTS BY PROVIDING EXCEPTIONAL RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND GREEN SPACES.

- » Work with City Council to initiate the process of establishing a recreation element to the Parks Department with a dedicated Parks Director
- » Budget for a director level hire.
- » Update the City website better to connect users to County- and TPW-managed facilities
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- » Incorporate QR codes for reporting issues, providing maps, and sharing safety tips.
- » Implement asset management software to track condition, repairs, and lifecycle replacement schedules.
- » Integrate universal design standards into all park infrastructure, including piers, boat launches, and playgrounds
- » Create flexible indoor and outdoor recreation areas for fitness, wellness, and community programs.
- » Design multi-generational recreation areas, including:
 - » Playgrounds, splash pads, and skate plazas/features.
 - » Fitness stations, jogging trails, and sports courts.
 - » Shaded seating, accessible pathways, and low-impact exercise zones.
- » Conduct an ADA assessment to determine what types of retrofits can improve ADA accessibility.
- » Install multi-use features (e.g., lawn areas, flexible shade shelters, portable seating) to support varied community events.
- » Create small activity nodes every ½–1 mile along long trails to encourage continuous circulation.
- » Encourage third-parties (youth groups, nonprofits, businesses) to host activities through simplified permitting and low-cost use agreements.
- » Coordinate with schools and youth organizations to host stewardship and environmental learning days.
- » Develop an "Adopt-a-Park" program inviting neighborhoods, businesses, and volunteers to provide support and monitoring.
- » Enhance/evaluate the rotating seasonal event schedule, ensuring at least one major community event per quarter
- » Develop partnerships with local schools and organizations to host a youth-focused gathering or event.
- » Develop partnerships with local organizations to host a senior-focused gathering or event.
- » Increase marketing and promotion of programs and special events
- » Create and launch a Block Party Trailer that can be rented for neighborhood events
- » Launch a collaboration with the School District to link student volunteers, who need community volunteer hours, with the City's events team to provide outreach assistance, setup, cleanup, and event staffing.
- » Implement a "Patio Night Series" featuring live music, art walks, and open-air dining experiences and invite indoor dining facilities to activate parking spaces
- » Define formal entry points and boundaries with signage, gateway elements, or design features.
- » Consolidate informal trails by converting into formal paths or decommissioning with vegetation or barriers.

- » Install low-cost guidance elements (bollards, fencing, landscaping) and utilize controlled vehicle access protocols, such as lockable gates or collapsible bollards for after-hours security and event management.
- » Place benches and gathering areas so they are visible from main circulation routes
- » Install dark sky-friendly lighting along high-use corridors, parking lots, and pavilions
- » Identify high incident location and create a rapid-response protocol (24–72 hours) for graffiti, vandalism, and damaged infrastructure.
- » Evaluate public Wi-Fi hotspots in major destinations to support real-time communication.
- » Work with neighborhood associations to conduct periodic “walk audits”
- » Continue installing shaded picnic pavilions and seating areas
- » Incorporate water features such as splash pads or misting stations
- » Ensuring that drinking fountains are readily available
- » Utilize heat safety signage or adjust operating hours during extreme heat events



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE AND BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

- » Plant shade trees throughout playgrounds and walkways
- » Use heat-reflective and permeable materials for paths and playground surfaces



EQUITABLE ACCESS: EXPAND ACCESS, CONNECTIVITY, AND ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH MULTI-MODAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

- » Identify expanded partnership opportunities with the YMCA, such as swim lessons and aquatic safety
- » Explore partnership opportunities to use vacant public property for semi-permanent uses like bouldering/climbing, paintball, or airsoft.
- » Coordinate with Calhoun County ISD and Calhoun County Library to explore esports,
- » Fill in programmatic gaps for adult fitness and wellness, nature, aquatic, and inclusive and adaptive program areas.
- » Issue an open call to churches, private rec centers, and other entities that have indoor recreation facilities, youth sports, after-school/daycare, and seniors events on their grounds; establish partnerships via 380 agreement to spread awareness of the facilities and provide access for residents at a fraction of the cost of a flagship recreation center.
- » Commission a Community Center Master Plan that provides an initial feasibility study and design program.
- » Any feasibility study should evaluate potential partnerships with Calhoun County
- » Incorporate features that can allow this facility to act as an emergency shelter during severe weather events.
- » Include commercial kitchen equipment in recreational centers; this opens potential to utilize space as a resilience hub during disaster events or to earn revenue by renting out space for events.
- » Co-locate indoor recreation space with libraries, public health clinics, or parks/trail networks to increase benefits.
- » In coordination with the EDC, conduct a STEM feasibility study focused on Esports and Makerspaces



ECONOMIC VITALITY: ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH RECREATIONAL TOURISM, PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS, AND INNOVATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES.

- » Issue an open call to local landowners to explore interest in establishing a private paintball, airsoft, high ropes, or dirtbike park
- » In coordination with the Parks Board, TIRZ Board and/or Port Lavaca Economic Development Corporation, establish a small business grant and support program that could:
 - » Partially fund site assessments or designs for prospective sites
 - » Contribute to basic renovations or site improvements
 - » Provide advertising and promotion
 - » Negotiate for voluntary public park areas, trail easements, or coastline dedication
 - » Support local businesses through vendor opportunities, pop-up markets, and collaborations with restaurants, breweries, and artisans.
 - » Foster public-private partnerships to expand event funding, sponsorships, and programming.
 - » Activate underutilized spaces with such as food truck courts, live performance spaces, and seasonal/temporary pop-ups/installations
 - » Provide affordable vendor spaces at community events, allowing local entrepreneurs to showcase their products and services.
 - » Develop a promotional campaign with digital marketing, social media highlights, and printed event guides.
- » Commission a tourism strategic plan to:
 - » Identify resources and assets needed to support special events, including public and private spaces
 - » Review and prioritize the next round of long-term improvements from the Waterfront Master Plan
 - » Identify the public and private spaces needed to support special events
 - » Determine use needs for future parks while they are still in the Level 1
- » Formulate and launch a recreation focused campaign to attract snowbirds, partners, vendors, sponsors, and new development



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND VITALITY THROUGH HIGH-QUALITY PARK PROGRAMMING AND SPECIAL EVENTS.

- » Identify existing makers, hobbyists, clubs, schools, libraries, and small manufacturers
- » Bring together potential partners: libraries, schools, community colleges, economic development staff, nonprofits, and local makers.
- » Start small and flexible: community centers, park buildings, recreation facilities, or shared library space.
- » Confirm basic requirements: power, ventilation, storage, safety, ADA access, and insurance.
- » Design for adaptability rather than permanence in the initial phase
- » Launch Core, Low-Barrier Programming by beginning with introductory and inclusive offerings
- » Keep costs low or free to build participation and trust.
- » Prioritize learning and community-building over advanced equipment at first.
- » Host maker meetups, demonstrations, and showcases.
- » Tour an existing makerspace, such as The MakerBarn in Magnolia or the jaX lab at TAMU Victoria