



FROM BAY TO BACKYARD

OUR PARKS, RECREATION, & TRAILS MASTER PLAN



CITY OF
PORT LAVACA
TEXAS



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Thank you to the countless residents who participated in a community event, emailed, took a survey, colored a picture, or otherwise contributed to this Plan!



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the City Manager	04
Executive Summary	05
Chapter 1: Introduction	06
Chapter 2: Parks & Facilities	24
Chapter 3: Trails	58
Chapter 4: PROGRAMS & Placemaking	78
Chapter 5: Implementation Plan	101

FIGURES

Figure 2: Community Engagement SWOT Analysis	16
Figure 3: Budget Breakdown	17
Figure 4: Park Typologies	28
Figure 6: Park Development Phases	32
Figure 7: Service & Upkeep Levels	36
Figure 10: Trail Typologies	63
Figure 11: Trail Cross Sections	68
Figure 14: Last Mile Linkages	74
Figure 15: Recreation Center Concept	83
Figure 16: Community Event Calendar	90
Figure 17: Placemaking Elements	92
Figure 18: Inclusive Facilities Elements	96

TABLES

Map 1: Existing Conditions Map	11
Map 2: Park System Map	27
Map 3: Park Access Level of Service Map	35
Map 4: Existing Trails Map	61
Map 5: Paddle Trails Map	71
Map 6: Regional Trails Map	72

MAPS

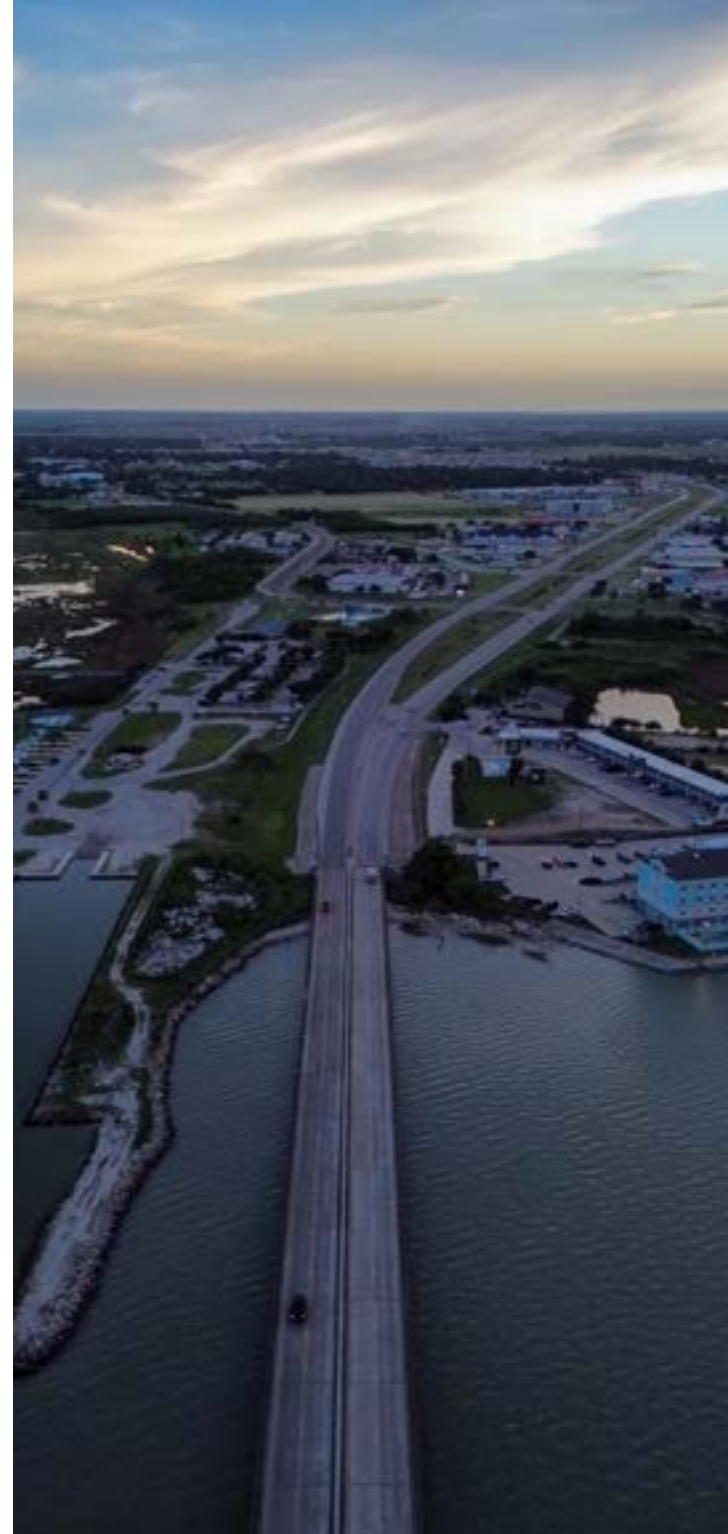
Table 1: Parks Performance Measures	18
Table 2: Park Inventory	31
Table 3: Parks Development Phases	32
Table 4: Service & Upkeep Levels	33



LETTER FROM OUR CITY MANAGER



Jody Weaver, PE- Port Lavaca City Manager



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Situated along the scenic shores of Lavaca Bay, Port Lavaca's parks, recreation, and trail system plays a vital role in shaping the community's coastal identity, quality of life, and economic vitality. Rooted in a resilient history and supported by a growing, business-friendly community, Port Lavaca's public spaces provide essential access to nature, outdoor recreation, and gathering places that serve residents, attract visitors, and support tourism, workforce retention, and long-term sustainable growth along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Initiated in May 2024, the Port Lavaca Parks & Recreation Master Plan serves as a comprehensive, long-range guide for efficiently growing and maintaining the City's parks, recreation areas, and trail network. The Plan establishes a framework to guide future improvements, prioritize capital investments, and inform operational and budgetary decisions. This will help ensure that the community's vision for a connected, accessible, and high-quality parks and recreation system can be realized.

The mission of the Parks & Recreation Department is to serve both residents and visitors by providing the highest standard of parks and leisure services in a safe, efficient, and professional manner. The department is responsible for operations and maintenance tasks including mowing, landscaping, park upkeep, playground equipment inspections, custodial duties, maintenance of the community swimming pool, and the construction of new facilities and amenities. Proactive planning is essential in park system management.

This Master Plan evaluates existing conditions, identifies gaps in service, and anticipates future recreational needs to ensure that park and trail investments keep pace with population changes, economic development, and environmental challenges. Particular emphasis is placed on coastal resilience, access to nature, and efficient, demand-based distribution of recreational amenities throughout the community.

Placemaking is also a central theme throughout the Plan. By enhancing parks and waterfront spaces, expanding recreational programs, and supporting community events, Port Lavaca can strengthen its civic identity and reinforce parks as vibrant community hubs. At the same time, strategic investment in natural resource protection and coastal preservation will safeguard the environmental assets that define the region and sustain the community for future generations.

The Master Plan is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 establishes the community's vision and guiding principles for parks, recreation, and trails. Chapter 2 evaluates the City's parks and facilities, including level of service and park inventory analysis. Chapter 3 focuses on trails and connectivity, emphasizing pedestrian access and system-wide integration. Chapter 4 explores events, programs, and placemaking as tools to activate public spaces and strengthen community life. Chapter 5 presents an actionable implementation plan that outlines recommended projects, priorities, phasing, and partnerships to guide decision-making over time.

Collectively, the Port Lavaca Parks & Recreation Master Plan provides a roadmap for enhancing quality of life, preserving natural landscapes, strengthening community identity, expanding connectivity, and supporting economic vitality through recreation and tourism. Through thoughtful planning and strategic investment, Port Lavaca's parks and recreation system will continue to serve as a cornerstone of a vibrant, resilient coastal community.

Welcome To



INTRODUCTION &
PLAN CONTEXT

01



Mural at Lighthouse Beach Park

Making Memories with
the Lighthouse Beach Park & the Lighthouse

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

Parks and trails play vital roles in the community. Play facilities promote healthy childhood development, creativity, and social skills through safe, unstructured play. Gathering spaces foster social connection, civic life, and a shared sense of community through events and informal interaction. Passive recreation to supports mental health, stress reduction, and overall well-being. Active recreation promotes physical health, reduce chronic disease, and provide accessible opportunities for movement and sport. Natural spaces preserve ecosystems, improve environmental quality, and connect people to the natural world.

Port Lavaca's current parks and recreation system is comprised of eight City parks that feature a wide variety of public amenities: playscapes, picnic areas, trails, beach access, a public pool, and a myriad of other public facilities. By leveraging these assets and prioritizing strategic investment and collaboration, Port Lavaca is strengthening a growing parks system that reflects the community's values, supports a high quality of life, celebrates the city's natural beauty, and fosters inclusive spaces for all.

The Port Lavaca Parks & Recreation Master Plan serves as a comprehensive guide for enhancing, expanding, and shaping the future of the City's parks, recreation areas, and trail networks. Initiated in May 2024, the Plan provides a clear framework to guide future improvements, prioritize investments, and inform budgetary decisions, ensuring that the community's vision for a well-connected, accessible, and resilient parks and recreation system become a reality.

As Port Lavaca continues to evolve, proactive planning is essential. This Plan ensures that the City's parks and recreation system offerings not only meet current needs but also anticipate and respond to future demands, positioning Port Lavaca for a vibrant, resilient future. Placemaking lies at the heart of this Plan. By enhancing public spaces, expanding recreational programs, and fostering community events, Port Lavaca can strengthen its unique identity and quality of life. At the same time, strategic investment in coastal preservation will protect the natural assets that define the region, ensuring that Port Lavaca's beauty and character endure for generations to come.

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

- » Enhance the quality of life for all residents by providing exceptional recreational opportunities and green spaces.
- » Preserve and protect the natural landscape, while guiding growth for community resilience.
- » Strengthen community identity and civic pride through investment in parks, trails, and recreational amenities.
- » Expand connectivity and access through trails and pedestrian infrastructure.
- » Strengthen economic vitality and growth through recreational tourism, strategic partnerships, and innovation.



Port Lavaca Lighthouse Beach Park



PHYSICAL FEATURES

Physical features, including natural and man-made barriers, play a key role in determining the suitability of sites for parks and trails. This suitability influences everything from the placement of parks to the layout and design of park spaces.

FLOODPLAIN

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) defines a floodplain as any land area susceptible to inundation by floodwaters. Port Lavaca's flood hazard areas are primarily located along Chocolate Bayou, and Lynn Bayou.

WETLANDS, MARSHES, & BAYOUS

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil, or is present at or near the surface of the soil, either year-round or for varying periods of time throughout the year, including during the growing season. Coastal and tidal wetlands are a specific type of wetland closely associated with estuaries where seawater and freshwater mix to create environments with varying salinity levels. Salt marshes are one form of 'blue carbon', the organic carbon captured and stored by the world's coastal and marine ecosystems. Port Lavaca's wetlands and marshes are primarily located along Lighthouse Beach and Harbor of Refuge.

Bayous are slow-moving tributaries that feed into larger bodies of water. The characteristic marshy waters of bayous are commonly found in low-lying coastal areas throughout the Gulf Coast region. Like coastal wetlands, bayous often consist of freshwater, saltwater, or a mix of both, known as brackish water. Port Lavaca's bayous support rich and diverse estuarine ecosystems, provide vital wildlife habitat, and offer valuable recreational opportunities.

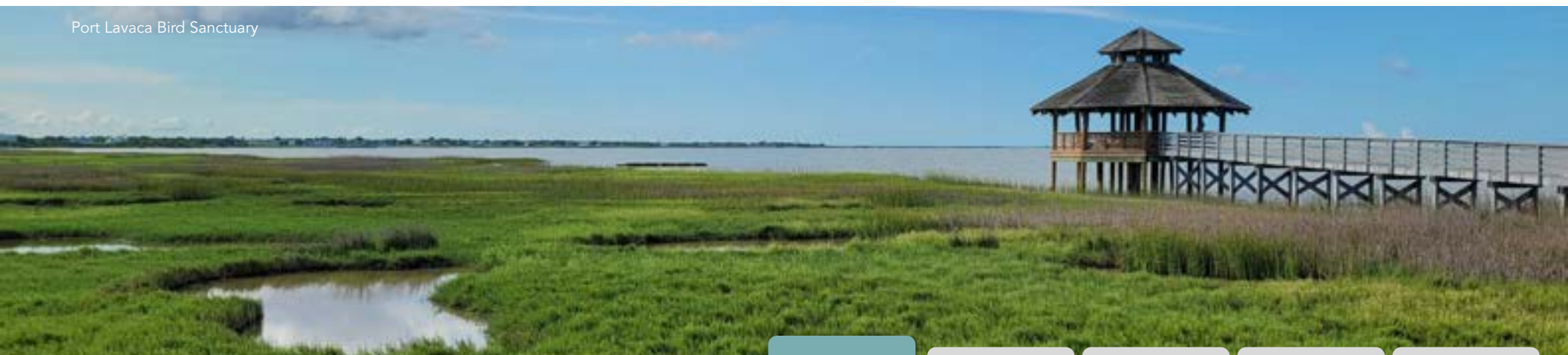
RAILROAD

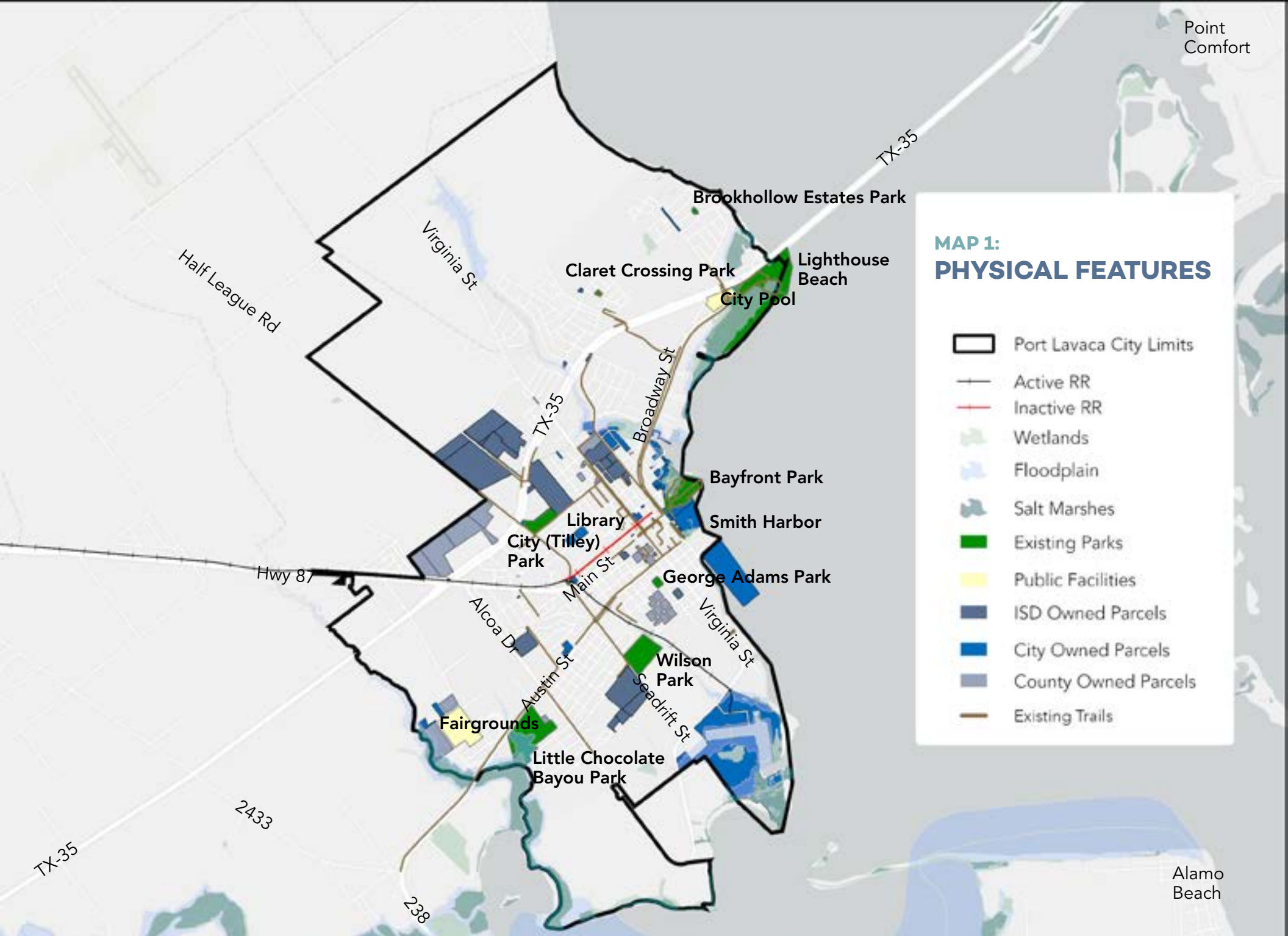
An active Union Pacific Railroad line bisects the city north to south along US 87, splitting at Half League Road. While the southern portion remains technically active, it is currently unused due to a washed-out bridge at Virginia Street/ 1090. The northern fork, however, is permanently inactive and terminates at the historic depot within the Waterfront District.

IMPERVIOUS SURFACES

Impervious surfaces (roads, roofs, parking lots) act as an indirect indicator for human development because they directly correlate with population density, economic activity, and urban sprawl.

Port Lavaca Bird Sanctuary





PARKS FOR THE PEOPLE OF PORT LAVACA

DEMOGRAPHICS

By recognizing the City's diverse population, this Plan ensures that parks are inclusive, accessible, and relevant to all users. Anticipating how population dynamics and growth trends may evolve also helps the City prioritize investments that support long-term community health, engagement, and quality of life.

Port Lavaca's population has remained relatively stable between 11,000 and 12,500 residents for over 30 years.

Port Lavaca is a diverse and multigenerational community. Hispanic residents make up 64 percent of the population, and the City boasts a high Diversity Index of 83.7 (as of 2025), well above the national average.

Nearly one-quarter of residents are children, and the City's median age of 38 reflects a balanced mix of young families, working professionals, and retirees.



COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

- » 11,335: Current population
- » -0.5: Population growth
- » 2.7: Average household size
- » 38: Median age
- » 64,000: Median household income
- » 135,500: Median home value
- » 197,000: Median net worth
- » 24%: Residents under age 18
- » 17%: Residents over age 65

TAPESTRY SEGMENTS

Esri's Tapestry Segmentation system groups residential areas into segments based on shared demographic, socioeconomic, and lifestyle characteristics - offering a clearer view of how people live, work, and recreate within a community.

RURAL ROOTS

Country-living and self-reliance are core values for this community. Residents place a strong emphasis on outdoor pursuits including hunting, fishing, motorcycling, hiking, camping, and golf, which play a significant role in their lifestyle.

HERITAGE HOMESTEADERS

This community is broadly characterized by traditional rural lifestyles. Residents value family time, embrace outdoor living, and spend much of their free time planning fishing, boating, or camping excursions.

FOUNDATIONAL FAMILIES

Family and the preservation of rich traditions are central to this community's identity. Residents deeply value time and activities spent with family and friends while carefully managing their budgets and expenses.

RURAL ROOTS

Education & Employment

- » Majority are college educated
- » Employed in professional sectors, self-employed, or retired

Housing

- » Older residents, primarily married couples with no children, living in single-family, owner-occupied homes
- » Older homes with ample acreage
- » Median home value: \$235,000

Lifestyle

- » Physically active
- » Engaged in their community
- » Own a variety of vehicles
- » Access to high-speed internet
- » Technology is viewed as more of a tool than trend
- » Cautious consumers focused on quality and durability
- » Pessimistic economic outlook but comfortable with debt

HERITAGE HOMESTEADERS

Education & Employment

- » Majority have a high school diploma and some college education
- » Employed in manufacturing, construction, or related industries

Housing

- » High homeownership rates
- » 2 in 3 households are married couples
- » Household income just over the national median and net worth is nearly double the national median

Lifestyle

- » Enjoy outdoor activities
- » Typically 2-car households
- » Access to high-speed internet
- » Seek face-to-face contact for routine activities and businesses
- » Cost-conscious consumers loyal to brands they like with a focus on buying American

FOUNDATIONAL FAMILIES

Education & Employment

- » Majority have a high school diploma
- » Employed in skilled positions across the manufacturing, construction, or retail trade sectors

Housing

- » Multi-generational households averaging 3.62 persons per home, living in older, owner-occupied homes
- » More than 1 in 4 households fall below the poverty line

Lifestyle

- » 1- or 2-car households
- » Access to cable television
- » Labor force participation is at 61%
- » Cost-conscious consumers loyal to brands they like with a focus on buying American

KEY TRENDS

- » Even among high-earning households in Port Lavaca, the City's primary demographic groups tend to have less discretionary income compared to similar groups nationally.
- » This low overall discretionary spending suggests that relying solely on sales and property taxes may be insufficient to fund a major revamping of the parks and recreation system.
- » Significant fluctuations in discretionary spending across groups and neighborhoods indicate that some areas may be more adversely affected by gaps in Level of Service (LOS).

PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

STAKEHOLDER & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WORKSHOP #1

As part of the 12-month planning process, a Public Workshop was held to gather meaningful input and guide the development of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. 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 collaborative and engaging discussions. Participants shared their ideas and priorities at various interactive feedback stations, helping to shape the vision and direction of the Master Plan.

Workshop Goals:

- » Introduce the community to the fundamentals of park master planning
- » Share information about the existing Parks and Recreation System
- » Understand public perspectives on current parks, programs, and facilities
- » Gather input to begin forming a collective community vision for the future

Stations were set up throughout the Community Center offering a mix of informational and hands-on opportunities designed to engage residents of all ages. Bilingual members of the LJA Planning Team were on-site to facilitate discussions, answer questions, and encourage dialogue throughout the evening.



Community Outreach Flyer

Public Workshop (May 20, 2025)





There is a strong local preference for larger parks with diverse offerings, even if the parks are further away.



Jars of the Future

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.

Nature (18 percent): Design spaces that protect sensitive or important natural areas and features, and integrate low impact / "green" practices.

Community Trends:

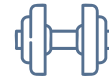
- » Additional shade trees or structures within existing parks
- » Residents appreciate larger parks with a range of amenities
- » Community recreational center with amenities for all age groups, such as sports courts and/or a public pool
- » More community events and programming
- » Rentals for kayaks, canoes, and paddle boats, near the water
- » Walking, running, and cycling trails within parks and neighborhoods
- » Splash pads for younger children
- » Free access to Lighthouse Beach for Port Lavaca residents



'My Dream Park' Activity from Public Workshop (May 20, 2025)

COMMUNITY “SWOT” ANALYSIS

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a strategic planning tool used to identify and evaluate existing conditions to develop effective strategies of improvement. This SWOT Analysis is based on community feedback and research identified through the public engagement process.



STRENGTHS

- » Coastline access, particularly the close proximity of downtown Port Lavaca to the shore
- » High-quality playgrounds, walking trails, and park splash pads
- » Quantity of existing parks
- » Strong prior planning efforts up to County level



OPPORTUNITIES

- » Expand trails and sidewalks to ultimately link 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, and more
- » Promote Port Lavaca’s parks as ecotourism destinations



WEAKNESSES

- » Lack of shade trees and structures which limit summertime enjoyment of parks and playgrounds
- » Lack of continuous, connected, and level trails, sidewalks, and safe pedestrian paths
- » No indoor recreational center
- » Limited maintenance for park facilities, particularly restrooms



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

ADMINISTRATION & ANNUAL BUDGET

ADMINISTRATION

In the early 2000's, the City of Port Lavaca operated a standalone Parks and Recreation Department. However, following the departure of the department's director, the position was not refilled and the department was subsequently consolidated under the Department of Public Works.

Currently, there are no dedicated City staff assigned to manage recreation programming. While the community pool is owned by the City and open to the public, daily operations and staffing are managed by the local YMCA. Public access is limited to the pool itself and does not include other YMCA amenities or programs.

Currently, as the Parks & Recreation Department is rolled into the Public Works team, there are 5 full-time city employees dedicated to parks: 1 park superintendent, 1 foreman, and 3 maintenance workers. During the summer, 1 temporary worker assists the team part-time.

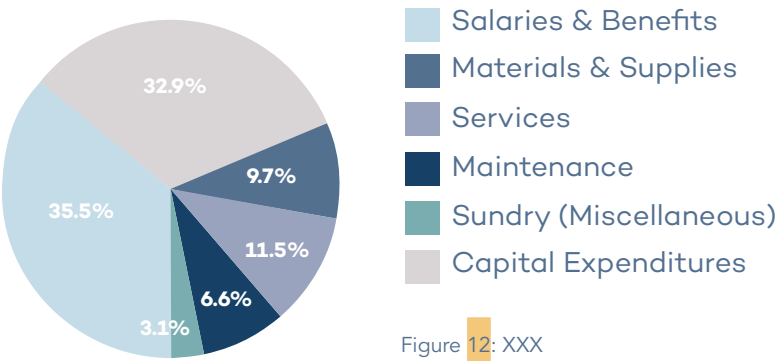


Figure 12: XXX

2023 - 2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- » Replaced all Lighthouse Beach metal frame picnic tables with wood.
- » Constructed a bird blind at Lighthouse Beach.
- » Repainted the old bathroom at Bayfront Park.
- » Installed new LED lights at Bayfront Park.
- » Replaced bollards cables at Blackrock.
- » Expanded the nuisance vegetation program with a bi-weekly spraying schedule.
- » Installed a shade structure at Bayfront Park splash pad.
- » Daily park inspections of maintenance and grounds keeping.
- » Constructed a new restroom at Wilson Park.
- » Worked with private partners to expand the Born Learning Trail.
- » Built 1 cabana at the Lighthouse Beach splash pad.
- » Rehabilitated pool plumbing and chlorination system.
- » Installed a new water slide at the community pool.
- » Reconstructed the volleyball court at City Park.

2025-2026 BUDGET OBJECTIVES

- » Install new surveillance cameras where needed.
- » Build 2 to 3 cabanas at the Lighthouse Beach splash pad.
- » Reconstruct the Lighthouse Beach volleyball court.
- » Butterfly Park improvements including lighting, cabanas, and fencing.
- » Add a covered basketball court at Wilson Park.
- » Hire a consultant to apply with the Army Corp of Engineers to connect the Veterans Memorial to Scully's via a boardwalk.

ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL PLANS + STUDIES

CALHOUN COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

- » Protect, enhance, and restore wetlands, coastal, and barrier areas to reduce erosion
- » Improve public facilities
- » Construct shade structures at public parks
- » Plant drought-resistant plants at public parks and facilities
- » Establish cooling centers at public parks and/or critical public facilities
- » Repair and/or install bulkhead along the coastline
- » Build a pavilion or covers in public areas and public parks
- » Implement erosion mitigation elements at Lighthouse Beach and boat ramp
- » Construct a living shoreline along the wetlands of Lighthouse Beach Park
- » Construct a stormwater relief channel upstream of Lynn Bayou
- » Construct shoreline protection of eastern shorelines of the Harbor of Refuge

TEXAS COASTAL RESILIENCY MASTER PLAN

- » Maintain coastal economic growth
- » Improve community resiliency
- » Grow key knowledge & experience
- » Adapt to changing conditions
- » Address under-represented needs
- » Manage coastal habitats, gulf shorelines, bay shorelines, and watersheds

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

TPWD is one of the largest grant providers for local parks, trails, and recreational facilities in Texas, awarding more than \$30.1 million in local parks grants in 2025. TPWD grant program guidelines outline funding opportunities for parks and trails, recommending sustainability measures, connectivity enhancements, and conservation easements to maximize eligibility. The applicable TPWD priorities are integrated into this Master Plan:

Conservation and Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Resources

- » Protect, restore, and manage Texas' land, water, and wildlife to ensure long-term environmental and recreational sustainability.

Increasing Public Access and Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- » Ensure that all Texans have equitable access to outdoor spaces and recreation.

Economic Development and Park-Based Tourism

- » Leverage parks and trails to drive local economies, boost tourism, and support small businesses.

Education, Community Engagement, and Recruitment

- » Expand public outreach, increase environmental education, and attract new park users.



DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Several city parks are located within the waterfront area, including Lighthouse Beach, Bayfront Peninsula Park, and Fay Bauer Sterling Park.

KEY ALIGNMENT TOPICS:

- » Add value to the waterfront through new public facilities & improvements, better access & opportunities for recreation
- » Preserve the natural environs & conserve valuable resources
- » Through placemaking, achieve broad recognition as a destination on the Texas Gulf Coast
- » Cohesive wayfinding and branding that promotes community identity
- » Restore the role of gathering and recreation by the waterfront

'PLAN PORT LAVACA' COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

KEY ALIGNMENT TOPICS:

- » Establish a parks dedication ordinance anticipating new development.
- » Explore opportunities for community gardens throughout the City, utilizing abandoned lots in neighborhoods
- » Explore and create beautification programs for the community
- » Recreation activity center and programming
- » Developing a citywide hike & bike trail system
- » Recreation opportunities for youth, adults, and visitors
- » Destinations to attract visitors
- » Resilient waterfront
- » Exciting waterfront amenities that generate activity and income
- » Grant funding for sidewalks and complete streets

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This page establishes the Community Vision and Guiding Principles that serve as the foundation for the overall structure and direction of this Plan. The visioning and implementation processes will inform capital improvements and long-range policy, ensuring alignment between community goals and future investments.

As with every chapter in this Parks & Recreation Master Plan, the goals identified are aligned with capital improvement plan (CIP) initiatives. Each set of goals remains thematically-focused providing a clear, topic-specific framework to guide decision making and resource allocation in support of the community's evolving recreational needs.

These five Guiding Principles form the basis of the Plan's analysis and recommendations:



QUALITY OF LIFE

Enhance the quality of life for all current and future residents by providing exceptional recreational opportunities and green spaces.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Preserve and protect the natural landscape and build community resilience.



EQUITABLE ACCESS

Expand access, connectivity, and accessibility through trails and pedestrian infrastructure.



ECONOMIC VITALITY

Encourage economic growth through recreational tourism, public-private partnerships, and innovative funding strategies.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Strengthen community identity and vitality through high-quality park programming and special events.



CHAPTER RECAP

This page will appear at the end of every chapter to summarize the key points. For chapters two through four, a summary of the chapter recommendations will also be provided.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

REGULATORY ALIGNMENT

- » Coastal and ecological protection and restoration
- » Heat mitigation through shade trees and structures
- » Recreational tourism
- » Placemaking
- » Expand access to parks and natural areas
- » Expanded recreational tourism and economic development
- » Fiscal resilience in system planning

COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT:

- » Additional shade trees or structures
- » Larger parks with a range of amenities
- » Community recreational center with amenities for all age groups
- » Community events and programming
- » Rentals for kayaks, canoes, and paddle boats
- » Walking, running, and cycling trails within parks and neighborhoods
- » Splash pads
- » Free beach access for residents

