

# FROM BAY TO BACKYARD

PARKS, RECREATION, & TRAILS MASTER PLAN

# PORT LAVACA, TEXAS

PRELIMINARY PUBLIC DRAFT

JANUARY 2026

FEBRUARY 2026

Prepared for the City of Port Lavaca, Texas by LJA

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## CITY STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION

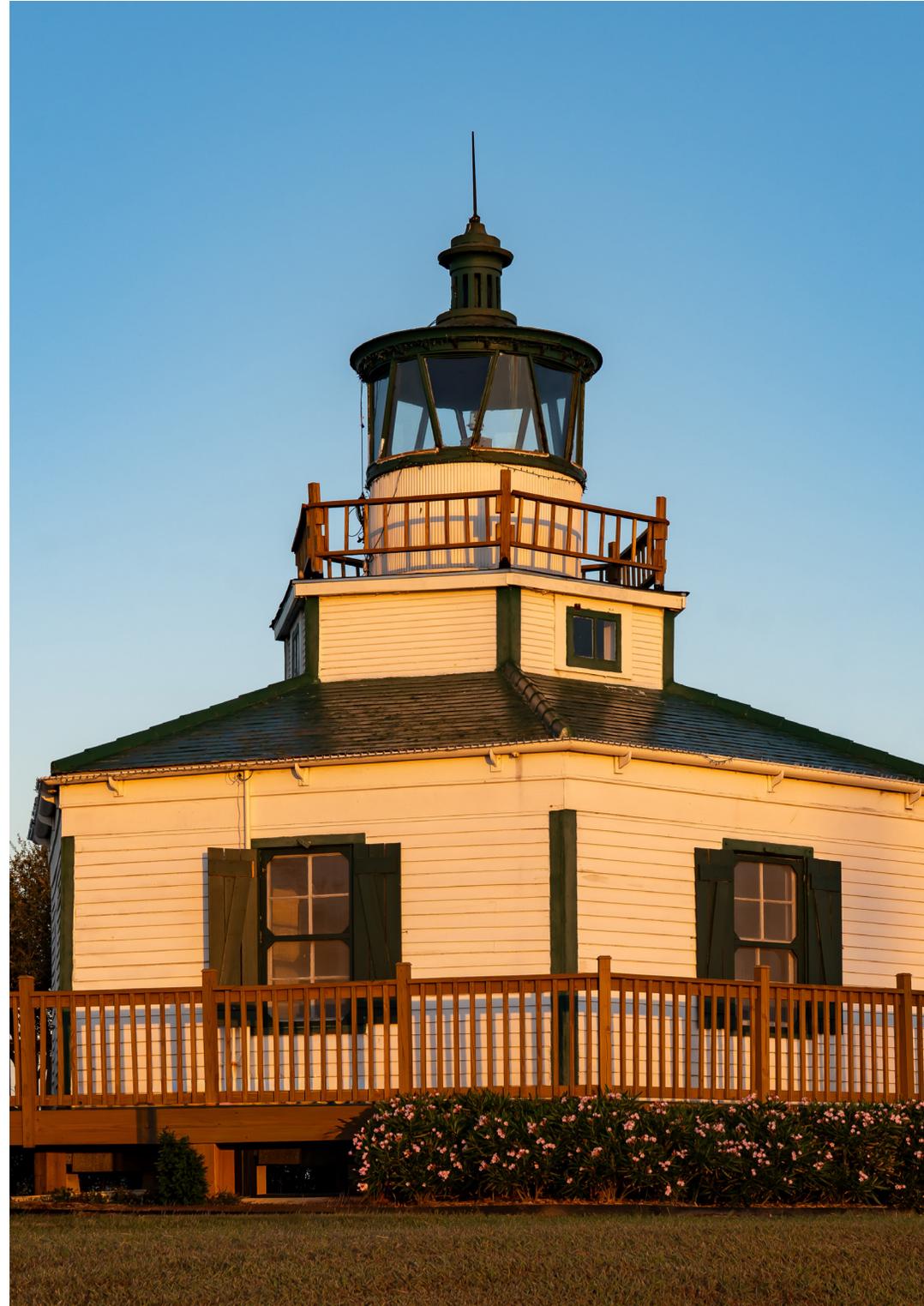
Jack Whitlow	Mayor
Daniel Aguirre	City Council District 1
Tim Dent	City Council District 2
Rosie Padron	City Council District 4
Rose Bland-Stewart	City Council District 5
Justin Burke	City Council District 6
Mac Sistrunk	Recreation and Parks Board Chair
Olga Szela	Recreation and Parks Board Vice Chair
Gregory Falcon	Recreation and Parks Board Member
Mary Lou Tharling	Recreation and Parks Board Member
Socorro Cantu	Recreation and Parks Board Member
Bill Reagan	Recreation and Parks Board Member
Jody Weaver, PE	City Manager
Wayne Shaffer	Public Works Director
Tania French	Events and Marketing Coordinator

## CONSULTANT TEAM

### LJA Planning & Landscape Architecture

Ernesto Alfaro, AICP	Project Manager
Corry McClellan, AICP	Associate Project Manager
Laura Cuervo	Associate Planner
Brissa Estrada	Graduate Planner
Kailey DeLuca, AICP	Planner
Francisco Garcia	Landscape Designer

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



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*Editor's Note: Final draft will contain captions throughout and credit where needed.*



# LETTER FROM THE CITY MANAGER

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# 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.

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.



Figure 2: Historic Image, Scene at Pavilion, Port Lavaca, Texas

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 & 01  
PLAN CONTEXT



house

# PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

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:

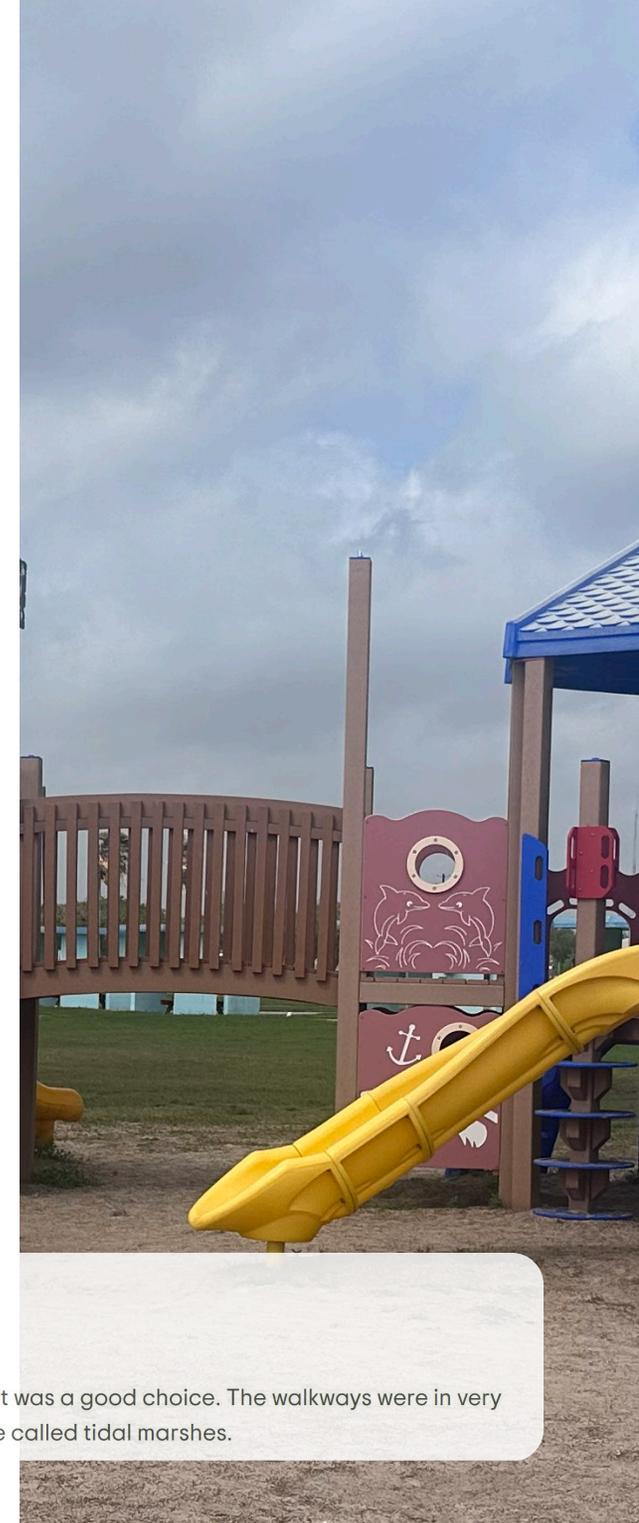
- Enhance the quality of life for all residents by providing exceptional recreational opportunities and green spaces.
- Preserve and protect the natural landscape, while guiding growth for community resilience.
- Strengthen community identity and civic pride through investment in parks, trails, and recreational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

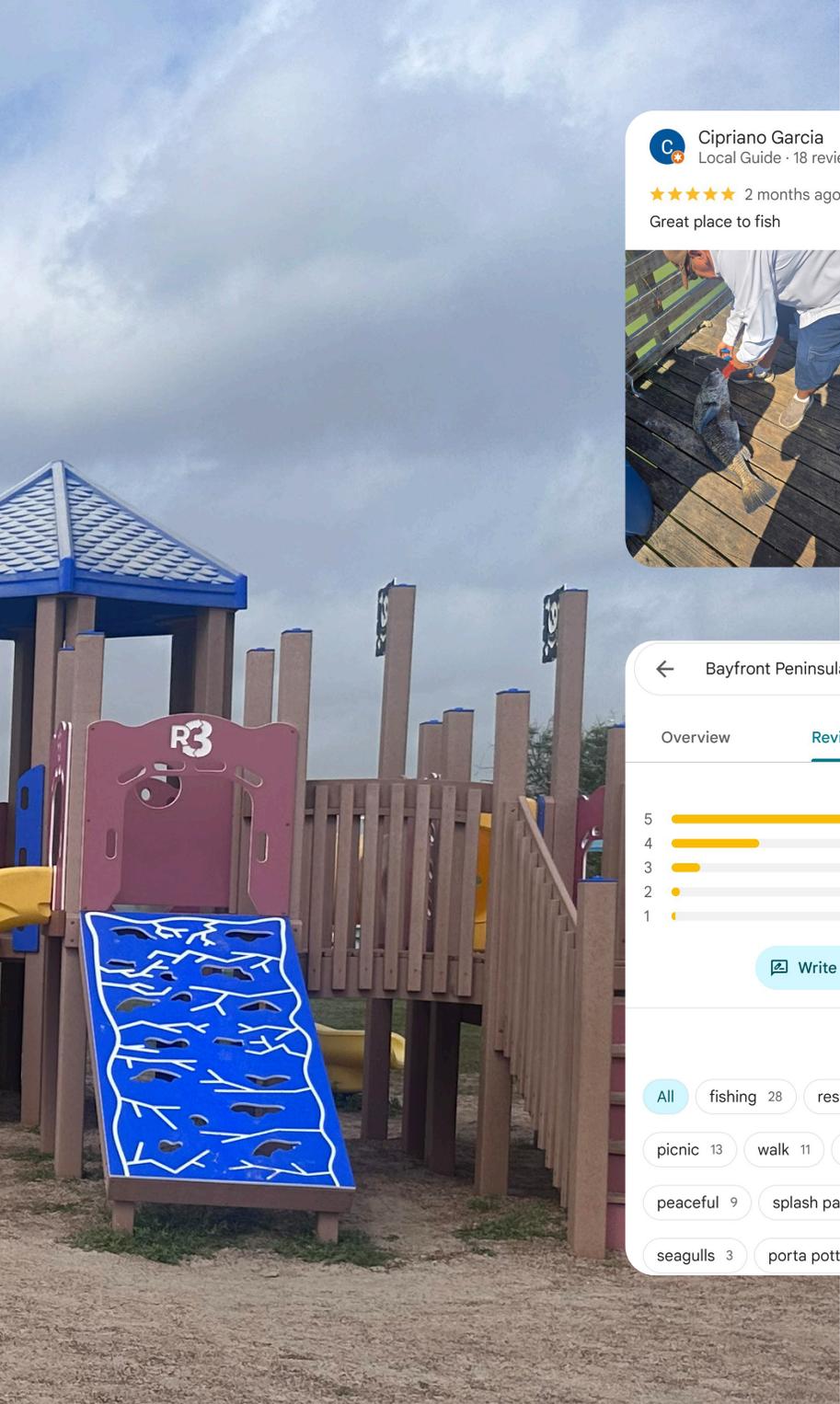


## Nice travel break

Feb 2023

This was an impromptu travel break to stretch our legs a bit. It was a good choice. The walkways were in very good repair with views of both open water and what might be called tidal marshes.





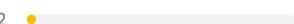
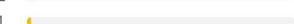
 **Cipriano Garcia**  
Local Guide · 18 reviews · 40 photos

★★★★★ 2 months ago  
Great place to fish



← Bayfront Peninsula Park 🔍 ✕

Overview Reviews About

5  4  3  2  1 

**4.5**  
★★★★★  
342 reviews

 Write a review

🔍 ☰ Sort

All fishing 28 restrooms 17

picnic 13 walk 11 pier 10

peaceful 9 splash pad 8 boat ramp 4

seagulls 3 porta potties 3

## TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

This Plan is designed to align with key priorities outlined in several Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) strategic documents. 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 following summary of TPWD priorities can be integrated into this Master Plan to align Port Lavaca for future funding and support through:

- **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.

# PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

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.

Development best practices recommend limiting construction within floodplains to structures specifically designed to withstand floodwaters. To minimize risk, many communities restrict floodplain development to trails and passive open spaces.

Development is also discouraged in wetland areas and along bayous to protect the quality and biodiversity of these vital natural landscapes. Preserving these sensitive environments helps maintain water quality, supports diverse plant and animal habitats, and sustains the beauty and character of the community.

## 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, Lynn Bayou, and Six Mile Creek.

## WETLANDS

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.

Port Lavaca's wetlands area are primarily located along Lavaca Bay and Lighthouse Beach Refuge.

## BAYOUS

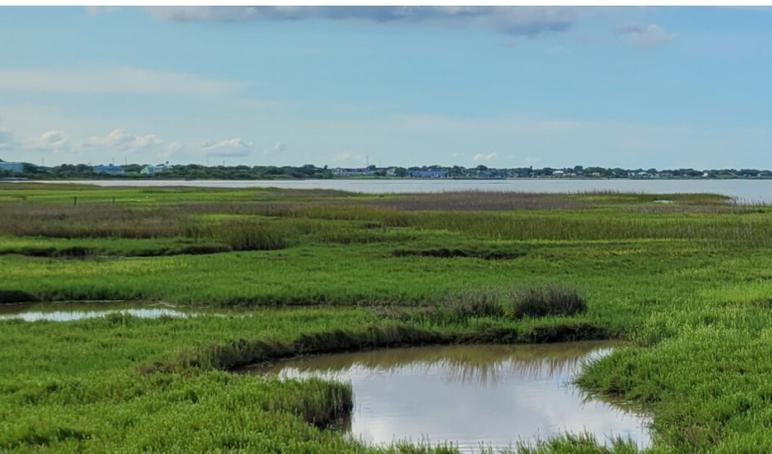
Bayous are slow-moving tributaries that feed into larger bodies of water. The characteristic marshy waters of bayous are commonly found in low-lying coastal areas throughout the Gulf Coast region. Like coastal wetlands, bayous often consist of freshwater, saltwater, or a mix of both, known as brackish water.

Port Lavaca's bayous support rich and diverse estuarine ecosystems, provide vital wildlife habitat, and offer valuable recreational opportunities.

## MAN-MADE BARRIERS

An active UPRR 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.

Municipalities can typically acquire these corridors and convert them into linear parks or multi-use trails through programs such as rail-banking or negotiated purchase agreements.



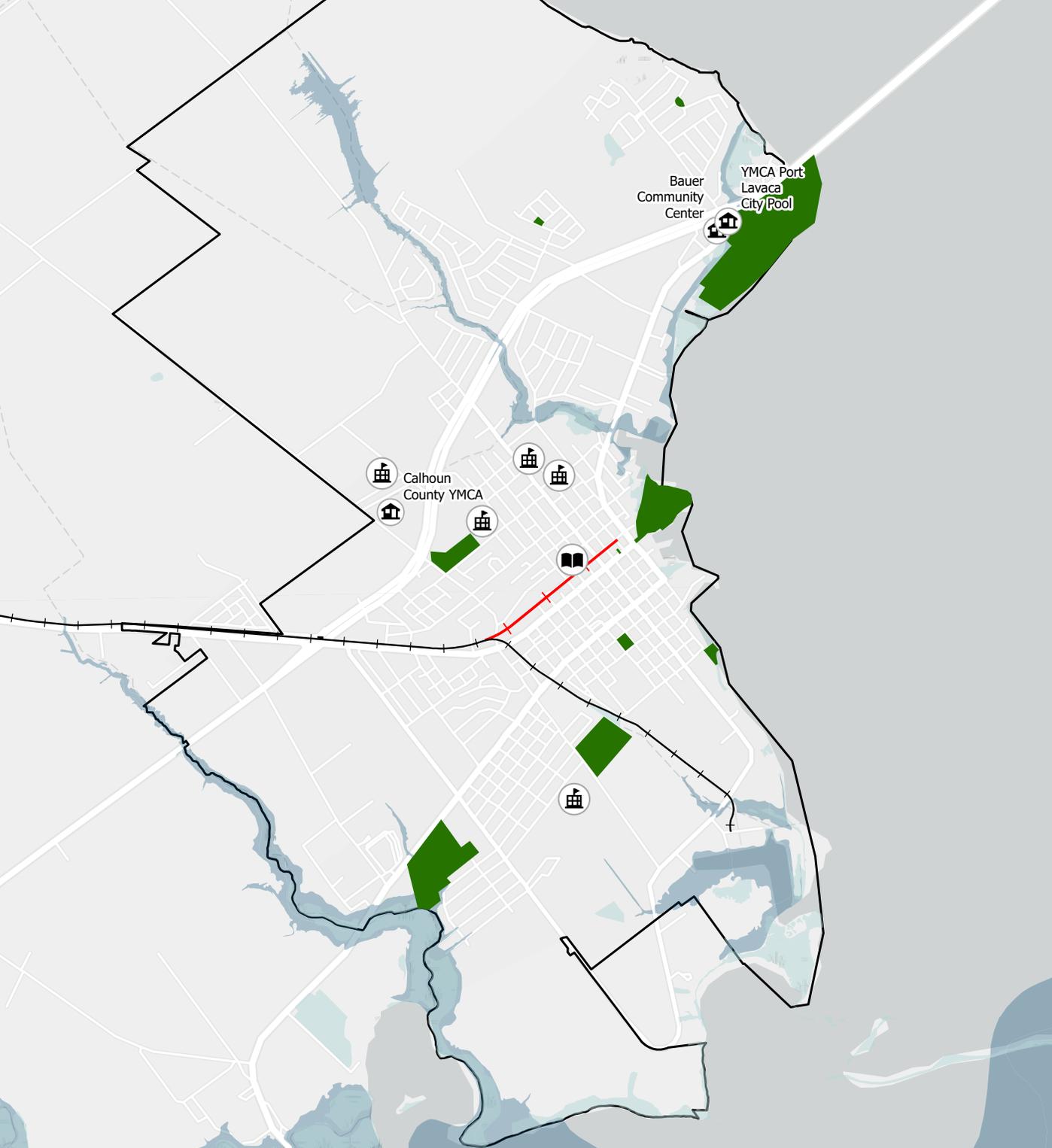
# Existing Conditions Map

City of Port Lavaca

## Legend

-  Port Lavaca City Limits
-  Active RR
-  Inactive RR
-  Wetlands
-  Floodplain
-  County Library
-  Community Center
-  Schools
-  Existing Parks

Data sourced from the City of Port Lavaca



# 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. However, Port Lavaca is now facing long-term population decline in the coming decades and could level out at around 9,000 residents.

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.

**HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF PORT LAVACA PARKS AND RECREATION**  
**¡TRANSFORMA EL FUTURO DE LOS PARQUES Y ESPACIOS VERDES EN PORT LAVACA!**

**Your voice matters—and we want to hear from YOU!**  
Drop in anytime between 6 - 8 pm and share your ideas for:

- PARKS & TRAILS
- OPEN SPACES
- EVENTS & RECREATION PROGRAMS

**¡Tu voz importa—y queremos escucharte!**  
Pasa en cualquier momento entre las 6 - 8 pm y comparte tus ideas para:

- PARQUES Y CAMINOS
- ESPACIOS ABIERTOS
- EVENTOS Y PROGRAMAS RECREATIVOS

**This is your chance to help guide the future of recreation in Port Lavaca!**  
It only takes 30 minutes or less to participate—just stop by, share your feedback and vision.

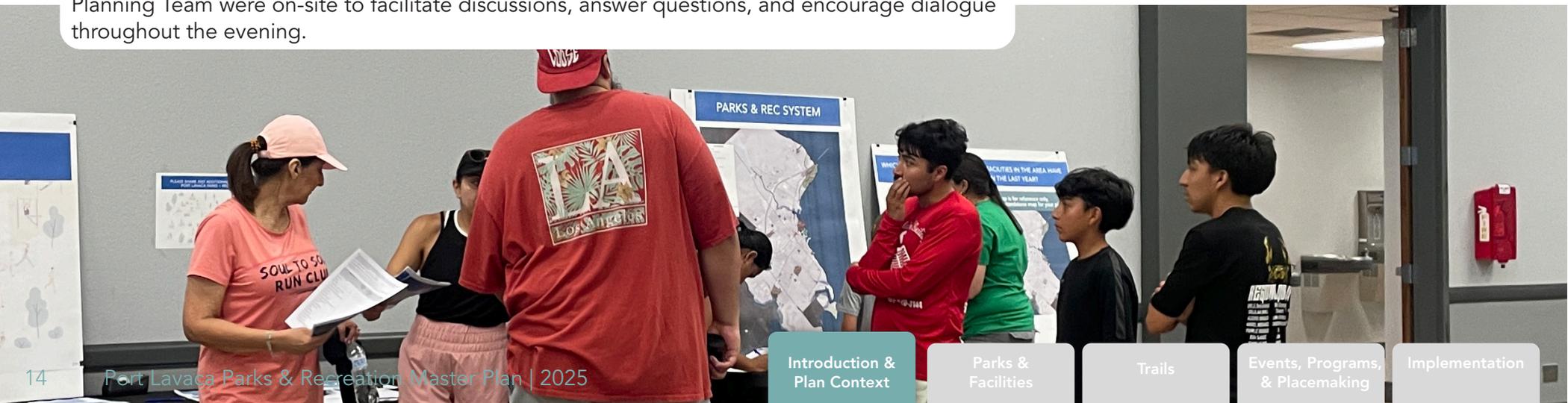
- Be part of the plan
- Come & go—quick, casual, and community-driven

**Tú puedes ayudar a dar forma al futuro de la recreación en Port Lavaca!**  
Participa a tu ritmo toma 30 minutos o menos—solo pasa, comparte tus ideas.

- Sé parte del plan
- Ven y sal cuando quieras—rápido, casual y enfocado en la comunidad

**LOCATION:**  
Bauer Community Center  
2300 TX-35, Port Lavaca, TX 77979  
**6-8pm MAY 20, 2025**

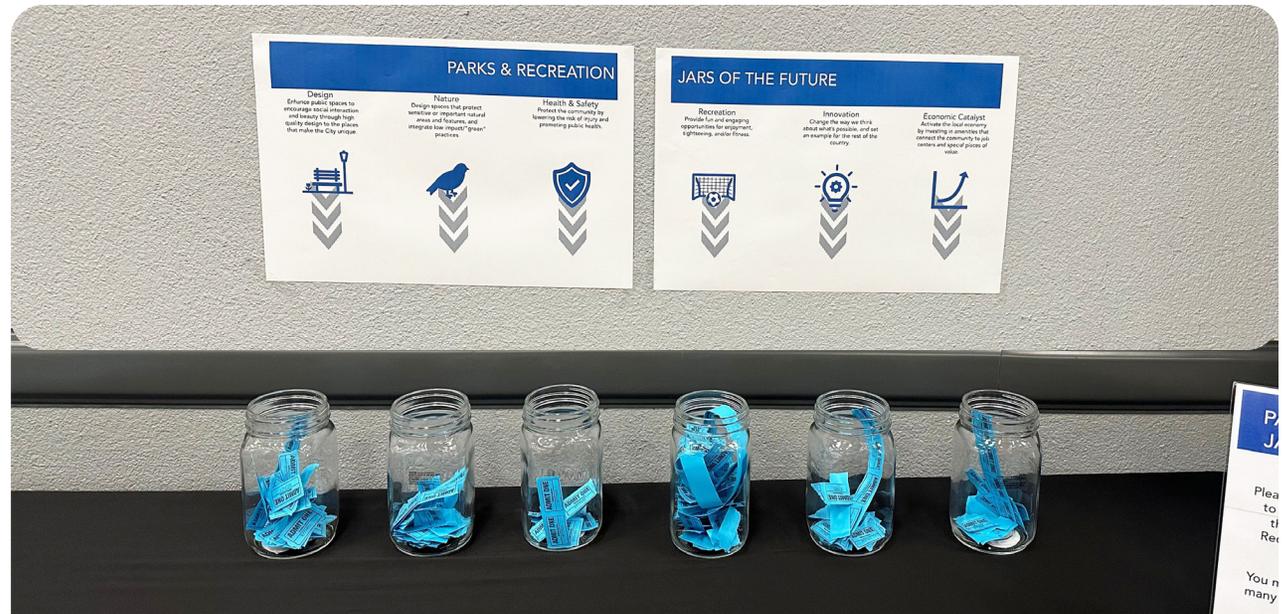
**La reunión será bilingüe, todos son bienvenidos**





### Where I Live, Where I Play:

This activity revealed that there is a strong local preference for larger parks, even if they 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.

### KEY 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



Figure 17: 'My Dream Park' Activity, Public Workshop held on 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



### 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



### 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



### 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.

## STAFFING

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.

## DEPARTMENT MISSION

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 community swimming pools, and the construction of new facilities and amenities.

## PARKS BOARD

The Port Lavaca Parks Board is a five-member advisory body composed of a Chair, Vice Chair, and three Board Members. Appointed by the City Council, the Board serves in a volunteer capacity to provide guidance on parks and recreation priorities, policies, and community needs.

The Parks Board acts as a liaison between residents and City leadership offering recommendations to the City Council on matters such as park improvements, programming opportunities, and long-term planning. Through regular meetings and collaboration with City staff, the Board plays a vital role in shaping a parks system that reflects the values and vision of the Port Lavaca community.

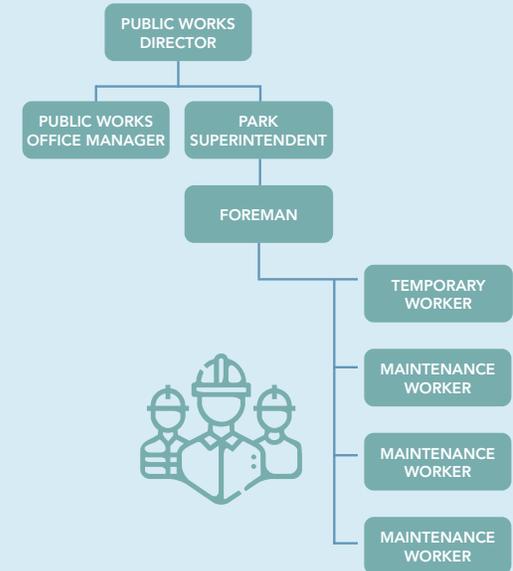


Figure 12: Current Parks Administrative Structure



Figure 13: Port Lavaca Department of Public Works Staff

## BUSINESS PLAN

Port Lavaca’s park improvements and accomplishments position this Plan to build on recent momentum and elevate the City’s park system.

### 2024 - 2025 Accomplishments

- » Replaced all Lighthouse Beach metal frame picnic tables with wood picnic tables.
- » Repainted the old bathroom at Bayfront Park.
- » Installed new LED lights at Bayfront Park.
- » Replaced bollards and installed new cables at Blackrock.
- » Repaired and repainted curbs, and marked fire lanes.
- » Expanded the nuisance vegetation eradication program with a bi-weekly spraying schedule.
- » Installed a shade structure at Bayfront Park splash pad.

### 2023 - 2024 Accomplishments

- » Daily park inspections of maintenance and grounds keeping.
- » Constructed a new restroom at Wilson Park.
- » Worked with the Rotary Club and United Way 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.

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Our Workload	Actual FY 2022-2023	Budget FY 2024-2024	Estimated FY 2023-2024	Budget FY 2024-2025
Acres of park grounds maintained	167.32	167.32	167.32	167.32
Number of playground inspections performed	52	52	52	52
Measuring our effectiveness				
% of park maintenance completed on time	100%	100%	85%	100%
% of bi-weekly spraying accomplished	85%	100%	50%	100%

Figure 14: Port Lavaca Parks Performance Measures, Annual Budget Reports

## 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.
- » Hire a consultant to apply with the Army Corp of Engineers to connect the Veterans Memorial to Scully’s via a boardwalk.

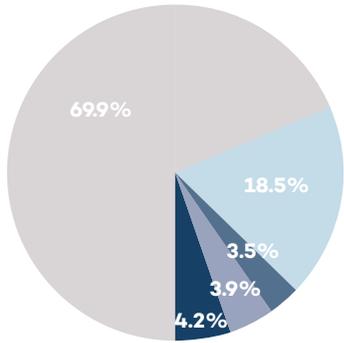
### STRATEGIC FOCUS:

- » **INFRASTRUCTURE**  
Port Lavaca residents enjoy new streets, sidewalks, and other improvements year after year;
- » **COMMUNITY**  
Port Lavaca is a culturally diverse community actively promoting tourism and encouraging economic development opportunities; and
- » **QUALITY OF LIFE**  
Port Lavaca residents enjoy a safe community with great amenities and affordable living.

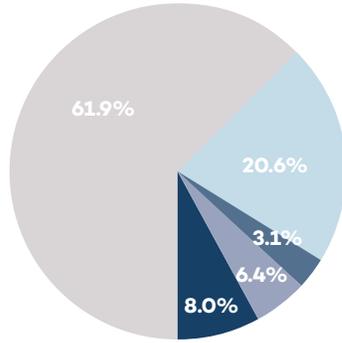
# BUDGET EVOLUTION



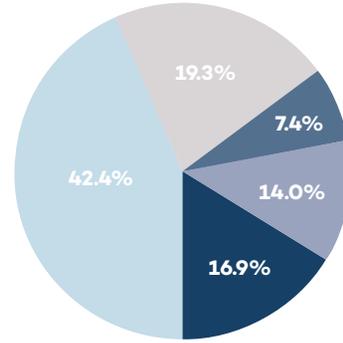
2020 - 2021



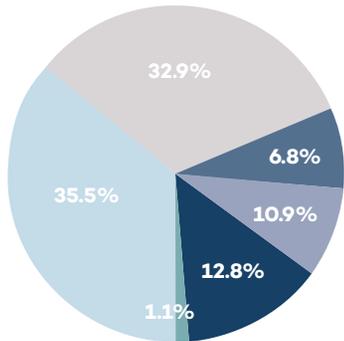
2021 - 2022



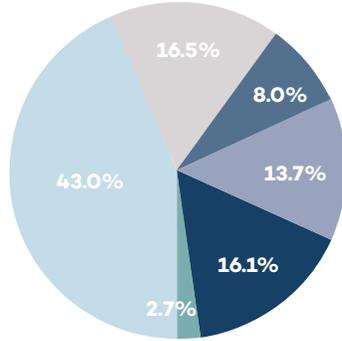
2022 - 2023



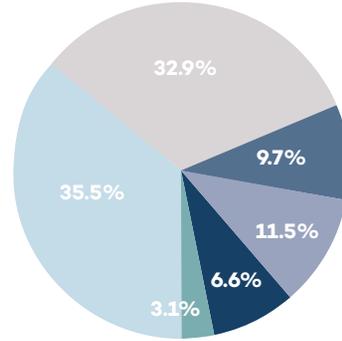
2023 - 2024



2024 - 2025



2025 - 2026



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Capital spending cut by 50% signifying major park upgrades have declined significantly, limiting long-term improvements.
- » Sundry at an all-time high, miscellaneous line items have reached their highest share of the budget, signaling a potential need for clearer financial categorization.
- » Salaries and spending on materials, services, and maintenance have remained consistent.

# ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL PLANS + STUDIES

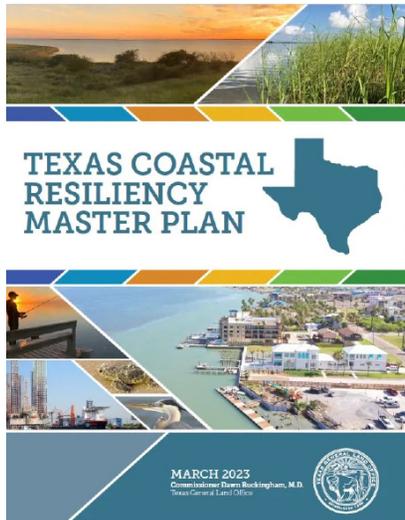


Figure 18: Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan

## CALHOUN COUNTY HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

### KEY ALIGNMENT TOPICS:

- » Protect, enhance, and restore wetland areas through a variety of mitigation mechanisms to reduce erosion;
- » Restore and protect both coastal and barrier areas;
- » 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; and
- » Enhance public parks through the enhancement of and implementation of new recreational fields and equipment, playgrounds, new cabanas, community pavilions, restrooms, and increased parking capacity.

## GENERAL LAND OFFICE 2023 TEXAS COASTAL RESILIENCY PLAN

### Key alignment topics:

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



» Implement erosion mitigation elements at Lighthouse Beach and boat ramp;

» Construct shoreline protection of eastern shorelines of the Harbor of Refuge

» Construct a living shoreline along the wetlands of Lighthouse Beach Park

» Implement Harbor of Refuge improvements.

» Construct a relief channel to divert storm water runoff affecting the bay upstream of Lynn Bayou;

# 'PLAN PORT LAVACA' COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Port Lavaca Parks & Recreation Master Plan aligns with key priorities outlined in Port Lavaca's 2016 Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Plan, Sidewalk Plan, and Waterfront Master Plan.

## 2016 Comprehensive Master Plan

- » Beautiful community
- » Recreation opportunities for youth, adults, and visitors
- » Destinations to attract visitors
- » Resilient waterfront that serves as an asset
- » Exciting waterfront amenities that generate activity and income

## Future Land Use Plan

- » Ensure adequate park land to support new residential development
- » Utilize the waterfront as a community asset

## Sidewalk Plan

- » Identify key locations for pedestrian upgrades
- » Continue to pursue grant funding

## ONGOING INITIATIVES:

- Approximately 71 total acres of parkland should be acquired by 2020 – 1 acre of Mini Parks, 1 acre of Neighborhood Parks, 9 acres of Community Parks, and 60 acres of Regional Parks.
- In 2010, the City identified the following five priorities for expansion of the park system:
  1. Developing a citywide hike & bike trail system
  2. Development of a sports complex (Wilson Field)
  3. Development of the Wetland Preserve
  4. Placement of thematic signage
  5. Renovation of playground equipment
- In 2015, City Staff identified the following recreational issues to be addressed in response to the input received at a public Town Hall meeting:
  1. Establish a parks dedication ordinance anticipating new development.
  2. Establish a parks master plan.
  3. Explore opportunities for community gardens throughout the City, utilizing abandoned lots in neighborhoods.
  4. Explore and create beautification programs for the community.

## New Activity Center:

- "Consider entering into a public-private partnership with Calhoun County ISD, Library, YMCA, or any other business/nonprofit with existing resources to facilitate youth-and-teen-oriented programs. Program offerings could include summer camps, seasonal sports leagues, and after-school clubs."



# ALIGNMENT WITH LOCAL PLANS + STUDIES

## DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT MASTER PLAN

Completed in 2023, the Waterfront Master Plan Report inventories existing conditions of the City and Downtown waterfront area. The plan provides the framework for a series of recommended design solutions ranging from physical elements to organizational elements:

- » 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

Several city parks are located within the waterfront area, including:

- » Lighthouse Beach
- » Bayfront Peninsula Park
- » Fay Bauer Sterling Park

## CALHOUN COUNTY SHORELINE ACCESS PLAN

Completed in 2012, the Shoreline Access Plan inventories existing conditions and future opportunities for all of the County's public shoreline, with specific attention paid to boat ramps, shoreline access, paddle trails, and locational amenities.





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.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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.



# PARKS & FACILITIES 02



This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of Port Lavaca's parks and recreational facilities. As one of three recommendation-focused chapters within the broader Parks Master Plan, it builds upon prior analyses of existing conditions, park classifications, community preferences, and visioning outcomes. While trails designed for recreational use within parks are addressed here, those serving broader connectivity purposes are discussed in the following chapter.

Port Lavaca's parks and facilities serve as vital public assets that offer spaces for gathering, play, cultural expression, and community identity.

This chapter translates the Plan's Guiding Principles into actionable strategies and outlines the methodology used to evaluate parks. It provides a detailed assessment of current and near-term Levels of Service (LOS), offering insight into how well the system meets community needs today and how it may perform in the near future.

It also defines the classifications of parks and facilities that make up the local recreation network, establishing a clear organizational framework to guide future planning, investment, and development efforts. Additionally, this chapter presents a comprehensive inventory of existing park assets and recreational facilities currently maintained and supported under the scope of the City's Comprehensive Plan, serving as a baseline for future improvements and expansion.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## QUALITY OF LIFE

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

- » Attain and surpass national standards for park level of service
- » Promote walkability and multimodal transportation through park connectivity
- » Utilize park design to encourage social interaction and healthy living



## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Preserve and protect the natural landscape and build community resilience.

- » Promote sustainable park management practices that preserve critical habitat for native species
- » Establish conservation easements to protect ecologically sensitive areas
- » Educate the public on native flora and fauna within local parks



## EQUITABLE ACCESS

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

- » Ensure every resident is within a 10-minute walk of a neighborhood park
- » Encourage universal design practices that ensure park accessibility across ability and age
- » Evenly distribute recreational amenities throughout the City



## ECONOMIC VITALITY

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

- » Ensure development and maintenance of park amenities are financially sustainable
- » Partner with local businesses and organizations to activate park spaces through placemaking initiatives
- » Activate neighborhoods and nearby businesses through high-quality parks and trails



## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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

- » Establish minimum standards for park development to meet the needs a diverse population
- » Create spaces within the parks for community members to share photos, feedback, and suggestions
- » Develop new park amenities based on community input gathered regularly

# KEY FEEDBACK

Common community desires identified through the public engagement process include:

- Additional shade trees or structures within existing parks
- Splash pads for younger children
- Free access to Lighthouse Beach for Port Lavaca residents;
- Covered or indoor basketball court
- Pickleball Courts
- Obstacle course with zip lines or a climbing wall
- Dog park(s)
- Improved safety, sidewalks, and restrooms

Community members want local parks to provide fun and engaging opportunities for enjoyment, sightseeing, and/or fitness.

They want to enhance public spaces to encourage social interaction and beauty through high quality design to the places that make the City unique.

Residents recommend focusing on larger parks with a wide range of amenities.



# SIZE-SPECIFIC

## PARK TYPOLOGIES

Parks come in a variety of types, shapes, and sizes, each designated to meet different community needs. From small, localized green spaces to expansive natural preserves, these park typologies help cities provide accessible recreation, support social interaction, and conserve natural resources for residents and visitors alike.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) provides guidance on park classifications to help communities plan and maintain effective recreation systems. The NRPA has established target level of service ratios for each park typology.

Bigger parks offer superior environmental benefits (better cooling, air quality, biodiversity) and enhanced programming opportunities (more space for activities, deeper restoration) compared to smaller parks. A network of fewer but bigger parks is also easier and more cost-effective to maintain.

Conversely, smaller parks are crucial for accessibility; they allow cities to provide baseline amenities with minimal setup costs and are vital for daily nature access and micro-benefits.

< 1 ACRE



### POCKET PARK

**Size:** 2,500 sq. ft. - 1 acre

**Service Area:** 0.25-mile radius

**Purpose:**

- » Serves small, localized recreational needs
- » May offer active recreation areas (playground)
- » May offer passive recreation areas (picnicking)
- » Small-scale parks designed to meet limited, localized recreation needs within a short walking distance.
- » **Brookhollow Estates (Butterfly) Park**
- » **Claret Crossing Pocket Park**
- » **Faye Bauer Sterling Park**

### NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

**Size:** 1 - 15 acres

**Service Area:** 0.25- to 0.5-mile radius

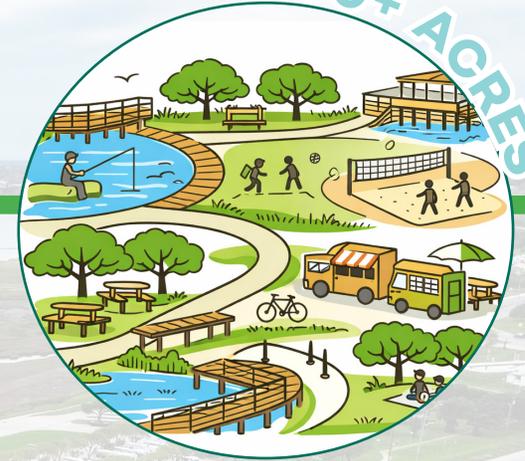
**Purpose:**

- » Serves local residents
- » Offers active recreation areas (playgrounds, sports courts and sports fields)
- » Also offers passive recreation areas (walking, picnicking)
- » Serves nearby residents by offering daily-use amenities tailored to the surrounding community.
- » **City (Tilley) Park**
- » **George Adams Park**
- » **Substation Site (future)**
- » **Kitchens Tract (future)**

15+ ACRE



500+ ACRES



## COMMUNITY PARK

**Size:** 16 - 99 acres

**Service Area:** 1- to 2-mile radius

**Purpose:**

- » Serves multiple neighborhoods
- » Offers more intense active recreation opportunities (sports fields, swimming pools, sports courts)
- » Also offers passive recreation areas (hiking, picnicking)
- » Provides a broader range of recreation facilities and programs that draw users from multiple neighborhoods across the city.
- » **Bayfront Peninsula Park**
- » **Wilson Park**

## METROPOLITAN PARK

**Size:** 100 - 499 acres

**Service Area:** Entire city & surrounding areas

**Purpose:**

- » Serves all city residents
- » Large, mixed-use park with natural landscapes & developed amenities including sports fields, trails, playgrounds, picnic areas, and water-based recreation
- » Large, citywide destinations that offer significant natural and recreational amenities.
- » **Lighthouse Beach Park**

## REGIONAL PARK

**Size:** 500+ acres

**Service Area:** Multiple communities within a 1-hour drive

**Purpose:**

- » Multi-use facilities supporting all ages and abilities
- » Often includes nature preservation, wildlife habitat, and conservation areas
- » Expansive multi-community destinations that conserve natural resources while supporting a wide variety of year-round recreational activities.
- » **Little Chocolate Bayou Park**

# NOT SIZE-SPECIFIC

Non size-specific parks may be larger standalone sites or distinct areas within larger parks (ie. the preserve within Lighthouse Beach versus Powderhorn Preserve).



## PRESERVE

**Size:** Varies

**Service Area:** Varies

**Purpose:**

- » Protects and manages natural or cultural resources
- » Active and passive recreation serve as a secondary focus
- » **Powderhorn State Park (future)**

## LINEAR PARK

**Size:** Varies

**Service Area:** Varies

**Purpose:**

- » Green corridors connecting neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces
- » Supports multimodal forms of transportation such as walking, jogging, biking, hiking, etc.
- » May include active recreation areas and/or gathering spaces
- » **Depot Linear Park (future)**

## SPECIAL USE AREA

**Size:** Varies

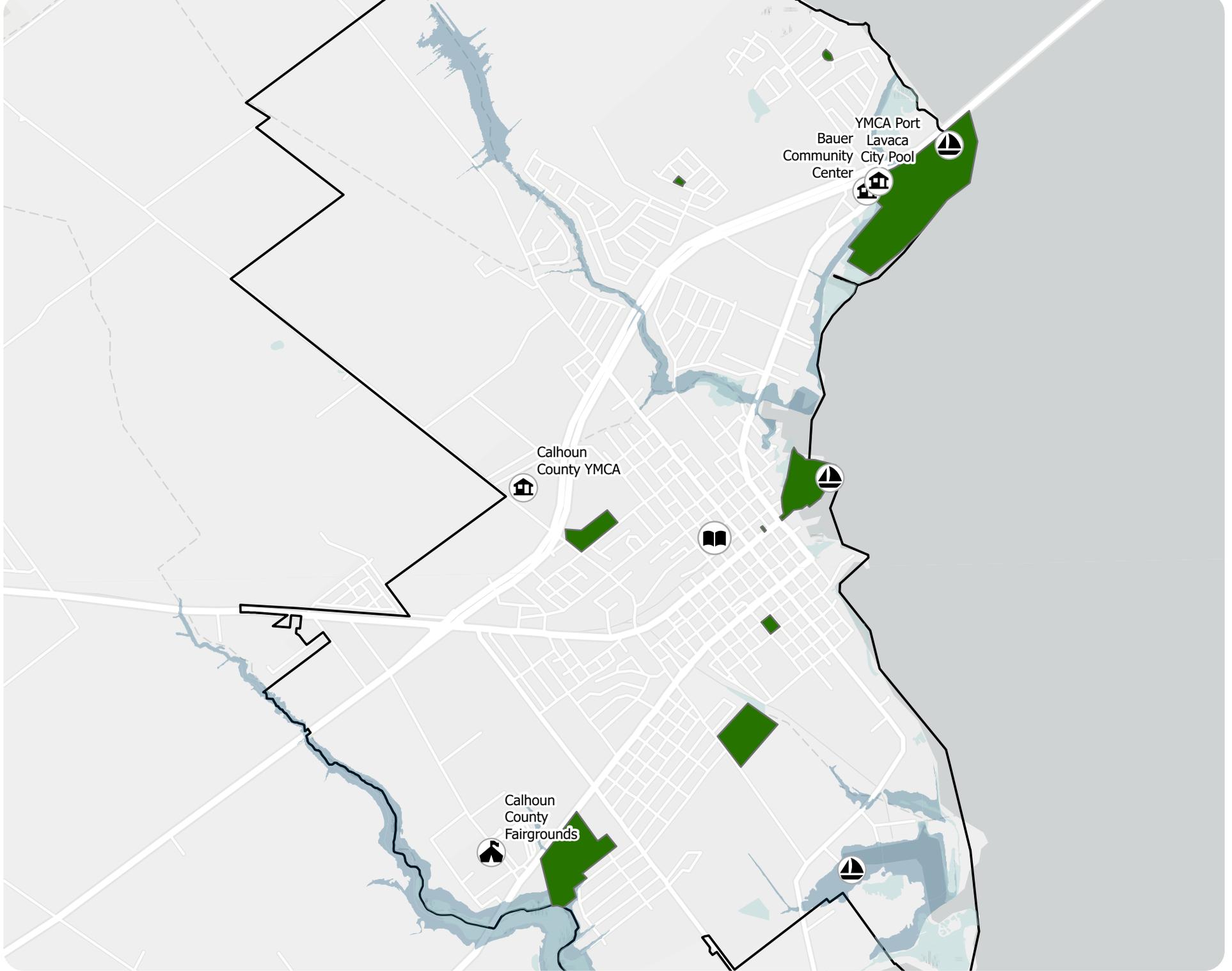
**Service Area:** Varies

**Purpose:**

- » Single-purpose or specialized activities such as marinas, golf courses, amphitheaters, plazas, arboretums, and historical sites
- » **Calhoun County Fairgrounds**
- » **Six Mile Park**
- » **Smith Harbor (future)**
- » **Boat docks**
- » **City Pool**

# PARK INVENTORY MATRIX

PARK FACILITY EXISTING OR PLANNED	ACREAGE	FACILITIES																																	
		BARBECUE PIT	BASEBALL FIELD	BASKETBALL COURT	BEACH ACCESS	BENCH	BIKE RACK	BOAT RAMP	CABANAS	EVENT SPACE	FITNESS CENTER	FISHING PIER	JUNGLE GYM	GAZEBO	MERRY-GO-ROUND	PARKING SPACES	PICNIC TABLE	PET DRINKING STATION	PET WASTE STATION	PLAYGROUND	PAVILION	RESTROOM	SAND BOX	SAND VOLLEYBALL	SKATE PARK	SOCCER FIELD	SOFTBALL FIELD	SPLASHPAD	SWING SET	T-BALL FIELD	TEETER-TOTTER	TRASH/ RECYCLING BIN	VETERANS MEMORIAL	WALKING PATH	WATER FOUNTAIN
<b>BAYFRONT PENINSULA PARK</b>	25.8	1			9	1	1	1		1				#	24	1	2	1	1	1	1					1				18	1	1	1		
<b>BROOKHOLLOW ESTATES PARK</b>	0.8				4				1						2	1	1	1									1		1	1	1				
<b>CITY (TILLEY) PARK</b>	10.3	4		1	4						1			#	7			2	1	2		1	1			1		8	1						
<b>CLARET CROSSING PARK</b>	0.7				4												1									2	1	2	1						
<b>FAYE BAUER STERLING PARK</b>	0.2											1		1															1						
<b>GEORGE ADAMS PARK</b>	2.1	4	1	1	2			1			1		1	13	15			1	1	2							4	1	4		1				
<b>LIGHTHOUSE BEACH PARK</b>	78.4	1			1	3		1	1		1			#	11			3		2		1				1			25	1	1				
<b>WILSON PARK</b>	21.4		1											#				1					1	1	1		1	1	5	1					
<b>EXISTING FACILITIES TOTAL</b>	<b>139.7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>KITCHEN SITE (PLANNED)</b>	2.4				1																														
<b>SMITH HARBOR (PLANNED)</b>	15.0																																		
<b>SUBSTATION SITE (PLANNED)</b>	0.4																																		
<b>EXISTING &amp; PLANNED FACILITIES TOTAL</b>	<b>179.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>



# Systems Map

## City of Port Lavaca

### Legend

-  Port Lavaca City Limits
-  Wetlands
-  Floodplain
-  County Library
-  Fair Grounds
-  Community Center
-  Boat Ramp
-  Existing Parks

### KEY OBSERVATIONS

While most neighborhoods are within a half-mile distance of a park, all neighborhoods north of SH 35 are only serviced by pocket parks, which are too small to support active recreation facilities (tennis/pickleball, basketball, ballfields, etc.)

When accounting for school playgrounds and recreational facilities owned and maintained by Calhoun County ISD (running tracks, basketball courts, etc.), central areas of the City are very well served with both parks and active recreation facilities.

### STRATEGIES: TYPOLOGY & AMENITIES

- Issue an open call to churches and other houses of worship in North Port Lavaca that have active recreation facilities on their grounds; establish partnerships to spread awareness of the facilities and provide access for residents of recreationally underserved neighborhoods.
- In recreationally underserved areas, prioritize active recreation amenities in any new parks over five acres constructed north of SH 35; at that time, allow for public input to guide which amenities are introduced.

# DEVELOPMENT PHASES

The Park Development Process serves as a guideline for its phased development upon acquisition of land. The Park Development Process is divided into three progressive phases. The park improvements and amenities which describe phases 1-3 serve as targets for typical development, but are not guaranteed items in each park.

The timing, techniques and procedures for accomplishing each phase may vary significantly in response to funding availability, constituent preferences and natural characteristics of the parkland. These phases, as well as their corresponding maintenance levels discussed next, form the basis of the parks and recreation-specific recommendations on page 65.

- Phase 1 marks the beginning of the Park Development Process by providing basic recreational opportunities and easy access for the public.
- Phase 2 provides many of the remaining facilities typical of the park type. Upon completion, a park should have a wide variety of recreational opportunities typical of its park type.
- Phase 3 development builds out the full recreational spectrum and refines the park's identity.
- Phase 0 (Rehabilitation) applies to any park type and revisits Phases 1-3 depending on condition and need.



- » Master planning and community input process
- » Initial signage and wayfinding
- » Open play areas and flexible turf fields
- » Basic picnic areas and benches
- » Trash and recycling infrastructure
- » Parking, trailheads, ADA pathways
- » Conduct baseline natural resource and cultural assessments
- » Prioritize ADA and safety features before programmed amenities
- » Stabilize soils and address initial erosion risks
- » Use native, low-maintenance vegetation to minimize maintenance strain
- » Engage neighborhood groups early to align expectations
- » Design future expansion capacity for Phase 2
- » For metropolitan parks: emphasize resource access rather than built amenities
- » If funds allow, recreational items responsive to specific groups, such as a children's playscape or community picnic shelter, may also be constructed under Phase 1



- Athletic fields (striping, goals, irrigation)
- Multipurpose courts: basketball, tennis, pickleball
- Recreation centers, community pools (district/metropolitan parks)
- Expanded parking and utilities
- Major playgrounds, pavilions, splash pads
- Wayfinding network with interpretive signage
- Bank stabilization, erosion control along greenways
- Landscaping for comfort (shade trees, lawn improvements)
- Add or upgrade irrigation systems where justified
- Standardize materials for courts, lighting, furniture
- Implement energy-efficient systems (LED lighting, solar where feasible)
- Use multi-phase CIP funding for large metro park investments
- Conduct traffic and parking demand assessments
- Integrate CPTED principles in design of larger facilities
- Expand trail loops and connectivity during this phase



- Complete full-site circulation and accessibility
- Use durable, long-lifespan materials to reduce operational burden
- Integrate public art installations aligned with cultural plans
- Add monitoring technology (visitor counters, smart irrigation)
- Reserve space for future programming or rotating installations
- Prioritize maintenance planning as amenities reach maturity



- Perform condition assessments and create replacement schedules
- Prioritize safety, ADA compliance, and heavily used assets
- Engage communities heavily in redesign of older parks
- Use rehabilitation as opportunity to lower long-term maintenance cost
- Add sustainable infrastructure: permeable paving, smart lighting, native and/or xeric landscaping
- Reassess maintenance level needs (3 → 2, or 2 → R depending on budget)
- Renewal of aging infrastructure (restrooms, courts, equipment)
- Replacement of turf, irrigation, lighting, and drainage systems
- Redesign of outdated spaces to meet current usage demands
- Modernization of playgrounds, shade structures, site furnishings
- Restoration of eroded trails and natural areas
- Removal of dysfunctional amenities

# MAINTENANCE LEVELS

Not all parks require the same level of upkeep or attention, even for parks in the same phase of development.

This list represents only the maintenance service levels that will likely apply to Port Lavaca in the lifetime of this Plan.



**LEVEL 6:  
FULLY  
UNDEVELOPED**

**LEVEL 5:  
MINIMUM  
MAINTENANCE**

**LEVEL 4:  
MODERATELY LOW  
MAINTENANCE**

**LEVEL 3:  
MODERATE  
MAINTENANCE**

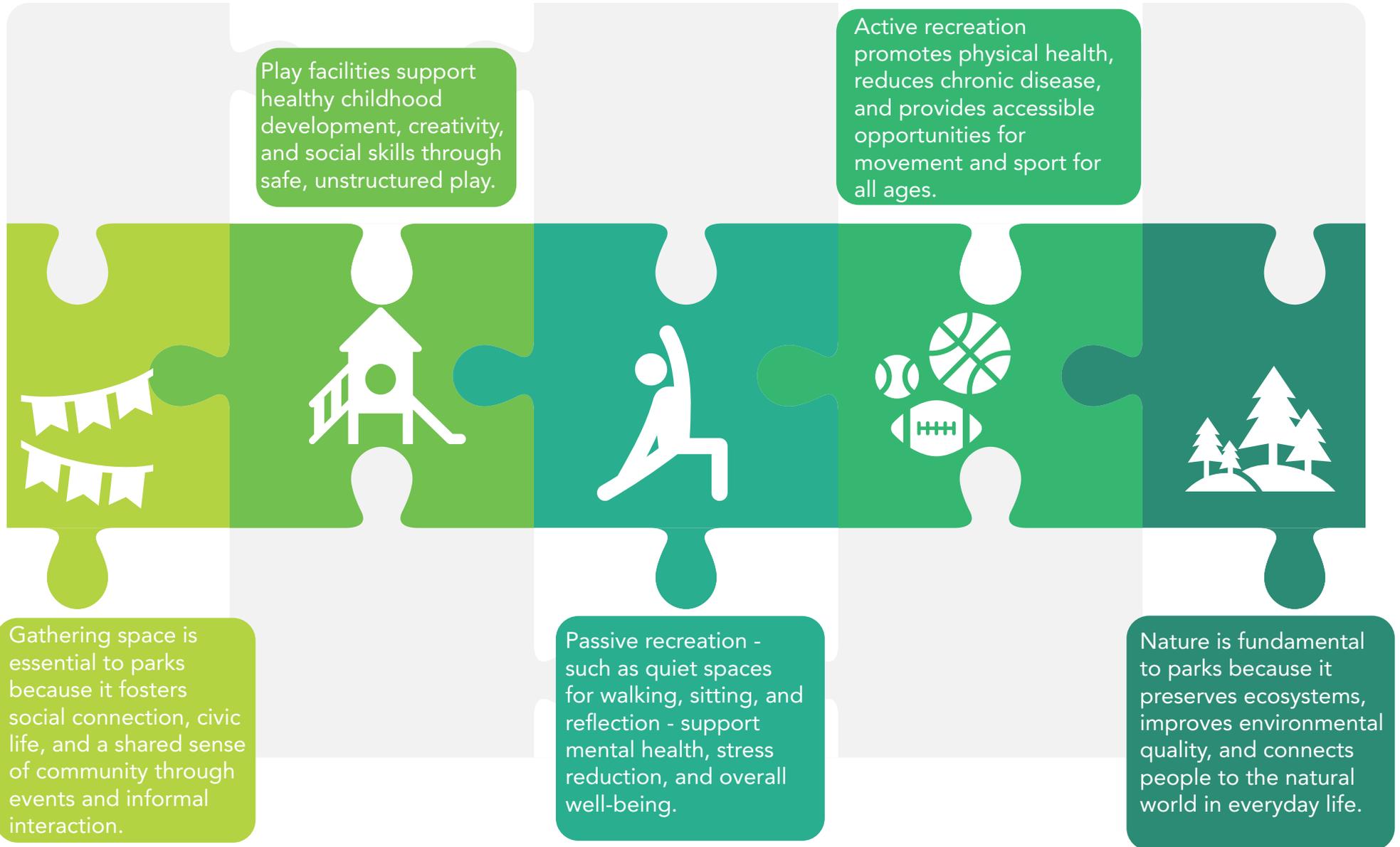
**LEVEL 2:  
HIGH  
MAINTENANCE**

**LEVEL 1:  
VERY HIGH  
MAINTENANCE**

Maintenance	Considerations
Undeveloped natural area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Ecological monitoring only</li> <li>» Invasive species control</li> <li>» Trail clearing (limited)</li> <li>» Habitat protection enforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Avoid new built amenities unless ecologically vetted</li> </ul>
Minimum maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Minimal intervention—annual checks only</li> <li>» Volunteer or partner-based stewardship encouraged</li> <li>» No ornamental plantings</li> <li>» Limited trash removal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Design decisions should minimize long-term obligations</li> <li>» Keep infrastructure minimal; rely on natural systems</li> </ul>
Moderately low maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Mowing only as needed</li> <li>» Limited trash pickup</li> <li>» Minimal structural maintenance</li> <li>» Allow natural succession where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Reduce lawn areas in design phases</li> <li>» Ideal for passive parks or natural restoration zones</li> </ul>
Moderate maintenance; Standard for balanced-use parks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Routine mowing cycles (biweekly or seasonal)</li> <li>» Basic trash removal</li> <li>» Moderate pruning and minimal ornamental planting</li> <li>» Annual safety inspections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Avoid high-amenity landscapes or ornamental plantings</li> <li>» Ideal for naturalistic design to reduce labor demands</li> </ul>
High-level of maintenance; common in well-developed public areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Regular lawn care, irrigation checks, and pruning</li> <li>» Weekly cleaning schedules</li> <li>» Periodic structural inspections of play and sport facilities</li> <li>» Ongoing invasive species control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Reduces lifecycle replacement issues compared with Level III–IV parks</li> <li>» Requires consistent staffing allocations</li> </ul>
State-of-the-art maintenance; common in high-traffic urban districts, signature civic spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» High-frequency turf grooming, irrigation, and fertilization</li> <li>» Weekly landscape detailing</li> <li>» Daily litter removal and restroom servicing</li> <li>» Seasonal plant color rotations</li> <li>» Intensive tree care with arborist oversight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Avoid high-maintenance design in large parks unless staff is adequate</li> <li>» Strong CIP and O&amp;M budgeting alignment required</li> </ul>

# CORE FUNCTIONS

Core functions of parks include:



Play facilities support healthy childhood development, creativity, and social skills through safe, unstructured play.

Active recreation promotes physical health, reduces chronic disease, and provides accessible opportunities for movement and sport for all ages.

Gathering space is essential to parks because it fosters social connection, civic life, and a shared sense of community through events and informal interaction.

Passive recreation - such as quiet spaces for walking, sitting, and reflection - support mental health, stress reduction, and overall well-being.

Nature is fundamental to parks because it preserves ecosystems, improves environmental quality, and connects people to the natural world in everyday life.

# LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS)

The quality of a community's parks and recreation system can be challenging to quantify. Level of service (LOS) is a qualitative measure used to describe the operational conditions of a parks system.

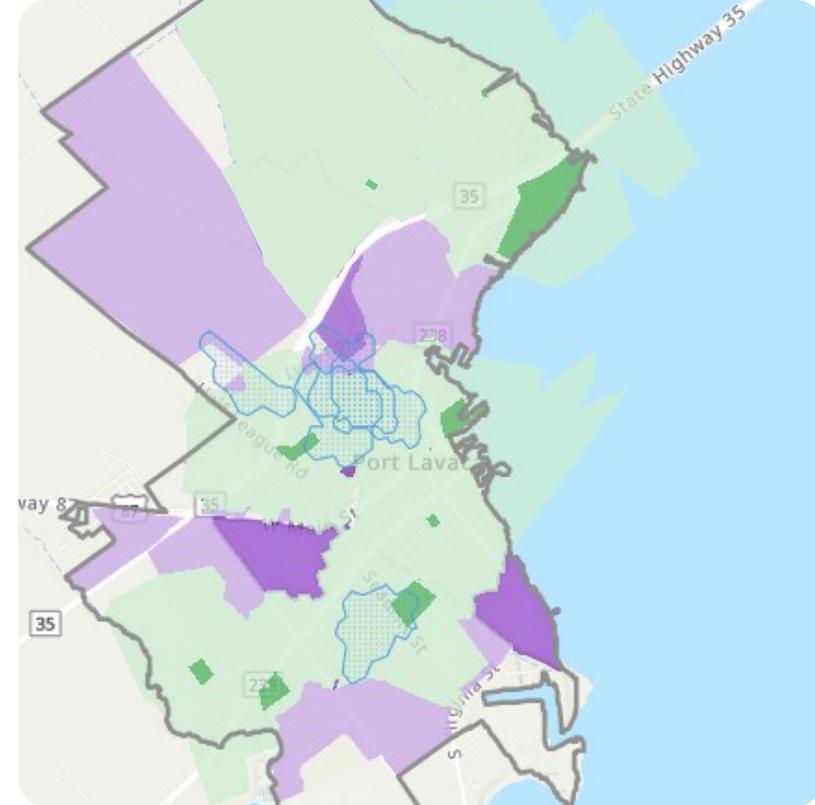
The three leading measures for park system level of service are:

- Parks within walking distance
- Residents per park
- Acres of parkland per capita

## 1. PARKS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Half a mile is generally considered the maximum distance most people are willing to walk to reach a park. At a brisk pace, a half-mile walk typically takes 7 to 10 minutes, while a leisurely walk might take upwards of 12 to 15 minutes. Based on current City- and County-owned parks within Port Lavaca city limits, roughly 58.5 percent of residents live within a ten-minute walk of a park. This measure does not account for ISD-owned playgrounds or facilities, which are shown in blue.

Built on the country's most comprehensive database of local parks, the ParkServe mapping platform provides insights into who has access to these parks – and who does not. Their online mapping tool enables anybody to 1) explore the relationships between park access and climate, health, or other community characteristics, 2) identify priority locations for new parks, 3) evaluate the impact of a proposed park on a community's park access, and 4) review and update the underlying park database.



It's important to note that the map above does not capture the actual walking experience residents face. Factors such as the availability and quality of sidewalks, shade coverage, and safe walking conditions along busy streets all affect how easily and comfortably people can reach nearby parks.

Pockets of need include:

- Between N Virginia/FM 1090 and Lynn Bayou, though parkland has already been identified for acquisition
- Between US 87 and W Austin
- RR track to bay south of San Dollar Dr, though parkland in this area has already been acquired
- South of Leon



70 percent of residents within a 10-minutes walk of a park

National average

58.5 percent of residents within a 10-minute walk of a park

Port Lavaca's current LOS

1,265 residents need a park within a 10-minute walk to meet the national average

## 2. RESIDENTS PER PARK

1 park per 2,411 residents

National community average



1 park per 1,001 residents

Average for jurisdictions with less than 20,000 residents

1 park per 1,413 residents

(Ratio improves to 1 park per 1,256 residents if the County-owned Little Chocolate Bayou Park is included)

With nine total parks including Little Chocolate Bayou Park, Port Lavaca would need to bring three more parks online to adequately serve all 11,300 residents. However, continued population decline could unintentionally fill the gap as well.

## 3. ACRES OF PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS

10.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents

Typical offering from parks and recreation agencies

12.9 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents



Typical offering from agencies serving fewer than 20,000 residents

20 acres of parkland per Port Lavaca resident

There are currently 220.2 acres of dedicated parkland in Port Lavaca - sufficient to service a population of over 20,000. This includes Little Chocolate Bayou Park and three undeveloped sites. Without counting these parks, Port Lavaca has 161.4 acres of parkland - sufficient for a population of approximately 15,000.



# STRATEGIES: CLASSIFICATIONS AND LEVEL OF SERVICE

## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

- Establish a City policy of developing pocket parks sparingly, such as for downtown plazas
- Identify floodplains, wetlands, easements, and distressed properties adjacent to existing pocket parks that could be used to expand park footprints

## LEVEL OF SERVICE

- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger, ideally a community park, north of SH 35 in the vicinity of Lynn Bayou
- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger along the southeast waterfront
- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger between US 87 and W Austin

## PARK DEVELOPMENT LONG-RANGE TARGETS

- Bring Faye Bauer Sterling Park into Phase 2
- Begin phased rehabilitation of George Adams Park, with the goal of reaching Phase 2 by 2035
- Initiate Phase 1 improvements for undeveloped park sites, especially Substation Site A and the Kitchen Tract

## PARK MAINTENANCE LONG-RANGE TARGETS

- Maintain Level 3 maintenance minimum for all parks/areas with recreational amenities, including playgrounds
- Maintain Level 2 maintenance for high-traffic parks at the community park level or higher, including any park hosting league play
- Maintain Level 1 maintenance for Downtown and regional parks
- Maintain Level 3 maintenance minimum for trailheads - see trails chapter
- Reduce costs by planting native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping
- Conduct a feasibility and staffing study to determine the resources needed to bring four existing parks into Level 2 by 2035

PARK DEVELOPMENT PHASES			
Existing Parks	Current	2030	2035
Bayfront Peninsula Park	2	2	3
Brookhollow Estates Park	2	3	3
City (Tilley) Park	2	2	3
Claret Crossing Park	2	3	3
Faye Bauer Sterling Park	1	3	3
George Adams Park	R	1	2
Lighthouse Beach Park	3	3	3
Wilson Park	2	3	3
Future Parks	Current	2030	2035
Marina	-	1	1
Substation A	-	2	3
Substation B	-	1	3
Kitchen	-	1	1
Depot	-	2	3

PARK MAINTAINENCE LEVELS			
Existing Parks	Current	2030	2035
Bayfront Peninsula Park	2	2	2
Brookhollow Estates Park	3	3	3
City (Tilley) Park	3	2	2
Claret Crossing Park	3	3	3
Faye Bauer Sterling Park	3	3	2
George Adams Park	3	1	2
Lighthouse Beach Park	3	2	2
Wilson Park	3	2	2
Future Parks	Current	2030	2035
Marina	6	4	2
Substation A	6	3	3
Substation B	6	5	3
Kitchen	6	4	3
Depot	5	4	2



**IF PARKING IS FULL,  
PRESERVE IS FULL.  
DO NOT CROWD.**



## MEETING FUTURE DEMAND

### PARKLAND DEDICATION

Parkland Dedication is a local government requirement imposed on subdivision and site plan applications mandating the dedication of land for a park and/or the payment of a fee to be used by the governmental entity to acquire land and/or develop park facilities.

The principle relates to the establishment of an “essential connection” between the demand generated by a development and the park or park improvement being constructed with the resources provided by the developer. For example, if a large apartment building is built where previously there was not a multifamily structure, nearby parks will face increased usage from new residents. In order to keep up with the increased demand on existing parks, a dedication is required. Land or fees acquired through dedication ordinances must be used to benefit those who will live in the development.

### DEDICATION FORMULA

750+ HOMES:

- One acre per 75 dwelling units established by the plat

<750 HOMES:

- Donation to the city of at least ten acres of parkland; OR
- Cash payment into the park development fund in an amount per dwelling unit as set by the City Council

### PARKLAND CRITERIA

- Location is consistent with the city’s future park needs
- Frontage on an existing public roadway
- Dimensions, topography, elevation, and other natural features to allow its use for organized recreational activities or passive recreation
- Potable water, sanitary sewer, and electric power is readily available from an adjacent street right-of-way or utility easement
- Adequate drainage
- Free of easements, pipelines, overhead utilities, and other conditions that would inhibit its effective use for organized recreational activities or passive recreation
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment within the preceding 12 months
- Cleared of all trash, refuse, waste materials, dilapidated structures, abandoned vehicles, and unwanted trees and brush



# PARK PROFILES

## BAYFRONT PENINSULA PARK

### LOCATION

East of Commerce Street, along the Lavaca Bay coastline.

### AMENITIES

- » Splash pad
- » Playground
- » Bike rack
- » Pet drinking station
- » Water fountain
- » Restrooms
- » Walking path
- » Pavilions
- » Cabanas
- » Fishing pier
- » Boat launch
- » Barbecue pits
- » Veterans memorial

### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Shared-use path connecting to Scully's (2028)
- » Entrance rehab (2027-2028)
- » Bench Shade Structures (2027)





## BROOKHOLLOW ESTATES (BUTTERFLY) PARK

### LOCATION

Tucked into the eastern curve of Harbor Drive East and Harbor Drive West across from La Salle Boulevard.

### AMENITIES

- » Playground
- » Swing set
- » Water fountain
- » Dog drinking station
- » Benches
- » Exercise equipment
- » Walking path



### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Perimeter fencing, entry improvements (2026)
- » Cabana structure (2026)
- » Brick-lined walkways (2026)
- » Lighting (2026)

## CITY (TILLEY) PARK

### LOCATION

At the corner of Half League Rd. and Tilley St., adjacent to Travis Middle School.

### AMENITIES

- » Half court basketball
- » Soccer goals
- » Sand volleyball
- » Covered pavilion
- » Barbecue pits
- » Junior Playground
- » Walking/learning trail
- » Benches
- » Water fountains
- » Restrooms
- » Parking



### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Parking improvements (2028-2030)
- » Sand volleyball (YEAR)
- » Covered pavilion (YEAR)
- » Barbecue pits (YEAR)





## CLARET CROSSING POCKET PARK

### LOCATION

Wedged between Aimable Street, Crimson Avenue, and Claret Drive.

### AMENITIES

- » Playground
- » Swing set
- » Teeter-totter
- » Benches
- » Dog drinking station



## PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » NA - New Playground

## FAYE BAUER STERLING PARK

### LOCATION

On the north side of E. U.S. Highway 87, between Colorado St. and Guadalupe St.

### AMENITIES

- » Gazebo
- » Event space
- » Planter boxes



### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » NA - New gazebo





## GEORGE ADAMS PARK

### LOCATION

Center St., San Antonio St.,  
S. Benavides St., and Martin  
Luther Kind Dr. Catty corner to  
the Port Lavaca Cemetery.

### AMENITIES

- » Basketball court
- » Baseball field
- » Playgrounds
- » Jungle gym
- » Merry-go-round
- » Teeter-totter
- » Swing set
- » Pavilion
- » Barbecue pits
- » Cabanas



## PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Sidewalk (2028)
- » Shade structure (2028)



# LIGHTHOUSE BEACH

## LOCATION

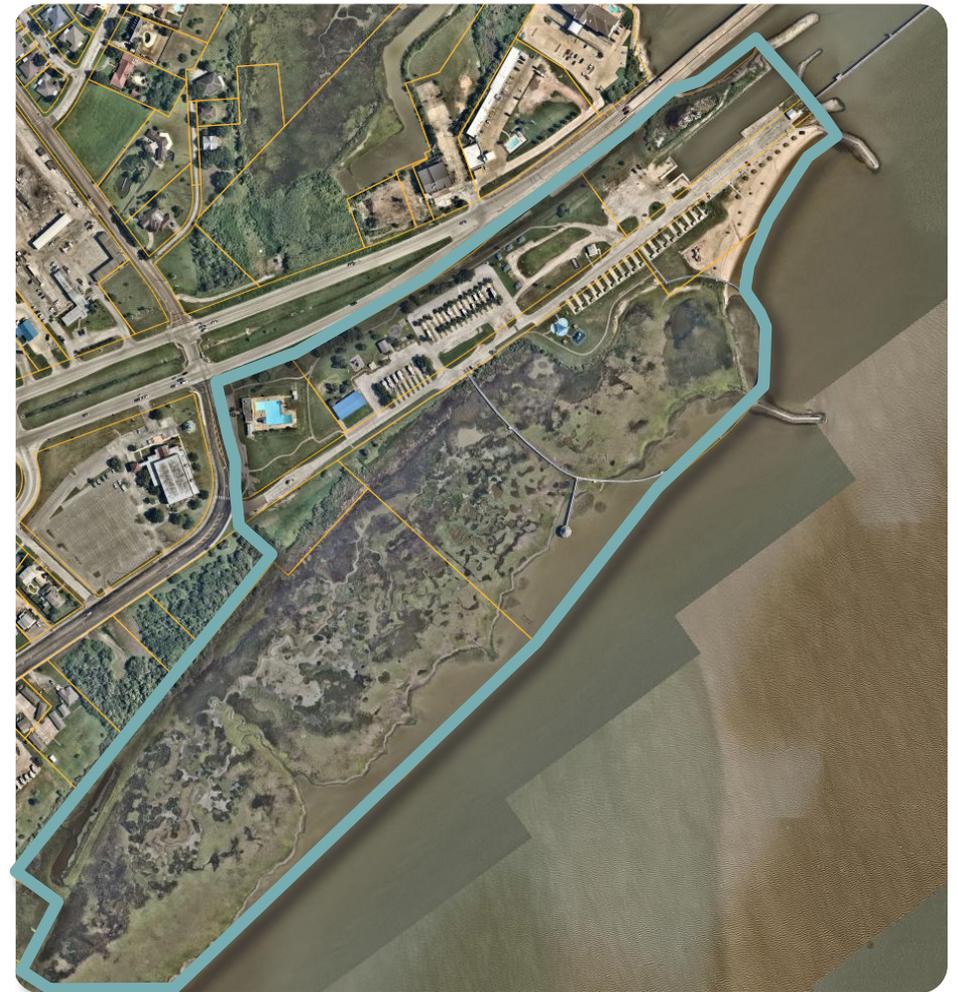
South of Lavaca Bay Causeway, along the Lavaca Bay coastline.

## AMENITIES

- » Playground (3)
- » Splash pad
- » Sand Volleyball
- » Fishing pier
- » Cabanas
- » Barbecue pits
- » Restrooms
- » Water fountains
- » Parking
- » Preserved wetlands
- » Observation points
- » Beach access
- » Benches

## PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Three new shaded cabanas at the city's splash pad facility with covered seating area and picnic tables
- » Develop camping area (2026)
- » Reconstruct volleyball court (2026)
- » Raised crosswalk and accessible sidewalk connecting splashpad to restrooms (2026)





## WILSON PARK

### LOCATION

East of Seadrift Street, across from Jackson Roosevelt Elementary School.

### AMENITIES

- » Baseball field
- » T-Ball field
- » Softball
- » Soccer field
- » Skate Park
- » Playground
- » Swing set
- » Restrooms
- » Benches

### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » Covered Basketball Court (2026)
- » Sidewalk (2028)
- » Pickleball Court (2028)



## LITTLE CHOCOLATE BAYOU PARK (COUNTY)

### LOCATION

South of Austin Street,  
between Alcoa Drive and  
Little Chocolate Bayou.

### AMENITIES

- » Athletic fields
- » New Playground
- » Swing set
- » Fishing Pond
- » Trails
- » Restrooms
- » Picnic Area
- » Grills
- » Pavilion
- » Benches

### PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- » NA - New Inclusive Playground recently completed 2025



# FUTURE PARKS

Port Lavaca is actively working to expand open space recreation opportunities by improving waterfront access, enhancing multi-use trail and greenway connections, and strengthening shoreline resilience measures. These efforts are framed around increasing public access, supporting community events, protecting natural resources, and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

## SMITH HARBOR

### LOCATION

S Commerce St & Live Oak St

### FUTURE Amenities

- » Public access boardwalk (2026)
- » Marina services area
- » Motorized boating and sailing center
- » Dredging, widening of Smith Harbor
- » Seawall armoring
- » Peninsula shaping and edge treatment
- » Elevated (stilted) marina building
- » Lowland trails
- » Planned/Budgeted: 10' boardwalk along existing concrete seawall



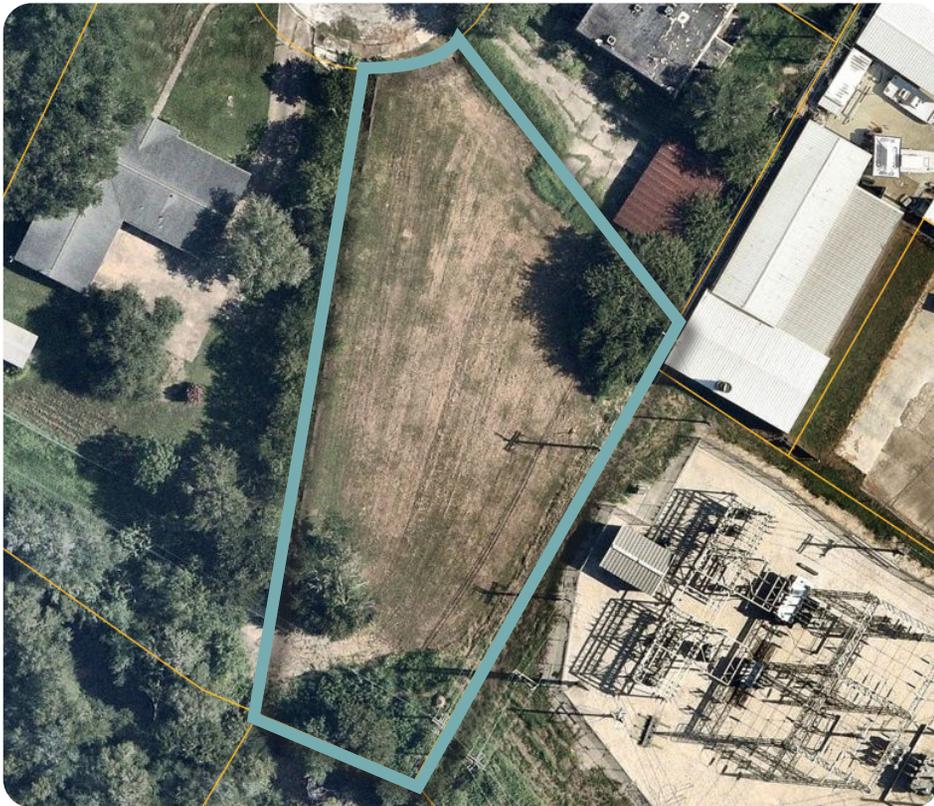
## SUBSTATION SITE A (PLANNED)

### LOCATION

Holiday Ln at Brookhollow Dr

### PLANNED AMENITIES

» N/A



## SUBSTATION SITE B (POTENTIAL)

### LOCATION

East of TX-35 near Holiday Ln at Brookhollow Dr

### PLANNED AMENITIES

» N/A



## KITCHEN SITE (PLANNED)

### LOCATION

E South St & S Guadalupe St

### PLANNED AMENITIES

- » Public access to Lavaca Bay (2026)
- » Preserve
- » Fishing





## MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

## NATURAL AREAS

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—such as those 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

# PARK STRATEGIES

## Typology & Amenities

- Issue and open call to churches and other houses of worship in North Port Lavaca that have active recreation facilities on their grounds; establish partnerships to spread awareness of the facilities and provide access for residents of recreationally underserved neighborhoods.
- In recreationally underserved areas, prioritize active recreation amenities in any new parks over five acres constructed north of SH 35; at that time, allow for public input to guide which amenities are introduced.

## Functional Classification

- Establish a City policy of developing pocket parks sparingly, such as for Downtown plazas
- Identify floodplains, wetlands, easements, and distressed properties adjacent to existing pocket parks that could be used to expand park footprints

## Level of Service

- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger, ideally a community park, north of SH 35 in the vicinity of Lynn Bayou
- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger along the southeast waterfront
- Prioritize development of a neighborhood park or larger between US 87 and W Austin

## PARK DEVELOPMENT LONG-RANGE TARGETS

- Bring Faye Bauer Sterling Park into Phase 2
- Begin phased rehabilitation of George Adams Park, with the goal of reaching Phase 2 by 2035
- Initiate Phase 1 improvements for undeveloped park sites, especially Substation Site A and the Kitchen Tract

## PARK MAINTENANCE LONG-RANGE TARGETS

- Maintain Level 3 maintenance minimum for all parks/areas with recreational amenities, including playgrounds
- Maintain Level 2 maintenance for high-traffic parks at the community park level or higher, including any park hosting league play
- Maintain Level 1 maintenance for downtown and regional parks
- Maintain Level 3 maintenance minimum for trailheads
- Reduce costs by using native, drought-tolerant landscapes
- Conduct a feasibility and staffing study to determine the resources needed to bring four existing parks into Level 2 by 2035
- Codify minimum standards for new parks, including private parks within future masterplanned communities
- Establish conservation easements or designated preserves to protect 500 acres of ecologically sensitive land from development and degradation.
  - Restore at minimum 50 acres of degraded prairie or wetland habitat through native planting and ecological enhancement features.
  - Adopt a riparian buffer policy to safeguard waterways, prevent erosion, and improve water quality along streams, creeks, and shorelines.
  - Integrate universal design standards into all park infrastructure, including piers, boat launches, and playgrounds. At minimum, ensure ADA compliance is met with all current and future park projects.

## FUTURE PARKS

- Adopt a park, trail, and improvements dedication ordinance to support efforts to expand the existing parks system
- Require developers to construct any trails that are shown on the Master Plan.
- Offer a fee-in-lieu option, which is a method to fund park enhancements where City Council has the ability to decide whether a financial contribution would be preferred to land dedication. In certain cases, the dedication of open space may not be desirable, or the City does not want the extra maintenance of another park. The fee collected for the development can be used in another area to make a more significant impact. These new regulations could be adopted as a standalone ordinance or incorporated within the subdivision ordinance.

# TRAILS 03





# INTRODUCTION

Movement and connectivity are key elements of a community's overall quality of life. Linking together parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other key destinations through strategic connectivity investments allows residents to more easily and safely access the world outside of their front doors. This chapter explores how an expanded trail network and improved pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure can transform Port Lavaca into a truly multimodal, accessible, and active community.

Multiuse trails and greenways are essential components of outdoor recreation infrastructure, providing a range of benefits including exercise opportunities, alternative transportation options, and access to natural spaces. This chapter considers trails located within City parks as well as those functioning more like sidewalks outside of parks themselves. This chapter also considers a range of trail types, including those for walking, running, biking, and paddling.

## FEEDBACK THEMES

- There is a growing community of runners in Port Lavaca, which has led to heightened interest in off-street / wooded trails
- Trails for connectivity are highly desired, such as trails connecting parks, neighborhoods, and amenities
- Long standing community interest in paddle trails
- Residents and guests are delighted by existing piers, nature trails, and boardwalks
- Residents appreciate the growing sidewalk connectivity, which has potentially added to community interest in additional trail development
- Trail maintenance and storm/flood resilience is a top priority for City Staff

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## QUALITY OF LIFE

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

- » Trails that enable both active and passive recreation
- » Trails that compliment and showcase the natural beauty of Port Lavaca
- » Trails that are comfortable to use year-round



## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Preserve and protect the natural landscape and build community resilience.

- » Trails that compliment and showcase the natural beauty of Port Lavaca
- » Use trails and linear parks as a tool to active floodplains and wetlands



## EQUITABLE ACCESS

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

- » Every resident within a 10-minute walk of an off-street trail
- » Accessibility and amenities for all ages and abilities
- » A trail system that feels and is safe
- » Continue to explore options to build trails in utility and railroad easements



## ECONOMIC VITALITY

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

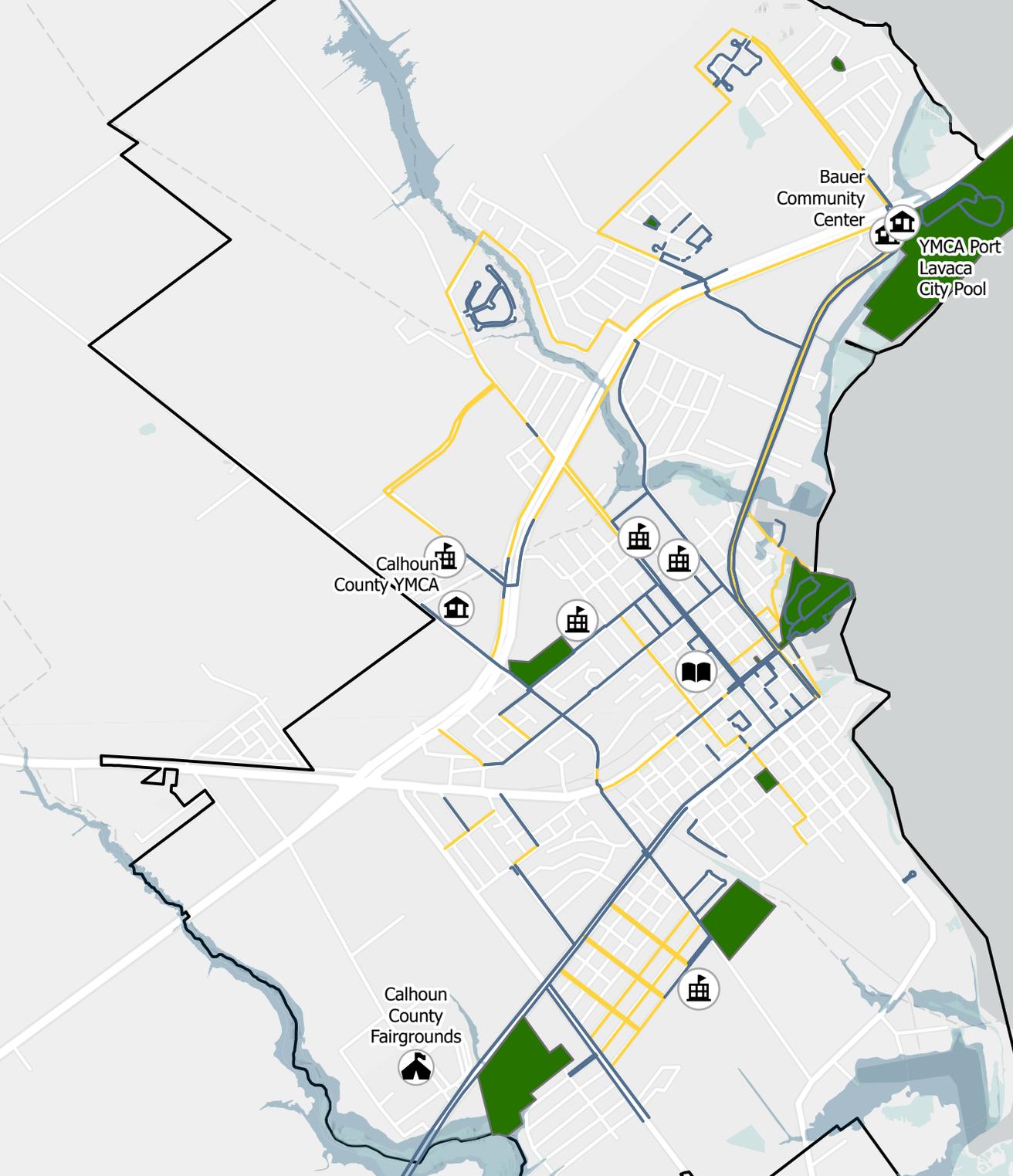
- » Consider park vendors and private rental shops as part of a larger trail ecosystem
- » Tap into the booming Heritage Trails market planning at the County level



## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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

- » Trail and amenity development process guided by community input
- » Understand which groups use certain trail types and why



## EXISTING TRAILS MAP: KEY OBSERVATIONS

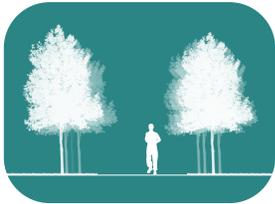
- Aside from walking trails confined to parks, much of Port Lavaca’s trail network is indistinguishable from sidewalks to the average user
- With the exception of sidewalks along 283/ W Austin Street, Port Lavaca is disconnected from other destinations within Calhoun County
- Many, though not all, of the City’s parks have at least partial connectivity to nearby neighborhoods and schools via sidewalks or on-street rails
- Lynn Bayou, SH 35, and railroad tracks are some of the greatest barriers to connectivity

Note: Other similar infrastructure are critical elements of holistic mobility and circulation system, but are not considered as part of this Plan, specifically safe routes to school (SRTS), standard sidewalks, and on-street bike lanes. For various reasons, these elements are better evaluated as part of the Comprehensive Plan or standalone documents.

# TRAIL TYPOLOGIES

## ACTIVITY TYPE

Trails come in a variety of types, shapes, and sizes, each designated to meet different community needs. Understanding their typologies help cities provide accessible recreation, support social interaction, and conserve natural resources for residents and visitors alike.



### NATURE TRAILS

- Width: 4' - 6' unmowed path or aggregate surface.
- Uses: walking, hiking, mountain biking, etc.
- Experience: natural trail
- Cost/Environmental Impact: minimal. Uses existing vegetation and open space
- Some trails may be limited by use type (hiking OR biking)



### NEIGHBORHOOD PATHS

- Width: 6' - 8' usually paved surface. Can be gravel in some cases.
- Uses: walking, hiking, biking, etc.
- Experience: links neighborhoods to community pathways and greenways
- Cost/Environmental Impact: medium. Utilizes land set aside for open space.
- Location, surface, and landscape design should tie with the development zone of which it is a part.



### COMMUNITY PATHS

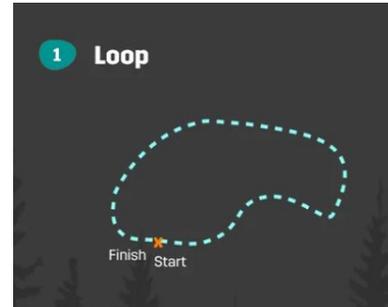
- Width: 6' - 10' paved surface
- Uses: Multi-use designation
- Experience: Unique environments and landscape treatments along its length
- Cost/Environmental Impact: high due to amount of hardscape and adjacency to roadway
- Highly efficient at moving residents to/from key amenity areas and special nodes.



### SIGNATURE GREENWAY

- Width: 12' - 15' paved surface
- Uses: ultimate multi-modal use designation
- Experience: regional connector between major community elements with signature wayfinding and landscape features.
- Cost/Environmental Impact: high due to level of investment required to construct and maintain.

## ROUTE TYPE



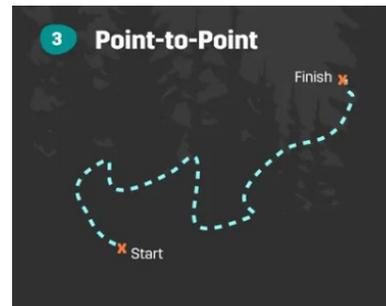
### LOOP

A loop or circuit trail forms a continuous path that begins and ends at the same location. This configuration enhances the user experience by providing ever-changing scenery and eliminating the need for backtracking.



### OUT-AND-BACK

An out-and-back trail consists of a linear path leading to a primary destination. Hikers reach a turnaround point, typically a vista or landmark, and retrace their steps back to the trailhead.



### POINT-TO-POINT

Point-to-point trails follow a linear route from an initial trailhead to a separate terminal location. Because the start and end points differ, these routes typically necessitate coordinated transportation for drop-off and pickup.



### LOLLIPOP

A lollipop trail combines elements of both loop and out-and-back configurations. Users traverse a shared initial segment before entering a circular loop, eventually returning to the trailhead via the original "stem" path.

# EXISTING TRAIL INVENTORY

At the present time, all of Port Lavaca's discernible trails (excludes sidewalks, bike lanes, etc.) are located within existing parks. This section reviews those in-park trails.

## BAYFRONT PENINSULA PARK



## LIGHTHOUSE BEACH



## WILSON PARK



## LITTLE CHOCOLATE BAYOU PARK (COUNTY)



# PLANNED TRAILS

Excluding trail and sidewalk development within existing parks and on-street improvements, Port Lavaca currently has two planned trail projects:

- Shared use path from Bayfront park to Skully's
- Public access boardwalk and lowland trails at smith harbor

## SMITH HARBOR



Fig. 61 - Smith Harbor - Perspective View - Existing Conditions



Fig. 62 - Smith Harbor - Perspective View with Proposed Improvements

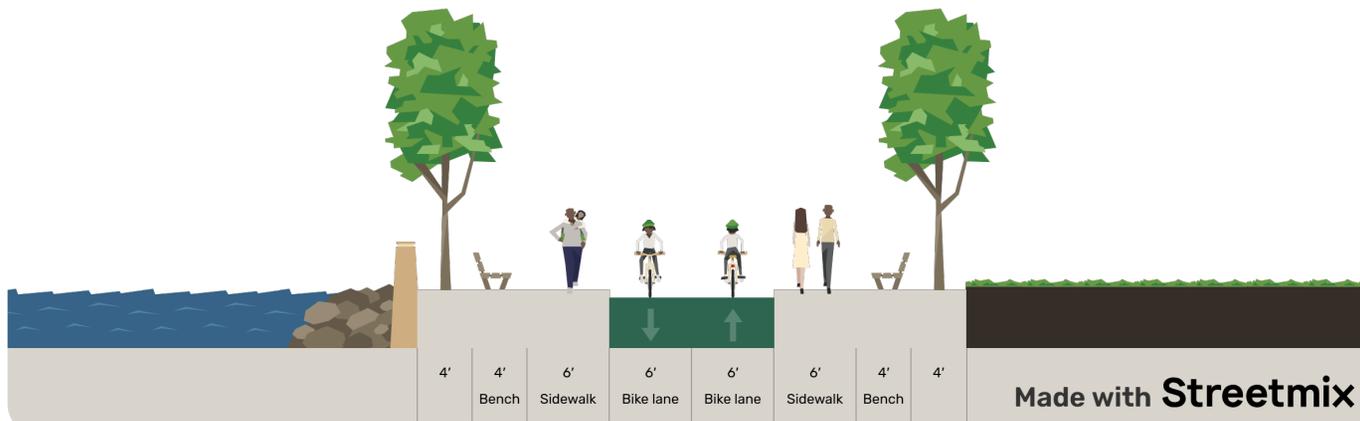
# BAYFRONT COMMONS



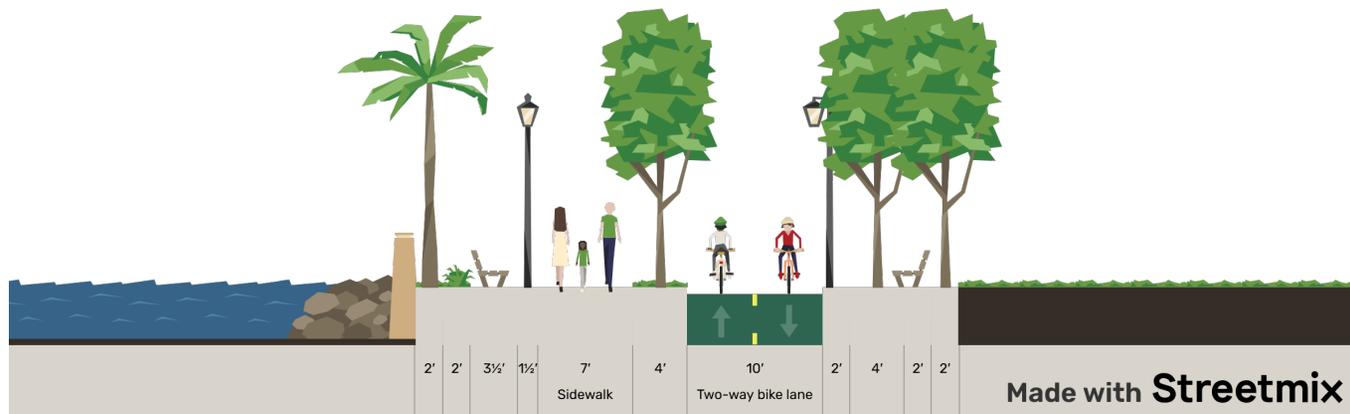
# CROSS SECTIONS

Typical trail cross sections have been developed as part of this trail study to offer local agencies additional guidance for subsequent project development and trail design. These cross sections can serve as the basis for discussions with property owners, project engineers and landscape architects, and other project stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of typical trail design elements. Additional trail design resources should be referenced in preliminary and final design phases.

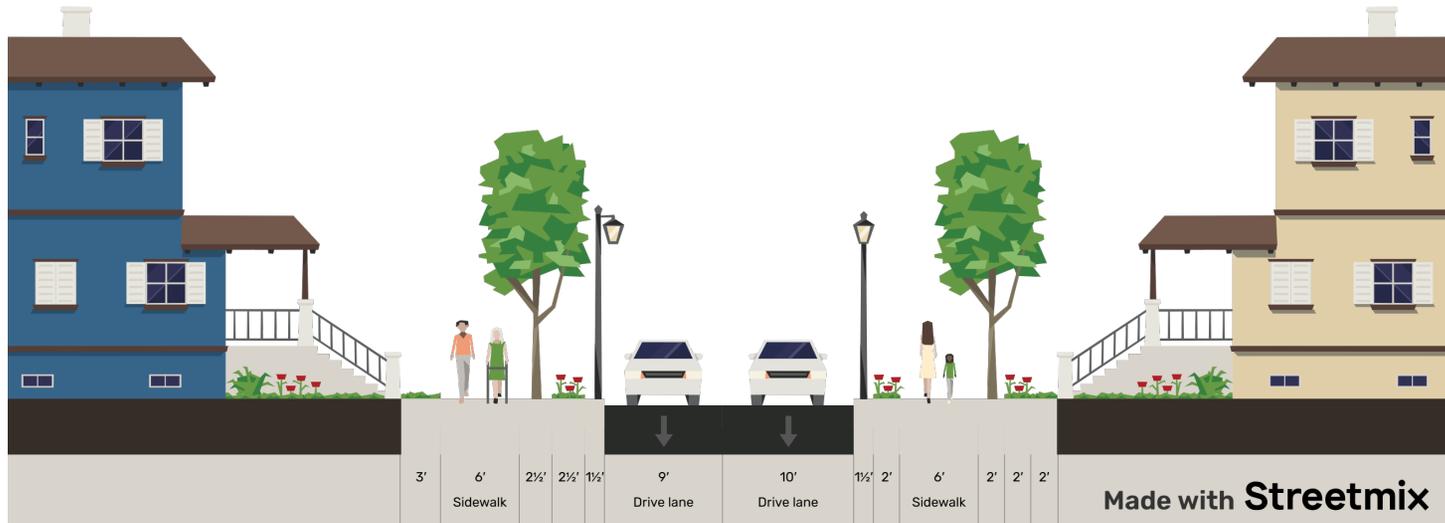
## OFF-STREET TRAIL/GREENWAY



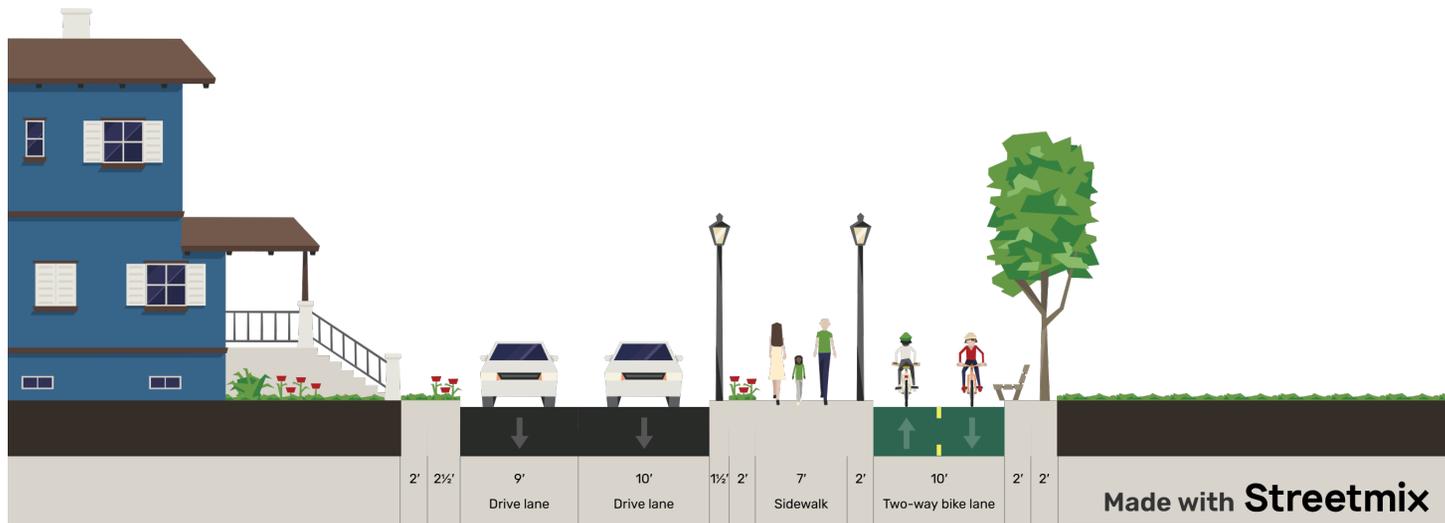
## NATURE TRAIL



## NEIGHBORHOOD PATH



## COMMUNITY PATH



# KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW TRAILS

Building trails entails key considerations like user needs, environmental impact, sustainability, site specifics, and community/social factors.

## Design & Layout

- **User-Centered:** Define users (hikers, bikes, horses) to set width (8-14 ft), sightlines (400 ft), and features (obstacles, tech).
- **Access:** Plan parking, access points, and facilities (restrooms).
- **Drainage:** Crucial for sustainability; use grade reversals, dips, and ensure the outside edge is lower for water flow.
- **Terrain:** Use cross-slopes, avoid ridge tops, dry washes can be good, and use natural features to guide layout.
- **Loops:** Create loops and avoid dead-ends for better user flow.
- **Safety:** Design intersections carefully, ensure clear vertical clearance (10ft+), and consider bridges/tunnels for motorized users.

## Environment & Site

- **Soil:** Locate on stable, well-draining soil; avoid deep loam, clay.
- **Habitat:** Minimize disruption, avoid fragmentation, and use quiet tools.
- **Water Crossings:** Select carefully and design to prevent erosion.
- **Control Points:** Use natural features like viewpoints, rock outcrops, or existing paths to guide the trail.
- **Dedication of adjacent development areas to conservation easements when bordering floodplains.**

## Sustainability & Maintenance

- **Build to Last:** Use full bench construction on slopes, avoid water bars (use grade reversals instead).
- **Materials:** Choose surfaces (rock, natural materials) for user satisfaction, accessibility, cost, and maintenance.
- **Management:** Plan for maintenance capacity, user management (directional, dogs), and restoration of closed trails.

**TRAIL MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

	Asphalt	Boardwalk	Re-Adapted Roads	Crushed Gravel	Natural Surface	Concrete
Cost Range	\$200 / linear foot	\$100 / square foot	\$0	\$50 / square foot	\$5 / square foot	\$35 / square foot
Ideal Conditions	Highly durable - High traffic, high use trails. Trails part of a multi-modal transportation network	Environmentally sensitive areas	Parks or natural areas where existing roads are converted to trails	Rail-to-trails, urban to rural trails, long-distance trails with lower grades (Can be built to meet ADA accessibility) guidelines	Natural areas, or open space patchwork in urban areas	Internal circulation, heavy use, areas prone to flooding, and greenway connectors

## PADDLE TRAILS

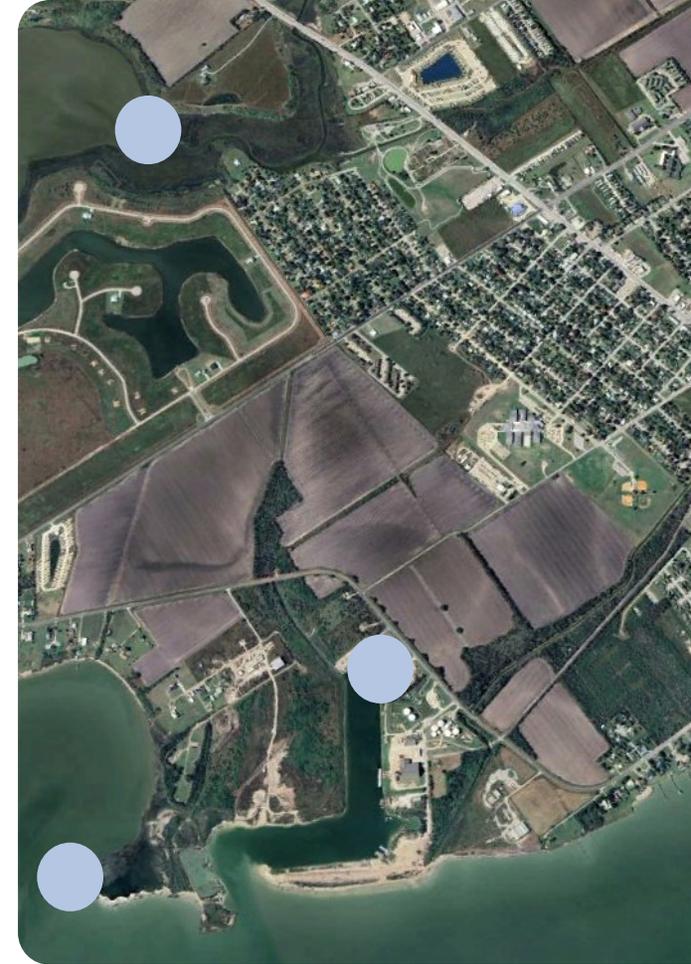
Paddle Trails in and around Port Lavaca have been discussed and researched dating back to at least the 2012 Calhoun County Texas Shoreline Access Plan. In the time since, concerns about water choppiness has slowed significant advancement. With the anticipated completion of the offshore breakwater projects, Port Lavaca is again in a position to move forward with the development of paddle trails.

The City can prepare for the development of paddle trails by reviewing Texas Parks and Wildlife's desirable characteristics:

- Public access must be a minimum of four paddling miles to a maximum of twelve paddling miles for each segment on linear trails; ponds,

lakes and bays may be shorter since paddlers can spend as long as they would like exploring this type of trail

- Presence of natural or historical attractions such as rapids, mature trees or unique habitat, wildlife diversity, historic sites, etc.
- Adequate water quality, river flows or water depth (seasonal flows acceptable)
- Local partner(s) to maintain put-in/ take-outs and keep them clean
- Canoe and kayak rentals from local sources (not required but helpful in promoting paddling tourism in your community)
- Designated parking
- TPT marker signage and kiosk



## KAYAK LAUNCHES

A kayak launch is a designated structure, like a ramp or floating platform, designed for safely and easily getting kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards into and out of the water, featuring stable surfaces, guide rails, or rollers to help paddlers board without getting wet or risking falls, making it ideal for beginners or varied water levels.



● Possible launch sites for further evaluation

## STRATEGIES: PADDLE TRAILS

- Formally express interest in the Texas Paddling Trails program via Texas Parks and Wildlife’s Nature Tourism Program
- Apply for the Texas Paddling Trails Program Community Application for Assistance
- Upon completion of the breakwater project, commission a **TYPE** study to determine the experience level for a shoreline paddle trail along previous identified alignments
- Identify City- and partner-owned waterfront sites that could host paddle-focused amenities
- Budget for the purchase, installation, and maintenance of one kayak launch annually, beginning with existing public boat ramps and shoreline access sites



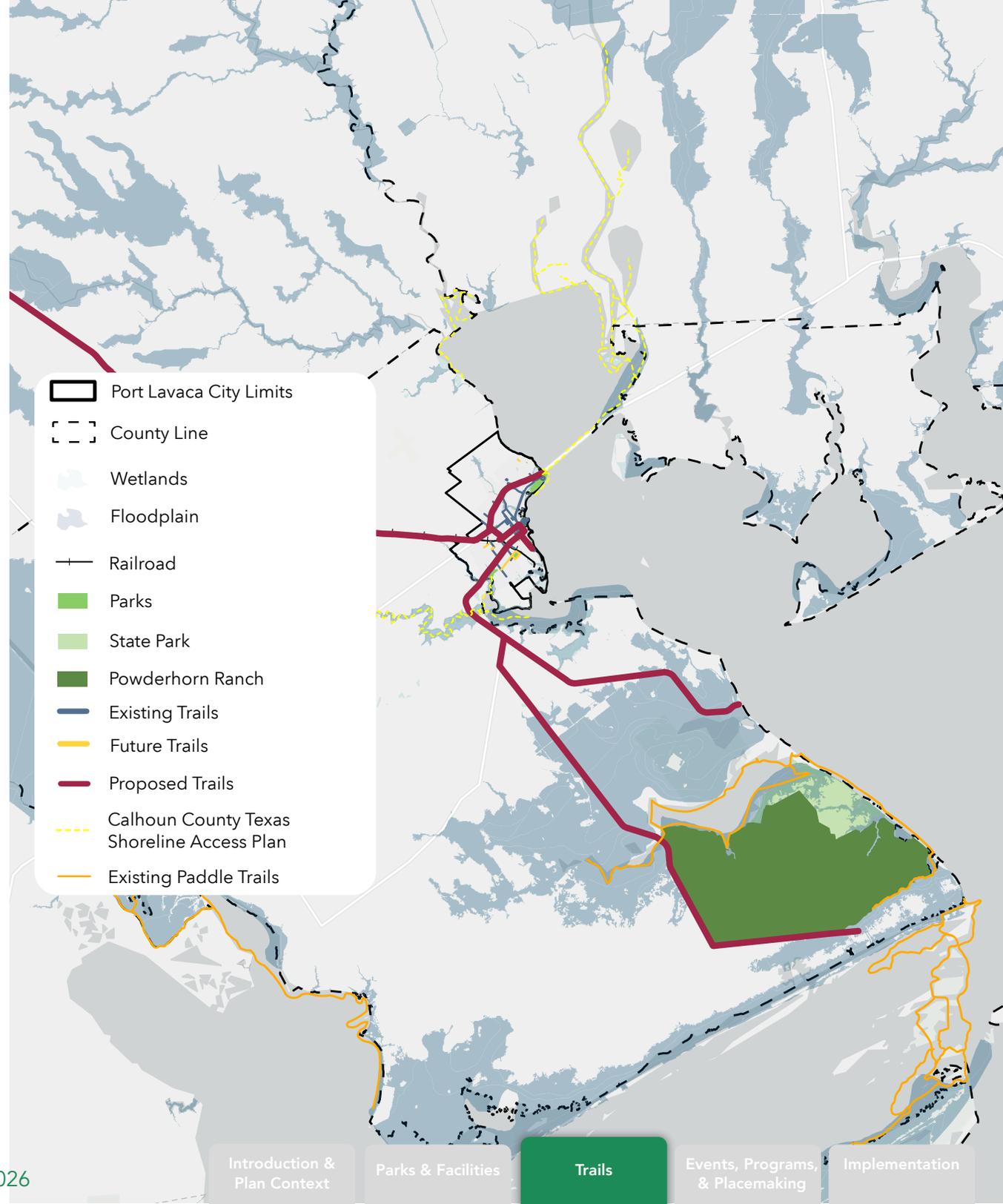
## REGIONAL TRAILS

Regional trails are public, shared-use paths that connect communities, counties, and other jurisdictions, providing recreational and transportation corridors between cities, parks, and open spaces. Regional trails serve both recreational and transportation needs, providing opportunities for exercise, leisure, and non-motorized commuting

Regional trails are designed to be physically separate from vehicle traffic and are accessible to a variety of users. Trails can range from paved, multi-use paths to natural surface trails and help complete a larger, interconnected network of greenways.

Key characteristics of regional trails include:

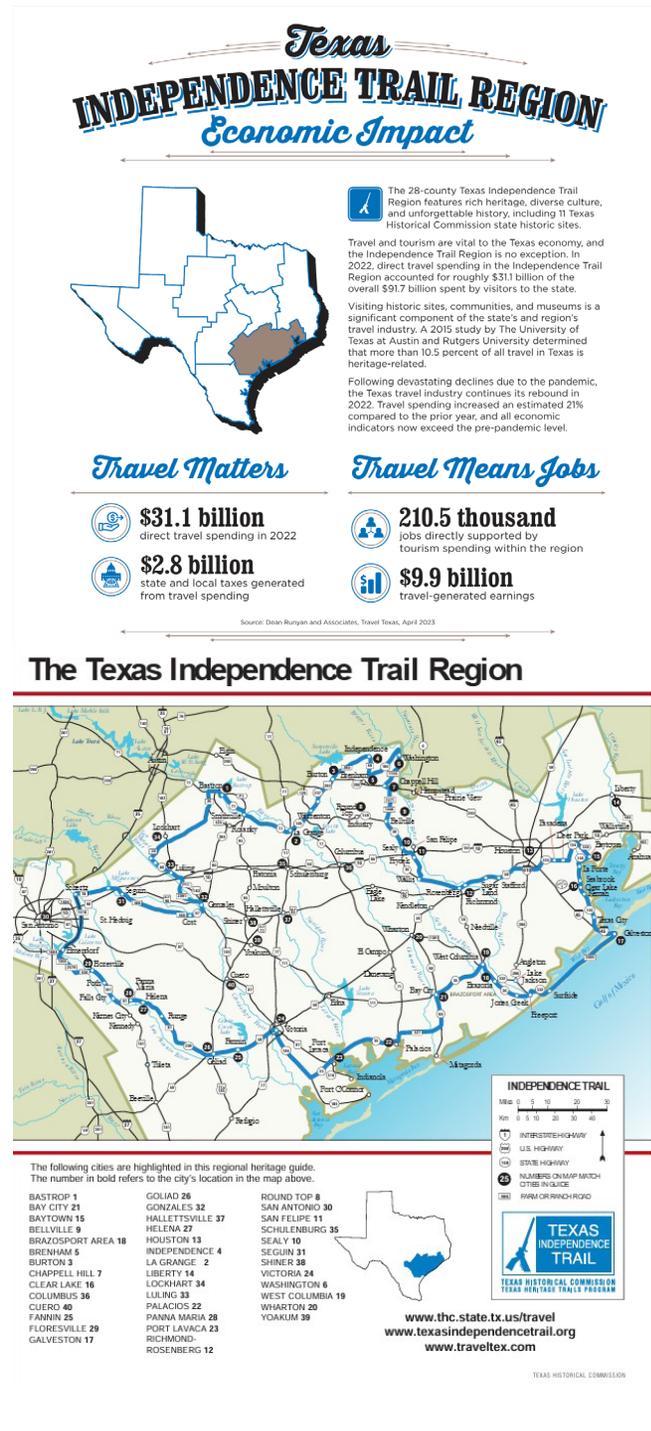
- Geographic scope: They extend beyond local neighborhoods to link entire cities or regions
- Shared use: They are multi-use paths designed for pedestrians, cyclists, and sometimes equestrians
- Separation from traffic: They are typically physically separated from vehicle traffic, offering a safer and more pleasant experience. In some cases, they connect segments of off-road paths with on-road bikeways or sidewalks.
- Connectivity: They serve as major arteries in a larger network, connecting local trails, parks, preserves, and other destinations.



## TEXAS HERITAGE TRAIL PROGRAM

The Texas Heritage Trails Program (THTP) is the Texas Historical Commission's award-winning heritage tourism initiative. This economic development initiative encourages communities, heritage regions, and the state to partner and promote Texas' historic and cultural resources. These successful local preservation efforts, combined with statewide marketing of heritage regions as tourism destinations, increase visitation to cultural and historic sites, and bring more dollars to Texas communities. This, in turn, supports the THC's mission to protect and preserve the state's historic and prehistoric resources for the use, education, economic benefit, and enjoyment of present and future generations. Each heritage region works to forge local tourism partnerships and support the region's attractions by developing its own unique blend of programs and promotions.

TXDOT also participates in the project by installing and maintaining the Texas Heritage Trails signs (D71 series). The signs are 42 x 24 inches. The trail arrows are 18 inches and 24 inches in diameter.



## STRATEGIES: REGIONAL & HERITAGE TRAILS

- Establish a working group through the local Council of Governments or form a standalone group to explore the feasibility of a regional trail system from Victoria to Port Lavaca to Powderhorn State Park and Port O'Connor
- In addition to partner communities, coordinate with TXDOT, Union Pacific, and utility providers to study easement opportunities for off-street trails
- Submit historic sites and community events to Texas Time Travel, part of the Texas Historical Commission, to be featured online and on the organization's trip planning app
- Coordinate with Calhoun County and TXDOT's Support Services Division to install signage along key roadways leading to Port Lavaca
- Coordinate with the City of Port O'Connor and Texas Parks and Wildlife to bring the City and Powderhorn State Park into the existing trail network





## NEIGHBORHOOD TRAILS & LINKAGES

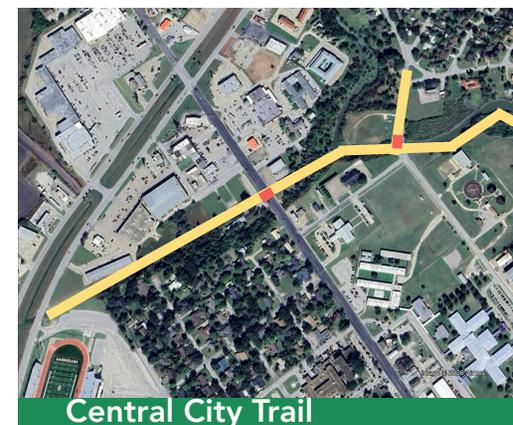
There are a number of locations in Port Lavaca where relatively minor trail projects can have an oversized impact for the local community. Five current future park sites were selected as case studies to illustrate the role of local trail-park linkages. The impact of these projects include:

- Neighborhoods connected directly to adjacent parks
- Introduction of trails in currently underserved areas
- Rerouting bike and pedestrian traffic away from high-volume roadways

Legend:

- Yellow: Conceptual Alignment
- Dashed Yellow: Planned Trail
- Red: Barrier (highway, floodplain, or Railroad)

Note: Case studies do not take into account current property ownership and are not a recommendation for eminent domain.





±2,300'



**Substation Park Site**

±730'



±5,900'



**Claret Crossing & Butterfly Pocket Parks**

±2,930'



Google Earth  
±6,030'



**Little Chocolate Bayou Park**

±1,000'

## STRATEGIES: NEIGHBORHOOD TRAILS & LINKAGES

- Consult with Union Pacific about constructing pedestrian bridges over their active tracks at key locations
- Continue to coordinate with Union Pacific about acquiring the unused portion of tracks leading into Downtown and express interest in acquiring the southern spur should the opportunity arise
- Consult with TXDOT about constructing pedestrian bridges over SH 35 at key locations
- Consult with TXDOT about developing off-street trails within the ROW of SH 35
- Identify and map the locations of all undeveloped City-owned properties, floodplains, and utility easements - relative to parks, schools, and neighborhoods - to determine possible additional trail linkages
- Budget for ±3.6 miles of local linkages annually

## STRATEGIES: PADDLE TRAILS

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EVENTS,  
PROGRAMS, &  
PLACEMAKING 04



## 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.

Some of the topics discussed herein are not currently provided as a service by the City, simply because a robust parks, recreation, and trails is costly to maintain - and the City has limited resources. These topics are discussed in order to identify the steps and best practices necessary to implement them, should there be community backing in the future.

## 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.

- » Programs: Determine community interested in funding indoor facilities
- » Events:
- » Placemaking:



## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Preserve and protect the natural landscape and build community resilience.

- » Programs: Continue to invest in ecotourism, and ensure a portion of tourism dollars are spent on coastal preservation
- » Events:
- » Placemaking:



## EQUITABLE ACCESS

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

- » Programs: Determine community interested in funding indoor facilities
- » Events:
- » Placemaking:



## ECONOMIC VITALITY

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

- » Programs: Determine community interested in funding indoor facilities
- » Events:
- » Placemaking:



## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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

- » Programs: Determine community interested in funding indoor facilities
- » Events:
- » Placemaking:

# PROGRAM MANAGEMENT: ADMINISTERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PARKS & REC

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, involving 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 (30%).



## 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.

Despite widespread stated interest in indoor recreation, Port Lavaca voters are historically averse to bond proposals and it remains unclear if such a proposal would pass.

Strengthening/expanding the YMCA partnership is more realistic in the interim YMCA of the Golden Crescent

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.

Key factors to consider:

- Community guidance: Engage residents through surveys and public meetings to understand what programs and activities they want (e.g., fitness classes, art spaces, tech hubs, childcare).
- Feasibility: The project's funding and the physical size of the available land will place practical constraints on the building's size and features.
- Programming: The required square footage varies significantly by function.

### Did you know?

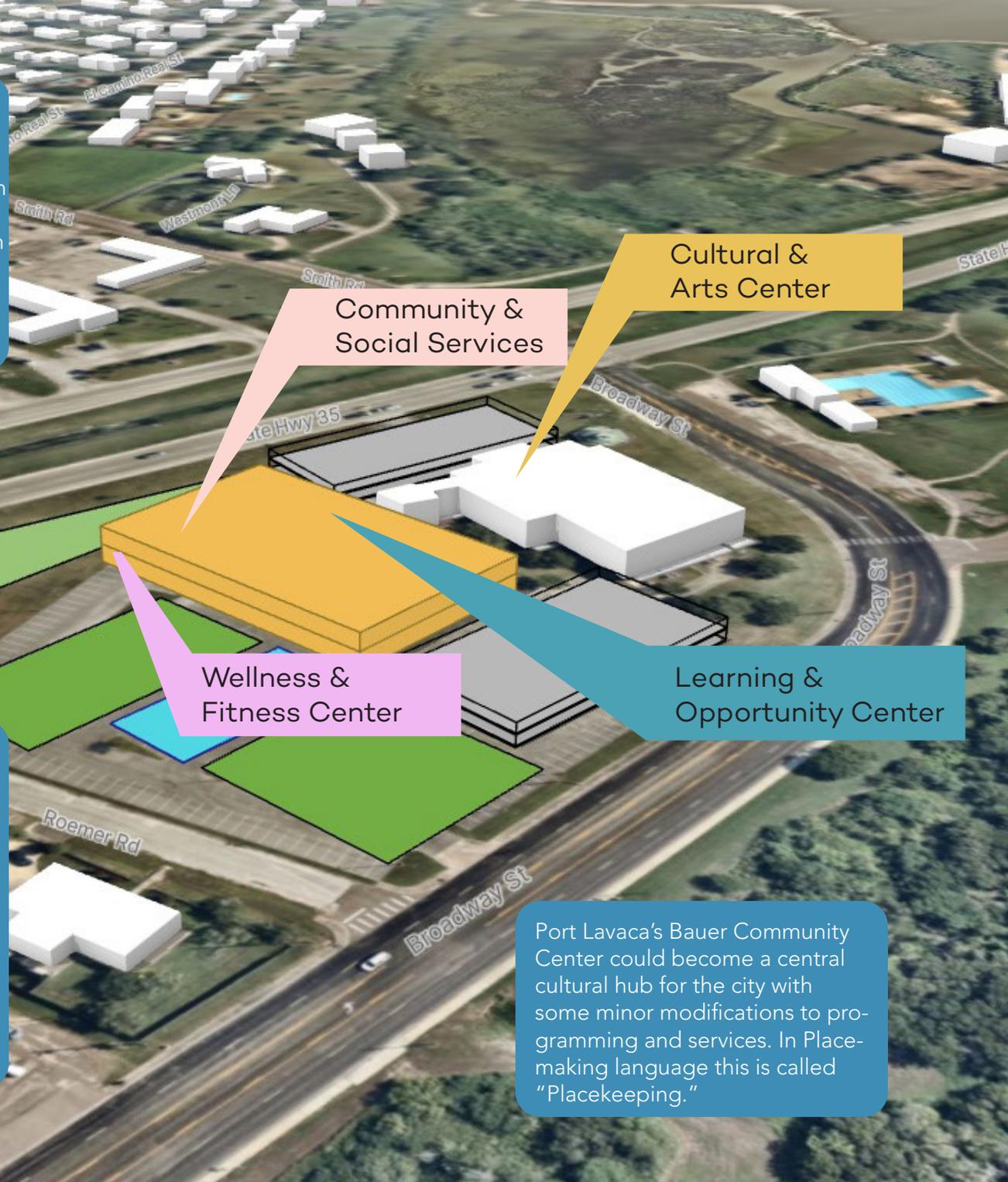
- A standard gymnasium alone can be around 12,000 sqft.
- Multi-purpose halls require around 25 sqft per person capacity.
- Fitness areas: Gyms often need 40-60 sqft per person for equipment.
- Meeting/office rooms: Individual offices might range from 100 to 400 sqft.

### A phased example for a community of ~12,000 residents could look like this:

- Phase 1: An initial 12,000 sqft community center with meeting rooms and staff offices.
- Phase 2: A separate 48,000 sqft recreation center housing a gymnasium, indoor walking track, and indoor pool.

This demonstrates a potential total size of around 60,000 sqft (1.37 acres) when comprehensive recreational facilities are included.

Port Lavaca's Bauer Community Center could become a central cultural hub for the city with some minor modifications to programming and services. In Place-making language this is called "Placekeeping."



# 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(\*) or Fairgrounds.

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

## Permits and Reservations

The Department has numerous facilities to rent for parties, picnics, socials, programs, and competitive sport events. Residents can rent picnic areas, facilities, and pools with equitable rates below industry standard.

## Other Services

In addition to core program areas and activities, the department facilitates other types of community leisure services. Park amenities, such as walking trails, splash pads, multipurpose fields, a skate park offer additional opportunities to recreate outside. Drop-in activities including open gym/game rooms are not currently available. Enrollment-based activities (those held on scheduled days and times that require pre-registration) are not currently offered.

## 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.



## 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.



### STRATEGIES: 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

# STRATEGIES: RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- Budget for a director level hire. When evaluating prospective directors, prioritize candidates with CPRP, MPA, or another industry-leading certification
- Work with City Council to initiate the process of establishing a Parks and Recreation Department
- 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,
- Update the City website to better showcase the City's parks including new photography, consistent naming and addressing, "sort by features" functionality, and all reservation/cost information and links
- Update the City website better to connect users to County- and TPW-managed facilities
- 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.

*Editor's Note: Esports, Maker Space, and Indoor Recreation strategies to be realigned prior to Final Draft.*

# 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. 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. An exciting, year-round lineup of events already enhances Port Lavaca's character, encourages community engagement, and offers entertainment for diverse ages and stages.

It is important to note the distinct differences between community versus tourism-oriented events. Although there can often be overlap between community interests, deliberate recreation tourism policies must be made holistically with other factors like:

- » Alignment with key industries
- » Hospitality accommodations
- » Community branding
- » Promotional marketing
- » Design intent of public spaces



TEXAS MID-COAST  
**BIRDING**  
*Festival*

## MAY 1 - 4, 2025

**PORT LAVACA, TEXAS**

Experience the Texas Mid-Coast Birding Festival and discover rare and beautiful bird species, including the iconic Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret and American Oystercatcher, while enjoying insider access to prime birding habitats. Perfect for both seasoned birders and nature enthusiasts, this festival offers an unforgettable adventure along one of North America's most important migratory flyways. Don't miss your chance to explore hidden gems and enhance your birding skills with expert guidance!

### This is one festival you won't want to miss!



FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [TEXASMIDCOASTBIRDINGFESTIVAL.COM](https://TEXASMIDCOASTBIRDINGFESTIVAL.COM)  
EMAIL US AT [INFO@TEXASMIDCOASTBIRDINGFESTIVAL.COM](mailto:INFO@TEXASMIDCOASTBIRDINGFESTIVAL.COM)



## 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.



## STRATEGIES: SPECIAL EVENTS

- » Enhance/evaluate the rotating seasonal event schedule, ensuring at least one major community event per quarter, such as a winter holiday market, spring art fair, summer concert series, and fall harvest festival.
- » 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 to a wider audience.
- Poll community interest in a seasonal, monthly farmer’s market. If interest is strong, identify a location with sufficient infrastructure that is appealing to residents and visitors alike.
- Increase marketing and promotion of programs and special events
- Create and launch a Block Party Trailer that can be rented for neighborhood events. The Trailer can be delivered upon request and will include movable seating, tables, yard games, and other useful celebration materials for neighborhood (not private) events.
- Launch a collaboration with the School District to create a Community Event Committee 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 at least once per month. Restaurants or establishments without outdoor dining facilities would be invited to activate a few parking spaces outside their area, or other nearby spot, in a City-approved configuration.
- Develop a promotional campaign with digital marketing, social media highlights, and printed event guides to increase event awareness and attendance.
- Offer vendor and sponsorship incentives for local businesses to participate in festivals, ensuring at least 10 new sponsor or vendor participants in City-hosted events per year.
- Commission a Tourism Strategic Plan intended to:
  - Identify and introduce key stakeholders
  - 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 Development stage
  - Formulate and launch a recreation focused campaign to attract snowbirds, partners, vendors, sponsors, and new development
  - Increase the likelihood of positive community perception by anticipating conflicts over parking, crowds, traffic flow, restrooms, accommodations, etc.

# 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.

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.
- **Focus on assets:** It builds on a community’s unique strengths, history, and natural features to create a strong sense of place and identity.



● KEY ATTRIBUTES ● INTANGIBLES ● MEASUREMENTS



← George Adams Park 🔍 ✕

Overview Reviews About

 **Michael Anthony Mayes**  
Local Guide · 62 reviews · 21 photos

★★★★☆ 4 years ago

They got plugs, they got shade, and the restrooms are private and don't smell like the beach unlike Tilly

👍 1    🔗 Share

## COMFORT & IMAGE

### PARK & TRAIL FURNITURE

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.

## SAFETY

CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) in parks uses 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, all to reduce crime opportunities and boost community use by making areas visible, understandable, and cared for.

Key CPTED Principles for Parks include Natural Surveillance, Natural Access Control, Territorial Reinforcement, Activity Support, and Maintenance.

## SHADE & COOLING

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 can implement design strategies like planting shade trees throughout playgrounds and walkways, installing shaded picnic pavilions and seating areas, and using heat-reflective and permeable materials for paths and playground surfaces. Incorporating water features such as splash pads or misting stations provides additional ways for park visitors to cool off during hot days. Ensuring that drinking fountains are readily available, signage about heat safety is posted, and operating hours are adjusted during extreme heat events are also key considerations. 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.



## STRATEGIES: COMFORT & IMAGE

### CPTED:

- Define clear, formal entry points and boundaries with signage, gateway elements, pavement changes, or landscape features.
- Consolidate informal trails by converting the feasible and most-used into formal paths and decommissioning the rest with vegetation or barriers.
- Install low-cost guidance elements (bollards, fencing, landscaping) to direct visitors toward desired areas and limit access to sensitive zones
- Continue to utilize controlled vehicle access protocols, such as lockable gates or collapsible bollards for after-hours security and event management.
- Place benches, bridges, and gathering areas so they are visible from main circulation routes

- Install dark sky-friendly lighting along high-use corridors, including parking lots, pavilions, and park entries; consider solar-powered or motion-activated fixtures in naturalized areas to reduce operational costs.
- Establish park identity with consistent branding and wayfinding, starting with the parks and drinking themes identified in the Waterfront Master Plan.
- Program parks intentionally with recurring events to reinforce legitimate occupancy and passive surveillance.
- Review the systemwide maintenance standard specifying routine cycles for mowing, litter removal, restroom cleaning, graffiti abatement, and vegetation trimming.
- Identify high incident location and create a rapid-response protocol (24–72 hours) for graffiti, vandalism, and damaged infrastructure.
- Implement asset management software to track condition, repairs, and lifecycle replacement schedules.  
Where vandalism is recurring, replace vulnerable materials with high-durability options (steel, anti-graffiti coatings, tamper-resistant hardware).
- Deploy cameras only in high-traffic or high-incident areas, ensuring signage indicates

monitored spaces.

- Evaluate public Wi-Fi hotspots in major destinations to support real-time communication.
- Incorporate QR codes for reporting issues, providing maps, and sharing safety tips.
- Work with neighborhood associations to conduct periodic “walk audits” identifying visibility and safety issues.

#### SHADE & COOLING:

- Establish seasonal cooling centers in high-traffic and low-shade parks
- Plant fast-growing native, drought-tolerant shade trees around seating areas, playgrounds, and along trails
- Install trellises or pergolas and cover them with climbing vines to create natural shade curtains
- Replace concrete or asphalt with turf, native grasses, or groundcover to reduce surface temperatures and heat radiation.
- Implement stormwater management practices that double as cooling, such as installing shade trees in bioswales or around roadside planters
- Use high-density polyethylene (HDPE) shade sails over playgrounds, picnic areas, and along trails. These are cheaper, versatile alternatives to solid structures that block up to 98% of UV rays.

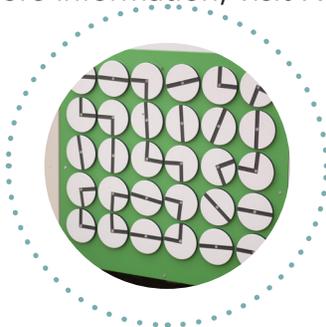
- Integrated Playground Shade: When replacing play equipment, prioritize structures with pre-installed shades, which are often more affordable than retrofitting separate structures.
- Replace asphalt with lighter-colored concrete or permeable paving materials to reflect solar energy rather than absorb it.

# SOCIABILITY, USES, & ACTIVITIES

## ALL AGES & ABILITIES

Nearly 30 percent of Americans have a disability of some kind, be it physical or mental [CDC Source]. 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

## MAKER 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.

*Editor's Note: Esports, Maker Space, and Indoor Recreation strategies to be realigned prior to Final Draft.*

## PASSIVE RECREATION

Passive recreation includes activities like walking, picnicking, and simply enjoying the scenery, which is crucial for both physical and mental well-being. It provides a valuable space for stress reduction, social interaction, and connection with nature, ultimately enhancing overall quality of life.



Kaylee Dammann

Local Guide · 244 reviews · 161 photos

★★★★★ a year ago

This park is so peaceful and quiet. I enjoyed having lunch and listening to the beauty of nature.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community partners are vital for parks and recreation systems because they provide extra funding, expertise, and volunteers, broaden program offerings, increase community engagement, foster stewardship, and help meet diverse resident needs, ultimately making parks more sustainable, accessible, and central to community life by bridging funding gaps and boosting local relevance.

## STRATEGIES: SOCIABILITY, USES, & ACTIVITIES

- Integrate universal design standards into all park infrastructure, including piers, boat launches, and playgrounds. At minimum, ensure ADA compliance is met
- Create flexible indoor and outdoor recreation areas for fitness, wellness, and community programs.
- Design multi-generational recreation areas, including:
  - For Youth: Playgrounds, splash pads, and skate plazas/features.
  - For Adults: Fitness stations, jogging trails, and sports courts.
  - For Seniors: Shaded seating, accessible pathways, and low-impact exercise zones.
- Conduct an ADA assessment on specified parks to determine what types of retrofits can improve ADA accessibility.
  - » Encourage community participation by involving local organizations, schools, and businesses in event planning and sponsorships.
  - » 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 creative placemaking initiatives, such as food truck courts, live performance spaces, and seasonal/temporary pop-ups/installations.
- Install multiuse features (e.g., lawn areas with power stanchions, flexible shade shelters, portable seating) to support varied community events.
- Create small activity nodes every ½–1 mile along long trails (water fountains, fitness stations, picnic pads) to encourage continuous circulation.
- Develop pop-up activation zones for temporary art, vendor kiosks, or mobile recreation units.
- Encourage third-party partners (youth groups, nonprofits, businesses) to host activities through simplified permitting and low-cost use agreements.
- Coordinate with schools and youth organizations to host stewardship days and environmental learning programs.
- Develop an “Adopt-a-Park” program inviting neighborhoods, businesses, and volunteers to provide support and monitoring.

## STRATEGIES: LEVERAGING ASSETS

- Issue an open call to local landowners to explore interest in establishing a private paintball, airsoft, 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

## STRATEGIES: RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- Budget for a director level hire. Work with City Council to initiate the process of establishing a Parks and Recreation Department
- 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,
- Update the City website to better showcase the City's parks including new photography, consistent naming and addressing, "sort by features" functionality, and all reservation/cost information and links
- Update the City website better to connect users to County- and TPW-managed facilities
- 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, afterschool/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.

## STRATEGIES: SPECIAL EVENTS

- » Enhance/evaluate the rotating seasonal event schedule, ensuring at least one major community event per quarter, such as a winter holiday market, spring art fair, summer concert series, and fall harvest festival.
- » 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 to a wider

- audience.
- Poll community interest in a seasonal, monthly farmer’s market. If interest is strong, identify a location with sufficient infrastructure that is appealing to residents and visitors alike.
- Increase marketing and promotion of programs and special events
- Create and launch a Block Party Trailer that can be rented for neighborhood events. The Trailer can be delivered upon request and will include movable seating, tables, yard games, and other useful celebration materials for neighborhood (not private) events.
- Launch a collaboration with the School District to create a Community Event Committee 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 at least once per month. Restaurants or establishments without outdoor dining facilities would be invited to activate a few parking spaces outside their area, or other nearby spot, in a City-approved configuration.
- Develop a promotional campaign with digital marketing, social media highlights, and printed event guides to increase event awareness and attendance.
- Offer vendor and sponsorship incentives for local businesses to participate in festivals, ensuring at least 10 new sponsor or vendor participants in City-hosted events per year.
- Commission a Tourism Strategic Plan

## **STRATEGIES: COMFORT & IMAGE**

### CPTED:

- Define clear, formal entry points and boundaries with signage, gateway elements, pavement changes, or landscape features.
- Consolidate informal trails by converting the feasible and most-used into formal paths and decommissioning the rest with vegetation or barriers.
- Install low-cost guidance elements (bollards, fencing, landscaping) to direct visitors toward desired areas and limit access to sensitive zones
- Continue to utilize controlled vehicle access protocols, such as lockable gates or collapsible bollards for after-hours security and event management.
- Place benches, bridges, and gathering areas so they are visible from main circulation routes
- Install dark sky-friendly lighting along high-use corridors, including parking lots, pavilions, and park entries; consider solar-powered or motion-activated fixtures in naturalized areas to reduce operational costs.
- Establish park identity with consistent branding and wayfinding, starting with the parks and drinking themes identified in the Waterfront Master Plan.
- Program parks intentionally with recurring events to reinforce legitimate occupancy and passive surveillance.
- Review the systemwide maintenance standard specifying routine cycles for mowing, litter removal, restroom cleaning, graffiti abatement, and vegetation trimming.

- Identify high incident location and create a rapid-response protocol (24–72 hours) for graffiti, vandalism, and damaged infrastructure.
- Implement asset management software to track condition, repairs, and lifecycle replacement schedules.  
Where vandalism is recurring, replace vulnerable materials with high-durability options (steel, anti-graffiti coatings, tamper-resistant hardware).
- Deploy cameras only in high-traffic or high-incident areas, ensuring signage indicates monitored spaces.
- Evaluate public Wi-Fi hotspots in major destinations to support real-time communication.
- Incorporate QR codes for reporting issues, providing maps, and sharing safety tips.
- Work with neighborhood associations to conduct periodic “walk audits” identifying visibility and safety issues.

#### SHADE & COOLING:

- Establish seasonal cooling centers in high-traffic and low-shade parks
- Plant fast-growing native, drought-tolerant shade trees around seating areas, playgrounds, and along trails
- Install trellises or pergolas and cover them with climbing vines to create natural shade curtains
- Replace concrete or asphalt with turf, native grasses, or groundcover to reduce surface temperatures and heat radiation.
- Implement stormwater management practices that double as cooling, such as installing shade trees in bioswales or around roadside planters
- Use high-density polyethylene (HDPE) shade sails over playgrounds, picnic areas, and along trails. These are cheaper, versatile alternatives to solid structures that block up to 98% of UV rays.
- Integrated Playground Shade: When replacing play equipment, prioritize structures with pre-installed shades, which are often more affordable than retrofitting separate structures.
- Replace asphalt with lighter-colored concrete or permeable paving materials to reflect solar energy rather than absorb it.

### STRATEGIES: SOCIABILITY, USES, & ACTIVITIES

- Integrate universal design standards into all park infrastructure, including piers, boat launches, and playgrounds. At minimum, ensure ADA compliance is met with all current and future park projects.
- Develop multi-sport athletic complexes that accommodate youth and adult leagues and informal play.
- Create flexible indoor and outdoor recreation areas for fitness, wellness, and community programs.
- Design multi-generational recreation areas, including:
  - For Youth: Playgrounds, splash pads, and skate plazas/features.
  - For Adults: Fitness stations, jogging trails, and sports courts.
  - For Seniors: Shaded seating, accessible pathways, and low-impact exercise zones.
- Conduct an ADA assessment on specified parks to determine what types of retrofits can improve ADA accessibility.

- » Encourage community participation by involving local organizations, schools, and businesses in event planning and sponsorships.
- » 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 creative placemaking initiatives, such as food truck courts, live performance spaces, and seasonal/temporary pop-ups/installations.
- Install multiuse features (e.g., lawn areas with power stanchions, flexible shade shelters, portable seating) to support varied community events.
- Create small activity nodes every ½–1 mile along long trails (water fountains, fitness stations, picnic pads) to encourage continuous circulation.
- Develop pop-up activation zones for temporary art, vendor kiosks, or mobile recreation units.
- Encourage third-party partners (youth groups, nonprofits, businesses) to host activities through simplified permitting and low-cost use agreements.
- Coordinate with schools and youth organizations to host stewardship days and environmental learning programs.
- Develop an “Adopt-a-Park” program inviting neighborhoods, businesses, and volunteers to provide support and monitoring.



