

XI Parks and Recreation Element

Introduction

St. John the Baptist Parish has seen significant change in recent years. Impacts from hurricanes Katrina, Ike/Gustav, and most recently Isaac created opportunity as well as uncertainty within St. John Parish. While many new residential subdivisions were built over the last twenty years, primarily in the LaPlace area, recent growth has slowed significantly and even begun to decline as a result of numerous factors. Taken together these suggest that in the short term there will not be significant population driven demand for developing new parks and recreation facilities.

The goal of this Parks, Recreation, and Open Space element is to enhance the quality of life of the citizens of St. John the Baptist Parish by improving the level of recreational facilities and services. This report identifies factors that will influence future demand for park and recreation facilities, inventories existing facilities and services, addresses the future general needs as well as the needs of specific facilities, and identifies goals, policies, and recommendations that support future park and recreation planning in St. John Parish.

The guidelines used within this element are park and recreation space standards that are applicable nationwide for planning, acquisition, and development of park, recreation, and open space lands, primarily at the community level. These standards should be viewed as a guide. They address minimum, not maximum, goals to be achieved. The standards are interpreted according to the particular situation to which they are applied and specific local needs.

Varieties of standards have been developed by professional and trade associations, which are used throughout the country. The standard derived from early studies of park acreages located within metropolitan areas was the expression of acres of parkland per unit of population. Over time, the figure of 10 acres per 1,000 residents came to be the commonly accepted standard used by a majority of communities. Other standards adopted include the "percent of area" approach, needs determined by user characteristics and participation projections, and area use based on the carrying capacity of the land. The fact that some of the standards have changed substantially is not an indication of their obsolescence.

Changes are a measure of the growing awareness and understanding of both participant and resource (land, water, etc.) limitations. Parks are for people. Park, recreation, and planning professionals must integrate the art and science of park

management in order to balance such park and open space resource values as water supply and air quality.

The Importance of Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Local communities reap many benefits from their parks, recreation and open space infrastructure. Not only do these sites provide an aesthetically pleasing place for citizens to spend their leisure time, there are more tangible benefits as well.

Research by the American Planning Association and other organizations has shown that communities with well-planned recreational opportunities, including parks and playgrounds, reap economic development benefits:

- Real property values are positively affected.
- Local tax revenues are increased.
- Affluent retirees are attracted and retained.
- Knowledge workers are attracted to the community and retained.
- Home buyers are attracted to buy homes.

In addition, parks and green space:

- Create safer neighborhoods.
- Can help revitalize residential and commercial areas.
- Help build a sense of community.
- Help children learn.
- Contribute to the overall health of citizens by providing safe opportunities for physical activity.

Methodology

In order to determine the specific recreation needs of St. John the Baptist Parish, the consultants utilized several sources of information. These included demographic information from the U.S. Census Bureau; previous population projections for the Parish; interviews with the Parish Administration and Council; interviews with various Parish Department heads, in particular the Recreation Department Director; interviews with the Parish Recreation Board; citizen input at public meetings; and a cataloging of existing recreation sites in the Parish and the facilities and condition of those facilities and equipment at each site.

A. Public Forums

On November 19, 2008, two focus group meetings were held to discuss housing issues. The groups consisted of residents, builders, developers, real estate brokers, non-profit service agencies and others. Because housing issues are intertwined with other quality of life issues, there was considerable discussion of recreation in the Parish by these community leaders.

Four public forums were also held to gather additional public comment on recreation and housing issues. These forums were held at the Parish Percy Hebert Building on December 1, two at the Edgard Courthouse on December 2 and February 9, 2009, and at the Garyville-Mt. Airy Magnet School on December 4, 2008.

As part of the Parks Master Plan prepared by Meyer Engineers in 2013 public meetings were held to get input from residents on specific needs and ideas related to parks and recreation in St. John Parish. These were incorporated into the Parks Master Plan. Some input included:

- Increase security at some parks by adding security cameras and signing to alert citizens to their presence
- Consider closing some parks due to maintenance issues
- Add additional small parks to areas and neighborhoods currently without them including Lucy, Pleasure Bend, Belle Terre, and St. Andrews among others.

As part of the recent update to this element two public forums were held to solicit updated input on parks and recreation....

B. Questionnaires

For additional public input, a Recreation Questionnaire was developed and distributed to various groups and individuals. A copy of the questionnaire is

found in the appendix section of this report. Approximately two dozen people responded to the questionnaire and their opinions shed additional light on the recreation issue.

C. Previous Studies and Reports

In addition to public input, several previous reports and studies were reviewed to provide background information on recreation in general and specific projects. There is no previous “Recreation Master Plan” for St. John Parish. However, several “master plans” for specific facilities and sites have been done in recent years. The studies below are the most recent:

1. St. John the Baptist Parks Master Plan, 2013, Meyer Engineers, Ltd. This Master Plan included public input and detailed analysis and recommendations for improving Parks in St. John Parish. This plan is included as part of the Parks and Recreation Element.
2. “St. John the Baptist Community Center Complex – Design Program”, Sizeler Architects, 2000. This study focused specifically on the then proposed (now open) community center at Highway 59 Park. Though focused on this building in particular and recreation in general, there was good research and a number of applicable goals included in the program.
3. “Regala Park Master Plan”, Meyer Engineers, Ltd., February 2007. This plan evaluated the existing facilities at Regala and proposed a number of improvements and some new facilities, including a new gymnasium. The total cost of these recommended improvements was \$5,306,000 with the gymnasium, and \$829,000 without the new gymnasium.
4. “Program and Master Plan – West Bank Recreational Complex”, by Greg Cantrell, Inc., and Meyer Engineers, Ltd., Feb. 2007. Like the Regala plan, this master plan laid out the program for improvements at the west bank facility. Unlike the Regala site, this site was vacant and all improvements started from scratch. The plan called for a number of facilities for various sports, including baseball, soccer, a skate park, a playground and more, to service the residents of the west bank of St. John Parish. As of the publication of this Recreation Plan, the only improvements at this site have been three baseball fields, built in part with funds from a Baseball America grant.
5. Recreation and Open Space Standards by the National Recreation and Park Association (Lancaster, 1990) - The standards most widely accepted by local governments for recreation and open space facilities

are from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The NRPA has a hierarchical classification system of parks based on size, service area and other features. It also recommends standards for nineteen specific recreational activities, such as tennis and baseball.

All of this information – previous reports and studies, public input, focus groups, questionnaires, interviews - all helped determine the goals, objectives and specific recommendations of this report.

Demographic Profile

A demographic profile can give important information regarding the potential market of users of the current and potential recreational facilities, the type of facilities and services that may be needed. As part of the post Isaac/Gustave development of the One Parish One Future St. John comprehensive plan a thorough review of demographic and population information was done to update all elements within the plan as well as inform development of new elements including Housing, Resilience, Hazard Mitigation, and the Natural Environment elements. The following information provides an overview of the main trends that affect need for various types and levels of park and recreation space in St. John Parish.

St. John Parish population is declining since an upswing following Hurricane Katrina. According to the most recent U.S. Census estimates the Parish's population in 2014 was 43,745, a 4.7% decline from 2010's population of 45,924. This puts the population at about the same level as in 2000. These numbers suggest that the influx of people due to Katrina reversed and now the Parish's future population looks to be stagnant.

Future population projections show the Parish's population is only expected to reach about 50,000 people by 2030. However, these figures are based on 2010 internal demographics, and do not reflect shifts and or population losses over the subsequent five years. To reach that figure by 2030 the Parish would have to grow by nearly 14.3%, a growth rate of nearly 1% per year. This type of growth is unlikely given other demographics within the Parish's population.

In addition to population decline, several important demographic characteristics that impact parks and recreation development suggest that St. John Parish is becoming an older population. During the most recent period for which this data is available – 2000-2010 the Parish lost over 6% of the under 44 population, a key demographic related to park and recreation use and need. During that same span, the over 45 population

increased by over 40%. Additionally, another important factor related to parks and recreation is the number of families with children. During this ten year span the numbers of families with children in St. John Parish declined as well. Taken together these all suggest an older, more mature population who will have different park and recreation needs with fewer children and young adults.

Population 1990-2014 – St. John the Baptist Parish

1990 Census	40,584
2000 Census	43,044
2010 Census	47,924
2014 Census Estimate	43,745

Playgrounds and Parks – Existing

St. John the Baptist Parish has a number of parks and playgrounds that are being used, depending on the facility, at varying levels by the public. It is important that an inventory of existing facilities be made as a baseline before any recommendations as to where the Parish need to go can be made. Below is a list of existing parks and playgrounds owned by the Parish and operated by the St. John Parish Recreation Department.

D. East Bank Recreational Facilities

1. Cambridge Park – Cambridge Park is one of several smaller yet very important recreational facilities in St. John Parish. Important because, due primarily to its location, it reaches its “market” easily. Located in a residential area of :LaPlace on a local street, it is easily accessible to families and children on bicycles
 - ,Walking / Jogging Path
 - Lighting
 - Playground Equipment
 - Basketball Court (uncovered)
 - Putting Green
2. Greenwood Playground – Greenwood, like Cambridge, is a small to moderate sized facility located in a residential neighborhood near several schools. As a result, it is well used by the community. Below are the amenities and attractions at Greenwood:

- Walking / Jogging Path
- Lighting
- Playground Equipment
- Tennis Courts (2)
- Shelters (2)
- Water Fountain
- Paved Parking lot

3. Highway 51 Park - Located on U.S. Highway 51 in LaPlace, Highway 51 Park is one of the parish's newest parks. It is very popular with walkers and joggers due to its location and its amenities, especially the walking / jogging path. It is also highly visible and adjacent to the Community Center and the St. John Parish Public Library. Existing amenities include the following:

- Walking / Jogging Path
- Lighting
- Playground Equipment
- Soccer Fields (4)
- Shelters (2)
- Water Fountain
- Rest Rooms
- Paved Parking lot

4. Regala Park – Regala Park is intended to be the Parish's flagship recreational site. It is a large facility, approximately 30 acres, off of Airline Highway in Reserve, not easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists, it is nonetheless well used because of its wide-ranging amenities, listed below. In addition, it is adjacent to the Frank Lapeyrolerie Senior Center and the Southeast Louisiana War Veterans facility.

- Walking / Jogging Path
- Lighting
- Playground Equipment
- Baseball Fields (4)
- Soccer Field (1)
- Basketball Courts (2) - uncovered
- Outdoor Swimming Pool
- Shelters (2)
- Water Fountain

- Concession Stand
 - Rest Rooms
 - Racquetball Courts (2)
 - Paved Parking lot
5. Belle Pointe Playground – Belle Pointe is located on the western edge of LaPlace, on Jackson Street near Airline Highway. It was the first Parish playground or park with a walking / jogging path. The path proved to be so popular and such a draw for the park, the Parish began installing walking / jogging paths at other parks.
- Walking / Jogging Path
 - Lighting
 - Playground Equipment
 - Restrooms
 - Water Fountain
 - Basketball Court (covered)
6. Ezekial Jackson Playground - Located in the heart of Garyville, Ezekial Jackson is popular and well-used by area residents.
- Walking / Jogging Path
 - Lighting
 - Shelter
 - Concession Stand / Restroom
 - Baseball Fields (2)
 - Playground Equipment
 - Paved Parking Lot
 - Basketball Court (uncovered)
7. Stephanie Wilkings Playground – the Parish’s newest facility, it serves a neighborhood in LaPlace that was previously underserved. Because of its limited size, it cannot add very many amenities but it serves a specific niche in the community.
- Playground Equipment
8. Emily C. Watkins (formerly Woodland) Playground – An older park in an older part of LaPlace, near the Mississippi River, it serves its immediate neighborhood. Its amenities are:

- Walking / Jogging Path
- Shelter
- Basketball Court (uncovered)
- Playground Equipment

E. West Bank Facilities

1. West Bank (Second Ward) Sports Complex
 - Baseball Fields (3)
2. Harold Scott Rousel (Castle Drive)
 - Walking / Jogging Path
 - Restrooms
 - Swimming Pool
 - Shelter
 - Basketball Court (uncovered)
 - Playground Equipment
3. Wallace Bridge Park
 - Walking / Jogging Path
 - Playground Equipment

In addition to facilities owned and operated by St. John the Baptist Parish, there are a number of privately-owned and operated recreational sites as well as some by other governmental agencies. Private and parochial schools, as well as private recreational clubs, with sports fields, gymnasiums, and other recreational facilities have been an important component of the Parish's recreation infrastructure. Riverlands Country Club and Belle Terre Country Club have the only golf courses in the Parish. They are both membership driven.

Natural Recreational Resources¹

One of Louisiana's nicknames is the "Sportsman's Paradise" and this applies to St. John Parish as well. The Parish has large areas on both sides of the river that are wetlands and undevelopable but otherwise afford many outdoor and natural recreational opportunities to residents and visitors. The Parish has miles of shoreline along both

¹ The Natural Resources Element includes specific goals and policies to address the natural areas of St. John Parish.

Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Maurepas with a Parish-owned boat launch at each and a small un-named rest area at Lake Maurepas. The Manchac Swamp is a beautiful natural area that is also an economic development resource where swamp tours attract visitors to the Parish. These lakes and natural areas offer unlimited opportunities for outdoor recreation – hunting, fishing, and water sports.

St. John Parish manages two natural recreation areas – Peninsula Park and Sunset Park. To provide access to these natural and beautiful areas, and to Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas, for hunters, fishermen or other outdoor sporting activities, the Parish prides several boat launches:

- Reserve Boat Launch
- Peavine Boat Launch
- Ruddock Boat launch
- Pleasure Bend Boat Launch.

St. John has also been involved in regional park and recreation planning activities. St. John Parish has committed resources to the multi-jurisdictional Pontchartrain Trace, or the “Ring Around the Lake”. The Parish, in cooperation with LA DOTD and the Regional Planning Commission, will begin construction of the first phase of the Levee Path on the Mississippi River from the St. Charles Parish line to LaPlace. Future phases will not only continue upriver on the levee but also branch north toward Manchac. The ultimate goal is to link to future phases in Tangipahoa and St. Tammany Parishes to eventually provide a continuous multi-purpose bicycle and pedestrian path around Lake Pontchartrain, in accordance with the RPC’s Pontchartrain Trace Master Plan. Comments from the citizens at the public forums and meeting indicated the residents of the Parish favor this kind of recreational and transportation opportunity.

Parks and Recreation Strengths and Needs

St. John Parish is fortunate in that it has approximately eleven established parks and playgrounds relatively evenly distributed geographically and demographically throughout the Parish. Three of the eleven parks are relatively large in area – Regala, Highway 51, and the Westbank Recreational Complex. The other eight smaller community parks are distributed throughout the Parish and are generally centrally located within the communities they serve.

The Parish has also over the years, especially since 2002, spent considerable public funds making improvements to many of those facilities. Much of that came through a 2001 bond election where \$18 million was approved, primarily for streets, drainage and recreation projects. Approximately \$2.0 million was spent on recreation projects throughout the Parish with these funds. As a result, many of the parks and playgrounds have new equipment, amenities and facilities.

Additionally, in 2012-2013 St. John Parish commissioned Meyer Engineers to develop a Parks Master Plan for the existing facilities in the Parish. The plan included public input, an analysis of the existing park infrastructure, and recommendations and likely costs for needed improvements to each park. The results of this Master Plan are included within the Parks and Recreation Element.

Using the Recreation and Open Space Standards recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), St. John should have approximately 480 acres of “close-to-home” recreation, park and open space. The recommendation by NRPA is for a range between 6.25 and 10.5 acres per 1,000 residents. With 665 acres for “Arts, Entertainment and Recreation” (based on UNO’s 2012 updated Land Use Survey of the Parish), the Parish exceeds this recommendation - at least with current population estimates – by a significant margin. However, it should be pointed out that approximately 295 of these acres are used by two private golf courses in LaPlace – Belle Terre Country Club and Riverlands Country Club. Actual land owned and operated as public recreation now comes to approximately 370 acres, which is an increase of about 140 acres since the original land use survey and plan was completed in 2007.

Using the minimum recommendations of the NRPA, the Parish needs a total of 273.4 acres based on the most recent census population estimate. This is well within the minimum recommended by NRPA. Assuming the Parish desired to reach the maximum recommended rate the Parish would need to develop an additional 90 acres of active

park land to reach the required 460 acres. This is likely not needed given the existing population demographics within St. John Parish.

Though the Parish has done a good job with its recreation facilities, there are a number of needs that the Parish must address to continue providing quality recreational facilities and programs. Many of these needs were identified or confirmed through the public input elements of this plan as well as the comments received during the development of the Parks Master Plan.

1. Despite recent improvements, a number of parks and playgrounds have older equipment and buildings that need repair or replacement. The Parish Department of Parks and Recreation recently added additional staff members to help in this area. More help may be necessary to maintain all of the Parish facilities.
2. Though St. John organized youth sports teams have a history of success in regional and national venues, numerous comments at the public meetings and on the questionnaires indicate there is a need and desire by the public for the expansion of organized youth sports leagues and teams in all sports – more sports, more teams, more leagues.
3. More Adult Recreation programs - Approximately 60% of the Parish's population is between the ages of 18 and 65. Public input heard during this planning process stated that the residents of the Parish, east and west banks feel more activities and programs are needed for this age group.
4. One of the opportunities the Parish should take advantage of, identified by the housing focus groups and confirmed by other data, is the growing baby-boomer retiree market. One way to help capture that market is to provide quality of life assets targeted to that group, including recreation programs and facilities.
5. Additional recreational land and facilities – Current projections suggest the population of the Parish will not increase significantly in the next 10-15 years. Additionally based on current internal demographics and population trends the Parish population is becoming older. This does not mean growth cannot and will not happen, however it does suggest that there will be lessening of demand short term for activities geared toward younger adults and children, and higher demand for activities serving an older population. The Parish should closely monitor development patterns and population changes moving forward to make sure any surge in population will be met with a concomitant increase in necessary park and recreation facilities – either through expansion of existing facilities or development of new ones.

The Parks Master Plan completed by Meyer Engineers, Ltd. In 2013 identified a series of recommendations to the parks and recreation facilities of St. John Parish. These were developed through analysis of existing facilities and public input from residents and Parish parks and recreation personnel. Below are a summary of the recommendations for improvements, enhancements, and new facilities recommended by the Parks Master Plan. Consult the Parks Master Plan for a full list of all items, maps depicting these recommendations, and potential cost estimates for the work.

East Bank Parks

Regala Park

New Facilities

- Add three new gazebos within the park.
- Add four new fitness stations with exercise machines along the walking path.
- Add a mister station near baseball field #1.
- Add a football/soccer field behind the Senior Center.
- Add a horseshoe facility.
- Add a concession stand between baseball fields #1 and #2.
- Add a playground in place of racquetball courts.
- Add a batting cage next to baseball field #2.
- Add a skate park and a spray park.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Remove tennis courts, which are overgrown.
- Remove racquetball courts.
- New net and striping for volleyball court
- Basketball court needs goal, nets, striping, and benches.
- Refurbish three baseball fields.
- Need nets on two batting cages.
- Refurbish swimming pool.
- Replace existing playground and add a soft play surface.
- Refurbish concession stand/amphitheater/restrooms.
- Add parking spots, wheel stops, striping, signage, and improve drainage.
- Refurbish restroom building.
- Extend walking path approximately ½ mile.
- Throughout the park add trees, shrubs, benches, trash cans, water fountains, replace sidewalk joint to joint as required, add crosswalk, and park signs on Airline Highway.

Highway 51 Park

New Facilities

- Add dog park
- Add concession stand
- Add fitness stations
- Add pavilion to pond with a boardwalk for access.
- Add three new gazebos.
- Pave the existing gravel parking lot #3.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Pave existing gravel lot closest to the playground.
- Pave additional areas in parking lot #2.
- Add access to the walking path.
- Add soft play surface, replace fence, improve drainage, add new play components.
- Refurbish restroom building.
- Remove gazebo #1 and replace with new gazebo.
- Re-grade and seal soccer fields.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Ezekial Jackson Park

New Facilities

- Replace the existing playground.
- Add two new fitness stations.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Replace the basketball court goals and nets and add benches and striping.
- Refurbish concession stand and restroom building.
- Regrade and sod football field.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Belle Pointe Park

New Facilities

- Add a horseshoe area.
- Add a new gazebo.
- Add a new fitness station.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Remove graffiti on basketball court and vandal proof the electrical box.
- Replace clatter bridge on playground #1 and add soft play surface.
- Add soft play surfaces to playgrounds #2 and #3.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Greenwood Park

New Facilities

- Add accessible playground equipment and soft play surface.
- Add fitness station along the walking path.
- Add new restroom building.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Refurbish tennis courts, shuffleboard courts, picnic area, gazebos.
- Add soft play surface to playground.
- Remove see saw and rocking horse riders.
- Remove swing set and replace with safety harness swing.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Stephanie Wilking Park

New Facilities

- Gazebo and concrete sidewalk.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Add soft play surfaces to playground and swing set.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Cambridge Park

New Facilities

- Add restroom, gazebo, horseshoe, volleyball court, fitness station, and parking lot.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Add soft play surface to playground.
- Replace the putting green.
- Refurbish basketball court.
- Refurbish existing fence.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Emily C. Watkins Park

New Facilities

- Add a volley ball court, horseshoe, fitness station and parking lot.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Refurbish basketball court, walking/jogging path, and gazebo.
- Remove monkey bars, swing set, and merry go round with new play equipment and a soft play surface.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Reserve Boat Launch

New Facilities

- Add three gazebos, landscaping, and trash containers.

Pevine Boat Launch

New Facilities

- Add a gazebo, trash containers, and an asphalt parking lot to park cars and boat trailers.

West Bank Parks

West Bank Park Complex

New Facilities

- Add youth football field, two gazebos, horseshoe area, playground with soft play surface, two new fitness stations, a batting cage, and an asphalt parking lot.
- Add a 6" barrier curb along entrance road.
- Close swale with 18" – 36" culverts.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Add benches, distance markers, and trash cans to the walking path.
- Add new sidewalk to the opposite side from parking lot to walking path.
- Re-grade baseballs fields and add clay infields.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Harold Scott Rousel Park

New Facilities

- Add grass volleyball court
- Refurbish playground #2 with new equipment and soft play surface.
- Add a gazebo.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Refurbish basketball court, existing gazebo, pool restrooms, and parking lot.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Wallace Bridge Park

New Facilities

- Add a grass volleyball court, playground, gazebo, two new fitness stations, a new Pavillion structure – 60' x 40', and horseshoe area.

Improvements to Existing Facilities

- Refurbish walking path.
- Refurbish Playground #1 and add soft play surface.
- Add trees, shrubs, benches, trashcans, etc. to the park.

Goals, Policies, and Recommendations

In order to make the most efficient use of revenue sources, it is important for the Parish to establish goals and priorities. Gathering input from citizens through focus groups and public meetings, as well as meetings and discussions with Parish officials, the Parish Recreation Board and the Parks and Recreation Department, the following general goals have been established:

Parks and Recreation Goals:

Goal 1: To provide parks and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for all citizens of St. John the Baptist Parish.

Goal 2: To provide parkland and recreational facilities which are convenient to all neighborhoods and meet the needs of a diverse population.

Goal 3: To enhance current recreational facilities and programs offered by the St. John the Baptist Parish Department of Parks and Recreation.

Goal 4: To find innovative ways to fund operations, maintenance and improvements at Parish recreational facilities.

Goal 5: Provide a diversity of recreation programs and facilities to meet the needs of all citizens.

Parks and Recreation Policies:

1. Support adequate funding and staffing of the Department of Parks and Recreation.
2. Consider development of a regional scale recreation facility in St. John Parish through either expansion of an existing facility or development of a new facility.
3. Ensure parks and recreation facilities and programs support citizens of all age ranges in St. John Parish.
4. Ensure all parks and recreation facilities incorporate appropriate resilience planning into their infrastructure to ensure that they are not severely impacted by a disaster.

5. Encourage development of playgrounds in all subdivisions where they do not currently exist.
6. Ensure safe and secure environments at all public parks and recreation facilities in St. John Parish.
7. Forge relationships between the Parish and other entities, such as the School Board, the YMCA, private recreational facilities and clubs, to share facilities in order to make more efficient use of limited funds and facilities by all parties.
8. Enforce SECTION 27:168. REQUIRED RESERVATION AND DEDICATION OF PUBLIC SITES of the St. John the Baptist Parish Subdivision Regulations. This section reads “All subdividers requesting approval for subdivisions containing five (5) lots or more shall dedicate land or pay fees in lieu of dedication for the purpose of providing green space or parks to the residents of St. John the Baptist Parish.” In the past, this has been enforced to varying degrees. In some cases, one lot out of a subdivision is reserved for a neighborhood pocket park. On other occasions developers were allowed to use the 5% for additional green space that beautified the development but provided no recreation amenities. There have been a few cases where the fee in lieu of dedication was collected but it is unknown if these funds were used for recreation improvements. The Parish should set up a fund specifically for this purpose and encourage or require the fee in lieu of dedication for developments in the LaPlace area to provide needed funds for park improvements. These improvements, besides possible property acquisition for new or expanded parks, could also be used for public green space, new trees, park benches and gazebos. For future subdivision developments in areas that are now vacant and where there are currently no parks, the land dedication requirement may be more appropriate than the fee option.
9. Utilize all available and appropriate public property for additional recreation and open space/green space. For instance, there are many drainage canals and ditches in the Parish whose banks could be landscaped and beautified, and in some instances have walking/jogging/bicycle paths installed.
10. Utilize flood plains and other similar areas for passive recreation activities and trails.
11. Encourage parks that incorporate local historical sites and natural areas to make these sites more attractive to residents as well as tourists visiting St. John Parish.

12. Utilize the recommended standards of the National Recreation and Park Association when planning specific new facilities or expanding existing ones.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations will help the Parish meet the general goals and policies stated above.

1. The Parish should continue development of the three large facilities:
 - a. West Bank Recreation Complex – the baseball fields are in operation. The Parish should begin development to diversify the recreation opportunities on the west bank – park lighting, basketball, playground and tot lot facilities should be the next priorities.
 - b. Highway 51 Park - This park, located in the middle of the most populated part of the Parish – LaPlace – should be the marquis facility in the Parish. It has the space and the access necessary to make it a successful and popular destination. Located next to the Community Center further adds to its importance.
 - c. Regala Park – Regala serves most of the western part of the east bank. It has diversity in current facilities, though some maintenance or replacement is necessary on the rest rooms and concession building. There has been a small but steady call for a new gymnasium at Regala, as called for in the 2007 Regala Park Master Plan by Meyer Engineers. Regala is also adjacent to the Frank Lapeyrolerie Senior Center and the War Veterans Center. Patrons of these two facilities would be greatly served by adding senior and handicapped-appropriate facilities at Regala such as additional walking paths and stretch stations.
2. St. John Parish should seriously study developing plans to build a regional recreation complex. The regional recreation complex is becoming a standard for many communities seeking to both expand and enhance recreational opportunities and facilities, but also to take advantage of economic development opportunities associated with regional recreational complexes. These sites often hosts tournaments for various sports such as soccer, baseball, softball, and lacrosse, among others. These tournaments often attract hundreds of competitors who will need to eat and lodge in the area offering significant

economic impact. Additionally tournaments can generate fees to assist with facility maintenance and administration.

3. Utilizing the Parks Master Plan as a guide renovate and rehabilitate existing parks and facilities to address the issues of inadequate, aging, and outdated recreational infrastructure: These parks and playgrounds, such as Belle Pointe in LaPlace, Ezekial Jackson in Garyville and Harold Scott Roussel in Edgard, serve a majority of the citizens of the Parish. They are convenient, accessible and are well-used by the citizens in their vicinity. It is therefore critical to maintain these parks as well as add new or replace equipment, facilities and landscaping.
4. Utilize the Mississippi River levee on both banks as a transportation link and a recreational resource. This idea was expressed in several public forums and on the questionnaires. Studies of other communities with similar facilities show a definite positive effect on quality of life issues and economic development opportunities.
 - a. Proceed with the Mississippi River Levee Path for bicyclists, pedestrians, skaters and other users. That project is in the design stage with construction funds in place.
 - b. Extend the levee path through the Parish on both sides of the river as funds become available.
 - c. Implement the RPC's "Ring Around the Lake Master Plan" by linking the levee path with the multi-Parish network described in the master plan, as funds become available.
5. Identify additional and/or potential park / playground sites to prepare for future growth and the corresponding recreational needs of these future citizens of the Parish. While current population demographics suggest limited growth out to 2020 it is prudent to still plan to meet the demand of increased population should rapid growth begin to occur.
6. Consider expanding facilities in parts of LaPlace, which appear underserved by existing facilities. One site could be added in the Belle Terre area (as suggested in one of the public forums). Other sites should be planned in areas of future residential growth, primarily on the east bank of the Parish.

7. Though less populated than the east bank, the west bank of the Parish has a more dispersed population. Two additional neighborhood type parks should be considered for the west bank.
8. Transportation and access are important to recreation in any community. Part of enhancing existing facilities and creating new parks is to make them easily accessible to local citizens.
 - a. Sidewalks and bike paths linking schools, parks and playgrounds to neighborhoods are critical. A example of this is the path behind Glade subdivision providing access to Highway 51 Park.
 - b. Adequate parking facilities at existing and new facilities must be provided.
 - c. Implement a sidewalk enhancement program to repair and replace existing sidewalks in neighborhoods.
 - d. Enact or enforce regulations that require new developments, commercial and residential, to provide pedestrian access linked to adjacent developments.
9. The St. John Parish Department of Parks and Recreation should increase its organized youth sports program to include more sports, such as soccer and tennis, and more teams and leagues for all youth sports.
10. Increase sports and recreation programs for adult leagues and programs. Besides team sports such as softball and basketball, many communities also offer arts and cultural programs through the recreation department. There is a growing need for this in St. John Parish and public input was loud and clear that it is a priority in many neighborhoods.
11. Enhance the Parish's outdoor recreation facilities by improvements at the boat launches on Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Maurepas, expanding the rest areas and facilities there, provide more boat trailer parking and other improvements to attract outdoor recreation enthusiasts.,
12. Increase programs and facilities for elderly citizens and retirees.
13. Establish appropriate funding levels for the Parish's Parks and Recreation system.
 - a. Predictable and adequate funding levels to meet capital and operating needs.

- b. Leverage public funding with outside sources (grants, industry sponsorship of facilities, etc.), such as Marathon's sponsorship of Ezekial Jackson Park.

Potential Funding Sources

Funding for recreation projects has always been difficult for many local governments. With the current global economic crisis, funding becomes an even larger challenge. Recreation projects in St. John have been funded through a number of sources over the years, including Parish-wide bond money, grants from the LA Department of Community Projects, Rural Development Office and others. Funding for the Parks and Recreation Department comes from dedicated video-poker funds. However, the economic turndown has affected this revenue stream as well. Some of the other funding sources have dried up and other avenues of funding must be found.

1. Special Taxing Districts

This method works like other taxing districts such as water or utility districts, school districts, development districts, etc., which are creations of the State of Louisiana. A designated area likely to reap the benefits of a park or other recreational facility or facilities would be taxed in some way, i.e., a sales tax or property tax millage, with those funds only to be used for capital projects, operations and maintenance of recreational facilities within the district. Pelican Park near Mandeville is operated by such a district, Recreation District #1. A similar district and park are being planned in eastern St. Tammany Parish near Slidell and a special district is being discussed by St. Tammany Parish and the municipalities along the Tammany Trace to help fund the operation and maintenance of the Tammany Trace.

2. Community Wide Sales or Property Tax (Bond Issues)

Some communities have a sales tax or property tax millage dedicated to specific recreational and/or bike facilities and programs. Many of the recent recreational projects built in the last few years in St. John Parish were funded by a 2002 bond election. Such a tax requires a vote of the public but would demonstrate the willingness, or unwillingness, of the community to pay for its amenities. However, a recent 2008 bond initiative that included \$2.5 million in funds for recreation and a new gymnasium was recently passed by voters.

3. Recreational Impact Fees

Impact fees are becoming more popular around the country to finance infrastructure improvements. Impact fees are one-time fees paid as the proportionate share of the capital costs of providing major facilities and services for new residents, not existing ones. Impact fees are not widely used in Louisiana, for a number of reasons, but in high growth states such as Florida, parks and recreational facilities are some of the more popular uses for impact fees. With so much new development in St. John Parish, a strong case can be made that new recreational facilities are needed to accommodate future residents.

4. The Governor's Office of Community Projects

Many recreational projects in St. John Parish were funded by various grant programs administered by the LA Governor's Office of Community Projects, formerly run as the Governor's Office of Rural Development. A grant program allocating funds to each Parish, the Rural Development Grant Program was discontinued a few years ago.

5. Recreational Trails Program

As its name implies this program is for trails, paths and other strictly recreational projects, as opposed to the Enhancement Program, which is primarily transportation related. The Office of State Parks in the Lieutenant Governor's Office Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism administers the program. Funding from this program is part of the funding mix for Phase 1 of the soon to be constructed Mississippi River Levee Path.

6. Enhancement Program

Federal Transportation funds have been a part of the funding matrix in some St. John Parish recreation projects, particularly the Mississippi River Levee Path. The **Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991** (Public Law 102-240; **ISTEA**, pronounced *Ice-Tea*) is a United States federal law that posed a major change to transportation planning and policy, as the first U.S. federal legislation on the subject in the post-Interstate Highway System era. It presented an overall intermodal approach to highway and transit funding with collaborative planning requirements, giving significant additional powers to metropolitan planning organizations. Signed into law on December 18, 1991 by President George H. W. Bush, it expired in 1997. It was preceded by the Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1987 and followed by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and most recently in 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A

Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

The “Enhancement” program of ISTEA and its subsequent reauthorizations sets aside a pocket of funds specifically to pay for alternative transportation projects, including bike and pedestrian paths whose primary purpose is transportation but which can also be used recreationally. Enhancement program funded the very successful “Tammany Trace” rails to trails program in St. Tammany Parish which greatly contributed to the Parish’s economic development and quality of life. It is hoped that this model will be duplicated in some way with the Mississippi River Levee Path, soon to begin construction in St. John Parish, The recently passed “Economic Stimulus Package” by President Obama’s administration and Congress seems to have included SAFETEA-LU and its programs in its funding.

7. Other Grant Programs

There are numerous grant programs administered by a multitude of groups, some non-profits and foundations. The “Baseball America” program, a division of Major League Baseball, financed some baseball field improvements at the West Bank Sports Complex in Edgard. The U.S. Soccer Foundation also has a grant program to assist local soccer programs, with specific assistance to help build facilities. One program, funded jointly with NikeGO, awards a total of ten \$100,000 grants each year by the Foundation to support the creation of 50 soccer fields under a five-year program. Detailed information on these financial assistance programs and other programs can be found on their website at www.ussoccerfoundation.org.

There are other state and federal programs that can help finance infrastructure and facilities but generally have specific parameters for eligibility. Most grant programs have a local match requirement, usually a 25-50% split.

8. Corporate or Community Sponsors

Many corporations like to contribute to the communities they serve by contributing to local causes. Even national and multi-national corporations, such as Wal-Mart, have programs for local support. An example in St. John Parish is Marathon Oil’s support of improvements at Ezekiel Jackson Playground in Garyville. Other local businesses could be offered the chance to participate in sponsoring a specific project at Regala, for instance, such as refurbishing the swimming pool area or funding the tennis court replacement.

9. Land Use Regulations

Most communities, including St. John Parish, have zoning regulations and subdivision regulations. These can be amended to require developers to provide property or other performance standards related to recreational facilities. If current regulations address these issues, they should be enforced fully in order to provide the required and desired facilities.

As discussed earlier in this report, St. John's Subdivision Regulations currently require all developments over a certain size to dedicate 5% of the total development to green space. The Parish could amend these regulations to provide incentives for the developer to contribute to a dedicated recreational fund for that area in lieu of the dedicated green space. Those dedicated funds could then be used to finance improvements at whatever recreation facility is closest and likely to be used by the new residents, or to acquire additional property if necessary.

10. Public Property Leases

St. John Parish could lease small pieces of the various park sites and other Parish property to cellular and PCS providers to locate their towers and other equipment. The lease agreements provide the Parish with a predictable, and fairly substantial, funding source for the life of the lease, usually 10-15 years. The funds are then used to finance operations and maintenance of adjacent or nearby Parish recreational facilities. The Parish could solicit these by sending letters to or contacting all providers offering tower sites at Parish parks.