2020 Parks Master Plan Notes

Staff comments:

- Sean Landis Listed Twice

Helen Burton Comments:

- Brummerhop ammenities missing a restroom
- When I took them on the park tour I didn't think of taking them to HOA parks. They don't know about the parks in Seabrook Island, Lakepointe Forest and Lake Cove. I think there might be one in Seascape too. So there are parks on the west side of 146, just not supported by the city.

John Coggeshall comments:

This 180 page report is just a blueprint sort of a standard master plan with the fields filled as best as possible. Over and over it references "develop standards, develop a plan, figure out what you want" etc. This is what the new master plan is supposed to do. We need something on 20 pages that is more concise and focused. This is very hard to get anything out of this report.

I like the 2030 seabrook master plan report from 2010 better … it was 36 pages … and it was clear what the goals are, from page 2

THE PLAN 82
5.1 Encourage a More Economically Viable City 9 83
5.2 Preserve Neighborhoods 11 84
5.3 Enhance Seabrook's Sense of Place 12 85
5.4 Maintain and Improve City Buildings and Infrastructure 15 86
5.5 Implement a Safe and Efficient Transportation System 17 87
5.6 Enhance the Recreation and Open Space System 18 88
5.7 Maintain and Improve the Quality of Seabrook's Natural and Manmade 89
Environments 19 90
5.8 Improve Public Safety 20 91
5.9 Support Education at All Levels 21 92

The 2012 master parks plan lacked a little focus on priorities. It did state "Goals" better, and the implementation strategy was better (see below), it sort of implied which goals were highest priority.

6.1 Timeline

(NC = no charge, actions undertaken by Open Space Committee volunteers and staff)

2011 **Start on priority parks goals** (Section 2.1)

Establish guidelines for parks donations and memorials (see Appendix L)

Launch 5-year shade tree initiative, multiple locations

Develop wish list to guide volunteer projects (NC)

Monitor Pine Gully restoration (NC)

2012 **Complete priority parks goals** (Section 2.1)

Target trail development, Lakeside/Meyer, Red Bluff Road

Seek grant funding for SH 146 trail crossings

2013 **Focus on waterfront access options**

GIS mapping to refine open space inventory (NC)

Develop large-scale version of Map 5 to guide on plan implementation (NC)

2014-16 **Focus on open space/park acquisitions, agreements, and easements**

Acquire park land, Old Seabrook, the Point, west side

Encourage development of flood buyout protocols

Five-year review of Open Space and Parks Master Plan, trails plan, and Carothers plan

2018-20 **Focus on enhancements**

Promote Habitat Island, review other projects for open space assets (section 4.0)

Promote native plantings

Refine guidelines for all parks and open space components

In conclusion, I think this plan lacks a lot of focus. My recommendation is have them cut it down to 25 pages , give specific recommendations and prioritize them better. Don't tell us to go develop plans.

On a smaller note, they do suggest better signage a lot. I believe I have a signage system idea that would improve the trails a lot. The signs would cost 150-200$ each. You put them at 3-7 trail heads. You build simple vertical sign holders with small roof. Volunteers can build signs. The signs would be in the tradition of national park trail maps. No pelicans, no hotels, a minimal amount of data that has a better impact on viewing. I have attached my example.

Most important

- Pine Gully by pier
- Meador Park trailhead
- Public Works trailhead by water where trail will be extended
-

If possible then these

- Hester Trailhead
- Todville trail crossing
- Wildlife Park trailhead
- Bayport trailhead
-

<u>David Popken comments:</u>

Sally Antrobus shared her detailed response with me. With a few exceptions, I am in full agreement with her comments. Especially her discussion of survey respondents "unmet needs". The notion of an indoor pooi/track facility as one of the top three priorities going forward is just plain nonsense. I think spending city funds on a feasibility study would be irresponsible.

Where we diverge, is on the subject of outside partnerships and fundraising opportunities. If our city and our parks system is going to grow and evolve, I think it is paramount that we look outside the normal revenue sources to help us reach our goals. So, I am in favor of keeping that as a viable part of the new master plan.

Regarding recommendation No 18, the need to upgrade and add additional lighting, using security as an excuse. I am not in favor of more lighting, in fact I favor reducing the amount of ambient light in our city and its parks. We as a society have become obsessed with lights everywhere to the point where it is nearly impossible to see the stars anymore. That to me is more important.

I also can see the value of some of the more bureaucratic recommendations such as a defined maintenance document, consistent equipment throughout Public Works and even trail maintenance standards guide. I'm reminded of the most recent trail maintenance where the quality of the granite gravel was substandard. I feel the resulting unevenness every day that I walk the Meador trails. If we had a trail standards guide, perhaps the granite gravel would have been assayed and the result would have been a rejection of the product. I'm not sure if they need to be in a comprehensive master plan, but in my opinion, should be considered as a way for our parks to be more consistent.

In general, I found the document well organized and consistent in its message. I know these MPs start as a basic template and Kimley-Horn then makes specific adjustments based staff, volunteer, council and public input. There is quite a lot to digest.

Ed Klein's comments:

1. Page 11: Individual parks in Seabrook. Need to add recently purchased city property across from Brummerhop Park.
2. Page 21: Carother's. All property lines are incorrect.
3. Page 22: Seabrook Wildlife Refuge. Need to show interior trails. Also show Public Works facilities.
4. Page 25: Bayside Park. Does the city really own the large parcel at the west end of the property line?

5. Page 35: Recommendation 5. Options seem viable for a kayak launch. No options support a boat launch since parking vehicles/trailers will be required.

6. Page 35: Delete Recommendation 8 about indoor facilities. You may not be able to do that, but this option is not feasible for Seabrook.

Ed

Feedback on Draft Open Space and Parks Master Plan

Sally Antrobus
May 1, 2020

1. FACILITY PRIORITIES

I feel bound to question the ETC Institute findings given as follows in the "Executive Summary" of the community survey results (p. 95), namely that in terms of facilities, the priorities are a kayak launch, pickleball courts, and indoor sports facilities. Here's what the draft plan says:

> **Facilities Needs and Priorities**
>
> Facility Needs: Respondents were asked to identify if their household had a need for 23 facilities and rate how well their needs for each were currently being met. Based on this analysis, ETC Institute was able to estimate the number of households in the community that had the greatest "unmet" need for various facilities.
>
> The three facilities with the highest number of households that have an unmet need were:
>
> 1. Boat ramp/kayak launch area - 1,780 households
> 2. Pickleball courts - 1,738 households
> 3. Indoor walking & running tracks – 1,662 households

These three amenities also get major emphasis in the "Priorities and Investment Ratings Analysis" (p. 29):

> "Overwhelmingly, survey respondents found the greatest need for a boat ramp and kayak launch area, followed by pickleball courts. Respondents are also looking for indoor facilities for their favorite activities, including an indoor walking and running track and indoor pool."

Various facilities were all listed in question 9 of the Community Survey, where residents were asked to answer YES or NO on whether these amenities are "unmet needs for anyone in your household" (p. 152). Following are their answers on the three items prioritized in the draft plan.

KAYAK LAUNCH
Q9-2 [Do you have a need for] "Boat ramp/kayak launch"?

YES	44.7%
NO	55.3%

Our boat launch under the bridge was a casualty of Highway 146 redevelopment. Note that fewer than half of respondents answered that YES, a boat launch is an unmet need. More than half answered NO. Does this warrant calling it the no. 1 priority under facilities?

PICKLEBALL

Q9-16 [Do you have a need for] "Pickleball courts"?

Yes 20.5 %

No 79.5 %

I had not heard of pickleball before this survey. More than two thirds answered NO. Maybe they too had never heard of it. Does 79.5% saying NO warrant calling this the facility of no. 2 priority?

INDOOR POOL AND INDOOR TRACK

Q9-4 [Do you have a need for] "Indoor pool"?

Q9-5 [Do you have a need for] "Indoor walking & running tracks"?

YES 30.5%

NO 69.5 %

The percentages for the two questions were identical. More than two thirds answered NO on both an indoor pool and indoor track. Does 69.5% saying no warrant calling this facility the no. 3 priority?

It seems to me quite misleading for the plan to say demand is "overwhelming" for a kayak launch, pickleball courts, or indoor sports facilities, when a majority of residents surveyed have answered that NO, these three amenities are not among their unmet needs. ***My standpoint on these three "priorities":***

Kayak launch: Of course I agree that replacement of lost kayak launch is desirable. Locations suggested in the draft master plan text are McHale Park, Wildwood, or land to be purchased at the end of Sea Channel Drive (Taylor Lake). McHale and Wildwood offer very limited parking. In my opinion the Slough provides better options on both sides of Main Street: calm water for launching, plenty of parking on Main Street, and easy access to both Clear Lake and Galveston Bay, with no land purchase needed. And yet a kayak launch is not suggested for "Bayside Park" (p. 25), where Main Street crosses the Slough. I recommend adding a kayak launch to "Opportunities" for Bayside Park and dropping it from McHale.

Pickleball: My understanding of pickleball is that players often carry their own small net and tape for converting a tennis court into up to three pickleball courts. It would thus seem that the existing tennis courts at Baybrook Park and Carothers Gardens likely answer the need with no construction required—especially considering that almost 80% of survey respondents said pickleball is not an unmet need for them. No action required—in effect the courts already exist.

Indoor pool and walking/running track: A review of other cities' facilities reveals that such amenities are unrealistic for a city of our size. For comparison, take the example of Worcester, Massachusetts, wanting indoor sports facilities because of long icy winters. They projected a minimum cost of $10 million (in 2010). Note that Worcester's population is 180,000 people—well over ten times the size of ours. And they projected that the facility would also have high *annual* operating costs in staffing for management, maintenance and program needs. This type of amenity seems well beyond Seabrook's financial reach, especially in terms of annual operating costs.

I question why consultants drafting our parks plan would list it in a community survey, and I question their Recommendation 8 (p. 36), which calls for a feasibility study of such an amenity. In my opinion, such a study would rather obviously be a waste of public money. I recommend dropping Recommendation 8.

2. WHAT THE DATA DO SHOW

It can be illuminating to review raw data. The community survey questions and their tabulated answers occupy more than 40 pages of the draft plan. But they are tucked away in the back (pp. 138–180), presenting the risk that Council and Open Space members may consider them an appendix, and may simply skip even reading them. For that reason I'm presenting a little of the raw detail here.

The 23 amenities mentioned above, and the percentage of YES/NO responses on whether these are unmet needs, appear on p. 152. *They are ranked below in order of popularity.*

RANKED BY % YES ANSWERS

	Yes	No
Q9-8. Natural areas/wildlife habitats	54.0%	46.0%
Q9-7. Mountain bike & hiking trails (natural surface)	53.0%	47.0%
Q9-14. Outdoor walking/running track	45.0%	55.0%
Q9-2. Boat ramp/kayak launch area	44.7%	55.3%
Q9-15. Paved trails	42.4%	57.6%
Q9-6. Large community parks	40.4%	59.6%
Q9-20. Small neighborhood parks (1-10 acres)	40.1%	59.9%
Q9-17. Playgrounds	32.1%	67.9%
Q9-4. Indoor pool	30.5%	69.5%
Q9-5. Indoor walking & running tracks	30.5%	69.5%
Q9-18. Recreation centers	27.8%	72.2%
Q9-22. Bird watching	25.5%	74.5%
Q9-10. Outdoor pool/lap lanes	21.5%	78.5%
Q9-3. Community garden (i.e. garden plots for residents)	20.5%	79.5%
Q9-19. Skate park	18.2%	81.8%
Q9-1. Baseball & softball fields	17.5%	82.5%
Q9-9. Outdoor basketball courts	16.9%	83.1%
Q9-13. Outdoor tennis courts	15.9%	84.1%
Q9-21. Soccer/football/lacrosse/rugby fields	13.2%	86.8%
Q9-11. Outdoor sand volleyball courts	11.3%	88.7%
Q9-16. Pickleball courts	7.6%	92.4%
Q9-23. Other	7.3%	92.7%

My standpoints on the raw data:

- Note that "natural areas/wildlife habitats" rank the highest.

- Note that trails rank next.

- Natural areas and trails are the *only* items more than half of respondents consider "unmet needs."

- Note that according to the plan text (p. 5), a "Statistically Valid Survey was conducted of 300 randomly selected households." This was not an informal gathering of opinion. It was not casual or anecdotal. Residents were randomly and scientifically surveyed, by a professional landscaping firm, assisted by its contracted specialist consultancy on parks, and using accepted survey methodology.

- In view of the high ranking residents assign to natural areas and wildlife, in my opinion this draft plan should be recommending efforts to develop wildlife crossings of major barriers like Highway 146. Effective wildlife under-crossings or over-pass ramps would likely be excellent safe crossings for hikers and cyclists as well, so that all trail users would benefit, right along with the wildlife that people so enjoy.

- As it is, however, the only mention of wildlife crossings that I saw in the draft parks master plan is in the "Staff Meeting Notes," under "Desired connections" (p. 88). I am very glad to see that staff raised the matter of such crossings to the consultants preparing the plan.

- With "Natural areas/wildlife habitats" ranking high for residents, I think the plan needs a recommendation specifically addressing this. (Perhaps it could replace Recommendation 8, which I've suggested above is unsustainable.)

3. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS 1-21

As a general observation, trying to follow up on 21 recommendations in the five-year span covered by this plan is a pretty tall order. I would favor pruning recommendations to a more feasible ten or fewer. (For comparison, our prior parks master plan spanned ten years and had seven recommendations.)

Recommendations 1–4: I regard the first four recommendations in the new draft as bureaucratic in nature, possibly inappropriate in a public document, probably unnecessary, and quite insulting to City staff. Suggest they be dropped.

Recommendation 5: In my opinion Main Street on the Slough is a better option for a kayak launch than the four locations on figure C. Suggest adjusting accordingly.

Recommendation 6: I question the need for a new Carothers task force focused almost entirely on money—fundraising, sponsorship, and grants. Emphasis on money led us up the wrong path once (events, unsustainable). Let's not take another unsustainable path that depends on ongoing fundraising! Suggest this be dropped and we conduct much more thorough review of ideas already on the table.

Recommendation 7: I question the need for a new "sponsorship philosophy" as inappropriate in a parks master plan. Suggest this be dropped.

Recommendation 8: As already outlined earlier in these comments, indoor sports facilities typify communities much larger than Seabrook. I regard paying for a feasibility study on indoor sports facilities as throwing good money after a bad idea. Suggest this be dropped.

Recommendation 9: OK.

Recommendations 10 and 11: In my view these are unnecessary. City staff already do a seriously fine job both on maximizing benefits of trails and on social media promotion of them. Suggest these be dropped.

Recommendation 12: OK, but makes me a bit nervous: sounds good but also sounds like a lot more work for a small staff and small set of volunteers, though there's no harm in being ambitious.

Recommendation 13: OK.

Recommendation 14 and 15: Are these needed? I note little public or survey input on updating playgrounds or adding classes at the pool. Suggest combining into a single recommendation.

Recommendation 16: OK. We have seen citizen advocacy and support for a pumptrack.

Recommendations 17, 18 and 19: OK. Suggest combining ideas for new trends, trail lighting, and ADA objectives into a single recommendation.

Recommendation 20: For our grand old lady of a Community House, do we really need a master plan recommendation to go out and beat the bushes for appropriate events and classes to be held there? The Community House has served us well for many years and for many purposes, at very low cost. It's fine. Suggest this be dropped.

Recommendation 21: Do we really need formal standards for trails? I regard this as much like the first four recommendations in this new draft master plan: bureaucratic, probably unnecessary, and actually insulting to the City staff who do *such a wonderful job on trail construction and maintenance*. Suggest this be dropped.

To summarize: The suggestions above would result in pruning the 21 recommendations in the draft master plan to a more elegant, feasible and sustainable set of seven, as follows:

1 = old rec 5, adjusted
2 = old rec 9
3 = old rec 12
4 = old rec 13
5 = old recs 14 and 15, combined
6 = old rec 16
7 = old recs 17, 18 and 19, combined
8 = see below

To the seven, I think we should add an eighth recommendation, addressing the high value that residents assign to natural areas and wildlife, by proposing initiatives to develop wildlife under-crossing(s) or over-pass ramp(s) at major barriers like Highway 146, knowing that these amenities would also be safe crossings for hikers and cyclists using the city's beloved trails.

In summary, I think the draft master plan would be strengthened significantly if some of its more bureaucratic-style content were reduced and some of its more naturalistic elements were expanded.

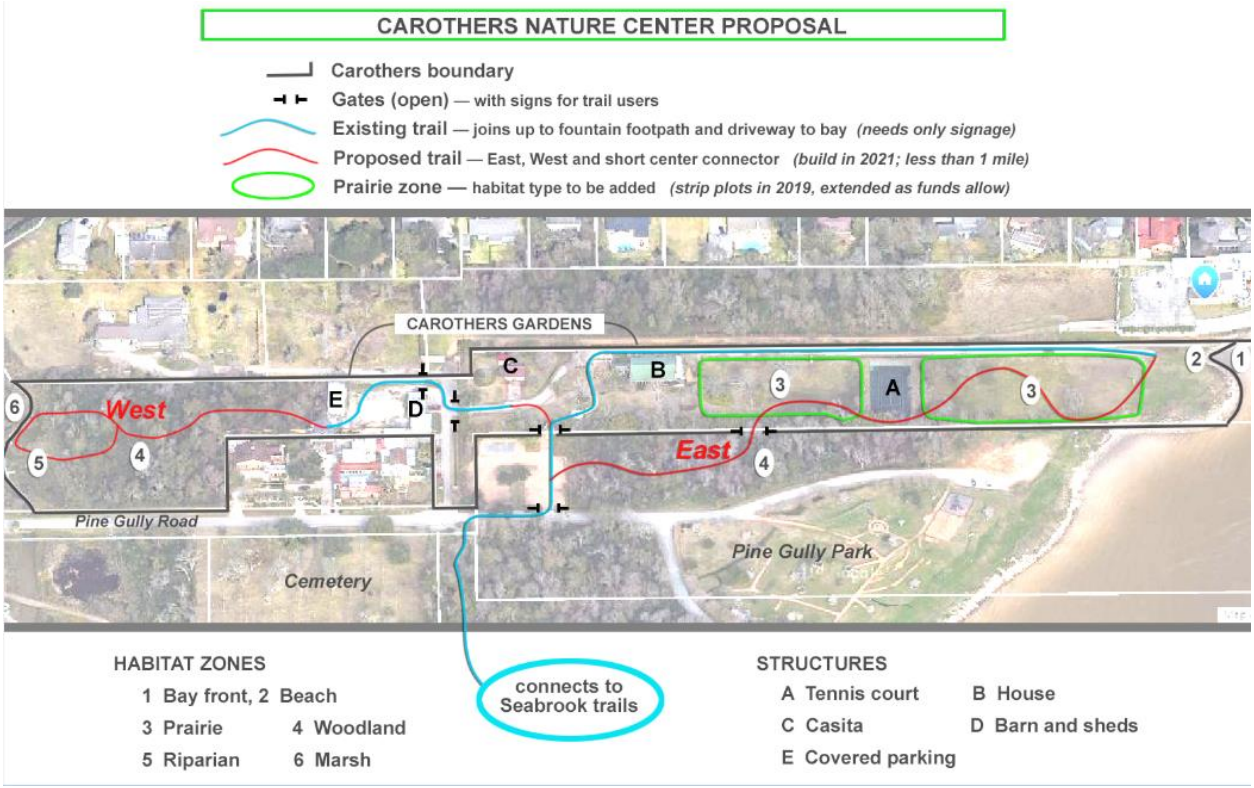
4. BEST NEW COMPONENT: GREENWAYS

I want to highlight the greenways discussion (p. 10, and following here in full) as a key *new* component and strength for us in this draft plan. In short, trails are really more than just trails—they are part of a whole suite of community benefits, including economic benefits, that come with a greenway. Perhaps the eighth recommendation I've suggested above should also make explicit mention of the benefits of greenways.

> GREENWAYS have become one of the most popular family recreation activities across the country. The value of greenways in terms of recreation, education and resource protection is invaluable. Greenways serve as linkages between cities, parks, schools, commercial areas and neighborhoods. They provide a safe mode of transportation that preserves the environment. There are several things to consider when developing a greenway system: • Have corridors been identified where people will access the area easily? • Does it connect elements within the community? • Does it incorporate all the characteristics of the natural resource areas?
>
> Typically, greenways can be anywhere from 10 to 12 feet wide and can be paved or natural surface. When developing a greenway system, corridors should be identified where people will access the area easily and connect elements within the community and incorporate all the characteristics of the natural resource areas. Greenway corridors should be no less than 50 feet in width except in neighborhoods, where 25 feet may be acceptable. In his article published in 1995, Julius Faros, a professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, divides greenways into three categories: Ecological, Recreational and Cultural.
>
> Greenways can be located in a variety of settings and can be utilized for active and passive recreation activities. Ecologically speaking, they are typically located along natural environments such as rivers, ridgelines and coastal areas. These trails provide connections to nature, protect and maintain biodiversity, minimize development, and provide for wildlife migration across natural and manmade boundaries. Recreational greenways commonly link elements that have diverse and significant landscapes. Many link rural areas to more urban locales and range from local trails to larger systems. Most are paved trails that accommodate pedestrians, skaters and bicycles.
>
> Another type of greenway is the cultural trail, which connects areas of significant historic value and culture. Economic benefits from these types of trails may be significant if linkages can be directed toward areas of commerce to provide an infrastructure for commuting.

5. BOUNDARY DETAILS

Please note that depiction of the western-most section of the Carothers Gardens land is inaccurate in two ways on the aerial photo in the draft plan (p. 21). It needs adjustment as follows before the master plan is finalized.

1. *Carothers land reaches significantly farther west than is shown*. It includes all the mature woodland and marsh reaching back to the small side creek that runs under Pine Gully Road (items 4, 5 and 6 on aerial, next page). The boundary in the draft plan should be extended westward.

2. *Carothers land does not include residential development on Pine Gully Road*. The park goes around the residence to the north and west. The boundary in the plan should be adjusted accordingly (see black boundary line on the aerial below).