



WHITE PAPER FOR A MASTER PLAN FOR PARKS, GREEN/OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION FOR NEW ORLEANS

**Prepared by Parks for All
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PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

In a recent plebiscite (May, 2019) New Orleans voters overwhelmingly approved a new millage structure to reallocate public funding for parks and recreation services and maintenance of the City's major open spaces. Accompanying this reallocation of funds is a unique Cooperative Endeavor Agreement ("CEA") that requires the four millage recipients to coordinate strategic planning and management of the City's principal parks and open spaces and to participate in the preparation of a City-wide Parks and Recreation Master Plan ("Master Plan"). The specific language in the CEA calls for "a city-wide parks, green/open space, and recreation master plan ... by a qualified third party with national park experience." Parks For All wants to stress that a city-wide plan must contemplate *all* open greenspace in the community, not just that managed by the millage recipients, and accordingly should engage to some degree all the principal organizations that control the City's greenspace, along with community leaders and members of the public. (See Appendix for a list of the jurisdictions we have identified.) The CEA ensures that planning and production of the Master Plan will be fully funded if necessary by millage proceeds, but there may also be other sources of funding relating especially to city-wide water management projects that may be available. Regardless of the source of funding, in the view of Parks For All the primary responsibility of the plan should rest squarely in the hands of the City Administration. Parks For All has prepared the following White Paper to offer its thoughts about how best to approach this Master Plan with respect to

(1) the selection process to identify the consultant, including the composition of a selection committee; (2) the qualifications of the consultant, including their suggested planning process; and (3) the subject areas that the plan should cover. Among our many objectives, the plan will be updated on a periodic basis, (e.g. every 10 years), but even more importantly, the plan must have clear near-term milestone goals (e.g. every three years) to set priorities and to ensure accountability of execution. The following organizations are in unanimous support of all the recommendations contained in this White Paper:

List in Formation

PARKS FOR ALL

Parks For All, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) grass-roots organization dedicated to the creation, maintenance, and beautification of public parks, playgrounds and greenspaces throughout New Orleans, has taken a leadership role in this discussion. In our view, the proposed Master Plan should emerge from a public planning process that is multifaceted, inclusive, and comprehensive. In an effort to inform the public about the process and benefits of developing such a Master Plan, Parks for All has been collecting information about best management practices in park systems and recreation master planning from numerous professional and academic sources elsewhere in America. We have reflected our research in this document. In addition, we have sponsored public forums with presentations from leaders in the field of open space planning and discussions among multiple constituencies.

In further efforts to continue this discussion, Parks For All offers the following suggestions for moving forward with a Master Plan for parks and open spaces in New Orleans. In general, we feel the proposed Master Plan should address a number of systemic themes in comprehensive ways. The resulting plan will include but also look beyond the individual components of improving individual locations and recreational programming in order to serve holistic goals such as equitable access, fiscal responsibility, water management, economic development, cultural and historic resources, and greenspace growth and preservation. Notwithstanding that the new millage affects only four of the City's greenspace managers, we feel strongly that the plan should incorporate *all* of the City's greenspace; none should be ignored.

SELECTION PROCESS

We realize there are two established procedures (the Request For Qualifications [RFQ] and the Request for Proposals [RFP] process) through which consultants are selected by public agencies. While we are not familiar with the general procurement process by which the City selects its consultants, we did experience the RFQ process that the previous administration followed to select a consultant for the Lafitte Greenway. We suggest that this process of soliciting qualifications and then evaluating them through a metric-based score be replicated.

The process is ideally administered through an appropriate City agency (e.g., Chief Administrative Office (CAO) or City Planning Commission) to accomplish two important goals. First, it allows interested parties (including elected officials, City decision makers, and relevant public constituents) opportunities to read and evaluate the qualifications, experiences, and design approaches of potential consultants. Secondly, a metric-based selection process enables decision makers to identify the relative value of specific components (e.g., experience in similar projects; acquaintance with local factors; composition of proposed team; process for public engagement, etc.) and provides transparency to the selection process. These two components will go a long way toward ensuring public confidence in the means through which a consultant is selected and the process through which the resulting Master Plan is devised.

We propose that the consultants respond to the Request in two formats: both printed copies and electronic copies that will be made available on-line through city portals, the public library, web-sites of CEA partners and others, as appropriate.

Further, we propose that the selection process involve two components: first, an evaluation of all responses by the Selection Committee (described below) to narrow the field to up to three (3) finalists; second, a presentation/interview process that allows finalists to give oral presentations (of up to 30 minutes) of their experience/qualifications/design approach, followed by Q&A/discussion with the Selection Committee (of up to 30 minutes). These presentations, ideally, will be in a venue that allows the public to attend. Based on this process, the Selection Committee would make a recommendation to the Mayor's Office regarding its ranking of the finalists. While qualifications/experience can be quantified, we feel an important — but unmeasurable — factor in the success of a project of this scope and duration hinges on the personalities of all involved.

Therefore, an interview process will enable the Selection Committee to have a better sense of different teams and how each would approach the tasks at hand.

SELECTION COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

We propose that the Selection Committee review the responses, evaluate them per pre-defined metrics, and deliver a ranked-order list of candidates, with any appropriate comments on the responses, to the Mayor's Office. We propose the Selection Committee be composed of nine (9) members who will represent the stakeholders and provide professional expertise:

- Millage recipients (as determined by the agencies' governing boards)
 1. Audubon Nature Institute
 2. City Park Improvement Association
 3. Parks and Parkways Commission
 4. NORDC
- Mayor's Office/Administration: Chief Administrative Office (CAO)
- City Council
- Public Nonprofit Organizations (e.g., Parks For All and Urban Conservancy)
- LSU's Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture

This Committee, at its first meeting, will elect a Chair and approve the document that seeks responses from interested consultants, per City procurement requirements/specifications. During its deliberations, the Committee may seek advice or non-voting participation from other entities that control greenspace in New Orleans (Louisiana Flood Protection Authorities, French Market Corporation, Downtown Development District, Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authorities, U.S. Fisheries & Wildlife Service); local/national nonprofits (Trust for Public Land, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, City Park Alliance, Friends of Lafitte Greenway, Urban Conservancy, Preservation Resource Center); local universities (UNO, Xavier, Dillard, Tulane); and others as it sees fit. The Committee's work will be facilitated by staff designated by the Mayor's Office and will meet on a schedule and at a place to be determined by the Committee and appropriate City agencies. Selection Committee meetings would be open to the public, per City standards for public meetings, with minutes made available to the public.

QUALIFICATIONS CONTENT FOR CONSULTANT

We propose a selection process that combines the best features of both the RFQ and RFP process into a hybrid response that enables consultants to discuss previous experience in detail as well as propose strategies that fit the specifics of this particular project. We understand that all potential consultants may not know enough about local conditions to respond in depth. Nevertheless, we are interested in how consultants would address situations unique to this project. Obviously a detailed scope of work would be negotiated in any subsequent contract between the City (“Client”) and the consultant (“Consultant”).

We feel the consultants’ responses should contain components that fall under two general headings: (1) process issues and (2) subject areas.

PROCESS ISSUES

- Overall Planning Process: We believe a clearly articulated planning process is essential to success of this endeavor. What are the major components (tasks) of Consultant’s planning process (in outline form) and what are the deliverables of each major task? What resources will the Consultant expect Client to provide?
- Analytics: We recognize that the final Master Plan will only be as useful as the information used in its development. What analytics will Consultant use to generate data that will become part of the decision-making process?
- Team Composition and Experience: Consultant will list up to 3 primary employees who will have direct involvement in the project/interaction with the Client and give a summary of their credentials and qualifications (up to three pages).
- Engagement: Community engagement is of course essential to the planning process. What is Consultant’s experience in the area of public engagement? How will Consultant identify potential open space constituencies/stakeholders to ensure active and substantive engagement from all relevant parties? We envision that the process will be at least as robust as the post-Katrina recovery plan and the City’s master plan process, and will include meetings in each Council district (or even smaller units), meetings concerning specific parks (not limited to the Regional

parcs), specific NORDC facilities, and large municipal green spaces, as well as city-wide meetings and meetings before the City Planning Commission and City Council at important stages in the drafting process.

- Cooperative Endeavor Agreement: What is the Consultant's experience in a client/consultant arrangement such as this and what measures would Consultant propose to give equal attention to meeting expectations of all parties? Since the CEA involves four entities (Audubon Nature Institute, City Park Improvement Association, and two City of New Orleans agencies, Parks and Parkways and NORDC) with separate budgets and fiduciary systems, what measures will Consultant propose to achieve consensus among CEA parties regarding internal budget, staffing, planning issues?
- Community Partnerships: A high-profile effort such as this will require support from CEA members (and their boards/governing agencies), participation from many constituents, and engagement with the public. While the CEA structure may define the Master Plan's primary participants, how would Consultant propose identifying other relevant agencies/constituencies — especially but not only those involved in managing the City's greenspace — with whom to work and defining what would their role be?
- City Council Participation: Regardless of governance, the City's parks and open spaces are geographically located within districts represented by elected City Councilmembers. What provisions would Consultant propose to ensure these elected officials are involved in the planning process and engaged as elected officials? As mentioned, community outreach should be organized, at least in part, by Council districts.
- Resources: What existing resources, including past studies and other published material, would Consultant use as background information to prepare the Master Plan?
- Timing: What is the projected time-line for completion of the Master Plan in New Orleans?
- Final Product and Accountability of Results: What does Consultant see as the most effective final product for successful implementation? What mechanisms does Consultant propose to ensure that the plan does not just

gather dust but becomes an active tool in a short-, medium-, and long-term execution process that ensures results consistent with the plan's recommendations?

- References: We propose that interested Consultants provide narratives of up to three (3) case studies of projects similar to this effort (1000 words or less); up to 10 illustrative images per case study; and names/contact information of people (elected officials; project administrators; public constituents; etc.) who can speak to the work of the consultant in the execution of the case study project.

SUBJECT AREAS

- Green Infrastructure: Public parks, neutral grounds, and open spaces (including levees) are places of play, public celebrations, gatherings, and even debate. They are vital to the physical and civic health of a community. How does Consultant think about such public spaces and what experience has Consultant had in creating new public spaces, rehabilitating existing older ones, and linking such spaces together in ways that create open space systems and urban green networks?
- Recreation: Parks and open spaces provide venues for active and passive recreation in the urban environment, but one should not take precedence over the other. How would Consultant approach the following: identifying demographic-based recreation needs for New Orleans residents, applying those needs to existing (or proposed) facilities, and balancing spaces programmed for active recreation with spaces left open and un-programmed?
- Equitable greenspace: In a similar vein, we believe in the equitable distribution of parks and green spaces throughout the entire city. Using the most recent census and current population trends, what is the current situation (by Council district) regarding different kinds of open spaces with relationship to population density? Using the Trust For Public Land's goal of providing greenspace access to every resident via a 10 minute walking distance (or perhaps a similar goal), what gaps exist for New Orleans to achieve such an objective? What can be developed both short- and long-term to address identified inequities?

- Greenspace acquisition: We would like to see the plan address the possibility of the City's acquiring land for use as public parks, either by outright purchase or by swapping land with other government entities, such as the school board. We see a municipal imperative to extend the City's green inventory along with funding mechanisms for doing so. This new approach to available public space would offer an alternative to the current trend of selling off public property — especially unneeded schools — to developers, who convert into private uses land that could instead have been redeveloped for civic and recreational purposes.
- Operations and Maintenance: What experience does Consultant have in financial planning with regard to parks/open space/recreation operations, improvements, maintenance, and growth? Where, among four CEA partners, are potential areas of consolidation for increasing efficiency and effective management? How would such consolidations be accomplished? What kinds of analyses (strategic, financial, demographic) are needed to address current operations, capital improvements, and earned income that doesn't sacrifice open space quality and quantity?
- Resiliency/ Water Management: How can the city's green infrastructure, broadly considered, become part of a comprehensive analysis/approach to resiliency from future environmental disturbances? What are the projected impacts of climate change, sea-level rise, hurricanes, floods and other weather events and how can the City's green infrastructure serve as effective risk reduction to such projected disturbances (e.g., serve as barriers and increased surface water absorption)? What measures can be implemented (in the short and long term) to connect green infrastructure with existing/proposed municipal water management plans?
- Habitat: Green infrastructure is habitat for wildlife, an important component of the City and regional eco-system. How can greenspaces contribute to maintaining/increasing wildlife habitat, corridors, and linkages that will facilitate wildlife stability in the urban environment? How can New Orleans' green infrastructure connect with our regional mosaic of habitats, including natural preserves, to enhance wildlife habitats and facilitate expansion of the city's urban tree coverage and aquatic habitats?
- Mobility: How can existing urban parks, greenspaces, and other public areas be connected to facilitate non-motorized transit (walking, bicycling)

throughout the City? How should on-going efforts to increase the city's inventory of bicycle trails be connected with the City's green infrastructure?

- Place-making: Parks are a critical place-making element of cities. This is particularly evident in New Orleans, a city of established neighborhoods that have their own unique features, characteristics, and open spaces. How can these spaces — often they are unconventional and under-appreciated — be identified, curated, honored, and preserved as identifying the unique cultural characteristics of our City's many neighborhoods and cultures? How might decisions be made about what elements should be added, removed, or simply left alone?
- Economic Development vs. Gentrification: Recent experiences with the success of the Lafitte Greenway confirm the tremendous economic development benefit of increasing/enhancing urban open spaces. What impacts will future open space developments have on the City's economic development? How can open space strategic planning be integrated into the City's plans for economic development? What parallel policies should be designed to contain the impact of gentrification — the disowning effect in economically distressed neighborhoods when economic development creates rising property values and gradual displacement of the original inhabitants.
- Tourism: How can the city's open space networks and green infrastructure become more engaged in visitors' authentic experience? Can tourism resources (advertising, marketing) become part of activities that lend support to future greenspace planning/ maintenance/expansion? What are the potential impacts on increased tourist activities in the city's open spaces?
- Cultural Landscapes: New Orleans is a city with a rich cultural heritage of built and natural environments. How can the City's greenspaces and urban parks become more visible and valuable in the public's understanding of this heritage? How might this heritage be used in future efforts to educate the public about the City's urban, cultural, social, and environmental evolution?

APPENDIX

Entities Governing Public Green Space in New Orleans

The French Market Corporation is responsible for Crescent Park, a 1.4 mile, 20 acre urban linear park on the Mississippi River in the Bywater neighborhood.

<http://www.frenchmarket.org/>

The Downtown Development District has been recently asked to revamp and manage Duncan Plaza across from City Hall. <https://downtownnola.com>

Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East oversees the southern shores of Lake Pontchartrain, the banks of Bayou St. John and the east bank Mississippi waterfront. <https://www.floodauthority.org/>

Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West manages the west bank levees on the Mississippi River. <https://slfpaw.org/>

The Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authority (NFPAMA) manages the 5.5 mile long Lakeshore Park along Lakeshore Drive and maintains the parks associated with the Lakeshore, Lake Vista, Lake Terrace, and Lake Oaks subdivisions as well as the New Basin Canal Park located on the median between West End and Pontchartrain Boulevards. www.nolalakefront.com

United States Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 23,000-acre Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge in Eastern New Orleans. https://www.fws.gov/southeastlouisiana/contact_us.html

Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO)

New Orleans Redevelopment Authority

Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans

New Orleans Public Schools

Millage recipients:

The Audubon Commission oversees the Audubon Nature Institute which manages: uptown's Audubon Park with its zoo and golf course; the Audubon Aquarium, the adjacent Woldenberg Park on the Mississippi River, and the Insectarium on Canal Street; the Audubon Nature Center in

the East; and, the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in Algiers. The Audubon Commission has also been tapped by the City to develop the last two industrial wharves on the downtown waterfront at Esplanade Avenue and Governor Nicholls Street into public park space.

<https://audubonnatureinstitute.org/audubon-commission>

New Orleans City Park, managed by the state City Park Improvement Association, hosts major public institutions such as the New Orleans Museum of Art and Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden, the New Orleans Botanical Garden, Christian Brothers School and soon-to-open Louisiana Children's Museum; it features the Storyland children's amusement park, two golf courses, tennis courts, driving range and putt-putt, horse stables, sports fields and stadiums. <http://neworleanscitypark.com>

The New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) manages 107 properties including 35 active (staffed) playgrounds, 12 recreation centers, 12 outdoor and four indoor pools, tennis courts and passive parks. <http://nordc.org/home>

Parks & Parkways has custody of over 2,000 acres of New Orleans' public green space, including major parks (e.g., [Brechtel](#) and [Palmer](#)); 200 smaller parks and squares, including [Jackson Square](#), [Armstrong Park/Congo Square](#), [Washington Square](#), and [Lafayette Square](#); New Orleans' [neutral grounds](#); and, the [Joseph M. Bartholomew Municipal Golf Course](#) in Pontchartrain Park. <https://www.nola.gov/parks-and-parkways/>