

September 2016

A Report for the

BOGUE FALAYA PARK

MASTER PLAN

SUBMITTED TO

City of Covington

SUBMITTED BY

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collaborators





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introduction

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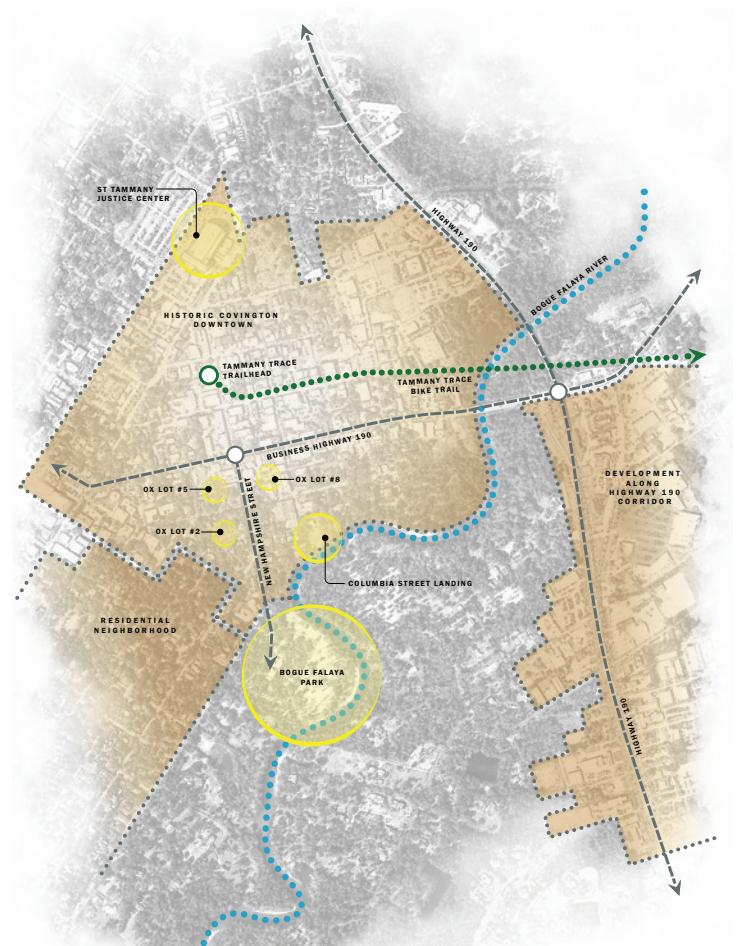
introduction

Project Background

Bogue Falaya Park is located at 213 Park Drive and sits along the winding banks of the Bogue Falaya River one-half mile away from the Tammany Trace Trailhead, and anchors the southern portion of historic downtown. The roughly 13 acre park offers a pavilion with bathrooms, playground equipment, and abundant open space with old growth Pines, Cypresses, and Oaks providing ample shade. Although it operates primarily as a passive nature park for the residents of Covington, Bogue Falaya Park is host to numerous events throughout the year, such as Monster Mash Halloween fundraiser, Swinging in the Pines with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, the Youth Service Bureau Chef Soiree, and the Fourth of July Celebration 'Sparks in the Park' to name a few. Additionally, the Park and pavilion are often rented for private events such as weddings and birthdays.



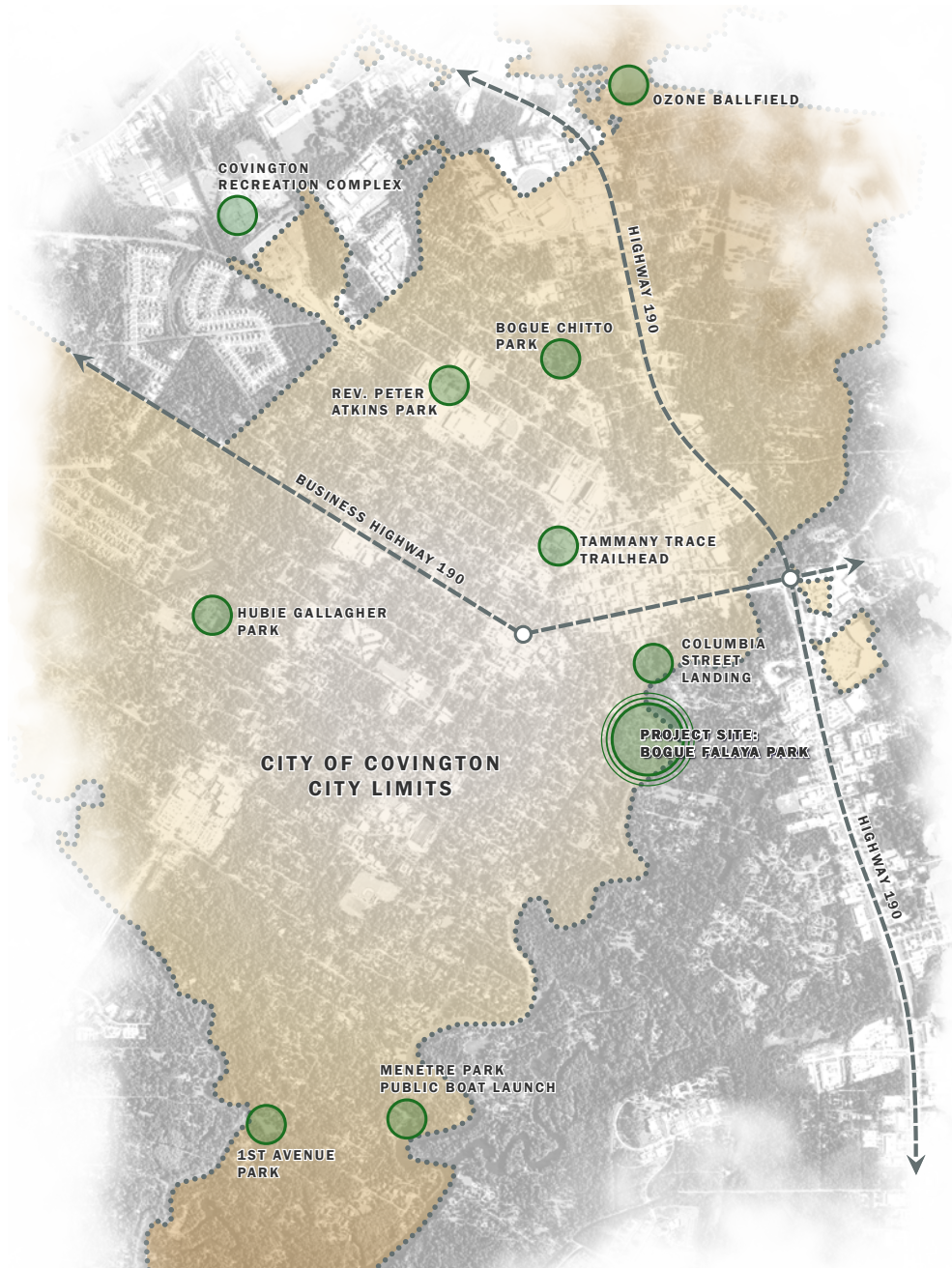
Park Aerial



Project Context Map

City of Covington

“The City of Wharton was founded in 1813 and changed name to the City of Covington in 1816, is a charming Southern community nestled among three rivers (the Bogue Falaya, Tchefuncta, and Abita). An eclectic mix of boutiques, art galleries, specialty shops and restaurants line the downtown streets. Special care has been taken to ensure the conservation of Covington’s historic homes and buildings while also allowing for the modernization of its infrastructure” (www.covla.com). The population estimate for Covington is 9,352 (US Census Bureau 2013). The daily population increases to almost 20,000 due to the St. Tammany Justice Center and associated businesses. New business and residential growth in the area are contributing to increased economic development. The City has several recreational sites and parks to serve the needs of the city residents. However, Bogue Falaya Park draws users from around the region.



Project Vicinity Map

Historic Downtown Covington

Historic Downtown Covington is an eclectic mix of businesses and residences. There are several neighborhood and community events held throughout the year. The layout of the district is a traditional grid system. One of the most notable landmarks in the area is the Tammany Trace that utilizes E. Gibson St. from Lee Lane to the Trailhead at N. New Hampshire St. The Tammany Trace is a popular and heavily used rails-to-trails conversion.

Arguably the most unique feature of Downtown Covington is its historic ox lots. These cultural relics, which operate today as free off-street public parking, hark back to the origin and founding of Covington. These public squares, located within the interior of blocks, were the epicenter of trade and commerce during Covington's development.

These aspects of the Historic Downtown District are important to the master plan of Bogue Falaya Park because bicyclist and pedestrian access to the park are enhanced by the Trace and Ox Lots .



Drone over Downtown Covington



Downtown Covington

Purpose and Need

As currently designed, Bogue Falaya Park does not operate at its full potential as it relates to community enhancement, spatial utilization, water management, and is in need of shoreline protection to prevent further erosion. Furthermore, should current environmental issues such as poor water quality, erosion, and habitat loss continue to escalate they will become increasingly difficult to reverse.

Goal

The study team, in conjunction with the City of Covington Mayor's Office, Council Representatives, stakeholders, and the public, is providing a framework for improvements to Bogue Falaya Park assuring it more effectively interacts with and serves the community and the environment through education, engagement, and habitat restoration; functions as a community park that emphasizes low-impact development and water management; is environmentally and economically sustainable; and provides features that attract more users and community events to fully utilize the park.

Scope of Work and Process

Task 1: Kick-off and Existing Conditions Analysis

- a. Kick-off Meeting
- b. Project Management Committee (PMC) and Stakeholder Group Formation
- c. Existing Conditions Inventory & Analysis

Task 2: Public Engagement

- a. Project Management Committee Meeting
- b. Stakeholders Meetings
- c. Public Open House

Task 3: Conceptual Park Planning

- a. Approval of Preferred Park Improvements
- b. Development of Two Alternative Conceptual Plans
- c. Project Management Committee Meeting
- d. Final Conceptual Plan

Task 4: Final Report

Project Management Committee and Stakeholders

The process was guided by a Project Management Committee (PMC). The PMC and the consultant team met regularly as the project progressed. The PMC members included Mayor Mike Cooper, Councilman Rick Smith, City Engineer Daniel Hill, P.E., Grants Manager Kelli Moore, and Facilities Director Jarne Martino.

The consultant team also developed a stakeholder group that was influential in the design of the park layout. The Stakeholders included Covington Culture, Arts, and Events Director Aimee Faucheux, Keep Covington Beautiful represented by Priscilla Floca, St. Tammany Parish Public Information Director Ronnie Simpson, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation Water Quality Program Director Andrea Calvin, PhD, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra represented by Amanda Wuerstlin and Rebecca Cain, Southern Hotel Owner Lisa Condrey-Ward, and Land Trust for Louisiana Board Member Rick Wilke.

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data collection & analysis



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data collection & analysis

The project team collected data and information related to Bogue Falaya Park in Historic Downtown Covington from several sources including the City of Covington and St. Tammany Parish. The City provided relevant studies, guides, and technical information needed to complete an inventory of the site. This information, along with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data including land use, zoning, existing tree locations, and utilities in the study area that the City provided, allowed the project team to conduct a thorough site analysis.

Several meetings for the purposes of developing the analysis were conducted between the city and the study team. In order to gain insight to the Park's function during both peak and everyday use, team members made numerous field visits to the project site for data collection and site analysis on both weekdays and weekends, as well as for the Sparks in the Park Fourth of July event.

Bogue Falaya Park

The history of Bogue Falaya Park dates back to 1908 when it was purchased by the city from a private landowner for \$3,000. Yet, as a result of the Depression in 1936, the city sold the park to the state of Louisiana. The Park remained in the state's possession until 1978 when it was donated to Covington.

Visitor Use

A conservative estimate is that 40,000 people visit the park each year. This includes 350 casual visitors on any given week, approximately 1,000 private party guests annually, 3,000 students per year for school events, and approximately 12,000 people annually for four major special events. Maximum capacity of the park is 3,500 visitors per event.

Existing Conditions

One of the Park's most frequently used and memorable existing features is the intricately designed, wooden playground that was constructed predominately by volunteers and is a major attraction when events are not scheduled. Picnic tables are scattered throughout the park under the shade of the existing trees, but are under-utilized due to a lack of access, circulation, other amenities such as walking and jogging paths. A single service drive follows the curve of the river providing access to the park's interior for maintenance and large events operations.

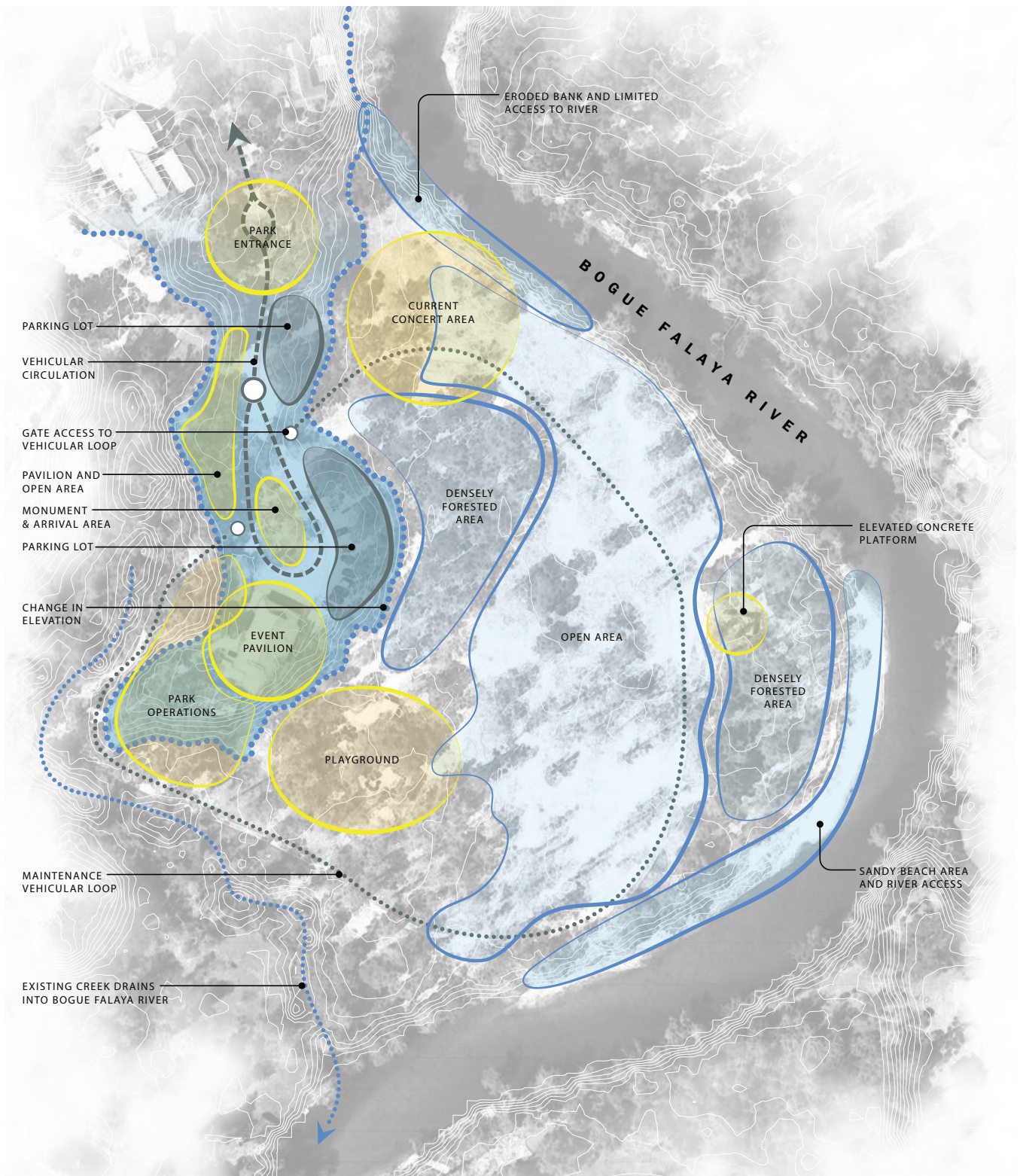
The Bogue Falaya River, which defines the eastern boundary of the Park, has not been consistently fishable or swimmable for a number of years since it was first listed as an impaired water body by the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ). According to the LDEQ Integrated Report, a number of chemical pollutants as well as low dissolved oxygen have been found in the river, and Mercury has been found in fish tissue. Due to the acute awareness of water quality issues by the surrounding community, activity within the park has suffered. However, people do use the river for kayaking and canoeing.

In addition to the concerns over water quality of the River, there is also considerable shoreline erosion and spit deposit that threatens the river, park, and safety of the users. According to the City of Covington, some sections of the shoreline has eroded more than 12 feet since 2005 when heavier than usual floodwaters inundated the park due to Hurricane Katrina.

The majority of the park is shady and contained within an old-growth forest canopy. It currently offers minimal amenities and basic services. These amenities, as listed in Section 1, includes primarily a passive program centered on enjoying the natural setting of the Park. One notable feature is a historic elevated concrete structure, believed to function as a snowball stand at one time that is located on the eastern edge of the park. Despite being underutilized, the park possesses a unique rustic, natural character and sense-of-place along the banks of the Bogue Falaya River that users enjoy and have become attached to. The goal of this master plan study is to preserve and improve upon this concept.

The proximity of the park to the water's edge has proven to be a threat as much as an asset. On March 11th and 12th of 2016 heavy rains in St. Tammany and to the north caused the Bogue Falaya River to rise to a record-setting level of over 20' (flood stage is 6'). Due to the volume and velocity of the flood waters several feet of shoreline was eroded, trees were uprooted and/or stripped of their bark, and electrical posts were damaged and knocked down. Several events that typically draw thousands of visitors to the Park were forced to relocate. This recent flooding event has brought the need for sustainable design within Bogue Falaya Park even more to the forefront.





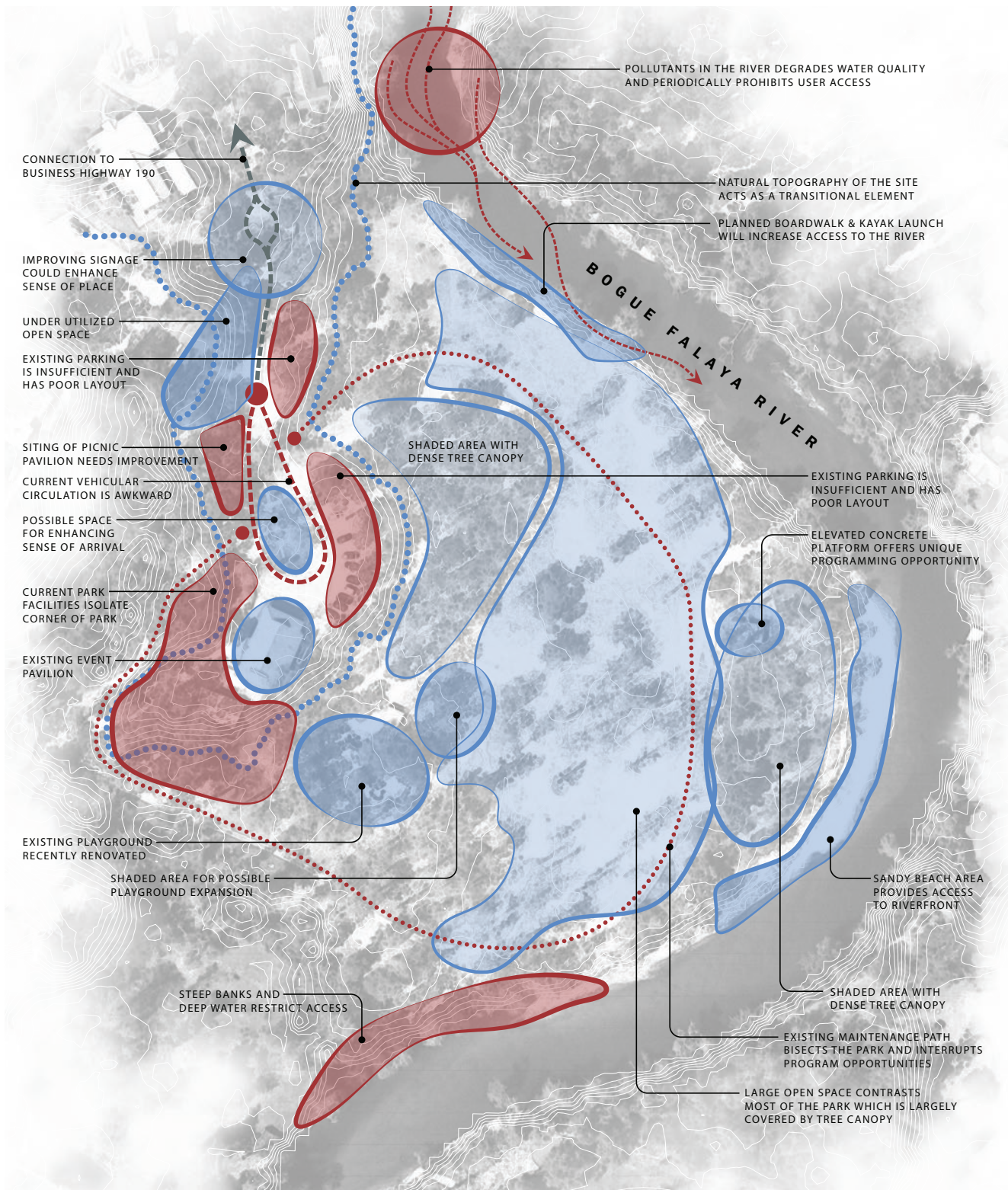
Existing Conditions Map

Site Analysis

Once all of the pertinent data was collected, the project team began the process of analysis to determine how the information collected could influence and strengthen the design of the park. Additionally, an initial program list of desired amenities and activities was provided by the PMC to give initial direction.

Through the site analysis, the project team discovered that in its current state the site arrival sequence needs improvement, and the lack of a defined circulation system causes the existing amenities within the park to feel disjointed and unrelated to one another. Furthermore, the vehicular circulation and parking areas as currently designed visually, and physically, separate visitors from the park upon arrival. There are also environmental concerns due to the poor water quality of the Bogue Falaya River, the severity of which fluctuates as reported by the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, and extensive erosion near the northern end of the site. These factors impact how and when users will be able to engage the river and its banks.

However, the analysis revealed numerous positive aspects of the park as well. The natural topography of the site is certainly unique to Southern Louisiana, and an asset and design opportunity in itself. Also, the park lies within a dense old-growth canopy of oaks, cypress, and other native tree species. This along with its location along the edge of the Bogue Falaya River define its character as a nature park, an essential factor to be considered in the developed Master Plan.



Site Analysis Map

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schematic design alternatives

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schematic design alternatives

Concept Development

Following analysis and the first Project Management Committee (PMC) and Stakeholders meetings, it was apparent that a number of park elements are consistently preferred by the City, stakeholders, and the residents. Following data collection, and the completion of site inventory and analysis, the project team met with the Project Management Committee (PMC) and the Stakeholder Committee in order to present their findings. These meetings were intended to use the site analysis in order to develop a program for the Park. It was apparent based on the feedback and input from the PMC and stakeholders that the Master Plan should aim to enhance the existing character of the Park, rather than invent a new identity for the park.

At meetings with the PMC and stakeholders, a number of desirable program elements, amenities, and activities were identified that would be consistent with the overall goal of enhance the existing character of the Park:

- *Improve Branding for the Park*
- *Integrate sustainable design elements into the park*
- *Flood resistance*
- *Concert Venue*
- *Existing Concrete Platform*
 - *Birdwatching*
 - *Stage*
 - *Multi-Use (Trail-head)*
- *Boardwalk & Kayak Launch (currently planned by City of Covington)*
- *Food Truck Area*
- *Canoe or Kayak Rental*
- *Splash Park*
- *ADA accessible playground, Innovative style playground*
- *Additional and Reconfigured Parking*
- *Special Event Access*

- *Renovated pavilion*
- *New park ranger cabin*
- *Pedestrian pathways*
- *ADA accessible circulation*
- *Walking & jogging paths*
- *Wayfinding*
- *Picnic Areas*
- *Improved Entrance / Arrival*
 - *Signage*
 - *Monuments*
 - *Drop-off Area*
 - *Circulation*
 - *Enhance Park Drive*
- *New Site Furniture*
 - *Benches*
 - *Picnic Tables*
 - *Trash Receptacles*
 - *Uniform style and color*
- *Improve Access to River's Edge*

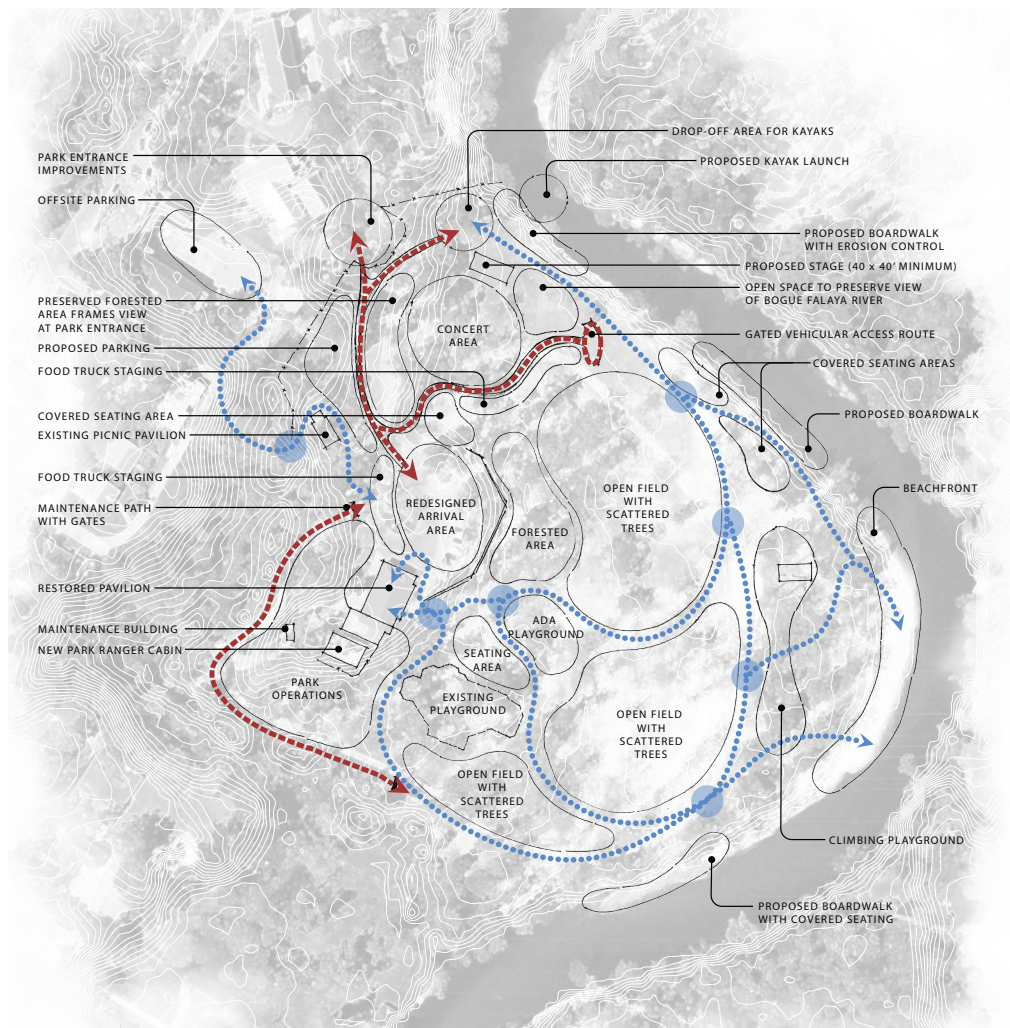
From the list above, two distinct program plans were developed that studied where improvements could occur, how these would function, and how they would interact with one another. Each of the two concepts shown below emphasizes a distinct group of site program elements identified by the PMC and Stakeholders.

Schematic Design 1

This concept alternative focuses on organizing the existing concert area utilized by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. The location of concert area is critical to the function of the Park's most popular event, so the project team gave special consideration to this amenity. However, the concept also integrates a number of new and improved amenities into the park such as ADA playground, preservation of existing trees and shaded areas, redesigned arrival area, areas for passive play including a climbing playground, pedestrian trails, and shoreline protection with a paddlers launch. The addition of a food truck staging area would further enhance the concert area.

Elements included the following:

- Redesigned arrival area
- Climbing playground
- ADA playground
- Walking trails
- Food truck staging area
- Shoreline protection
- Paddlers launch



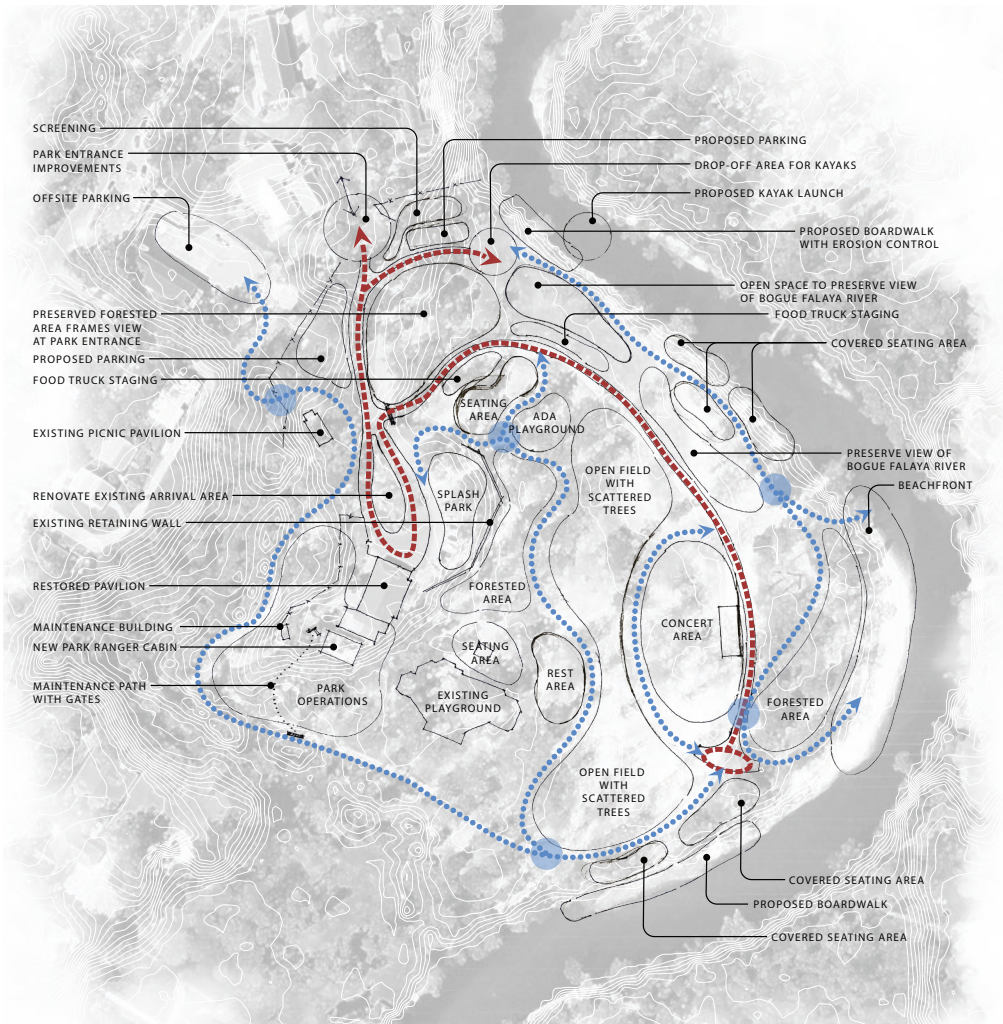
Schematic Design 1

Schematic Design 2

The primary feature of this concept alternative, as it differs from the Schematic Design 1, is the introduction of permanent stage and concert area into the interior of the park. This proposed location near the eastern edge of the site takes advantage of the natural topography of the park, which slopes up in elevation back towards the historic pavilion. As proposed, this concert area would be highly visible from the redesigned arrival area and function as a major landmark within the park even when it is not in use. Similar to its counterpart, Schematic Design 2 offers numerous improvements to the park including shaded seating areas, redesigned arrival area, areas for passive play including an ADA compliant playground, pedestrian trails, and shoreline protection with a paddlers launch.

Elements included the following:

- Relocated concert area
- Redesigned arrival area
- ADA playground
- Walking trails
- Food truck staging area
- Shoreline protection
- Paddlers launch



Schematic Design 2

Draft Master Plan

Review of the two concept alternates revealed each plan possessed components that the PMC and stakeholders found to be favorable improvements to the park. As a result, the initial master plan was developed as a hybrid of both program plans.

Please refer to the following page for the illustration of the Draft Master Plan.

The master plan focused first on increasing the arrival sense and entry sequence into the Park from N New Hampshire Street. Additionally, the redesigned drive and parking area orients parking along the west side of the travel aisle opening views into the park as users enter, as opposed to the current condition which blocks views behind a row of head-in parking. Aside from this main drive and arrival court, a secondary parking area and drop-off area would be provided closer to the water's edge for paddlers to utilize. Vehicles are restricted to these areas only in proposed design in order to preserve the character of the park's natural interior. However, a gated maintenance and park operations drive would be provided that would allow for the maintenance access, emergency access, and special event staging.

Throughout the park, pedestrian walking and hiking trails would be implemented that would better define the circulation within the park and between its various site elements. These paths would converge at a wayfinding node with a sculptural element and surrounding seating elements in the southeast corner of the park.

The existing playground area would be preserved and enhanced with the introduction of an ADA compliant playground and a splash pad. Two boardwalk locations, aside from the paddler launch could be sited along the river. At this stage of the project an additional pedestrian entrance was included from E. 20th Ave.

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BOGUE FALAYA PARK MASTER PLAN

DRAFT MASTER PLAN



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Revised Draft Master Plan

Review and comment from the PMC and Stakeholder committees led to further refinement of the site plan. The old concrete structure/platform use ideas include a multi-use building such as a snowball/concession stand and possible paddler outfitter.

Please refer to the next page to see the Revised Draft Master Plan.

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BOGUE FALAYA PARK MASTER PLAN

REVISED DRAFT MASTER PLAN



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community engagement

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community engagement

A key aspect to any successful planning project is community engagement early and often in the design process. Mayor Cooper initiated a proven three-tiered engagement program for the Bogue Falaya Park Master Plan. The three levels of participation included a Project Management Committee, a Stakeholder Committee, and a Public Open House. Additionally, the plan will have a formal public hearing when placed on the city council agenda.

Project Management Committee

The team assisted the City of Covington in establishing and supporting a Project Management Committee (PMC) to guide the technical work effort and to review and comment upon the park planning deliverables. The PMC was developed at the project kick-off meeting held April 21, 2016.

The PMC included:

- Mayor Mike Cooper
- City Engineer Daniel Hill, P.E.
- Grants Administrator Kelli Moore
- Facilities Director Jarne Martino
- Councilman Rick Smith

The PMC met three times during the course of the study effort. The dates were:

- Meeting 1: June 8, 2016
- Meeting 2: July 6, 2016
- Meeting 3: August 1, 2016

The team provided all necessary agendas, handouts, and exhibits for the PMC meetings. In addition, the planning team conducted numerous meetings and correspondence with PMC members to discuss the project's purpose, need, and project-related opportunities and concerns.

Stakeholder Committee

The team in association with the PMC developed a Stakeholder Committee to guide the park planning process. The Stakeholder Committee's primary purpose was to assist in the development of a program for the Park while also providing input, review, and comments on the park planning effort. Also, further input was provided by a series of interviews conducted with property owners, applicable service providers, business leaders, and City decision-makers who are most knowledgeable about the park's constraints

and opportunities. The result of stakeholder meetings was clear identification of the range of plans, goals, objectives, and concerns that need to be addressed when developing and ultimately evaluating concept alternatives.

The Stakeholders Committee included:

- Covington Culture, Arts, and Events Director Aimee Faucheux
- Keep Covington Beautiful represented by Priscilla Floca
- St. Tammany Parish Public Information Director Ronnie Simpson
- Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra represented by Amanda Wuerstlin and Rebecca Cain
- Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation Water Quality Program Director Andrea Calvin, PhD
- Land Trust for Louisiana Board Member Rick Wilke
- Southern Hotel Owner Lisa Condrey-Ward

The Stakeholders Committee met twice during the course of the study effort. The dates were:

- Meeting 1: May 24, 2016
- Meeting 2: June 21, 2016

Public Open House

The city invited the public to view the draft site plan, ask questions, and make comments regarding the park's future. The focus of the open house was on the park layout and enhancements under consideration. The open house was held in the Covington City Council Chambers at 222 E. Kirkland St. from 5:30-7:30pm. Approximately 75 people attended and 22 left responses on comment cards (which are included in Appendix B). The open house set up had 7 stations, 3 full park rendering stations, and 4 staffed stations highlighting key elements of the park. Mayor Cooper provided introductory comments about the planning process and site layout, he was followed by Ross Liner of Digital Engineering who further detailed key aspects of the site plan and encouraged the attendees to visit the stations to ask questions and make comments. For those who couldn't attend the City posted the draft park site plan on its website and made comments available to city staff.

The Open House took place on:

- July 13, 2016



Open House Attendance

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master plan

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master plan

A key aspect to the success of the Bogue Falaya Park Master Plan project was the engagement and communication between the Mayor’s Office, City Council, and the public. As illustrated within this report, the master plan below is a culmination of months of meetings, site visits, and an iterative design process. The resulting plan is the vision of the city and those who engaged in the process. The planning team provided technical assistance and resources to develop that vision into a feasible plan that can be implemented by the City of Covington.

Plan

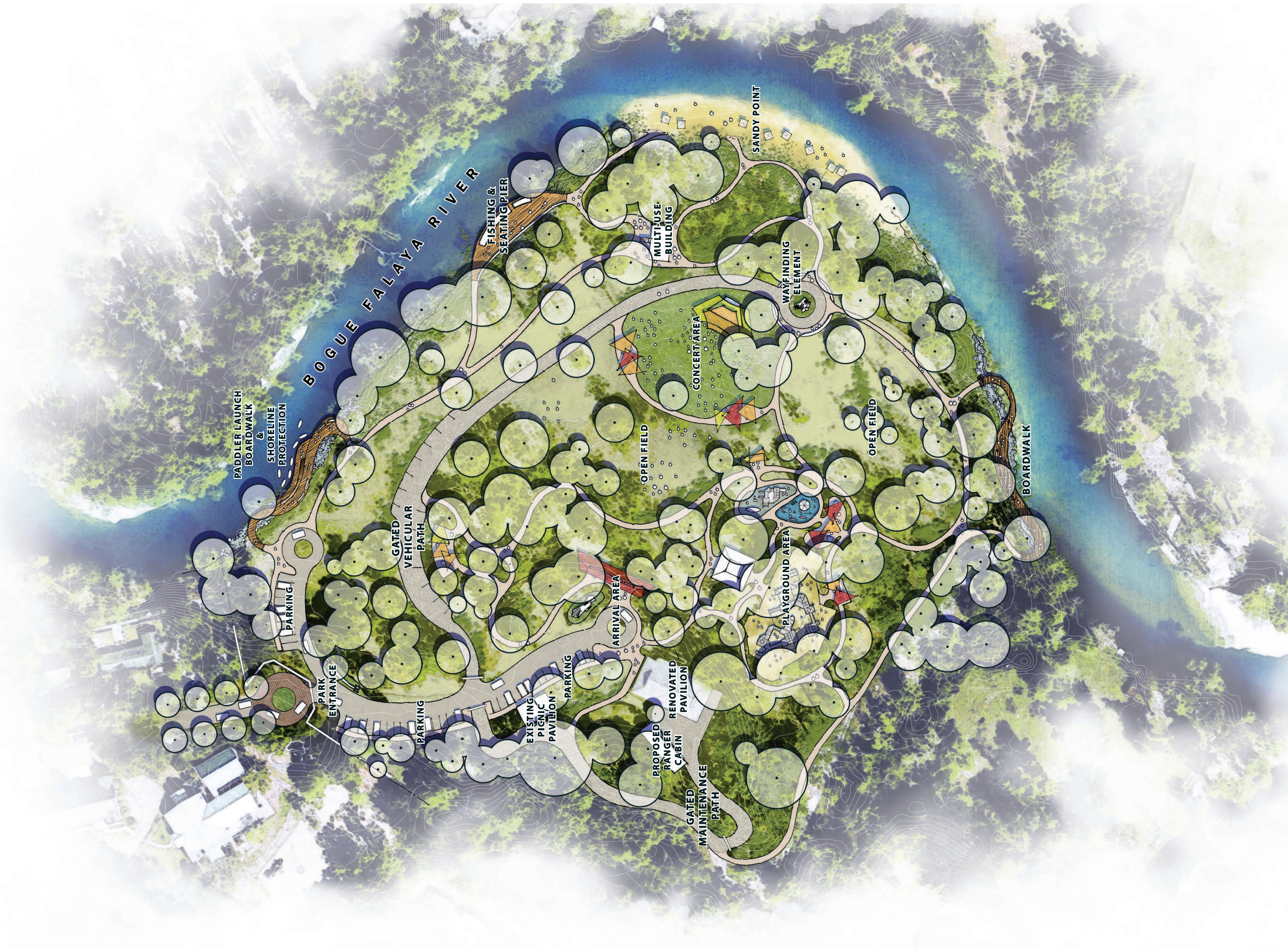
The mission of the Bogue Falaya Park Master Plan is to enhance the natural setting users identify with this park. Our goal was to improve the park for users of all abilities and ages, to provide interaction with and interpretation of the natural setting, and to protect the park from shoreline and habitat loss. The park entrance will be enhanced to elevate the exposure of the park and augment the sense of arrival. There will be wayfinding information such as maps and guides to help the user fully utilize the park. The park will feature pedestrian pathways made with green infrastructure materials and will be accessible for all users.

Please refer to the Final Master Plan illustration on the following page.

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BOGUE FALAYA PARK MASTER PLAN

FINAL MASTER PLAN



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Key Aspects Detailed

The Bogue Falaya Park Master Plan seeks to create a nature-based community/regional space for the City of Covington and St. Tammany Parish. The park fills the important role for the community as a space that provides equal opportunities for passive recreation to all residents of Covington and the surrounding region. The following is a description illustrating the design intent of various portions of the proposed Master Plan. As mentioned previously, each of these areas will be connected by pedestrian pathways with wayfinding and interpretive elements.

Arrival Area

The goal of the arrival area as proposed is to maximize the sense of arrival for visitors. This includes relocating all of the parking to the west side of the drive aisle in order to open up views into the park for visitors as they enter. Additional signage would be provided at the arrival gate and upon entering the park in order to direct users to the appropriate sections of the park. Also, in order to improve upon the daily operations of the park a new ranger cabin, which will replace the existing one onsite, is proposed here.



Arrival Area Enlargement

Paddler Launch Boardwalk

As a response to recent flooding and river surge events that have caused a substantial amount of erosion along the Park's northeastern edge, erosion control measures will be provided for approximately 200' of the Bogue Falaya shoreline. The recommendation by the project team is for the City of Covington to provide erosion control. Additionally, a boardwalk would be provided along this stretch of shore that would function primarily as a paddler launch, which is becoming an increasingly popular activity in the Park. These numbers will continue to increase as St. Tammany Parish begins to implement its regional "blueway" networks of kayak trails. This paddler launch boardwalk will have an associated drop-off and small parking area intended to assist users in accessing the river's edge.



Paddler Launch Boardwalk Area Enlargement

Playground Area

The proposed playground area would build upon the already quite popular existing playground by allowing for passive activities that serve all age groups and abilities. Furthermore, the addition of an ADA compliant playground and splash pad expand the playground's use as a year-round feature. Shaded seating areas will allow parents and children both a place to rest and relax within the immediate proximity of the playground. The existing seating area with handprint painted tiles will be re-purposed onsite, potentially into a covered pavilion. The covered pavilion would provide ample shade and shelter more so than the other proposed seating areas surrounding the playgrounds. Adjacent to the playground area in the southeast corner of the park there is another opportunity to engage the river's edge along a proposed boardwalk with seating.



Playground Area Enlargement

Concert Area

Based on a consensus among the stakeholders and the PMC, the proposed concert area would be located on the eastern edge of the park's interior. This shift in location from the existing temporary stage area near the park's entrance offers a number of advantages for both performers and attendees. The proposed location takes advantage of the natural topography of the park, allowing patrons to sit in the preserved open spaces of the park that climb up in elevation as one moves further from the stage towards the historic pavilion and the existing headwall. This would provide excellent views down to the stage with the Bogue Falaya River as a backdrop. Located between the concert area and the sandy point there is also a repurposed concrete structure that would function as a multi-use building that could sell concessions such as snowballs, sunscreen, and rent kayaks. Beyond the multi-use building, the park would feature a number of amenities that allow for users to view and engage the water's edge. The sandy point would be preserved to allow visitors to set up their own seating and umbrellas on the waterfront, while a fishing pier with permanent seatwalls would offer a different experience of the river.



Concert Area Enlargement

Phasing

It is important to note that the implementation of the park recommendations will take several budget cycles and multiple funding sources. Below is a phasing guide the project team prepared as to how the proposed Master Plan could be logically implemented. It is a guide in that as funding becomes available, specific items can be implemented. However, depending on the revenue source it may be for a specific item not necessarily in the preferred implementation phasing order. The goal is to implement the improvements in a manner that minimizes effects on the park's function, and allows for it to operate as normally as possible while improvements are installed.

Phase 1: Shoreline Protection, Paddler Launch and Boardwalk with access road and parking.

Phase 2: Park Ranger Cabin

Phase 3 Park Entrance, Redesigned Parking, Arrival Area

Phase 4: Pedestrian Pathways, Gated Vehicular/Maintenance Path, and Wayfinding Element

Phase 5: Playground Area and Renovated Pavilion

Phase 6: Concert Area and Multi-Use Building

Phase 7: Fishing and Seating Pier

Phase 8: Boardwalk

Please refer to the Phasing Plan illustration on the following page.



Phasing Plan

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