



**October 17, 2024**

Dear Residents of East Baton Rouge Parish,

At BREC, we take our mission to provide exceptional parks and recreational experiences for all of East Baton Rouge parish and our fiduciary responsibilities as stewards of your tax dollars very seriously. We know that your trust in BREC has propelled us to where we are today, after the implementation of the first two Imagine Your Parks plans that completely transformed the park system from one in despair prior to 2004 to the Gold Medal-award winning system it is today. We know that there is still work to do, which is why we are very excited about our recently completed third Imagine Your Parks plan. It is an exciting and important time for your nationally accredited and acclaimed park system with the release of BREC's next 10-year strategic master plan, Imagine Your Parks 3 (IYP3). The plan, which was developed in close collaboration with the East Baton Rouge Parish community, builds on 20-years of Imagine Your Parks plans, which brought twelve community parks, Liberty Lagoon, an abundance of walking paths, new playgrounds, improvements to the Baton Rouge Zoo, turfed baseball fields, new recreation centers, and much more to East Baton Rouge Parish!

After more than a year of community engagement and input, BREC again learned that East Baton Rouge Parish residents highly value their neighborhood parks. Improvements to parks in close proximity to homes was the highest requested improvement across the parish. The second most requested need was more paved connectivity trails. The IYP3 plan will help to ensure that every parish resident has adequate access to safe, modern, and well-maintained parks in a sustainable manner so that all residents can equitably enjoy the many quality-of-life and economic benefits that parks provide.

Similar to the previous two Imagine Your Parks plans, funding and successful implementation of IYP3 is directly dependent on the renewal of BREC's millages. Two of those millages are on the November 5<sup>th</sup> ballot and represent approximately 65% of BREC's current budget. BREC parks provide residents with free and low-cost places and programs for enrichment and physical activity, opportunities to experience nature and free play, reduced risk of localized flooding to houses and businesses surrounding parks, and increased property values. Additionally, the many trees and vegetation throughout the parks provide habitats for wildlife, clean pollutants from our air, soak up and slow down stormwater, and helps to combat urban heat. BREC has also been collaborating with partners and community members to host community-based violence intervention programs like the Late Night Hype program at Gus Young Park this past summer, with continued work with partners such as the Baton Rouge Police Department to offer more of these types of programs in the future. Studies show that crime prevention through community-based interventions is an integral part of reducing crime.

Because your trust in us has allowed the park system to provide so many great benefits to our community, it is important to clarify the facts about the delays in our external audits, which have recently been mischaracterized. The delays are the result of several challenges, some within our control and some outside of our control. BREC implemented a new financial system in 2020 that went live in 2021. When the auditors initially began the 2021 audit in the Spring of 2022, we were slow to provide



some of the information, partly due to the new system and partly due to staff turnover and a national shortage of accountants, which caused the initial delay followed by a need to reschedule the auditors' return due to other clients they were scheduled to audit. The external audit firm was subsequently acquired by a new firm. Our CFO later passed away unexpectedly in the Summer of 2023, and there was again a period when our audit firm needed to move on to other scheduled clients. The 2021 audit is now completed. The misappropriations that were included in the 2021 audit report are instances discovered by BREC's internal controls and were immediately and responsibly reported by BREC to the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA) as required by State law. The external auditors are currently reviewing all of the 2022 audit data provided to them, and we anticipate receiving a draft of that audit in the coming weeks. These delays do not equate to the claims of poor leadership and mismanagement of your tax dollars as recently portrayed and, more importantly, have not impacted our Gold Medal level of service to you, the community. We recently celebrated the completion of the largest project in our 78-year history with more than \$50 million of improvements to the Greenwood Community Park which includes the Baton Rouge Zoo and J.S. Clark Golf Course and recently completed our most successful summer camp program which received over 90% positive feedback from those that participated. Recent improvements to our ballfields have more than doubled the participation at our sports complexes with youth league play at Hartley Vey Oak Villa and Central Sports Park and more than 10,000 youth are registered to participate in soccer through our partnership with Baton Rouge Soccer Club and support from Our Lady of the Lake Children's Hospital.

As trusted stewards of your tax dollars, BREC continues to remain fully transparent with our financial records as our annual audits, annual budgets, and monthly financial statements as well as monthly Commission meetings with associated documents all remain posted on our website ([www.brec.org](http://www.brec.org)) and are available at the click of a mouse for those that are interested. We are also excited about the recent hiring of our most qualified Chief Financial Officer, Don Johnson, with over 20 years of government and public accounting experience and are already reaping the benefits of him joining our team.

I hope you remain as proud as I am of the American Academy of Parks and Recreation Administration's Nation Gold Medal Award won in the fall of 2022 for the first time since 1991 over other large park systems such as Cleveland, Charlotte, Chicago, Atlanta and Austin. The award is not only a reflection of the hard work put in by thousands of employees who have worked at BREC over the years serving the community to the best of their abilities but is also a testament to the community engagement and input we receive from you on a daily basis on what you would like to see accomplished with your tax dollars. More information about how we accomplished this tremendous honor can also be found on our website. BREC is very well known nationally and is among a prestigious 2% of park systems across the nation that is accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). Many park and recreation agencies from around the country visit and call on BREC to learn how to better serve their communities. It is truly a shame that anyone would try to disparage and downplay one of the greatest things Baton Rouge can be proud of on a national level. We look forward to competing for another Gold Medal Award when we are once again eligible in 2027 (after the required 5-year period following a win).

In closing, I want to thank you for the trust you have provided to us over the last 78 years, allowing us to be recognized as one of the best park systems in the country and emphasize that your trust is of the

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utmost importance to me and to the rest of the BREC staff. We will continue to serve our residents at a Gold Medal level and with transparency. BREC parks are not just a resource but the cornerstone of our community's quality of life. I encourage all residents to look at the full picture of benefits your park system provides to the community as you consider how to vote in the upcoming election.

Sincerely,  
Corey K. Wilson,  
BREC Superintendent

*BREC is an award-winning agency that connects people to parks and nature in East Baton Rouge Parish. It is a political subdivision of the state of Louisiana created in 1946 to develop, maintain and operate public park and recreational facilities. Throughout its 78-year history, BREC has taken seriously its responsibility to improve the health, safety, environment and quality of life for all citizens. BREC was among the first park agencies to earn national accreditation and is still among only 2% of park systems across the nation to hold this honor. BREC is a three-time National Gold Medal Award winner and 20-time national finalist. For more information, visit [brec.org/ParkParks](http://brec.org/ParkParks). This letter will also be posted at [brec.org/LetterToEBR](http://brec.org/LetterToEBR).*

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