



CHAPTER 8 – STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN – FINDINGS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge, (BREC) has gathered community input over a three month period in the **first phase** of the development of a new Strategic Plan that will guide the park system over the next ten years, or more. Citizens in individual, small and large groups, community leaders, school children and user groups have been quite vocal in dozens of meetings. Findings from this initial phase of information gathering will be used by the planning team to prepare recommendations for improving the programs and facilities provided by BREC as it moves forward to meet as many citizen needs as possible.

There is ample research detailing the environmental, social, economic, physical and mental health benefits of park systems. Most people felt that BREC is important to the quality of life in the Parish as its programs, services and facilities are tools which enable citizens to enjoy these benefits. On a broad perspective the Findings in this report show that the majority of citizens felt the following:

- An appreciation for BREC operating with integrity, trustworthiness and fiscal responsibility
- A need for more public interaction in BREC’s planning processes
- A need to place more emphasis on quality of parks and facilities even if it results in less quantity
- A need for better communication to make citizens aware of the services provided by BREC
- A need for better maintenance was expressed by many, though some of these concerns were due to aging facilities whose appearance is not pleasing
- A strong desire for BREC to pursue natural and cultural resource conservation projects
- A strong desire for BREC to create and maintain partnerships that benefit the community

The citizens expressed a desire for upgrading existing facilities, and an interest in new facilities. Some of the new facilities that were mentioned most often were:

- Aquatic facilities
- Walking / hiking / biking / nature trails
- Dog Parks
- Skateboard Park
- Hobby Facilities (remote control planes, boats and model trains)

When BREC is compared to other park departments nationally, the consultants found the following:

- Though BREC has a large number of parks, the amount of acreage is **below** national standards
- BREC is funded slightly **below** the national average
- Other communities seek voter approval for funding of capital improvement projects but not for operating budgets
- Most communities place a different emphasis on community level recreation centers by providing fewer centers, but much larger facilities with more features

FINDINGS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

BREC's history of parks and recreation is rich with its determination to provide close to home parks and facilities, affordable leisure opportunities for all citizens, a variety of special cultural and non-athletic facilities, and, most importantly, the development of trust between the agency and the citizens. The Strategic Master Plan for BREC's parks and recreation future builds on this legacy. It provides a framework of *values* to guide planning and development over the life of this plan and beyond.



Values - A relationship, or affinity, of ideas evolved during the public meeting process. As citizens expressed themselves in over 100 meetings, their expectations of BREC began to fit into categories. It was determined at the conclusion of the meetings that twelve categories would capture the essence of public input. These categories, or *values*, will be used by the consultant as the foundation for recommendations to be made in the final report. The values that citizens identified include:

- An open citizen input process
- An increase in quality programs and facilities
- Conservation of natural resources
- Safety from hazards and security from crime
- Equal access to parks and facilities
- Respect for racial and cultural diversity
- Appreciation for BREC operating with honesty, trustworthiness and fiscal responsibility
- A wide range of types of facilities
- A respect for the past and recognition of the accomplishments that have been made
- Pursuit and use of qualifying partnerships
- Recreation activities that focus on the total family
- Opportunities for all to participate in core activities regardless of ability to pay

Final Report Recommendations will be tested - As recommendations are made in the final report, each will be tested against these values to ensure that future changes and improvements to the park system stay on track with citizen expectations. Management criteria and performance measures have also been selected as a guide for BREC to follow as it moves toward implementation of its plan. The management criteria and performance measures which have been selected include: a) a partnership model; b) the seven criteria of an Excellent Park System; and, c) Best Practices of successful agencies. In summary, the four tests that the final report recommendations will be tested against are as follows:



- Baton Rouge values as expressed by citizens;
- The elements required to strengthen families;
- The Seven Measures of an Excellent Park System as developed by the Trust for Public Lands;
- Best Practices of successful agencies.

BENEFITS OF A SUCCESSFUL PARK SYSTEM

THE ROLE PARKS AND RECREATION CAN PLAY IN ADDRESSING AMERICA’S HEALTH PROBLEMS

U.S. Surgeon General Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona addressed thousands of park and recreation professionals in October 2003 at the Annual Congress of the National Recreation and Park Association in St. Louis, Mo. BREC staff, commissioners and the consultant team were in the audience to listen to his remarks about the role parks and recreation can play in addressing America’s health problems. The Surgeon General’s three priorities for addressing the nation’s health agenda are:

- *Prevention.* What can each of us do in our lives and communities to make ourselves and our families healthier? Carmona lamented that 95% of health costs in the United States go to treatment, while only 5% go to prevention.
- *Preparedness.* Each of us has to be concerned with germs as weapons or planes as weapons.
- *Health care disparities.* There is a recognition of the needs of the underserved in America as too many citizens do not have equal access to the health care system as they are without health insurance. For too many citizens, a trip to the dentist is only made when it is really bad, or a trip to the physician is only made when arrangements can be made to go to a public health clinic. The President of the United States and the Surgeon General want to address this issue and make it better for all citizens.

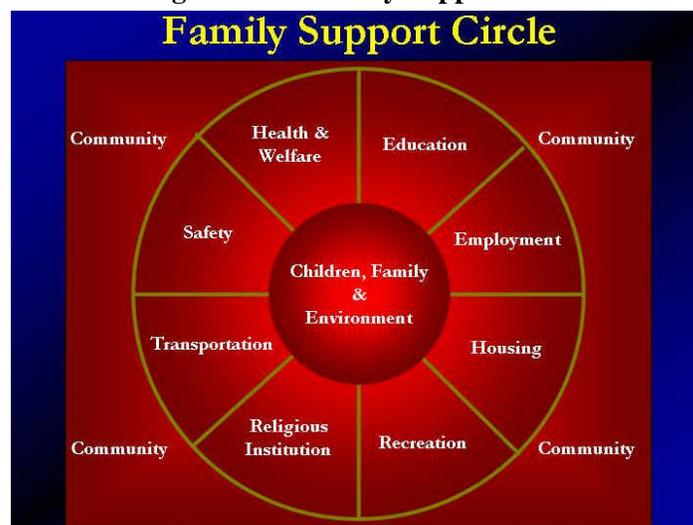
The Surgeon General went on to emphasize the importance of parks which are often the heart of the community; that recreation centers and parks help improve the quality of people’s lives; that physical activity can actually reduce feelings of depression, anxiety and stress; that physical activity is a key element in helping us maintain a healthy weight and improve cardiovascular functioning; and, that we are all in the business of disease prevention and health promotion.

ELEMENTS REQUIRED TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

On November 20, 2003, Charles Jordan, Chairman of the Conservation Fund and former Park Department Director from Portland, Oregon was the featured presenter at a community meeting. Mr. Jordan spoke of the importance of partnerships among all providers as they strive to collectively provide citizens, particularly young people, with the tools they need to succeed. Mr. Jordan spoke of the importance of:

- recreation programs which provide the basis for lifelong learning skills;
- caring mentors to show love and educate those in need; and,
- good programs which provide opportunities to improve self-esteem.

Figure 8.1: – Family Support Circle



This Family Support Circle Graphic captures the needs and identifies the various Parish partnerships which must be in place to accomplish the goals of which Mr. Jordan spoke.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARK SYSTEMS

Dr. John Crompton, Distinguished Professor at Texas A & M University, was the keynote speaker at the Kickoff Meeting on October 1, 2003. Dr. Crompton spoke of ways that a strong park system can boost the local economy:

- By raising property values – attractive parks which are nicely maintained can increase adjacent property values by as much as 20%;
- By attracting tourists – tourists are looking for opportunities to visit attractions which include sports venues, historic sites, cultural activities and special attractions such as the Baton Rouge Zoo and observatory.
- By attracting businesses – recently, the Boeing Aircraft Corporation selected Chicago over Dallas



because it decided the northern city had a better quality of life as a result of its recreation and park system.

- By attracting retirees – affluent retirees move to a city because of climate and recreational activities. Mobile, active retirees usually bring private pensions to spend. The Parish of East Baton Rouge certainly has the climate and is working to improve its facilities.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF A PARK SYSTEM

Community Opinion Surveys done for BREC in 1990 and 2003 indicate the public has a strong desire to conserve and protect natural areas in the Parish. Research has indicated that the chance to enjoy natural areas on a day-to-day basis is valued highly by the public nationally, and locally, contributes to a higher quality of life. Park systems typically include natural systems that provide many benefits to the public including flood protection, air and water quality improvements, protection of wildlife habitats, and mitigation of noise pollution.

THE SEVEN MEASURES OF AN EXCELLENT PARK SYSTEM

To provide BREC with a better understanding, or framework, with which to compare its existing conditions, the consultant team has included recently completed research by the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) – work that was completed under the direction of Peter Harnik. TPL’s research was completed to answer one question from community leaders throughout the United States: *How do I achieve the best possible park system?* The answer to that question is contained in a TPL Report which identifies seven (7) key factors which are achieved by those agencies who are effective at “getting it right”. BREC has been nationally recognized over the years for “getting it right” for much of what it does, however, it also understands that success is a tricky proposition and a strong effort must continue as new challenges are facing it each and every day. The seven (7) factors of excellence as identified by TPL are:

1. *A clear expression of purpose* – park systems do not just happen. Wild areas do not automatically protect themselves from development, outmoded waterfronts don’t spontaneously sprout flowers and promenades, and flat ground doesn’t morph into ball fields. Even trees and flora don’t instinctively grow – at least not always in a pleasing, usable fashion. The citizenry must set forth in writing the purpose of the park system and a mandate for the park department. The department must then use that mandate as a springboard for its mission statement and the definition of its core services.
2. *An ongoing planning and community involvement process* – to be successful, a park system needs a master plan. A plan is more than an “intention” to do good things. It is a document built upon a process, and expressing a final outcome. The department’s master plan should be substantiated thoroughly, reviewed regularly, and updated every five years. The agency should have a robust, formalized community involvement mechanism.
3. *Sufficient assets in land, staffing and equipment to meet the system’s goals* – an agency’s park system should have the capability to grow sufficiently to meet the goals outlined in its master plan; the agency needs sufficient public revenue for land management and programs;



expenditures must be tracked accurately and reported to the public usefully and understandably.

4. *Equitable access* – parks, squares, plazas, ball fields and community centers should be sited in such a way that every neighborhood and every resident is equitably served.
5. *User satisfaction* – by definition, the excellent park system is well used. High usership is the ultimate validation that it is attractive and that it meets citizen’s needs. High attendance also increases safety because of more eyes on the park. Agencies should attempt to understand their park uses and users by time of day, by park, by activity and by demographics. In addition to direct observations and staff surveys, the use of statistically valid citizen surveys is very effective to better understand users and the only practical way to understand non-users.
6. *Safety from crime and physical hazards* – to be successful, a park system should be safe, free of crime and unreasonable physical hazards. Crime, of course is dependent on a large number of factors that are beyond the reach of the agency—poverty, drug and alcohol use, population demographics, lack of stabilizing neighborhood institutions. But there are other factors – park location, park design, presence of uniformed personnel, presence of park amenities, availability of youth programming – over which the agency has some control. Ultimately, the greatest deterrent is the presence of large numbers of users.
7. *Benefits for the Parish beyond the boundaries of the parks* – the value of a park system extends beyond the boundaries of the parks themselves. In fact, the excellent park system is a form of natural infrastructure that provides many goods for the community as a whole: cleaner air, as trees and vegetation filter out pollutants by day and produce oxygen by night; cleaner water, as roots trap silt and contaminants before they flow into streams, rivers and lakes; reduced health costs from sedentary syndromes such as obesity and diabetes, thanks to walking and running trails, sports fields, recreation centers, bikeways, golf courses and other opportunities for physical fitness; improved learning opportunities from outdoor classrooms in forests and wetlands; increased urban tourism based on attractive, successful parks, with resulting increased commerce and sales tax revenue; increased business vitality based on employer and employee attraction to quality parks; and, natural beauty and respite from traffic and noise. The sophisticated agency regularly collects financial data in order to know which of its parks are positively impacting the surrounding neighborhood.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL AGENCIES

Best Practices of successful agencies were identified by the Arthur Andersen Company. Companies and organizations around the world were analyzed for common denominators in their management practices which allowed them to succeed. Their findings concluded that a successful organization must have a clear vision, constantly search for a better way, develop a serious relationship with its stakeholders, identify and understand the organization’s processes, measure often and walk the talk. Listed below are those findings with comments:

Clear vision

- strategic planning is worthless – unless there is first a strategic vision



Constantly searching for a better way

- Benchmark against the “Best of Class”
- Ask customers what they think
- Staff input is important for their ideas and their support of decisions

Serious relationship with stakeholders

- What are our customer’s needs and expectations?
- How well are we meeting those needs and expectations?
- How well are our competitor’s meeting them?
- How can we delight our customers?
- Do we know what our customers value?

Strong process view of their agency

- All work is part of a process – identify them and work to constantly improve them

Measure often

- Develop a list of “hard” performance measures in four categories: staff, process, financial and customer satisfaction

Walk the talk

- We hold ourselves accountable for doing what we say we are going to do.



PROCESS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FINDINGS REPORT

The planning process was citizen driven! Public meetings, individual interviews, small focus groups, e-mail and direct phone calls provided citizens with many opportunities to learn more about the services provided by BREC and to express their views. As a result of comments made at over 100 public meetings, the consultant team’s observations from its work in the field, and notes taken from citizens and staff throughout the planning process, a number of key issues, or *FINDINGS*, have been identified for further evaluation. To be added in January will be findings from a statistically valid citizen survey and an Economic Impact Study.

Figure 8.2: – Stakeholder Management



This chapter is dedicated to the listing, and categorization, of the *Findings*. A subsequent chapter in the final report will identify the findings which should be further evaluated and prioritized for action by BREC during the life of this Plan. That chapter will be titled “Recommendations”.

As depicted in the graphic, key issues (findings) were gathered from a variety of citizen involvement sources. In addition to the Team’s effort in the field, the graphic portrays that staff, user groups, non users (citizens-at-large), elected officials and appointed members of the Recreation and Park Commission were involved.

FINDINGS BY CATEGORY

Demographic Findings

Demographic Findings were taken from the 2000 Report of the U.S. Census Bureau. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau was analyzed by a Community Planner for Bucher, Willis & Ratliff Corporation (BWR) and applied by the Parks and Recreation Team of BWR who completed the strategic planning report.

- The Parish population is 412,852.
- The City of Baton Rouge’s population is 227,818, or 55% of the total population of the Parish.
- The City of Baker’s population is 13,233, or 3% of the total population of the Parish.
- The City of Zachary’s population is 9,036, or 2% of the total population of the Parish.
- The Parish is the third most populated Parish in the State of Louisiana.
- The Parish added 38,000 people during the 90’s, second only in the State to St. Tammany Parish which added 46,760 people. This was an increase of 8.6%.
- The census tracts in the southern part of the Parish are most heavily populated.



- The female population is 52.1% in the Parish as compared with 47.9% male. This is typical due to the longer life expectancy among women as compared to men.
- The African American population increased from 1990 to 2000 from 34.8% to 40.5% while the white population decreased from 63.3% to 56.9%.
- The African American population is located primarily in the city while the white population tends to live in the suburbs.
- The median age in the State is 34; the median age in the nation is 35.3; the median age in the city is 30.4; and, the median age in the Parish is 31.5.
- By age group, there is a high percentage in the 20-24 year old category. There is also a higher percentage of elderly females and a larger young and young-adult population and a smaller percentage of baby boomers and empty nesters. This indicates a preference for leaving the Parish when people enter their higher wage earning years of ages 35-54.
- The central area of the Parish has a high percentage of elderly.
- There is a higher percentage of pre-schoolers in the southern part of the Parish and a higher percentage of school-age children towards the northern part of the Parish.
- The population projection is to grow by 48,000 to 64,000 by 2020.
- The median household income is \$37,224 and is \$7,000 more than the statewide average.
- Household size in 2000 was 2.47 which is down from 2.6 in 1990.
- Louisiana's poverty rate is 19.6% or 49th in the nation. EBRP is 17.9%.
- More than 26% of Louisiana children live in poverty – the second highest rate in the nation and the highest in the south.
- The high school dropout rate in the Parish is 8.8% which is 1% higher than the State average of 7.8%.

Findings from Public Meetings

Public meetings were held throughout the Parish between October and December 2003. Three types of forums were provided: neighborhood meetings for the immediate vicinity of a facility; area meetings for an area covering multiple facilities in the same region; and, city-wide meetings for all residents to discuss any item of interest. From those twenty three meetings, we learned the following:

- *Increase the emphasis on quality of facilities* – Citizens appreciated the wide range of facilities but want to increase the quality at all above the need for quantity.
- *Marketing & Communications* – a key issue found throughout was the lack of internal and external communications. Citizens do not seem to be aware of the services provided by BREC.
- *Improved Interconnection of Locations* – Interest was expressed for real time information about all activities, their locations and frequently asked questions (FAQ).
- *Maintenance* – Comments were made concerning the discrepancies in the standard of buildings and upkeep. It was felt that a lot of the older buildings looked bad and this was blamed on lack of maintenance.
- *Staff* – Most comments were very positive, however, some did express an interest in a stronger staff presence.
- *Community Church Connections* – It was suggested that a relationship between each local facility and their local area churches would provide a good platform for the advertisement of facility

events and services through the clergy to each congregation.

- *Scope of Recreation Programs* – Citizens expressed an interest in a greater diversity of programs and tutoring classes. This included computer, hobbies and sports.
- *Programs for Seniors* – Some felt a need for more programming for seniors.
- *Air Conditioning* – For those citizens who exercise in BREC facilities, there is interest in adding air conditioning.
- *Outside Lighting* – For facilities which have reasons for users to stay after dark, it is felt that lighting of parking lots and front entrances is vital to a sense of safety.
- *Safety & Security* – Some citizens expressed concern for safety in the parks in the evenings. Suggestions included lighting and park police.
- *Parking Lots* – Parks with gravel parking lots were mentioned as an annoyance, especially for the dust problems.
- *Gymnasium/Court Floors* – Requests were made for soft floors to mitigate against knee problems.
- *Water Fountains* – Citizens expressed an interest in accessible drinking fountains.
- *Swimming Pools* – Perhaps the most requested new facility was the addition of swimming pools with equitable access to all citizens.
- *Trails and Nature Walks* – Requests were received for walking/biking/nature trails.
- *Dog Parks* – Interest was expressed for dedicated dog parks with fenced areas.
- *Indoor Walking Tracks* – The indoor track at North Sherwood Park was identified as a track that citizens enjoy – they would like to have more like it around the Parish.
- *Hobby Facilities & Programs* – Interest was expressed for facilities to accommodate those involved with remote control planes, boats and model trains.
- *Super Complexes* – Citizens expressed interest in the expansion of existing facilities such as Independence Park. Ideas were also shared for quality neighborhood parks with adjacent super complexes.
- *Skateboard Park* – Citizens expressed an interest in skateboard park facilities

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND COMMUNITY LEADER MEETINGS



Several focus groups and community leader meetings were held. Participants included the Mayors from Baton Rouge, Baker and Zachary and elected officials, members of the Recreation and Parks Commission, BREC staff, Sports Foundation, Chancellors of LSU and Southern University, Friends of City Park, Tennis Association, YMCA, YWCA, Arts Council, city officials from Baker and Zachary, United Way Agencies, BREC Foundation, Urban Forest Group, Convention and Visitors Bureau, BRAMBA (mountain bikers), skateboarders, Friends of Magnolia

Mound, Baton Rouge Garden Center, Foundation for Historical Louisiana, equestrians, Friends of the



Zoo, Astronomical Club and the Bluebonnet Swamp Foundation and groups that provide after school programming. Much of what was heard in the public meetings was reiterated in the focus group meetings. From these groups, we learned the following:

User Groups and Community Leader Comments

Change – the timing of the strategic plan with the change of leadership at BREC is considered to be a positive opportunity. Citizens are appreciative of the accomplishments over the last 50 years and are eager for a new vision which respects the past but moves BREC to a new level of quality facilities, exciting programs and strong partnerships.

Quality of Life Improvements – many felt that BREC has much to offer in improving the quality of life in the Parish which has a multitude of benefits for all citizens.

Economic Impact, especially through sports – many leaders have expressed a desire for destination facilities which would attract visitors to the Parish for the purpose of providing quality events and positively affecting the local economy.

Protection of Natural Resources – most feel that BREC should continue to protect and acquire natural resources for the Parish.

Points of Excellence – nearly 100% of those who have been interviewed have asked for improvements to the quality of facilities and less quantity, if needed to accomplish better quality. Some feel that BREC needs to provide more “points of excellence” in the park system.

Points of Excellence – nearly 100% of those who have been interviewed have asked for improvements to the quality of facilities and less quantity, if needed to accomplish better quality.

Partnerships – several agencies and groups are anxious to partner with BREC. Many have a need for space and can provide BREC with new programming opportunities while BREC has excess building capacity which it can provide as its contribution to the partnership.

Trails – many have expressed an interest in trails along the river, linkages between major parks and points of interest, and, as loops in some parks.

Equestrian Facilities – citizens expressed interest in improving facilities and adding trails.

Build schools and parks adjacent to one another – it is important to consider joint development of schools and parks to leverage resources and to provide good close to home services.

Keep recreation facilities open at night – some have expressed a need for facilities to expand their hours of operation.

Cultural activities, not just sports – some feel that the provision of sports is okay but would like to see more cultural activities offered.



Safety and security - citizens are desirous of parks and facilities which are free of crime and hazards.

Retain open space/undeveloped parks – many of the parks are developed but some citizens are desirous of retaining as much non programmed open space as possible.

Would like to see a business-like approach – some citizens recognize the balance between BREC’s need to provide affordable programs but also the corresponding need to establish a pricing system for other programs so the level of quality can be increased.

Programs that develop discipline and life-long learning skills – some have recognized the needs of at-risk youth and the role BREC can play through its programs by developing discipline and life-long learning skills.

Free or Low Cost Services – many citizens recognize that cost of services will greatly impact the ability of many that are not able to afford significant fees. While some believed free programs should be offered, others thought no programs should be free and that some cost – even sweat equity, should be charged.

Staff Comments

Change – a change of leadership after 42 years presents opportunities.

Mission statement – the current Mission Statement has not been modified for a number of years. As conditions have changed, and with new leadership, this is an opportune time to re-visit the Mission Statement and alter it, as needed. Specific mention was made to analyze the need for improved quality and less quantity.

Politics of the tax election – two referendums fund the operations of BREC, each for about half of the 9 mills that are assessed for operations. The politics of having to constantly go for renewal of operating taxes results in decisions made with emphasis on political reasons as opposed to decisions made for sound park planning reasons.

Safety and Security – comments were made relative to the need for citizens to feel safe and secure from crime and hazards in the parks and facilities. Concerns were expressed in getting from home to the parks in some areas.

Partnerships – some existing partnerships are falling short of desired results and guidelines for forming and conducting partnerships are needed.

Citizen needs and wants – never enough funding to provide everything that citizens are desirous of.

Autonomy versus inclusiveness – BREC is an autonomous agency as authorized by the State Legislature. This is a model that works well in the United States as exemplified in the State of Illinois which is highly acclaimed for its park districts and their accomplishments. The balance in this equation is for BREC to work cooperatively with others in the Parish to leverage resources for the purpose of accomplishing



shared goals.

Branding – there is a particular need for improved signage in the park system.

Bonding versus pay as you go – there is a need to analyze the pros and cons of bonding for immediate improvements versus the current approach of paying as you go.

Aging facilities – much of the BREC infrastructure and facilities are at the end of their useful life and will require renovation, replacement or removal in the coming years.

Residents versus non-residents – there is a need to analyze fees paid by residents versus non-residents. Perhaps non-residents should pay more for some, or all, services but that is to be determined.

Blanket application of standards – there is consensus that all parks and facilities be developed according to standards.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT, COMMUNITY RESOURCE DEPARTMENT AND OTHER PROVIDER FINDINGS

Recreation Department and Community Resource Department Findings were determined by interviews with Department Directors, group and some individual meetings with staff, direct observation of several recreation facilities, and interviews with outside agencies who provide programs in the Parish. Findings are as follows:

Recreation Department Findings

- Core programs have not been identified; thus there has not been a clear focus on what programs BREC can do best.
- Facilities, staff and program areas appear to compete with each other for the same market share. Therefore there is a lot of duplication in services. This also creates a territorial feeling in staff.
- There are little or no joint programming efforts in the recreation division. This creates inconsistencies in programming from site to site and also does not utilize resources in the most efficient manner.
- Marketing appears to be an issue with programs and special facilities. The program guide is not used as adequately as it could be to showcase programs. More needs to be done to increase awareness and recognition of programs and facilities.
- There are no program or service standards in place for recreation programs to ensure quality or consistency. This is creating many inconsistencies in program delivery and customer service.
- Customer service and program evaluations are done sporadically. There is no way to track customer satisfaction with programs or services without measures. Life cycles of programs are not tracked.



- The hours of operation at facilities limit programming capabilities. There also appears to be a great deal of excess capacity in facilities where facilities sit empty.
- Partnerships for programs and services are limited at this time.
- There is no clear vision for the recreation division as a whole. Therefore, staff in each area is operating on individual goals, objectives and its own vision.

Community Resource Department Findings

- The Community Resources Department partners with a number of outside agencies to produce programs.
- There is duplication of effort between two BREC Departments – the Community Resources Department and the Recreation Department.
- New program ideas are done in concert with staff and other providers to determine if they are the best use of resources.
- The food bank program should be produced by an outside agency.
- Program results are not quantified to determine if behavior is improved after a participant's involvement in a program provided by the Department.

Other Provider Findings

- BREC does not appear to control the market in any program area with the exception of Special Events. The YMCA, Churches and Catholic Youth Organization appear to have a large percentage of the youth sports market. While BREC is doing a pretty good job at providing fitness programs, the private fitness centers control the largest part of the market. Other major providers of leisure services in the Parish are the YMCA, Catholic Youth Organization, churches and private providers (day care centers and fitness centers). BREC is a major provider of leisure services, however, not the sole provider of any service.

Social Impact Findings

- BREC is offering some programs that would be considered social impact programs in the youth-at-risk area. There is no quantitative information available from existing records to show the actual impact of these programs. There is a need to focus on youth-at-risk programs due to the demographic factors in the Parish.

PARK SYSTEM FINDINGS

Park system findings include comments and observations made at all parks and special use facilities. There are 184 parks in the system including several special use facilities. The special use facilities include a BMX Track, velodrome, skatepark, in-line skating park, theater and cultural arts center, art gallery, horse activity center, astronomical observatory, nature center and conservation areas, zoo, historic cemetery and plantation, arboretum, botanic garden, conservation area,



six tennis centers and seven golf courses (golf courses are being analyzed by another firm in a separate contract). Findings for the Park System and special use facilities were identified through the efforts of a landscape architecture team which completed an inventory and analysis of the parks; from BREC records and staff; from citizen comments in focus groups and public meetings; and, from the senior management team from BWR as it toured several of the parks and special facilities. Findings are as follows:

- Other communities seek voter approval for funding of capital improvement projects but not for operating budgets.
- Off 155 audited parks, 8 received a rating of excellent; 32 received a rating of good; 95 received a rating of fair; and, 20 received a rating of poor.
- The most common issue seen during the audit was the increasing age of inventory and a lack of uniformity of maintenance operations. The inventory forms used for each park audit also recommend immediate action for hazardous conditions and removal of graffiti. By prioritizing these issues, BREC will be able to develop budgets and schedules to deal with the needs of each park in an orderly fashion.
- The second most encountered issue observed during the audit was the lack of ADA required access to parks and their facilities.
- From a programming perspective there is much provided in the parks but the majority of it is at the end of its life cycle and needs to be replaced.
- Due to the age/condition of many of the recreational elements in the parks there are several conditions that could be considered a liability:
 - Accessibility issues concerning play areas (walks to play areas, accessible surfacing, accessible play equipment)
 - Code issues concerning play equipment (positioning of equipment, adequate play surfacing, adequate guard rails on high equipment)



- Baseball fields (surface conditions are inconsistent and may lead to injuries, majority of bleachers do not have guardrails or fencing on the sides or backs and there need to be riser boards installed between the seats and the treads to keep people from falling)
 - There are a few parks that have a substantial amount of broken glass on the premises.
- There are 5,699 total acres (developed and undeveloped) of parks in the park system.
- There are 3,500 developed acres in the park system.
- Per acre maintenance budget is \$1,700.
- Developed park acres per 1,000 citizens is 8.5.
- Total acres provided per 1,000 citizens is 13.8.
- There are no downtown parks.
- Special Use Facilities are a high point of the BREC system and should be considered for upgrades.
- The quantity of close to home parks must be evaluated to determine which should be upgraded for quality neighborhood parks, which should be designated as playgrounds, which should be designated as unimproved green space, and, which, if any, should be eliminated from the park system inventory.
- The park system has 143 playgrounds. The quantity needs to be evaluated to determine which, if any, need to be eliminated from the park system inventory.
- There is a citizen expectation for improved quality in the park system.
- There is a citizen perception that BREC has too much quantity of parks and facilities though BREC is below national standards in some categories such as land.
- The average per resident expenditure for parks and recreation is \$77.48.
- The average per resident operating tax expenditure for parks and recreation is \$45.47.
- Population density in the Parish is .70 citizens per acre, this is a low density statistic.
- Emphasis has been placed on neighborhood, close to home, parks.
- Riverfront Development and center city development is occurring and BREC is participating in the process.





Table 8.1: – Facility Standards

Facility	Recommended Facilities per Population	Existing Facilities at BREC	Recommended Facilities
Soccer fields	1 per 10,000	26	8 fields at Zachary 8 fields at Central
Baseball fields – youth	1 per 7,000	50	
Softball fields – youth	1 per 5,000	33	
Baseball fields – adult	1 per 25,000	1	
Softball fields – adult	1 per 8,000	19	
Football fields	1 per 50,000	2 stadiums	1
Lighted baseball fields	n/a	35	
Unlighted baseball fields	n/a	5	
Lighted softball fields	n/a	50	
Unlighted softball fields	n/a	38	
Tennis courts	1 per 4,000	170	
Outdoor basketball	1 per 4,000		
Outdoor volleyball	1 per 30,000		
Golf courses	Market driven	7	None recommended
Recreation Centers	1 sq. ft. per person	61	3 contemporary centers
Swimming Pools	Market driven	8 older pools	4 contemporary aquatic facilities

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FINDINGS

The consultant interviewed a number of current and potential new partners. In each instance, interest was expressed to discuss a stronger, or new, partnership with BREC. For example, the school district would like to develop schools in partnership with BREC as it provides park land adjacent to the school; United Way Agencies have a need for programming space while it appears that BREC has excess capacity at several of its recreation centers; the Convention and Visitors Bureau is interested in an investment in sports venues to impact the local economy while BREC would manage those venues; the Universities are interested in improvements to the Parish that improve the quality of life as they work to attract students and professors. Several of the groups interviewed are as follows:

- Schools
- United Way Agencies
- Churches
- Universities
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- User Groups



FACILITY FINDINGS

The consultant team completed an inventory and analyzed 63 recreation centers for their physical and functional ability to meet community and programming needs.

Facilities were audited by a team of architects which rated the physical condition of floors, doors, ceilings, HVAC, exterior surfaces, roofs, foundations, interior and exterior lighting, drainage, usability, maintainability and access/circulation.

From a functional perspective, selected facilities were evaluated to determine if interior and exterior conditions were adequate to provide a variety of community and programming needs, if the environment was comfortable and user-friendly and, if physical conditions were limiting to programming requirements.

Key findings from the physical facility audit are as follows:

- Parking is inadequate (mostly unpaved areas) ADA access needs to be addressed.
- Gymnasiums are provided with heating only, cooling needs to be provided to accommodate more indoor summer activities.
- Lighting levels need to be investigated for proper illumination.
- Moisture within the buildings is a problem during the summer months, the gym floors are slick and unsafe (proper air conditioning of the interior will resolve this problem).
- The existing structures are structurally sound, however, major renovation work should be considered to address ADA, and updates for special program requirements/activities.
- Exterior facades of the buildings are in need of repair/cleaning.

Key findings from the functional facility audit are as follows:

- The size of existing facilities limits the type and number of activities that can occur within them.
- Facilities are not air conditioned, thus there are limits to the types of activities that can safely occur within them and the number of citizens who would want to sue them when the temperatures warrant air conditioning.
- Most existing facilities include a meeting room and a gymnasium which provide good access to neighborhoods who are in need of those amenities.
- Exterior finishes and areas immediately surrounding the facilities do not have good “curb appeal”, thus citizens have asked for something better. This is consistent with the overall reaction to BREC facilities as expressed by citizens during the planning process that they want less quantity and more quality.



Table 8.2: – Seven Measures of an Excellent Park System Findings

Excellence Factor	BREC’s Status
Expression of purpose	Mission Statement is under review
Ongoing planning effort	Planning effort is underway
Sufficient assets	A need for new capital funds
Equitable access	To be determined by further analysis
User satisfaction	A need for ongoing customer feedback
Safety from crime and hazards	There are some issues with crime
Additional benefits beyond park boundaries	An effort to measure economic impact is underway

Table 8.3: –

Excellence Criteria	National Average	BREC
Park land acres per 1,000 residents	16.2	13.8
Percent of land area devoted to parks for low density cities	5.7% (this number is for cities as no number is available for counties/Parishes)	1.9%
Park spending per resident	\$80	\$77.48
Number of full-time employees per 1,000 residents	1.0	1.0
Percent of citizens using BREC recreation programs	30%	24%
Percent of citizens using BREC parks	70%	64%
Percent of citizens rating park conditions as excellent or good	27% rate park conditions as excellent 52% rate park conditions as good	18% 56%
Percent of citizens rating recreation program quality as excellent or good	30% rate program quality as excellent 55% rate program quality as good	30% 57%

GOVERNANCE FINDINGS

- Mission Statement* – The importance of a Mission Statement has been addressed by many scholars, authors, business leaders and executives in the public and private sectors. John Naisbitt suggested in his book *Megatrends* that Strategic Planning is worthless unless there is first a strategic vision. He further suggests that in a constantly changing world, strategic planning is not enough; it becomes planning for its own sake. Strategic planning must be completely geared to a strategic vision and know exactly where it is going, with clarity that remains in spite of the confusion natural to the first stages of change. BREC’s existing Mission Statement has not been reviewed for quite some time. A new Mission Statement must be developed from the “ground up” to ensure Commissioner, employee and citizen buy-in.
- Organizational Design* – The existing organizational structure is not suited for the Strategic Master Plan’s implementation. Recommendations will be considered for a new structure which: a) decreases the number of staff reporting to the Superintendent; b) which reduces the number of recreation areas from six to something less; and, c) which consolidates the Recreation Department and the Community Resources Department.



- *Marketing* – Citizens expressed a desire for improvements to the current marketing program. They want to be better informed about registration options, they want more detail about programs and services, and, they want easier access to senior officials at those times when they have questions. BREC has already made a strong commitment to the improvement of its marketing program by hiring qualified staff and significantly increasing the size of its budget. Transition and Communication Plans must include from a governance perspective, the urgency of full staff support for the marketing division is critical.
- *Communications Plan* – As change occurs within the agency, there will be a need for a Communications Plan to ensure that each employee and the citizens are well informed about the actions being taken and their impact on the agency and the Parish-at-large.
- *Public Relations Plan* – As the Strategic Plan is implemented, clear communication of ideas and directions will be critical for citizen involvement and support.
- *Cost Recovery Plan* – There is no existing Cost Recovery Plan, however, there has been a historical expectation of 25% cost recovery of General Fund Revenues. In 2004, user fees are anticipated to generate \$6,716,000 of total revenues of \$26,977.00. From a national perspective, total agency budgets total \$18B while cost recovery is \$6B, or 33%. From a national perspective for individual recreation division budgets, cost recovery expectations are in the range of 50% to 65%.

FINANCIAL FINDINGS

- Long term projections of General Fund revenues and expenditures indicate that the operating surplus continues to shrink consistently from year to year. From 2000 to 2002 the surplus decreased approximately 50%; from \$2,478,000 in 2000 to \$1,297,000 in 2002. In 2003 it is anticipated that the surplus will shrink further to only \$900,000.
- Deficit spending may be projected as early as 2005 if revenues and expenditures continue to grow at their current rate.
- User fees and charges represent approximately 25% of total General Fund revenues. In 2004, user fees are anticipated to generate \$6,716,000 of total revenues of a total budget of \$26,977,000.
- BREC has always favored “pay-as-you-go” plans for Capital Improvements due to the high cost of financing a small bond issue; especially considering high interest rates that prevailed from the 1960’s through the 1990’s. Today’s low interest rates, combined with a favorable bond rating, may provide a suitable means of accelerating the schedule for some park improvement projects.
- Operating and capital funding is approved by citizens through a Tax Plan. It is common to seek voter approval for capital funds but not operating funds



- Funding is not adequate to maintain the system at a level which meets, or exceeds, citizen expectations
- The current philosophy to recover a relatively small portion of BREC’s costs for providing its services has been based on an unwritten agreement with citizens that their support of the 10-year Tax Plan will result in lower fees. The consultant is of the opinion that a greater percentage of costs must be recovered to adequately address the needs and impacts in today’s economy, to appropriately charge those who can afford to pay and to scholarship those who cannot afford to pay

CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE FINDINGS

- BREC has worked to provide opportunities for citizens to voice their opinion about natural resource, cultural and historical resources through a Needs Assessment Survey and participation in the Horizon Plan;
- Citizens are supportive of conserving natural resources.
- Development of land is negatively impacting vegetative and animal habitats.
- The Parish has many outstanding natural features which are scenic and reservoirs for natural wildlife.
- Areas of archaeological significance are endangered by lack of conservation.
- The Parish has three vegetation communities whereas, most Parishes in the State only have one or two.
- Habitat loss is the most significant cause of loss of species diversity.
- There are approximately 130 documented archaeological and cultural sites in the Parish, some of which are on BREC property.

BREC Youth Survey

A nonscientific survey was conducted in December 2003 through many areas schools with school children from elementary to high school. The main findings are:

New facilities desired

1. Aquatic Facilities
2. Skate Park
3. Climbing Walls
4. Canoeing
5. Hiking



Top activities youth would like to participate in

1. Basketball
2. Football
3. Dance
4. Swimming
5. Art
6. Baseball
7. Volleyball
8. Soccer

Top family activities youth would like to participate in at parks

1. Picnic
2. Family gatherings
3. Sports Activities
4. Games

The top five existing BREC programs for Youth

1. Basketball
2. Football
3. Baseball
4. Softball
5. Tennis