

What is HOUSE BILL 649?



House Bill 649, introduced during the 2025 Louisiana Regular Legislative Session, would separate the City of Central from BREC's nationally accredited, parish-wide park system and establish a **separate state-created recreation and park district**, duplicating BREC's current responsibilities and run solely by the City of Central. If passed the bill would:

- **Remove all parks, conservation areas, and responsibilities within the City of Central from BREC's parish-wide park system**
- **Transfer annual tax revenue to a new, separate state recreation and park district controlled by the City of Central**
- **Eliminate parish oversight and remove these assets from a system funded and supported by all East Baton Rouge Parish taxpayers**

WHAT WOULD THIS MEAN FOR EBR PARISH + THE CITY OF CENTRAL?



Creates a New, Duplicative Government Entity HB 649 would establish a duplicative state government entity with no existing infrastructure, accreditation, nor proven success in managing parks and conservation areas.



Strips Central Residents of Parish-Wide Key Benefits Removal from the BREC system would **strip Central residents of key benefits, such as early registration and reduced rates** for parish-wide programs, camps, and events across the parish, currently subsidized by BREC's robust parish-wide framework. The strength of this system lies in its diverse offerings and amenities that cater to all ages and backgrounds, ensuring equitable access for everyone. Dismantling it would lead to fewer choices, diminished opportunities, and a decline in quality for all.



Possible Higher Costs for All Reduced parish-wide revenue for BREC will lead to **higher admission fees at shared BREC amenities** like Liberty Lagoon, BREC golf courses, and the Baton Rouge Zoo.



Potential Loss of CAPRA Accreditation Best Practices and National Standards Parks, conservation areas, playgrounds, and more would be removed from a nationally accredited, award-winning system and placed under city control, jeopardizing the professional standards and long-term sustainability that have defined their success. The bill turns those responsibilities over to a new entity with **no current recreation infrastructure, staff, or proven success**.



Risk to Major Parish-Wide Projects Major, parish-wide projects funded by shared tax dollars, including future phases of the Baton Rouge Zoo and Greenwood Community Park, the Bike/Ped Master Plan, and Frenchtown Conservation Area upgrades that are built on pooled parish-wide funding, **could be delayed or scaled back**.



Broader Implications Parks in the City of Central were developed using tax revenue collected from all residents of East Baton Rouge Parish. Transferring these assets out-of-parish oversight would remove them from the governance structure supported by those parish-wide contributions and could establish a precedent for similar efforts in other areas.

Future Phases of the Reimagined Zoo



Bike/Pedestrian Master Plan



Frenchtown Conservation Area



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BREC'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE CITY OF CENTRAL



Investment: Over the past 5 years, BREC has invested over \$20 Million within the City of Central's parks and conservation areas. Since 2021, BREC has completed significant capital projects in Central, including the new Jackson Community Park, a brand-new dog park at Lovett Road Park, a new Nature Center at Frenchtown Conservation Area, several improvements at Central Sports Complex, and more.



Activated Spaces: Following significant investments, parks in the City of Central have experienced a remarkable 49% surge in attendance from 2021 to 2024. This growth is notably fueled by a 25% increase at the Central Sports Complex, which attracts visitors from across the region. The addition of artificial turf by BREC at the complex has been particularly impactful, leading to a staggering 200% rise in tournament rentals.



Increased Community Engagement: In 2021, Senator Bodi White deferred a bill to remove the City of Central from the BREC system in exchange for BREC's creation of a community advisory council. BREC has implemented a Community Engagement Policy mandating community advisory councils for major parish-wide projects. The inaugural community advisory council played a pivotal role in shaping BREC's Imagine Your Parks 3 Plan, a nationally recognized, equity-focused roadmap for park enhancements across East Baton Rouge Parish. Voters approved this funding for this transformative initiative that is equity-centered plan for the next decade in November 2024, ensuring continued investment in accessible, resilient, and community-driven recreational spaces.



Kept Promises: In 2022, Senator White publicly recognized BREC's efforts and threw out the ceremonial first pitch to celebrate the completion of Central Sports Park, in which BREC invested almost \$3 Million to match approximately \$500,000 in capital outlay funds secured by Senator White.



Willing Collaborator: BREC has consistently expressed willingness to negotiate a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (CEA) with the City of Central that would provide both tax revenue and operational oversight of park systems to the city. In exchange, BREC seeks assurances that parks and conservation areas would adhere to professional management standards and best practices in alignment with Louisiana's constitutional requirements for CEAs, including demonstrable public benefit and equivalent value exchange.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED Email or call your legislator: house.louisiana.gov/H_Cmtes/Municipal

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The bills will go before the **House Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs** when the committee places each bill on its agenda for a scheduled meeting. The Baton Rouge Zoo Foundation will send text messages notifying subscribers when the bills are placed on a scheduled committee agenda.



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