

# 2024 Fort Bend County Parks and Trails Vision Plan

Commissioners Court Presentation

October 22, 2024



# AGENDA

- **Introductions**
- **Summary of Project Timeline**
- **Overview of Plan**



# THE HALFF TEAM



**JAMES HEMENES, PLA,  
ASLA, CPRE**

Director of Landscape  
Architecture



**NATHLIE VARLEY, AICP,  
CFM**

Senior Planner



**EMILY BARKER**

Planner



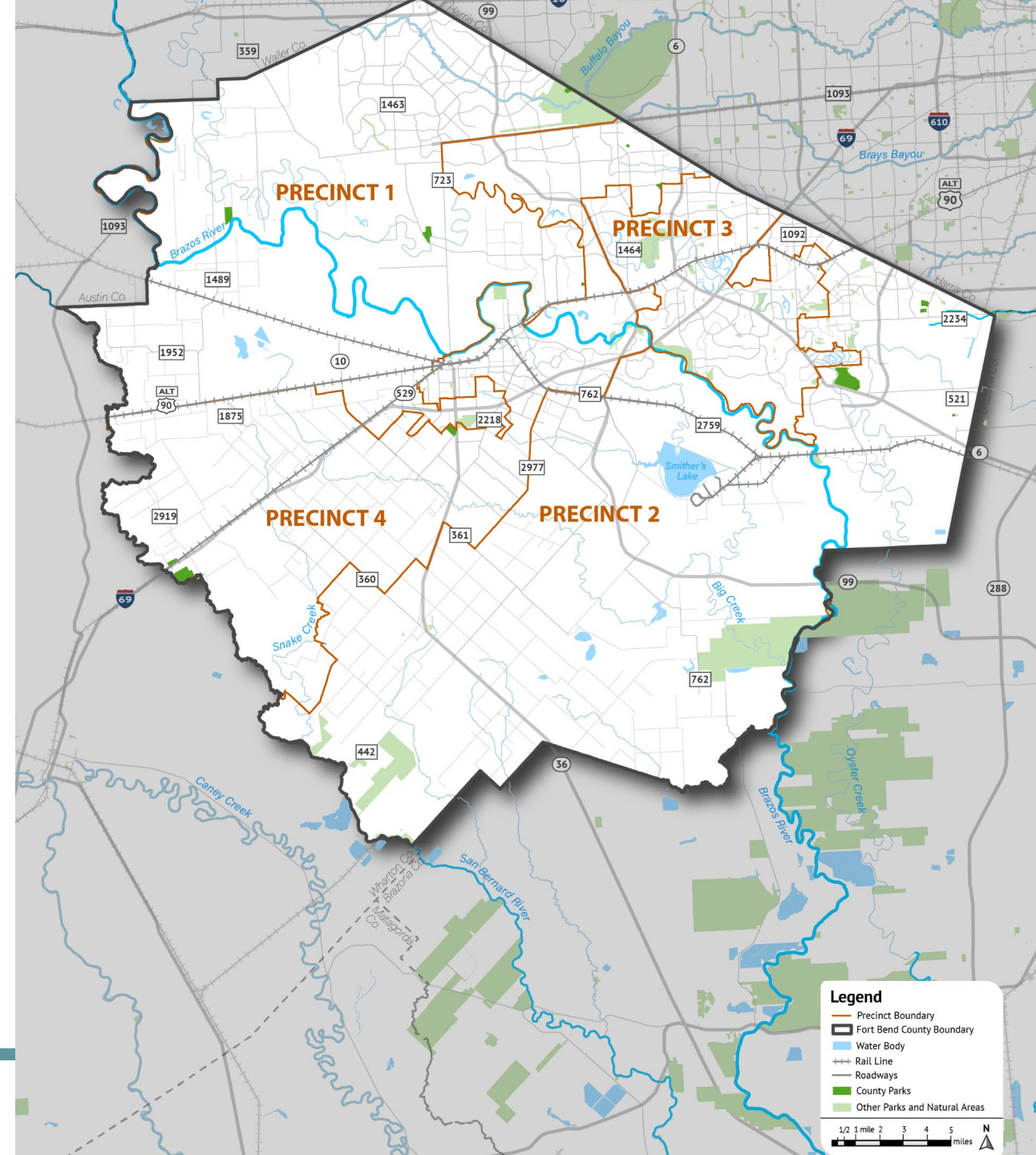
# SUMMARY - PROJECT OVERVIEW





# PARK SYSTEM

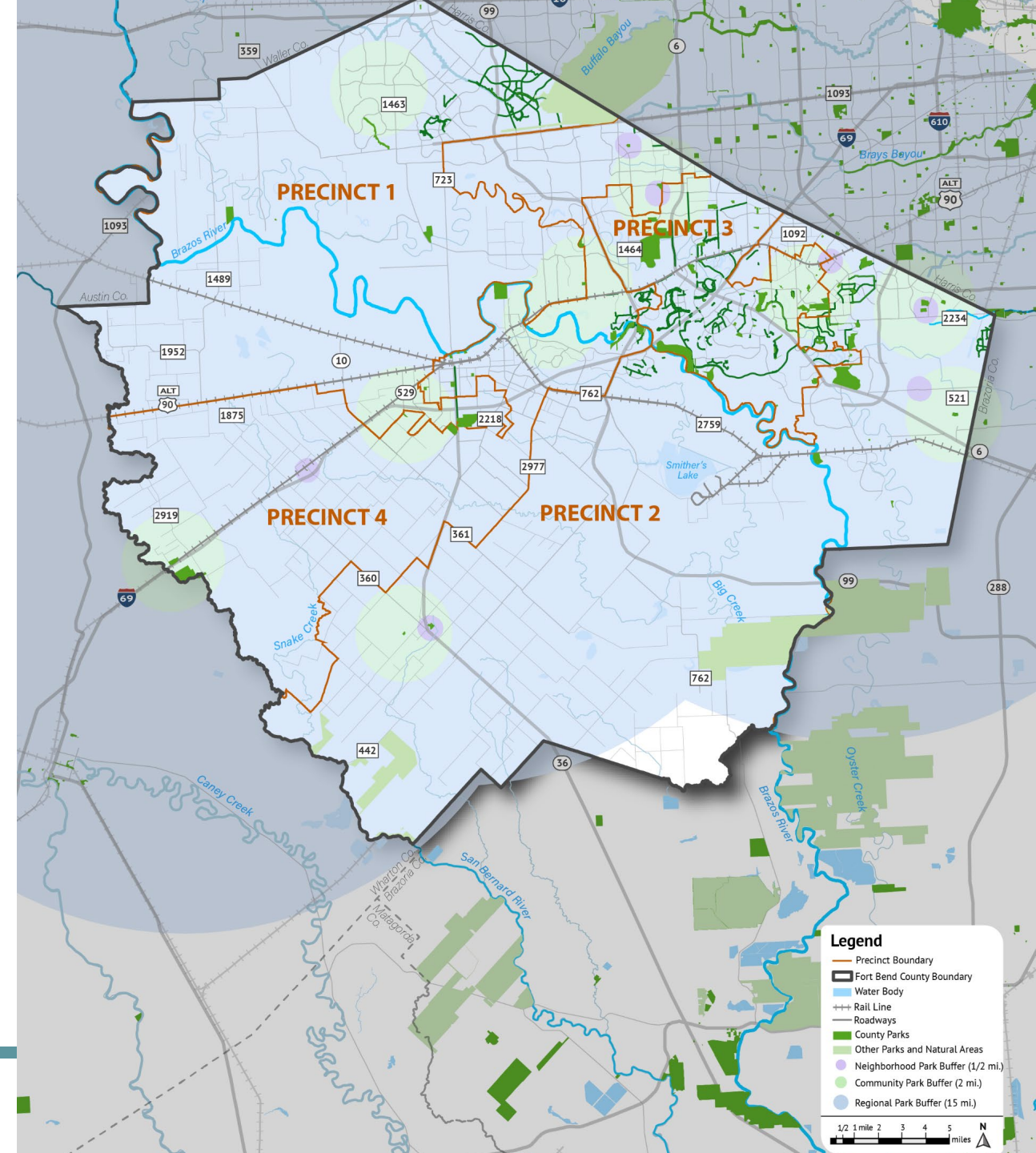
- Over 820,000 residents throughout Fort Bend County (expected to grow to 1M+ by 2030)
- Nearly 2,800 acres across 19 County-owned and maintained park facilities
- Amenities include playgrounds, splash pads, sport courts and fields, and gathering spaces





# ANALYSIS

- Three analyses completed:
  - Park acreage
  - Access to parkland
  - Facility assessment
- County, City, HOA/MUD Parks





# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## Stakeholder Meetings (4)

- July 2023
- City and County staff
- Environmental groups and non-profits
- HOAs, MUDs, user groups, and sports leagues
- Elected officials, regional agencies, and state entities

## Public Meetings (4)

- April 2024
- One held in each Commissioner Precinct



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## Key Public Desires

- Increased awareness of County-owned park facilities and amenities
- Opportunity for improved connectivity and accessibility of park system
- Improved signage and lighting is needed at all parks
- Opportunity to preserve native planting areas and natural vegetation
- Additional programming for youth and adults
- Trail connections throughout the County along drainage ditches, utility easements, and railroad rights-of-way
- Sports fields should be flexible to accommodate multiple user groups (baseball, football, soccer, cricket, etc.)
- Work with developers to incorporate trail connectivity and open space preservation in master planned communities

**YOUR PRIORITIES**

What parks and trails initiatives do you feel should be prioritized for future implementation? Select your top five (5) priorities by placing sticky dots below.

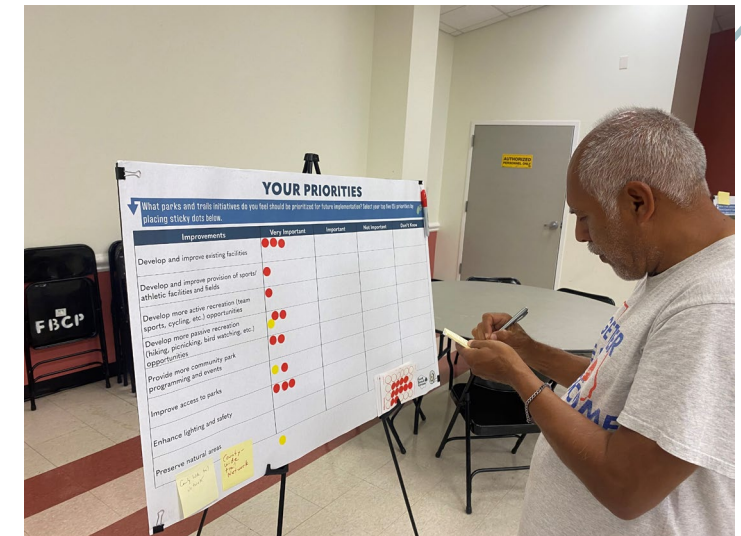
Improvements	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Don't Know
Develop and improve existing facilities	●●●●●●●●	●●	●	
Develop and improve provision of sports/athletic facilities and fields	●●●●●●●●			
Develop more active recreation (team sports, cycling, etc.) opportunities	●●●●●●●●			
Develop more passive recreation (hiking, picnicking, bird watching, etc.) opportunities	●●●●●●●●	●●		
Provide more community park programming and events	●●●●●●●●	●●	●	
Improve access to parks	●●●●●●●●			
Enhance lighting and safety	●●●●●●●●	●●	●●	
Preserve natural areas	●●●●●●●●			

County-wide Trail Network

Trail network - improve trail connectivity

Wildlife habitat

Fort Bend County Parks and Trails







# SURVEY FEEDBACK

Survey Open April to May 2024



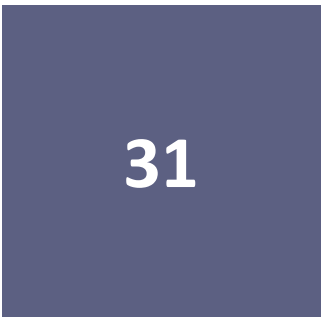
Avg. Age of Respondent



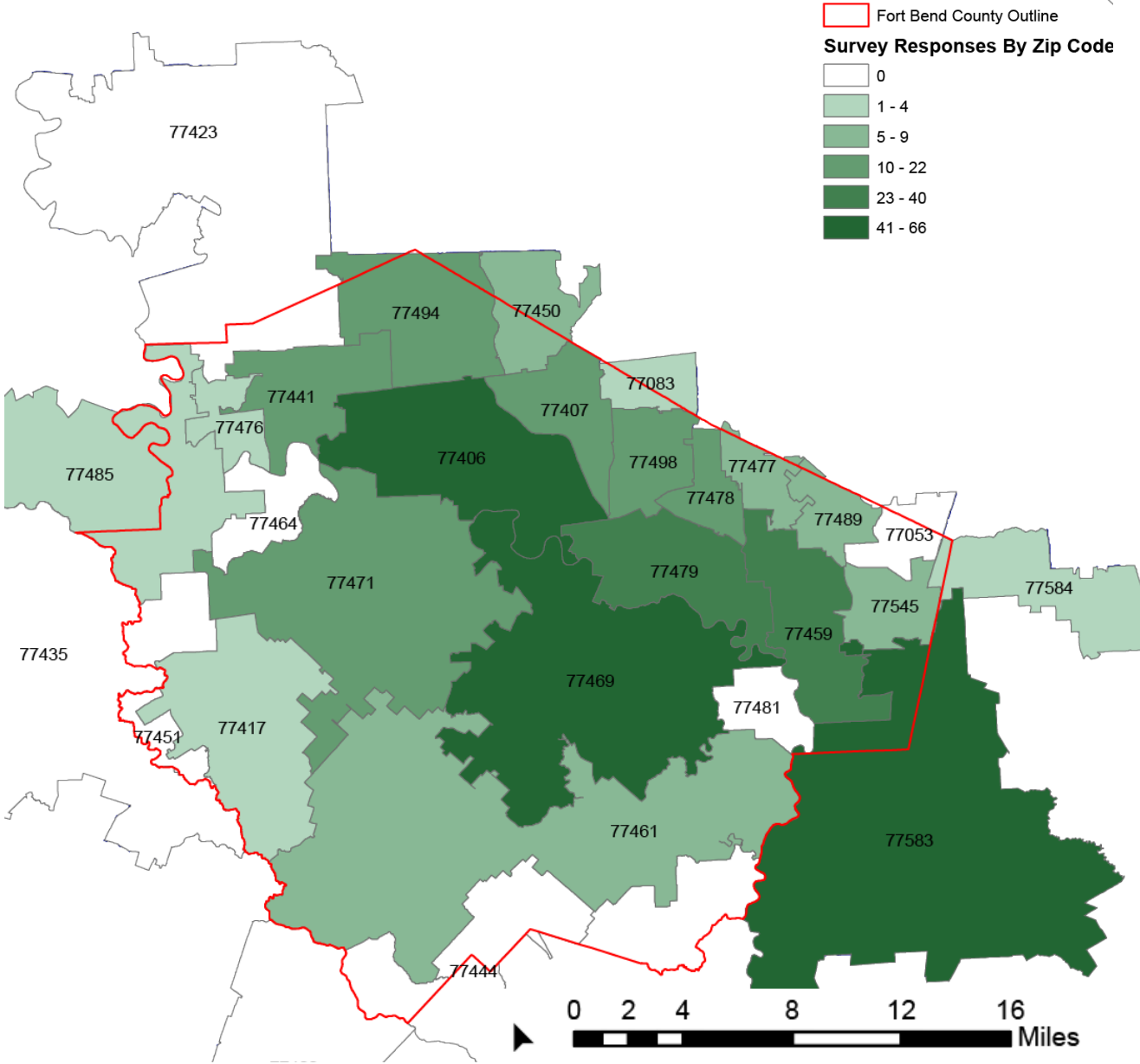
Respondents lived in Fort Bend 20+ years



Total Survey Respondents



Zip Codes Respondents Live





# SURVEY FEEDBACK

## Survey Response Insights:

- Lack of awareness
- Programmed events and activities preferred
- Safety and Cleanliness
- More opportunity to be close to nature
- Expanding the trail system
- Park visits correlate to proximity to homes
- Request for more variety within parks (active, passive, youth, adult, etc.)



Youth Sports Fields



Safe Crossings to  
Access Parks



Signage &  
Wayfinding



Shade Structures  
Other Amenities



Pickleball &  
Adult Activities



Trails Connecting  
Communities



Events and  
Programing



More Nature and  
Open Space Access



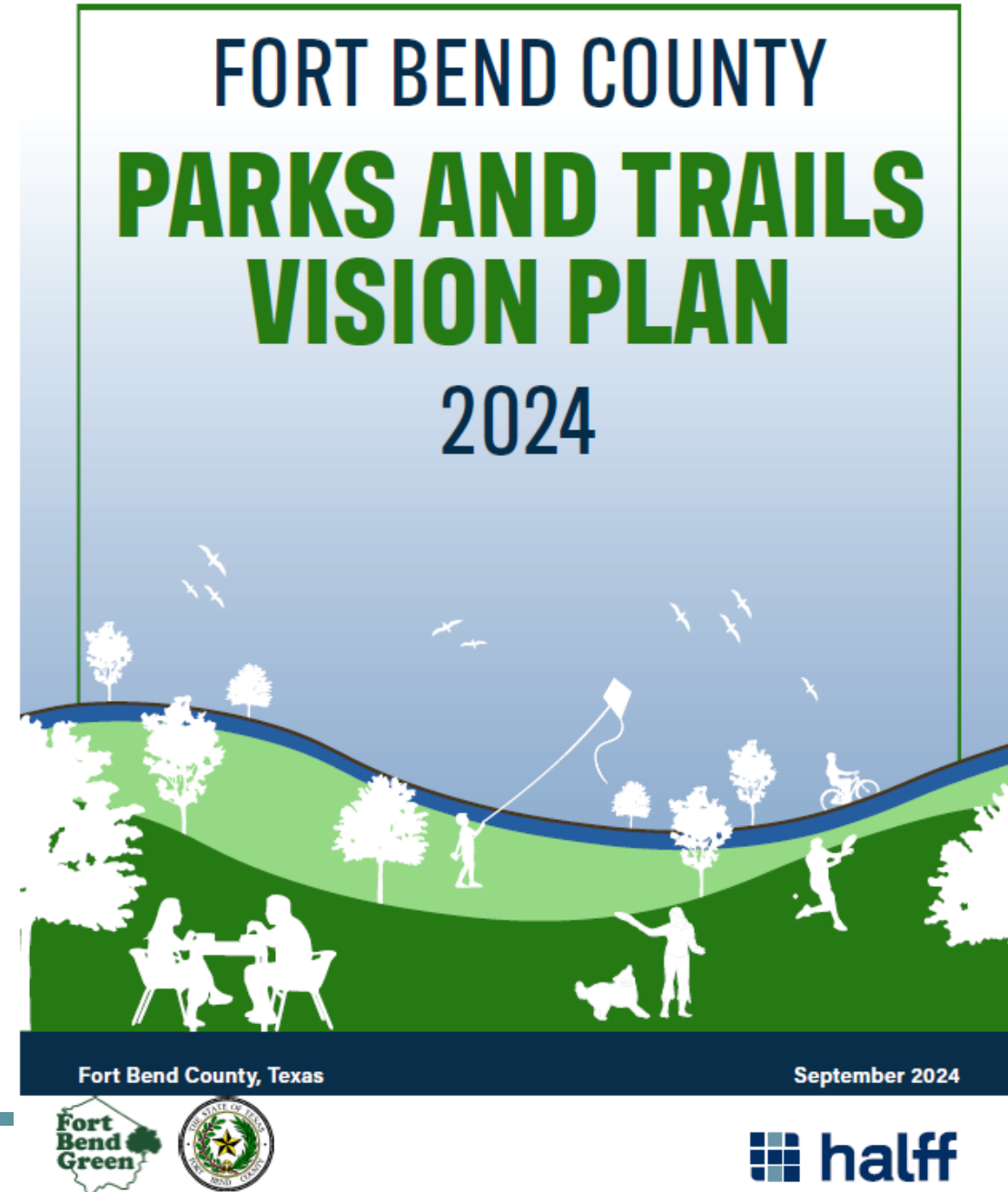
Youth Activities  
Updated Facilities



# PARKS AND TRAILS VISION PLAN

## Plan Structure

- Chapter 1 | Background
- Chapter 2 | Fort Bend County Parks System
- Chapter 3 | Needs Assessment
- Chapter 4 | Recommendations & Implementation
- Appendix A: Public Engagement Results
- Appendix B: Park Conditions Scores
- Funding Resources Memo



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Executive Summary

The Fort Bend County Parks and Trails Vision Plan looks to further improve the existing assets and identify future facility types and regions underserved by parks and recreation. This Vision Plan serves as a guiding document for decision makers, government leaders, and property developers to encourage the continued provision of parks, trails, recreation, and natural areas for Fort Bend County residents. This plan represents a snapshot in time of the Fort Bend County parks system. The County is implementing rapid changes and developing many new facilities from the 2023 bond. This plan has done its best to incorporate and celebrate new facilities.

The Vision Plan is divided into four chapters that take a qualitative and quantitative look at the Fort Bend County Parks system. The planning process included public feedback which informed the project team of community needs and desires. This document provides actionable recommendations and opportunities for Fort Bend County and its partners to maintain and enhance parks and open space in the County.

**"I'd like to see more parks developed and have parks connected by safe running & cycling trails."**

- Survey Respondent

### Our Outreach:

**439**  
Survey Responses

**4**  
Focus Group Meetings

**4**  
Open House Meetings

**10+**  
Social Media Posts

### What We Heard:

- » There is a need for **increased lighting within parks**
- » Many residents of Fort Bend County are **not aware of County parks**
- » **Safe pedestrian access to parks is highly requested** by those living near parks and without access to personal vehicles
- » There is a **strong desire for off-street recreational trails** that connect County, City, and State parks in and around Fort Bend County

### Key Takeaways from Existing Conditions Assessments

- » The County alone does not provide an adequate level of service for parkland based on national standards. However, when combined with city-owned parks, the service level is more than exceeded.
- » The western and southern portions of the County that do not have easy access to neighborhood or community County parks, and should be prioritized for new parkland and trail connections.
- » Overall, Fort Bend County parks scored an average of 2.87 out of 5.0 for all parks that were assessed. Individual precinct scores are as follows: Precinct 1 scored 3.10, Precinct 2 scored 2.83, Precinct 3 scored 2.36, and Precinct 4 scored 2.83.

VI

## Plan Vision

### Master Plan Vision

This plan envisions a future focused on connectivity, safety, natural resource protection, and community gathering for Fort Bend County Parks. Our foundation is built upon the community's desire for safe, walkable connections to parks, programming and recreation for all ages, and protecting unique natural features. Through efficient use of County resources, practical solutions, and leveraging collaborative partnerships, this plan aspires to ensure parks serve as vital community hubs that foster a sense of place and belonging for generations to come.

### Plan Goals



VII



# CHAPTER 1 & 2

- Introduction and existing conditions
- Demographics & background
- Previous planning efforts & recent accomplishments
- Park system inventory
- County-owned trails

## County Population Profile

**40.5%  
INCREASE**

2010 to 2020  
population

**87%  
PROJECTED  
GROWTH**

Increase in  
population by 2050

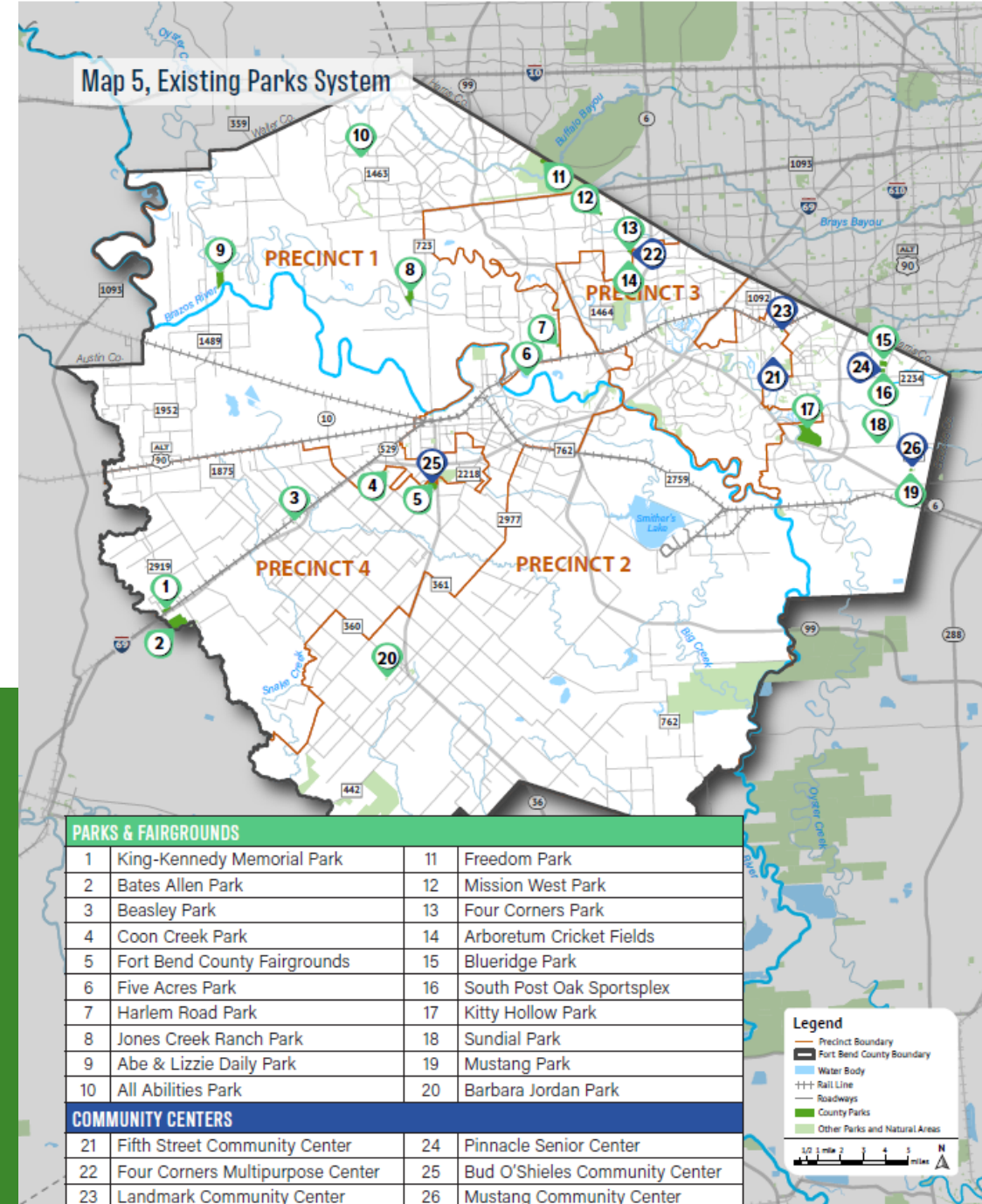
**30%  
BELOW 19  
Y/O**

249,000 residents  
aged 0-19

**7.5%  
ABOVE 70  
Y/O**

65,000 residents  
aged 70+

Map 5, Existing Parks System



# CHAPTER 3

## Demand assessment

- Community needs and desires

## Standards assessment

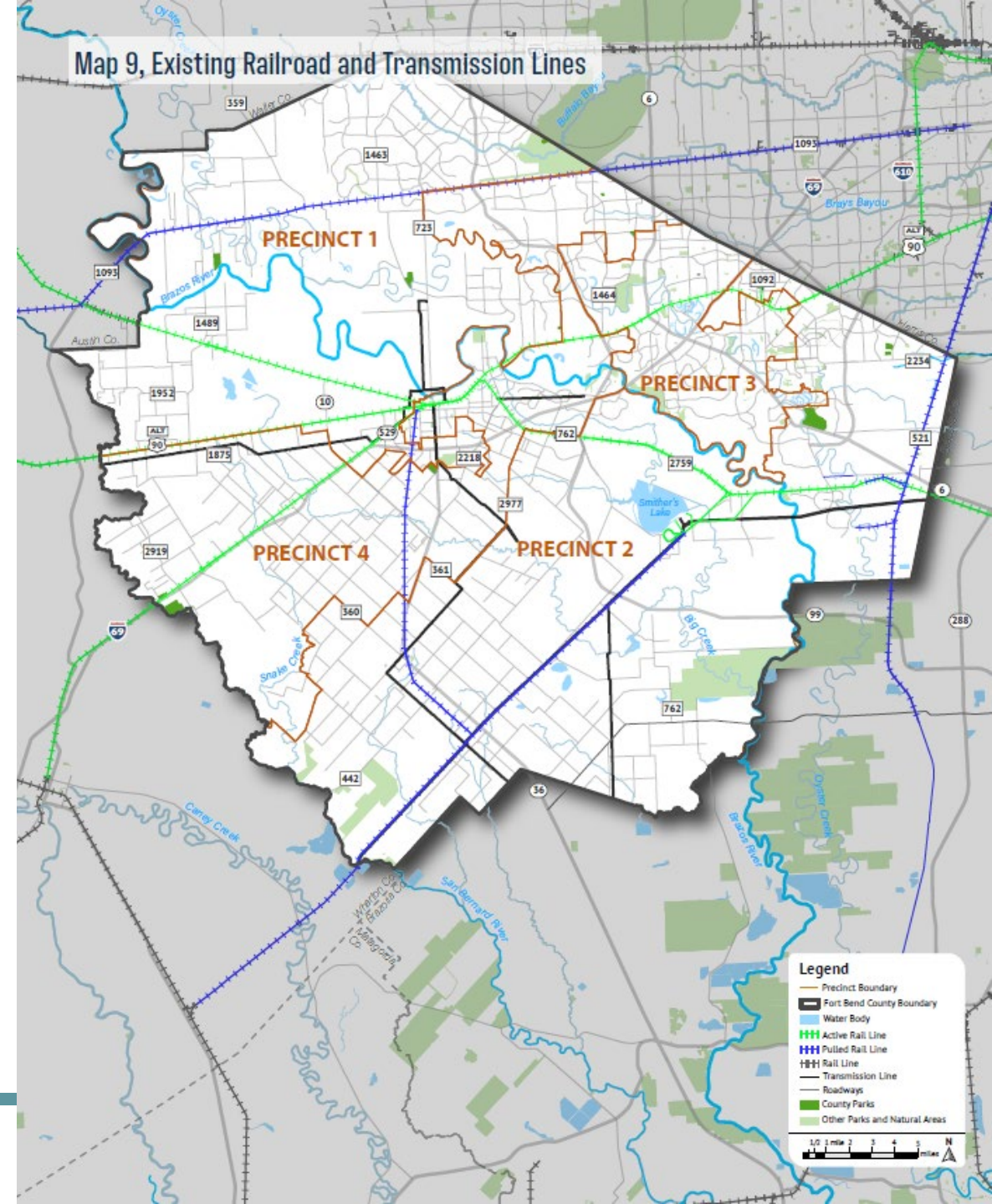
- NRPA standards and a gap analysis

## Conditions assessment

- Assessed in July 2023, serves as baseline for future improvements

## Trails assessment

- Identified areas throughout the County that could provide trail connections





# CHAPTER 4

## Vision Statement & Four Goals

This plan envisions a future focused on connectivity, safety, natural resource protection, and community gathering for Fort Bend County Parks. Our foundation is built upon the community's desire for safe, walkable connections to parks, programming and recreation for all ages, and protecting unique natural features. Through efficient use of County resources, practical solutions, and leveraging collaborative partnerships, this plan aspires to ensure parks serve as vital community hubs that foster a sense of place and belonging for generations to come.

**4 Goals → 18 Strategies → 42 Actions**



# CHAPTER 4 – GOAL 1

## Support Efficient Operations of the Parks Department

- Strengthen partnerships
- Revisit design standards and County policies
- Develop an Operations and Maintenance Plan
- Track volunteer efforts

### GOAL 1: SUPPORT EFFICIENT OPERATIONS OF THE PARKS DEPARTMENT

Counties often face the challenge of maintaining a high-quality park system with limited resources. Budget constraints, staffing shortages, and the growing demands of a growing population can stretch available resources thin, making it difficult to address all maintenance needs and improvements. Despite these challenges, counties must find ways to balance fiscal responsibility with the community's expectations for safe, accessible, and well-maintained parks. For that reason, it is important to support efficient operations for the parks department, foster collaborative partnerships, implement consistent design standards, and reduce the maintenance burden through sustainable practices.

The following recommendations offer guidance for the Parks and Recreation Department to efficiently utilize resources to sustain success and drive improvement.

**STRATEGY 1.1 – Strengthen partnerships and relations with organizations such as Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, and others, and schedule quarterly meetings to identify park needs and opportunities.**

Fort Bend County does not have limitless resources and would benefit from strengthening partnerships with local and regional entities to assist with park needs, maintenance, or opportunities. Seek partnerships with different entities and develop a rapport through quarterly meetings and revisiting the goals of this vision plan to measure success. Looping in partners can help alleviate the heavy lift of not only maintaining Fort Bend's County Park system but also identifying funding for new development and programming.

- » **ACTION:** Create a list of local, regional, or state entities such as Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, and others which could provide beneficial partnerships for Fort Bend County Parks and Recreation Department.
- » **ACTION:** Establish regular meetings with such entities with the goal of discussing or identifying park needs and opportunities.
- » **ACTION:** Publicly highlight successes of new projects and receiving grant projects, and encourage partners to share good news on their public facing accounts.

**STRATEGY 1.2 – Consider updating County development regulations to develop and apply uniform design standards and policies for park system improvements.**

Establishing minimum design standards for parks and park improvements ensures a consistent level of quality across County parks. Minimum design parameters often include requirements for accessibility and safety features, ensuring that parks are usable and enjoyable for individuals of all ages and abilities. Establishing minimum design standards can also help reinforce community identity and character by incorporating local culture, history, and preferences into park design as well as ensure that the parkland grows equally across the entire County.

- » **ACTION:** Establish a minimum standard of quality for new recreation improvements such as benches, BBQ pits, or any other amenity to be applied equitably across the County parks.
- » **ACTION:** Examine if any updates are required, due to changes in technology or community preferences (i.e. dark skies, safety concerns, etc.), to the outdoor lighting regulations which have not been updated since 2006.
- » **ACTION:** Revise County subdivision ordinance to increase the minimum width for walking trails from a minimum of four feet to a minimum of eight feet.
- » **ACTION:** Consider revising the County's green space requirements to encourage more parkland for planned subdivisions and a higher minimum standard for parkland development.

# CHAPTER 4 – GOAL 2

## Invest in Park Improvements to Meet the Community's Needs

- Develop full concept plans for select parks
- Improvements based on conditions assessment findings
- Seek innovative funding opportunities
- Develop a 5-year CIP plan
- Grow parks in areas of the county lacking county parks

### STRATEGY 2.5 - Establish a clear plan of action for immediate park improvements prioritizing park accessibility.

A number of the County's parks include elements which may be inaccessible to those who use a wheelchair or walking aid. The County should prioritize these improvements by developing a five-year capital improvement plan to fund and implement all necessary Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements. By prioritizing ADA compliance in park design, infrastructure, programming, and services, the County can promote inclusivity, enhance accessibility, and provide equitable recreational opportunities for the community.

- » **ACTION:** Formulate a five-year capital improvement plan that prioritizes park accessibility and maintenance of existing facilities.

### STRATEGY 2.6 - Explore opportunities for parkland expansion in areas lacking park access and experiencing faster growth or with regional trail opportunities.

Based on the level of service analysis outlined in Chapter 3, *Needs Assessment*, the County should prioritize the creation of new neighborhood or community parks or trails in the western and southern portions of Fort Bend County. Most County-owned parkland is concentrated in the eastern and central areas of the County, while the western and southern areas, which are more rural, have fewer parks and more unincorporated land. This means that many residents in these regions do not have easy access to County parks, though they may be closer to some city-maintained parks.

- » **ACTION:** Proactively seek opportunities to acquire parkland or trail easements in the southern and western portions of the County.



Park equipment should be accessible for children of all abilities  
Source: Access Advocates



Water play equipment, such as splash pads, can provide additional opportunities for accessible play  
Source: Barrington Park District



Rural hike and bike trails can provide long-distance trail connectivity  
Source: Nebraska Game and Parks



# CHAPTER 4 – GOAL 3

## Enhance Programs and Events to Foster Community Connections

- Strengthen programming and events partnerships with cities and other area agencies
- Consider expanding recreational programming
- Increase public awareness of County parks and programs

### CASE STUDY: EAGLE SCOUT PROJECTS ACROSS FORT BEND COUNTY

Fort Bend County Parks works with local Eagle Scout candidates to help individuals identify ideas for their Enhancement projects. Eagle Scouts have helped support improvements to Camp Sienna, owned by the Sienna Plantation Levee Improvement District, as well as other parks and open space across the County. Eagle Scout projects over the last five years have included installation of a Brazos River Trail Kiosk, development of an overnight area, trail foliage and tree identification signage, installing a bridge (pictured), construction of horseshoe pits, and a community event for Blue Bird House/Habitat construction. The following picture(s) show Eagle Scouts next to their bridge at Jones Creek Ranch Disc Golf Park to help improve mobility and access for all park users.



Eagle Scout Bridge  
Source: Fort Bend County Parks Facebook

### STRATEGY 3.3 – Consider expanding recreational programming offered at County parks for all ages.

Through this planning process, it became clear that residents value a diverse range of activities and programs that cater to different age groups and interests. This includes programs designed for adults, such as fitness classes or walking groups, that encourage healthy lifestyles and social interaction. Senior programming is equally important, providing opportunities for older adults to stay active, engaged, and connected with their peers. For teens, physical activity programs and safe spaces for recreation are critical for their physical health, social development, and overall well-being. And after-school programs play a crucial role in providing young people with productive, supervised environments where they can learn, play, and interact with others.

- » **ACTION:** Consider pilot projects for new recreational programming for all ages, include participation tracking, feedback surveys, and use this data to refine and expand successful programs.

### STRATEGY 3.4 – Increase public awareness of County recreational programs and facilities.

A major theme in survey responses was a lack of awareness of which parks were a part of the County park system. Increasing awareness of resources offered by the County could increase public participation in programming and use of park facilities.

- » **ACTION:** Consider creating a County-wide campaign to promote parks system and facilities including an informational packet or webpage about programs and facilities offered.



Brazos Bend State Park provides spaces and programs that promote inclusivity and diversity in the Houston region  
Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department



Santa Clara County Concert in the Parks Series  
Source: Santa Clara County Parks Department

# CHAPTER 4 – GOAL 4

## Improve Safety, Access, and Connectivity to Parks

- Develop a County-wide trail system
- Continue to support the Brazos River Corridor Master Plan
- Build neighborhood connections to parks
- Develop a Signage and Wayfinding Plan

### GOAL 4: IMPROVE SAFETY, ACCESS, AND CONNECTIVITY TO PARKS

Fort Bend has an inventory of trails concentrated in the eastern region of the County, adjacent to the extensive Houston trail network, but the lack of trails in other parts of the County has left a void for a significant part of the County population. Survey respondents highlighted this void by emphasizing the need for safe access to parks and connection between open spaces across city and County lines. Previous sections of this plan laid out the gaps by assessing the existing and planned trails, and identifying areas for growth and development. A layered assessment of different strategies such as rails-to-trails and developing electrical ROW paths was undertaken to identify low hanging fruit for future implementation. Currently, the primary mode of transportation to parks and trails is by personal vehicle, which is an obstacle to users with mobility issues, young, and other residents who don't have a vehicle. As new development continues in Fort Bend, the County could plan out new trail additions to connect new neighborhoods with existing development.

The following recommendations support the creation of a County-wide trail system to increase accessibility to parkland for Fort Bend County residents.

**STRATEGY 4.1 – Develop a County-wide trail system that promotes the history and culture of Fort Bend County and provides opportunity for connection to citywide trails systems.**

As a facilitator, Fort Bend County, along with Fort Bend Green can partner with local organizations and volunteers to seek out funding opportunities and implement art installations along recreational trails and parks to highlight the unique history and style of Fort Bend. The trail system could incorporate historical markers and connect important points of interest in the County.

- » **ACTION:** Seek funding to develop prioritized trail connections throughout the County. Prioritize important connections, short connections, or other opportunities with less obstacles or challenges to begin with.
- » **ACTION:** Partner with local groups such as Chamber of Commerce, school districts, and Eagle Scouts, to invest in low-cost amenities for parks and developing art installations to engage and educate visitors.
- » **ACTION:** Work with area Chambers of Commerce to bring awareness to new trails, park developments, and improvements to encourage visitors and tourism into the region.
- » **ACTION:** Incorporate trail opportunities into future plans for when funding becomes available.
- » **ACTION:** Explore using low-impact design strategies, such as permeable pavers on trails and around art installations, with the option for entities to put their name on blocks as a donation.

**STRATEGY 4.2 – Continue to promote opportunities for parks, recreation, and open space along Brazos River.**

The Brazos River Corridor Master Plan outlines community goals to enhance the river corridor by designating the adjacent land as a heritage corridor, adding new kayak/canoe launches, incorporating trails with historical exhibits, and mapping out paddle trails. The river is a valuable part of Fort Bend's history, development, and an attraction for the public from all over the region, not just the County. The County can partner with communities to protect this vital natural resource and develop ecotourism activities for residents.

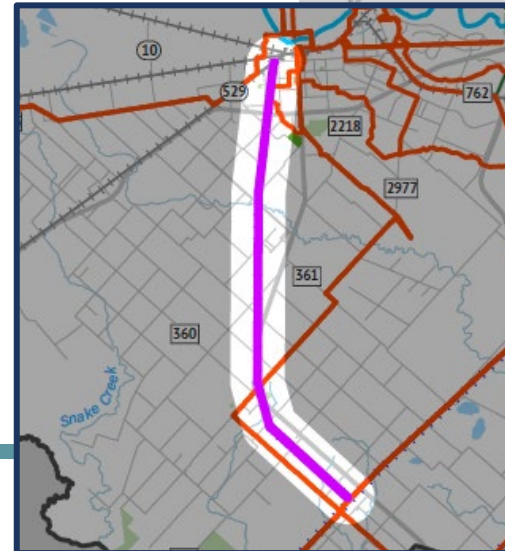
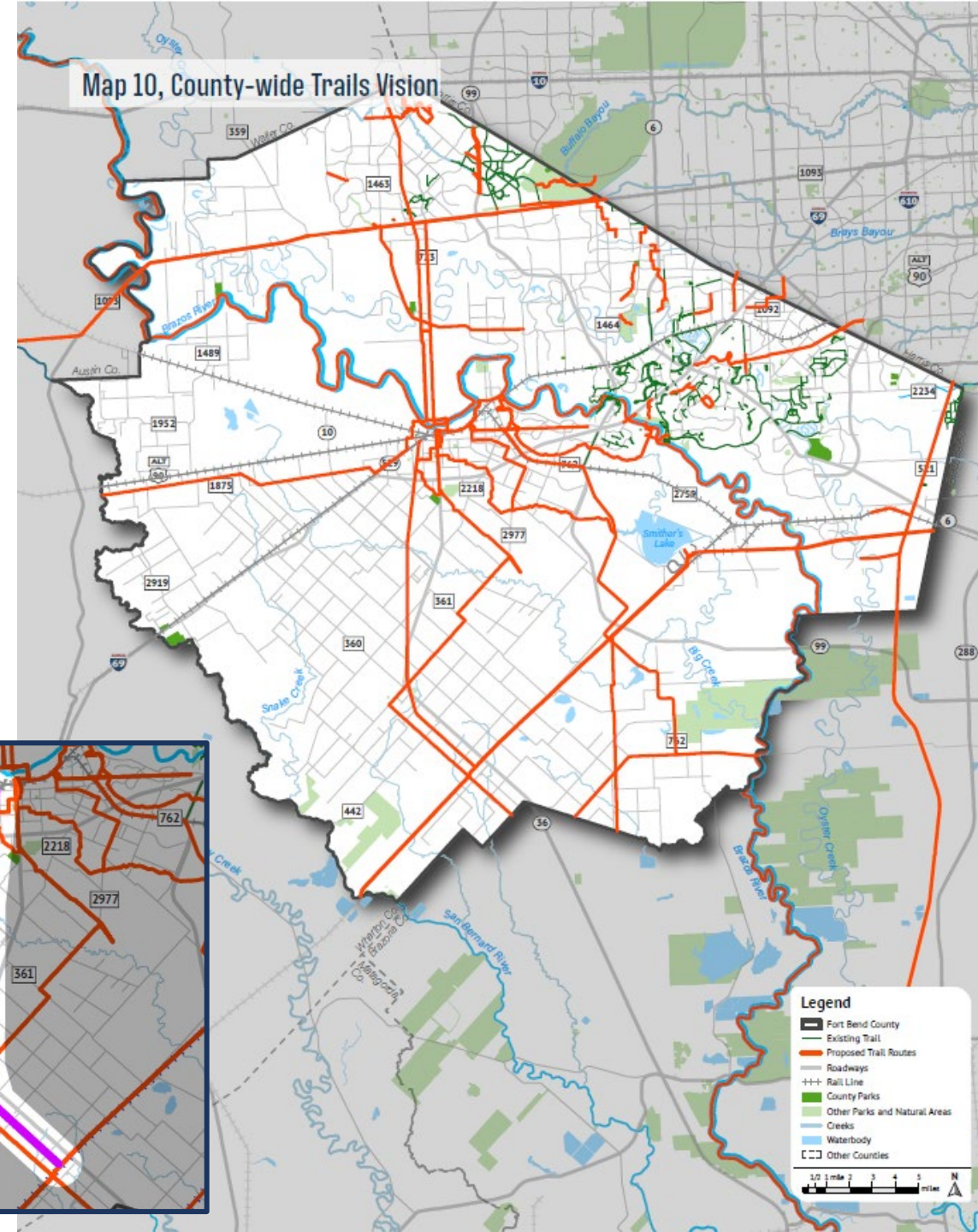
- » **ACTION:** Partner with organizations to build relationships with landowners adjacent to Brazos River and provide them with information about goals for Brazos River corridor and guidance for conservation practices.
- » **ACTION:** Create a map of trails and green space in Fort Bend, starting with Brazos River amenities and make available on public websites and/or social media sites for residents.
- » **ACTION:** Consult a Master Naturalist to guide landscaping and conservation decisions.



# CHAPTER 4 – PROPOSED TRAIL NETWORK

## Trail recommendations

- County-wide connectivity
- 8 prioritized segments based on available infrastructure, connection to points of interest, and proximity to existing trails





# CHAPTER 4 - IMPLEMENTATION

## Implementation Table

- Suggested timeframe for actions
- Potential funding sources
- Potential partnering entities

N

	Timeframe			Potential Funding Resources	Potential Partnering Entities
	S	M	L		
GOAL 1: SUPPORT EFFICIENT OPERATIONS OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT.					
STRATEGY 1.1: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONS WITH ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS FORT BEND GREEN, TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE, OR OTHERS AND SCHEDULE QUARTERLY MEETINGS TO IDENTIFY PARK NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES.					
ACTION: Create a list of local, regional, or state entities such as Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, or others which could provide beneficial partnerships for Fort Bend County Parks and Recreation Department.	S			N/A	Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, Fort Bend EDC, Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce
ACTION: Establish regular meetings with such entities with the goal of discussing or identifying park needs and opportunities.	S			N/A	Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, Fort Bend EDC, Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce
ACTION: Publicly highlight successes of new projects and receiving grant projects and encourage partners to share good news on their public facing accounts.		M		GENERAL FUND	Fort Bend Green, Texas A&M AgriLife, Fort Bend EDC, Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce
STRATEGY 1.2: DEVELOP AND APPLY UNIFORM DESIGN STANDARDS AND POLICIES FOR PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS.					
ACTION: Establish a minimum standard of quality for new recreation improvements such as benches, BBQ pits, or any other amenity to be applied equitably across the County parks.	S			GENERAL FUND	N/A
ACTION: Examine if any updates are required, due to changes in technology or community preferences (i.e. dark skies, safety concerns, etc.), to the outdoor lighting regulations which have not been updated since 2006.			L	N/A	N/A
ACTION: Revise County subdivision ordinance to increase the minimum width for walking trails from a minimum of four feet to a minimum of eight feet.		M		GENERAL FUND	N/A



Thank you!