

University Lakes Project Update

Public Engagement Recap

Prior to the public engagement events in 2021, focus group conversations were held with representatives of many area stakeholder populations to assist in development of overall engagement efforts. These focus groups included numerous civic associations, elected officials, water- and land-based recreation interests, and institutions. Additional virtual engagement in late 2020, as well as online and in-person input opportunities in 2021, captured more than 1,500 community comments for consideration by the team.

Throughout this implementation effort, the University Lakes Project Team has kept the Project Management Committee informed of developments. This PMC consists of major project partners LSU, Louisiana Division of Administration, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, BREC, LSU Foundation, City of Baton Rouge, and Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and two community representatives.

What We Heard and How We Listened

Inputs from the public from 2016 master planning efforts and 2021 engagement efforts directly contributed to final designs in the following areas:

Resilience

Conditions safe and welcoming to wildlife, planning for maintenance over the long term, improved water quality, restored ecosystems for native plants, and reductions of neighborhood flooding drove the varied habitat creation approaches along the lakes system, including the creation of living shorelines as a first and continual element in the landscape development

Activity

Increased water-based options, improved amenities, connectivity between lakes and destinations/activities for all ages

Safety

Biker/walker/fisher safety to be prioritized, including clear and separate paths for bikers and walkers, reduction in vehicular/biker/walker/fisher interaction points, improved signs and lighting, and placement of paths in ways that protect viewsheds as much as possible

Accessibility

Improved connectivity to neighborhoods with better entry points, inclusive of parking option approaches along the lakes system

How a Vision Becomes Reality

Input from the 2016 Master Plan formed the basic vision for the University Lakes effort. Building on the concepts from that plan, the designers surveyed the public between May and August 2021 on specific design components. Example images and concept drawings were part of these surveys so that respondents could choose specific options. Design features that had clear public preferences were piers for fishing and boat launches, a stage-focused large gathering space, boardwalks that travel through landscapes with islands and waterways, and multi-use trails separating bike and pedestrian activity, with a strong preference for those paths to be separated from roadways. These preferences provided the guidance for the team to move forward with the design. Design expertise in sustainability, resilience, and ecology played a critical role in bridging the input received from the public with actionable site-appropriate solutions for implementation.

Phasing of University Lakes Project

Due to funding timelines, the project is broken into separate phases. Phase 1 of the project is fully funded and includes:

- 1** Dredging of City Park Lake, Erie Lake, Lake Crest, Campus Lake and College Lake (Note: dredging of University Lake to be included in Phase 2)
- 2** Enhancements
 - a. City Park Lake Forebay and Improvements
 - b. May Street Bridge and Site Improvements
 - c. Campus Lake Improvements (including path)
 - d. Stanford Avenue Boardwalk (for safer circulation as opposed to forcing walkers and bikers onto the existing sidewalk at Stanford)

Timing of Phase 1

Summer 2022	Advance Work Project, allowing contractor to test dredging strategies while developing island* habitat off Stanford
Fall 2022	Design finalized, construction contracting
Winter 2022/2023	Phase 1 construction begins (Timelines are subject to change based on available funding and progress of the widening of I-10)
Winter 2023/2024	Phase 1 dredging complete

*Islands provide a more cost-effective alternative to hauling dredge material off-site while being beneficial for creation of native plant and animal habitats. Islands also can slow surface water flows, which can increase sediment deposition, and can reduce wave erosion. These islands are designed for habit creation and will not allow for congregation by park users.

Timing of Phase 2

Winter 2023/2024	Beginning construction (pending confirmation of funding)
Winter 2024/2025	Phase 2 dredging complete

Timing of Implementation of future phases is dependent upon confirmation of additional funding.