

April 4, 2023

Mr. Kenny Blanke
United States Army Corps of Engineers
7400 Leake Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70118

**RE: Responses to Public Comments
University Lake Aquatic Restoration & Flood Risk Reduction Project
MVN-2021-01140-CQ
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
CSRS Project No 216194**

Dear Mr. Blanke,

CSRS, LLC (CSRS), on behalf of University Lakes, LLC, provides the following responses to the public comments received on March 22, 2023 for the public comment period that ended on February 8, 2023 for the University Lakes Aquatic Restoration & Flood Risk Reduction Project (MVN-2021-01140-CQ) located in Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.

Due to the volume of comments, responses to the comments have been grouped by the themes and are answered broadly to incorporate all applicable comments. All public comments are provided in **Attachment 1**. Each public comment was given a citation number. Citation numbers are provided below and coordinate with the public comments in **Attachment 1**. Public comments that were in support of the project or suggestions as to how to accomplish the work are not addressed in this response.

Theme: Request for an extension to the Public Notice Period and Public Hearing

Response: The intent of University Lakes, LLC has always been to provide transparency to the public. This project began with a robust master planning process that involved community members through a number of meetings and activities. More recently, as the project has shifted towards implementation, community meetings were held to provide information and gather feedback in November 2020, June 2021, and August 2021. In addition, our planning team attended six community events during the summer of 2021 to provide information, and met with multiple focus groups, including neighboring homeowners associations. In August 2022, we held two additional information meetings focused on residents who live near the project. A public project website was also created in 2020 which has provided continuous updates on the project. Lastly, the project team has complied with all public notice requirements of the USACE, HUD, and the State of Louisiana.

Public comments cited: 18, 22

Theme: Qualified Subcontractors

Response: The designers for the project were selected through a competitive procurement based on a number of factors, including qualifications related to projects similar in scope and scale to the University Lakes. While some of the individual professionals participating in the design do not live in Baton Rouge, many of them do, and all of the firms have experience working in Louisiana. Moreover, the design has been managed by the CSRS/B&D Joint Venture, based in Baton Rouge, and the project is overseen by a Project

Management Committee that includes the City of Baton Rouge-Parish of East Baton Rouge, BREC, LSU, and the State of Louisiana.

The project team has conducted a significant amount of due diligence to gather as much information as possible about the existing conditions, including tree stumps. The contractor selected to dredge the lakes does have extensive experience with similar projects and provided its price proposal based on the data available.

Public comments cited: 18, 16

Theme: Changes to the Lakes

Response: The Project will dredge lake bottom sediment in the lake system that have entered the system due to erosion and stormwater run-off. The University Lakes are currently used as a flood control. Studies have shown that if improvements are not done that the University Lakes would eventually silt in resulting in increased flood in areas due to lack of storage in the drainage system. The Project intends to improve storage and long-term management of sediment that enter the University Lakes.

As designed, the project will reduce the open-lake acreage by approximately 77 acres. The placement of dredged sediment was designed with careful consideration of its impact on views.

The improvements to the weir at Stanford Avenue will increase water retention ability, and allow for the water surface elevation to actually increase by approximately six inches.

The Acts of Donations in 1933 created by the original landowners specify that the purpose of the land should be used for constructing or building a public lake and public park for the use of the whole public. The objectives of the Project are in keeping with requirements of The Acts of Donations. All of the improvements will be available to the public once construction is finalized.

The water surface area is not expected to significantly decrease as a result of the proposed improvements to University Lakes. The water column depth and water quality of the University Lakes is expected to improve as a result of the Project. Improving the conditions of the University Lakes is expected to be a more inviting presence for local residents and visitors to participate in water-based activities. Currently, little water-based activities are done within the University Lakes due to poor water quality, decreased water depth, and persistent algae blooms.

Public comments cited: 18, 25, 17, 16, 29, 6, 4, 21

Theme: Impacts to the Surrounding Community from the Islands

Response: In the summer of 2021, the project team undertook an Advance Work Project in University Lake to test different construction means and methods in the existing conditions prior to the finalization of design and construction pricing. A cove in the southeastern corner of University Lake was selected for multiple reasons: 1) that location housed multiple challenging conditions that the designers and contractor anticipated encountering elsewhere in the project, 2) it was easily accessible and observable, and 3) the Advance Work would lay the groundwork for future implementation. The Advance Work Project scope included mobilization, hydraulic and mechanical dredging, and the construction of an island using geotextile tubes and sediment. The Advance Work Project was a success in that it provided critical information that allowed the engineers to finalize the design, and the contractor to provide more accurate pricing. The Advance Work Project was left undisturbed since construction completed in the summer of 2022 to evaluate

settlement of the geotubes. Top-dressing and landscaping of the Advanced Work Project is expected to occur in summer 2023.

Public comments cited: 18, 1,22,28,8,25,2,29,14

Theme: Dredged Soil

Response: Beneficial reuse of soil is considered a best management practice (BMP) and an environmentally conscious method of dealing with excess soil. Alternatives to beneficial reuse of soil would be removing the dredged material offsite for disposal will add significant costs to the project. The additional costs are associated with multiple steps/rehandling the materials at multiple “touch points”. All of the steps associated with achieving offsite disposal are: 1) Dredge the materials mechanically and place in barge, 2) Barge sediments to a shoreline offloading area, 3) Offload very wet sediment and contain the interstitial pore water, 4) Decant water will most likely need to be treated before returning back to the Lake system, 5) The materials will need to be quickly dried to make them suitable for truck transport, 6) Portland cement will have to be added to the fine grained materials at approximately 8% Portland by weight, 7) Once Portland cement is blended, materials are picked up a again and staged for curing, 8) Materials would have to be staged to allow for curing for approximately 48 hours, 9) Once the material meet paint filter test and strength requirements for the disposal location, they are loaded into an over highway dump truck, 10) Materials are trucked to final location, and 11) At final location materials are dumped and pushed with a dozer and graded. This additional handling costs approximately three times more than beneficially reusing the sediment on site and reduces the disruption of hundreds of dump trucks coming in and out on a regular basis to haul off the material.

Public comments cited: 18, 22, 8,25, 2, 29, 14, 23

Theme: Geotextile Tubes (Geotubes)

Response: Geotextile tubes are a sustainable solution to erosion. They are made from materials that have been recycled. The material is heavy woven to be durable and long lasting. The lake bottom sediment that will be dredged is silty in nature which will be pumped directly into the geotextile tubes. As the tubes fill, water is displaced through the woven material; leaving the sediment within the tube. Geotextile tubes may be visible during the initial phases of the construction but are expected to settle and will be covered with soil. The geotextile tubes will not be visible once construction of the Project is complete. The geotextile tubes are meant to break down over time, over the material inside has consolidated.

Public comments cited: 2, 29, 25, 8

Theme: Coordination with DOTD I-10 Bridge Project

Response: The Project Team is actively working with DOTD so that both projects can be achieved in an efficient manner.

Public comments cited: 14

Theme: Maintenance Plan

Response: Sediment will only be placed on land owned by either LSU or the City of Baton Rouge-Parish of East Baton Rouge. Those entities will be responsible for maintaining the new land, but a long-term

maintenance strategy may include enabling a new entity that will be responsible for maintaining the University Lakes.

LSU will be responsible maintaining the land between University Lake and E. and W. Lakeshore.

Public comments cited: 18, 22, 28, public comments, 14

Theme: Construction Timeline

Response: Phase 1 construction will take approximately one year. Additional phases of construction will be contingent upon additional funding.

Public comments cited: 30

Theme: Health, Safety and Overall Well-Being

Response: The health, safety, and overall well-being of residents and visitors of the University Lakes is of utmost importance of University Lakes, LLC. planned mobility improvements aim to address missing segments, and improve connectivity and safety overall to the running/cycling path around the lakes.

The algae in the lake is a result of current lake conditions - low oxygen levels and stagnant water. Objectives of the Project are to increase the oxygen levels within the water and increase water movement.

During construction, there will be laydown areas for equipment and vehicle parking. There will be some level of disturbance to everyday life as with any infrastructure improvement project. Prior to construction activities, the Project Team will determine the best plan that will cause the least amount of disturbance to residents and users of the University Lakes

Flood risk will be reduced by increasing the lakes' capacity to store floodwater, reducing backwater flooding in some of the surrounding areas, as well as flooding downstream along Bayou Duplantier.

Analytical testing of the sediments within the University Lakes has been conducted and reviewed by Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ). It was determined that levels were not deemed to cause a hazard to human health.

Public comments cited: 18, 22, 8, 16, 14, 6, 15, 24, 7

Theme: Bridges and Boardwalks

Response: The proposed pedestrian boardwalk across University Lake near Stanford Avenue is essential for providing safe, dedicated bike and pedestrian pathways around that portion of the lake. As proposed, the boardwalk will have lighting, and the design was revised to reduce or eliminate areas that might encourage gathering. None of the proposed boardwalks are currently funded, and their implementation will be contingent upon available funding in the future. The team received comments from residents near the lakes that they did not want dedicated parking in residential areas, so parking is concentrated in public areas, namely the LSU campus and BREC parks.

The May Street Bridge was designed for connectivity between University Lake and City Park Lake. It is not anticipated that traffic or parking problems will occur as a result of the May Street Bridge.

Public comments cited: 18, 22, 28, 8, 24

Theme: Wildlife and the Environment

Response: One of the missions of the University Lakes Project is to create and enhance habitat, and the design aims to do just that. The project team includes scientists who have informed the design relative to its impacts and benefits on wildlife. Also, our team consulted both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and Louisiana Departments of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) to discuss best practices for mitigating negative impacts on species that use the lakes, including white pelicans. Our team's observation is that the island constructed as part of the Advance Work Project has been very popular with white pelicans and other birds. Additionally, expansion of the Bird Sanctuary along E. Lakeshore Drive is part of the Project's scope providing secure nesting areas.

Public comments cited: 22, 8, 10, 27, 16, 14, 6, 15, 23

Theme: Communication

Response: This project began with a robust master planning process that involved community members through a number of meetings and activities. More recently, as the project has shifted towards implementation, community meetings were held to provide information and gather feedback in November 2020, June 2021, and August 2021. In addition, our planning team attended six community events during the summer of 2021 to provide information, and met with multiple focus groups, including neighboring homeowners associations. In August 2022, we held two additional information meetings focused on residents who live near the project. A public project website was also created in 2020 which has provided continuous updates on the project. Lastly, the project team has complied with all public notice requirements of the USACE, HUD, and the State of Louisiana.

Public comments cited: 22, 28, 2, 14, 11

Theme: Funding and Cost

Response: The total cost for implementing the entire project is over \$100 million. No contracts for a phase can be signed absent funding, and deferral of mobility improvement phases does not negatively impact earlier dredging phases nor use of current pathways.

Public comments cited: 22, 8, 25, 14, 24, 9

If you have any questions, please contact me at 504-473-3338 or via email at Kelly.fauber@csrsinc.com.

Respectfully,



Kelly Faerber

Water Permits Specialist and Environmental Geologist