

North Lake Charles

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO NATURE AND
CREATING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND HEALTHY FOODS



Hurricane Laura

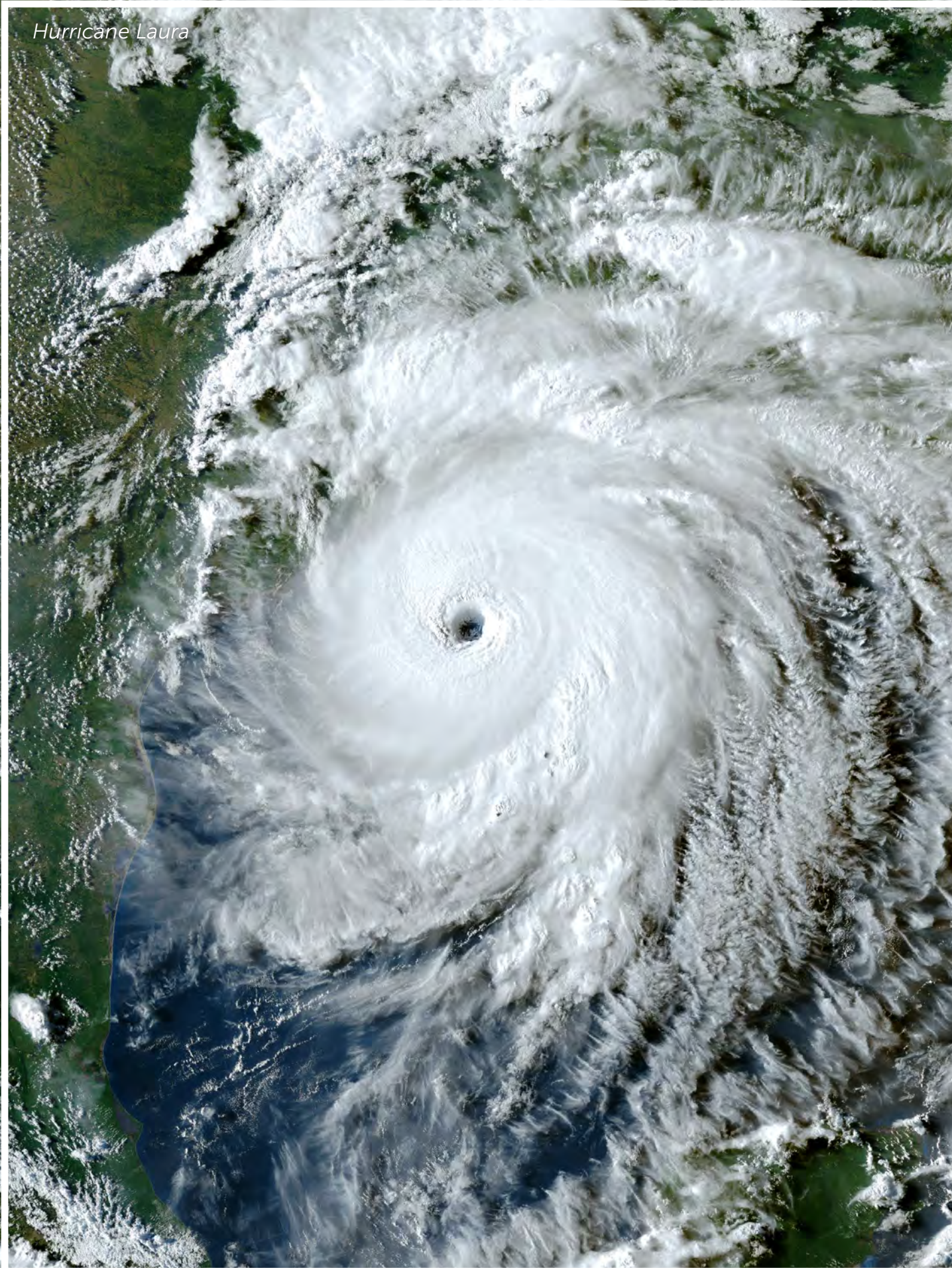


Photo: NOAA



FEMA



NPS-RTCA
Rivers, Trails and Conservation
Assistance Program



SEPTEMBER 2024

When the Category 4 hurricanes, Laura and Delta, swept through southwestern Louisiana in August and October of 2020, their high winds, heavy rains, and extensive flooding left a pattern of destruction across southwest Louisiana reaching more than 80 miles inland.

Showing the generational resiliency arising from the impacts of numerous storms, the disaster-impacted communities of DeRidder and Lake Charles, along with representatives of Calcasieu, Cameron, and Allen parishes, requested assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) to help with the development of long-term recovery plans.

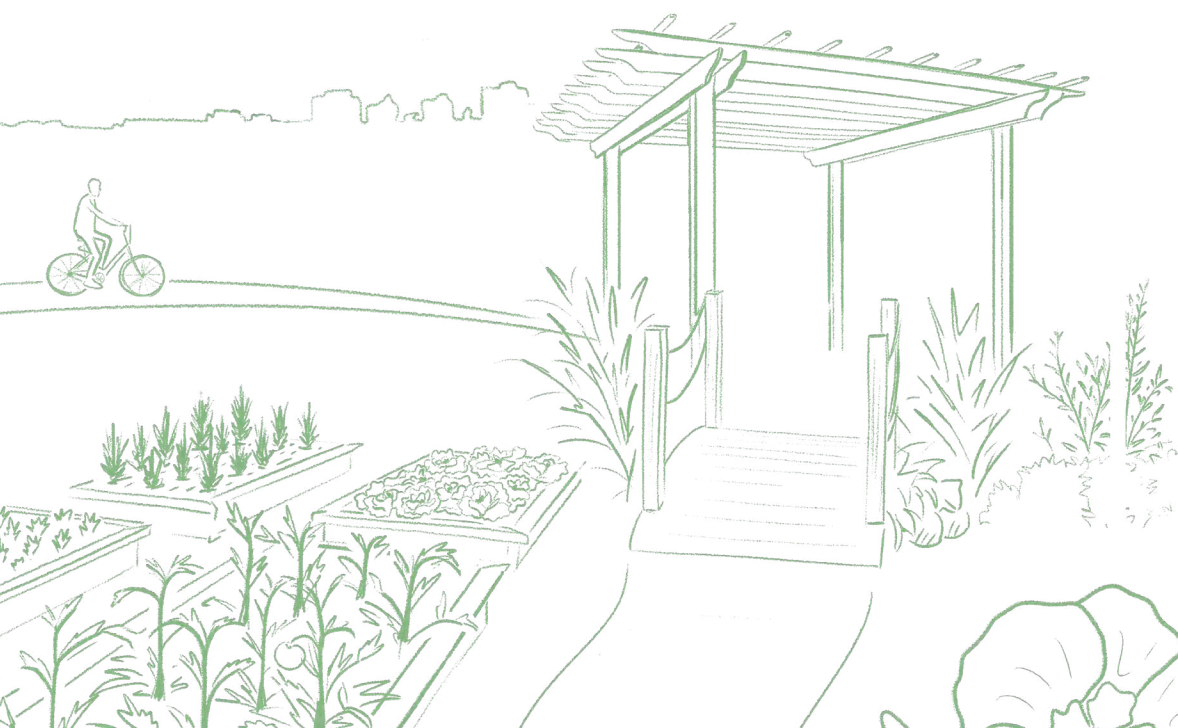
Working closely with local partners, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Park Service helped facilitate six southwest Louisiana community-led projects focused on natural and cultural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, and nature-based tourism.



North Lake Charles

Louisiana

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



North Lake Charles, historically underdeveloped compared to other parts of the city, is designated as a “food desert,” making it difficult for residents to access affordable and healthy food. The area also lacks safe bike and pedestrian routes, complicating access to quality foods.

In 2020, North Lake Charles was selected for assistance through the Environmental Protection Agency’s Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP) program, resulting in a comprehensive Community Action Plan. Goals include improving food distribution systems, creating community gardening and nutrition education opportunities, promoting healthy eating, and activating underutilized areas.

In 2021, the City of Lake Charles requested natural disaster recovery assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) to help address the following components of the Community Action Plan’s goals:

- Assessing the impacts of local planning initiatives on North Lake Charles and Bayou Greenbelt.
- Improving bike and pedestrian connections, intersection functionality, and beautification.
- Identifying opportunity areas and uses for city-owned adjudicated properties.
- Creating an inventory of park facilities and advancing the revitalization of Goosport Park.

The NPS-RTCA team made observations and developed recommendations regarding these components:

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Advocating for bike and pedestrian improvements along key routes.
- Installing at-grade rail crossings or other options to overcome barriers.
- Using intersection design standards for safe crossings, trailheads, parking, and wayfinding signage.
- Plan for shade tree planting.

REVITALIZING GOOSPORT PARK

- Removing most fences while retaining the backstop.
- Adding a pool, themed playground, and upgrading the basketball court.
- Ensuring safe bike and pedestrian access to the park.
- Preserving tree cover and planting additional shade trees.

PARK FACILITIES INVENTORY

A comprehensive inventory of park facilities has been developed, to include not only the parks in North Lake Charles, but all parks in Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes, whether managed by federal, state, parish or local governments. This inventory will help guide the prioritizing of park amenities. Visit Lake Charles, the tourism commission, is leading the process to create an online guide.

ASSESSMENT OF OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Opportunity areas include unused city-owned parcels and underutilized areas in schools, parks, and churches. Neighborhood champions will transform these into community assets like pocket parks and community gardens. A working group mapped resources and identified 13 opportunity areas, prioritized in May 2022.

MOVING FORWARD

The Community Action Plan offers significant benefits to North Lake Charles. A revitalized Steering Committee could move the plan forward, potentially creating a full-time position to develop partnerships, engage residents, and advocate for plan implementation. These efforts will help lay the groundwork for greater collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank.

As part of the recovery efforts from hurricanes Laura and Delta which made landfall only six weeks apart in 2020, the City of Lake Charles requested assistance from the National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) to help address the goals and action items identified in the Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan.



The National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects and assists communities with natural disaster recovery across the United States. NPS-RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors.



The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana “connects people who care with causes that matter while enhancing the quality of life in Southwest Louisiana.” Among many other regional efforts, the Community Foundation worked with Urban Design Associates to develop the “Just Imagine SWLA” initiative, a 50-year resilience master plan featuring 11 catalytic projects for Calcasieu and Cameron parishes.



The Federal Emergency Management Agency Community Assistance Recovery Support Function (CARSF) enables local governments to effectively and efficiently carry out community-based recovery planning and management in a post-disaster environment. CARSF also supports state or territorial governments in developing programs of support for local recovery planning.



The Southwest Louisiana Center for Health Services helped identify and review opportunity areas throughout North Lake Charles.



The City of Lake Charles provided assistance and input primarily through the Mayor’s Office as well as the Planning and Development and Recreation and Parks departments.

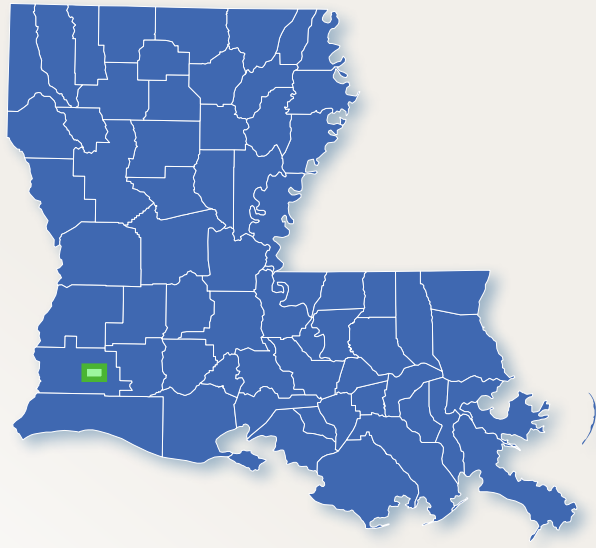


The Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, through the Administrator’s Office, staff from both parish parks, and the Geographic Information Systems Department, provided invaluable input and mapping services.



Second Harvest Food Bank provides 2.4 million meals annually to people in need in our region through partnerships with 29 local organizations, including Abraham’s Tent in Lake Charles, CareHelp in Sulphur, and two elementary school pantries.

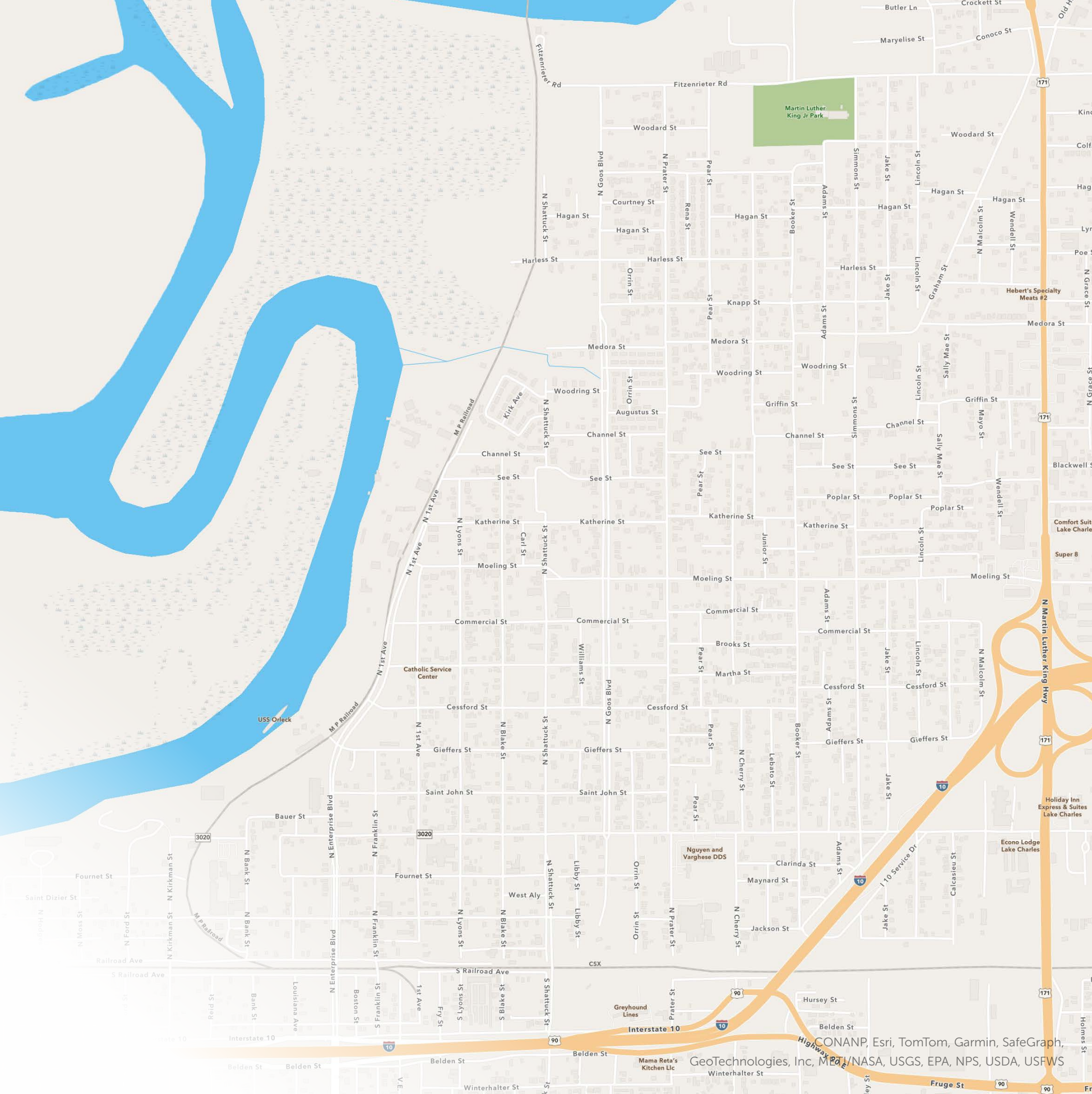




THE NORTH LAKE CHARLES COMMUNITY

Compared to other areas of the city, North Lake Charles falls behind when it comes to development. In [this video](#), the local news station, KPLC, [provides an overview of the lack of investment and other challenges facing North Lake Charles which they describe as “a diamond in the rough.”](#) However, it also reveals the optimism of its residents and highlights the community’s abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities.

[Due in part to the lack of investment, North Lake Charles has become a food desert.](#) Residents in food deserts often have lower rates of vehicle ownership and face a lack of safe routes for bike and pedestrian travel, making access to good quality and healthy food even more challenging. [To address these and related issues, the City of Lake Charles was selected to receive assistance through the Environmental Protection Agency’s Local Foods, Local Places program.](#)



LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES (LFLP)

The Local Foods, Local Places planning assistance program helps cities and towns engage with stakeholders to develop local food systems, preserve open space, revitalize Main Streets and downtowns, boost economic opportunities for local businesses, and improve access to local and healthy foods, especially among disadvantaged populations.

North Lake Charles was selected by the Environmental Protection Agency as a 2020 Local Foods, Local Places Partner Community. Participation in the program resulted in the development of a Community Action Plan with four primary goals:

GOAL 1

Improve the resiliency of the local food distribution system to better connect residents to locally grown produce. Explore growing produce on church properties and involving youth groups.

GOAL 2

Increase access to affordable and nutritious food for residents of North Lake Charles through new food markets or other types of outlets. Work with small businesses to provide sustainable retail or coop options.

GOAL 3

Offer community gardening and nutrition education opportunities that promote the health and wellness benefits of eating fresh foods.

GOAL 4

Explore opportunities to improve, beautify, and activate underutilized areas of North Lake Charles with food projects, pocket parks, infrastructure, etc.



PROJECT WORK PLAN

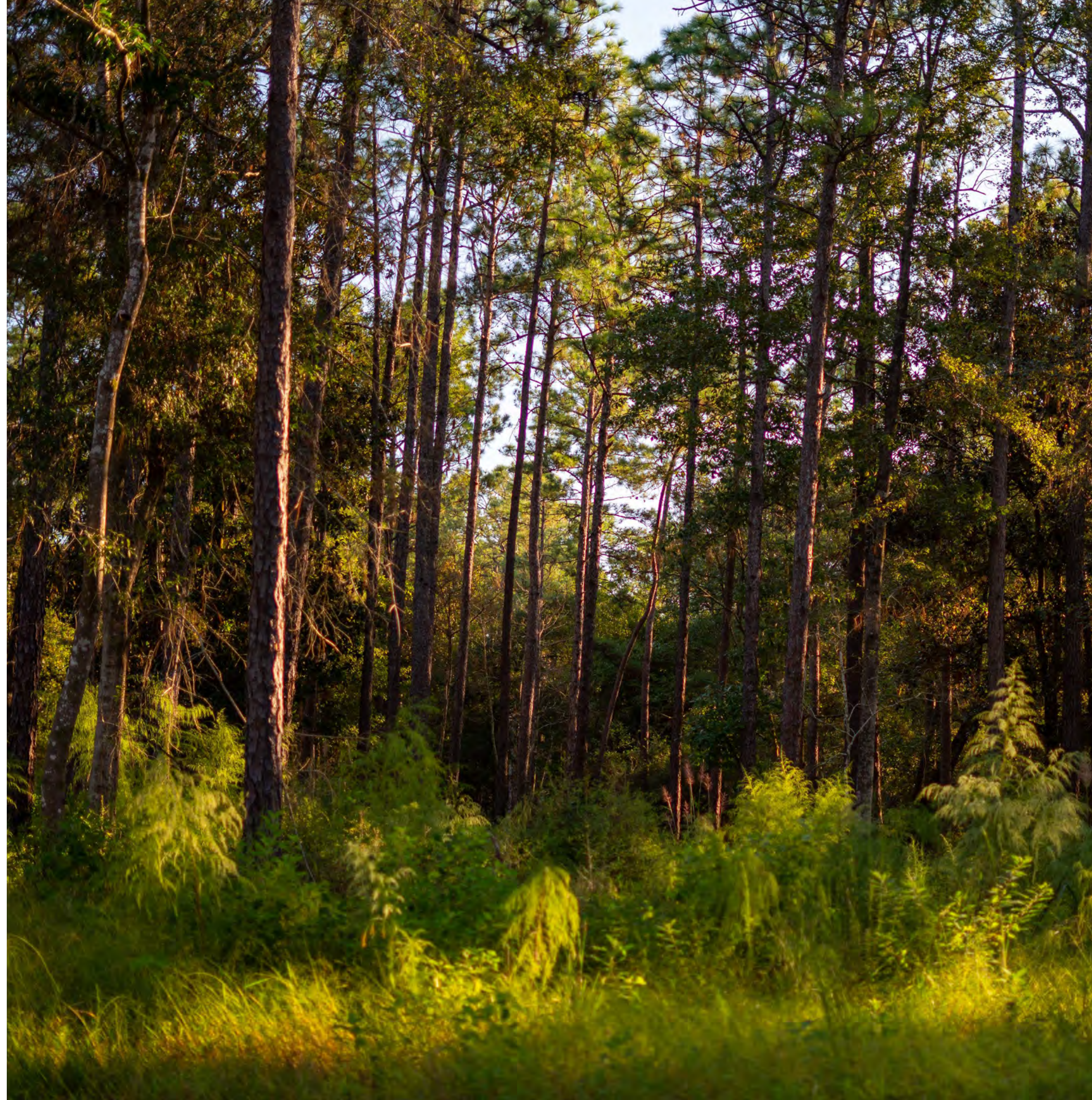
The National Park Service developed recommendations and provided relevant resources primarily related to the fourth goal in the Community Action Plan – addressing infrastructure needs and opportunity areas that can help improve, beautify, and activate underutilized areas of North Lake Charles.

Components included:

- Improving bike and pedestrian connections, intersection functionality, and beautification.
- Revitalizing parks.
- Identifying and reviewing opportunity areas and potential uses for city-owned adjudicated properties.

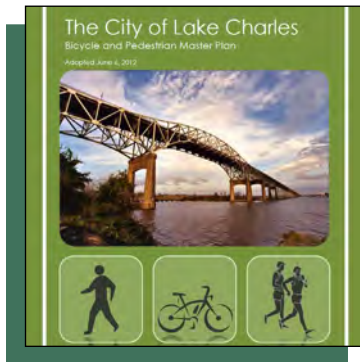
To accomplish this, the project team developed a work plan in September 2021, identifying the following tasks and areas that required targeted attention from the National Park Service:

- Conducting a review of local planning efforts and their relevancy to the Local Foods, Local Places goals as well as to the Bayou Greenbelt project.
- Improving community connections as well as bike and pedestrian travel.
 - Review east/west and north/south streets for potential routes and connections.
 - Identify significant intersections and recommend improvements.
 - Address unsafe railroad crossings.
- Reviewing plans for the revitalization of Goosport Park.
- Assessing Bayou Greenbelt's potential impact on North Lake Charles.
- Facilitating an inventory of city, parish, and state park facilities in North Lake Charles.
- Identifying and reviewing opportunity areas, utilizing public and adjudicated properties to support the goals of the Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan.

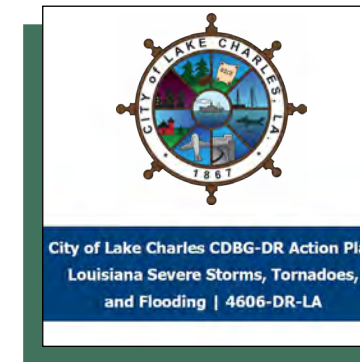


Local Planning Efforts and North Lake Charles

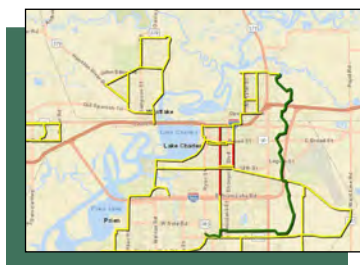
The National Park Service reviewed the following local planning efforts and initiatives with a focus on their potential to positively impact the residents of North Lake Charles:



The City of Lake Charles Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, 2012. The plan is comprehensive and includes sidewalk and street improvements throughout the city. Partners should advocate for its implementation. The vision of the plan is "to promote the City of Lake Charles as a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly environment by providing a variety of convenient, safe and attractive transportation choices." The map titled "Recommended Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements" shows the impact that the numerous projects involved with a fully implemented plan would have on North Lake Charles, vastly improving the quality of life for residents.



The Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding is considered a "gap" funding source and is intended to help meet recovery needs not covered by other public and private funding sources. Stormwater funds from this source could be used for gardens, which could benefit projects identified in the Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan.



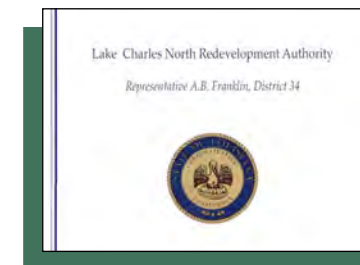
The 2024 Bayou Bike and Hike Southwest Louisiana Trail Network, builds on the plan above, providing not only local connections, but regional ones as well. Local partners should also advocate for its implementation.



The Bayou Greenbelt Project, one of the 11 catalytic projects from the "Just Imagine SWLA" initiative, will provide North Lake Charles residents with access to outdoor recreation opportunities and programs, promoting healthy lifestyles. The greenbelt will attract visitors which may increase the demand for locally grown foods, benefitting the community's small businesses.



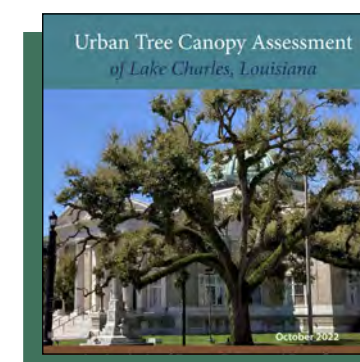
The City of Lake Charles' Complete Streets Policy from 2019 requires new infrastructure and street improvements to be designed to accommodate not only cars, but also pedestrians, cyclists, and public transportation.



Lake Charles North Redevelopment Authority from 2009 is focused on promoting reinvestments in the North Lake Charles community.



The North Lake Charles Riverfront Parkway and Redevelopment Plan was developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2006 in partnership with the City of Lake Charles. The plan was intended to restore the ecology of the Upper Calcasieu Estuary and revitalize riverfront neighborhoods. There has been no progress with implementation, but it is worth revisiting.



The Lake Charles Urban Tree Canopy Assessment developed by the Green Infrastructure Center in 2022 illustrates how the simple act of planting trees can provide an incredible array of benefits such as: reducing stormwater runoff and filtering pollutants; providing a buffer from storms and flooding; cooling a city by 2 to 7 degrees; cleaning the air and reducing the impacts of climate change; encouraging people to walk more; and increasing the value of homes. The assessment was conducted in response to the area's diminished tree canopy, largely due to development and recent storms. It is an easy-to-read, interesting, and informative document with 21 specific recommendations. The recent Inflation Reduction Act provided almost \$900,000 for Lake Charles to begin restoring the community's tree canopy.

Enhancing Community Connections

Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics



The Local Foods, Local Places projects are not only focused on developing local food systems, they also encourage promoting safe transportation, connecting people, and creating bike and pedestrian friendly communities. The National Park Service team assessed numerous routes and intersections to:

- Identify areas that could help enhance bike and pedestrian access to community assets like parks, trails, waterways, schools, healthcare, and local businesses.
- Assess existing bike and pedestrian facilities and highlight potential improvements.
- Address the barriers facing cyclists and pedestrians within North Lake Charles.
- Provide functional and beautifying options for intersections.
- Recommend areas for shade tree plantings, with an emphasis on native and sustainable species.
- Present opportunities for trailhead and parking development.
- Describe potential wayfinding and informational signage.
- Add to the information presented in the 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, with observations and suggestions particularly related to North Lake Charles.

During the process, it quickly became apparent that the active east/west rail lines present substantial barriers to north/south bike and pedestrian travel through Lake Charles, which also impacts vehicular traffic. However, these barriers are not insurmountable, and overcoming them would encourage north/south travel throughout the city, helping to enhance a sense of community. While addressing this issue, project partners should establish working relationships with the rail lines operating in the Lake Charles area, namely Amtrak, Burlington Northern and Santa Fe, Kansas City Southern, Port Rail Inc., and Union Pacific.



Below Enterprise Blvd,
at South Railroad Avenue

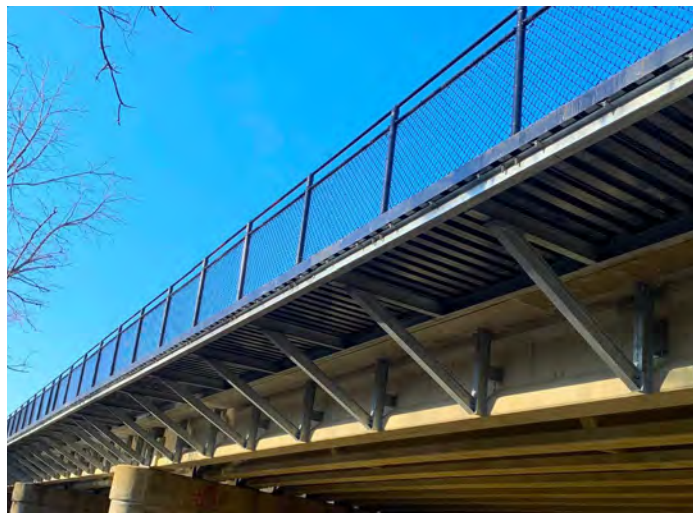
Significant North/South Routes

Ryan Street

- Passes underneath Interstate 10 with an excellent, at-grade rail crossing, just north of South Railroad Street.
- Width becomes an issue on Ryan Street, just before this crossing and northward.
- There are unmarked bike lanes as Ryan Street heads south towards downtown Lake Charles. These lanes could be easily marked.
- Ryan Street would be an excellent connecting route.

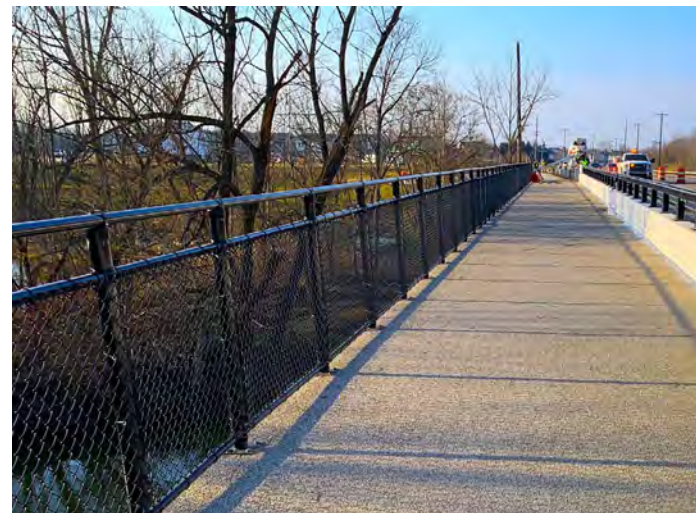
North Enterprise Boulevard

- Its boulevard design and width provide options for designated bike lanes.
- North of N. 1st Avenue, the boulevard turns into a two-lane street and ends at a small commercial area. An extension, in conjunction with future trail development, is being considered.
- North Enterprise travels above the rail lines on an overpass. The four lanes of vehicular traffic do not accommodate designated bike lanes, and the narrow walkways on either side provide little buffer from traffic.
- Design guidelines and traffic counts would determine the feasibility of reducing the four vehicular lanes into one vehicular lane and one designated bike lane per side.
- A cantilevered pathway on the overpass could be a viable option. **The following images show an example of this concept in Clinton Township, Michigan, with a view from above and below (Cass Avenue Bridge Cantilever Sidewalk).**



North Kirkman Street

- Travelling under Interstate 10, it provides an at-grade rail crossing in good condition between South Railroad and North Railroad streets.
- There is a significant "hump" at this crossing. It is not ideal, but certainly passable, and could be improved.
- The street could offer a good north/south connection between McNeese State University and North Lake Charles.
- Kirkman Street features a center turn lane (which could be redesigned) from the university north to Interstate 10. It also has designated bike lanes until just past Interstate 10.
- From this point to the rail crossing mentioned above, the street is narrow. This section is short and could be a candidate for widening.



North Goos Boulevard, north of Opelousas Street

- The "boulevard" starts at Opelousas Street.
- South of Opelousas, North Goos Boulevard is an unimproved dead-end.
 - This area could be considered as a trailhead.
 - Adjudicated property may provide an opportunity for a community garden.
- Its design and width present options for designated bike lanes or a separate bike/pedestrian path.
- **Its center median strip could provide room for a bike/pedestrian path like the one shown below.**
- The two lanes on either side could be reduced to one vehicular lane and a designated bike lane.
- There appears to be enough right-of-way space for widening if needed.
- It provides a connection to the Carver Courts Housing Authority development.
- North of Medora, North Goos Boulevard becomes a two-lane street, with some sections of open drainage ditches. It would require widening to complete a safe connection to Fitzenreiter Street.
- North Goosport Boulevard could be a primary connection to the vast outdoor recreation opportunities in the northwest corner of the community.



North Shattuck Street

- The Shattuck overpass could provide an opportunity for cyclists and pedestrians to pass over the rail lines.
- Design guidelines would determine if there is room to add designated bike lanes on both sides.
- Signage, markings, and a reduced speed limit, could be considered.
- A cantilevered pathway on the overpass may be an option as well.
- Shattuck Street travels along the eastern side of Goosport Park.

North Prater Street

- Travels mostly through residential areas, including both Clark and Carver Courts Housing Authority developments.
- Offers a low-traffic, quiet connection to Fitzenreiter Street.
- Passes J.D. Clifton Elementary, Prater Street Community Garden, and the Allen P. August Sr. Multipurpose Center.

North Simmons Street

- Could serve as an important route through the northeast corner of North Lake Charles, providing an alternative road to the busy Highway 171.
- There are no sidewalks south of Moeling, and those that are north, are narrow.
- Travels past Molo Middle School, Marion High School, Mary Belle Park, and ends at Fitzenreiter Street and the Martin Luther King Center.
- Appears to have sufficient width for bike and pedestrian improvements.



Significant East/West Routes

Fitzenreiter Street

- Fitzenreiter Street can serve as an important connection to the outdoor recreation opportunities at Perkins Ferry and Riverside parks, the Calcasieu River, English Bayou, and the proposed One Lake Charles Bike Trail.
- It passes Combre-Fondel Elementary School.
- The street has intermittent and narrow sidewalks, open drainage ditches, and no designated bike lanes.
- There appears to be enough right-of-way space to add bike lanes, improve sidewalks, and eliminate open drainage ditches.

Moeling Street

- The numerous local businesses located on Moeling Street, between Prater and Highway 171, would benefit from more cyclists and pedestrians.
- The street is wide enough for bike pedestrian improvements.
- It could connect North Enterprise and North Goos boulevards.

Cessford Street

- Another good connection between the two boulevards.
- Travels through residential areas and passes the Donald Ray Stevens Community Center and Park as well as Goosport Park.
- Looks to have sufficient width for bike and pedestrian improvements.
- There are beautification opportunities at the North Enterprise and North Shattuck intersections.

Opelousas Street

- The street is narrow but forms many significant intersections, making widening projects potentially worthwhile investments.
- Could serve as a connection to the beginning of North Goos Boulevard.
- Travels past R. F. Wilson Elementary.

North Railroad Street and South Railroad Street

- Both streets are parallel to the north and south sides of the rail lines, north of Interstate 10.
- Little vehicular traffic.
- North Railroad Street features two at-grade, level rail crossings between North Kirkman and North Bank Street. Both need upgrades.
- Both streets could serve as east/west connections.

Kirby Street

- Provides a good connection to downtown from Kirkman to Ryan streets.
- Could explore the feasibility of converting the three lane section into two lanes with designated bike lanes.

Significant Intersections: Observations, and Recommendations

The following intersections could play particularly important roles in enhancing connections and access to community assets. Many provide opportunities for shade tree plantings and could also serve as potential sites for trailheads and parking. Therefore, these crossroads should be considered for potential functional improvement and beautification projects. The National Association of City Transportation Officials has an [Urban Street Design Guide](#) which can serve as an excellent resource.

The infrastructure improvements would help create a network of connections, making North Lake Charles a more bike and pedestrian friendly community that is healthier and less dependent on cars. Residents would have easier and safer access to outdoor recreation opportunities, community assets, and local businesses. Visitors would also find it easier to travel through the community, providing potential new markets for local foods and businesses.

Fitzenreiter Street and North Goos Boulevard

- Could be a gateway to Riverside and Perkins Ferry parks, the Calcasieu River, English Bayou, and the proposed One Lake Charles Trail. The "Build a Future" project site is also located here.
- A kiosk and wayfinding signage could provide information for cyclists, pedestrians, and visitors about all the outdoor recreation opportunities in the area.
- Undeveloped land could serve as a site for trailhead and parking development.

Moeling Street, North Enterprise Boulevard, and North 1st Avenue

- North 1st, entering from the southeast, creates a large open area that may be ideal for trailhead and parking development.

Moeling Street and North Shattuck Street

- Shade trees can be planted in the large open area on the northeast corner.

Moeling Street and North Goos Boulevard

- Beautification improvements on the southeast and southwest corners as well as the median could transform this area into a welcoming intersection.

Moeling Street and North Simmons

- A small grocery store is located here.
- The southwest corner provides an opportunity for shade tree planting.
- The intersection would greatly benefit from beautification efforts.

Cessford Street and North Enterprise Boulevard

- With Cessford Street identified as a significant route, this can be an important intersection.
- The northeast and southeast corners could provide limited parking.

Cessford Street and North Shattuck Street

- These streets meet at Goosport Park and present an opportunity for a signature intersection, providing a safe, attractive, and welcoming gateway to the park.

Opelousas Street and North Enterprise Boulevard

- The southwest and northwest corners feature large areas ideal for shade tree planting and potential parking.
- If the North Enterprise Boulevard overpass eventually provides bike and pedestrian travel, this could be a significant intersection.

Opelousas Street and North Shattuck Street

- The parking area on the southeast corner could be improved.
- The northeast corner provides an open, grassy area.
- The northeast corner would benefit from shade tree planting.

Opelousas Street and North Goos Boulevard

- Goos Boulevard, south of this intersection, is an unimproved dead-end,
- presenting the potential for trailhead development.
- Church-owned property may provide an opportunity for a community garden.

Opelousas Street and North Prater Street

- This noteworthy intersection features the SWLA Center for Health Services and Prater Street Community Gardens. It is also close to J.D. Clifton Elementary School.

Revitalizing Goosport Park

Goosport Park, often referred to as the “city’s living room” has been a vital part of the surrounding neighborhood for generations. However, use patterns have changed and the park now requires upgrades and additions to better serve the needs of the community. The National Park Service team visited the site multiple times with project partners including Michael Castille, the Director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Lake Charles.

While walking through the park, the Director outlined the following items and initiatives that he and his staff think can revitalize this treasured neighborhood resource:

- Eliminating most of the park’s fences to enhance its connection with the community.
- Keeping the backstop intact for pick-up baseball and softball.
- Adding a new pool that complements the existing splash pad.
- Providing infrastructure for events, including electric hookups for food trucks.
- Installing a new themed playground, designed to be unique to Goosport Park.
- Upgrading and covering the basketball court.
- Exploring potential uses for city-owned, adjudicated parcels surrounding the park.
- Upgrading the Community Center to accommodate programs and encourage residents to visit.

The National Park Service team added the following observations and recommendations:

- Provide safe, accessible ways to walk or ride bikes to Goosport Park.
 - Support the implementation of the city’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan which recommends connections to the park.
 - Explore the Safe Routes to School website which has relevant resources, toolkits, and case studies.
- Preserve and protect the park’s existing tree cover, and plant additional shade trees.
 - Consider asking neighborhood residents to name and register Goosport Park’s signature live oaks. A look at the [Live Oak Society’s registry](#) revealed numerous listings in Lake Charles, but none surrounding the park. Celebrate and recognize these grand old trees by working with the [Lake Charles Garden Club](#).
- Utilize a portion of the park, or one of the adjacent adjudicated properties, for community gardens and/or a dog park.
- Consider signature design concepts for the park’s four corner intersections.
 - Signature design concepts would slow traffic, making travel to the park safer. Beautification efforts would further connect it to the neighborhood.
 - Options could include mini roundabouts and raised intersections.
- While planning for park improvements, include a versatile site for a mobile market.
- Involve the [Lake Area Food Truck Alliance](#) in the planning process.
- Consider the Community Center’s potential to be a Resilience Hub – a community-serving facility that supports residents, coordinates communication, distributes resources, and enhances the quality of life. The establishment of these facilities is one of the catalytic projects from the [“Just Imagine SWLA” initiative](#).



Bayou Greenbelt and Its Importance to North Lake Charles

Just Imagine SWLA describes **Bayou Greenbelt** as “an interconnected network of blue and green trails that will transform the quality of life, resilience, drainage, and connections to the natural environment and recreation. Trailheads and boat launches will provide access to new multi-use trails and bayous and coulees that are currently not accessible. Bayou Greenbelt could become a beloved amenity, connecting people to that natural environment that makes SWLA special.”

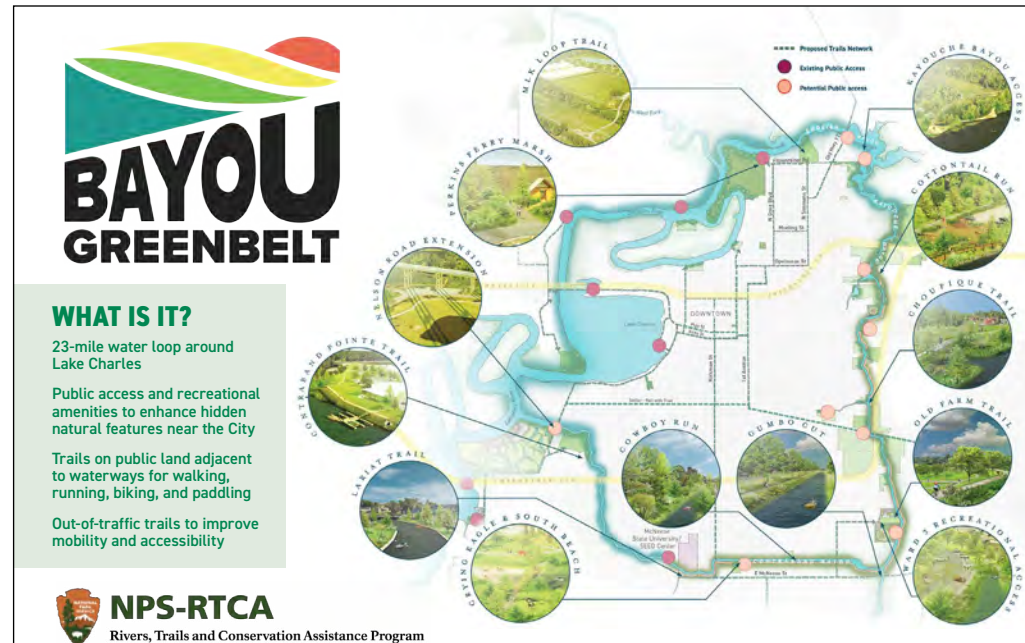
Surrounded on three sides by rivers, lakes, and bayous, residents of North Lake Charles will benefit from Bayou Greenbelt’s water-based outdoor recreation opportunities and planned multi-purpose trails. During a meeting with project partners, the need to “get kayakers on the water,” was emphasized. With this in mind:

- The city should begin implementing Bayou Greenbelt initiatives, particularly the addition of paddling access points on the English Bayou, Kayouche Bayou, and at Riverside Park. These access points would directly benefit North Lake Charles residents.
- The City’s Recreation and Parks Department could offer kayak and paddleboard instructional programs and equipment to introduce children and adults to these outdoor recreation opportunities. Offering interpretive trips could also be considered.
- Provide self-serve kayak rental kiosks, like the one at nearby Sam Houston Jones State Park.

Enhancing bike and pedestrian facilities and establishing community connections will play a critical role in providing North Lake Charles residents with access to all that Bayou Greenbelt has to offer.

The entire community will benefit from these connections. Studies repeatedly show that the availability of parks and outdoor recreation opportunities provide positive health and wellness outcomes, as well as economic benefits such as increased home values. Potential residents are increasingly considering these factors when choosing a place to live. Supporting information can be found on the following websites:

- [National Recreation and Park Association’s 2021 Engagement with Parks Report](#)
- Parks and Recreation Is Essential
- The Value of Local Trails
- Annual Health Care Cost Benefit of Equitable Access to Parks
- Parks and Improved Mental Health and Quality of Life
- The Environmental Protection Agency’s Recreation Economy for Rural Communities





Inventory of Park Facilities

In addition to the City of Lake Charles' request, the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury also sought assistance from the National Park Service to help facilitate a comprehensive inventory of park facilities. Initially, the inventory was only going to include facilities in North Lake Charles, but it quickly grew into a vision of a "one-source" online searchable guide for park facilities in the city, parish, or state. This will help both residents and visitors take better advantage of these community resources.

A working group consisting of representatives from Lake Charles, Calcasieu Parish, Sam Houston Jones State Park, and local tourism officials took the lead in developing spreadsheets that served as templates for the three organizations to enter their facility information.

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana and the National Park Service facilitated a meeting with the working group in August 2023 to refine the spreadsheets, add categories, and enter content. The spreadsheets are included in Appendix 3.

The working group is exploring options regarding who should host and maintain this important web-based inventory and guide.



Assessment of Opportunity Areas

Opportunity areas include underutilized public land at schools and parks, as well as adjudicated (tax delinquent) properties that might be converted to public land. Neighborhood champions are key to transforming them into community assets such as pocket parks, community gardens, food markets, and sites for shade tree planting. The National Park Service team helped identify potential local champions and opportunity areas by mapping adjudicated properties, school and park parcels, churches, and key corridors and intersections for bike/ pedestrian improvements.

As a result of this process, the team identified resource clusters in 13 opportunity areas which were then ranked by the local working group in May 2022 during a facilitated virtual white-board exercise using Mural. Meeting and planning notes, along with photos pertaining to these opportunity areas, are included in Appendix 4.

The 13 opportunity areas and sites included:

Head Start, SLAC Housing Authority, and Johnson Elementary

Good locations for mobile markets.

Wilson Elementary and six nearby churches

Opportunities for food forests, community gardens, and mobile markets.

SWLA Health Center, Prater Street Community Garden, and Clifton Elementary

Consider expanding Prater Street Community Garden. The "Build a Future" project pledged a lot in this area for a mobile market site.

Family Baptist Church w/ adjudicated properties, & Eastwood United Pentecostal Church

Explore potential partnerships with Louisiana State and McNeese State universities to offer urban agriculture, gardening, and nutrition programs.

United Christian Fellowship Church, adjacent to Kayouche Bayou

Large area conducive to food forests, community gardens, and mobile markets.

Goosport Park, the "living room" of North Lake Charles

Work in partnership with the Recreation and Parks Department during renovations. Consider creating a concept for a small festival ground. Several city-owned adjudicated parcels surrounding the park may present opportunities. There is a multi-purpose building with a kitchen and gathering area on-site.

The former Young's Fruit Stand, Emanuel Baptist Church and Catholic Diocese, and Union Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Explore the possibility of reopening or developing a new business similar to the Young's Fruit Stand. The large area of land, east of Emanuel Baptist Church, which is owned by the Catholic Diocese, could present opportunities.

Mary Bell Williams Park area

Many opportunities present at Molo Middle School, Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church, Our Lady of Fatima Chapel, and many adjudicated properties.

Washington-Marion High School

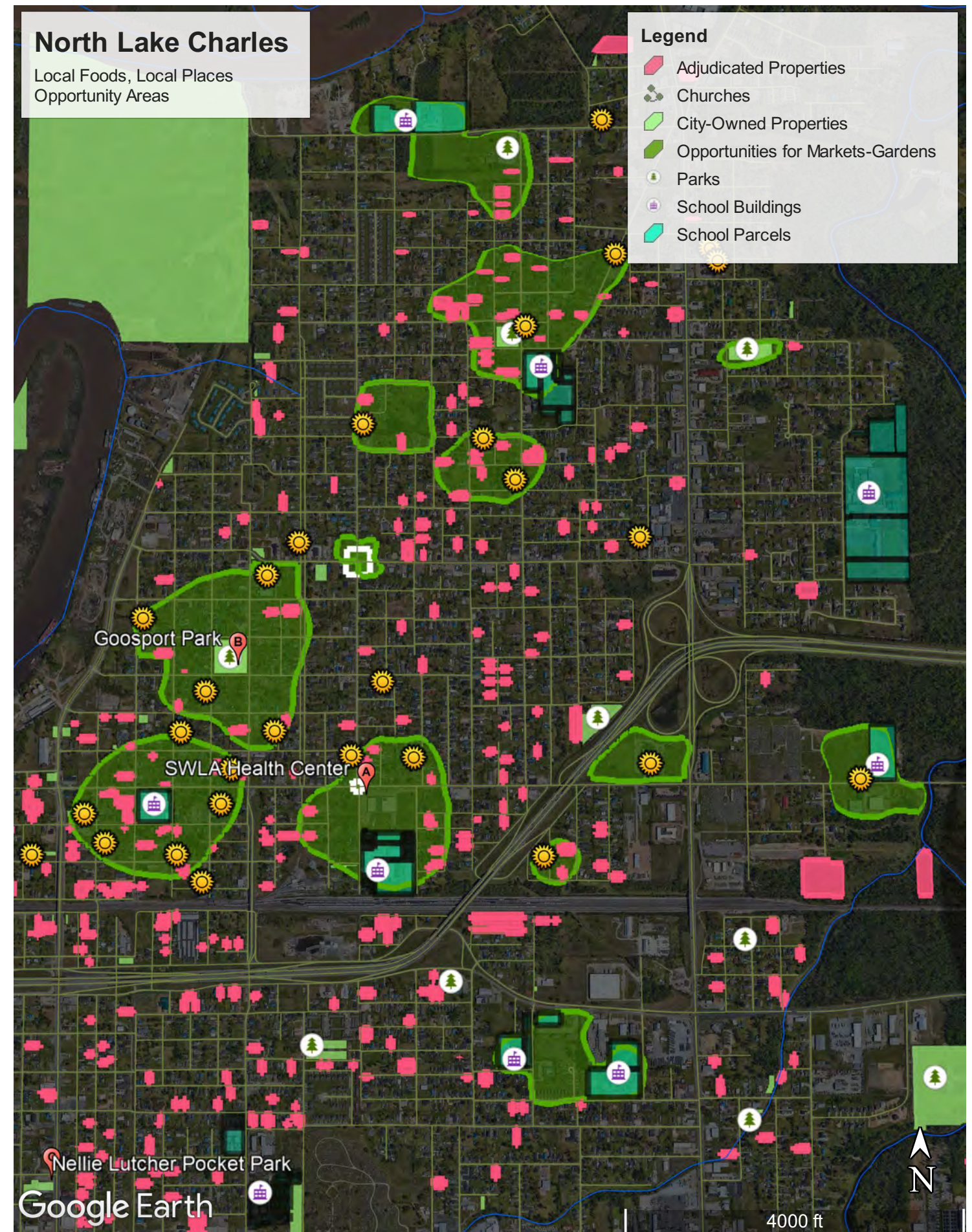
Involve existing, or start, a student 4-H Club – a youth development organization.

Martin Luther King Park

Students started a garden at MLK Youth Center.

Tips for Success to Improve Opportunity Areas:

1. Community gardens require more than a site and an idea; successful, sustainable community gardens require both a community engagement strategy and a long-term maintenance plan.
2. Establish or reenforce partnerships to implement tangible, physical improvements.





Additional Recommendations

Along with the initiatives and concepts already presented, project partners should also consider:

- Greater coordination with local staff of Second Harvest Food Bank.
- Creating a full-time position, potentially housed in the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, to help realize the Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan's goals. This person would be the champion needed to develop and lead partnerships, engage residents, activate opportunity areas, and advocate for the implementation of relevant plans.
- Establishing community-owned food co-op's and/or grocery stores.
 - Dayton, Ohio's [Gem City Market](#) is a great example of a co-op built and owned by the community.
 - The [Legacy Café](#) in nearby Natchitoches, Louisiana has a community garden and offers programming, in addition to a great menu.
 - For general information about food co-op's, [review this website](#) developed by the National Co-op Grocers.
- Developing a community-owned kitchen, like [Colleton Commercial Kitchen](#) in Walterboro, South Carolina.
- Exploring the potential for creating a hydroponic greenhouse. [Cajun Acres Hydroponic Greenhouse](#) in Lafayette, Louisiana is a local example.
- Meeting with [Shreveport Green](#), an organization that provides many of the services and programs that would be relevant to North Lake Charles, including a series of mobile markets and an urban farm project.
- Piloting a city-wide bike share program in North Lake Charles. This could help kickstart residents' use of new and improved bike and pedestrian facilities. The [Bikeshare Solutions for Small Cities and Towns](#) and [Bike Share and Shared Micromobility Initiative](#) are two good resources to check out.
 - Local bike shops often offer programs to help increase cycling in their communities. Investigate [Capitol Cyclery Bicycle Superstore](#) and [Southern Bicycle Co.](#) in Lake Charles.
 - Eventually, develop a Walking and Biking Guide to North Lake Charles, showing local routes, bike and pedestrian improvements, and popular destinations.
- Implementing proactive initiatives to mitigate the potential for gentrification, where revitalization and reinvestment in a community cause a significant increase in rent and home values in low- and moderate-income urban neighborhoods, resulting in actual or imminent displacement of residents. Check out the [Seven Policies That Could Prevent Gentrification](#).
- Establishing a safe crossing at Highway 171, which is a barrier to cyclists and pedestrians.
 - Develop a heavily marked and signed crosswalk with bike/pedestrian-activated traffic lights and lower speed limits at the intersection of Fitzenreiter and Highway 171.
 - Providing a safe way to cross Highway 171 will create safe access to the outdoor recreation opportunities along Kayouche Bayou and English Bayou to all residents of the city, particularly those in North Lake Charles.
- Finally, local partners should consider applying for a [Groundwork Trust designation](#) – developing a locally-led nonprofit organization which engages community residents, especially youth, in projects and programs to improve their physical and social environment. It may be just the vehicle for change and implementation that is particularly suited to the needs of North Lake Charles.



MOVING FORWARD

The Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan is a wonderful document that was developed by an engaged public and its implementation would undoubtedly benefit the residents of North Lake Charles. A revitalized and formalized Steering Committee, with local champions and leaders, could begin to coordinate these efforts and move the plan's initiatives forward. Simultaneously, the Steering Committee and local partners should continuously advocate for the implementation of the regional Bayou Hike and Bike Plan as well as components of Bayou Greenbelt. Both complement and support many goals developed by the Local Foods, Local Places program.

Implementing the initiatives that the community has developed will lay the groundwork for increased investment and an improved quality of life for those who call North Lake Charles home, benefitting the entire city as well.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. **Relevant Resources**

[7 POLICIES THAT COULD PREVENT GENTRIFICATION — SHELTERFORCE](#)

[ANNUAL HEALTH CARE COST BENEFIT OF EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PARKS](#)

[BAYOU GREENBELT - JUST IMAGINE SWLA](#)

[BIKE SHARE AND SHARED MICROMOBILITY INITIATIVE - NATL. ASSOC. OF CITY TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS](#)

[BIKESHARE SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL CITIES & TOWNS - NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES](#)

[CAJUN ACRES HYDROPONIC GREENHOUSE | LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA](#)

[CAPITOL CYCLERY BICYCLE SUPERSTORE](#)

[CASS AVENUE BRIDGE CANTILEVER SIDEWALK - CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN](#)

[CITY OF LAKE CHARLES BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN](#)

[COLLETON COMMERCIAL KITCHEN](#)

[COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT—DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING](#)

[COMMUNITY RESILIENCE HUBS - JUST IMAGINE SWLA](#)

[CULVERT REMOVAL, REPLACEMENT & RESTORATION GRANTS - FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION](#)

[DAYTON, OHIO'S GEM CITY MARKET](#)

[GROUNDWORK \(U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE\)](#)

[LAKE AREA FOOD TRUCK ALLIANCE](#)

[LAKE CHARLES COMPLETE STREETS POLICY](#)

[LAKE CHARLES GARDEN CLUB](#)

[LAKE CHARLES NORTH REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY](#)

[LAKE CHARLES URBAN TREE CANOPY ASSESSMENT](#)

[LIVE OAK SOCIETY – LOUISIANA GARDEN CLUB FEDERATION, INC.](#)

[LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES | US EPA](#)

[NATCHITOCHE, LOUISIANA'S LEGACY CAFÉ](#)

[NORTH LAKE CHARLES OPPORTUNITY AREA PRIORITIZATION WITH MURAL SOFTWARE](#)

[NORTH LAKE CHARLES RIVERFRONT PARKWAY AND REDEVELOPMENT PLAN](#)

[NORTH LAKE CHARLES: A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH](#)

[NRPA'S 2021 ENGAGEMENT WITH PARKS REPORT](#)

[PARKS AND IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE](#)

[PARKS AND RECREATION IS ESSENTIAL | NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION](#)

[RECREATION ECONOMY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES | US EPA](#)

[SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL | SAFE ROUTES PARTNERSHIP](#)

[SHREVEPORT GREEN](#)

[SOUTHERN BICYCLE CO.](#)

[STRAVA | RUNNING, CYCLING, & HIKING APP](#)

[THE VALUE OF LOCAL TRAILS](#)

[URBAN STREET DESIGN GUIDE | NATL. ASSOC. OF CITY TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS](#)

[WHY CO-OPS?](#)

Appendix 2. **Lake Charles Application Materials**

Appendix 3. **Local Foods, Local Places Community Action Plan**

Appendix 4. **Park Inventory Spreadsheets/Templates**

Appendix 5. **Opportunity Area Details**

Appendix 6. **Food Initiatives in Tucson, AZ**

To download appendices, visit:
go.nps.gov/NorthLakeCharles

