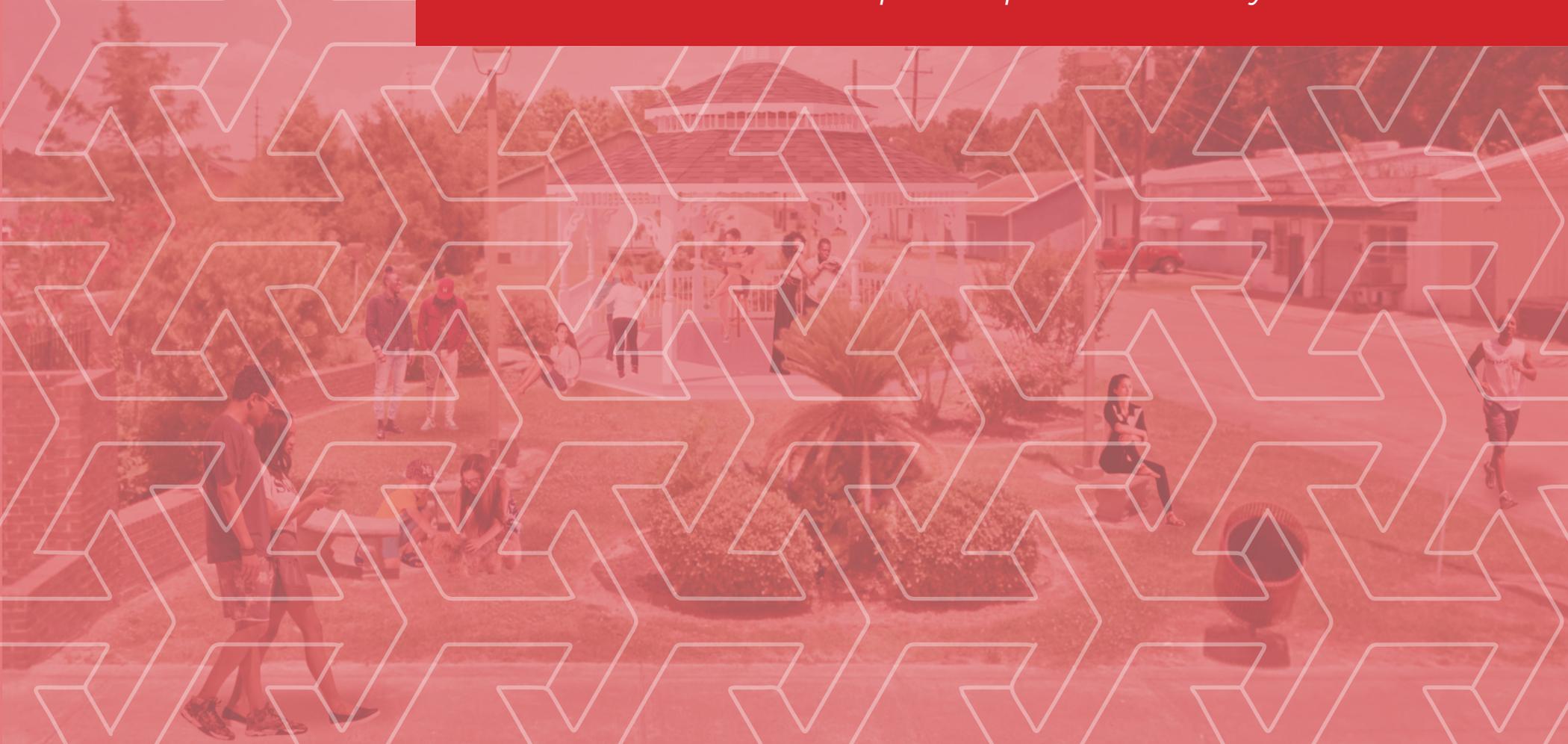


VILLE PLATTE POCKET PARKS

A vision for new public spaces in the city of Ville Platte



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
VILLE PLATTE TODAY	6
PLANNING THE PARKS	8
PROGRAMMING	18
IMPLEMENTATION	21
MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY PROFILE	24

*“We want
to be one.
We want
to be one
in Ville
Platte.”*

*Jennifer Vidrine,
Mayor of Ville Platte*



INTRODUCTION

The Ville Platte Pocket Park Plan is an initiative of the City of Ville Platte under the leadership of Mayor Jennifer Vidrine. She was selected as an inaugural fellow of E Pluribus Unum and conceived of a pocket park network to address the increased racial division in Ville Platte. This plan identifies a system of neighborhood recreational areas anchored by a centralized meeting space with the goals of creating opportunities for safe recreation and social interaction between users and providing access to educational and cultural programs. This system will include a series of pocket parks and a network of connections that allow safe pedestrian access between the parks.

At the heart of this plan is the belief that the built environment shapes a place and its people in profound ways. Physical barriers can reinforce social and psychological barriers, while well-designed public spaces have the power to bring communities together. Access to green space and safe spaces for public gathering have been shown to contribute positively to community health

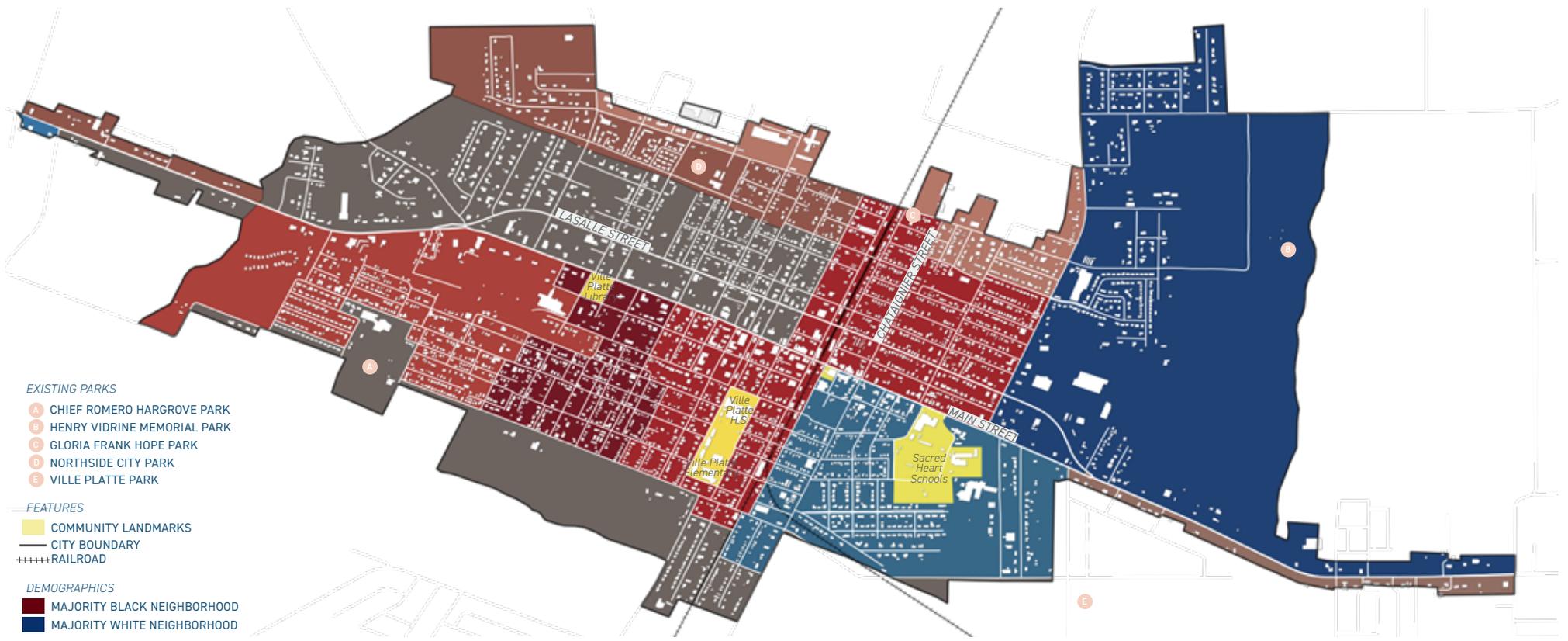
outcomes such as reduced stress, better mental health, increased physical activity, and greater social cohesion. The pocket parks proposed in this plan aim to provide a common ground--a public venue for genuine engagement among Ville Platte residents. Gatherings in the parks will be opportunities for residents to be unified by the things they share in common rather than divided by their differences.

This plan puts forward a vision for how active public space can transform Ville Platte. It celebrates the existing assets of the city while proposing

some planning and design recommendations to move Ville Platte forward. The plan reflects the feedback provided by Ville Platte residents throughout the planning process to help ensure that it is context sensitive and belongs to the community. It also provides a roadmap for the city to implement these transformational parks. The successful implementation of the plan will take a unified effort by city leaders, area businesses, community advocates, and residents. Once established, these parks will serve as gathering places for generations of Ville Plattians to celebrate their heritage and build a common future.







CONTEXT

For nearly 250 years, Ville Platte, Louisiana, has been home to a diverse mix of peoples, resulting in a rich cultural heritage that defines the city. Ville Platte is known for its distinct culinary traditions, music, and annual festivals which attract visitors from across the region. Named for its relatively flat topography, Ville Platte is the seat of Evangeline Parish and serves as a hub for commerce and services among adjacent rural areas.

Despite this cultural richness, the Ville Platte of today faces many challenges. It is among the poorest metropolitan areas in Louisiana and is

divided along racial lines. The city’s central rail line separates the majority Black (62%) residents from White residents. Although current residential patterns paint a more complicated picture of racial distribution, the separation of races on either side of the “tracks” is clearly evidenced by recent US Census tract data, as seen in the map above.

This planning process has been founded on the premise that the condition of the physical environment has profound impacts on social and health outcomes, and the separation of Ville Platte residents is the impetus for designing the Unity

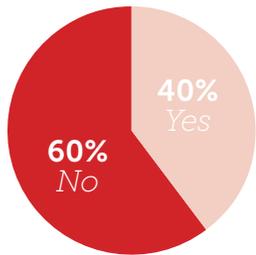
Parks. The city currently has four parks within its boundary: Henry J. Vidrine Memorial Park, Gloria S. Frank Hope Park, Ville Platte Northside City Park, and Chief Romeo Hargrove City Park. While these parks are valuable amenities, they are roughly distributed along the city’s perimeter, leaving the heart of the city with virtually no public space. By designing and implementing flexible public spaces in easily-accessible, neutral locations, this plan aims to combat the city’s racial division and build a shared sense of community.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

SURVEY RESULTS

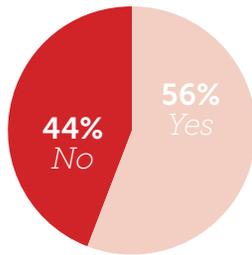
The project team conducted a public survey to better understand community conditions related to existing public spaces and usage as well as information about community members.

Do you use Ville Platte's parks and public spaces now?



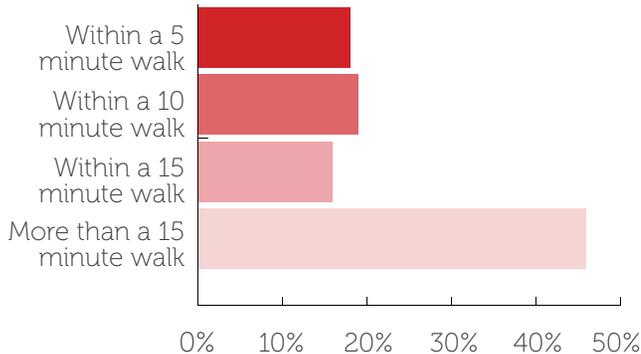
Although I would love to use our public parks, they are not in walking distance for me and my child. With no vehicle it is very difficult.

Do you think your neighborhood needs more gathering space?



Would enjoy using them if they were available in my neighborhood

How close do you live to a park or other public gathering space?



COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Analyzing data on community demographics also helped the project team gain a robust understanding of Ville Platte today. Some highlights of this research are included below.

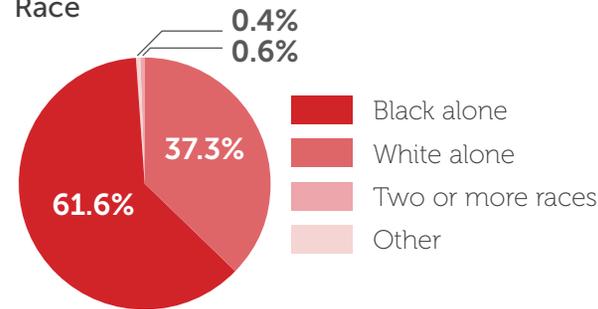
Median Age
34.2
YEARS



Total Households
3,007



Race



Primary Industries



Median Household Income

\$19,616
COMPARED TO
THE STATE'S
MEDIAN OF
\$51,073



COMMUNITY HEALTH

This plan was informed by health information and data that helps identify some characteristics of Ville Platte's population health, focusing on conditions and indicators that can be influenced by the built environment. As can be seen in the chart below, residents of Ville Platte experience conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and arthritis at significantly higher rates than populations at the parish, state, and national levels. Similarly, Ville Platte residents have higher rates of smoking and physical inactivity, which are significant contributors to negative health outcomes. Creating public amenities that provide safe, convenient, and inviting places to engage in physical activity, social interaction, and access green space and community programs makes it easier for residents to engage in healthy behaviors. A growing body of research indicates that social divisions contribute to chronic mental and physical health challenges; therefore, creating public assets designed to encourage social cohesion can support community health in this way as well.

Health Measures	Ville Platte	Parish	State	U.S.
High blood pressure	51.0%	42.3%	39.7%	32.3%
Physical inactivity	44.3%	37.1%	30.8%	23.8%
Obesity	44.6%	39.0%	36.8%	30.9%
Diabetes	21.2%	15.9%	14.1%	10.9%
Arthritis	37.4%	33.1%	29.2%	26.3%
Lack of health insurance	21.1%	17.9%	9.7%	10.9%
Smoking	31.3%	28.9%	20.5%	16.1%

PLANNING THE PARKS

Pocket parks are small, publicly-accessible parks and are typically created from vacant, irregular, or overlooked parcels. This means they are often built in empty residential lots, along the medians of broad streets, or in parking areas. The defining characteristic of these parks is their size; they are usually less than one acre. Pocket parks typically have scaled down features and amenities to offer benefits similar to larger parks, though they take up a fraction of the space.

While Ville Platte has several large neighborhood and regional parks, there are still neighborhoods within the city that do not have convenient park access. A survey conducted in the course of this initiative showed that 29 percent of respondents lived more than a 15 minute walk to a public park. The proposed pocket park network will extend recreation access to additional Ville Platte residents while also establishing new community gathering places to build camaraderie and public good will across racial boundaries.

The system of designated Unity Parks will be placed within walking distance of distinct Ville Platte neighborhoods and, where possible, near the borders of traditionally Black and White neighborhoods, so that members of each community can have an attractive and useful “neutral space” in which to meet, relax, converse, play games, share cultural events, and take advantage of community offerings.





SITE SELECTION

The team developed the following criteria for pocket park site selection. These criteria served as guideposts to help ensure that the pocket park plan meets the goals set forth by Mayor Vidrine. They could also be used in the future to identify ideal locations for additions to the pocket park system.

Equitable distribution

- Should be located across town, in diverse neighborhoods
- Should be seen as fairly apportioned between predominantly Black and White residential areas

Access to the site

- Ability to accommodate groups of people for events, etc.
- Proximity to parking (either on-street or lot)
- Likelihood of attracting people from diverse neighborhoods
- Walkable proximity to Gazebo Unity

Visibility of the site

- Proximity to active corridors is beneficial
- Should be easy to locate for people not from the host neighborhood
- Proximity to other public facilities

Property ownership

- Must be owned by the city

Each of the sites selected will bring convenient park access to nearby residents, provide new public gathering spaces, and offer unique opportunities for programming. The proposed pocket park sites are distributed on both sides of the railroad tracks, serve a range of neighborhoods and demographics, and make the most of vacant or underutilized parcels across Ville Platte. The following section details each of the sites and the proposed pocket park design.

GAZEBO UNITY

The centrally located Gazebo Unity will provide a unique public gathering space and location for community events. It will feature a large gazebo structure with shade and seating and will be able to accommodate a range of outdoor events. The Gazebo Unity will be constructed on an existing area of city-owned property within fifty yards of Ville Platte City Hall and adjacent to the central railroad line.

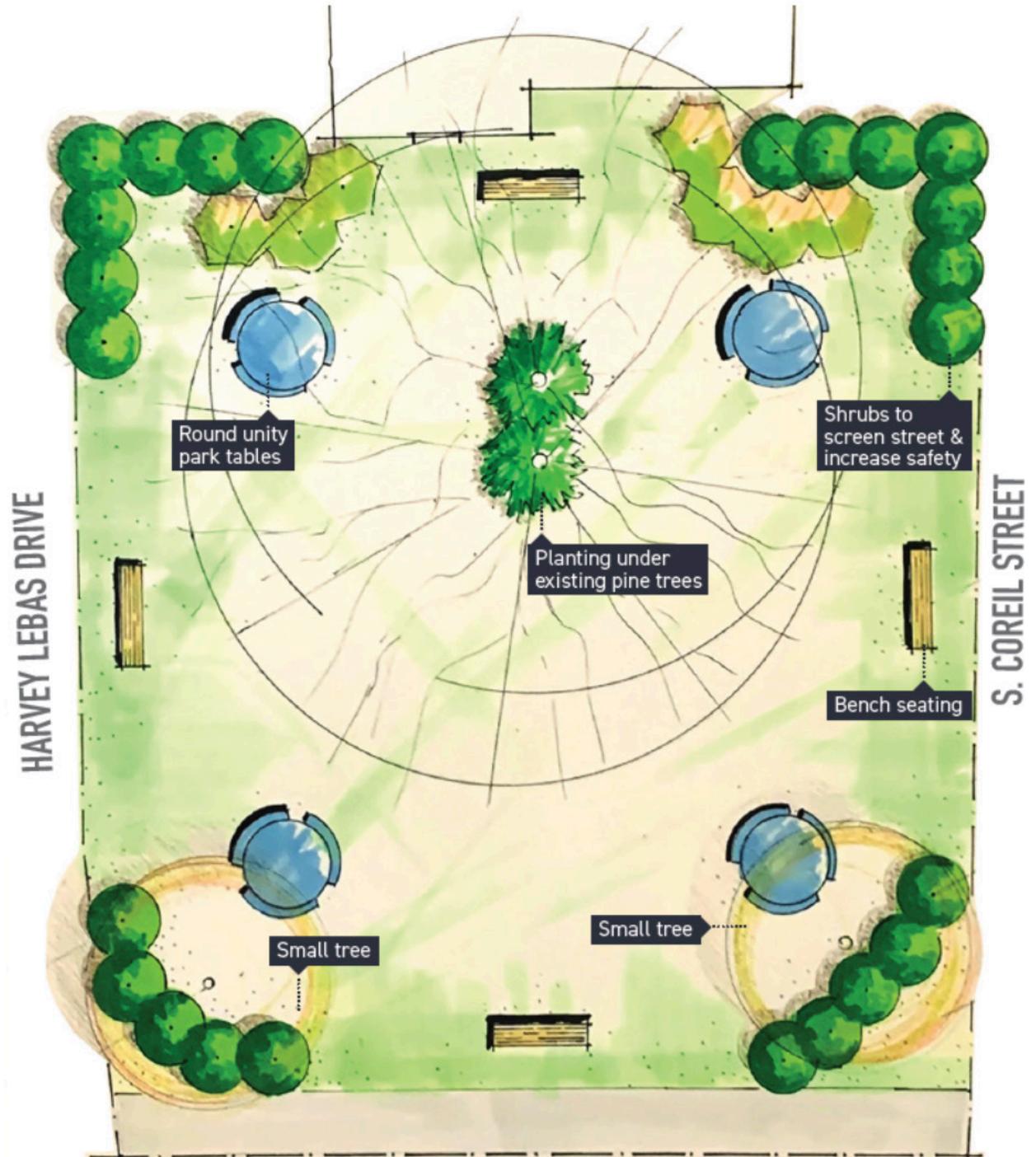
Programming opportunities include outdoor entertainment, including live performances, civic ceremonies, group exercise, community meetings, hobby groups, and more. Gazebo Unity will be a flexible space intended to accommodate many potential uses.



COTTON STREET COMMUNITY PARK

The Cotton Street Community Park will be adjacent to Ville Platte High School and Elementary School and will be in close proximity to several other public destinations. The site is a small parcel (0.1 square acres) bordered on three sides by local streets, and it is currently used as a gathering space for game day activities.

The proposed design for the pocket park features vegetation around the corners of the site to help screen traffic, increase user safety, and establish a feeling of enclosure. The design is intended to create a welcoming, flexible space that can continue to house football game tailgating and other kinds of events currently hosted here. This existing programming will be supported with the signature round picnic tables, symbolizing unity, and benches.

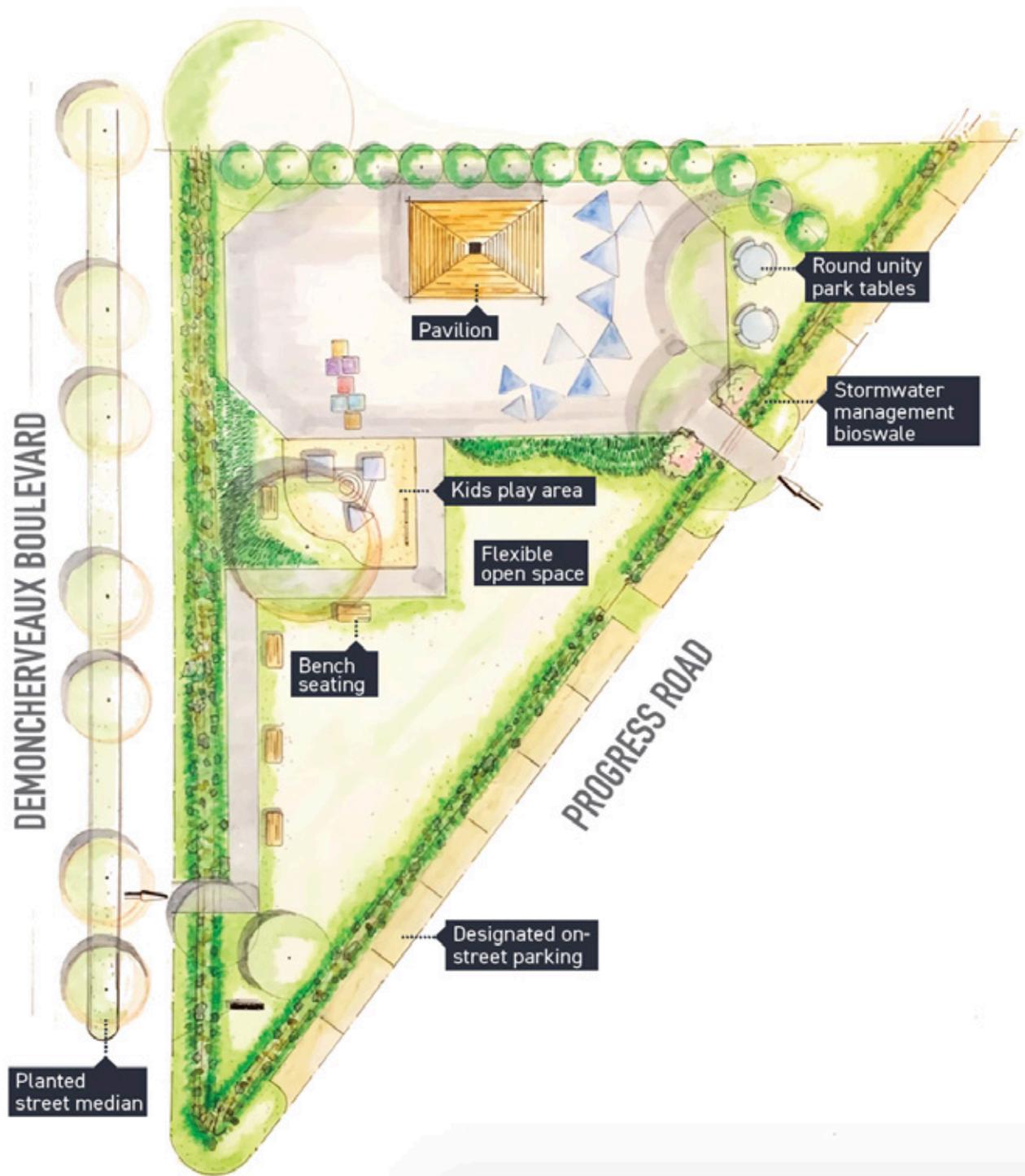




DEMONCHERVEAUX PARK

The Demoncherveaux site sits at the entrance of a residential community on a triangular parcel of land. Though there was once a tennis court on the site, it does not currently host any recreational use. The neighborhood is near the city's railroad tracks, and it is occupied by a mix of Black and White residents. This is the largest of the pocket parks, allowing for larger events to be hosted on the site.

The proposed design for this pocket park features a covered pavilion on the existing slab, offering a comfortable gathering place. Benches and round unity tables offer additional seating for visitors. A small playground provides a space for children to socialize and be active, and a large open green space is available for flexible use. Parking on the south side of the site allows for convenient access, and planted bioswales adjacent to the park allow for on-site water management and feature native plants.

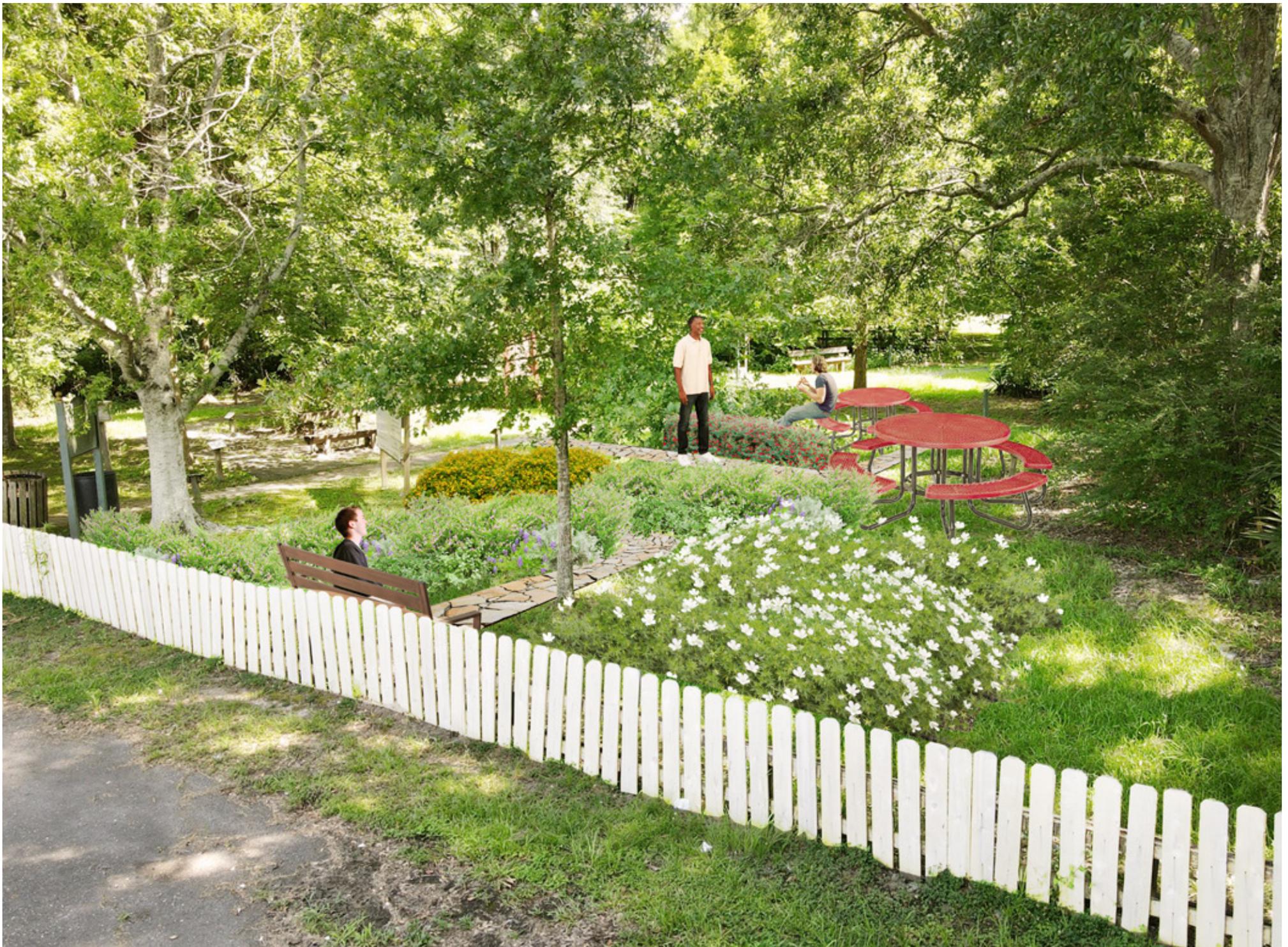


HERITAGE GARDEN PARK

The Heritage Garden Park sits at the entrance of the Ville Platte Native Plant Heritage Garden. The site is located on East Lasalle Street, nestled between some frequent community destinations like Wal Mart and the Sacred Heart School and hospital complex. While the entire Native Plant Heritage Garden site is much larger, the pocket park is carved out of a corner of the park near the parking area and entrance. The site is currently used as a peaceful place to eat lunch for employees at nearby commercial destinations.

The design for this pocket park celebrates the site's native plant theme with a pollinator garden. It features flagstone paths that wind through the planting beds and lead to seating areas, including the signature unity picnic tables and park benches. Educational signage about the native perennials and pollinators, including their benefits to people and the environment, will add to its programming opportunities.

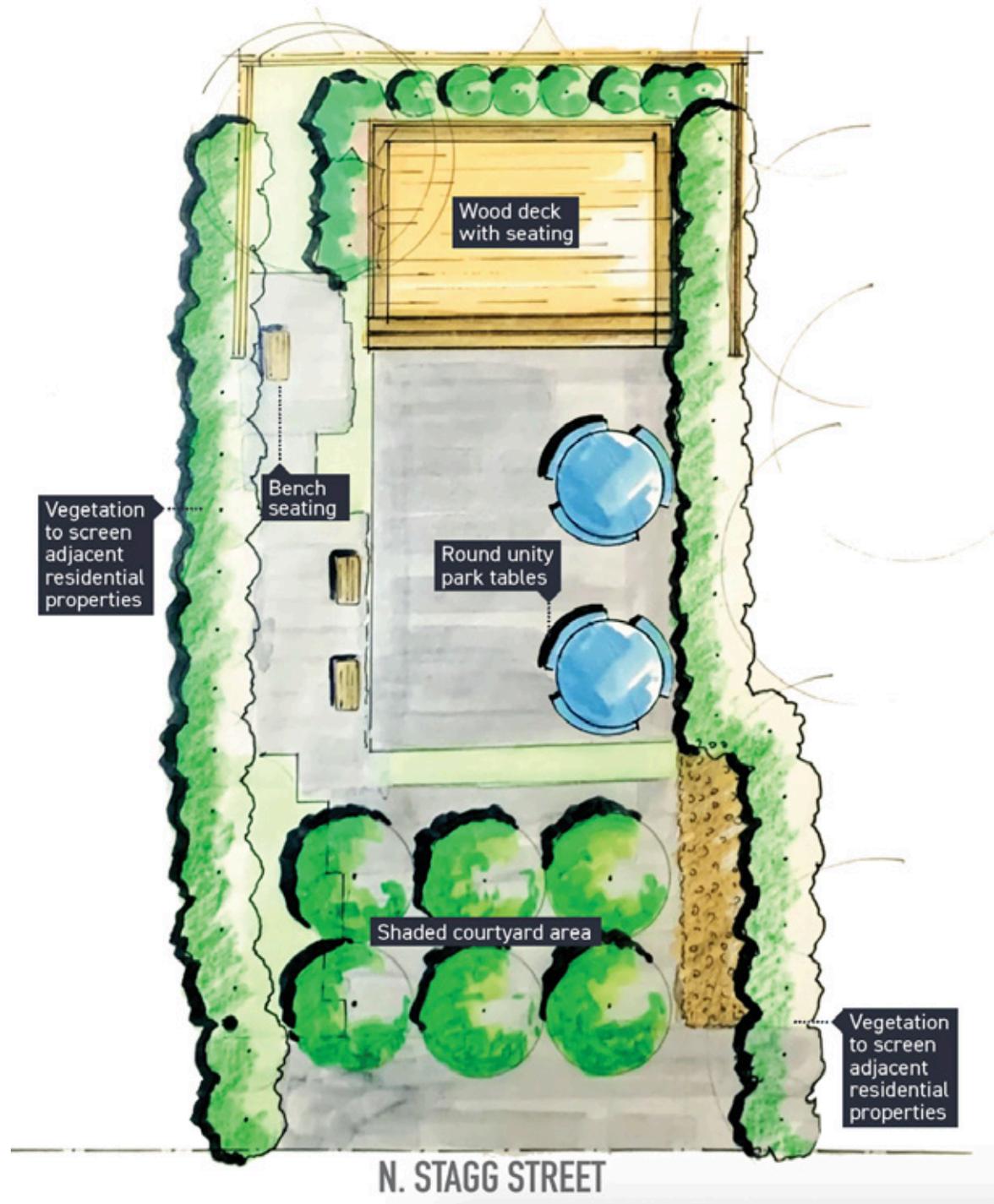




STAGG STREET PARK

The Stagg Street Park is tucked into a residential neighborhood in the northeast corner of the city. It is bordered by residential properties on each side and will provide a new recreational space for the neighborhood and adjacent area. The site formerly had a house on it, and the proposed design integrates the foundation of the house into the park plan.

The proposed pocket park design features vegetation around the perimeter of the site to screen the park from adjacent residential properties. A grid of trees stands near the road with shaded seating areas below, forming a courtyard-like entry to the park. There is additional bench seating along the southern edge of the park. On the large slab, there are the signature unity park tables and a wooden deck with perimeter bench seating to serve as a gathering or performance area for the neighborhood.



PARK CHARACTER

The Ville Platte Unity Parks will have a unique character that speak to the vernacular of Ville Platte while distinguishing them from other public spaces in the area. The design of the parks aims to pull from the material palette of this part of Louisiana, using typical materials like wood and concrete. The exception to this rule is the installation of iconic red round tables at each of the unity parks. These tables represent the aspirational nature of the park system and are meant to encourage conversation among Ville Platte residents.

The plant palette for these parks leans heavily on natives that are drought tolerant and hardy. Using primarily natives that are well-acclimated to the climate of Ville Platte will minimize maintenance in the long-term and serve as another reminder of the beauty inherent to this part of the state.



Wayfinding signage identifies park network



Native plants reduce maintenance



Wooden furnishings offer respite



Evergreen natives screen adjacent uses



Stamped concrete customizes standard materials



Red round tables identify Unity Parks

PROGRAMMING

Event programming will be an important component of the Unity Parks' success. A publicly-accessible calendar of unity-themed events will encourage Ville Platte residents of every race, gender, and age to gather on a regular basis. The different parks have the capacity to accommodate a diverse range of activities that support unity, physical activity and healthy living, the local economy, and education. The parks offer an opportunity for local businesses to conduct outdoor markets and hold hiring fairs in parks where they may find new customers or employees. Other potential events include health fairs with free wellness check-ups, tutoring opportunities for school children, adult literacy classes, book or poetry readings, live music performances, local cooking demonstrations, group exercise classes, and city-wide table game tournaments.

While the parks will provide new venues for all types of events in the city, some programming will directly address the theme of unity. This will include Ville Platte's popular Homecoming Week, already the most integrated and celebrated of local annual gatherings, as a keystone public Unity event. Ville Platte's first Black and female Mayor, Jennifer Vidrine, now serving in her third term, will host the first Ville Platte Day of Unity (including an annual "Mayor's Summit on Race, Culture and Human Relations") during Homecoming Week. This special day will feature addresses by local, state, and national public figures, artistic programs that highlight the potential of our shared humanity, and will promote themes of equity, inclusion, and a

Event	Unity Gazebo	Cotton Street Park	Demoncher-veaux Park	Heritage Garden Park	Stagg Street Park
Ville Platte Day of Unity	x				
Mayor's Summit on Race	x				
Football Tailgates	x	x			
Farmer's Market	x	x			
Market Days	x				
Neighborhood Naturalist Program				x	
Community Garden Program				x	x
Story Time	x	x	x	x	x
Planting Workshops				x	
Movie Nights	x	x	x	x	x
Live Music	x		x		
Mobile Health	x	x	x	x	x
Group Exercise	x	x	x	x	x

sense of integration in the Ville Platte community.

There will also be a concerted annual program of racial and historical education with featured speakers, local cultural events, pop-up markets, medical checkups and other gatherings planned for the Unity-themed spaces that will catalyze constructive conversations between neighbors and provide a forum for new connections between Ville Platte's Black and White families.

In the course of community engagement for this plan's development, the most requested programs/ events were: live music, farmers' markets, group exercise classes, movie screenings, market days with local vendors, and a mobile health clinic. The adjacent table identifies programming opportunities that are well-suited for the pocket parks, noting which sites are most conducive to different types of events.





BRINGING THE VISION TO REALITY

This plan is intended to provide Ville Platte with a roadmap for developing a pocket park system within the city. It presents conceptual park designs which were vetted by the community and outlines the features of each pocket park. This plan crafts a vision and lays the groundwork for the city of Ville Platte to begin implementing that vision. The most successful plan implementations involve elected officials, town staff, and volunteers in a coordinated effort to tackle pieces of projects that add up to larger change.

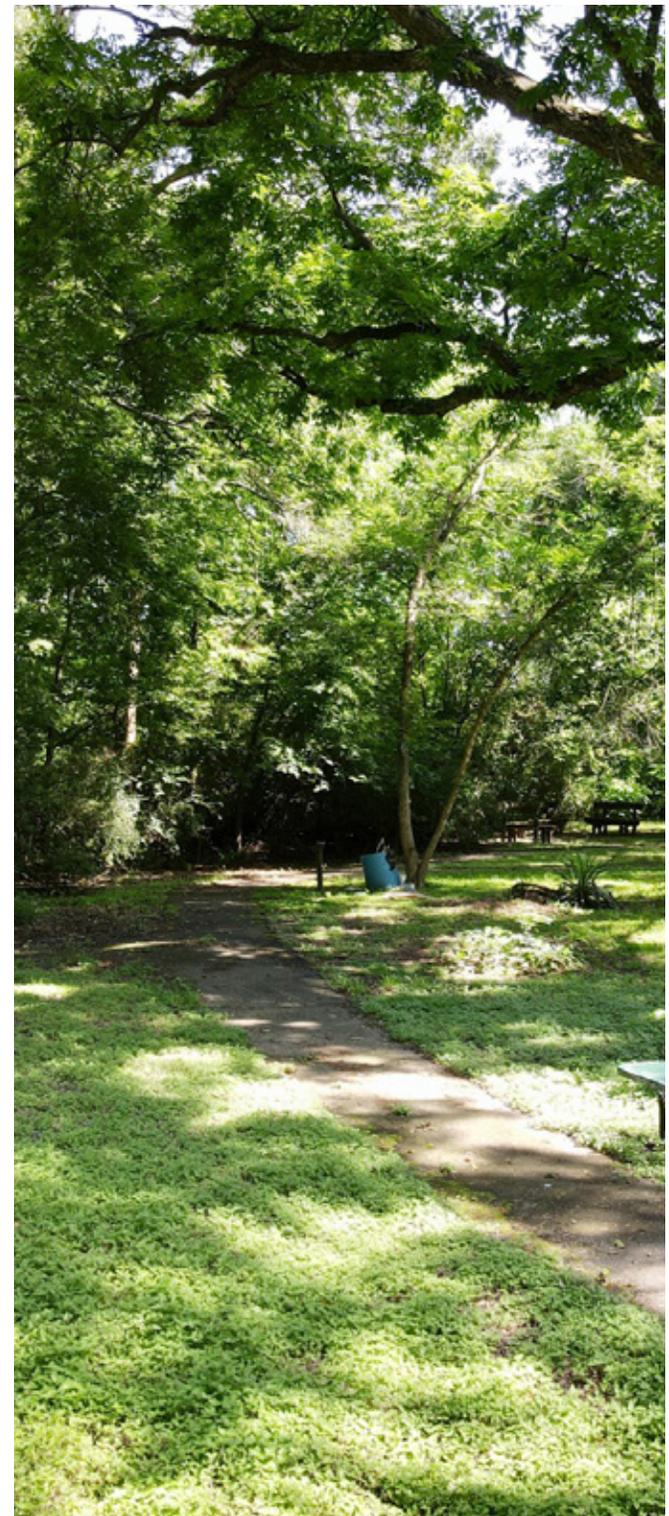
Constructing a coordinated network of public spaces like the ones proposed here will require the dedicated, consistent attention of a city employee or consultant whose responsibility is to manage the implementation of the pocket parks. Furthermore, the designs presented in this plan are conceptual—they provide a vision for what these pocket parks will look like. However, they are not construction documents, and a professional consultant (i.e. a landscape architect, architect, or engineer) may be needed to complete an element of a pocket park. For instance, a consultant might be employed to complete construction drawings for a shade structure or to liaison with LA DOTD regarding street improvement measures.

The steps below outline implementation strategies and roles various stakeholders can play to bring this plan to reality.

BUILDING OWNERSHIP

Forming implementation committees that include city staff, residents, business owners, and volunteers is a great way to build momentum for the pocket park system and to divide up the work. The mayor and council should consider establishing committees that are responsible for overseeing park construction and maintenance. These committees should include people who have a special interest in a particular project, as well as city staff to help implement the project. These committees should report progress to the council and mayor on a regular basis—at least every other month.

Entities such as property owners, business owners, enthusiastic residents, local garden clubs, developers, etc. can also play a role in developing programming in the pocket parks. Delegating responsibility for event planning and/or maintenance to parties that have a vested interest in Ville Platte and its people can be a great way to alleviate some pressure from city staff. This can be particularly effective if there are parties whose interest aligns with obvious programming elements—for instance, if a local hospital or clinic can take responsibility for organizing monthly mobile health checks in the parks. Similarly, volunteer groups from nearby schools, neighborhoods, businesses, or other institutions can play an important role in park maintenance.



SAFETY AND CONNECTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION

The recommendations listed in the mobility profile are designed to move the city closer to an equitable and accessible system of roads and sidewalks. Implementation will require successful partnership between Ville Platte and LA DOTD, the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), the Acadiana Planning Commission, and the Chamber of Commerce. Funding and guidance are available from each of the partner agencies.

FUNDING IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing a plan like this one can be expensive, and resources are often scarce. To leverage city resources as much as possible, we have outlined below some potential funding sources for implementing the pocket park plan. Implementing and maintaining all of the park features outlined in the conceptual designs may require multiple funding sources over a long period of time.

Potential grant opportunities:

RAISE: Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (formerly BUILD); US DOT

INFRA: Infrastructure for Rebuilding America; US DOT

STBG: Surface Transportation Block Grant program; US FHWA

SEDAP: States' Economic Development Assistance Program, DRA

SRTPP: Safe Routes to Public Places (formerly Safe Routes to School); LA DOTD

LWCF: Land and Water Conservation Fund

HSIP: Highway Safety Improvement Program; FHWA

National Association of Realtors Placemaking Grants

In addition to the above funding sources, the area

of Ville Platte west of Tate Cove falls within U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Opportunity Zones. As such, private investors in these areas may be eligible for special tax refunds.

Site	Feature	Qty.
Gazebo Unity	Gazebo	1
Gazebo Unity	Round picnic table	3
Cotton Street	Round picnic table	4
Cotton Street	Bench	4
Cotton Street	Small tree	2
Cotton Street	Evergreen shrub	
Cotton Street	Flowering shrub	
Cotton Street	Shade tolerant groundcover	
Demoncherveaux	Crushed limestone for parking	
Demoncherveaux	Pavilion	
Demoncherveaux	Round picnic table	2
Demoncherveaux	Bench	5
Demoncherveaux	Playground equipment set	1
Demoncherveaux	Native plants for bioswale	
Demoncherveaux	Small trees for median	
Demoncherveaux	Evergreen shrub	
Demoncherveaux	Small tree	2
Demoncherveaux	Privacy fence	

Site	Feature	Qty.
Heritage Garden Park	Round picnic table	2
Heritage Garden Park	Stepping stones	
Heritage Garden Park	Planting area edging	
Heritage Garden Park	Native pollinator plants	
Heritage Garden Park	Plant identification signage	
Heritage Garden Park	Bench	2
Stagg Street	Evergreen shrub	
Stagg Street	Small tree	6
Stagg Street	Round picnic table	2
Stagg Street	Bench	6
Stagg Street	Wood deck	1

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY PROFILE



To catalyze new connections, reconnect neighborhoods, and invigorate Ville Platte's downtown, this plan aims to connect neighborhood-based recreational infrastructure with pedestrian-friendly pathways to Gazebo Unity, where the annual program of education and cultural events will be held. The network of connections in this mobility and accessibility profile support safe pedestrian and bicycle access between the parks.

SAFETY

In terms of mobility and accessibility, safety relates to how roads, sidewalks, and signage support or take away from people's safety. This includes things like speed limits, bike lanes, crosswalks, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant ramps, signs and traffic signals.



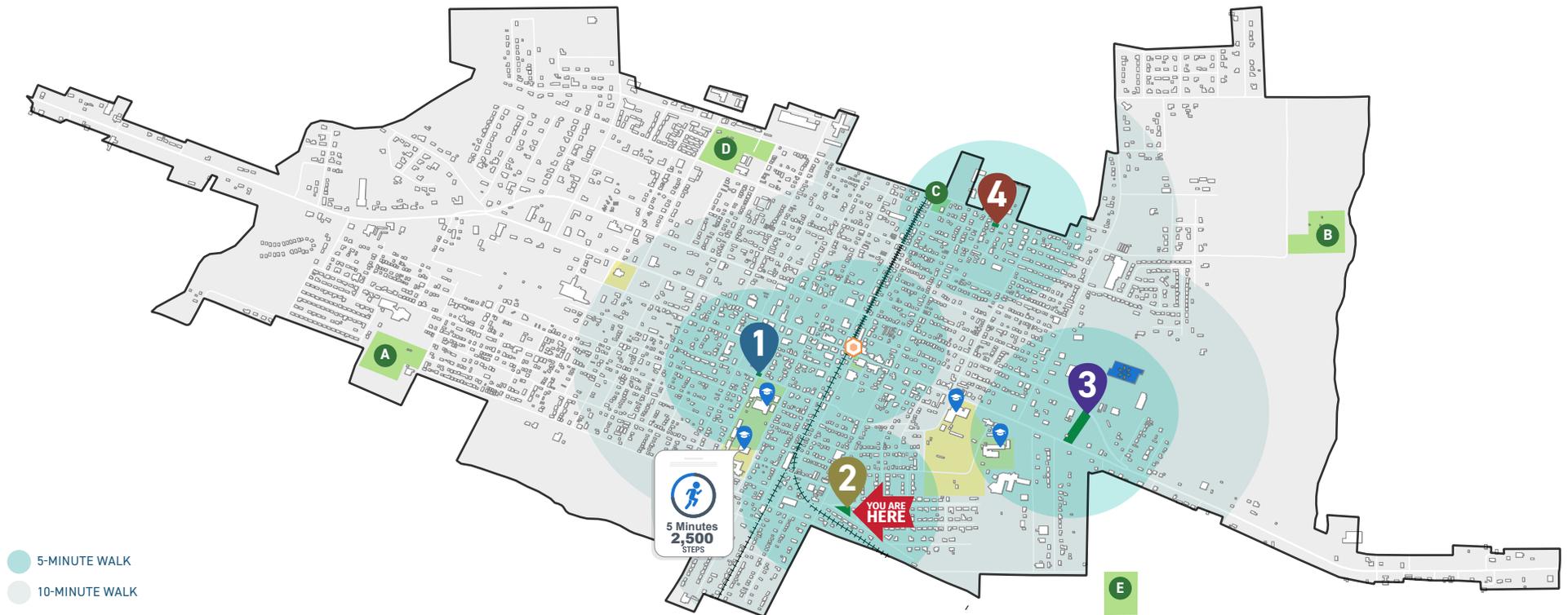
CONNECTIONS

People walking and biking around Ville Platte depend on sidewalks and roads that are well-connected and have facilities appropriate to the level of use. The level of demand for sidewalks and bike facilities was gathered from LA DOTD's Bike Planning Tool in combination with popular bicycling and walking routes from a fitness app that Ville Platte residents use to track their walks and bike rides.



KEY DESTINATIONS

Connectivity and accessibility concerns getting to and from Pocket Parks as well as the routes that people will take to get to the park from home or other nearby destinations. This key destinations analysis looks at places where people might go while on a walking or biking trip to one of the Pocket Parks based on 5 and 10 minute trips.



COMPLETE STREETS

Ville Platte’s higher traffic corridors should be looked at for potential safety improvements aligned with the Louisiana Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) whose goal is “reduce the human and economic toll on Louisiana’s surface transportation system due to traffic crashes.” To achieve that goal the SHSP relies on direction from the statewide Complete Streets policy. The Complete Streets Policy adopted by LA DOTD in 2009 has committed to making streets as safe as possible by using context-sensitive solutions. It doesn’t take huge investments to make roads safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Sometimes an investment as small as a sign or a new road marking can have substantial impact. To best harness the capabilities of the Complete Streets

Policy, a local Complete Streets Plan that includes DOTD and local roads is highly recommended.

SIDEWALKS

Sidewalks are a crucial part of keeping pedestrians safe from traffic and encouraging use of active transportation modes that help residents engage socially and meet their daily physical activity needs. The map below shows the existing sidewalk network and the places where new sidewalks are needed.

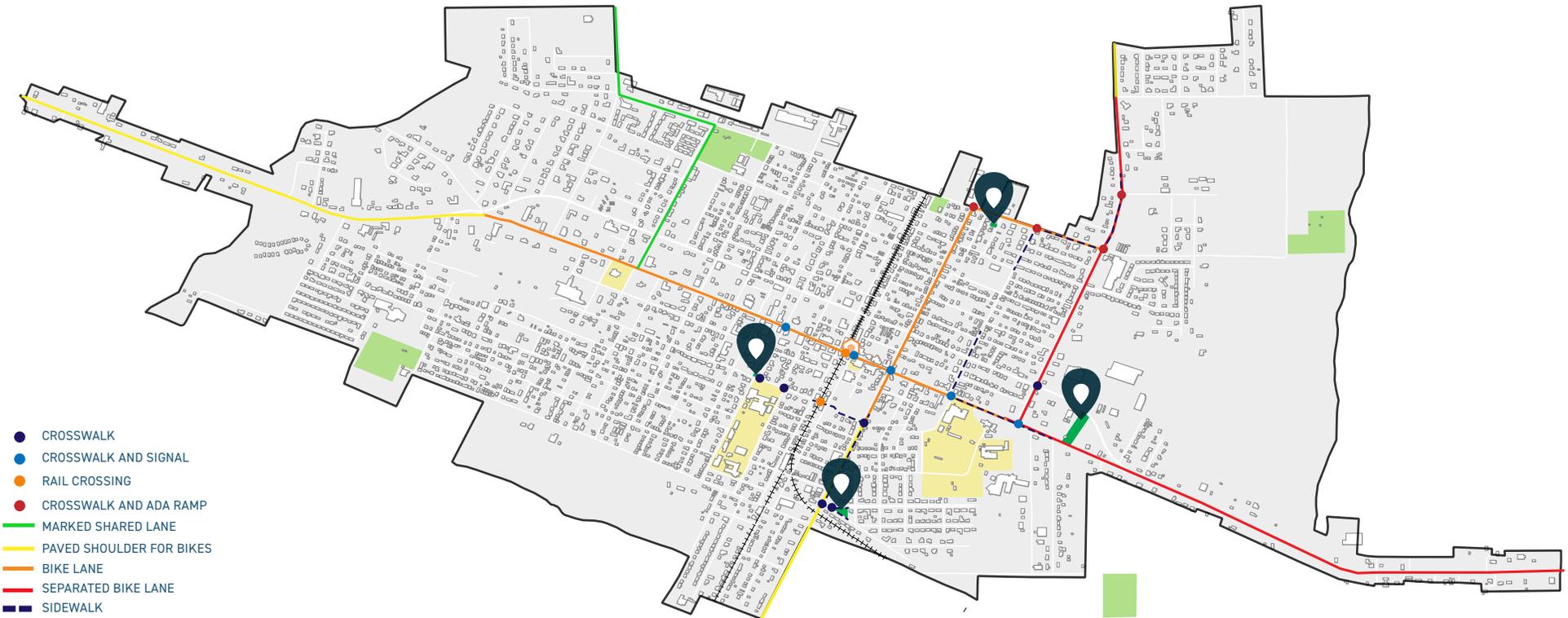
BIKE PATHS & LANES

A combination of signage and road markings are needed to make roads safer for bicyclists. In Ville Platte, a combination of shared lanes (no special signs or markings), paved shoulders, bike lanes or buffered bike lanes, and separated bike lanes are

recommended. Based on these recommendations and the popular biking routes through the city, there are several roads where bike facilities are needed. The map below shows these locations as well as the type of investment needed.

CROSSWALKS AND RAMPS

Crosswalks and ramps help keep pedestrians safe from cars and make the city accessible to people with disabilities. The map below shows places where crosswalks and ramps can be added in an impactful way to the existing and recommended new sidewalk connections. It also shows places near schools and senior living facilities where signal lights may be needed at the crosswalks. Because Gazebo Unity is next to the rail line it is also important to think about a safe rail crossing at that location.



WAYFINDING

A wayfinding system consists of signs and markers that help people find their way around town. This could include large maps at each Pocket Park, small directional signs between the parks, or arches and other large signs that make the park a local landmark. A wayfinding sign posted at each of the Pocket Parks will help visitors to find their way from one park to another. In addition to the parks themselves, wayfinding signs can include local landmarks, locations of benches, key destinations, and suggested routes. The wayfinding system should be easy for anyone to read and should be branded in a consistent color and graphic theme across all elements of the

system. The map below is an example of an easy to read wayfinding sign that could be posted at the Heritage Garden Pocket Park.

CONCLUSION

Ville Platte is in a good position to build on the existing, positive qualities that make it so attractive to residents. By investing in some additional connections and facilities, the city will create a system of recreational areas that is attractive to residents, promotes social cohesion, and encourages healthy behaviors. The following table of recommendations conveys a phased approach to filling connectivity gaps in the city. The first phase of recommended investments--designed

to connect the pocket parks--should take place within the walkability buffers; subsequent phases set the stage for future pocket park investments.

Facility Type	Funding Source
Bike Paths & Lanes	INFRA, RAISE, SRTPPP, STBG
Complete Streets Plan	RAISE
Crosswalks, Rail Crossings, ADA Ramps, and Crossing Signals	RAISE, SEDAP, SRTPPP, STBG
Sidewalks	RAISE, SEDAP, SRTPPP, STBG
Wayfinding	LWCF, UNUM

