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Foundation seeks Master Planner for BR Lakes

Planners will deliver blueprint for preserving lakes, making them a destination

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is seeking consultants to create a $400,000 master plan for the Baton Rouge lakes. Led by landscape architects, a planning team will be chosen and hired this summer to create a blueprint for enhancing the lakes area with amenities in balance with long-term preservation of the natural system.

Under the issued Request for Proposals, the planning team must engage residents of East Baton Rouge Parish to seek ideas for making the lakes an even better destination for the community. Prospective consultants must submit proposals by May 23. Representatives of the Foundation, city-parish government, LSU, BREC, area homeowners and technical experts will pick the best applicants. Finalists are expected to present their preliminary ideas in an open forum, with the winning team chosen soon thereafter.

The Foundation announced the lakes project – Destination: The Lakes – at its 50th anniversary celebration in March. The work is being conducted in consultation with donors to the project, lake-area residents, LSU and the city-parish, which own the lakes; and BREC, which operates Milford Wampold Memorial Park on Stanford Avenue.

The city’s lakes were created in the 1930’s by transforming an undesirable stretch of swamp to open water for the parish to enjoy. But the lakes face problems, much bigger than even the lack of safe pathways for pedestrians. On average, the lakes are only 2.5 feet deep and getting shallower each year. If nothing is done, the lakes will turn into mud flats and eventually revert to swampland.

A 2008 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report recommends dredging the lakes to an average depth of five feet, with deeper areas for healthy fish habitats. The Corps also recommends tubes for flushing out sediment, preserving the lakes’ health for more than five decades to come. The expectation is that oxygen levels in the water will be higher after 50 years than they are now.

The Foundation is building on the Corps report. Engineers hired by the Foundation are measuring lake depths and probing the lake bottom to determine its soil composition. This research is crucial for
understanding how much material has to be dredged up, as well as how it can be used to build new amenities, such as walking paths along the shoreline.

The landscape architect-led team will come behind the engineers, delivering a final plan by summer 2015. Knowing how much material has to be dredged and what can be created with it, they will seek public input about amenities, such as trails along the shoreline.

In its Request for Proposals, the Foundation asks planners to offer an overall design for the lakes and 45 acres that surround it, a circulation plan that includes paths with connections to surrounding neighborhoods, as well as gateway suggestions for exits at I-10 and Dalrymple Drive. Planners must propose a landscaping scheme, design wayfinding and signs, offer a habitat restoration plan, and suggest methods for reducing noise and mitigating drainage from I-10.

The final plan must identify funding sources for dredging and building amenities. Recommendations for governing will be included to ensure the long-term upkeep and improvement of the City Park and LSU Lakes, along with the four smaller lakes that connect to them.

Planners are instructed to have an open and transparent process in creating the plan, with very important consideration given to community outreach.