Lakes Master Plan Meetings Set

Public invited to share ideas with master planners for the University, City Park lakes

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation will host four public meetings for the lakes master planning project. At the meetings, designers and engineers led by SWA Group will ask residents for ideas that can be used to make the plan better. The master plan will be revealed at the final meeting.

“We announced that we were underwriting the plan at our 50th anniversary event in March, and have had whole-hearted support since then,” said John M. Spain, Foundation executive vice president who oversees civic leadership initiatives. “We now need the people of our parish to share their ideas at the public meetings. The more support we have, the easier it will be to implement what is being drawn up by the people and the planners.”

Here is the schedule for the first two of four meetings:

Overview and Brainstorming: Thursday, Nov. 6, 2014, 6-8 p.m., LSU E.J. Ourso Business School Auditorium.

Build Your Own Park: Thursday, Dec. 11, 6-8 p.m., LSU Union Cotillion Ballroom

A third meeting to present the overall design and a fourth one to present the master plan will be held next year. The Foundation will provide more details when those meetings are finalized.

The Foundation would appreciate an RSVP at BRAF.org/LakesMeetings.

The Foundation began a master plan after consulting LSU and city-parish government, which own the lakes, and BREC, which operates parks around the lakes. SWA, in association with Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects, was hired last summer to do the work, which is a necessary step toward reversing the declining lakes.

The problem: University and City Park lakes – and three of the four smaller lakes that surround them – are too shallow, and are silting over time. In 2008, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a draft report that recommended dredging to deepen the lakes and installing pipes to flush sediment to keep them rich with oxygen for more than five decades. This year, the Foundation raised nearly $750,000 for a master plan and related studies to advance the Corps’ draft.
Public meetings are a necessary part of creating an exceptional master plan. Residents can also share opinions and ideas anytime at TheLakes.MindMixer.com, an online public engagement platform. More information about the project is also at BatonRougeLakes.org.

In summer 2015, SWA will deliver a comprehensive design for the six lakes and 45 acres surrounding it, along with gateway suggestions for exits at I-10 and Dalrymple Drive. Planners are also charged with delivering a cohesive landscaping scheme, enabling way-finding and creating signs to support it, providing a habitat restoration strategy, and proposing methods for mitigating both noise and drainage from I-10. As well, the planners will recommend shoreline improvements with the dredged materials, such as a walking and biking paths. To achieve all these ends, they will also identify funding sources for implementation.

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 surround them.

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 and lake-area residents, users of the lakes, LSU, the city-parish, BREC, Louisiana Division of Administration, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, La. Department of Transportation and Development, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources and Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

**About the Foundation:** The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is among more than 700 community foundations in the United States. The Foundation works in two ways to improve the quality of life across South Louisiana. One, The Foundation connects donors who open charitable accounts with nonprofits that provide services to the community. Over 50 years, fund donors and the Foundation have granted more than $350 million. Two, the foundation takes on projects that improve the quality of life. Contributions from members, who number about 600, partly underwrite these projects, which include master planning of the Baton Rouge lakes, education reform, downtown redevelopment, and creating The Water Institute of the Gulf to solve problems caused by rising seas and vanishing wetlands. People can learn more about becoming a member or opening a charitable fund by calling 225-387-6126.