

Sankofa Wetland Park & Nature Trail

Lower Ninth Ward
New Orleans, Louisiana

Phase III
Conceptual Plan



PREPARED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM

NPS-RTCA

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation
Assistance Program



Sankofa Wetland Park & Nature Trail **Phase III Conceptual Plan**

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Executive Summary

The Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail is a community-led project in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward that restores wetlands, reduces flooding, and provides a vibrant public space. The 40-acre park transforms flood-prone, disinvested land into a model for nature-based engineering centered on community experience. It also establishes a pathway to restore 400 additional acres of adjacent flooded land into marsh and cypress-tupelo swamp, offering a replicable blueprint for climate-vulnerable coastal cities across the United States.

Phases I and II of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail provided a proof of concept for what community-led restoration can achieve. The initial demonstration site transformed vacant, flood-prone land into a functioning wetland that manages stormwater, improves habitat, and welcomes residents back to the bayou. Building on that foundation, Phase II expanded ecological restoration and added educational and recreational features. Together, these phases showed that natural systems can once again protect and enrich the Lower Ninth Ward, and that grassroots leadership supported by technical partners can succeed where traditional recovery efforts fell short.

Phase III expands this vision and will have a large positive impact on both the park and the surrounding community. It adds amenities that make the park more welcoming and useful, while also improving safe connections to the neighborhood and regional trail system. Key elements include:

- An amphitheater and events lawn for community gatherings and performances
- Nature-based play areas for children and families
- Quiet reflection spaces that support mental health and well-being
- Integrated signage and interpretation that highlight the history, ecology, and culture of the Lower Ninth Ward
- Greenways and bike routes designed with Complete Streets principles
- A connector trail linking the Wetland Park to the regional St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Canal Trail



Phase III is guided by principles that reflect both community priorities and technical expertise: a community-led vision, safe and equitable access, ecological resilience, and stronger connections within the neighborhood and region. By weaving environmental restoration together with social and cultural investment, Phase III will strengthen community identity, improve public health, and facilitate resilient ecosystems in the Lower Ninth Ward area.

The Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail is more than a park. It is a model of how communities can reclaim land, restore natural systems, and build resilience by working with nature instead of against it. Its impact has reached far beyond the Lower Ninth Ward, drawing national attention to the power of community-led recovery.

In July 2025, the park was featured in the National Geographic's documentary series [Hurricane Katrina: Race Against Time](#). While much of the film revisited the devastation caused by the hurricane, it also illuminated the community's enduring resilience. Toward the end of the film, lifelong resident Keith Craft walks viewers through the neighborhood, reflecting on both its challenges and progress. His path leads to the park, where he shares, "Now we have the park. It started out small and it grew. It's a little bit like it was before, and it's something we are doing ourselves – starting over and a new beginning."

Historical Context: **Where Our Story Began**

The story of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail begins with the Lower Ninth Ward's geography and history. This neighborhood, shaped by the Mississippi River to the south and Bayou Bienvenue to the north, and its fate has been tied to the shifting balance between natural systems and human interventions.

The Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail emerged from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina to create a community-led effort to reclaim land, restore wetlands, and create spaces that reduce flooding while also supporting health, culture, and community.

Caught Between the Bayou and the Mighty Mississippi

The Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans has always been defined by water. For generations, residents fished and gathered along the bayou, while the river shaped commerce, livelihoods, and the very ground the community stands on.

Over time, canals, levees, and urban development severed these ties. Wetlands were drained, protective swamps disappeared, and access to the bayou was cut off by floodwalls and industry. What once provided sustenance, recreation, and a buffer from storms became a hardened boundary. The neighborhood grew more exposed just as its natural defenses were disappearing.



Losing Ground

Like much of coastal Louisiana, the Lower Ninth Ward is sinking beneath our feet. For thousands of years, the Mississippi River built new land by depositing sediment across its floodplain. When levees cut the river off from this process, the soil began to compact and sink in a process called subsidence. Add rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and stronger storms, and together these forces steadily lower the neighborhood's elevation, making it harder to recover from even routine rain events and leaving residents more dependent on levees and floodwalls for protection.



Ghost Swamps of Bayou Bienvenue

Bayou Bienvenue was once surrounded by cypress-tupelo swamps that absorbed storm surges, filtered water, and provided habitat for wildlife. These wetlands also offered food, recreation, and cultural connection for residents.

Today, much of that forest is gone. What remains is a "ghost swamp": stands of dead cypress trees rising starkly from open water, reminders of saltwater intrusion and altered water flows. Canals, levees, and navigation channels severed the bayou from the Mississippi River, accelerating wetland loss and weakening one of the community's most important natural defenses.

With the loss of these swamps, the Lower Ninth Ward was left more exposed to storms and flooding. At the same time, the ground beneath the neighborhood was sinking, creating an even deeper vulnerability that continues today.

When the Levees Broke

These vulnerabilities were laid bare in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Storm surge overwhelmed levees, and floodwaters rushed into the Lower Ninth Ward with catastrophic force. Lives were lost, homes destroyed, and nearly the entire community was displaced. The population plummeted, with many residents unable to return even after rebuilding began elsewhere in the city. Vacant lots and adjudicated properties remain visible reminders of the storm's destruction and the uneven pace of recovery.

Katrina also underscored the urgent need to restore natural systems as part of community resilience. The loss of wetlands and tree canopy amplified the storm's impact, while decades of disinvestment left the neighborhood without adequate defenses.



Phases I and II: Reclaiming the Land

Out of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, residents began to imagine a different future. Where others saw abandoned land and standing water, community leaders saw an opportunity to heal both people and place. In 2008, the Sankofa Community Development Corporation was founded with a mission to improve the health and environment of the Lower Ninth Ward. Its name, drawn from the Akan language of Ghana, means “to go back and get it,” a reminder that recovery must learn from the past to build a stronger future.

Phase I of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail created an eight-acre demonstration site along Bayou Bienvenue. This first step reclaimed neglected land and transformed it into a living example of community-led restoration. The project retained nearly two million gallons of stormwater, removed invasive vegetation, planted native trees, and created trails and signage that invited residents and visitors back to the bayou.

Phase II built on that success by expanding ecological restoration and community use. This phase deepened wetland and habitat restoration, increased public access, and added features for education and recreation.

Together, Phases I and II provided proof of concept. They demonstrated that natural systems could once again protect and enrich the Lower Ninth Ward, and that grassroots action supported by technical assistance could achieve what large-scale recovery programs could not. This success became the catalyst for Phase III, an expanded vision for resilience, connectivity, and quality of life.



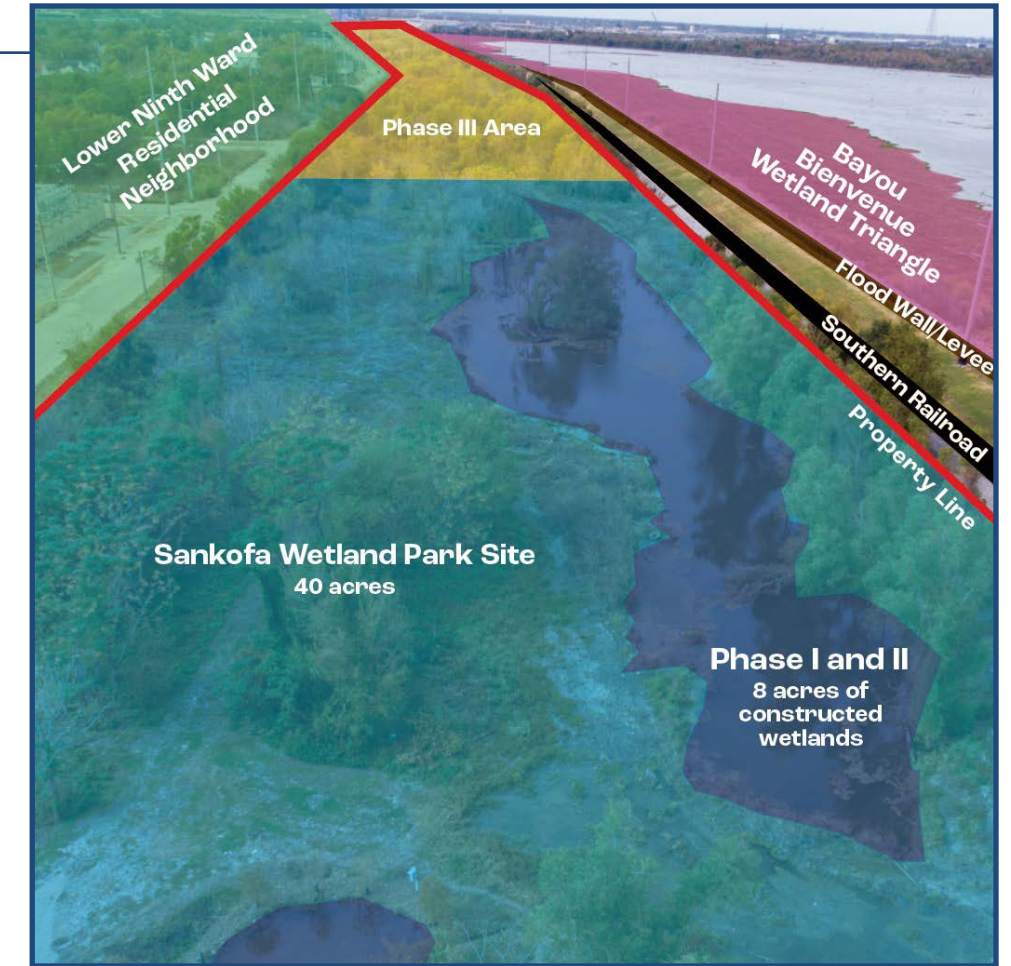
Phase III: Expanding the Vision

With proof of concept established through Phases I and II, the community is now ready to scale up its vision. Phase III of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail builds on what has already been achieved while addressing broader neighborhood needs for resilience, connectivity, and quality of life.

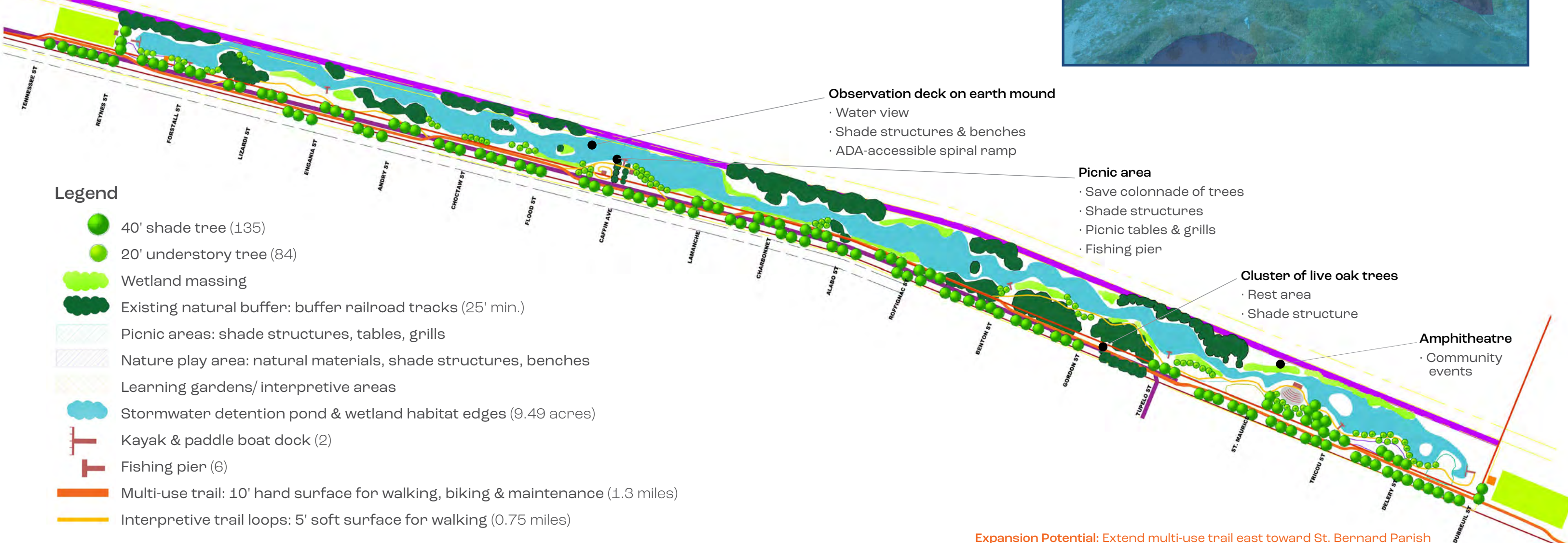
Within the park, Phase III proposes new gathering spaces, educational features, and amenities that make the park more accessible and welcoming. Beyond the park, the plan strengthens links to neighborhood streets, schools, and regional trails, creating safe routes for walking and biking that connect residents to the park and to each other.

Equally important, Phase III positions the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail as a model of community-led restoration. By expanding wetlands, increasing tree canopy, and adding community amenities, the project shows how environmental repair and social investment can reinforce one another.

An overview of the initial plan, completed in August 2020, is shown below.



Expansion Potential: Extend multi-use trail west toward Corps of Engineers Parcel and go south along the Industrial Canal to connect Sankofa Wetland Park to more of the neighborhood



Expansion Potential: Extend multi-use trail east toward St. Bernard Parish



Key Partners

The Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail is a community-led project, but its progress has depended on strong partnerships. Each phase has brought together local organizations, technical experts, and government agencies whose combined efforts have shaped the park's vision and made it possible to move from ideas to implementation.

Community leadership. At the heart of the project is the [Sankofa Community Development Corporation](#) (Sankofa CDC), who initiated the project vision and led the planning and outreach, which provided continuity from the earliest phases through the current effort. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward have also been central partners, guiding design priorities through workshops, site visits, and ongoing input.

Technical and design support. The [National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program](#) (NPS-RTCA) has contributed technical expertise, helping to frame the conceptual plan and connect local vision to best practices in resilience and ecological restoration. Civic Studio and Scape Landscape Architecture developed signage guidelines and trail concepts, while other design and planning partners contributed to mapping, hydrological studies, and habitat restoration.

Agency and institutional partners. Local and regional agencies have provided essential support, from the City of New Orleans and the Sewerage and Water Board to Flood Protection Authority East and St. Bernard Parish. Universities and research organizations have contributed data, analysis, and student-led projects that deepened the community's understanding of its landscape.

Extended partnership network. Conservation, recreation, cultural, and civic groups have supported the Sankofa Wetland Park & Nature Trail through technical expertise, coordination, and policy support, helping connect the park to broader networks and advance its development. These contributors include Comite Resources, Wetland Resources, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Silver Jackets Program, the offices of Congressman Troy Carter and State Senator Joseph Bouie, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, University of New Orleans Research and Technology Foundation, and Environmental Defense Fund.

Together, these partnerships have created more than a plan. They have built a collaborative framework that continues to sustain the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail as both a neighborhood resource and a model for other communities.



Community engagement has been central to every phase of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. Between December 2023 and March 2024, Sankofa CDC and NPS-RTCA convened partners and residents in a series of meetings to gather input on Phase III. These sessions invited residents to share ideas, review draft concepts, and help set priorities for the future of the park.

The process began with a partner meeting on December 7, 2023, at the Sankofa CDC office on Dauphine and Reynes Streets. Nineteen participants attended, including Sankofa CDC staff, NPS-RTCA planners, university partners, and local advisors. Discussions covered ecological restoration, tree planting, youth engagement, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) programming, and safe walking and biking connections.

In March 2024, three community workshops followed at the Sanchez-Byrd Multi-Service Center on Fats Domino Avenue. Residents generated ideas for Phase III park features as well as neighborhood-scale improvements. The series culminated on March 27, 2024, with a larger master plan meeting at the Lower Ninth Ward Senior Center. Attendees reviewed draft concepts at interactive stations, shared stories about their history with the bayou, and provided passionate feedback.

From these meetings, several recurring themes and priorities emerged. Design priorities incorporated into Phase III include:

- **Access and connections:** greenways and bike routes consistent with Complete Streets principles, and a connector to the St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Canal Trail.
- **Gathering and events spaces:** an amphitheater and a flexible lawn for community celebrations.
- **Nature and play:** a nature-based play area and a quiet area for reflection, both shaped by resident input.
- **Education and culture:** integrated signage, wayfinding, and interpretive panels highlighting the history and ecology of the neighborhood.
- **Health and environment:** wetland restoration and tree planting to expand the urban canopy.

Ideas identified as longer-term opportunities include:

- Expanded murals and public art
- Additional shaded picnic areas and play features
- More extensive quiet zones for reflection and healing
- Urban tree canopy restoration across the Lower Ninth Ward, beyond the park itself

Not every idea can be addressed in this phase, but all reflect the strong desire of residents to see the park grow as both a community space and a symbol of renewal. The appendices provide more details on meeting dates, participation, and complete notes from each session.

Principles Guiding the Plan

The Phase III plan for the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail reflects the combined vision of community members, partners, and technical experts. While the design draws directly from community priorities, it is also guided by principles that will help ensure the park strengthens resilience, restores ecological function, and creates opportunities for long-term stewardship.

Resilience and Climate Adaptation

The Lower Ninth Ward remains one of the most flood-vulnerable neighborhoods in New Orleans. The plan builds on what has already been accomplished through the eight-acre demonstration site, which retains nearly two million gallons of stormwater and provides space for trails, signage, and recreation. Expanding bioretention ponds and tree canopy cover will further reduce flood risk while improving the neighborhood's livability.



Together, these principles provide a foundation for decision-making and ensure that the plan remains rooted in both community priorities and best practices for resilience.

Community-Led Vision and Equity

Sankofa CDC was founded on the belief that the community must lead its own recovery. This principle shaped the planning process, which included workshops and engagement sessions at schools, churches, and community centers. NPS-RTCA staff helped facilitate these sessions and synthesize feedback, but the vision for the park remains rooted in the voices and priorities of Lower Ninth Ward residents.

Ecological Restoration and Biodiversity

The Wetland Park is designed to restore native vegetation, wildlife, and the character of Louisiana's wetlands in the community. Bald cypress, water tupelo, and other native species will strengthen storm resilience while supporting habitat diversity. These efforts not only restore ecological function but also reconnect residents to the landscapes that once defined their neighborhood.

Connectivity and Complete Streets

Residents consistently emphasized the need for safe and inviting ways to reach the park by walking or biking. The plan incorporates the concept of Complete Streets—streets designed for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Applying this principle to future bike routes and neighborhood greenways will tie the park into a broader active transportation network.

Education, Culture, and Stewardship

The park is more than infrastructure; it is a classroom, gathering space, and cultural anchor. Community members called for learning trails, interpretive signage, and space for cultural events. Long-term stewardship will be supported by groups such as a Friends organization, ensuring that education, culture, and restoration are integrated into the park's future.

Park Improvements and Connections

Phase III Plan

The Phase III Conceptual Plan translates the guiding principles and community vision into specific improvements for both the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail and its surrounding connections. Building on the accomplishments of Phases I and II, this plan reflects the ideas gathered through community engagement and the technical recommendations of partners.

The plan is organized in two parts:

- **Within the Park:** improvements to the amphitheater, events area and learning trails, nature-based play, and the West End Trailhead, as identified in the as-built survey/base map.
- **Beyond the Park:** connections through neighborhood greenways, bike routes, and a trail link to the 40 Arpent Canal.

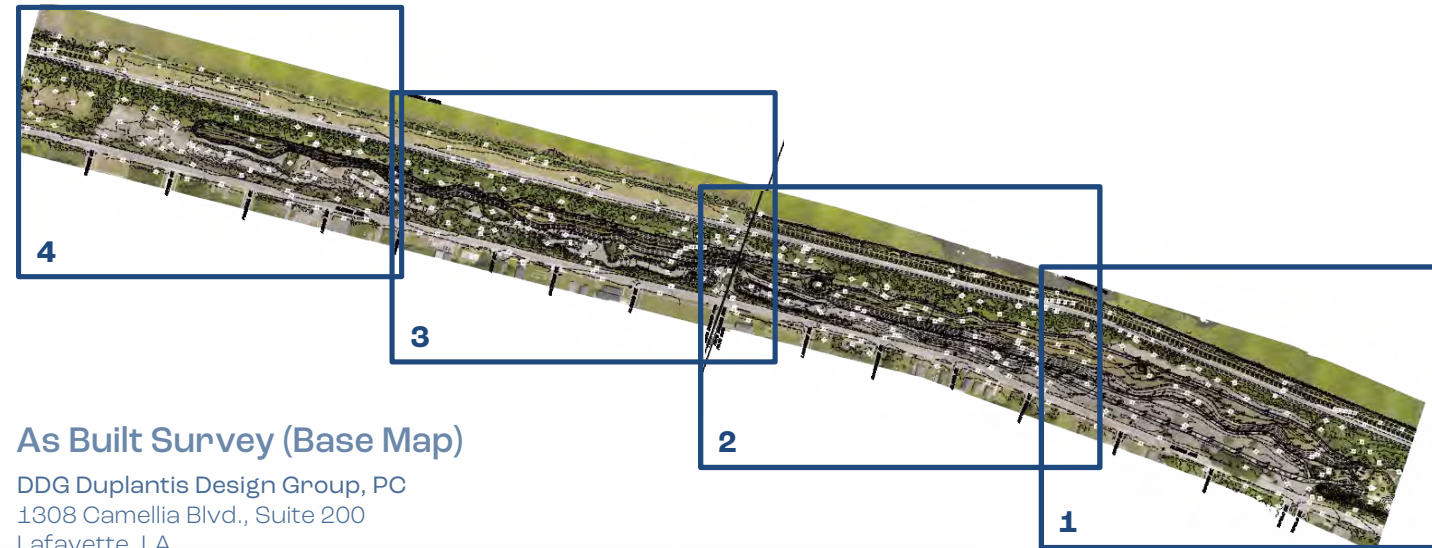


Photo: Sankofa Community Development Corporation

Inside the Park

Phase III includes several improvements within the boundaries of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. These features are identified in the as-built survey/base map and respond directly to community input and partner recommendations. Together, they create spaces for gathering, learning, play, and access, while also strengthening the park's ecological and cultural functions.

Please refer to the following conceptual master plans for these four areas of the Sankofa Wetland Park & Nature Trail Phase 3 development recommendations.

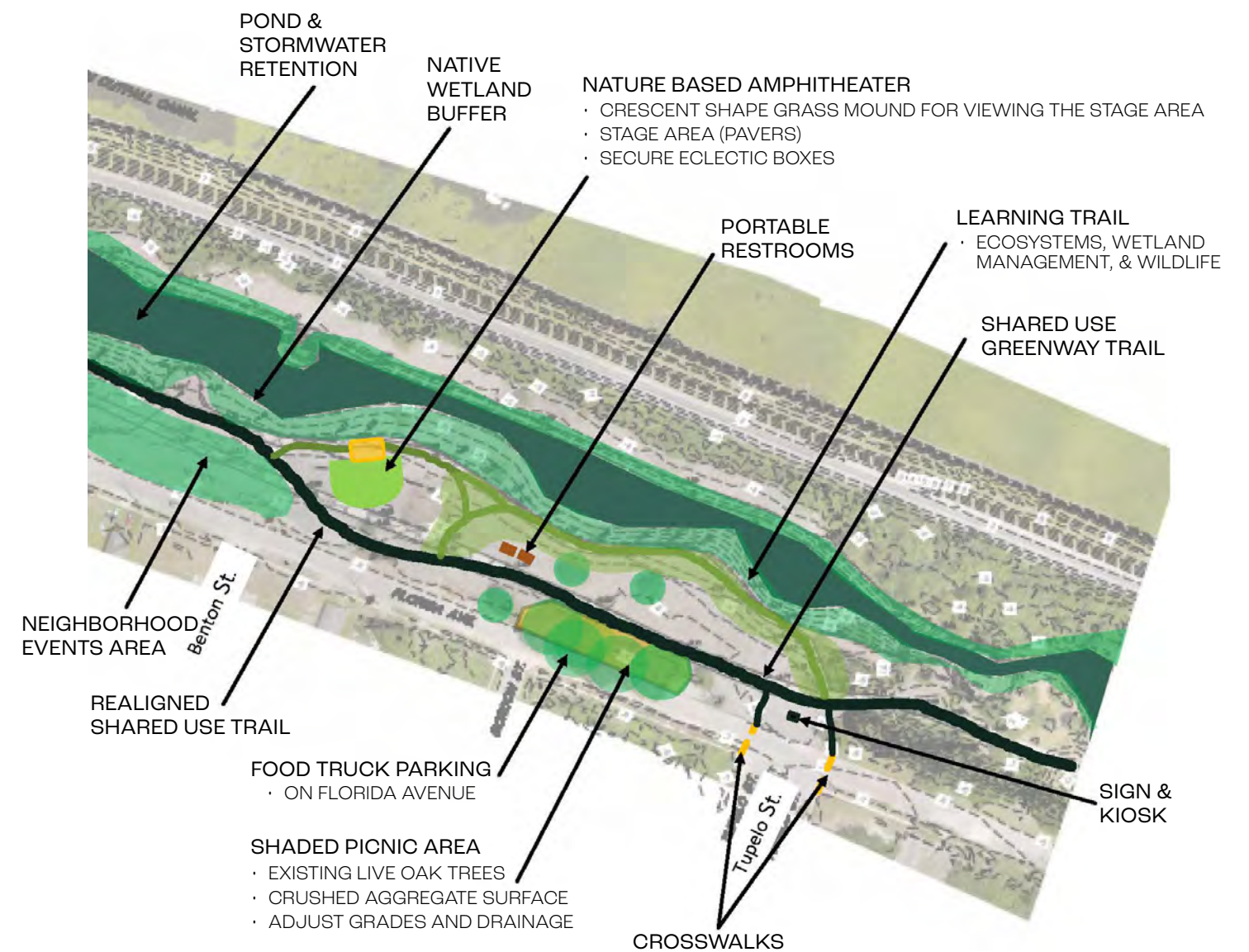


Amphitheater

Community members consistently emphasized the importance of creating spaces that support music, theater, and cultural events. They wanted a place to celebrate the neighborhood's traditions and to gather together for performances, festivals, and community programs. These priorities shaped the design of an amphitheater as a flexible, open-air venue that can accommodate cultural performances, environmental education programs, and informal gatherings. Located near the main pond, it will be both a natural gathering spot and a central feature of the park. Seating will be shaped into the landscape, creating a space that feels connected to its surroundings while also providing accessibility for all ages and abilities.



SHEET NUMBER 1 OF 4



Amphitheater concept design for the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail.



Events Area and Learning Trails

Community members identified the need for a large, flexible green space that could support a wide variety of activities. Their input included farmers markets, festivals, concerts, and cultural gatherings, as well as fitness stations, outdoor classrooms, native plant gardens, and art installations along trails. Collectively, these ideas reflected the desire for the park to be a place where recreation, culture, and learning come together.

This vision is carried forward in the Events Area and Learning Trails. At its heart is an open lawn large enough to host markets, festivals, concerts, and performances. Framing this space is a network of trails that connect different areas of the park while also providing shaded walking paths and opportunities for

interpretation. Along these trails, features such as signage, demonstration gardens, and art installations will highlight the ecological, cultural, and historical significance of the landscape.

By combining an active events lawn with an educational trail system, this section of the park offers space for both large gatherings and quiet exploration. Shaded seating and tree plantings provide comfort for families and visitors, while the trails strengthen circulation across the site and extend the reach of the lawn into the broader park.



SHEET NUMBER 2 OF 4

Nature-Based Play Area

Community members feel very strongly about the role that nature and parks play in enhancing mental health. Residents emphasized the need for play spaces that are safe, accessible, and connected to nature—places where children can explore with imagination and curiosity and families can gather in shaded, comfortable settings.

Phase III incorporates these priorities in a nature-based play area that features play structures built from natural materials such as logs, rocks, and native plantings. The area will be buffered by native shrubs and located next to a shaded picnic area, creating a seamless connection between play and

family gathering spaces. Shaded seating will give caregivers comfortable places to watch, while the overall design encourages children to interact with the landscape and discover its ecological features.

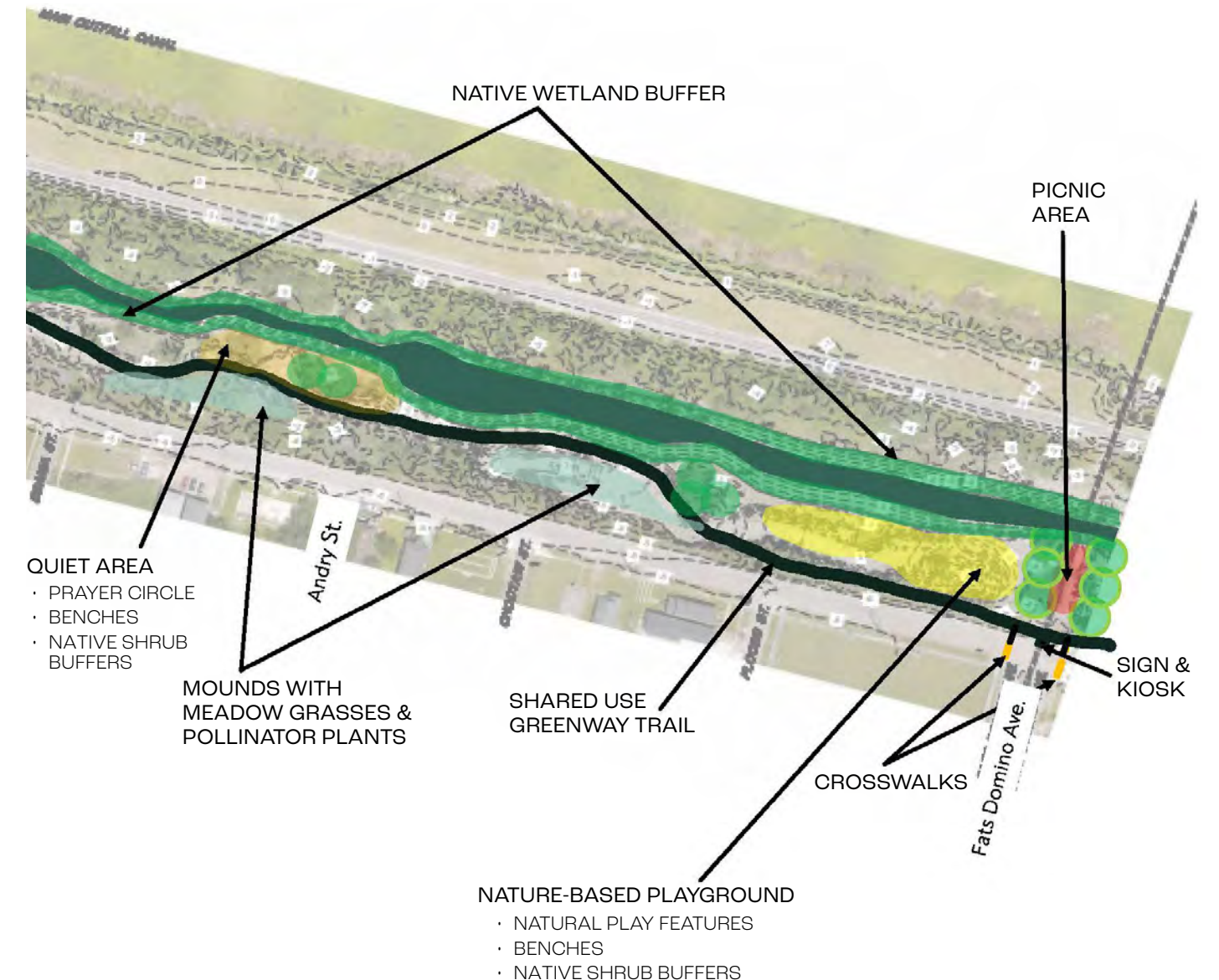
To further support well-being, this section of the park will also include a Quiet Area where visitors can sit, relax, and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature. This contemplative space provides a restorative counterbalance to the energy of the play area, reflecting the community's vision for parks that nurture both body and mind.



SHEET NUMBER 3 OF 4



Concept rendering of the events lawn and learning trails, designed as flexible spaces for markets, festivals, and outdoor classrooms.



Nature-based play area concept, with natural play features, shaded picnic spaces, and a quiet area.

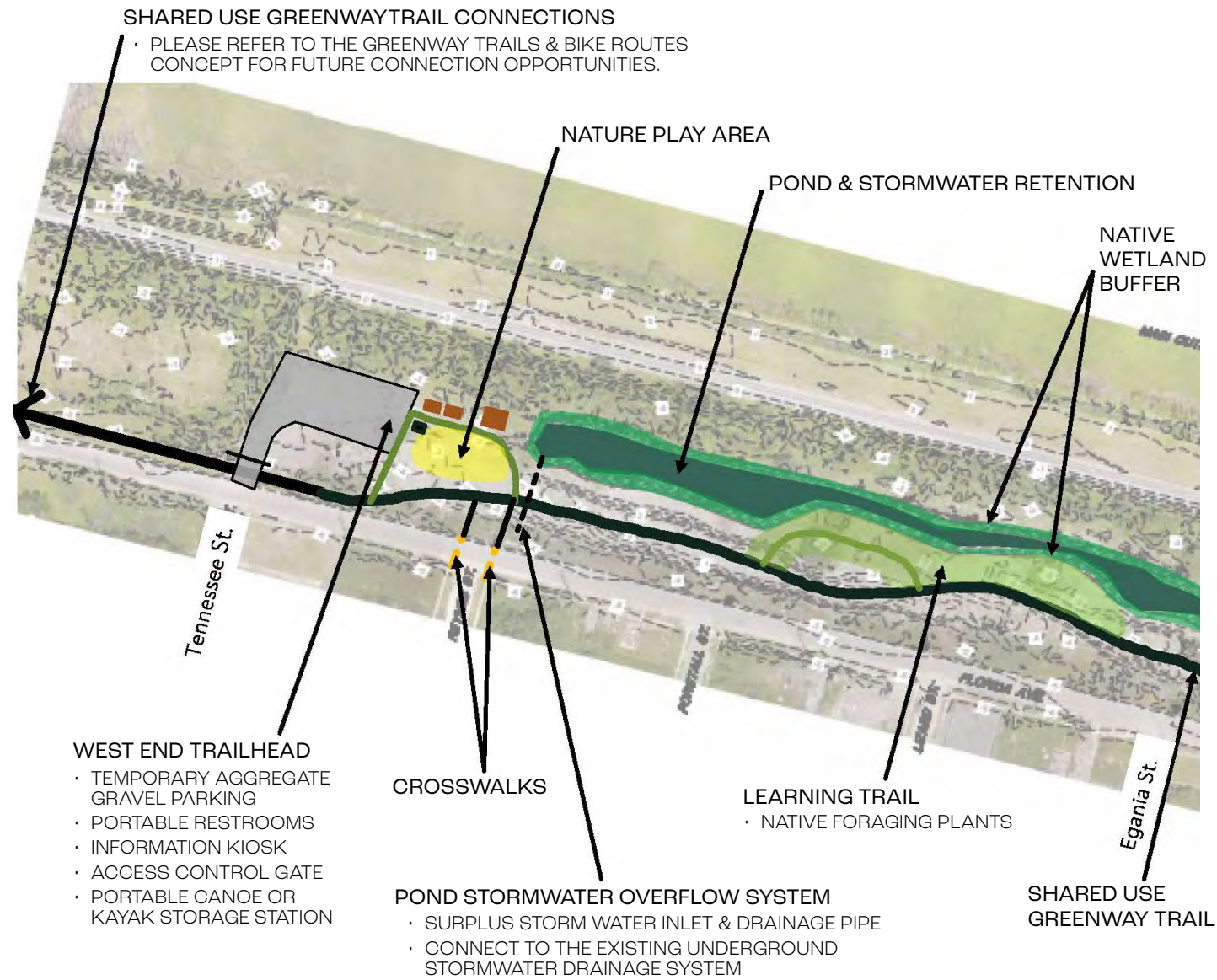
West End Trailhead Area

Community members emphasized the need for a welcoming and clearly defined entrance to the park. They wanted safe access points with clear wayfinding, shaded gathering areas, and amenities that make the trail's edge both functional and inviting. These ideas are carried into the West End Trailhead, which is envisioned as both a gateway and an orientation point for visitors.

The design includes prominent signage to mark the entrance, interpretive displays to introduce the park's ecological and cultural features, and shaded seating where visitors can gather before or after a walk. A small water access point is also planned, giving residents and visitors a place to connect with the site's restored pond and enjoy the landscape from a different perspective. Safety is reinforced through lighting, visibility, and well-marked circulation routes that connect directly to the park's trail system.



SHEET NUMBER 4 OF 4



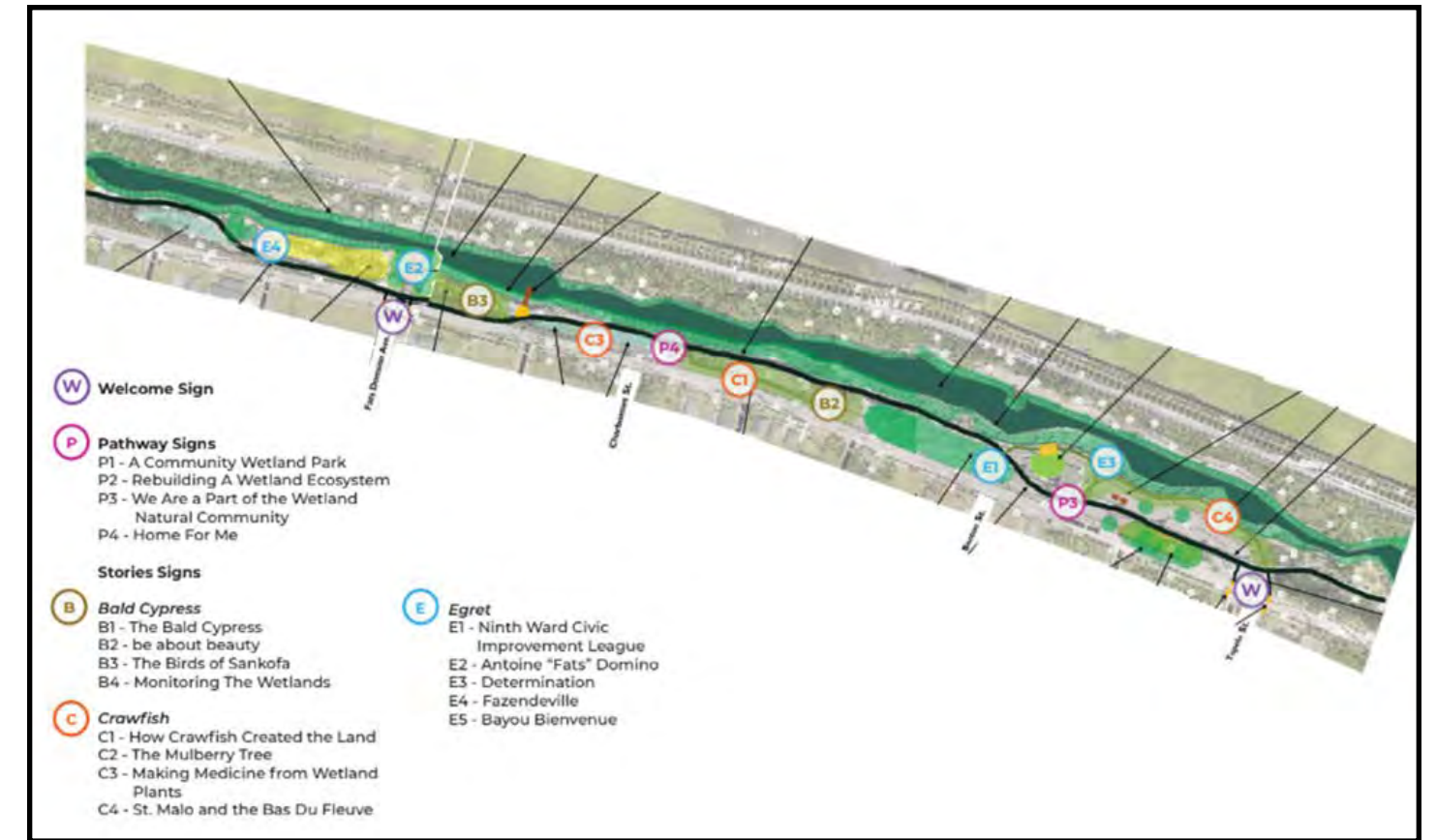
Concept design for the West End Trailhead, featuring signage, shaded seating, and interpretive displays.

Integrated Signage and Interpretation

Community members highlighted the importance of clear signage and interpretation to help visitors navigate the park and understand its history, ecology, and cultural significance. Their suggestions ranged from wayfinding signs and directional markers to interpretive panels, murals, and other creative features that reflect the identity of the Lower Ninth Ward. To help bring this vision to life, Sankofa CDC partnered with local firm Civic Studio to develop a [Signage Content Plan](#).

These ideas are carried forward through an integrated signage and interpretation system that will serve both practical and educational purposes. Wayfinding signs at entrances and along trails will orient visitors and connect them to key features such as the amphitheater, events lawn, play area, and trailhead. Interpretive panels will highlight the site's restored wetland ecosystem, the history of the neighborhood, and the community's ongoing efforts to rebuild with nature. Murals and public art, designed in partnership with local artists, will add cultural expression and a sense of place.

To ensure durability and accessibility, signage will use materials that can withstand the wetland environment and include features such as large-print text and simple graphics. Together, these elements will make the park more welcoming, navigable, and meaningful for all visitors.



Concepts for integrated signage and interpretation at the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail, including wayfinding, interpretive panels, and public art. Potential locations for signs are shown in the concept.

Beyond the Park

Community members also emphasized the importance of connections beyond the boundaries of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. They want safe, inviting routes that link the park to nearby neighborhoods, schools, and regional trails so people can easily reach the site on foot or by bike.

Phase III carries these priorities forward through two major connections: the creation of neighborhood greenways and bike routes guided by Complete Streets principles, and a trail link that connects the park to the St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Canal Trail. Together, these improvements will knit the park more tightly into the community, expand opportunities for recreation and mobility, and strengthen its role within the broader regional trail network.

Greenways and Bike Routes

Community members consistently voiced the need for safer, more inviting ways to walk and bike through the Lower Ninth Ward and to the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. They emphasized connecting the park to schools, churches, and neighborhood destinations, and creating routes that children and families could use with confidence.

Consistent with Complete Streets principles, the greenways and bike routes concept includes new bike lanes, improved sidewalks, well-marked crosswalks, signage, shared-use paths, and lighting to make streets safer and more accessible for all users while linking the park directly to the amphitheater, events lawn, learning trails, and play areas.

LEGEND

- PROPOSED GREENWAY TRAILS (SHARED USE TRAIL)
- EXISTING GREENWAY TRAIL
- PROPOSED CROSSWALKS (FLORIDA AVENUE)

New Orleans Bikeway Blueprint*

- PROPOSED BIKE BOULEVARD SHARED LANE
- BUFFERED BIKE LANES
- PROPOSED PROTECTED BIKE LANE
- EXISTING BIKE LANE & PROPOSED PROTECTED BIKE LANE

*New Orleans Bikeway Blueprint Map Recommendations
See the following document for more details and descriptions.
[Moving New Orleans Bikes - City of New Orleans \(nola.gov\)](http://nola.gov)



The Lower Ninth Ward in 2009
Credit: nicknormal / Flickr



Concept for greenways and bike routes connecting the Lower Ninth Ward to the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail, consistent with Complete Streets principles. Potential routes are shown in the concept.

Connector to the St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Canal Trail

Community members stressed the importance of connections beyond the neighborhood. This connector will link the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail in Orleans Parish to the regional 40 Arpent Canal Trail in neighboring St. Bernard Parish, creating a major cross-parish route that extends the reach of the park. The 40 Arpent Canal is a historic drainage canal, later incorporated into the parish's levee system, that now provides a backbone for regional trail development.

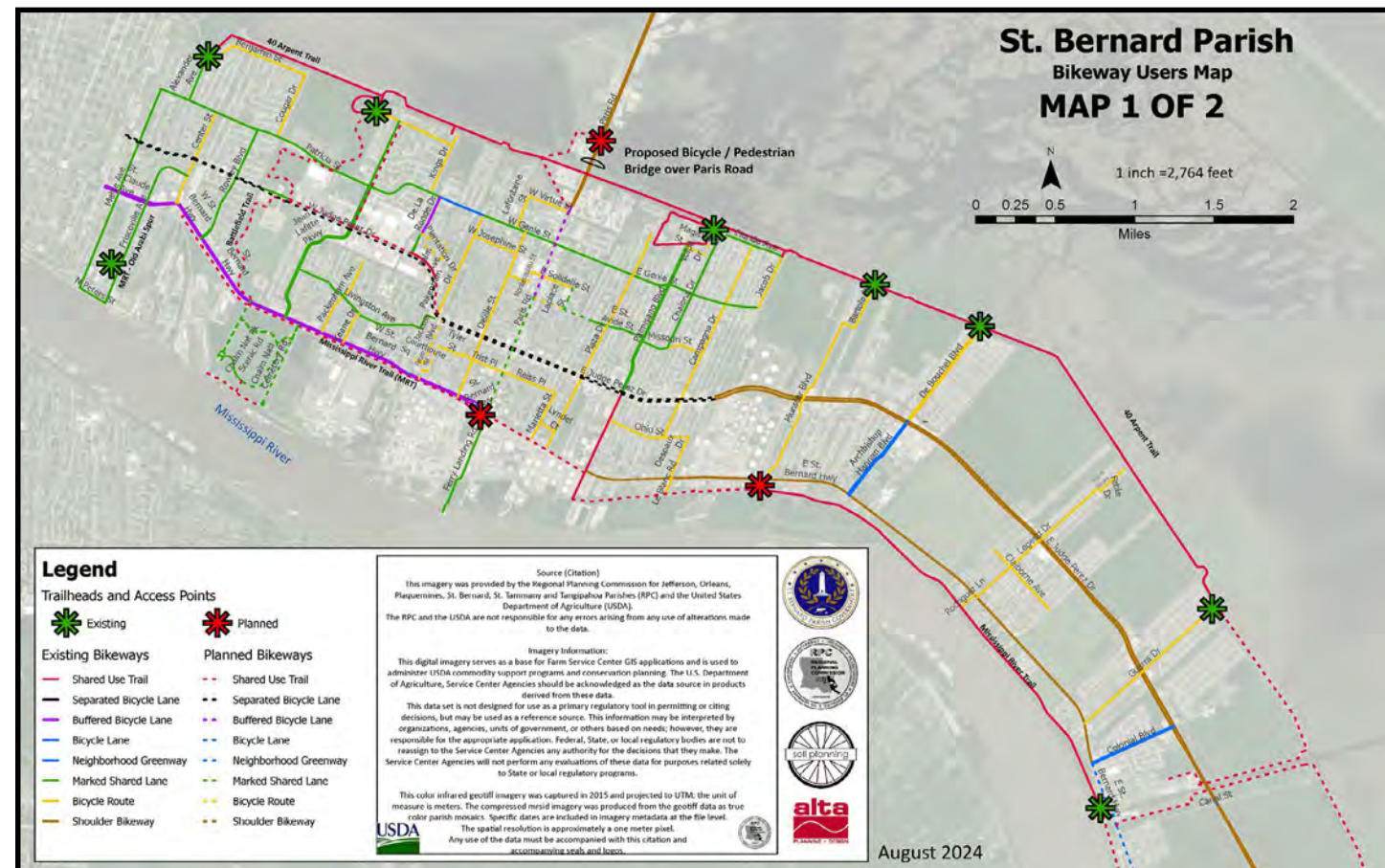
The proposed route would begin at the St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Canal Trailhead on Alexander Avenue. From there, it would travel on the levee along the Norfolk Southern Railroad right-of-way for about 1,500 feet to a rail crossing on an unimproved, little-used section of Florida Avenue. The trail would then continue west along Florida Avenue for about 1,000 feet, where it would connect with the Shared Use Greenway Trail within the Sankofa Wetland Park. All told, the connector would be approximately a half mile long.

Making this connection may require collaboration with the Levee Board, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Norfolk Southern Railroad, the Flood Protection Authority East, and St. Bernard Parish. In the future, as trail use grows, it may be beneficial to upgrade the at-grade rail crossing and improve the stretch of Florida Avenue that runs along Jackson Barracks.

By tying into existing and planned regional trails, the connector would provide safe, well-marked routes for walking and biking beyond the Lower Ninth Ward, while opening opportunities for expanded connections to other greenways in the future. With this link in place, the Sankofa Wetland Park will not only be easier to reach but also part of the region's growing network of parks and trails.



Concept for the 40 Arpent Trail Connector, linking the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail to the regional trail system.



Bikeway Users Map showing bicycle routes in St. Bernard Parish, including the 40 Arpent Canal Trail. Source: St. Bernard Parish Government, Public Information Department.



West End of the Existing St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Trail System



Existing Railroad Corridor and Levee Structure



Existing Florida Avenue Railroad Crossing

Moving Forward



The Phase III Conceptual Plan outlines both the guiding principles and specific improvements that will shape the future of the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail. Moving forward, the focus shifts to building partnerships, testing ideas through small projects, and creating opportunities for fundraising and programming that keep the momentum strong. Its success will depend not only on design and funding but also on the continued leadership of Sankofa CDC and the commitment of community members and partners who have shaped the project from the start. The following steps highlight practical ways to advance the plan while deepening the park's role as a community-led model of resilience and restoration.

Implementation and Fundraising

This report itself can serve as a tool for fundraising and grant writing. In addition to larger investments, small contributions and volunteer programs will keep the park moving forward. [Adjudicated properties](#) in the Lower Ninth Ward should also be seen as “opportunity areas” for future projects such as community gardens, providing flexible space for neighborhood initiatives that complement the park. In future phases, quiet zones for reflection and healing could also be expanded based on resident interest.

Quick Wins and Demonstration Projects

Small, visible projects can build momentum while larger improvements are underway. Temporary [pop-up bike lanes](#) can show how new infrastructure improves safety for cyclists, while also engaging residents in planning. A “Big, Little Projects” program could allow families, civic groups, and businesses to sponsor specific items. “Little Projects” can have “Big Impacts.” Together, they can generate broader public support and enhance the sense of community. A family could donate a single tree, a local business could provide a bike rack or amphitheater paver, and civic groups could fund trail amenities or nature-based play equipment. These contributions could also support expanded play features and shaded gathering areas requested by residents. Together, these efforts show progress, generate public support, and strengthen the park's connection to the community.

Partnerships and Stewardship

Sankofa CDC should continue to expand its partnerships, both locally and regionally. Potential opportunities include working with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries on ecological restoration and programming and formalizing a Friends Group to support the park. Friends Groups are common across park systems and can provide maintenance assistance, host events, organize volunteers, and build both political and financial support. Expanding the Lower Ninth Ward's urban tree canopy, beyond the boundaries of the park itself, is another area where partnerships can deliver long-term benefits.

Programming and Visibility

Educational and cultural programming will help anchor the park as a community hub. An example is hosting a [National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count](#), a century-old, nationwide event where volunteers tally bird species in a single day. The Lower Ninth Ward's location on the Mississippi Flyway makes it an exceptional birding site, and a Bird Count here would highlight the park's ecological value, engage both kids and adults, and place the community on the map for birders from around the world. Community input also pointed to the value of murals and public art as cultural anchors. These could be pursued through partnerships with local artists and organizations.

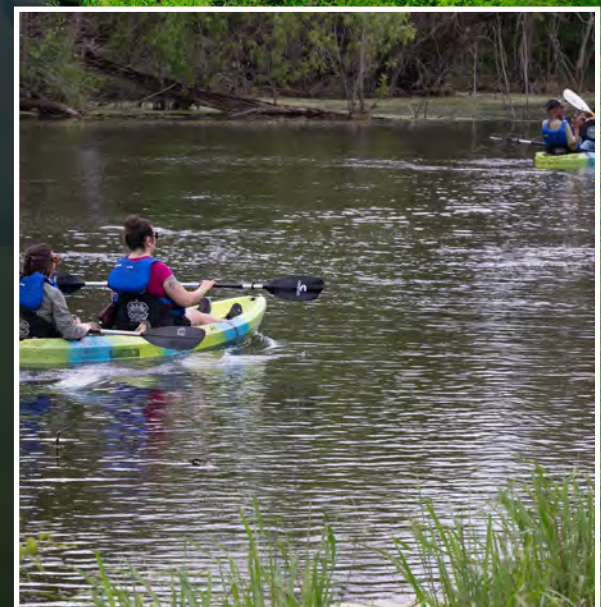
Community Engagement and Outreach

Continued outreach will be key. Reaching out to displaced residents of the Lower Ninth Ward about the positive changes underway could help generate support and possibly encourage returns. Digital engagement tools such as a check in-style system, where visitors “check in” and share their experiences, could provide useful feedback and keep the community connected to the park's growth. For example, users of the [South River Trail](#) in Atlanta check in online and often provide valuable input to help protect the river.

Next Steps

- **Build partnerships:** work with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and formalize a Friends Group to support stewardship and advocacy.
- **Show progress:** test temporary pop-up bike lanes, and launch a “Big, Little Projects” program for community and business sponsorships.
- **Engage the community:** connect with current residents and reach out to displaced families to share the positive developments in the neighborhood. This may build support for Sankofa CDC's efforts and could even encourage some to return home.
- **Expand programming:** host events such as the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and pursue murals and public art with local artists.
- **Plan for growth:** pursue grants, highlight quick wins, and explore adjudicated properties as “opportunity areas” for gardens and other community projects. Future phases could expand quiet zones for reflection and healing.

The progress outlined here reflects the input of Lower Ninth Ward residents and their partners. Continuing to work together will ensure that the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail remains both a neighborhood resource and a model of resilience for years to come.



Acknowledgements

The Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail reflects the vision and persistence of the Lower Ninth Ward community and the many partners who contributed their time, expertise, and support.

The Sankofa Community Development Corporation thanks the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward for their ideas and commitment, as well as the local organizations, agencies, and institutions that made this plan possible. Thanks are also due to Civic Studio, universities, conservation groups, and civic organizations whose contributions enriched the planning process. City and regional agencies—including the City of New Orleans, the Sewerage and Water Board, regional levee authorities, and St. Bernard Parish—provided important guidance and support.

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program is honored to have been invited into the community to facilitate the planning process, provide technical guidance, and support Sankofa CDC and residents in shaping a shared vision for the park and trail. It has been a privilege to collaborate with Sankofa CDC and its partners. We look forward to seeing future phases of the project bring even more opportunities for the Lower Ninth Ward.



Founded in 2008 by Lower Ninth Ward residents, the [Sankofa Community Development Corporation](#) emerged from a simple but powerful belief: communities create the best solutions for themselves. When traditional recovery efforts fell short, neighbors came together to build something different—an integrated approach that addresses environmental health, food access, and economic development as one interconnected ecosystem.



NPS-RTCA

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

The [National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program](#) (NPS-RTCA) supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation. 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 youth in the outdoors. As a collaborative partner, NPS-RTCA helps achieve successful project outcomes by engaging communities in the visioning, planning, and implementation of each project.



Appendices

Appendix 1 Initial Partner Meeting Notes

Sankofa CDC Offices, Lower 9th Ward, December 7, 2023

Attendees

Rashida Ferdinand, Executive Director, Sankofa CDC. Rashida@sankofanola.org
Melissa Lee, CAAB Board of Directors, Sankofa CDC. Mslee01@icloud.com
Rev. Richard Bell, CAAB. Sankofa CDC. 504-909-6144. Richard.bell@cox.net
Rosana Seymour, Secretary, CAAB. Sankofa CDC. rseemo.rs@gmail.com
Julia Nickle, Community Development Specialist, Sankofa CDC. julia@sankofanola.org
Magnisha Casseus, Env. Justice Education Coord., Sankofa CDC. magnisha@sankofanola.org
Kiarra Keith, Marketing Specialist, Sankofa CDC. Kiarra@sankofanola.org
Alexandra Miller, Urban Planner, Sankofa CDC. 224-619-4400. Alexandra.p.miller@gmail.com
Marcia St. Martin, Environmental Advisor, Sankofa CDC. Marciaastmartin@gmail.com

Rashida Ferdinand welcomed the group and gave introductory comments about Sankofa CDC. Attendees introduced themselves.

Group Engagement

Russ Clark provided an overview of the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (NPS-RTCA) and its past involvement with Sankofa CDC. Russ then asked the group for comments, priorities, suggestions, and ideas related to the Wetland Park and other neighborhood initiatives.

The group's input included:

Dr. Morewell Gaseller "Highlight the many positive environmental impacts of the park, particularly regarding air quality. Monitor and study air quality, particularly in relation to the positive impacts of trees. And we need to plant more trees!"

Magnisha Casseus "It's important to increase environmental awareness and interest among the neighborhood's youth and intergenerationally, as well. Use the Wetland Park for this purpose, and STEAM education programs, as well. Host events with constant learning objectives. Provide hands-on experiences for exposure to nature outside of the Lower 9th Ward."

Marcia St. Martin "The Wetland Park provides passive recreation, like walking and birding, within the city. Provide amenities like benches and lighting. The park's location is unique as it has water infrastructure and wastewater treatment facilities at the east and west ends, effectively serving as "bookends." This presents an opportunity to show how the park's wetlands serve to naturally clean the water. The park should offer environmental education programs, and connections to new experiences." **Marcia** mentioned last year's NatureFest with over 300 families attending. A local Black Horseback group provided rides in the park.

Jerome Johnson "Trails are so important. Are there more trails coming to the Wetland Park?"

Rashida Ferdinand Mentioned the success of last year's NatureFest Program. Talked about the concept of linear block development in the neighborhood, improving walkability, and the importance of connecting the Wetland Park Trail to St. Bernard Parish's Arpent Trail.

Russ Clark "Prior to this morning's meeting, the NPS-RTCA team explored a potentially good connection opportunity between the two trails, just west of the Arpent Trailhead, and adjacent to the rail line."

Alex Miller "Current bike and pedestrian issues do present barriers to the community's use of the park. However, a Complete Street Plan has been developed to provide connections between the park and the Lower 9th Ward."

John Olivier "The Safe Routes Partnership could be a source of funding for bike/pedestrian improvements".

Dr. Morewell Gaseller "The area has a rich tradition of fishing. Fishing opportunities should be developed in the park."

Rashida Ferdinand "The Wetland Park now features a new fishing pier."

Alex Miller "We should also provide active recreation opportunities and consider a center for programming and special events."

Joshua Moore, NPS-RTCA, 404-507-5696. Joshua_moore@nps.gov
Russell Clark, Landscape Architect, NPS-RTCA. 231-631-0523. Russell_clark@nps.gov
John Olivier, Writer/Editor, NPS-RTCA. 234-738-8079. John_olivier@partner.nps.gov
Rob Lane, PhD. CEO of Comite Resources. Rlane@comiteres.com
Jorge Penso, Urban Conservationist, NPS-NRCS. 832-660-3819. Jorge.penso@usda.gov
Dr. Morewell Gaseller, Professor of Physics, Xavier University. 814-790-2157. mgassel@xula.edu
Takei Jones, Student, Xavier University. 313-712-0191. tjones82@xula.edu
Isabel Barrios, Senior Program Officer, Greater New Orleans Foundation. Isabel@gnof.org
Darren Martin Sr. Rep., District E / Councilman Oliver Thomas, 901-658-1051. darren.martin@nola.gov
Jerome Johnson, Legislative Aid. Rep. Troy Carter. 202-365-3270. jerome.johnson@mail.house.gov

Rashida Ferdinand Mentioned horseback riding and kayaking as examples of active recreation. "Need space for art activities, covered pavilion, connections to basketball courts."

Magnisha Casseus Suggested fishing classes, birding programs, and yoga. Talked about the positive mental health benefits of these, and other outdoor recreation programs.

Rashida Ferdinand "In regard to social media and promoting events and programs, Word of mouth works in the 9th!"

Marcia St. Martin "The park developments can help the community go from "disaster tourism" to "environmental tourism" and start to change negative perceptions of the area."

Rashida Ferdinand "The neighborhood has always valued the Wetland Park area."

Rosana Seymour "Agree with all the comments above."

Russ Clark "Are any other groups that should be involved?"

Rashida Ferdinand suggested including Main Street Organization, and MLK junior high and elementary schools.

Russ Clark "What do you think is the best method of public outreach?"

Rashida Ferdinand "Public meetings, like we've held in the past for community and partner groups, worked well. We can have multiple small group meetings, followed by one for all the groups."

Russ Clark "Are there any additional thoughts regarding the project and/or vision?"

Dr. Lane "We can put more instrumentation in the park to measure how the water retention system is working, and bubblers should be added. (It was mentioned that a bubbler is indeed in place.) We should also measure the water quality coming into and going out of the park. Much useable environmental knowledge to be gained. Partner with universities. Continue to address invasive species."

Rashida Ferdinand "Need to add learning spaces, in part for programs exposing kids to different career paths."

Dr. Morewell Gaseller "It would be good to develop some type of online forum to collect ideas."

Next Steps

Russ Clark "Scheduling the next round of community engagement meetings should be our top priority. Getting buy-in from those invested in the community will be required before moving forward. Take into consideration that not everyone will be 100% satisfied. To help illustrate concepts, updated graphics and good maps of the neighborhood, the Wetland Park, and potential trail connections, will be critical."

March was suggested as a good month to target for the next round of engagement. Sankofa CDC will begin reviewing dates and locations.

Thank you for your attendance, input, and support. We look forward to seeing you during the next round of public engagement meetings. In the meantime, if you have further input or questions, please feel free to contact Rashida Ferdinand or Russell Clark.

Appendix 2 Recap of Public Engagement Efforts

Community Meetings, March 26, 27 & 28, 2024

Sanchez-Byrd Multi-Service Center 1616 Fats Domino Avenue, New Orleans, LA

The following ideas were generated by residents and stakeholders of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana for the Sankofa Wetland Park and Nature Trail (40-acre site) along Florida Avenue. Three community meetings were facilitated by the NPS-RTCA team held on March 26, 27 & 28, 2024. The ideas represent what residents would like to see included in the third phase of the park development. Residents also identified other opportunities to improve their neighborhood. These ideas are not in any order of priority.

General Master Plan Ideas

- Plant larger trees and create signage with meaningful quotes about the value of trees.
- Restore the Bayou Bienvenue platform and its access.
- Explore a raised earth mound and access trail to the top on the south side of the pond to view the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle area (height to be determined).
- Provide access/connections to other recreational activities and parks (pickleball, tennis, basketball, etc.).
- Explore linkages to existing trail networks in the region - Lafite Greenway, Mississippi Trail, etc.
- Create a Sacred Quiet Space geared towards people facing mental illness, but beneficial to all. Include things like stepping stones, colored stones, stone decorations, native plants. Use as a prayer circle, children's circle, senior's circle, or a get-away-from-it-all space.
- Include features to help people with disabilities and to improve motor skills.
- Add Community Events Space Art in the Park, Art and Craft Shows, Neighborhood Events, Tie-Die Festival, etc.
- Solar powered lights on trails, gazebo, Florida Avenue, for safety.
- Solar powered phone charging stations.
- Exercise stations for all ages along the trails.
- Solar and/or wind powered water sprays in the pond, with solar powered colored lights.
- Compost restroom facilities (portable restrooms)
- Safe biking trail
- Picnic areas
- Improve the sidewalk along Florida Avenue and sidewalk connections into the neighborhood.
- Integrate native foraging plants, edible shrubs, and trees (berries and nuts). Could be an educational opportunity.
- Capture stormwater to reduce neighborhood flooding.
- Create misting fan stations.
- Install police boxes and/or cameras for security.
- Partner with local park department management.
- Use nature-based solutions/ideas.
- Feature sculptures and murals created by local artists.

Green Amphitheater

- Features to consider:
 - » Roof for inclement weather and shade from the sun. Could be a fabric roof.
 - » Locate the stage near the pond, looking out over the water.
 - » Electric outlets with secure main breaker box.
 - » Stage made of pavers, or concrete.
 - » Seating on a sloping lawn area or terraced levels with dry laid rock, or interlocking masonry units.
 - » Set the stage area above the pond flood level.
 - » Need a multipurpose trail to serve the stage area and bring in equipment.
 - » Ability to add cooling fans.
 - » Shaded area/quiet space for meditation in a copse of trees.
 - » Potential uses and users of the amphitheater:
 - » Schools, churches, concerts, festival events.
 - » Poetry readings, small and medium sized groups.
 - » Classes for Yoga, Zumba, Tai Chi, Pilates, etc.

STEM/STEAM Learning Trails

- Cooling station.
- Covered/shaded walking trail.
- Wheelchair access.
- Regional history signage/interpretation.
- Utilize the web/QR codes to tell the history of the area, the park, and the wildlife present in the nature park.
- Trail names.
- Signage that will not fade or be easily destroyed.
- Method to maintain the trails.
- Mileage markers on the trails.
- Wildlife and birding education interpretation.
- Bird and reptile interpretation information.
- Wetland value education (science projects, education projects and programs for the youth).
- Plant and pollinators identification station.
- Nature based play area for kids (natural materials).
- Make learning fun.
- Identify plants (signage and QR codes linking to a learning website.)
- Include art and music elements by local artists. (sculptures, murals, etc.).
- Kinetic sculptures that not only move

- but perhaps are solar powered and light up by local artists.
- Interactive hydro-electric fountain in the pond that visitors can manipulate.
- Incorporate a gears and cogs display that kids can manipulate.
- University partnership to help create the environmental education features and information.
- Wayfinding signage.

Neighborhood Greenways

- Connect the upper 9th Ward, across the Industrial Canal to the Wetland Nature Park.
- The most used street connections to the Wetland Nature Park are:
 - » Tupelo Street (mentioned a bit more than Fats Domino Avenue, but not much)
 - » Fats Domino Avenue
 - » St. Maurice Avenue
 - » Forestall Street
 - » Andry Street
 - » Florida Avenue Bridge
 - » Jordan Avenue (west end)
 - » Tricou Street (eastern end, mentioned several times)
 - » Tennessee Street
 - » Florida Avenue (opposite side of the waterway)
- Create a connection from the Wetland Park & Nature Trail to the St. Claude Bridge to promote visits from the upper 9th Ward. Start underneath Florida Avenue Bridge. Connect via Jourdan and Sisters Street.
- Have designated bike lanes on Florida Avenue and Tupelo Street.
- Connect the Wetland Park trails to St. Bernard Parish trails.
- Add bike signage, green-painted bike lanes.
- Connect the Wetland Park to the Mississippi River Greenway.
- Create a lower 9th Ward Bike/Ped Loop Involving the Wetland Park & Nature Trail, Industrial Canal, Levee to Delery Play Spot, Tricou Street, and back to the Wetland Park & Nature Trail.

Programing Ideas

- Scavenger hunts
- Geocaching
- Stargazing
- Michael the Wildlife Detective for sustainability and environmental stewardship programming.
- Yoga classes, Zumba, tai chi, and Pilates classes

Ideas for Additions to other Parks in the Neighborhood

- Rock climbing features
- Dog park
- Splash pad
- Pickleball courts

General Notes

- Boca Raton Park neat interactive educational elements, learning a fun way. Handmade tiles with kid's handprints.
- Dorothy Height School love their playground as an example.
- Consider electric charging stations for bikes and cars.
- Develop a camping area for kids and groups.

Potential Action Items

The following items are recommended by the NPS-RTCA team:

- Trail to connect the Wetland Park & Nature Trail to the St. Bernard Parish 40 Arpent Trail. Sankofa CDC team to arrange a meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers and CSX Railroad to discuss potential creation of a multipurpose trail along the levee wall and a pedestrian crossing at an existing gravel road railroad crossing with the assistance of the NPS-RTCA team.
- Bayou Bienvenue platform. Neighborhood group to seek the railroad company's approval for a pedestrian crossing at the Bayou Bienvenue platform.
- Access the Bayou Bienvenue platform/bridge structure, if the railroad company approves a pedestrian crossing and the city approves bridge structure at this location in the park.
- Access to Bayou Bienvenue Triangle. Sankofa CDC and neighborhood stakeholders to seek a Public Access Site to the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle (parking, launch facility, benches, etc.). Consider contacting the State Fish & Wildlife Department for potential assistance and funding.
- Lower 9th Ward Bike/Pedestrian Loop. Sankofa CDC to explore the use of the Army Corps of Engineers levee greenspace along the Industrial Canal to create a trail corridor, evaluate potential Tricou Street sidewalk improvements, crosswalks, and potential bike lanes with the assistance of the NPS-RTCA team and the city streets engineering department.

Appendix 3 Relevant Resources

Funding Sources

[LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES BOATING AND FISHING ACCESS GRANTS](#)

[LAND & WATER CONSERVATION FUND | LOUISIANA STATE PARKS](#)

State-administered, federal funding source for a wide range of outdoor recreation projects).

[LOUISIANA OUTDOORS FOREVER | LOUISIANA DEPT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES](#)

(Funding source for conservation projects).

[LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT](#)

[PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION.](#)

[LOUISIANA | NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE](#)

Technical Assistance

[LAND CONSERVATION TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR LANDOWNERS IN LOUISIANA](#)

Resources

[NPS MAKING FRIENDS MANUAL](#)

[FRIENDS GROUPS: PEOPLE WITH PASSION FOR PARKS | CONSERVATION | NRPA](#)

[FRIENDSGROUPBOOK.PDF \(MILWAUKEE.GOV\)](#)

[FRIENDS TOOLBOOK.DOCX.DOCX \(BALTIMORECITY.GOV\)](#)

[NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S NATURE PLAY AT HOME GUIDE](#)

[BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE WITH NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS: A GUIDE FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS \(FEMA\)](#)

[LAKE CHARLES_CANOPY-ASSESSMENT.PDF](#)

[EBIRD - DISCOVER A NEW WORLD OF BIRDING](#)

[STRAVA | RUNNING, CYCLING & HIKING APP - TRAIN, TRACK & SHARE.](#)

[FIVE WAYS TO MAKE THE OUTDOORS MORE INCLUSIVE: AN ACTION PLAN FOR CHANGE](#)

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

[CASS AVENUE BRIDGE CANTILEVER SIDEWALK \(POTENTIAL BRIDGE CROSSING SOLUTION\).](#)

[URBAN STREET DESIGN GUIDE | NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CITY TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS](#)

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