



HOUSTON
PARKS BOARD

Community Voices

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AND TRAILS



When a new trail is proposed, community members often have questions about how it may impact their neighborhood. At Houston Parks Board, we work closely with communities from the start of a project or study to understand and mitigate their concerns, especially those relating to crime and safety. We have been doing this meaningful work for a long time: Houston Parks Board has a 45-year history of creating new parks and greenspaces and currently maintains 100 miles of Bayou Greenway trails and approximately 2,800 acres of greenspace. To see a map of these greenways, see pages 4 – 5.

As part of our commitment to communities, Houston Parks Board strives to build a more resilient future by facilitating, advocating for, and collaborating to achieve equitable access and outcomes wherever possible. Community input is critical to the success and longevity of trail projects. Neighbors will be engaged during the planning process to help us understand the wants and needs of the current and future residents.



Watch a Video of White Oak Bayou Greenway and Gateway

qrco.de/WhiteOakBayou



Our community outreach begins even before the trail is designed. A community member who lives along Greens Bayou Greenway shared his experience:

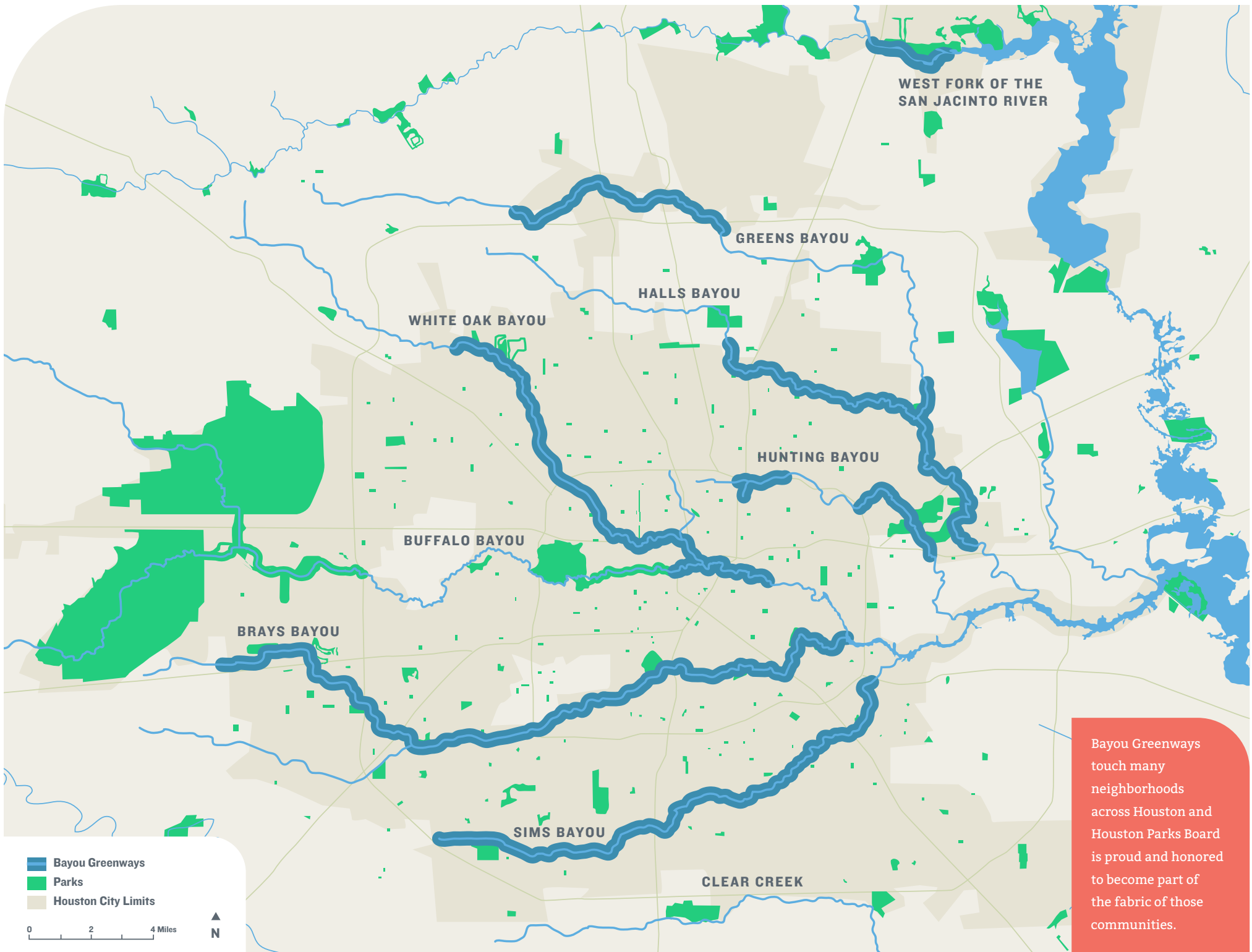
"We were first contacted by the [Houston] Parks Board, and our city councilman got involved at one of our civic association meetings and discussed the possibility of putting in a hike and bike trail to connect to the metro park and ride and connect to Herman Brown Park." – Norbert, ETCP Neighborhood

TRAILS AND SAFETY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

At Houston Parks Board, community outreach and engagement begins during the design process and continues throughout the life of a project. Since 2015 we engaged with 39,018 attendees at 464 events.

- 155 community meetings with 7,611 total attendees
- 150 booths and tables at events that reached 23,924 total attendees
- 159 speaking engagements that reached 7,483 total attendees





Bayou Greenways touch many neighborhoods across Houston and Houston Parks Board is proud and honored to become part of the fabric of those communities.

CONCERNS ABOUT CRIME

Community members may be concerned that a trail will result in less privacy, increased neighborhood traffic, and higher crime rates. However, research shows that multi-use paths are not associated with increases in property crime or violent crime, and that presence of community members using the trail can actually help deter crime.¹ Trails can also improve neighborhood safety by providing pedestrians and cyclists with a safe pathway away from traffic, which reduces the likelihood of accidents.² A study by Rails to Trails Conservancy and the National Park Service of 372 trails showed that “the rate of vandalism and break-ins to adjacent property was well below the neighborhood average.”³



Houston Parks Board collects case studies, like those mentioned above and shown on the next page, to help paint a larger picture showing that expanded recreation access is an essential part of a community's fabric. Collecting input and history of crime is also very important to understanding a community

better, and that is why HPB coordinates with an extensive list of safety partners at the outset of a project, including but not limited to:

- Houston Police Department, various divisions, including but not limited to the Homeless Outreach Team
- Harris County Constable Precincts 1 – 8
- Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Houston Parks and Recreation Department Urban Park Rangers
- Houston Independent School District Police
- University of Houston Police
- University of Houston Downtown Police
- METRO Police
- Private patrol security hired by neighborhoods

Houston Parks Board sincerely appreciates the time and assistance provided by these partners to help ensure a future trail is a welcome addition to a neighborhood.



Trails across the United States

Statistics and case studies from other communities across the country show that hike-and-bike trails don't lead to a decrease in neighborhood safety.

- **CHICAGO, IL**
Decrease in violent, disorderly, and property crimes after the construction of The 606, across all socio-economic status neighborhoods⁴
- **INDIANAPOLIS, IN**
The development of an urban greenway trail system did not elevate crime levels⁵
- **FLINT HILLS, KS**
No increase in crime, drug use, or vandalism after building a 38-mile trail⁶
- **CLEVELAND, OH**
Outreach with block clubs addresses community concerns and creates trail pride and ownership⁷

Trails lead to more eyes on the street, which can help reduce crime in areas that weren't previously visible. According to a neighbor along Sims Bayou,

“My concerns about the area of town were greater than my concerns about [Sims Bayou Greenway]. Our property is up against the bayou. If the bayou was not also a park, it would be more exposed and reason for concern; because if it's a park, there are more people around to witness if something happens, versus if it's just a muddy bayou.”

– Mike, Windsor Village Neighborhood



SPOTLIGHT: GREENS BAYOU GREENWAY

Beginning in northwest Houston, Greens Bayou courses southeast until it reaches the Ship Channel, passing through neighborhood parks, including Thomas R. Wussow, City View, Brock, Maxey, and Thomas Bell Foster. Houston celebrated the groundbreaking of the Greens Bayou Greenway in January 2018. The greenway features three kayak launches, pedestrian bridges, updated landscaping, and paved and natural trails creating access to previously inaccessible places along the bayou and connecting new neighborhoods.

Initially, residents in the ETCP neighborhood along Greens Bayou had concerns that a new multipurpose trail would lead to reduced privacy and increased crime. Long-time resident Norbert shared his experience:

"Like most of the people here, I've lived here since '81, about 40 years ... Some were very against [Greens Bayou Greenway] initially. There was some concern about the apartments here, that they would start bleeding over into the neighborhood and that the park would be built into basketball courts, SPARK park, etc. And we didn't want the influx from the apartment complex because this is a pretty private neighborhood ... Because of the additional traffic going through the neighborhood, there was the possibility of additional crime as well. The majority of the neighborhood was concerned."

We haven't had any additional crime issues. We work closely with the Houston Police Dept. We have a liaison at our office, the northeast station. We haven't had anything really major happening in the neighborhood, just some teenagers now and then."

– Norbert, ETCP Neighborhood (left)



"There was a community meeting where they told us about [Greens Bayou Greenway] and we went. A lot of people were against it because they feared a breach of privacy ... At first I was a little worried that more people would be going through the neighborhood, but as time's progressed, I haven't seen that be an issue. We don't see that many people. We use the trail the most to walk our dogs."

– Liliana, ETCP Neighborhood (center)

Learn more about Greens Bayou Greenway and Strickland Park Trailhead

qrco.ed/GreensBayou



TRAIL DESIGN AND MAINTENANCE

Trails and greenways are often constructed in right-of-ways or areas that were previously unutilized. Constructing trails transforms eyesores and unkempt areas into useable spaces for recreation and transportation. During the planning process, we work closely with community members on trail design to understand and mitigate safety concerns. We carefully consider a variety of trail design factors including parking placement, accessibility, and lighting.

Each trail follows design guidelines set by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Trails are eight to ten feet wide to allow plenty of space for multiple uses. On each side of the trail, we construct a shoulder that is at least five feet wide. We also maintain a buffer around benches, signs, and handrails that is at least two feet wide. Trail maintenance includes regular mowing, graffiti and litter removal, forestry and prairie work, and flood cleanup.

When funding is available, additional design elements can be incorporated into a proposed trail. Installing bollards or gates can prevent unauthorized access by cars or ATVs. Rules signage, maps, and 9-1-1 safety markers can also be added along the trail and at trailheads and trail gateways. In some instances, regular patrolling may occur.

In many cases, the underlying fee or easement owner such as Harris County Flood Control District or CenterPoint have restrictions imposed on the land that will not allow for lighting to be added to trail projects. In addition, those trails that are owned and operated by Houston Parks and Recreation Department are strictly open “dawn to dusk.” In rare instances, lighting may be approved for the trail if there is an entity responsible for the capital investment, maintenance, and operation of the lighting system.

The thoughtful and strategic inclusion of design features works to create trails that meet the needs of the neighboring community and foster a safe and enjoyable experience.



Wood Shadows II Civic Club President Warren has seen the benefits of regular maintenance along Hunting Bayou Greenway.

“[Before it opened] there were concerns about benches bringing loiterers or people sleeping on them ... [Hunting Bayou Greenway] is kept up well. It’s edged; it’s neat. We have a good trail here. A lot of kids in the neighborhood are using the trail to get to and from school.”

– Warren, Wood Shadows II Neighborhood (center)



Watch a video of Hunting Bayou Greenway in Wood Shadows II

[Qrco.de/HuntingBayou](https://qrco.de/HuntingBayou)





TRAILS FOSTER COMMUNITY

Houston Parks Board works on trail projects, big and small, but we don't do it alone. Working with community partners and trail neighbors like you fosters new possibilities and creates a community for everyone's future. We want to create trails that serve, build, and connect communities and hope you'll get involved in the project in your neighborhood! Along Sims Bayou, the greenway has created greater connection in the neighborhood.



"The greenway reinforces the community. There are people that I see on a daily basis. We wave and say hello because it's people I see all the time. Actually, getting people out of their cars and walking strengthens the sense of community. When we first moved here, we saw people driving to their homes and didn't see them again. But now, we see people out walking along the paths ... I think the greenway is inviting. We sit on our back patio and enjoy watching people ride their bikes by." – Mike, Windsor Village Neighborhood



Whether you're a veteran or novice trail user, Houston Parks Board trails are for you.

"Today is our first day on the trail. It opened just a few months ago. The trail is very nice and smooth; before this area was bumpy. We live in the apartments next door."

– Oscar and Mario, Wood Shadows II



1. https://www.belmont-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf6831/f/file/belmont-community-path-advisory-committee_final-report_2014-06-07.pdf
2. <https://sfct.org/trails/neighborhoods/>
3. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/docs/rt_safecomm.pdf
4. <https://cdn2.assets-servd.host/material-civet/production/images/documents/Different-Views-From-The-606.pdf>
5. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347381533_The_Development_of_an_Urban_Greenway_Trail_System_and_Levels_of_Crime
6. <https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2018/november/13/kansas-flint-hills-trail-state-park/>
7. <https://vimeo.com/38062769>
8. http://www.rudybruneraward.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RBA-Pub2019_BOOK_PreFINALhq_BuffaloBayouPark.pdf



WHO IS HOUSTON PARKS BOARD?



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VISION STATEMENT

An interconnected network of parks, trails, and greenspace for a more resilient and equitable Houston.

MISSION STATEMENT

Houston Parks Board is a nonprofit organization with a mission to expand, improve, and protect parks and greenspace in the Houston region.

Together with our primary partners, the City of Houston and Harris County, we work hand in hand with our fellow park leaders, elected leaders, philanthropists, and neighbors throughout the city to build, strengthen, and uplift our green infrastructure.

Visit us at houstonparksboard.org to learn more about how you can get involved.

Connect with Us

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