

September 2014

**VENETIAN GARDENS  
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION DESIGN  
CHARENTE REPORT**

Prepared By:



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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I. INTRODUCTION ..... 1  
II. HISTORY ..... 1  
III. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS ..... 3  
IV. CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN..... 9  
V. SUMMARY ..... 13

**LIST OF MAPS**

MAP 1 – CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN ..... 14

**APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A – COST ESTIMATE.....15

# INTRODUCTION

## I. Introduction

LPG Urban and Regional Planners, Inc. was retained by the City of Leesburg to facilitate three (3) community workshops to discuss the future of Venetian Gardens and derive input pertaining to potential infrastructure, existing and proposed land uses, public uses, and recreation/open space options. This report will summarize the input received and general conclusions reached during the visioning process.

# HISTORY

## II. History

Venetian Gardens has a history deeply tied to the City of Leesburg, clubs/organizations, and its residents. This 82 acre park began its roots with a vision of the city forefathers as Leesburg becoming a water front community. The vision started with the acquisition of the park property in 1923. A bond issue was utilized to improve the park and dredge the yacht basin. A swimming pool was built by the local Kiwanis Club in 1929 which the city enlarged in 1962.



The Great Depression hit hard in 1937 and lasted until the early 1940's; however, President Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted new deal programs of which one was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to help curb unemployment and put people to work. WPA workers were utilized to create the islands and canals of the park. The ballpark was constructed in 1937 and at that time was called the baseball island of Venetian Park due to the water that surrounding the ball park.

In the late 1930's a landscape plan was prepared by Lloyd Galiner who used a varied palate of native and naturalized plants. The plan was designed to display seasonal color and provide shade.



Howell C. Hopson was the architect who designed the Community Building which was completed in 1954, funded with cigarette tax money. Reflecting pools adorned the lawn of the community building as shown in the photograph below.



In 1968, the city built the fountain along Dixie Avenue. In 1978, the Cultural Arts building was built on pilings and fill at the tip of what had been a *canal*.



In 1983 the community building was remodeled. In 2002 the City retained the services of a dredging company to remove the accumulation of muck from the canals.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

### III. Community Workshops

LPGURP facilitated a total of three (3) workshops at the Venetian Gardens community building.

The workshops were held on April 5, 2014, April 12, 2014 and May 3, 2014. In addition, the Leesburg Chamber hosted a field trip on April 17, 2014 to provide participants an opportunity to visit other community water front developments. Each workshop was approximately four (4) hours.



Those in attendance included local property owners, business owners, residents, clubs/organizations, city staff, and city leaders.

The purpose of the workshops was threefold:

- First, to have participants identify existing elements of the park area that they value and to brainstorm what they would like the park to become; Topics of discussion will include the community building, pool, marina, Pat Thomas Stadium and existing access (both vehicular and pedestrian);
- Second, to have participants think seriously about the physical infrastructure required to support their vision; and
- Third, to have participants link the costs of infrastructure improvements to their vision as well as to suggest funding options for the City.



The workshop participants received a packet containing an agenda, comment sheet, history, and exhibits. Attendees were seated at six tables forming six (6) groups with six (6) to eight (8) persons in each group.

Each person within the group had ten (10) “votes” which to cast for their top priorities, as developed by the group as a whole. They could vote for their own ideas or those of any other group.

Many of the “Wants & Needs”, as developed by the six (6) groups during the meeting overlapped, but may have differed slightly. In summarizing and categorizing the “Wants & Needs”, we attempted to identify the main theme of the “Want & Need” and group accordingly.

The following table represents the top ten “Want & Needs” as developed by the attendees of the Venetian Gardens Charette on Saturday, April 5, 2014.

	General Category	Total Votes	Groups
1	Restaurant	30	1,2,5,6
2	Landscaping	25	1,2,4,5,6
3	Connection to Downtown / Main St.	24	1,2,3
4a	Beach	20	ALL
4b	Kid's Splash Park	20	2,3,4,6
4c	Trail / Sidewalk Around and within Park	20	2,3,5,6
5	Fountain	17	2,4,6
6a	Boardwalk	15	3,4,5
6b	Commercial Shops	15	3,5,6
7a	Marina Improvements	14	1,5
7b	Pool (Repair / New)	14	1,3,4,5,6
8	Paddle Boat, Kayak, Canoe Rental / Launch Area	13	2,3,4,5,6
9	Restrooms	12	5,6
10a	Band Shell / Concert	11	1,2,6
10b	Improve Entrance	11	3,6
10c	Monkey Island Light House	11	3,6

*Shading Differentiates Vote Ranking*

The following table is the summaries for the remaining Items that did not fall in the Top Ten.

	General Category	Total Votes	Groups
11a	Dixie Ave Bridge / Crossing	9	3,6
11b	Monkey Island Beach	9	1,5
11c	Parking Improvements	9	1,2,3,5
12a	Docks	8	1,2,5
12b	Frisbee Golf	8	2,3
12c	Monkey Island Improvements (Other)	8	2,4,5
12d	Remove Venetian Isles	8	2
12e	Signage - Welcome / Informational / Wayfinding	8	1,6
13a	Pavilion Picnic Area	7	3,5
13b	Public Wi-Fi	7	6
14a	Active Landscaping	6	4
14b	Amusement Area	6	1,6
15	Purchase Kid's Corner Apartments	5	2,6
16a	Dog Park	4	1,5
16b	Light House	4	5
16c	No Wake Zone (Keep)	4	5
16d	Zip-Line Course	4	3
17a	Boat Club	3	1,5
17b	Community Building Improvements	3	2,4
17c	Events	3	5
17d	No Commercial	3	4
17e	Playground (New / Move)	3	4,5
17f	Sea Plane Base in Basin	3	5,6
18a	Boat Ramp with Public Restrooms	2	1
18b	Relocate Ballfield	2	2
19a	Filter Surface Water	1	3
19b	Golf Cart Accessible Paths	1	1
19c	Hotel (Boutique)	1	6
19d	Multi-Purpose Field	1	5
19e	One way Street Around Community Center	1	4
19f	Pavillion Floating Barge	1	3
19g	Remove "Bumper" Barriers Replace with Natural Looking alternative	1	4
19h	Sound System	1	3

*Shading Differentiates Vote Ranking*

During the workshop the infrastructure needs were discussed which would be required in order to implement the wants and needs list. The following provides a summary of those needs.

***Energize Park***

The park needs more active recreation because the islands currently provide passive recreation. The main focus of activity should be public use space and marina. Attractions need to draw more users to the park and allow for a diversity of activities.

***Update to Modern Uses***

Public spaces are designed for many uses and have many features that are currently not found in the park since it was designed in the late 30's. Provide open areas to host large events such as art festivals, craft shows, farmers markets, and various other holiday events. Provide vendor facilities such as 20 amp power, potable water, and Wi-Fi.

***Iconization***

Develop a symbol or logo for the park that relates to the activities and architecture style.

***Commercial support and customer attraction***

Restaurant and vendors for food , supplies and activities (zip line, water, food, equipment, cameras).

***Expand connection to water***

New boardwalks and seawalls. Expand marina. Currently has parking on the land that fronts the water. This area needs to be accessible by pedestrians only.

***Expand connection to downtown***

Pedestrian walkway to downtown area with full featured cross walks and pedestrian ways. Lighted with shelters.

***Focus on historical features***

Park was designed in the 20's and 30's more vehicular based than now. Originally had a road proposed along the islands and parking in the lake front baseball board walk

***Design criteria***

1920s craftsman original pavilion was craftsman style with tapered columns and vintage detailing. Another option would be Cracker style which is similar style utilized at Tavares Waterfront Park.

**Ecotourism**

The ample waterways and wetland systems provide opportunities for ecotourism. Canoe and kayak rental could be out of the same building as the zip line. Franchise with the same people that run the one at Central Florida Zoo. Kayak and canoe rental adjacent to ample parking. Zip line with climbing wall.

**Fitness**

Frisbee golf and Jogging trails can enhance passive uses on the islands facing the water.

**Parking**

Add parking and reduce vehicular/pedestrian conflict points.

**Landscaping**

New landscaping with traditional plants. The landscape plans that were prepared for the park in the late 30's by Lloyd Galiner Landscape architect used a varied palate of native and naturalized plants. The plan was designed to display seasonal color and provide shade using plants that were available at that time. Many new cultivars have been developed providing more options and colors.

**Second Workshop**

The workshop held on April 12<sup>th</sup> gave the participants the opportunity to design the park taking into account the wants and needs list, and the infrastructure improvement needs. Attendees were seated at six tables forming six (6) groups with six (6) to eight (8) persons in each group. Each table was provided a large scale aerial of the park property overlaid with vellum in order to design and locate the facilities and improvements. Each table appointed a facilitator to present their designs.



### **Final Workshop**

At the final workshop held on May 3, 2014, LPGURP presented a conceptual plan based on the designs prepared by the participants. The participants were given an opportunity to finalize the overall layout. Each person within the group had ten (10) "votes" which to cast. Results of the votes revealed that a consensus could not be reached regarding the location of Kid's Korner or the community building.



## CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

### IV. CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

Based on the results of the charette and critique of the conceptual plans, a final concept plan was developed.

The following provides the proposed phasing plan:

#### PHASE I

Purchase apartments  
Parking lot construction  
Kids Korner playground  
Splash Pad  
Dixie Road fencing  
Fountain refurbishment  
New pavilion  
Signage  
Ground lease for restaurant, west of boat club  
Ground lease for canoe/kayak rental building  
Zip line lease

The following items in Phase I are costs to be borne by others:

- Removal of fence/rail by FDOT
- Restaurant west of boat club – land lease
- Zip line operation – land lease
- Canoe/kayak rental – land lease

The following items are relatively low in construction cost and can be adjusted to what level of spending the city can budget:

- Create design standards for all future structures
- Upgrade to 20 amp power, portable water and wi-fi

These projects are those that can have community sponsors that contribute the funds toward the task and could be augmented with grants such as CDBG:

- Kid's Korner expansion
- Landscape along Dixie Avenue and within gardens
- Parking improvements for Kid's Korner

The City may partner with Community sponsors to expedite the improvements. Suggestions:

- Parking improvement for Kid's Korner

## **PHASE II**

Purchase lots 1 – 6  
Relocate Communications Department  
Relocate Public Works  
Relocate Lakefront TV  
Demo lots 1 – 6  
Construct parking lots  
Ground lease for commercial waterfront around marina

The following item is at no cost to the City and to be borne by others:

- Land lease for commercial waterfront uses at current marina location

## **PHASE III**

Boardwalk extension in front of marina  
Create design standards for all future structures  
Landscaping along Dixie Avenue  
Construct board walk in front of restaurant to boat club  
Frisbee golf & equipment  
Ground lease around community building/Pat Thomas Stadium  
Initiation of pool relocation complex  
Landscaping along Dixie Avenue  
Pavilions (# as \$ available)  
Provide route for golf carts  
Restroom at ski beach (light house look)  
Star Island (Monkey Island) Improvement  
Volleyball courts – Ski Beach

The following item could utilize volunteers to offset costs and minimize cost to City:

- Landscaping
- Volleyball courts added – number to be phased
- Sand beach to be phased – Ski Beach

The following item is at no cost to the City and to be borne by others:

- Land lease for commercial uses on east side of community building and Pat Thomas Stadium

The following items could be programmed via the City capital budget or grants:

- Restroom at Ski Beach with light house design
- Pavilions at Ski Beach and Island as funds allow
- Parking improved to community building and Pat Thomas Stadium
- Boardwalk in marina area
- Frisbee golf
- Golf cart path – route

#### **PHASE IV**

Boat ramp at Ski Beach  
Close section of Lakeshore Drive  
Transient boat slips – restaurant area, boat club, ball field (in that order for permitting and construction)  
Pavilions  
Parking improved to community building and Pat Thomas Stadium  
Restrooms  
Sand beach  
Shell rock road – Ski Beach area

The following item could utilize volunteers to offset costs and minimize cost to City:

- Shell rock road – ski beach area
- Complete sand beach

#### **PHASE V**

Landscaping along Dixie  
Transient boat slips  
Parking Improvements on Venetian Park Drive & Pat Thomas Stadium  
Pavilions  
Restrooms

#### **PHASE VI**

Community building expansion and alternate location revisited  
Transient boat slips added  
This phase addresses the community building and whether it is expanded or a

new facility constructed close to the boat basin. A suggestion is to go back to the Community and have preliminary engineering available so the costs of both options are available and an informed decision may be made. Both options work so no bad decision can be reached (\$5,000,000 estimated cost not including engineering). More transient boat slips could also be built if needed as well.

#### **PHASE VII**

Permit and build rental boat houses

Lease boat rental area and have lease holders construct facilities – City cost minimal

Cost estimates for the proposed improvements are included in Appendix A.

## SUMMARY

### V. SUMMARY

Community residents, business and property owners, merchants, local organizations and the City have an opportunity to support and assist one another in revitalizing Venetian Gardens. The proposed community improvements provide opportunities which would benefit the community at large and offer common rewards. Public and private investment opportunities are available with the proposed plan.

Funding options for the proposed improvements to the park include public/private partnerships, contributions/donations, grants, bonds, user fees, city funds, CRA funds, and CDBG funds. The park has a rich history of public/private partnerships with clubs/organizations from the construction of the swimming pool to the donation and planting of the landscape. Promotion and visibility of the park, its amenities and activities for festivals and other events would encourage economic partnerships.



# APPENDIX A – COST ESTIMATE

## Venetian Gardens cost estimate

Description	Cost Each	Qty.	Phase 1	Qty.	Phase 2	Qty.	Phase 3	Qty.	Phase 4	Qty.	Phase 5	Qty.	Phase 6	Qty.	Phase 7
Purchase Apartments	\$500,000.00	1	\$500,000.00												
Construct Parking Lot	\$200,000.00	1	\$200,000.00												
Kids Korner Playground	grants		grants												
Splash Pad	\$300,000.00	1	\$300,000.00												
Dixie Road Fencing	\$75,000.00	1	\$75,000.00												
Refurbish Fountain	\$75,000.00	1	\$75,000.00												
New Pavilion	\$40,000.00	1	\$40,000.00												
Signage	\$30,000.00	1	\$30,000.00												
Purchases Lots 1-6	\$420,000.00			1	\$420,000.00										
Relocate Comm. Department	\$50,000.00			1	\$50,000.00										
Relocate Public Works	\$250,000.00			1	\$250,000.00										
Relocate Lakefront TV	\$100,000.00			1	\$100,000.00										
Demo lots 1-6	\$75,000.00			1	\$75,000.00										
Construct Parking Lots	\$250,000.00			1	\$250,000.00										
Construct Pool Complex	\$4,000,000.00				1	\$4,000,000.00									
Small Pavilion (16'x24')	\$19,834.00				4	\$77,536.00		2	\$39,668.00	2	\$39,668.00				
Large Pavilion (70'X40')	\$78,000.00							1	\$78,000.00	2	\$78,000.00				
Benches ( 8'-0" )	\$780.00														
Picnic Tables ( 8'-0" )	\$900.00														
Trash Rec. w/ liners	\$450.00														
Restrooms Lighthouse	\$100,000.00				1	\$100,000.00									
Restrooms	\$50,000.00							1	\$50,000.00	1	\$50,000.00				
Pavilion and Lighting Electric	\$1,350.00				5	\$6,750.00									
Boardwalk 10' (lf)	\$300.00				250	\$75,000.00		400	\$120,000.00						
Landscaping per lf	\$35.00				600	\$21,000.00		500	\$17,500.00	700	\$24,500.00				
Shell Rock Paving (sf)	\$7.00/sf								25,000	\$175,000.00					
Sand Volleyball Courts	\$6000.00/ea				2	\$12,000.00									
Boat Ramp (sf)	\$80.00/sf							700	\$56,000.00						
Sand Beach Construction .05 ton	\$0.25/ton				35,000	\$8,750.00		10,000	\$2,500.00						
Star Island Improvements	\$5,000.00				1	\$5,000.00									
Boat Slips (ea)	\$13,000.00							10	\$130,000.00	10	\$130,000.00				
Frisbee Golf and Equipment (per	\$450.00				18	\$8,100.00									
Cart Path Improvements (per lf)	\$15.00				1,200	\$18,000.00									
Lake Shore Drive Closing	\$5,000.00							1	\$5,000.00						
Parking Lot (per space)* as nee	\$3,000.00				35	\$105,000.00			120	\$420,000.00					
Create Design Standards	\$2,500.00				1	\$2,500.00									
Community Building Renovations											1	\$5,000,000.00			
Permit and Build Rental Boat Ho	\$1,000,000.00													25	\$1,000,000.00
<b>Total Estimated Cost</b>			<b>\$1,220,000.00</b>		<b>\$1,145,000.00</b>		<b>\$4,439,636.00</b>		<b>\$673,668.00</b>		<b>\$742,168.00</b>		<b>\$5,130,000.00</b>		<b>\$1,000,000.00</b>
Pavilions, Gazebos, and hard surface amenities include concrete slab															
prices are estimates only															