



Audubon Park  
*A Facility of Audubon Nature Institute*

## *90% Master Plan Overview*

In developing the Audubon Park Master Plan, the highest priority of the Audubon Commission is to continue its stewardship of the unique character of Audubon Park that has been a source of enjoyment for generations of New Orleanians. **The site plan contained in Section A, therefore, reflects no major changes to land uses in Audubon Park.** However, within this existing framework of uses, the Audubon Commission will continue to improve the beauty of the Park, ensure its historical integrity and respond to the evolving recreational needs of the entire New Orleans community.

The 90% Master Plan is prepared as a document to guide the development of specific programs and facilities in Audubon Park for the next twenty years. The plan is divided into five major sections. Section A is a site plan overview of Audubon Park, providing an overall perspective of land uses in the Park. As can be seen in this site plan, there are no significant changes in land use or traffic patterns included in this master plan. Sections B, C and D include detailed discussions of the three major areas of Audubon Park: St. Charles to Magazine Street; Magazine Street to the railroad tracks; and the railroad tracks to the river. These three sections provide additional detail and discussion of the various land uses contained in the overall site plan and provide a description of the physical characteristics and the visitor experiences in each of these different areas of Audubon Park. The final section, Section E, contains an appendix of more detailed information regarding programs or physical improvements that are intended to be implemented under the Master Plan.

The 90% Master Plan represents a direction for Audubon Park which the Audubon Commission believes is consistent with Audubon Park's history, the changing recreational needs of the entire New Orleans community and the expressed desires of Audubon Park's users and neighbors. Under the leadership the Audubon Commission, this Master Plan will ensure that Audubon Park will continue to be a treasured asset for all New Orleanians far into the future.

# *90% Master Plan Process*

## *Process*

The process for developing the Audubon Park Master Plan began with a public meeting on January 13, 2003. The meeting had over 150 attendees and the comment period after the meeting resulted in many written responses, over 100 email comments, numerous telephone comments and meetings between staff and interested groups and individuals. After reviewing and analyzing all the public comments, the Audubon Commission published a 50% Draft Master Plan in May, 2003. This 50% Plan was disseminated for review and comment by the general public, park users and park neighbors.

A public meeting to receive comments on the Draft Plan was held on July 9, 2003 in the Audubon Tea Room. This public meeting was attended by over 100 individuals and the sixty-day comment period subsequent to the public meeting resulted in a continuation of the public dialog regarding all aspects of Audubon Park.

In order to complete the public input process related to the Audubon Park Master Plan, the Audubon Commission will hold a public meeting to receive comments on the 90% Master Plan in late 2004. In addition, written comments will be solicited from the public for 30 days after the public meeting, thus providing all citizens an opportunity to provide direct comments regarding any aspect of the Audubon Park Master Plan.

After all public comments have been received and considered, a 100% Master Plan will be published and submitted to the Audubon Commission for its consideration in 2005. Included in the final Master Plan will be an analysis of the funding necessary to implement the Master Plan and a prioritization of the specific programs and improvements delineated in the Master Plan.

## **Audubon Park – St. Charles Avenue to Magazine Street: Front Section**

For generations of New Orleanians, the front section of Audubon Park has been a valued part of their lives. In 1884 it was the site of the World's Fair, hosting tens of thousands of visitors and containing many buildings, one covering more than 30 acres. The Audubon Park Golf Course opened in 1898. The lagoon, roadway, beautiful St. Charles entrance and majestic oak trees have enriched the lives of New Orleanians for nearly a century. A carousel, playground, the Audubon Tea Room and the Newman Bandstand have all been aspects of the front of Audubon Park that have been enjoyed by New Orleanians. The evolution of this section of Audubon Park to meet the changing recreational needs of our community has continued during the last several decades. The road in the front of Audubon Park was closed to vehicular traffic in the 1980's to accommodate a growing number of new park users. The St. Charles entrance was improved with new paving and landscaping, preserving the beauty and integrity of this historic public space. Play areas were added, hundreds of trees were planted and maintenance improved. Most recently, the renovated Audubon Park Golf Course opened in Fall, 2002, immensely improving the beauty of the front section of Audubon Park and earning accolades in *Golf Digest Magazine* as the highest rated golf course over a hundred years old in the country. In addition, the Audubon Golf Clubhouse opened in Spring, 2003, providing golfers and park users a wonderful, relaxing way to enjoy the beauty of Audubon Park.

The Master Plan envisions the front section of Audubon Park continuing to evolve as a beautiful, peaceful and valuable space for park users and neighbors while preserving the heritage of Audubon Park that has been enjoyed by generations of New Orleanians. A major historical aspect of this section of Audubon Park is the St. Charles Avenue entrance. See Appendix I. Built by the Audubon Commission over three quarters of a century ago, the John Charles Olmsted designed entrance has been rededicated as the Ogden Entrance Pavilion in recognition of a generous sponsorship from Roger H. Ogden for its preservation. Because Audubon Park receives no public funding for operational expenses, the participation of the private sector in the maintenance and preservation of Audubon Park is crucial to its long term success. The donation of private funds for the preservation and maintenance of this historic front entrance to Audubon Park will be, we hope, a model for other citizens to join in the future of Audubon Park. Lighting of the entrance architecture and oak trees are included as an aspect of this Master Plan. The lighting will provide a strong visual presence for this historic entrance at night

and provide another way for New Orleanians to appreciate the visual heritage of Audubon Park.

The lagoon in the front section of Audubon Park is arguably the largest single landscape feature in the entire Park. It has been defined by its current boundaries for more than 70 years and the Master Plan includes retaining the existing perimeter of the lagoon. The lagoon was originally used for public swimming before the construction of the swimming pool in Audubon Park. Later, it was the site of the swan boat ride and pedal boat rentals. None of these uses have been present in the lagoon for the last twenty years and the Master Plan does not anticipate any active recreational use of the lagoon returning. Rather, steps will be taken to address the long term water quality in the lagoon, particularly given the high level of biological materials transmitted into the lagoon by Bird Island. This will include a study regarding dredging the lagoon to remove the layer of decayed material at its bottom and the addition of significantly greater aeration to increase the oxygen content of the water at all levels.

The roadway (now a jogging path) around the front of the Park has also been in its existing location for more than 75 years. The only change to this circular path was the addition of a connection to complete the loop along Magazine Street. This was added by the Audubon Commission after the front of the Park was closed to vehicular traffic. The Master Plan includes no changes to the width or the location of this roadway. It served vehicles extremely well for the many decades it was open to vehicular traffic and it is serving a variety of runners, walkers, bikers, roller bladders, etc. presently. The largest number of public comments regarding the jogging path concerned lighting and the use of the jogging path at night. These comments were evenly divided between those who wanted significantly more lighting and those who wanted no additional lighting. The Master Plan recognizes that an improvement in the lighting on the jogging path is appropriate to enhance the safety and enjoyment of the path. The Plan also recognizes that this path is not a public vehicular road and therefore should not be lit as such. The jogging path lighting plan is contained as Appendix II in this Plan. The existing light fixtures along the jogging path will be replaced with new light poles and lights which will provide greater illumination at their locations and be more easily maintained. As per many of the comments at the public meeting, the light will be directed downward onto the jogging path rather than upward into the trees and sky.

There are currently more than 2400 trees in the front section of Audubon Park, including approximately 1000 live oak trees. The Master Plan recognizes these trees as Audubon Park's most important living asset. A tree inventory and a tree master plan are contained as the Appendices III

and IV of this report. In the front section of Audubon Park, the objective is to continue a program of maintenance and planting which maximizes the longevity and beauty of the historic live oaks, maintains the existing balance between open space and tree canopy and plans for an appropriate diversity of tree species in the Park. A large number of the live oaks in Audubon Park were planted more than 50 years ago. The care and retention of these trees is one of the highest priorities of Audubon's activities. Developing the resources and public support for this effort will be a major focus of Audubon over the next 20 years.

The St. Charles entrance, the lagoon, the jogging path and the oak trees are all part of the more passive aspects of the front section of Audubon Park. The playgrounds and shelter houses represent some of the more active uses, uses which must be both improved as well as controlled. Each of the three shelter houses in the front section of Audubon Park will be improved by a renovation of the bathrooms and the covered area associated with the shelter house buildings. This will provide Park users with amenities at a quality level more consistent with one of the great parks of the City. Specific drawings related to these improvements are included in Appendix V. Although the vast majority of activities at the shelter houses have been appropriate and non-intrusive on other park users and park neighbors, new regulations are included in this Master Plan in order to provide greater assurance of appropriate activities in Audubon Park. These new regulations are included as Appendix VI in this report. No new shelter houses or other such facilities are included in the Master Plan and the existing facilities are not scheduled for expansion.

The Master Plan includes the addition of a small playground in the area of Audubon Park near the Newman Bandstand and the Golf Clubhouse. This is in addition to the retention of the two playgrounds near St. Charles Avenue. There are currently no playgrounds in the area near Magazine Street, which historically has been a level of high activity, including the Audubon Tea Room, a carousel and boat rentals.

The renovation of the Audubon Park Golf Course has been a phenomenal success. The Master Plan anticipates no expansion of the golf course beyond its current location, which has been the location of the golf course in Audubon Park for more than a hundred years. The golf course will continue to provide an outstanding level of quality and be a beautiful visual amenity to all park users.

The Audubon Park Golf Clubhouse has quickly become a wonderful place to enjoy Audubon Park for golfers and park users. Its setting and architecture blend in beautifully with the lagoon, the oak grove, the golf course and the area of Audubon Park along Magazine Street. It is a

wonderful location to enjoy the beauty and serenity of Audubon Park, particularly for those members of the New Orleans community whose enjoyment of the Park's beauty may not include bicycling or running.

Drainage is a constant concern throughout the entire City of New Orleans and southeast Louisiana. One of the reasons that the Olmsted Firm designed the lagoon in the front section of Audubon Park was to provide fill for low areas, to create a gently sloping topography in the Park to assist in drainage and to provide a holding vessel for draining Audubon Park without sending all of the water directly into the surrounding neighborhood. This lagoon and the new lagoons on the golf course will continue to serve a drainage purpose for the vast majority of the front section of Audubon Park. However, there are areas of Audubon Park, primarily on the Walnut Street and Exposition sides and in the area between the Newman Bandstand and Magazine Street, where improving drainage must be addressed. See Appendix VII of this report for further information.

### **Audubon Park – Magazine Street to Railroad Tracks: Middle Section**

This section of Audubon Park has historically been the focus for the highest levels of recreational activity and facilities in the Park. Horticulture Hall, built as part of the 1884 World's Fair, dominated a large portion of this section in the Park until it was destroyed by a hurricane. Animals exhibits were built in this area more than a hundred years ago. These exhibits eventually evolved into the development of Audubon Zoo, many of whose buildings were sited and/or designed by the Olmsted firm, which continued working for the Audubon Commission into the 1940's. The rebirth of the Audubon Zoo in the 1970's, 80's and 90's significantly improved the educational and recreational services offered to the New Orleans community while retaining consistent use of this important part of Audubon Park.

The Master Plan envisions that, while Audubon Zoo will continue to provide a higher level of facilities and programs within the existing perimeter of the Zoo, the middle section of Audubon Park will evolve into uses which will make the green space outside the Zoo perimeter fence more passive and beautiful.

Perhaps the most historically significant area of the middle section of Audubon Park is the oak alley and the Hyams fountain which serve as both the framework and terminus for the connection across Magazine Street to the Newman Bandstand. The Audubon Park Tree Master Plan

will address the preservation and maintenance of these historic oak trees. The preservation of Hyams fountain will continue as it has for the last 80 years and landscaping will be revised around the fountain to enhance its placement on the axis between the Newman Bandstand and the Odehemier complex inside Audubon Zoo. (see Appendix IX)

In addition to Hyams fountain, there are two structures in this section of the Park which date to the early days of Audubon Park and the use of this area for animal exhibits. These are the structure located near Magazine Street, commonly referred to as Shelter 13, and the original elephant night house, a structure located near the Zoo perimeter fence upriver from the Hyams fountain. Both structures are delineated on the site plan. The Master Plan includes uses for these two structures which support passive public use of this Park space, stabilization and preservation of the structure.

Shelter 13 along Magazine Street will not be used as a picnic shelter and will not contain active restrooms. The roof structure of the building was recently repaired. Exterior maintenance and restoration of the building will continue to preserve its architecture relationship with this area of Audubon Park. Historical signage will be placed on and adjacent to the building that will explain the uses of this area of Audubon Park during the history of the Park (see sample in Appendix XI).

The original elephant night house building will continue to be maintained and its use will continue as a storage and support building for activities in Audubon Zoo. As with Shelter 13, maintenance of the exterior structure of the building will continue and interpretive signage will be added to enable Park users to understand the context of the building within this area of Audubon Park.

In 1998, the City of New Orleans constructed the Whitney Young Pool and added several acres of open green space in the area where the original Audubon Natatorium existed. This new swimming pool has enabled the New Orleans Recreation Department to provide swimming in Audubon Park at a level that is consistent with the neighborhood swimming programs throughout the city. In addition, the open green space provides an informal recreational space, enabled by the removal of the large concrete slab that was adjacent to Magazine Street and the replacement of an overgrown and unusable swimming pool. The Master Plan anticipates the continuation of both the Whitney Young Pool and the adjacent open green space in their present forms, conditions and usage. The swimming pool would continue under administration of the New Orleans Recreation Department as part of its overall, city-wide recreation programs. This would include summer usage for public swimming, NORD programs and in conjunction with select Zoo activities.

The green space would continue open and unencumbered, usable for both informal athletics as well as overflow parking for the Zoo on those days when the paved Zoo parking lot is inadequate.

The agreement for renovating and operating the stables in Audubon Park has been cancelled by mutual agreement between the Audubon Commission and the lessee. It is imperative that, if stables are to remain in Audubon Park, a significant improvement in the physical facilities must be undertaken. The Audubon Commission has revised the requirements for the renovation and operation of a stable in Audubon Park by revising the capital investment requirements while maintaining high standards for the development and operation of the facility.

Included in the Appendix XII are the bid specifications for a new stables facility. The lease area under this bid proposal is the same space as is currently occupied by the stables and involves no decrease in public green space in Audubon Park.

As can be seen in the attached bid specifications, the new stables facility anticipates the demolition of the existing barn and house located on the property. The demolition of the old barn was also contained in the previous bid and lease agreement. The new bid specifications, however, anticipate that the demolition of the barn will be undertaken by the Audubon Commission. The new bid specifications also require the successful bidder to complete the construction of the new facility before occupying the premises and placing horses on the site. The termination of the existing lease requires the current lessee to vacate the premises by October 15<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, whether a new lease is executed or not, stables operations will cease in Audubon Park for at least the period of time it takes to construct new facilities. If for some reason a new lease is not executed, the Audubon Commission will hold a public meeting to discuss possible uses for this area of Audubon Park.

The Audubon Park Master Plan includes significant improvement to the quality of Audubon Park in the area between the stables and the railroad tracks. The improvement is not an increase in the activity level in this section of the park. It is a significant increase in the beauty, landscaping and maintenance of this area to enhance its peaceful and tranquil usage. See the overall site plan

Currently the area immediately riverward of the stables is occupied by a shell road, a small shelter facility, an abandoned railroad train bed and an open green space with majestic oak trees on its edge near the Zoo perimeter fence. First, the Master Plan includes the removal of the existing shelter house, shell parking area, shell road and the foundations of the railroad track from this area. After their removal, these areas



would be replaced with grass, landscaping and open green space. Public vehicular traffic would be excluded from this area, limited to East Drive and the parking areas immediately alongside the roadway. While improving the beauty of this area of Audubon Park, it will also eliminate potential overcrowding and security issues.

In order to further enhance the beauty and serenity of this area of the Park, a labyrinth is proposed (see Appendix XIII) as delineated on the site plan. Detailed drawings are included in the appendix, but the labyrinth will be a 60 foot diameter circle of brick and stone paving materials in a landscape setting and adjacent to a crushed stone paved meditation walk with landscaping and benches. See plans in Appendix XIV. The open lawn area and trees immediately riverward from the labyrinth will remain essentially unchanged, except for increased maintenance, trimming and preservation of the live oak trees and the related trees in the area. This has long been an area of informal gatherings (and an occasional wedding) and the Master Plan anticipates that this type of use will be enhanced, but not expanded, by these improvements.

The area of Audubon Park adjacent to Children's Hospital and riverward of Tchoupitoulas Street was added by Audubon in 1949. This area has always been used for athletics and the Master Plan anticipates this usage continuing at an enhanced level. The tennis courts would not be expanded, but some of the support and infrastructures facilities would be improved as explained in Appendix XV. Along with these improvements would come an increase in fees for use of the tennis courts by the general public and an effort to make the tennis facilities more accessible to neighborhood schools.

The athletic fields riverward of the tennis courts have been used at various times for baseball, softball and soccer. The Master Plan anticipates that this area will continue to be used for baseball and/or soccer. The infrastructure of the fields would be improved and they would be operated in conjunction with the athletic fields on Riverview. At the time of this Master Plan, it is uncertain whether the major activities would be in association with the baseball fields on Riverview or the soccer fields on Riverview. However, the fields would be improved, including enhanced lighting.

The Master Plan contains no significant changes to roadways or traffic flow in this section of Audubon Park. West Drive will continue to be a two-lane, two-way road leading to the Riverview and East Drive will continue to be a one-way, two-lane road leading from Riverview to Magazine Street. Entergy Boulevard and Tea Room Boulevard will remain unchanged.

The primary revisions to East Drive will be improved parking adjacent to the street, with the addition of crushed stone along East Drive from Tchoupitoulas to Magazine Street. This will include a continuous line of wooden bollards to ensure that vehicular traffic remains on the road or the adjacent parking spaces and not in the green space of the Park. A stop sign and speed bump were recently added on East Drive at Laurel Street to encourage drivers to operate vehicles in a safe manner.

The Master Plan calls for two additional speed bumps to be added, one close to the Tchoupitoulas connection on East Drive and the other half-way between Laurel Street and Magazine Street.

### **Audubon Park – Railroad Tracks to Mississippi River: Back Section (Riverview)**

This is the “newest” section of Audubon Park. It was reclaimed as usable recreational space in the 1960’s. At that time, the Audubon Commission recognized an opportunity to create the largest and most significant recreational space on the edge of the Mississippi River in the City of New Orleans. During the last 40 years this section of Audubon Park, like the other areas of the Park, has seen an ongoing evolution of recreational uses and physical improvements. This area of Audubon Park was, and often is, referred to as “the Butterfly”. This nomenclature came from a concrete refreshment/river overlook structure built in the 1960’s and removed, due to structure and maintenance issues, in the 1980’s. Significant river edge improvements (walkways, lighting, benches and riverside erosion control) were added in the 1980’s. A riverboat landing dock and rear entrance to Audubon Zoo were added at about the same time. The growing demand for baseball, football and soccer fields in the City led to the expansion of the athletic fields on the downriver side of Riverview. Overall, however, this area of Audubon Park has consistently been a favorite place for New Orleanians to enjoy peaceful, beautiful and easy access to the Mississippi River. The Audubon Park Master Plan envisions a continuing evolution of the quality of these experiences.

The upriver section of Riverview is the area most commonly used for sunbathing, picnicking and informal recreation. This is the area of Riverview most accessible for public use as a combination of open green space and views of the Mississippi River. The Audubon Park Master Plan envisions improving this type of use without negatively impacting either the available green space or creating new, disruptive uses.

The current restroom/shelter facilities in this area include only a small bathroom facility. The Master Plan includes replacing this old restroom

facility with a new covered shelter house and restroom combination. Details are included in the Appendix XVI. This new facility is designed for two primary purposes. The first is to enhance the public facilities available in this area of Riverview. The second purpose is to provide an alternative location for some of the large picnics and activities which are currently occurring at the shelter house near Magazine Street and the Newman Bandstand. This will provide a location in Audubon Park with better vehicular access and parking than that available in the front section of the Park.

As can be seen on the site plan, the remainder of this area of Riverview continues as open green space, a perfect area to sit in the sun or under the shade of trees and enjoy the beauty of the Park and the excitement of the Mississippi River.

The New Orleans Steamboat riverboat dock will continue, as will the pedestrian connection from the river cruise dock to a rear entrance into Audubon Zoo. This dock annually provides access to river activities from Audubon Park for nearly a hundred thousand people and provides an active connection to the river for all Audubon Park users. It is an amenity and an activity that Audubon hopes will continue to grow over the next twenty years.

The expansion and improvement of the athletic fields on Riverview have been a tremendous success. The partnership between the Audubon Commission and the Carrollton Soccer Association has not only improved the quality and scope of the athletic programs, but it has also improved the quality and safety of the visitor experience for the entire Riverview area of Audubon Park. The Master Plan includes improvements to the existing baseball field area of Riverview, allowing an expansion of programs for youngsters that, in partnership with Carrollton baseball, will provide both an increase in positive family usage of the Park as well as a significant upgrade in the facilities available to all Park users.

The physical improvements in this area are further detailed in the Appendix XVII. On the site of the existing large baseball diamond will be built four smaller diamonds, one of which is a Miracle Field for use by handicapped children. At the center of this complex is a new restroom and concession facility. In addition, an upgrade of the existing playground will be completed. Therefore, this will provide upgraded facilities not only for baseball and soccer, but also for more informal recreational activities by many Park users. As with the soccer fields, the baseball fields will be available for rental by schools and the general public whenever they are not in use by the instructional and recreational

programs of the Carrollton Soccer Association and Carrollton Booster's Club.

The Audubon Commission has been privileged to create two of the finest public recreational areas on the Mississippi River in Orleans Parish. These are, of course, the Audubon Park Riverview and Woldenberg Riverfront Park. Woldenberg Riverfront Park's river edge provides outstanding views of the activities and grandeur of the Mississippi River, excellent lighting and opportunities (both in and adjacent to Woldenberg Riverfront Park) to stop and enjoy the river in both indoor and outdoor settings. This was the same vision for the river edge of Audubon Park that was developed several decades ago. Parts of this vision of the river edge were completed with the addition of lighting, walkway, benches and erosion control improvements twenty years ago. However, some of those improvements have deteriorated over the years, tree growth outside Audubon Park has impacted the view of the river in many locations and the replacement structure for the "butterfly" building was never completed. The Audubon Park Master Plan addresses all of these issues on the Mississippi River edge.

The lighting on the pedestrian edge of the river will be repaired and replaced so that the lighting is as effective and attractive as it was when it was first installed. In addition, the street lights on the Riverview road, which were de-energized several decades ago, will be either reenergized or replaced. This will provide better and consistent lighting both on the road and the pedestrian river edge.

The Master Plan envisions working with the appropriate City and State agencies for the removal of many of the trees growing between Audubon Park property and the river edge, creating greatly improved visual access to the Mississippi River from most points on the Audubon Park Riverview. A new structure will be built at the location of the old "butterfly" building. This structure is shown in conceptual form in the Appendix. The structure is designed to provide a significant space directly over the Mississippi for the public to enjoy the same feeling of immediate, direct contact to the Mississippi River as can be enjoyed in Woldenberg Park. It will provide another destination for riverboat activity, either from downtown, Westwego or within Audubon Park. It will also contain an indoor area that would be available for public rental where events and activities could occur in a facility that combines the beauty of Audubon Park and the excitement of the Mississippi River in one unique location.

The vehicular road and parking would remain essentially unchanged in the Audubon Park Master Plan. Traffic would still enter the Riverview area only at the upriver end and exit only at the downriver end. A slight

change in the traffic flow around the baseball fields and playground will provide an opportunity for traffic to circle this area while preserving one way traffic flow. Some additional roadside parking may be added, as needed. However, no parking other than immediately adjacent to the road is included in the Master Plan.