Why the Development of the Brazos River Corridor Recreation Master Plan is Important for the continued Growth and Success of Fort Bend County, Texas

The development of expanded outdoor recreational opportunities along the Brazos River Corridor in Fort Bend County is important to the County’s continued growth and development. The improvements referenced include but are not limited to the development of additional parks and green spaces, hiking and biking trails, greenways and paddling trails. The benefits to our County can be divided into five basic categories – Economic, Environmental, Social, Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing.

1. Economic (adapted from The Trust for Public Lands, Spring 2006)

* Parks and green spaces increase the value of nearby property
* Parks and green spaces attract business and high quality employees due to an improved quality of life for a given area.
* Parks and green spaces attract tourist that support local economies.
* Recreational master planning allow communities to grow more efficiently. Fort Bend County is one of the top counties in the U.S. in population growth.

1. Environmental

* Managed parks and green spaces protect drinking water, clean the air and mitigate floods better than other more costly methods (adapted from The Trust for Public Lands, Spring 2006).
* Increased environmental awareness / stewardship by allowing the public to make connections of how society’s activities (both short-term and long-term) affect the natural environment in which all we rely upon.
* Conserve dwindling Brazos River riparian habitat for present and future generation to experience and enjoy.

1. Social (Health and Social Benefits of Recreation 2005 - California State Parks)

* Parks, green spaces and outdoor recreational opportunities are essential for strengthening and maintaining a well-adjusted community.
* The development of outdoor recreation venues and associated activities become social gathering locations that bond individuals and diverse groups within communities which support a social consciousness.
* Parks and recreation improve a community’s image and creates a sense of place.
* Parks and outdoor recreational opportunities have been shown to reduce crime rates in communities.
* Parks, green spaces and outdoor recreational opportunities encourage volunteerism which promotes a citizenry that take pride and thereby give back to their community through dollars and labor.

1. Physical Health

* Exercise derived from recreational activities lessen health care related problems and lower health care costs (National Park Service 1983)
* Children who spend time outdoors are healthier than their indoor counterparts (Outdoor Recreation, Health and Wellness 2009 – G. Godbey)
* Taking part in regular outdoor recreational activities in parks and green spaces can improve physical wellness (Dr. Laura L. Payne, University of Illinois; Livestrong.com)
* Well planned and managed parks and green spaces that provide outdoor recreational opportunities have the potential to positively impact the health of individuals and communities.
* Outdoor recreation is an investment in preventative health care. The sedentary lifestyle results in increased obesity rates, coronary heart disease and several cancers which parks and outdoor space recreational activities can combat.

1. Mental Wellbeing

* Reduced effects of stress are a direct benefit of participating in outdoor activities in parks and green spaces. Individuals have an increased ability to positively deal with life’s stressors (Outdoors Queensland – Queensland Outdoor Recreation Foundation).
* Improved self-esteem and positive self-image is a benefit of participating in outdoor recreational activities in parks and green spaces (Outdoors Queensland – Queensland Outdoor Recreation Foundation).
* Life satisfaction, inspiration and self-realization are benefits of those regularly participating in outdoor recreational activities (Outdoors Queensland – Queensland Outdoor Recreation Foundation).
* Improved confidence and creativity are additional benefits in participating in outdoor recreational activities (Top Five Benefits of Outdoor Recreation, Dr. Andrew Lepp, Kent State University)
* Physical and recreational activities have been show in multiple studies to reduce depression (Health and Social Benefits of Recreation 2005 - California State Parks)