

# RESETTLEMENT OF ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES

## BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW



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 [IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov](http://IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov)



**LOUISIANA**  
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# RESETTLEMENT OF ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES

## THE MULTIFACETED VIEW

Imperiled on the front line of coastal erosion and rising seas, the bayou region of south Louisiana is home to diverse peoples and cultures. The residents of Isle de Jean Charles—a population of predominantly American Indian ancestry—live in this region, on an island that is rapidly disappearing into the Gulf of Mexico. Once encompassing more than 22,000 acres, only 320 acres of Isle de Jean Charles remain. The sole connecting road to the mainland—Island Road, built in 1953—is often impassable due to high winds, tides, sea level rise or storm surge. This effectively blocks residents from school, work and essential goods and services.

The land where island residents and their families once hunted, trapped, grazed animals and farmed is now open water. Unfortunately, the challenges of restoring or preserving the island's landmass are insurmountable. So the question arises: How does the state help residents resettle to a new home, while preserving their culture and values in a new place that offers a prosperous and sustainable future? In response to that question, a dedicated team of state and local officials, planners, engineers, architects and policymakers is collaborating with current and past island residents to implement a program for the Resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles.

Even with this focused effort, the Resettlement emerges as a complex process, involving a wide range of cultural, social, environmental, economic, institutional and political factors. As with any inclusive effort, all stakeholders bring unique values and perspectives to the table, which often complicates consensus-based decision-making. Therefore, the Resettlement cannot be driven solely by economic and operational objectives, but must incorporate a comprehensive, holistic and open-ended approach.



## RESETTLEMENT FUNDING: HUD AWARDS \$48.3 MILLION IN CDBG FUNDING

In January 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the state of Louisiana \$48.3 million in Community Development Block Grant funds for the Resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles, as part of the Office of Community Development's winning application to the National Disaster Resilience Competition.<sup>1</sup> With this funding, Louisiana is developing and implementing a structured and voluntary retreat from Isle de Jean Charles that is thoughtful and equitable, while maximizing opportunities for current and past island residents.

## RESETTLEMENT MISSION: HOLISTIC APPROACH TO RELOCATION

From the outset, the state's expressed purpose has been to provide all current, permanent residents with relocation options that reflect the values of the Isle de Jean Charles people. In keeping with this goal and mindful of the dire environmental conditions faced by island residents, the intended primary beneficiaries of the Resettlement are current permanent, primary residents of the island and past permanent, primary island residents displaced since Aug. 28, 2012.<sup>2</sup>

The Resettlement team is committed to implementing the relocation process in a manner that emphasizes residents' self-determination. Guided by an understanding of their expressed priorities, needs and concerns, the new community will reflect the Isle de Jean Charles people's values, cultural affiliations and economic objectives.

With resilience in mind, the Resettlement will incorporate sustainable materials and practices conducive to residents' future safety and stewardship of natural resources. Moreover, a primary goal of the Resettlement is to ensure the community is economically sustainable in its new location.

Finally, in addition to serving the needs of the island residents, the state hopes its holistic approach will illustrate best practices and lessons learned for the resettlement of other diverse and culturally rich communities facing climate-driven relocation.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. "HUD Awards \$1 Billion Through National Disaster Resilience Competition." Last modified Jan. 29, 2016. <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-awards-1-billion-through-national-disaster-resilience-competition/>  
Grantee profiles: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/NDRCGRANTPROF.PDF>

<sup>2</sup> This date marks Hurricane Isaac's landfall, which qualified the Resettlement for funding through HUD's National Disaster Resilience Competition.

## RESETTLEMENT GOALS

### SAFETY, COLLABORATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND PRESERVATION

#### THE GOALS OF THE ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES RESETTLEMENT INCLUDE:

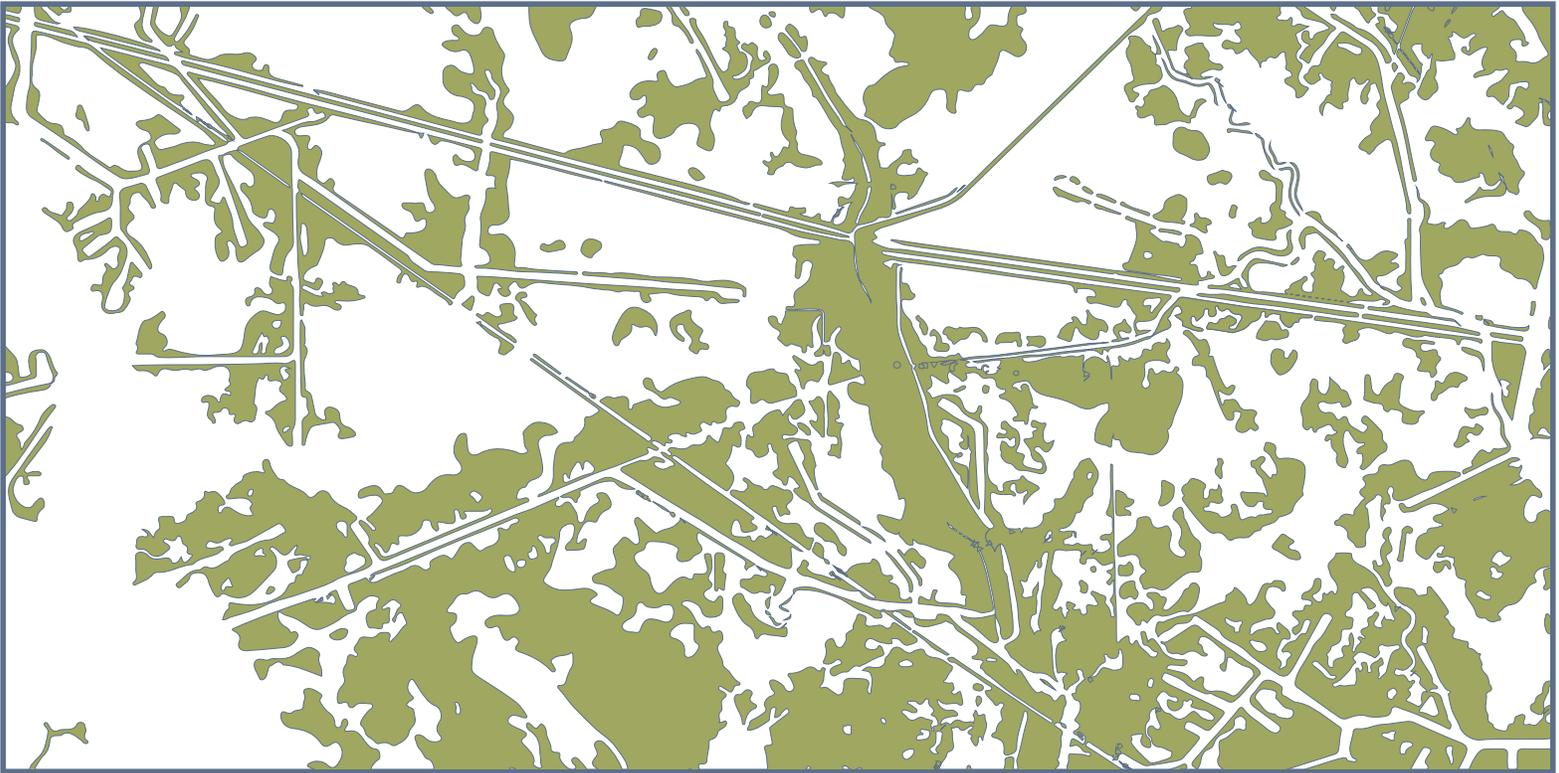
- Assist willing island residents in moving out of harm's way to safe, new homes in a community that provides an improved quality of life and is located on safer, higher ground than their island property; or, if they prefer not to join the new community, they may move to an existing home in a lower-risk area in Louisiana.
- Collaborate with current and past island residents on the design of the new community.
- Ensure that the community is economically sustainable in its new location.
- Facilitate preservation and continuity of islanders' diverse cultural identities and traditions.
- Create a holistic approach to the Resettlement that will illustrate best practices and lessons learned for consideration by other diverse and culturally rich communities facing climate-driven relocation.

## FEDERAL AND STATE RECOGNITION OF AMERICAN INDIANS ON ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES

In 1979, the Houma Alliance and the Houma Tribe merged into the United Houma Nation, forming a not-for-profit organization. In 1981, the UHN joined the Intertribal Council of Louisiana, which guides Louisiana government in matters concerning American Indians. In 1985, the United Houma Nation, which included some residents of Isle de Jean Charles, filed its first petition for federal recognition, which was denied in 1994. UHN filed a rebuttal in 1996.

Following the Bureau of Indian Affairs' denial of the United Houma Nation's petition for federal recognition in 1994, some individuals withdrew from the UHN. The Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees Inc. and the Pointe-au-Chien Tribe each filed separate petitions for federal recognition, but both were denied in 2008. On July 1, 2015, the U.S. Department of the Interior published a new set of guidelines for recognition. All three tribes are now seeking federal recognition under the revised regulations.

Some U.S. states have established legal processes to evaluate and recognize American Indian tribes and organizations that are not federally recognized in order to provide aid or assistance to members of those groups. These processes vary across states. Many island residents have ties to and/or are a member of either the United Houma Nation tribe or the Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees Inc. tribe, both of which are recognized by the state of Louisiana.



## RESETTLEMENT CENSUS: THE CURRENT POPULATION OF ISLE DE JEAN CHARLES

After HUD awarded the grant to Louisiana, OCD conducted a census of island residents. This was the first foray into what would become an extensive, on-the-ground outreach and engagement initiative, which also documented the island's infrastructure. During this initial effort, the team formed relationships with many island residents, as well as the extended community.

Through this exhaustive process, the state discovered a diverse community of sometimes competing tribal interests. Some residents speak of ties to the Isle de Jean Charles Band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees while others speak of ties to the United Houma Nation Tribe. Some speak of ties to both tribes, and still others speak of no tribal affiliation. The outreach team also noted that many former island residents, identifying with differing tribal affiliations, moved inland after repeated disasters, seeking safety and economic opportunity. Hence, in addition to resettling current residents, the Resettlement is designed to give past island residents a chance to rejoin the community in its new location.

Regardless of which tribe current and past residents identify with, the Resettlement is, by federal law and the state's desire, not tied to any particular tribe, race or belief system. Participation in the Resettlement is entirely voluntary; the state will not force anyone to leave the island and residents are encouraged to make their own, independent decisions. The state continues to conduct outreach and strengthen relationships with island residents in many ways, including regular visits to the island.

## RESETTLEMENT TRANSITIONAL HOUSING: OPTIONAL RELOCATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

More than 20 island families are living in upland rental units off the island while the new community is being developed. This interim rental option allows residents the ability to relocate prior to completion of the new community. These families represent about half of the island's 2016 population. Some residents have opted to remain on the island until the new community is ready for move-in, while others may choose not to leave the island at all.



## RESETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT IN PHASES

### PHASE I: DATA GATHERING AND ENGAGEMENT (JUNE 2016 – NOVEMBER 2016)

Phase I included initial outreach to and engagement with current island residents, as well as a preliminary land use and infrastructure survey of the island. The team’s interactions with residents provided insight into residents’ priorities and revealed additional complexities to be addressed during subsequent phases. The team learned that residents’ values include privacy, seclusion, access to water, safety, flood protection, continued access to the island and maintaining and strengthening cultural identity. However, values vary widely from individual to individual—there is no single, homogeneous set of community priorities shared by all island residents. The program team continues to build relationships with island residents to ensure the diversity of values and varying priorities are well represented in the development of the new community. A final report on Phase I can be found on [IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov](http://IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov).

### PHASE II: SITE SELECTION, ACQUISITION AND MASTER PLANNING (DECEMBER 2016 – FEBRUARY 2019)

Understanding and reflecting residents’ needs and visions for their future community is the project’s highest priority. As part of the Resettlement’s planning phase, the Resettlement team engaged in a series of public meetings and one-on-one conversations which have continued throughout the planning and implementation phases to ensure island residents have ongoing engagement with team members and the process as a whole.

- **December 2016 – June 2017:** The state conducted an exhaustive site evaluation process throughout Terrebonne Parish. In May 2017, the state provided island residents an opportunity to visit potential sites for the new community.
- **July 2017 – December 2017:** In July 2017, the Resettlement team hosted its third community meeting to discuss the pros and cons of the identified suitable tracts, to discuss general market and appraised values and to take a site preference survey of island residents. The state also issued an RFP for a master planner. A selection committee, which included representatives from the island community, chose a consultant team to develop a master plan. The planning team was introduced at the fourth community meeting in December 2017, and team members began to work with current and past island residents to solidify design plans and programming for the new community.
- **January 2018 – September 2018:** A steering committee comprising island residents and various island community stakeholders—including representatives from the United Houma Nation and Isle de Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogees—convened six times throughout the master planning process. The steering committee serves as an advisory board and liaison between the state and the island community. The state held three design workshops in which planners, architects and current and past residents explored multiple design options that best expressed the values and priorities of the community. A separate academic advisory committee provides guidance to the planning team. The academic advisory committee includes local and national scholars who understand the environment and cultures of the region, as well as the complexities of resettlement processes.
- **March 2018:** The state placed a purchase option on the property a majority of residents selected during the site preference survey. The selected site, about 40 miles north of Isle de Jean Charles, is a higher, safer and more resilient location.

#### *The New Isle*

- 515 acres of rural land near Schriever in Terrebonne Parish
- About 120 houses once fully developed
- Site plans include commercial and retail spaces, a community center and walking trails
- **December 2018:** Following completion of site due diligence, including federally required environmental reviews, the Louisiana Land Trust, on behalf of the state, purchased the selected property for development of the new community.

### PHASE III: DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION (MARCH 2019 – 2021)

The state is currently implementing the new community master plan, which includes completing the next phase of the environmental review, finalizing site design work, acquiring permits, laying infrastructure, constructing housing, initiating business development activities, launching workforce training programs and helping residents move into the new community.

- **November 2019:** Island residents name their new community "The New Isle."
- **May 2020:** Infrastructure construction begins.

### PHASE IV: LIVING IN THE NEW COMMUNITY

Eligible families that participate in the Resettlement will enter into a forgivable mortgage on the property in The New Isle. One-fifth of the mortgage will be forgiven each year over the course of five years, during which time no payments are required, provided the resident maintains primary residency and the required insurance on the new property. After five years the resident will own the new property in full, provided these requirements have been met.

## RESETTLEMENT CONSTRAINTS: COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL LAWS AND FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Given that the Resettlement is federally funded with CDBG funds from HUD, it is subject to a vast and complex body of regulations and laws. Two federal requirements are particularly relevant to the program design: cost reasonableness and compliance with the Fair Housing Act.

### COST REASONABLENESS: RELOCATION COSTS AND CONTINUED USE OF ISLAND PROPERTY

As required by HUD, costs paid with CDBG funds must be necessary and reasonable<sup>3</sup> to carry out the grant's objectives. The state's application argued that high-risk conditions on the island make it unsafe for habitation—a position HUD agreed with in awarding the grant to OCD. It is neither necessary nor reasonable to use federal funds to relocate families from high-risk properties, only to allow those families to return to those high-risk properties for residential purposes in the future. Not only would this place them in harm's way, it would also create a potential need for more disaster recovery funding in the future.

That said, the island holds an important sense of place for its current and former residents. As such, it is critical to allow island residents continued access to the island for ceremonial, cultural, historical and recreational purposes. Therefore, in order to comply with HUD requirements and respect the desires of islanders, the state has created an approach that allows residents continued access to their island properties. This is an innovative solution and a significant departure from traditional HUD-funded relocation programs, which require vacated land to become permanent open space.

All participants will be required to sign a Homeowner Assistance Agreement that includes certain terms related to island property use, including:

- Use island property only for recreational, cultural and/or historical purposes and not for residential purposes.
- Not convey or sell an island property to any person or entity other than OCD or its designee.
- Not use any local, state or federal funds to repair or improve an island property.
- Not make or allow for substantial repairs with personal funds to an island property.
- Not apply for subsequent disaster assistance.
- Not rent or lease an island property.
- Not mortgage or grant any security interest or lien on an island property.

### THE FAIR HOUSING ACT

In addition to cost reasonable requirements, the Resettlement must comply with the Fair Housing Act, which makes it illegal for public or private housing developments to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status or national origin. Therefore, the Resettlement is open to all current and past residents of the island, regardless of tribal affiliation, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or disability.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 CFR 200.403, 2 CFR 200.404

## RESETTLEMENT STATUS: RESIDENT APPLICATION

Interested individuals are encouraged to reach out to a member of the Resettlement team by phone or by visiting the program office to learn more and complete an application. Expressing interest in and/or completing an application for the program does not commit an individual to participation.

- **Options A and D application:** The application period for Options A and D opened in March 2019 and concluded on January 31, 2020.
- **Option B application:** The application period for Option B opened on February 10, 2020. The deadline to apply for Option B is June 30, 2021.

**Phone:** 833.632.2976

**Email:** [IsleDeJeanCharles@la.gov](mailto:IsleDeJeanCharles@la.gov)

**Website:** [IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov](http://IsleDeJeanCharles.la.gov)

**Office:** Monday – Thursday  
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Catholic Charities Building  
120 Aycock St.  
Houma, LA 70363

## HEART OF THE RESETTLEMENT: PARTING FROM THE ISLAND

The Resettlement of Isle de Jean Charles is a process filled with both relief and uncertainty for islanders. Many current residents know they should move, but this move will take them away from all they have ever known. Several residents have expressed concern about the distance between The New Isle and the island.

In interviews with the Resettlement team, island residents revealed they see Isle de Jean Charles as a place of security and isolation. They embrace the rural setting—the quiet and the tranquility. It is a place where they know each other and their history, and a place where both independence and care for neighbors and family are core values.

Despite its challenges, residents know how to live on the island. They are resilient and ingenious “do-it-yourself” individuals who can repair their houses and fix their cars, heaters and pipes. They know how to prepare for storms and how to recover afterward. Some of these skills are transferable to The New Isle, but others will be lost. As one islander said, “I have never fished in fresh water; I have only fished in salt water.” He went on to describe how he views the difference and the magnitude of change it requires. This is just one of the many changes islanders are facing. Although the proposed move is only 40 miles north, in many ways, it is perceived as a world away.

Parting from the island will be a transformative process, as individuals and families adapt in significant ways. The Resettlement team will continue to work closely with the community to ensure that throughout this leave-taking and the losses it entails, there are new opportunities, new connections and new peace and security to be found.

# RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND BENEFITS

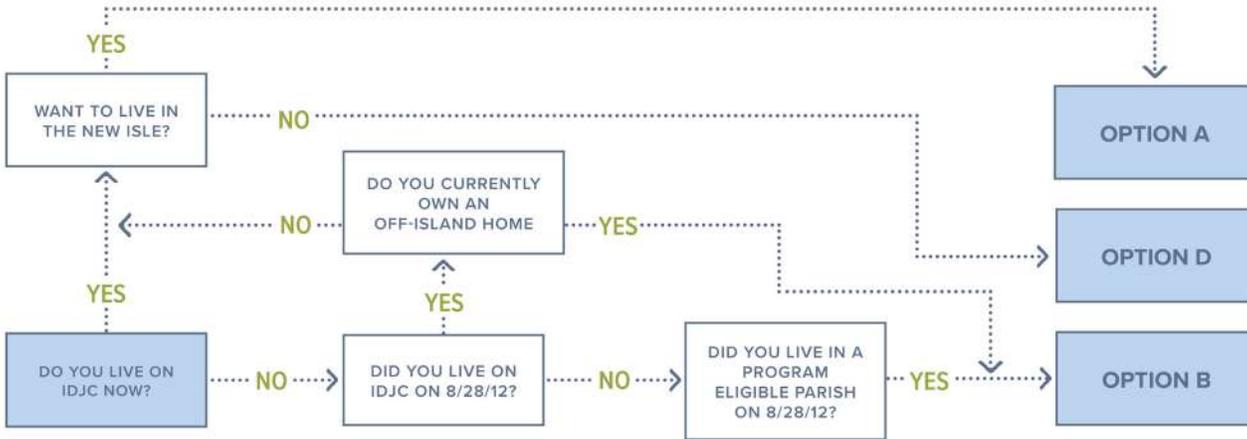
A NEW HOME IN THE NEW ISLE	AN EXISTING HOME IN LOUISIANA	AN IMPROVED LOT IN THE NEW ISLE
<p><b>AVAILABLE BENEFIT</b></p> <p>Eligible households will receive a new home built at the resettlement site.</p>	<p><b>AVAILABLE BENEFIT</b></p> <p>Eligible households will receive funding toward an existing home within Louisiana that meets program standards, is located outside the currently recognized 100-year floodplain and is separate from the resettlement site.</p>	<p><b>AVAILABLE BENEFIT</b></p> <p>Eligible households will receive an improved lot within the resettlement site that is ready for construction. The program will support residents in identifying potential financing options—as needed—to build a home on the resettlement site.</p>
<p><b>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</b></p> <p>Current permanent, primary residents on the island.</p> <p>— or —</p> <p>Past permanent, primary residents who lived on the island on Aug. 28, 2012 (Hurricane Isaac), have been displaced since that time and do not currently own an off-island home.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>A</b></p>	<p><b>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</b></p> <p>Current permanent, primary residents on the island.</p> <p>— or —</p> <p>Past permanent, primary residents who lived on the island on Aug. 28, 2012 (Hurricane Isaac), have been displaced since that time and do not currently own an off-island home.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>D</b></p>	<p><b>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</b></p> <p>Past permanent, primary residents who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were displaced from the island before Aug. 28, 2012 (Hurricane Isaac), and lived in a program eligible parish at the time of the storm.</li> <li>• Were displaced on or after Aug. 28, 2012, and currently owns an off-island home.</li> <li>• Lived in a program eligible parish on Aug. 28, 2012, and lived on the island after that time.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, Option B participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must demonstrate financial ability to build a new home at the resettlement site. The program will support participants in identifying potential financing options.</li> <li>• Will be prioritized based on when they lived on the island.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>B</b></p>

**PROGRAM-ELIGIBLE PARISHES:** JEFFERSON, LAFOURCHE, PLAQUEMINES, ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, ST. TAMMANY AND TERREBONNE

If properties remain after earlier portions of the program conclude, those properties will be processed in a manner consistent with CDBG requirements while taking community needs into consideration.

“Current residents” refers to those who lived on/maintained permanent residency on the island on March 9, 2019, when the Resettlement launched.

# RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND PROGRAM BENEFITS

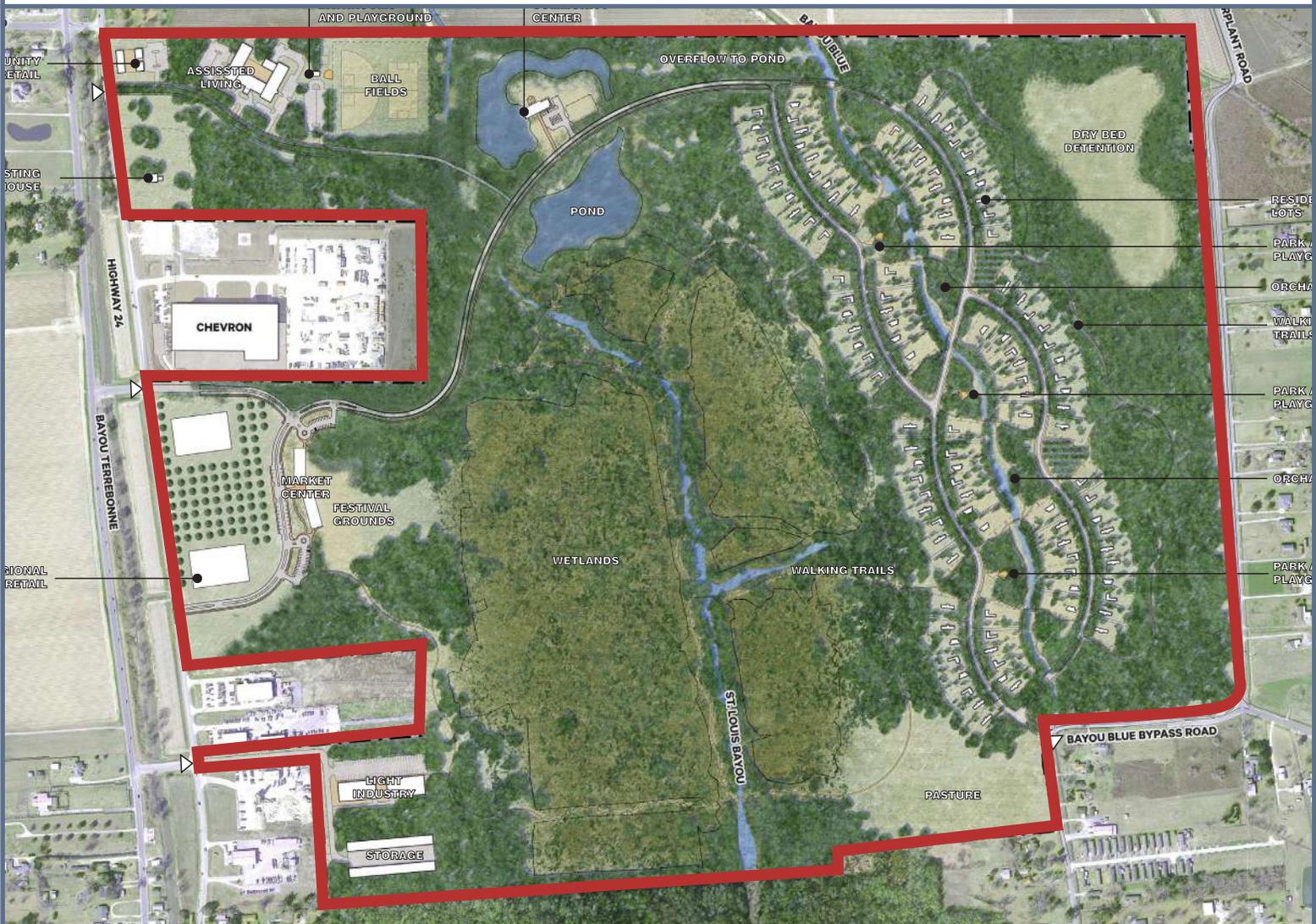


If properties remain after earlier portions of the program conclude, those properties will be processed in a manner consistent with CDBG requirements while taking community needs into consideration.

Program options are only available to individuals who lived on IDJC prior to March 9, 2019, the date of program launch.

**PROGRAM-ELIGIBLE PARISHES:** Jefferson, Lafourche, Plaquemines, St. John The Baptist, St. Tammany and Terrebonne

## RESETTLEMENT SITE PLAN





CONTACT



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