

## CITY PARKS FORUM CASE STUDY

# Jackson Metro Parkway and Lake Hico: Jackson, Mississippi



Mississippi has unfortunately been the location of tragic events with national repercussions. In 1970, Mississippi National Guardsmen shot and killed two black students protesting U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The shootings took place at Jackson State University, arguably the cultural anchor of the west side of Jackson, the capital and largest city of Mississippi.

More than three decades later, community leaders in both West Jackson and Jackson have collaborated to remake Lynch Street, an artery connecting West Jackson and Jackson that was closed immediately after the shootings, into Jackson Metro Parkway. The public lands that comprise the parkway were the subject of an intensive community planning process led by Matthew Dalbey, AICP (assistant professor of urban and regional planning at Jackson State University), and David Perkes (associate professor of architecture at Mississippi State University and director of the Jackson Community Design Center).

The American Planning Association featured the work of Dalbey and Perkes in the Winter 2003 issue of *Practicing Planner*.

Focused on the Jackson Metro Parkway, the authors' primary conclusion was that the right-of-way should not be limited solely to a community greenbelt. Rather, the space had to be developed in a way that added value to the community. "Nurturing" and

"knitting" are words the authors use throughout their discussion of the neighborhood's needs. Interventions were not the answer, but rather cultivation of community vision.



The American Planning Association's City Parks Forum and then-Mayor Harvey Johnson and his staff teamed in 2001 for a catalyst grant to plan and develop the new Jackson Metro Parkway to relink West Jackson and Jackson and to reopen Lake Hico to all of the Jackson public. Lake Hico is a human-made reservoir, constructed in 1957 to serve as a cooling pond (it still used in that capacity today by Entergy Mississippi). It was also open only to whites for recreational use. In 1968 Lake Hico was closed to the public for recreation, shortly after blacks began to use the lake, and it has remained closed to the present. Both former Mayor Harvey Johnson and current Mayor Frank

Melton have labored intensively to seek community support to reopen the lake to all people for recreation.



Jackson Metro Parkway and Lake Hico are indicative of the strong motivation in Jackson to rectify historical planning issues steeped strongly in racial tension. In both cases, insecurity prompted the immediate closing of major public infrastructure in the city, reducing the quality of life for all residents. Jackson's recent mayors have show strong proactive planning initiative to reknit these areas back into the community fabric. Critical support has come from the local academic and professional planning community, as demonstrated by the work of Dalbey and Perkes, along with the active participation of Jackson leaders in APA's City Parks Forum. The Jackson community has made incredible strides to reopen not only its infrastructure, but also itself to the world as a city that cares deeply about each of its own. The commitment of Jacksonians to their city is the necessary antiseptic to heal historical wounds.

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*Images: Top — Metro Parkway sign. City of Jackson. Middle — Lake Hico. American Planning Association. Bottom Insert Parkway. City of Jackson.*

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