

Late Backup

Proposed Disc Golf Course: Two Properties – Two Histories by Stefan Wray, January 9, 2011

The 35-acre proposed disc golf course at the Roy G Guerrero Colorado River Park consists of two separate properties each with their own history that needs to be considered. The site includes 7 acres of parkland that's been part of an extensive planning process, involving considerable public input, over a number of years. And it includes 28 acres of new parkland that has been subject to little planning and input.

7 Acres of Existing Parkland

In 1999, the Austin Parks Foundation funded Hargreaves Associates to develop a plan for the City for the Colorado River Park. That work included a stakeholder process that developed a Park Action Plan completed in 2000. According to Ted Siff, who was then Executive Director of the Austin Parks Foundation, the Parks Board voted in 2000 to approve this Park Action Plan. In that original plan, within the 7 acres now being considered for disc golf, there was supposed to be a "Sunset Viewing Area" that would be connected by a trail to the Montopolis Youth Complex. In 2003, the Parks Department released its Schematic Master Plan for the park. In that next plan, the "Sunset Viewing Area" was removed, left as green space, and a basketball court was added near it.

28 Acres of New Parkland

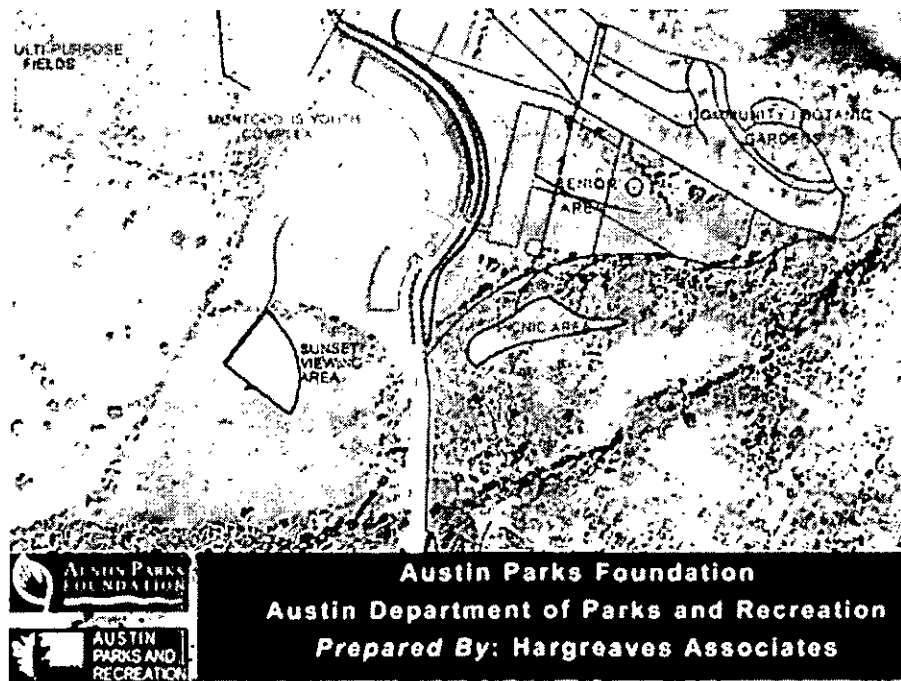
In 2006 Austin voters approved a bond measure that provided \$5 million for destination parks. In 2007 the City Council approved spending \$4 million of that to purchase the 28 acres. Throughout 2008 and 2009, there was no public discussion about what might happen to this property or how it might be used. Not only was this 28 acres not part of earlier master plan processes, as of the beginning of 2011, the zoning use hadn't even been changed to parks or open space zoning. The recent PARD planning process for this 28 acres has been exclusively focused on its potential use as a disc golf course. And the public input process has also been limited and only in reaction to the disc golf proposal context. There has not been a public input and planning process for this property conducted in an open ended manner in relation to the overall goals for the park.

Some Issues and Concerns

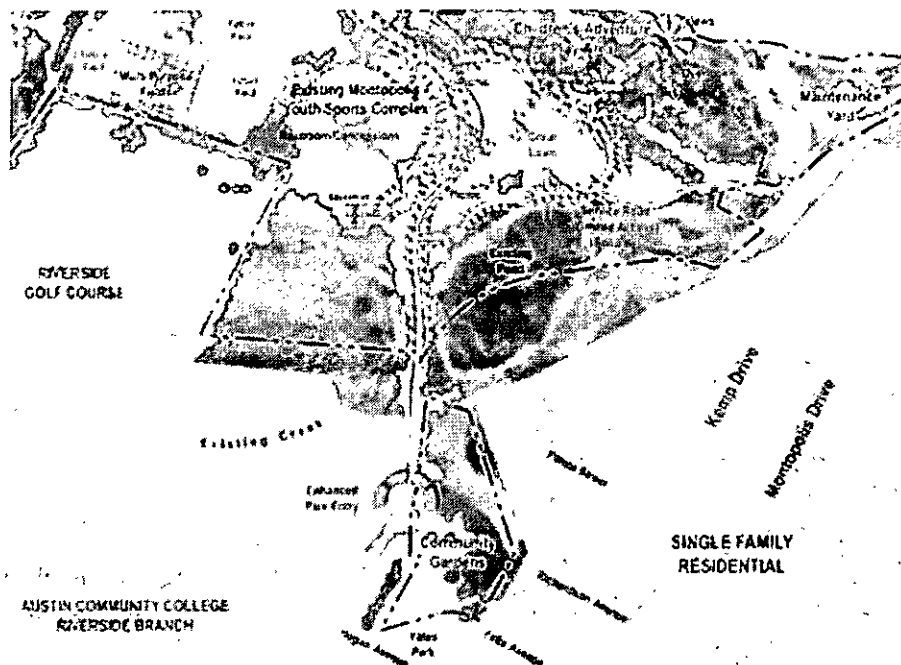
When asked if part or all of the 28 acres could be considered for inclusion in the City's preservation system, therefore setting aside the 28 acres as a natural area, PARD conveniently answers that this would be inconsistent with the original master plan, citing that a preserve is only supposed to be on the north side of the Colorado River.

Yet at the same time, PARD sees fit to ignore or skirt around the original 2000 Park Action Plan and the 2003 Schematic Master Plan, when it comes to taking that 7 acres and combining it into a 35 acre disc golf site. Both the 2000 and the 2003 plans depict relatively low impact uses for that area of the park. Both of those plans preserve the natural character and contribute to maintaining that section as a wildlife corridor.

If PARD is going to anchor its argument that none of the 28 acres can be considered for inclusion in the City's preserve system in the earlier plan documents, then there also needs to be validity to the argument that there was never any intent that the 7 acre portion of the existing park would be used for disc golf. PARD's planning process needs more scrutiny and this entire project needs to slow down.



2000: Colorado River Park Action Plan



2003: Roy G Guerrero Colorado River Park Schematic Master Plan