



COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORT

COMMITTEE ON OPEN SPACE, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Date: April 27, 2016

Agenda Item #: 3

Agenda Item: Briefing and discussion regarding the Cities Connecting Children to Nature planning grant.

Vote No vote was taken.

Sponsors/Department: Parks and Recreation Department (PARC)

Presenters: Margaret Russell, Parks and Recreation Department, Julia Campbell, Parks and Recreation Department, Molly Stevens, Executive Director of West Cave Outdoor Discovery Center, Hayden Brooks, Co-founder of the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin, Patrick Beyer, Parks and Recreation Department

Summary of Discussion

- Margaret Russell, Project Manager with PARC, introduced the grant. The City of Austin is one of six cities nationwide who has received a \$25,000 planning grant from the project partners for Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) that will help fund an implementation plan to increase equitable and abundant connections between children and nature. The Parks and Recreation Department has dedicated an additional \$25,000 in capital planning funding to assist in the planning effort.
- Julia Campbell, Project Coordinator with PARC explained that PARC will lead the planning process in partnership with 10 other City of Austin departments that have pledged support. Local partners include Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center, Children in Nature Collaborative Austin, YMCA Austin, University of Texas Health and Science Center, Austin ISD, and community stakeholders.
- Molly Stevens, Executive Director of West Cave Outdoor Discovery Center, explained the role of the Children in Nature Collaborative in Austin (CINCA). CINCA has more than 30 formal partner organizations. Ms. Stevens emphasized the importance of identifying gaps in needs across Austin and looking at key policy program partnerships and leadership opportunities.
- Hayden Brooks, Co-founder of the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin outlined the next steps for the planning process. Next steps include 1) Gap Analysis and Needs Assessment (in progress), 2) Community Engagement, 3) Identify a Common Agenda, 4)

Establish Shared Metrics, and 5) Draft Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan is due to the National League of Cities and Cities Connecting Children to Nature in August.

- Patrick Beyer, a Landscape Architect with PARD, explained the methodology and results of the Geographic Information Systems-based gap analysis, which produces a “Nature Score” that measures access to nature for all parks across the City. This interactive web-based map will be available to the public upon its completion.
- CM Zimmerman asked what the upper limit on funding that would be required to implement the plan. Mr. Brooks and Chair Pool explained that the Implementation Plan will enter Austin into the running for a competitive grant of \$50,000 from the National League of Cities for implementation. If Austin were to win the grant, the funds would go towards augmenting current programs and initiatives.
- CM Zimmerman commented that numerous non-governmental groups serve the function of connecting children to nature, and that public funds should not be dedicated to this purpose.
- The presenters asked for guidance on how to update the Committee and how to best connect to interested constituents. Chair Pool offered to send ideas for interested constituents by email and directed staff to send updates regarding the grant by email. Chair Pool also commented that if Austin were to win the implementation grant, the item should be brought before the entire council to discuss how it could play out in the larger fabric of the City.

Speakers

Verlin Callahan

Direction

Chair Pool directed PARD staff to keep the Committee updated on the progress of the Implementation Plan via email.

Recommendation

There was no recommendation to the full Council