



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Carlos Rivera, Director, Health and Human Services Department
Michael Trimble, Capital Planning Officer

DATE: July 18, 2014

SUBJECT: Montopolis Community Center Proposed Construction

In an effort to provide quality recreation programs, social services, and preventive health services to the Austin community, city staff proposed the construction of a joint use facility within the Montopolis community between the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) and the Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) as part of the 2012 Bond Proposal. Recently, some community members have expressed to Council concern regarding the direction of this project. Subsequently, Council's Health and Human Services Committee directed staff to further review and consider the project.

After a thorough review of the circumstances and in consideration of the community stakeholder feedback, staff determined it is most appropriate to proceed with the design and construction of the planned joint use facility within the Montopolis community. The details below explain the considerations that led to this recommendation.

In 2011, the Parks and Recreation Department conducted a park system wide needs assessment including a Montopolis Recreation Center feasibility study regarding the overall structural and functional health of the facility. The study indicated the current structure was beyond repair and a new structure needed to be constructed. Additionally, the Health and Human Services Department identified in 2012 an operational need for a new Neighborhood Center to service southeast Austin as part of the 2012 bond development and needs assessment process. Both exercises informed and assisted in the individual Department's bond proposals.

Based upon the Departments' assessments, the synergies of current PARD and HHSD services and the potential cost savings to tax payers, staff developed a proposal for a joint use facility. From April, 2012 through to August, 2012, City staff from the Capital Planning Office, Parks and Recreation Department and Health and Human Services Department presented numerous times at the Bond Election Advisory Task Force (BEATF) meetings, the BEATF Parks and Open Space Committee meetings, community forums, and before City Council recommending a joint

facility. On various occasions, the team sited multiple benefits to a joint facility including but not limited to:

- Economies of scale with regard to construction (single design, single permitting process, etc.)
- Economies of scale with regards to the physical building (shared restrooms, shared commercial kitchen, shared elevator, shared loading dock etc.)
- Economies of scale with regards to operations (single receptionist, increased operational hours, synergies of wellness programs, etc.)
- Alignment with city initiatives such as Imagine Austin

The Bond Election Advisory Task Force's Parks and Open Space Committee recommended the joint-use facility for funding and it was included in the Task Force's final recommendations to Council as well as the City Manager's recommendations which were presented to Council on June 26, 2012.

On August 17, 2012, Council unanimously approved placing \$385 million bond package across seven propositions on the November 6, 2012 ballot. This package included the Montopolis Community Center joint-use facility as reflected in Council discussion and deliberations leading up to final approval of the ballot language.

After the August 17th approval, the City's website posted 2012 Bond election and Bond development materials for public viewing and downloading. Additionally, staff presented information regarding the 2012 Bond election at an Austin Neighborhood Council meeting on September 19, 2012. Other information provided to the public regarding the approved 2012 Bond program included:

- Presentations to professional organizations and community groups by request including Community Action Network, the American Institute of Architects Austin and the American Society of Civil Engineers
- Media coverage of the bond proposal including newspaper articles and media reports aired on television stations
- Public service announcements on Channel 6 and on line
- City hotline for citizens to call to ask questions

Although the above listed information outreach activities were performed in a city-wide effort to inform the public of the approved bond program projects, staff did not specifically address the Montopolis community regarding the details of the approved 2012 Bond projects. Staff provided briefings and additional information to specific community organizations as requested and several such briefings were provided. No request for additional information or briefing was received regarding the Montopolis joint facility; therefore, engagement with this and several other community stakeholder groups in the City was incorporated into the communications and engagement activities included in the 2012 Bond development process.

The bond ballot language for proposition 14 stated the following: "The issuance of \$77,680,000 park and recreation improvement bonds and notes and the levy of a tax sufficient to pay for the bonds and notes".

The bond brochure language for proposition 14 provided the following details:

- Provide funding for interior and exterior renovations, expansions and new facilities to accommodate park related programs and activities. Representative projects may include:
 - Barton Springs Bathhouse Renovations
 - Dougherty Arts Center
 - Dove Springs Recreation Center Expansion
 - Elisabet Ney Museum Renovations
 - Montopolis Community Building - Recreation Center

The bond ballot language for proposition 17 stated the following: "The issuance of \$11,148,000 health and human services facility improvement bonds and notes and the levy of a tax sufficient to pay for the bonds and notes".

The bond brochure language for proposition 17 provided the following details:

- The types of projects to be undertaken as part of this bond proposition, if approved, may include but are not limited to the following:
 - Women and Children's Shelter Renovations/Expansion
 - Montopolis Community Building - Neighborhood Health Center
 - Far South Clinic and Montopolis Clinic Parking Lot Expansions

While the community expressed concern regarding transparency in the City's intent to build a joint use facility and whether voters fully understood the project they approved, the information above, reviewed in its totality, demonstrates it was the City's intention to build a joint facility with the 2012 bond funding approved by the voters. The Attorney General's Office must approve the issuance of the bonds. They will look to see if the funds are being used for the purpose for which they were approved by the voters. Staff is concerned that there is not enough funding in the propositions to build separate facilities.

Legal title to the property is also an issue. Central Health owns the clinic buildings, has a long-term lease on the underlying non-parkland property, and has an easement interest in the common areas and the parking lot. These interests must be addressed with Central Health in order for the City to be able to legally pursue the construction of a joint use facility or to expand the recreation center. Addressing the lease and ownership interests would be part of the process associated with the development of the joint use facility. Discussions have begun with Central Health executives to look at mutually terminating the current agreement.

Equally important are the technical aspects associated with the intended use of bond funds. The proposed joint use facility has great potential and capacity to provide the desired programs and services expressed by the community. The community has expressed the desire for a full spectrum of recreation and leisure programs along with a desire for facility services that, while coordinated by recreation staff, are traditionally supported by health and human service partners. This facility will provide the increased capacity to provide traditional social service type programs such as a senior lunch program, parenting classes, nutritional cooking classes, food pantry and tutoring. The opportunity to share resources provides the potential for increased community access to a multitude of programs and services.

City staff understand the community's desire to utilize the space available for construction in the most efficient and effective manner. City staff also understands the community's needs may exceed the available 2012 Bond Program resources for design and construction of a Montopolis Community Center. The team is mindful of the park needs as well as parking concerns. Therefore, it is the project team's intention to thoughtfully design a community center that can accommodate future expansion or site development. This thoughtful design is intended to accommodate construction of future park amenities or prepare for the re-design of current amenities not included in the 2012 Bond Program.

It should also be noted that opinions in favor of the joint-use facility have been expressed by Montopolis community members, advocating for a facility to address both recreational and public health/basic needs.

In an effort to fulfill its obligation to the City of Austin voters, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Health and Human Services Department will work to engage the entire community and address expressed concerns associated with the project. There is no foreseeable reason to believe a full complement of recreation services will not be implemented because of a joint use facility.

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