

THE SOUTH GROUNDS

SOUTH LAWN

The South Lawn is generally characterized by St. Augustine grass under a canopy of pecan trees. It extends from the diving board all the way to the eastern fence, some 400 ft. In the other direction, it slopes up from the Pool deck to level ground some 30 ft. higher. The slope faces the water, and is a popular place for sunbathing, and, clearly visible from sight-seeing points along the northern edge of the Pool, it is one of the enduring icons of Barton Springs. Further from the water, where the ground flattens, it is popular for yoga, tai chi and other life-affirming activities.

Recommendations

Plant more trees

The huge pecans on the South Lawn towering over the lush lawn is one of the most inviting vistas of Barton Springs. Because the South Lawn is such a beloved feature, care should be taken to avoid temptations to either re-imagine it or to use it to solve functional problems. (Handicapped accessibility or maintenance truck accessibility come to mind.) It is a tree-covered lawn today. It should be a tree-covered lawn going forward. It should not be a tree-covered lawn with accessways cutting through it.

The tree canopy should be inspected to determine the health of the trees and to make recommendations for remedial action or tree replacement. Regardless of the inspection outcome, new trees should be planted to preemptively replenish the canopy and to densify the shade. More shade will reduce irrigation requirements. As with all new trees at Barton Springs, they should be selected from the native Texas tree palette, and should be chosen for their beauty, their durability and their appropriateness to their waterside location. In general, this plan recommends diversifying the canopy from a close to pecan monoculture, to a forest of more diversity but similar form. Where there is sufficient sun, Chinquapin oak, a stately native tree that can grow beside creeks in the Hill Country, would be lovely and have a form similar to the existing large pecans. Another suitable oak may be the Bur Oak. Both of these native oaks are large, majestic, long-lived trees.

Intensify lawn maintenance

The lawn should be cared for using approved methods that acknowledge the environmental sensitivity of the site. Thus, soil aeration should be considered, but fertilization should not. A more specific description of lawn maintenance issues is included in the 'Grounds



The South Lawn as seen from the Tree Court.



South Lawn

- A. *Plant more native Texas trees to add shade and to diversify the tree stock at the Pool.*
- B. *New, more attractive fence.*
- C. *New turnstiles*
- D. *New, modest South bathhouse.*



Overview' part of this document.

Replace difficult to maintain lawn areas with planting beds

Beside the steps up from the Pool sidewalk, beside the downstream dam, the lawn is too steeply sloping to be easily maintained or usable. Replace the lawn with a planting bed, planted with a spreading native groundcover like mountain pea, stemodia or gregg's dalea.

Minimize runoff into south path

The existing path to the south gate should be maintained without any changes, at this time. It is the kind of casual, almost accidental element that makes the Barton Springs Pool seem to work so effortlessly, and is used by City staff for small vehicular access to the Pool deck. In heavy rains, however, runoff can course from the south parking lots down

the path toward the Pool. Efforts should be made to divert that runoff into a ‘rain garden’, of planted flat depressions to slow runoff and allow it to percolate into the ground. After an accessible route is built from the south entrance, this path may be reconsidered.

SOUTH WOODS

The South Woods is a two-thirds acre densely wooded area outside the Pool fence, located just south of the diving board. Its tree canopy is dominated by cedar elms, though hackberrys can also be seen. Its understory is punctuated by nuisance nandinas, Japanese ligustrums and poison ivy as well as numerous desirable species, such as maidenhair ferns and other native plants. Its land form is characterized by a gully running south to north, which used to carry runoff from the hills beyond until public works diversion projects were installed. Now it only carries water from its immediate surrounds. Even so, during intense downpours, water running through it will overwhelm the stormwater mitigation features already in place and bring turbid water into the Pool. The bottom of the gully is wet in places due to minor spring activity.

Its thick vegetation and its proximity to park amenities have made the South Woods an attractive encampment location for homeless men. Historically, this has posed a park operations problem, where several times a year, campers are arrested for disorderly conduct or indecent exposure. Less serious, but unpleasant, is the occasional harassment of Pool goers as they walk to their cars.

The path from the south parking lot to the Pool is not accessible. Though there is not an ADA requirement for accessibility, the planners believe that it will be a welcome amenity that is consistent with the City of Austin value: to be an accessible city.

Recommendations

Relocate the fenceline

The fence line for the Pool should be relocated to bring the South Woods into the Pool precinct. This would enable better supervision and use of the area.

Manage vegetation

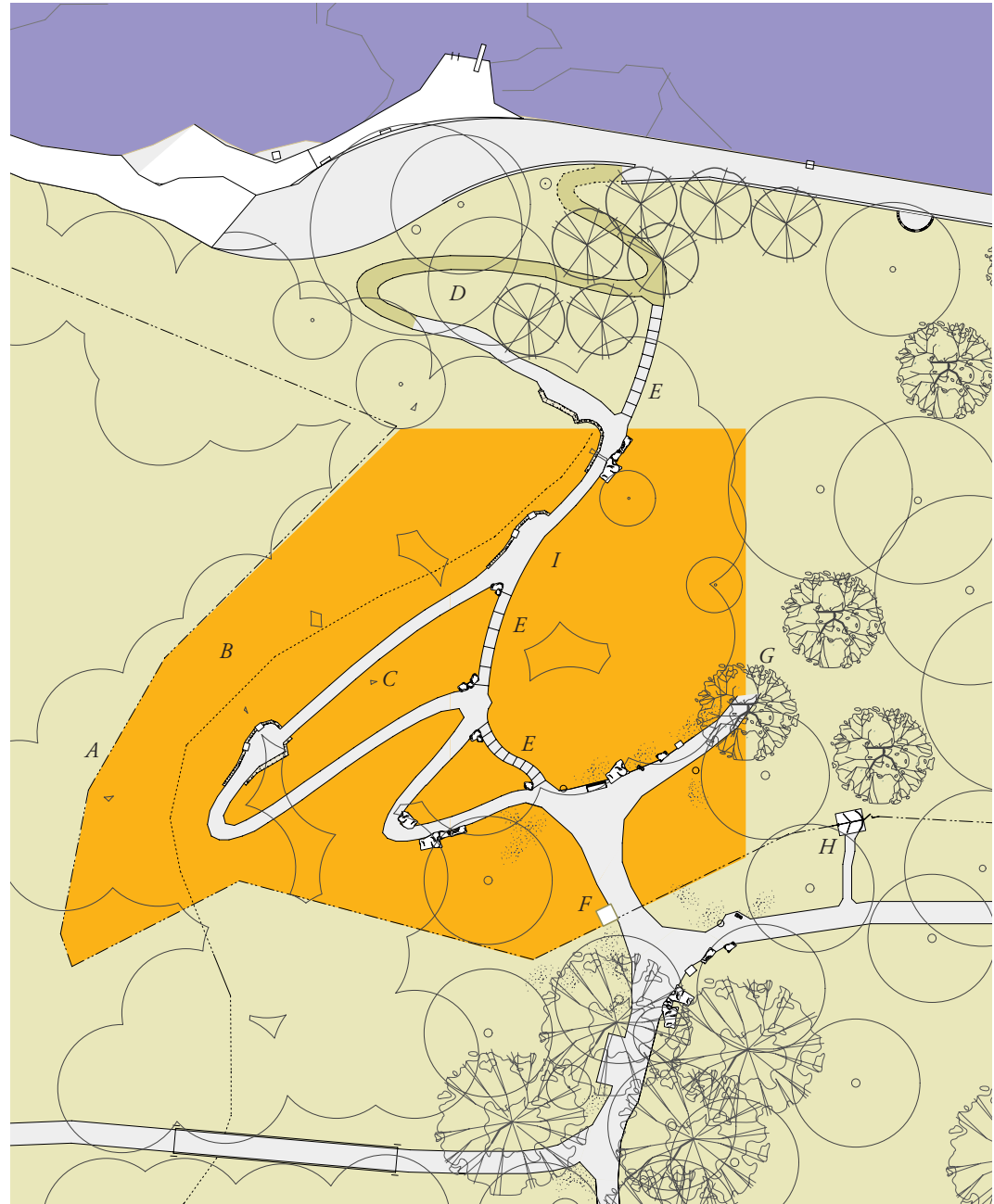
Much of the existing vegetation in the south woods is invasive and low quality, like ligustrum and hackberry. Nuisance vegetation should be removed. The tree canopy should be assessed for density, and if required, should be augmented by native Texas trees such as red oak or bald cypress. Planting (other than seeds and perhaps seedlings) in the woods as it exists now is unlikely to be successful, since new plantings would be difficult to maintain and monitor. Should a trail be built through the south woods, that would be a good opportunity to introduce some higher quality native forest vegetation. The landscape should



The South Woods should be restocked with native vegetation as required.

Accessible Route

- A. Relocate fence line to include South Woods in the Pool precinct using new, more attractive fencing.
- B. Remove nuisance vegetation, such as poison ivy, nandina, ligustrum and chinaberry. Repopulate with appropriate native Texas plants and trees.
- C. New accessible route, pervious paving.
- D. New accessible route, "Grass-pave".
- E. Steps for shorter, more direct travel.
- F. New gatehouse. New location, but same size as existing.
- G. Existing path to Pool remains.
- H. New turnstile.
- I. Lighting for safe travel at dusk (not shown).



be restocked with native understory plantings, especially those acclimated to wet, shady conditions, like inland sea oats or maidenhair ferns. Good trees to introduce would be rusty blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*), Eve's necklace (*Sophora affinis*), and escarpment black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var *eximia*).

There is not a functioning irrigation system in this area. As the trail is extended through these woods, it would be appropriate to extend a water line as well, that can provide temporary irrigation for establishing larger plants.

Build an accessible path

Within the South Woods, build an accessible path to connect the south parking lot to the water's edge. Aside from the obvious amenity for wheelchair accessibility, this path will also accommodate parents with strollers, people with joint problems and those who may simply enjoy a walk in the woods.

The slope of this path should intentionally stay shallower than 5% to satisfy accessibility requirements while not invoking handicapped ramp requirements. It should wind through the woods as naturalistically as possible, and it should have the occasional place to sit and the occasional overlook. Keeping it narrow (generally 5 ft. or so) should help it to blend into its surroundings. Interpretive graphics should be integrated into the experience, offering commentary on the natural surroundings. This path may also include steps for the less-patient, able bodied people who wish to make the trip more directly.

The path surface should be suitable for accessibility and it should be pervious to minimize runoff. For retaining walls, steps or other details, Central Texas stone should be used. Numerous examples of appropriate stonework can be found within the park including the stonework at Sunken Garden and the stonework scattered throughout the Zilker Nature Preserve. Other examples can be found at the West Cave Preserve. Since this path will be in use after dark, convenience lighting should be installed.

As this path emerges from the Woods towards the diving board, care should be taken to make it as inconspicuous as possible to preserve the Pool ambiance as it exists today. To that end, consideration should be given to changing the paving surface from a hard pervious paving (like Eccocreto) to a vegetated paving surface (like Grasspave2).

The design of this new route should integrate improved runoff mitigation features in the gully. For example, a "rain garden" design could capture runoff in low depressions planted with native vegetation.



The accessible route should feel like a walk in the woods. It should integrate natural features where possible.





The south parking lot should be heavily planted with trees for beauty and shade. It should be paved to reduce dust and to reduce turbid runoff.

SOUTH ENTRY

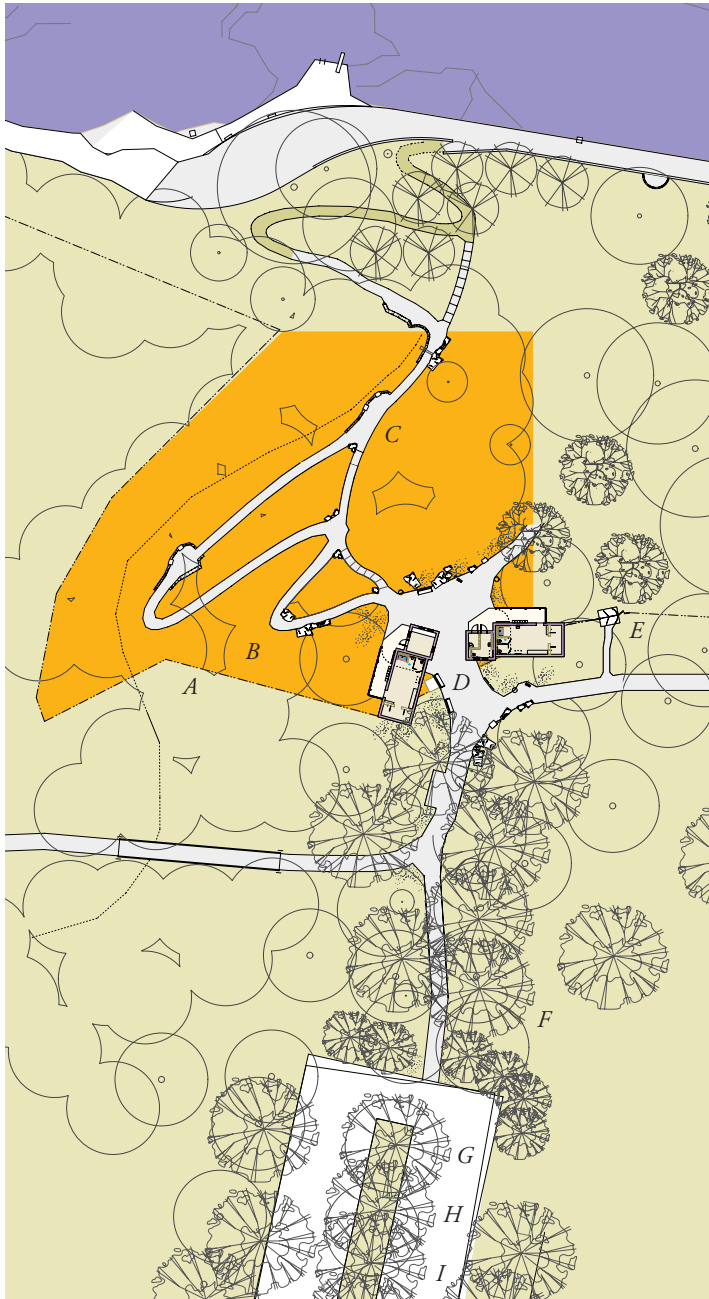
The character of the south entry to the Pool contrasts sharply with the entry experience on the north side. The north side, with its Tree Court, its concession stand, the “Splash!” exhibit and its substantial Bathhouse, is practically urbane by comparison to the south. The south side features a dusty, unpaved parking lot and a simple, crushed granite path that passes through an unmanicured open field to a simple guard shack at the fence line. While the south side is usually quiet, the north side is sometimes carnivalesque.

For many nearby neighbors, the south entry is thought of as a neighborhood entry. The fact that it is casual is seen as a plus. It feels natural. It feels like a walk to an old-time swimming hole. For others, the south entry is a convenient entry for a swim before work. While the north entry is by far the most heavily used access point to the Pool, the south entry is popular for its convenience and because the parking is free.

The public participation element of this project found a divergence of opinion on appropriate next steps for this area. For some, leaving it as it is seemed right. That way, the experience remains “natural”, and traffic congestion—always a concern on Robert E. Lee Drive—is not exacerbated. For others, changing and restroom amenities are lacking. For these people, an accessible route to the Pool would be a welcome addition. While there was some divergence of opinion on the question of paving the parking lot, the level of emotion seemed to be lower, as did the number of people opposing it. Opinions converged on the question of improving the landscape in this area. Planting more trees, especially around the parking lot itself, was seen as a good idea as was planting wildflowers in the field between the parking lot and the south gate.

The idea that the feel of the south side should be different and more casual than the north side should continue to be appreciated and preserved. It should always be mellower, quieter and feel somehow more private. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that contemporary park demands suggest the addition of certain basic amenities. Accessibility, whether it is a legal imperative or not, is an important Austin value and should be addressed. And the south side, like all aspects of the park, is subject to heavier usage now than in the past. The desire for dressing and restroom facilities here is reasonable, and consistent with good park management practices.

The apparent contradiction in wanting to keep the south side low-key while also adding amenities is not a foregone conclusion if the new amenities are discretely designed and their scale is kept down.



South Woods/South Entry

- A. Relocate fence line to include South Woods in the Pool precinct using new, more attractive fencing.
- B. Remove nuisance vegetation, such as poison ivy, nandina, legustrum and hackberry. Repopulate with appropriate native Texas plants and trees.
- C. New accessible route.
- D. New, modest South bathhouse.
- E. New turnstile.
- F. Plant Texas wildflowers and more native trees to beautify and add shade to path between south parking lot and south entry.
- G. Plant native trees in parking lot.
- H. Pave parking lot to reduce dust and turbid runoff.
- I. Locate a solar-powered electric-bike, electric-scooter recharge station (provided by Austin Energy).

Notes on Paving the Parking Lot

The planning team initially sought to improve this less-than-perfect situation with pervious paving, a type of concrete that allows water to drain through it. The thought was that pervious paving would eliminate air-borne dust during dry conditions and eliminate turbid runoff from what is now a powdery crushed limestone surface. Pervious paving does allow stormwater to pass through it. Unfortunately, it also allows oil and other vehicle drippings to drain through as well. Recognizing the proximity of this site to the Pool, this once-promising idea was abandoned in favor of a more conventional, less environmentally fraught paving solution.



The space along the path between the south parking lot and the south entry (above) should be planted with trees and with Texas wildflowers (below).

The fields outside the south entrance to the Pool have some very large pecans, but are mostly open. For the league and informal playfields, this is appropriate. However, trees lining the roads and parking lots, and shading those areas that are not used as playfields would make the area more pleasant and usable.

Plant more trees

First and foremost, add no new parking to the south side. Instead, add substantial quantities of new trees. These trees should shade the parking lot itself and they should shade the path from car to gate. This tree canopy should also extend toward Robert E. Lee. Add a row of trees along the Zilker Trail as it approaches the south gate from the east. These trees will shade the path and they will help to distinguish the zone for the trail from the outfield of the playing field to its south. They will also echo the rhythm of the row of trees on the other side of the path, creating a beautiful tree-covered archway experience.

The park lanes on the south side should be planted with lines of shade trees to shade the cars that park along those lanes and to screen the body of the park from the road and parked cars. Cedar elms, Mexican White Oak (*Quercus polymorpha*) and Texas ash could be used to line the roads and parking lots. Majestic bur oaks and chinquapin oaks would be appropriate as solitary specimen trees in those open areas on the south side that are not used for field sports. A line of Chinquapin oaks following the curve of the highest Sunken Garden wall, between the wall and the trail, would be a beautiful addition to the area.

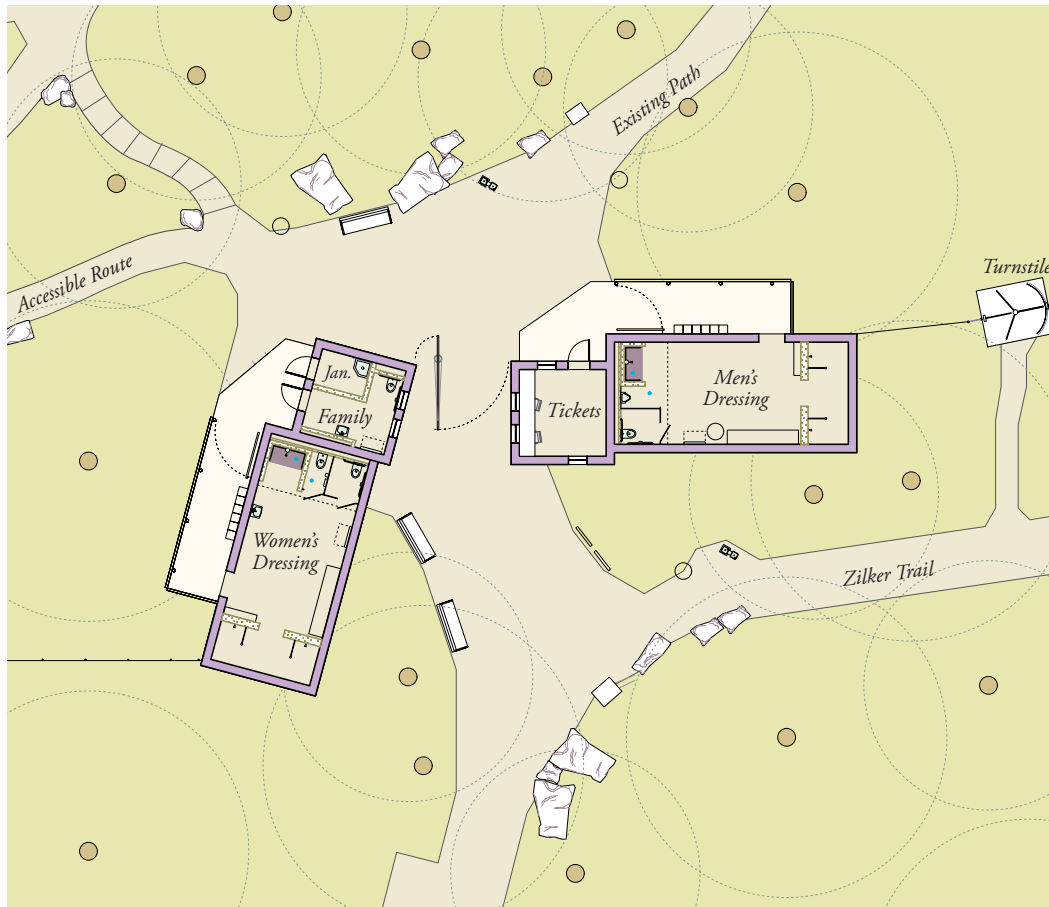
There is not a functioning irrigation system in the south fields, but much of the area is fairly accessible from paved areas so that new trees could be watered by the watering truck.

Add a wildflower meadow

Plant wildflowers all around the parking lot, especially in the field between car and gate. This meadow could be combined with the 'Rain Garden' described below.

Pave the existing parking lot

Paving the existing parking lot would eliminate dust and the potential for crushed limestone grit to be washed into the gully during heavy rain events. Grading should be carefully reviewed and modified as required to direct runoff away from the gully (which flows toward the Pool). Use vegetated swales and other best management practices to mitigate stormwater runoff from the parking lot. This is a perfect location for a 'Rain Garden': a series of swales and depressions planted with native moisture tolerating plants, that can slow runoff enough to allow percolation into the soil.



Build a new, though modest, south bathhouse.

While the design and the scope of this amenity should be refined through a public participation process, initial studies by the planning team suggest that it can be quite compact and still satisfy its function. It can be as small as two toilet fixtures on each side with a modest changing area. One shower on each side will likely satisfy. Whatever the outcome of the public process regarding the numbers and arrangement of fixtures, the building should be built with its low-key park setting in mind. The design should eschew materials and structural techniques that suggest an inappropriate urbanity for this context. Instead, the building should revel in its natural setting, and should seek to blend or complement it's

South Bathhouse, Three Considerations:

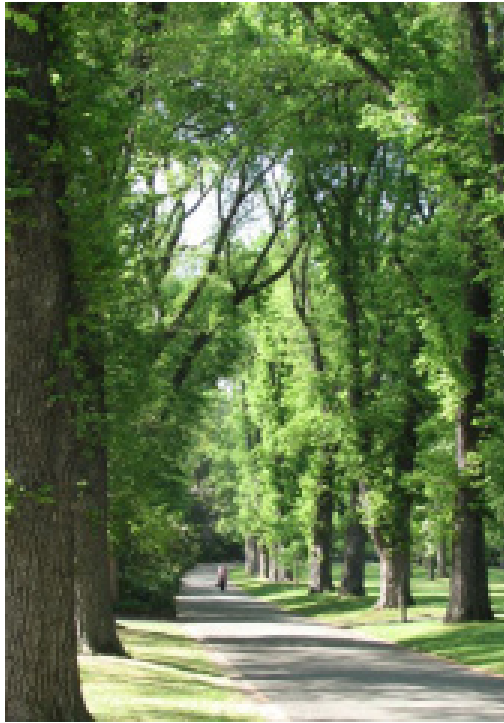
One--Barton Springs Pool is Austin's most popular pool by far where 484,067 people passed through its gates during the 2005-2006 swimming season. Its next most popular pool is Deep Eddy, with 95,315 users during the same period. If only 20% of the Barton attendance came through the south entry, that number would be 96,813, roughly equaling the Deep Eddy attendance. (Source: Aquatic Department statistics).

Two--From the center of the South Lawn, a round trip to the existing north Bathhouse is almost 1/2 mile, and includes a 32-step climb from Pool deck to Bathhouse, almost two flights of stairs.

Three--Anecdotal. In response to the question put to a number of south gate users: Where do you go when you need to go?, a frequent response was: 'I go in the Pool.' or, 'I find a tree'.



The South bathhouse should revel in its natural setting. Central Texas limestone should be strongly encouraged as the dominant building material.



*The south fields can be bordered with trees and still maintain the open playfields.
Photo: Melburnian*

setting. Central Texas limestone should be strongly encouraged for the dominant building material. Stonework patterns might draw inspiration from Sunken Garden. The bathhouse should be an open-air experience as much as possible. But if some areas require roofs, then “green roofs” should be considered for reasons of sustainability and for their ability to literally merge the building into its landscape. And the paving, both within the dressing areas and around the outside should be pervious paving wherever possible to minimize the building’s stormwater runoff impact.

Improve the entrance on Robert E Lee Road

The drainage channel along Robert E Lee Road is the first view of the Barton Springs area for many. The drainage channel is overgrown with johnsongrass and other noxious weedy vegetation, with bank sides that are too steep to be easily maintained. In consultation with the City drainage utility, native creekside vegetation should be established along this channel.

The overhead utilities along the drainage channel should be relocated or buried, as should the extensive network of overhead lines throughout the south side of the park. Signage that indicates the Pool entry should be installed.

Define the edges of the existing little league parking lot

By the north little league field, much more extensive asphalt paving has been installed than is required for a standard width parking lot. A reasonable sized parking lot should be delineated; the edges defined with wheel stops; and the excess asphalt removed. Maintenance of sports facilities is done primarily by the leagues that use them. Stricter control of permitted facilities, and how they are maintained should be considered.

SOUTH BLUFF

The bluff across from the Pecan Grove is one of the most beautiful and distinctive features of the Barton Springs area. It is the one place on the Pool grounds today where we can see what the area was like before it was graded, dammed and developed as a park. The concrete walk across the north dam ends at a rough, largely natural ledge on this bluff. This ledge ends in the lawn just south of the diving board.

Recommendations

The ledge along the top of the bluff serves as an undeveloped informal path from the diving board area to the north side, and to make it more passable, some minor improvements have been made to it over the years. Rocks have been moved aside to make passage easier in places, and rocks have been mortared into rough steps here and there. This ledge is not, and cannot be made accessible, without causing harm to the bluff, a significant natural feature. Because the rest of the Pool area is or can be made accessible by other routes, we recommend that no improvements be made to the south bluff ledge, to make it more accessible. We recommend that this ledge remain largely as it is, an undeveloped informal path that is posted as potentially hazardous.

Up the bluff from the ledge is heavily vegetated, with poison ivy being the vegetation closest to the ledge in some places. Control of noxious vegetation should be regularly undertaken in this area. However because of the proximity of the springs, no chemicals, organic or otherwise, are appropriate for use in the south bluff area. Poison ivy, nandina, ligustrum and other vegetation identified by the City of Austin Grow Green program as invasive should be regularly removed by hand. This bluff is a good place to install acorns, seeds and seedlings of hill country bluff plants, like nolina, Mexican buckeye, and eupatorium.



The ledge along the top of the South Bluff should generally remain as it is, an undeveloped informal path that is posted as potentially hazardous.

Photo: Megan Peyton



The south entry road, paralleling Robert E Lee Rd, now. To the left is a drainage channel, often overgrown with johnsongrass. To the right are the playfields.