

PARKING METER WORKING GROUP REPORT SUMMARY

JUNE 17, 2020

As determined in the Parks and Recreation Board Meeting in fall 2019, Board members Nina Rinaldi, Romteen Farasat and Laura Cottam Sajbel volunteered for a working group to study concerns about metering lots and streets near public pools, municipal parks, and the Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail around Lady Bird Lake. These amenities are unique in the city, the pools are the only ones open year-round that offer non-chlorinated and cold water.

Current prevailing thinking in city planning encourages cities to meter all parking to 1) encourage vehicle turnover for businesses and to avoid problems with long-term parking on public streets and 2) as a source of revenue to pay for policing of the meters themselves and drawing some additional funding for city amenities.

However, recent installation of meters on the north side of the hike and bike trail and an increase in price from \$1 to \$2 per hour on the meters prompted discussion of the equity issue this poses to taxpayers who fund the parks and would like to access these public amenities for regular exercise and recreation.

Much discussion took place over the free lot by Deep Eddy & Eilers Park, which had been filled with construction traffic as well as a rapidly increasing number of patrons and staff of new area businesses along Lake Austin Boulevard, businesses that opened without adequate parking of their own. Cars that previously parked along the road near Austin High School, which had been metered, began to park in the Deep Eddy lot for free. Pool-goers complained about the difficulty of finding parking spaces. As a remedy the city stated their intention to meter the lot.

Metering a public parking lot that is part of the Deep Eddy Historical Site upset a lot of swimmers, as well as families shepherding small children with gear to the park and to the pool. This also affects residents who may have disabilities or who are caring for someone with disabilities. The issue of metering brought up the question of equal access, as the pool is near West Austin neighborhoods that are more likely to have residents who can afford the parking meters, but metering could clearly become a burden for daily runners or swimmers trying to access the trail and pool from neighborhoods farther from the amenities.

In talking to city planners, it became clear that the intent of the city is to continue installing meters on city streets around Deep Eddy and the trail (extending eastward, too) and Zilker Park, which felt to many citizens like a blocking of access. One daily walker lamented that she had to pay \$40 per month now to walk the trail for her health, when she had chosen that exercise because she could not afford a gym membership.

In a December 2019 meeting with Parks Director McNeeley, Asst. Director Anthony Segura, Sammi Curless, and Parks Board Members Nina Rinaldi and Laura Cottam Sajbel, options such as signs for two-hour parking in the Deep Eddy lot turned into a test run of those signs, in lieu

of parking meters. PARD also offered the option of free parking with a pool pass, but that left out park-goers and trail users. Presently, those signs have been installed but have not been fully tested, as the Covid-19 orders have kept numbers of swimmers low, and the newly renovated park is not yet open.

Cottam Sajbel also met with a number of City employees in various departments related to transportation in late 2019 and early 2020. Jason Redfern and Joseph Al-Hajiri were helpful in explaining how the parking enterprise works and why the prevailing theory is that limiting parking provides more opportunities for other cars to utilize limited spaces. One thing the conversation pointed to is the need for better transportation options for citizens to access their parks.

Cap Metro's Lonny Stern provided helpful history on the lack of Cap Metro routes through Zilker Park or to Deep Eddy, involving old negotiations with UT and other stakeholders, regarding UT shuttles to graduate student housing near Deep Eddy and the shut-out of bus routes during major events at Zilker Park.

Cole Kitten explained to me the way transportation policy is planned and implemented, as well as how programs are rolled out and marketed.

Ashley Greenstein and Cari Buetow, of the Austin Transportation Department, Get There ATX and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) discussed with me the parking and transportation aspects of the Zilker Master Plan. They also explained the specifics of how the City is encouraging "field trips" for some neighborhoods, to help them understand alternative transportation opportunities. They directed me to the GetThereATX website, and we discussed how the City could provide easily accessed maps and webpages that show parklands and corresponding transportation options.

On February 15, 2020, Rinaldi and Cottam Sajbel hosted a field trip, inviting stakeholders from Bike ATX and the Bicycle Advisory Council, as well as Parks Director McNeely and other commission members. The group met in Zilker Park and divided into two, assessing the greater park area for ways to make it more accessible to residents who might arrive by foot or bike. As noted also in the 2019 Zilker Park Working Group report, there are still no safe bike lanes for those trying to ride down busy Barton Springs to the park/pool/events/trails. We discussed shuttles and potentially a new train that might shuttle park patrons from one area to another. We also noted an absence of picnic tables and grills, an improvement which might make for a more welcoming park environment for citizens who came to the park from areas farther away. The absence of trails around that large central park area are a detriment for anyone with a physical disability or strollers, and appropriate transportation is needed to ensure access for those citizens.

PARKING METER WORKING GROUP MOTION

Date: June 17, 2020

Subject: Concern that Parking Meters along parkland create equity access issue

Motion by:

Seconded by:

Rationale:

WHEREAS, it is the goal of Parks and Recreation, the City of Austin, and Imagine Austin to ensure that citizens have equitable access to publicly funded parkland for recreation and adequate exercise, under the SD23 goals to “Improve Access for All” and to “Offer Relief from Urban Life”

WHEREAS, at present, there are relatively few Capitol Metro lines or protected bike lanes that run to main public parks and pools, specifically Deep Eddy, Barton Springs, and the Ann & Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, which are unique within the city but far from many neighborhoods,

WHEREAS, similar access to year-round pool facilities and major parks is not equitably distributed across the city,

WHEREAS, there is a push by city officials to meter parking everywhere, to encourage more frequent vehicle turnover, but metering access to public parklands potentially limits or denies access to some taxpaying citizens,

WHEREAS, paying for metered parking is prohibitive for many Austinites who want to use parks regularly to exercise,

WHEREAS, it is possible to better educate the public about available access by bike trail or about bus routes with reasonably timed schedules,

WHEREAS, safer and more visible bike parking, along with safer bike routes through the city, are needed to encourage modes of transportation other than cars or buses,

WHEREAS, Austin has extremely hot summers that may prohibit some citizens from walking, scootering, or biking to such parkland amenities,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Parks and Recreation Board recommends to City Council that the City of Austin not install metered parking around public parkland amenities (trails, parks, pools) until there is adequate, affordable, reasonably quick, and equitable public transportation for taxpayers to access these amenities for recreation and exercise. **Metered parking makes sense only at park facilities which have frequent transit.**

- In addition, we strongly encourage the City to implement more of the pedestrian and bike routes to major parks recommended in the Zilker Park Working Group final report of June 7, 2019, allowing safer access to the pools and parks for those not in cars or buses.
- We recommend the City continue to invest in pools and parks for underserved parts of the city, to provide easier access to all citizens to appropriate trails, parkland, and swimming facilities.
- Once new routes or protected trails are implemented, we encourage the City to spend time and effort communicating with and educating citizens about the alternate modes of transportation and safe routes, as those become available.