

Austin Memorial Park Prairie Project

Community Engagement Plan Outline Tool

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Austin Memorial Park Prairie Project

Brief Description

This project is a community-led initiative exploring ways to provide habitat restoration to unused areas in Austin Memorial Park Cemetery (AMP). Spaces will be identified by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) with community support provided in the implementation of the prairie restoration.

Project Resources and Funding

No funds have currently been identified. However, additional funding is being sought by community leaders.

Purpose

The project aims to fulfill the purposes of the Austin Memorial Park cemetery by improving and preserving the property by allowing a natural respite to pray, meditate, or reflect in ways that honor those who are interred here while also contributing ecological benefit to the cemetery property.

Overall Public Participation Level: Consult

Participation Objectives

- Provide information to community about AMP projects.
- Share feedback and input received by community members.
- Obtain additional community input on the locations, possible purposes and additional questions.
- Provide ongoing updates through the process and project completion.

The community engagement process should accomplish the following outcomes:

Goal:	Achieved through:	Measured by:
Raise awareness and educate the community about the historical cemetery purposes and AMP projects.	Website, community presentations, social media.	Attendance numbers, surveys completed, website visits
Educate community around the process of community engagement.	Website, community presentations.	Attendance numbers, surveys completed, website visits
Provide background and information around prairie project and ways community can provide additional input.	Community meeting, connecting to community leaders.	Attendance numbers and surveys completed.
Identify and connect to community members interested in supporting the project and share ways to contribute to the project and current and future programming needs.	Outreach to current groups and artists.	Attendance numbers and surveys completed.
Identify potential conflicts in needs among groups and allow opportunities to reflect on ways to reach consensus.	Community meeting, connecting to community leaders.	Attendance numbers and surveys completed.
Create deeper connections to the AMP and increase opportunities to fulfill ways the cemetery can fulfill its purpose.	Collaborative programming with community members.	Follow-up conversations, future program and event attendance.

Scope of Community Engagement

The scope of engagement is articulated below.

1. **Developing Community Engagement Goals and Outcomes and Project Kickoff:** Thinking carefully and early in the process about what an engagement initiative should achieve is critical

for success. The co-creation of expected outcomes and goals will ensure that the key stakeholders are a part of the team, engaged along the way. These key stakeholders, along with the Project Team, will identify what questions remain from the 2018 Plan and what guidance the Plan already provides.

- a. **Developing Community Engagement Goals**
 - i. **Level of Engagement:** Involve
 - ii. **Key Stakeholders:** AMP Staff members and Community Leaders
 - iii. **Promise:** PARD staff will work together to ensure that concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the community engagement goals developed and use these goals to assist in evaluation of the process.
 - iv. **Process:** PARD staff will meet to develop outcomes hoped for through engagement process.
 - b. **Project Kickoff**
 - i. **Level of Engagement:** Involve
 - ii. **Key Stakeholders:** AMP Staff members, PARD staff members, Community Planners
 - iii. **Promise:** The Project Team will work together with internal stakeholders to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the community engagement goals developed and use these goals to assist in evaluation of the process.
 - iv. **Process:** Led by PARD staff will discuss vision, goals, expectations, introduce decision-makers, and outline schedule
2. **Interest Assessment:** For the initial phase, PARD will seek stakeholder feedback on community proposal for habitat restoration in unused portions of AMP. PARD will present these findings to the community and evaluate the process in alignment with the community engagement goals.
- a. **Level of Engagement:** Consult
 - b. **Stakeholders:** community members with loved one interred at AMP, neighbors, and interested communities in Austin.
 - c. **Promise:** The Project Team will keep community members informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the recommendations moving forward.
 - d. **Challenge:** Initial survey will propose the idea, but community members may want additional information on implementation and possible locations. In addition, community members who may disagree with the results may seek ways to delay any progress on the project.
3. **Prairie Planning:** If community interest favors proceeding with the prairie project, PARD will proceed by involving community leaders and interested stakeholders in the process of planning for the habitat restoration.
- a. **Level of Engagement:** Consult
 - b. **Stakeholders:** Cemetery staff members, community planners, community members with loved one interred at AMP, neighbors, and interested communities in Austin.
 - c. **Promise:** PARD will keep community members informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the recommendations moving forward.
 - d. **Challenge:** The primary challenges are identifying the available locations. PARD will need to make decisions about its projects such as the moving of the maintenance yard, columbarium, and scatter garden.

4. **Prairie Implementation:** During implementation, PARD will keep the community informed by providing updates to stakeholders engaged or interested in the process.
 - a. **Level of Engagement:** Inform
 - b. **Stakeholders:** Austin community members
 - c. **Promise:** The Project Team will keep community members informed of progress made regarding implementation of the habitat restoration.
 - d. **Challenge:** Funding may be an ongoing challenge.

Decision Makers and How Decisions Will Be Made

The recommendations of the prairie project community engagement will be reported to and approved by the PARD Executive Team. Community feedback will inform the final recommendations to the Executive Team.

Project Team Roles and Responsibilities

The Project Team will consist primarily of PARD staff members and Community Planners as outlined below. The following roles and personnel are poised to be present throughout the project:

Parks and Recreation Department Roles and Responsibilities

PARD Cemeteries Staff: Tonja Walls-Davis, Cemeteries Division Manager; Caitlen Hill,

- Identify key stakeholders.
- Coordinate and communicate engagement opportunities.
- Share messages and opportunities with stakeholders.
- Timely dissemination of information to community members about upcoming engagement opportunities.
- Inform media outlets of opportunities for community engagement.

PARD Community Engagement: Justin Schneider

- Support outreach efforts of Cemeteries staff.
- Support engagement planning and implementation efforts.
- Access and support for digital tools such as Zoom or SurveyMonkey.

Community Planners

Prairie Project Community Managers: Carolyn Mixon, Ranleigh Hirsh, Stephen Scace

- Prepare in-depth information about habitat restoration in cemeteries.
- Create community presentation about proposal and areas for community input.
- Develop prairie plan and proposed implementation process.

Stakeholders and Key Topics

Identified Key Stakeholders

The history of Austin Memorial Park is significant. As a cemetery in the heart of Austin, stakeholders can have deep personal connections to the space as well historical and environmental interests. Initial identified stakeholders include:

- Personal connection
 - Family and friends interred at AMP
 - Space reserved for future interment of family members or self

- Historical interests
 - Cultural Groups
 - Organizations with historical preservation interests
- Environmental, social, local interests
 - Neighbors
 - Climate interests
 - Religious or social groups

Key Issues in the Community, Relationships, and Social Environment

With deep connections, opinions and recommendations may have significant impact on stakeholders. Some community members may believe that the space should only be used to inter loved ones without additional opportunities or spaces for reflection, whereas other community members may desire a space for social and natural connection as cemeteries were traditionally used.

Additionally, the COVID pandemic continues to impact the entire Austin community. Significant challenges in outreach to interested stakeholders continues to be difficult and should be identified through the process.

Outreach Efforts

Outreach efforts will be conducted primarily through the stakeholder lists of Cemeteries who have been involved with AMP in the past.

Email notices: Primary outreach will occur through emails to established listservs. Email notices will keep the community up to date on the process and informed of relevant engagement opportunities.

Social Media: PARD staff will post and maintain the content on PARD digital platforms, including: the project webpage, Facebook, Instagram, and the Cemeteries website.

Press/Media Releases: PARD staff will provide media releases with information about how to get involved. These efforts will happen in advance of and during each of the public engagement opportunities. Efforts should include targeted media groups as outlined in Equity Strategy.

Flyers, Posters, Banners, and other Physical Notices: In order to help address the digital divide issues listed in the Equity Strategy, flyers and posters will be created and posted at AMP and other locations that may be allow flyers posted.

Direct Contact: Where possible and in alignment with Equity goals, efforts should be made to reach out to key stakeholders by phone or in-person when possible. This effort is the most effective but time-intensive, so strategies will be used to align with goals of this engagement plan. An in-person exhibit will be planned in the Coronado Gallery.

Community Engagement Techniques and Events

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, community engagement opportunities may be restricted to online activities or at events where health protocols are observed. Additional opportunities for individuals without access to digital platforms will be made upon request.

Engagement Activities

At each project phase, provide an update to the communities via the Newsletter, social media, and the project website.

1. **Develop Community Engagement Goals and Project Kickoff**
 - a. Identified project goals.
 - b. *Kick Off Announcement:* Provide summary of goals and project timeline.

- c. *Community meeting Announcement:* Email and promotion of the Initial Community Meeting via the Newsletter, social media platforms, the project website, as well as the community news outlet.
2. **Interest Assessment**
 - a. *Community Survey:* Conduct an initial survey to interest in pursuing the prairie project at AMP.
3. **Prairie Planning**
 - a. *Community Meeting:* A virtual presentation will be given, which will include results from survey, opportunity for additional comments, description of proposed prairie project, and opportunities for additional input by community members regarding planning for the habitat restoration.
 - b. *Follow-up Questionnaire:* Follow-up questions will include same questions identified in the community meeting and provide opportunity.
4. **Prairie Implementation**
 - a. *Email updates:* The project will shift to the inform stage and updates will be sent primarily through email and webpage updates.

All Virtual Engagement Activities will be recorded for viewing by community members. The online meeting presentation will allow for additional community members to view the information and provide feedback on their schedule prior to the deadline.

Anticipated Timeline and Events

Timeline

1: Engagement Goals and Communication Before Kick-off

Goal Development November to January 2022

- PARD Staff and Community Planners

Announcements February 2022

- Project Announcements
- Notices for upcoming engagement
- Development of Community Engagement Plan

2: Assessing Interest November to January 2022

- Initial Survey

3: Prairie Planning February to March 2022

- Community Meeting
- Follow-up Meeting Questionnaire
- Additional engagement needs

4: Prairie Implementation Begins Spring 2022

- Mowing of paths, surveys of plants and birds; removal of invasive plant species with volunteers
- Seeding to begin in fall 2022

Reporting

All engagement opportunities will be recorded and posted on the project webpage at their completion.