

**Zilker Park Improvements
Barton Springs Bathhouse Zone
Community Engagement Report**



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Project Background

In recognition of the most intensively used parkland within the City of Austin (COA) the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) has begun preliminary work to identify park improvements that build upon the recent renovations at Barton Springs Pool. In addition, PARC will continue to partner with allied COA departments and divisions such as Watershed Protection, Public Works, and Street and Bridge Operations to address many existing concerns for future enhancement of the project area.

The purpose of this project is to develop an improvement plan that considers the Barton Springs Bathhouse, as well as its surrounding amenities and features, including how they interrelate. The plan will serve as a guide for future park improvements in the designated area. The condition assessment study will analyze existing uses, utilities, environmental and historic aspects of this area. In addition to improvements for visitors and staff that use the bathhouse, the study will also focus on the following: pedestrian connectivity, playscape improvement/replacement, Zilker Park signage, parking and roadway and circulation improvements, irrigation and landscape renovation, improvements to the Pecan Grove Picnic Area, utilities upgrades and extension of rain water irrigation.

Project Timeline

December 2008	Barton Springs Master Plan
2013	Funding Provided from the 2012 Bond for Facility Renovation and Improvements
June-August 2015	MWM Design Group's Condition Assessment for Barton Springs Bathhouse Zone
October-December 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open House, October 27th 6:00-8:00 PM Zilker Botanical Gardens • Environmental/Infrastructure Focus Group, November 3rd 6:00-8:00 PM McBeth Recreation Center • Bathhouse Focus Group, November 12th 6:00-8:00 PM Zilker Botanical Gardens • Children's Facilities Focus Group, November 18th 6:00-8:00 PM Zilker Botanical Gardens • Review and Alternatives, December 9th 6:00-8:00 PM 721 Barton Springs Rd, Room 130 • Draft Recommendations, January 9th 2:00-4:00 PM Zilker Botanical Gardens
November 2015 - January 2016	Develop Concept Design and Recommendations for Bathhouse Zone
2016	Initiate Funded Project Designs in the Bathhouse Zone

Stakeholder Groups

These City departments, divisions, and offices, and other organizations were engaged for the purpose of consultation, determining project feasibility, and development of recommendations that reflect the desires of the public.

Internal

1. City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD)
 - a. PARD Capital Improvement Projects Division
 - b. PARD Aquatics Division
 - c. PARD Environmental Centers
 - d. PARD Marketing and Communications Unit
2. City of Austin Public Works Department
3. City of Austin Watershed Protection Department
4. Street and Bridge Operations

External

1. Barton Springs Conservancy
2. Friends of Barton Springs Pool
3. Austin Parks Foundation
4. Hill Country Conservancy
5. Save Barton Creek Association
6. Save Our Springs Alliance
7. The Trail Foundation
8. Heritage Tree Foundation
9. Zilker Neighborhood Association
10. Austin ISD
11. General public

Outreach Tools Used

1. Project Webpage
2. Stakeholder Emails
3. PARD Social Media- Facebook and Twitter
4. City Source
5. NextDoor
6. City of Austin Website- Banners
7. Local Media
8. Flyers
9. Press Releases

Zilker Park Survey

The PARD released a survey that was promoted through the project webpage and social media resulting in over 1300 responses. Many of the responses were open ended. PARD looked for reoccurring themes to gather direction for the Bathhouse Zone Improvements. Here are general items that came from the survey:

- Most folks visit Zilker once a month, then once or multiple times a week
- 90% of people use an automobile to visit Zilker park
- Most people agree that Zilker Park is accessible
 - Some complaints about parking, that the park is closed, that bike and pedestrian circulation is confusing
- There are requests for better signage for all aspects of the park
 - Primarily parking and trail signage
- Barton Springs pool was rated the most important cultural amenity
- People would like to see more drinking fountains
- Themes:
 - Restoration of the bathhouse
 - Improved entrance to the pool
 - More and improved bathrooms
 - Improved circulation, i.e. crossing of bike/ped paths and children’s play area
 - More signage and drinking fountains/filtered water stations
 - More shade
- The majority of people that took the survey use the trails, and believe that the trails are sufficient and properly maintained
 - Some complaints about dog waste
- Most people were satisfied with the playscape, but they would like to see more natural elements or a combination of manmade and natural
- A majority of people believe it was important to protect trees
- Other Themes:
 - Most people visit the park for Barton Springs
 - Like the openness of the park and like the trails

Survey Quote: *“Barton Springs Pool and the historic bathhouse are the centerpiece of the Park. Given the growth of the City, the influx of newcomers, and the fragility of the Springs, education on environmental values relating to water quality, conservation, etc., should be a key component of any renovation of the bathhouse and the surrounding area. In addition, upgrades to bathrooms, changing rooms and other staff space should be considered.”*

Open House- Public Meeting #1

The Parks and Recreation Department hosted an Open House on October 27, 2015 at Zilker Botanical Gardens to kick-off the community engagement phase of the improvements within the Barton Springs Bathhouse Zone. Participants at the meeting were able to have discussion with consultant MWM Design Group and expert City staff, and provide their comments and feedback to the project. Several boards displayed information regarding the project constraints, environmental and infrastructure concerns, bathhouse rehabilitation, children's facilities, concessions, amenities and other facilities. A total of 80 comments were collected from each display and can be found in the appendix of this document.

Participant Quote: *"Upgrade the trail system to provide access to all of Zilker for everyone."*

Environmental and Infrastructure- Focus Group Meeting #1

At the Open House attendees were invited to participate in a series of focus group meetings. The PARC hosted the first focus group meeting on November 3, 2015 at McBeth Recreation Center to discuss goals, priorities, and solutions related to the site environmental and infrastructure concerns. Participants were divided into groups with a scribe at each table to document feedback. A short presentation was given by Public Works Project Manager and MWM Design Group, an overview of the bathhouse zone plan and constraints. Small group discussion covered topics including parking, pedestrian and bike circulation, amenities and concessions, and the environment. Comments from the focus group can be found in the appendix of this document.

Feedback: There were approximately 150 comments provided from the public. *Solution- offsite parking with shuttle, reconfiguring of parking and pedestrian, bike, and auto flow.*

Bathhouse Plan- Focus Group Meeting #2

The PARC hosted the second focus group meeting on November 12, 2015 at Zilker Botanical Gardens to discuss goals, priorities, and solutions related to the Barton Springs Bathhouse. The meeting was structured the same as the first focus group with a short presentation and the majority of the time spent in small group discussion with a scribe at each table. At the opening of the meeting, PARC staff reviewed the community engagement conducted and summarized feedback from the survey and previous meetings. The topics related to the bathhouse discussed were; the immediate surrounding zone, dressing areas, rotunda area, and support facilities. Comments from the focus group can be found in the appendix of this document.

Feedback: There were approximately 270 comments provided from the public. *Solution- well defined entrances and exits.*

Children's Facilities- Focus Group Meeting #3

The PARD hosted the third and final focus group meeting on November 18, 2015 at Zilker Botanical Gardens to discuss goals, priorities, and solutions related to the site children's facilities. The meeting was structured the same as the other focus group meetings. A short presentation was provided by the Project Manager and consultant on the Bathhouse Zone Plan and an overview of the project constraints. Small group discussions were focused on the playscape, children's amenities and other facilities, the Sheffield Center and Splash! Exhibit, and environmental education. Community members that were not able to attend the focus group meetings were able to view the presentations on the project webpage and provide comments via the project email. Comments from the focus group can be found in the appendix of this document.

Feedback: There were approximately 70 comments provided from the public. *Priority- Enhance educational opportunity, aspire to educate about more, expand information to better educate kids and adults on environment in the zone.*

Review and Alternatives- Public Meeting #2

After review of all of the feedback from the survey and meetings, the project team presented the findings and alternatives on December 9, 2015 at the Austin Energy building assembly room for public comment. The majority of the meeting consisted of a presentation given by the Public Works Project Manager and MWM Design Group, followed by a survey of preferences of the alternatives presented, and review of display boards for open ended comments. The presentation thoroughly reviewed the project priorities and goals, constraints, and key findings regarding the infrastructure, bathhouse, Sheffield Center and Splash! Exhibit, and other children's facilities. Key findings included research from the feasibility study conducted by the consultant and comments collected throughout the public engagement. Four primary alternatives were presented; funded site projects, potential site projects, Bathhouse Repairs, and Bathhouse Rehabilitation. Attendees completed the survey regarding their preferences of the alternatives presented. The same survey was posted on SpeakUp Austin.

Feedback: Twelve surveys were completed at the public meeting, and 276 responses came from SpeakUp Austin. The results of the survey can be found in the appendix of this document. A total of 35 open ended comments came from display boards at the public meeting.

Quote: *"Love the idea of water quality feature as part of the design."*

Draft Recommendations

From the results of the survey and responses collected from SpeakUpAustin, the Parks and Recreation Department with MWM Design Group developed Draft Recommendations. These recommendations were presented to the public on January 9, 2016 at Zilker Botanical Gardens. The meeting format was primarily a presentation with visuals and time for Q&A throughout. The presentation included a summary of the survey results, review of project objectives, critical constraints, key findings of the study

and community input, and preliminary recommendations. The public was notified of next steps for the project team to present at the Land and Facilities Committee Meeting January 11, 2016 and the Joint Committee (Environmental Commission/Parks and Recreation Board) Meeting January 19, 2016. All public comment was compiled and incorporated into the Feasibility Report.

Appendix

1. Zilker Park Survey Results
2. Open House Comments
3. Focus Group #1 Comments
4. Focus Group #2 Comments
5. Focus Group #3 Comments
6. Review and Alternatives Comments
7. Review and Alternatives Survey Results
8. Project articles from local media