

ZILKER METROPOLITAN PARK VISION PLAN

An Urban Treasure in Need of a Comprehensive Plan

March 2023

Prepared by

DESIGNWORKSHOP

812 SAN ANTONIO STREET, SUITE
401, AUSTIN, TEXAS 78701
512.499.0222

TX
AUSTIN





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ZILKER METROPOLITAN PARK IS A PARK IN CRISIS.

The proximity to Downtown and environmental treasures like Barton Springs Pool make it a desired destination for all of Austin and visitors to our city. With the growth of the city, Zilker Park is facing increased ecological degradation, accessibility stresses due to a lack of connected circulation, and overuse in certain areas due to growing visitation and no significant changes to how the park is operated in decades. As a metropolitan park, it serves the entire community of Austin.

Zilker Metropolitan Park is Austin's oldest metropolitan park. In 1997, Zilker Metropolitan Park was added to the National Register of Historic Places as the park includes many resources of historical, architectural, and archeological significance. Today, the park serves as a hub for many recreational activities and includes major

facilities and amenities such as Barton Springs Pool, Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin Nature and Science Center, Zilker Clubhouse, Girl Scout Lodge, Sunshine Camp, Zilker Hillside Theater, Zilker Caretaker Lodge, Umlauf Sculpture Gardens, McBeth Recreation Center, the Butler Hike and Bike Trail, and Barton Creek Trail. The park is home to large-scale events such as the Austin City Limits Music Festival, the Trail of Lights, and ABC Kite Fest.

This Vision Plan is the first comprehensive planning initiative to encompass the park's 351 acres and associated facilities. The park is a special site for generations of Austin residents and needs active management to ensure it continues to be for generations to come.



THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THIS PLANNING PROJECT IS TO DEVELOP A VISIONARY FRAMEWORK.

The framework in this plan will be used to guide the restoration and future development of Zilker Metropolitan Park and its numerous facilities and features. The planning process assessed all aspects of the site with a comprehensive lens which included programming, maintenance, environmental features and ecology, historical preservation and cultural resources, transportation, circulation, and parking, as well as business operations and management. The vision plan will be used as a roadmap for the

park's future by providing recommendations and implementation strategies that facilitate execution of phased improvements and development. The vision plan will help garner support and funding for future phases through public and private partnerships, operational strategies, revenue generation, and financial sustainability.

PLAN OVERVIEW



WHAT IS VISION PLAN?

Outlines the long-term vision, principles, goals, and strategies for the enhancement, management, and operation of Zilker Park.

WHAT IS 'NOT' VISION PLAN?

- Detailed design or construction plans
- Detailed plans for day to day park management and maintenance
- Detailed budgeting for park enhancements

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THE PROCESS

THE VISION PLAN IS BUILT FROM ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY AND ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLEX EXISTING SITE.



The Zilker Park Vision Plan community engagement began in November 2020 with a baseline survey that received input from more than 4,000 participants. After the initial survey, the planning team was finalized, and a community engagement plan was developed by the team. The plan uses the International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Participation to identify the level of engagement. For the public, the plan identified the participation level as "consult" with the purpose of obtaining feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions. At the "consult" level, the organization commits to "keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision" (IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation). Additional key stakeholders were noted at the "involve" level, including the Zilker Neighborhood Association and organizations now included in the Zilker Collective Impact Working Group. The planning team has worked with these organizations to ensure their concerns and aspirations are reflected in the process, even when it may not be possible to include all of them in the plan. As a standard method for identifying criteria-based decisions, the planning team created a set of planning values to guide how input should be assessed. The team presented a draft of these values, called "Guiding Principles and Goals" for community feedback. Based on the feedback received at the first meeting and the corresponding survey that followed, the final Guiding Principles and Goals were established. Since then, future community input and feedback have been explored through the lens of these shared park values.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS



Accessibility



Nature and Ecology



Sustainability



History and Culture



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Vision Plan identifies Guiding Principles to guide and shape every step of the future of Zilker Park, from planning, design, construction and maintenance to future park uses.

Guiding principles are fundamental guidelines driving the project. They are big statements meant to describe the big picture. They also aid decision-making when competing ideas or interests are considered. When this happens, referencing the Guiding Principles can help determine the direction forward.



Accessibility

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The plan should knit the segmented pieces of the park together, ensuring a more accessible, safe, and connected park.
- » The park should be a place you can reach with multiple travel options.

GOALS

- 1** Ensure there are multiple safe, enjoyable, and convenient modes of transportation to access the park.
- 2** Improve and incentivize non-automobile mode access to, from, and within the park, in support of the City's ambitious mode split and climate goals.
- 3** Improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation between the north and south side of Barton Springs Rd. Make travel through the park and to various parts of the park intuitive, safe, and easy by foot, bike, and accessible paths.
- 4** Examine the surrounding trail network to create and extend safe active travel within and through the park.
- 5** Create accessible multi-modal transportation networks within the park.
- 6** Improve the wayfinding to and from different park destinations. Provide clear circulation, entryways, gateways, and connectivity between facilities within the park and throughout the park elements.
- 7** Use transportation assets efficiently, to preserve park space for ecological and recreation systems.
- 8** Collaborate with CapMetro and TxDOT to review, analyze, and recommend the transportation system to and around the park.
- 9** Achieve a high level of ADA accessibility within the park.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS



Nature and Ecology

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The Plan should treat the Park as an ecological treasure.
- » The plan should recognize the park's relation to water and explore opportunities for interaction with the lake without compromising environmental integrity.

GOALS

- 1** Protect, enhance, and restore land and waterscape elements that are imperative for ecological function.
- 2** Establish an interpretive program to educate visitors, especially for the youth about the park's sensitive features. Public stewardship should be developed as part of the interpretive program.
- 3** The Plan should champion best practices in green design, planning and land management.
- 4** Ensure safe and sustainable access to the water including entry to Lady Bird Lake and protection of Barton Creek.
- 5** The Plan should protect Zilker's natural resources for generations to come.
- 6** Support and rehabilitate native plants and species.



History and Culture

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The park is a metropolitan park which has a regional draw and focus.
- » The Plan should treat the Park's historic and cultural resources as a valued legacy to be celebrated for future generations.

GOALS

- 1** The Plan should honor and respect the Park's historic and cultural resources and should integrate them into the future life of the park.
- 2** The Plan should offer a framework that provides a successful balance between historic preservation and current/future needs.
- 3** The Plan should tell the deeper and complete stories of the people and the history of the park to better enrich the visitor experience and to elevate a sense of public stewardship.
- 4** The Plan should create opportunities for local artists and art to be a part of park spaces. These opportunities may include music, performance, and temporary exhibits.
- 5** Celebrate the stories of the people that lived on the land throughout history, including the indigenous people, and bring to light those stories that are not often heard.
- 6** Establish and integrate education components such as an education center to encourage and convey cultural and historical aspects of the park.



Sustainability

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The plan should champion sustainability best practices for the park.
- » The plan should be forward-looking and should embrace both its challenges and its opportunities for future generations.
- » Zilker Park should serve as an example of sustainability, protecting and enhancing our natural spaces and assets.

GOALS

- 1** Implement adaptive management strategies to create a resilient landscape in the face of climate change and dynamic user needs.
- 2** Achieve balance between metropolitan use and ecological/environmental concerns.
- 3** Balance revenue and ecological/environmental health with operations and maintenance of the park.
- 4** Provide equitable opportunities for access to the park and enjoyment of amenities.
- 5** Explore new and harness existing partnerships that extend the reach of the Parks Department to accommodate new opportunities.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » Zilker Park should serve the entire community of Austin.
- » Programs should be aligned with community interest.

GOALS

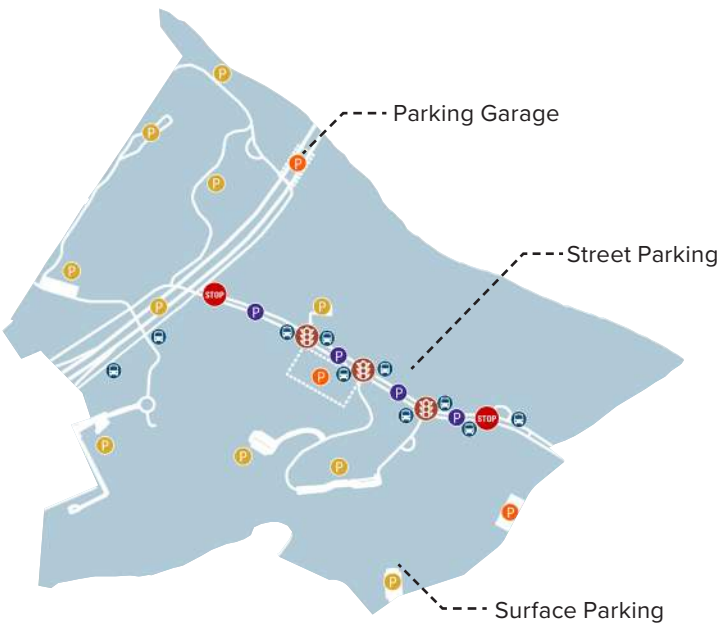
- 1** Design park elements that are welcoming to individuals and small groups and able to accommodate large groups.
- 2** Support equitable access, with special focus on:
 - Safety
 - Accessibility
 - Events and programs for diverse cultures
- 3** Support new and enhance existing learning opportunities within the park.
- 4** Sustain the implementation and maintenance of the park and stewardship of the park utilizing volunteers and partner organizations.

FRAMEWORK OF THE VISION PLAN

There are many aspects to Zilker Park and the layering of these elements together is what produced the Vision Plan map. Those elements can be peeled apart to reveal the framework.

| | | EXISTING | PROPOSED |
|-------------------|---|-------------|------------------|
| Parking | Formal | 1,300 | 2,450 |
| | Informal | 1,150 | 0 |
| | Total Spaces | 2,450 | 2,450 |
| Impervious Cover | Roads | 20.9 | 19.9 |
| | Parking | 12.52 | 3.4 |
| | Programs/ Structure | 2.5 | 10.87 |
| | Total Acres | 35.92 | 27 |
| Ecological Uplift | Upland Woodland Acres | 96 | 114 |
| | Riparian Wetland Acres | 69.6 | 82.6 |
| | Meadow/ Savanna Acres | 0.4 | 49.3 |
| | Canopy Enhancement Acres | - | 10 |
| | Drainage Enhancement Acres | - | 2 |
| | Total Acres | 166 | 258 |
| | Trails | Total Miles | 12.6 |
| Programs | Caretakers Cottage | | Renovated |
| | Quonset Hut | | Renovated |
| | Sunken Garden | | No Change |
| | Hillside Theater | | Relocated |
| | Girl Scout Cabin | | No Change |
| | Zilker Club House | | No Change |
| | Playgrounds | | Existing + 4 New |
| | Volleyball Courts | | Relocated |
| | Disc Golf | | No Change |
| | Baseball Field | | Relocated |
| | Zilker Park Boat Rentals | | Relocated |
| | Rugby Field | | Enhanced |
| | Informal Parking Lots | | Removed |
| | Andrew Zilker Road | | Partially Closed |
| | Columbus Drive | | Partially Closed |
| | Lou Neff Road | | Closed |
| | All of the contributing resources for National Register of Historic Places will remain. | | |

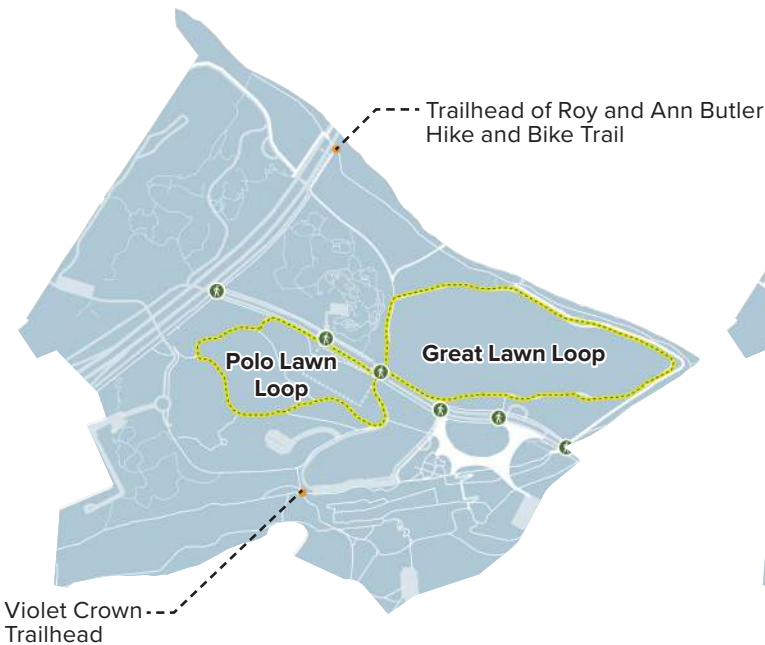
VEHICLE CIRCULATION AND PARKING



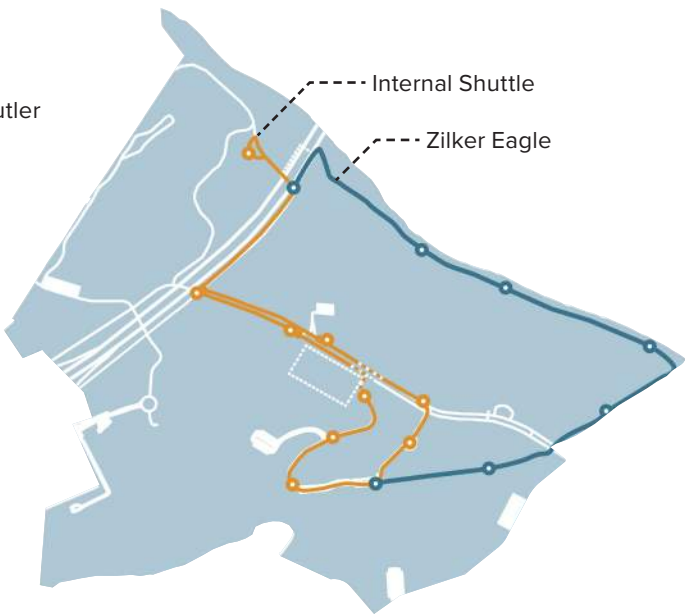
WAYFINDING / INTERPRETIVE STORY



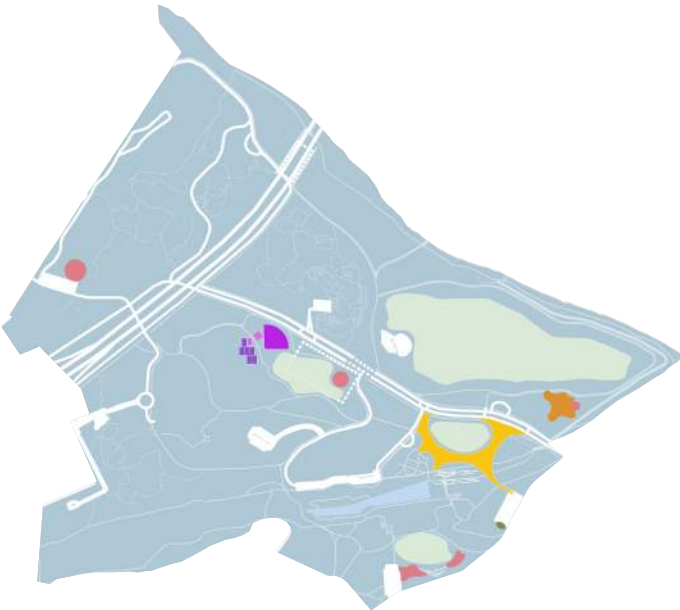
PEDESTRIAN/BIKE NETWORK



INTERNAL CIRCULATOR



NEW PROGRAMMING



ECOLOGY



- Playground
- Sports Fields
- New Picnic Area
- Lawn
- Barton Springs Pool
- Welcome Center

- Upland Woodland
- Riparian Wetland
- Meadow/Savanna
- Canopy Enhancement
- Drainage Enhancement
- Park Area with Regular Maintenance

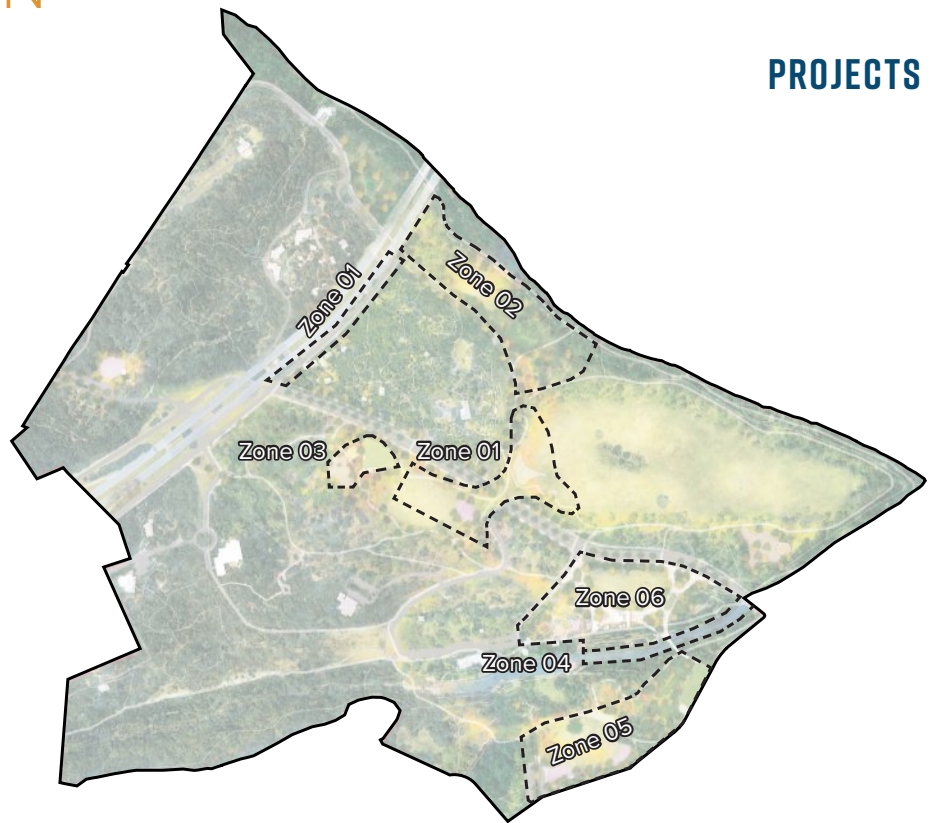
IMPLEMENTATION

Zilker Park is one of Austin's busiest parks, given the many amenities and destinations located within its 351 acres, as well as its central location near downtown. Not only are individual community members invested in the future of Zilker, but also organizations that have operated in Zilker for decades. To support the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, the Vision Plan recommends a nonprofit partner that can act as a liaison between the Department and the many active organizations and interested stakeholders in Zilker Park. The unified nonprofit partner could also raise funds to pay for project managers, tools and supplies, and recognition programs for volunteers.

A key goal should be developing the best practice of creating zone horticultural care program, where regular volunteers are paired with City and/ or unified Zilker nonprofit staff working to plant, water, weed, and otherwise maintain different portions of the park, especially in areas targeted for ecological restoration. Details in the agreements would be worked out with PARD and the City of Austin in the future.

The Zilker Park Vision Plan will come to life over the next several decades. Drivers of the timeline include funding sources, community engagement on the planned

PROJECTS



ZONE 01: LAND BRIDGE

- » Restoration of Polo Field
- » Stratford Dr Realignment
- » Underground Parking Garage
- » Land Bridge
- » Zilker Hillside Theater

ZONE 02: LANDFILL

- » Restoration of Landfill Area
- » Parking Garage under MoPac
- » Zilker Trailhead to Butler Hike and Bike Trail

ZONE 03: SPORTS AREA

- » Restoration of Polo Field
- » Sports Area

ZONE 04: WELCOME CENTER

- » Removal of Surface Parking
- » Enhancement of Existing Playground
- » Welcome Center

ZONE 05: SOUTH SIDE OF BARTON SPRINGS ROAD

- » Parking Garage
- » Removal of Surface Parking
- » Drainage Improvement
- » South Side New Play Areas

ZONE 06: BARTON CREEK

- » Controlled Barton Creek Water Access
- » Restoration of Barton Creek Bank
- » Additional Bridge along Barton Creek
- » Relocation of Ped/Bike Bridge along Barton Creek

PROJECT TIMELINE

YEAR 1-3

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Restoration of Barton Creek Banks | Barton Springs Road Improvements |
| External Shuttle | Barton Creek Water Access |
| Additional Restrooms | Internal Shuttle |
| Drainage Improvements | Closing Lou Neff Road to Vehicles |
| Wayfinding Design | South side new playgrounds |
| Establishing Partnerships | Nature Play at Zilker Preserve Trailhead |
| Zilker Park Umbrella Organization | Departmental Partnerships |
| Mitigation of Erosion Issues | Interpretive Storyline |

NEAR TERM

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Land Bridge | Zilker Hillside Theater |
| Closing Andrew Zilker Road to Vehicles | Underground Parking Garage |
| Restoration of Old Zilker Hillside Theater Area | Restoration of Polo Field |
| Enhancement of existing playground | Additional Trails |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Tree Canopy Enhancement | -----> |
| Invasive Plant Control | -----> |

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Removal of Surface Parking | -----> |
|----------------------------|--------|

MID TERM

| | |
|--|--|
| Parking Garage(s) | New Trailhead to Nature Preserve |
| Restoration of Landfill Area | Ped/Bike Bridge on Lady Bird Lake |
| Additional Bridge along Barton Creek | Welcome Center |
| Relocation of Ped/Bike Bridge along Barton Creek | Extended Zilker Eagle Route |
| | Zilker trailhead to Butler Hike and Bike Trail |

LONG TERM

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Sports Area | Canopy Walk |
| Stratford Dr Realignment | |

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Removal of Surface Parking | -----> |
| Tree Canopy Enhancement | -----> |
| Invasive Plant Control | -----> |

SUMMARY

Zilker Park is Austin's oldest and most iconic metropolitan park. Its physical and environmental resources reflect the foresight of the previous owners and citizens who sought to preserve it as a grand park for future generations to appreciate. Previous generations could not foresee the growth that would come to Austin and how it would impact this important and central park. Two major development phases, completed between 1917 and 1939, established its nuanced and complex character and set the stage for the park we enjoy today. At over 350 acres, it offers a wide range of recreational and natural features to capture the visitor's imagination. It features over 2,000 linear feet of lake frontage. Its Great Lawn features panoramic views of the city skyline. It is the home of world-famous, spring-fed Barton Springs Pool. Zilker Park is a place of mystery and wonder, but not without its connection to darker aspects of our history.

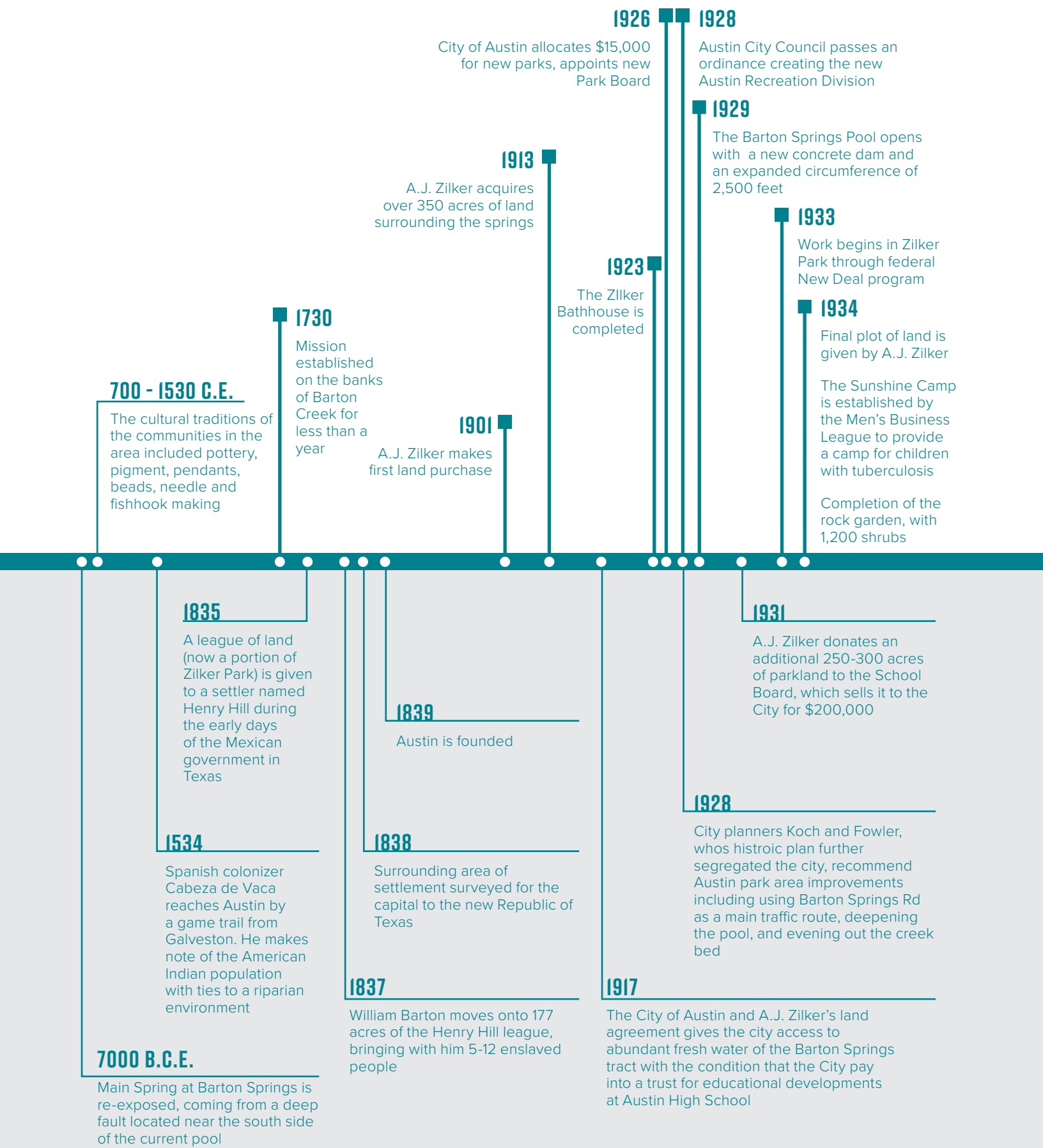
CHAPTER ONE

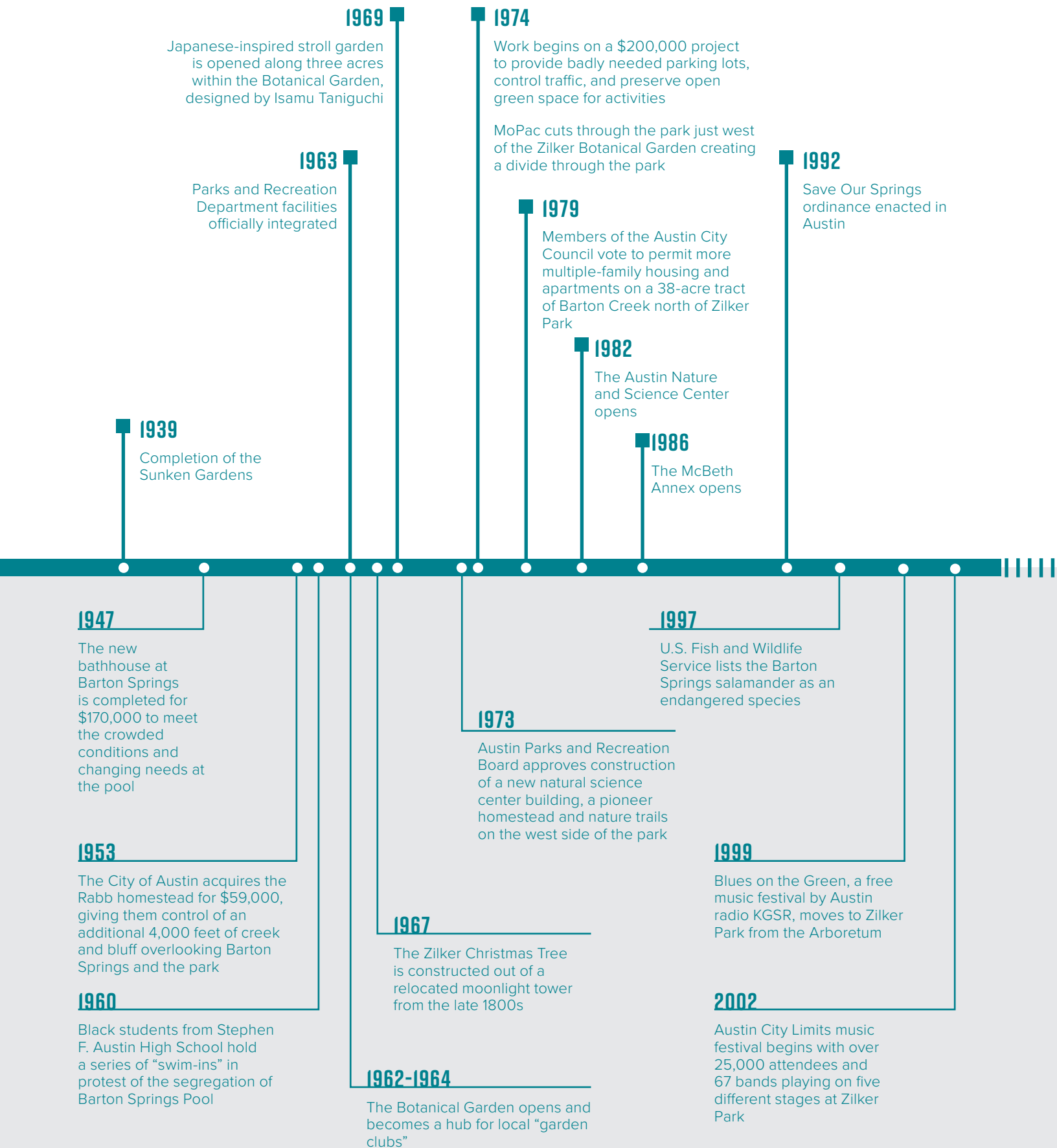
IN THIS CHAPTER

Historic Timeline
Historic Context

HISTORY OF ZILKER PARK

HISTORIC TIMELINE





HISTORIC CONTEXT

SUMMARY

- 1 Zilker Park is Austin's oldest metropolitan park, providing physical and environmental resources to residents and visitors since before the land was purchased in 1917.
- 2 The park's popularity skyrocketed following Depression-era public improvements.
- 3 This Vision Plan is the first comprehensive effort looking at the park as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Zilker Park has long been a place of gathering for the people of the Austin area. From a verdant hunting ground for Indigenous peoples, to powering small industries and supporting ranch land, to a well-loved swimming and bathing pool situated within a large metropolitan park. The park's relationship to the springs, creeks, and Lower Colorado River creates a landscape capable of supporting and responding to a myriad of ever-evolving cultural demands.

PREHISTORY

The modern occupation of the area around Zilker Park began at about the time the city of Austin was founded, in 1839. But for more than a few thousand years before that, the site was familiar to the indigenous people of the region and the natural forces that formed Barton Springs began hundreds of millions of years ago. The springs, actually a group of four springs, are artesian springs, issuing under pressure from a fault line in the underlying limestone formation. The springs, and the abundant plants and wildlife they sustained, and the ready source of stone for toolmaking attracted indigenous peoples to the site.

Archaeological excavations conducted in the area of the springs found evidence of middens, camps and shelters, quarries and butchering sites, as well as tools, artifacts and points. In 1928, a crew led by J. E. Pearce conducted archeological investigations near the confluence of Barton Creek and the Colorado River, with excavations made on the south side of the creek. Pearce was the chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas and had studied the archeology of indigenous natives of Texas for a decade before. From previous investigations in Central Texas, he had described a nomadic life centered on hunting, fishing and gathering of plants and nuts for subsistence. He located stone points and tools used for hunting and scraping, shells and burned rock middens, which he described as "kitchen middens." He presented his early field research and findings to professional groups and scholarly publications, establishing Central Texas archeology as a major research field. Pearce was later the director of the Texas Memorial Museum.

Although the records of Pearce's investigation in Zilker Park have apparently been lost, more recent studies were completed in the 1980s, 1990s, 2008 and 2010 at what is now called the Vara Daniel Site, prior to installation of a new sewer line in the park. Stratified buried archeological deposits from a span of more than 11,000 years were identified, representing life in the late Paleoindian through the late Prehistoric periods. The sites are deeply buried and were accessed through carefully controlled, deep archeological excavations. The artifacts and features reflect changes in climate and technology over the span of thousands of years. The Paleoindian findings date to about 10,900 years Before Present (BP) and indicate people who hunted large mammals and smaller animals, used dart points and spears and gathered plants. Evidence of Archaic occupations, dating from 8,800 BP to 1,200 BP, suggest that people hunted bison and deer with smaller dart points and spears, gathered nuts, stem and root plants, and cooked food with hot rocks and earth ovens. The excavations also suggest that the location of the river changed over time, and periods of moisture and flooding occurred when snail species were deposited on what is high ground today. Evidence of human occupancy of the site during the Late Prehistoric period from 1,200 BP to 500 BP has also been documented through archeological investigations. People hunted with bow and arrow, farmed to augment gathered plants and used pottery in this time period.



City of Austin and Vicinity, 1839.
Source: Texas General Land Office, Map 3149

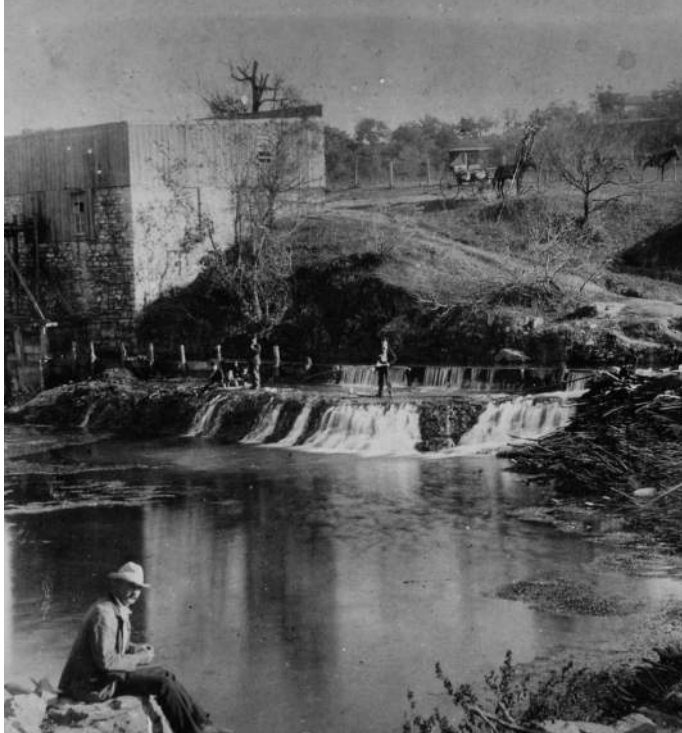
Native American people, including Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Comanche tribes, also occupied the area around the springs. By the time of the Spanish settlements in 1730, the Tonkawa and Lipan Apache tribes inhabited the area around Austin. A few decades later, the Comanche and Kiowa tribes inhabited parts of Travis County. Barton Springs was a sacred Comanche landmark, on a tribal trail between Bandera County and Nacogdoches. The creek and springs likely were used by the Comanche for bathing. Comanche Marker Trees were used to mark trails and springs and may well have been placed in areas of the park to mark those sites.

SPRING CREEK

For a very brief time in 1730 and 1731, three Spanish frontier missions were located in the vicinity of the springs. The Franciscan missions were originally founded in 1716 in East Texas, and later moved to Central Texas on the Colorado River, in hopes of attracting the participation of local tribes. Conditions in this location were apparently unfavorable, and the missions were soon moved to the San Antonio River in 1731. The brief stop on the Colorado River is commemorated with a historical marker installed on the south grounds of Barton Springs Pool by the Texas Centennial Commission in 1936.

The Spanish also began the practice of making private land grants to individual settlers in the eighteenth century, as a way to populate the vast stretches of land that lay north of the Rio Grande. After winning independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico continued the practice, creating a system of *empresarios*, or agents, contracted to recruit colonists and allocate land grants. One such *empresario*, Ben Milam, received a contract to settle 300 families between the Colorado and Guadalupe Rivers in 1826. Milam's Colony included the land surrounding Spring Creek, which is today called Barton Creek. In 1835 League No. 21 in Milam's Colony, a tract at the mouth of Spring Creek, was granted to Henry P. Hill, a twenty-eight-year-old native of Georgia and a lawyer. Hill returned to Georgia within a few years, perhaps during the Texas Revolution, protecting his ownership of League 21 from afar.

Although he was not the original recipient of League 21, William Barton is the settler with the strongest association with the springs. Barton was born in South Carolina in 1782 and lived in Kentucky and Alabama before coming to Texas in 1828, settling a league of land in Stephen F. Austin's Little Colony, in the area near Bastrop, with his wife, five children, and five enslaved people. Barton applied to the Republic of Texas for



English & English Mill, circa 1880.
Source: Austin History Center

additional labor (177.1 acres) of land, which he was entitled to as a head of household living in the republic in 1836. He selected a site on the west bank of the Colorado, at the mouth of Spring Creek and moved there around 1837. But a patent was never actually granted by the General Land Office because it was later determined that the land selected by Barton was on the tract already patented to Henry P. Hill.

Barton built a house on the south bank of Spring Creek near the main spring. It has been claimed that he named two of the springs for daughters Parthenia and Eliza. Barton's cabin and the springs are depicted in an 1839 map of Austin. The spot became known as "Barton's" or Barton Springs, as it is still called today.

As Austin grew, Barton Springs was a favorite spot for fishing, swimming and sightseeing. Barton kept two baby buffaloes at his place, and the tamed animals were part of the attraction. He also leased spring flow and land on the north bank of the creek to a group to erect a saw mill, beginning a pattern of small industrial uses at the spring site.

Barton died in 1840, and due to the confusion over the actual ownership of the labor of land, it took fifteen years before the estate was settled. The question of the ownership of the labor of land was finally resolved by a decree of the Travis County District Court issued in 1855. The labor of land was then sold on behalf of the heirs to A.B. McGill for \$5,044.50. The land changed hands several times, and in 1860 the land and water rights were sold to John Rabb, whose heirs would hold the land for the next century. The Rabbs lived in a log cabin at the springs and raised a herd of cattle on their 50 acres of land. In 1867, Mary Rabb had a two-story limestone house built near the log cabin. Three generations of the Rabb family lived in the limestone house until 1955, when the site was sold to the City of Austin. The house burned down shortly after the city took it over and it no longer stands there today.

After the Civil War, a gradual shift in the land uses around the springs began, as more intensive industrial uses were intermixed with ranching and farming. In addition to the saw mill, a grist mill and ice manufacturing business were built at the springs by Michael Paggi. A large, water-powered flour mill was built on land leased by the Rabbs to English & English Mill. The railroad arrived in Austin in 1871, opening the local markets to reliable transportation, and the interest in harnessing the water power of the springs remained strong through the end of the nineteenth century.



Zilker Amphitheatre at Eliza Spring, circa 1915.
Source: Austin History Center



Stone arch bridge over Barton Creek, circa 1890.

Source: Austin History Center

Newspaper accounts in the 1870s also described the springs as a popular destination for Sunday afternoon carriage rides. Paggi encouraged visitors to the site, building a bathhouse for changing and renting swimming suits for visitors to use. The springs were also a popular spot for military reunions and picnics. In the 1850s, US Army troops camped at the springs on their way to the forts in West Texas, including stops by Robert E. Lee and Albert Sidney Johnston. Union troops also camped at the springs during Reconstruction in the late 1860s.

In 1889 a handsome stone arch bridge was built over Barton Creek, just upstream of the springs, which gave access to the north bank of the creek and the pasture land beyond, and also to the road to the west to Bee Cave. A heavy flood in April 1900 washed the bridge out and it was not rebuilt.

By the turn of the century, the Rabbs owned considerable acreage in portions of the original Henry

P. Hill league and beyond the south portion of the Barton labor. They began to sell these lands off to various buyers, and thus began the next major transition at the springs. A.J. Zilker had begun buying land in the area in 1901 and in 1907, Gail Rabb sold the land along the creek, including the main spring to him. Rabb reserved a tract upstream of the main spring for the Rabb residence.

Andrew Jackson Zilker, an Austin businessman, came from Indiana to Austin as an eighteen-year-old young man in 1876. He arrived with only fifty cents in his pocket, but through hard work became a successful businessman, working in the manufacture of artificial ice and eventually owning the entire ice plant. He held other business and political positions, serving as a volunteer fireman, a city alderman for the Tenth Ward, a director of the First National Bank and was the Water and Light Commissioner in Austin for a time. He was especially interested in education and was on the Travis

County Board of Education for many years. He was an advocate of practical education in public schools, including manual training and home economics, and could point to his rags-to-riches story as an illustration of the importance of this training. He married Ida Peck in 1888, and they had two daughters and a son.

In 1901, Zilker began acquiring property around the springs, when he purchased about 350 acres on the south bank of the Colorado. He continued to accumulate property in this area through 1913, acquiring Eliza Spring on the north bank of the creek in 1901 and the Main Spring and Old Mill Spring on the south bank of the creek from Gail Rabb in 1907. Zilker used the land for farming and ranching. He raised feed for horses, which were used in the ice business to pull delivery wagons to homes throughout Austin. He also raised livestock on the ranch and also leased part of the land to the Butler Brick Company.

Andrew Zilker was an early member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Austin Lodge #201, which was founded in 1891. In 1903 Lodge #201 hosted the Elks State Encampment, a convention gathering of lodges from across the state of Texas. Zilker had a stepped amphitheater structure built around Eliza Spring likely in anticipation of the event. The amphitheater is an open-air meeting space, built in a large, stepped oval around the mouth of the spring.

BARTON SPRINGS PARK

The Zilker family used the springs for family gatherings and celebrations. Andrew and Ida Zilker were planning to build a house on the land in about the location of the current Zilker Botanical Garden when Ida Zilker died in 1916. Zilker reconsidered the use of the property in a way that reflected his long-term love of the springs and his firm belief in the value of practical education for young people. At the time there was a water shortage in Austin and the springs were considered a potential source of water for the City.

In 1917, Zilker approached the Austin School Board and the City Council with an offer to donate the tract of land at Barton Springs to the public realm. He proposed to donate about forty acres of land, including the four springs at Barton Springs, to the School Board, on the condition that the city purchase the land from the schools for use as a public park. The purchase price of \$100,000 was to fund an endowment for industrial education and home economics training in the schools, called the Zilker Permanent Fund. Zilker retained ownership and use of the larger, adjacent parcel of land for his livestock. The proposed arrangement included a provision for an easement from Bee Cave Road to the creek, to allow Zilker's livestock access to water. Zilker also allowed for the possibility of an easement across his remaining land in the event the City chose to use the springs as a source of municipal water. This easement would be critical for laying water mains from the springs to a remote pumping station. The proposal was approved by the citizens of Austin in an election held in the fall of 1917, and the warranty deed was accepted in early 1918. The city made the \$100,000 payment in \$10,000 increments, with 6% interest, over the course of the next ten years.

On January 15, 1928, Mayor P. W. McFadden made the final payment, in a ceremony at the Majestic Theater, to J. Harris Gardner with the Austin school board. Gardner presented the mayor with the deed to Barton Springs and read a resolution of appreciation to Zilker from the school board. Andrew Zilker was proclaimed Austin's "Most Worthy Citizen" of 1927. In his remarks, Zilker spoke about his love for the springs, and that it should belong not to an individual, but to all the people of Austin.

Once the City acquired Barton Springs, it had an abundant source of municipal water, if needed. However the rains came, the drought was broken and the water supply was steadied without tapping the springs. Instead, the city leaders began to think of the springs as a municipal amenity and a tourist attraction. By 1920, Austin was dubbed the “Automobile City of Texas” by the *Austin Statesman*, and there were 6,000 vehicles in the county. In 1921, work began on several automobile tourist camps in Austin parks, including one at Barton Springs Park. The tourist camp was touted by marketing brochures and depicted on city maps at the time. Within a few years, the vision for the use and development of the park changed, and the Council voted to discontinue the tourist camp at the site in 1928.

Related to automobile access to the park, Barton Springs Road was extended across the creek with a new concrete bridge constructed in 1926. The road itself was asphalt paved by 1925 and extended across the creek. Bee Cave Road, in its location at that time, extended along the north edge of the Barton Springs Park property, separating it from Zilker’s ranch and pasture lands.

In support of recreational uses at the park, the Chamber of Commerce and the Lions Club funded the construction of a public bathhouse on the north bank of the creek by 1923. The building had dressing rooms for men and women on the second floor and a wide promenade on three sides. The two-story wooden structure was designed by Hugo Kuehne, Austin native, MIT trained architect and an organizer of University of Texas School of Architecture. Kuehne established a private architectural practice in Austin in 1915 and completed many projects for the City of Austin. He also served on city boards and commissions, including the Parks Board and the Planning Commission.

Public interest in developing a city parks system came in to full force in the mid-1920s. A 1923 editorial in the *Austin Statesman* decried the limited supply of public parkland, finding the supply of less than one acre for every 1,000 inhabitants deficient. The editorial noted that the city was growing and advocated setting aside large tracts for parkland to avoid the possibility of later having to tear buildings down to create parks. Continued growth in Austin also taxed the existing city infrastructure of utilities, amenities and public services. As a remedy, the City Council instructed the new City Manager, Adam Johnson, to prepare a plan of action to solve the problems.

To assist in this effort, an unpaid advisory board called the City Plan Commission was created in 1926, charged with addressing a list of problems including street conditions, traffic issues, utility routing and civic and public improvements. The commission was also directed to study subdivisions, parks, community centers, zoning and flood protection. To fulfill their responsibilities, the commission recommended the city hire the Dallas firm of Koch and Fowler Engineers to prepare a city plan for Austin.

The firm produced a comprehensive city plan with recommendations to address the problems and issues the City Plan Commission had been asked to solve. The plan was adopted by the City of Austin in 1928 and

BARTON SPRINGS PARK

- 1 The springs were used by the Zilker Family for their gatherings and celebrations.
 - 2 As a result of the land deal between Zilker and the City, the land around Barton Springs to the public in 1917.
 - 3 As the city grew, so did the public interest in developing a city park system; the City Plan Commission was formed in 1926.
 - 4 Over the years, several improvements were proposed including construction of a concrete trap dam, that created Barton Springs Pool
-

included recommendations that called for the deliberate segregation of the city. By using the premise of “separate but equal” accommodation of the races in the provision of facilities and conveniences, including schools and parks, tacit separation was accomplished without the use of segregation by zoning. It would be decades before Austin parks and schools were legally desegregated.

With respect to parks, the document recommended a five-year plan for the development of parks across the city, ranging from small neighborhood playgrounds to large nature reserves. The Koch and Fowler plan spoke favorably of Barton Springs Park and made specific recommendations for improvements that might be made in the park, including a recommendation to expand the park to the east.

Based on the findings of the city plan, the first parks board, actually a committee of businessmen from the Austin Lions Club, was formed in 1928, and a bond election for park and playground acquisition and development funds was passed the same year. Also the City established the Recreation Department and hired its first paid Superintendent of Recreation, James Garrison.

In October, the City Manager presented his program of proposed improvements at Barton Springs to include a dam, retaining wall, storm sewer and other improvements at the pool. The Council approved the proposed improvements and authorized \$50,000 for the work. The drawings for the dam and retaining wall work were prepared by the City Engineer’s office in October 1928. The work included the current downstream dam and a children’s wading pool (later removed) installed in the shallow end of the pool. The drawings also included a sidewalk on the north bank of the creek adjacent to the children’s wading pool. The construction work was completed later that year.

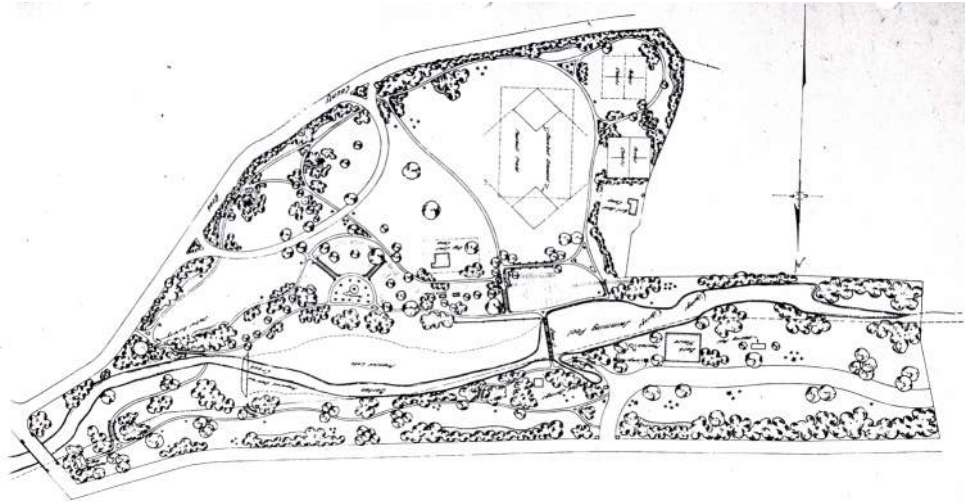
The following year, the Council considered bids for paving, curbs, gutters, and for parkways and driveways in Barton Springs Park. They also approved the plans for a concession stand and caretaker’s cottage, both designed by Hugo Kuehne. The concession stand, designed to suggest the appearance of a wind-powered mill, was built on the north bank of the creek, to the east of Eliza Spring. It was demolished in 1959 when the current concession stand was built. The Caretaker’s Cottage is still in use as an office for park staff.

In late 1929, the Council received bids for the construction of baseball diamonds and bleachers, and the construction took place the following year. The baseball diamonds remain today on the south bank of the creek. At the end of the year, the Parks Board recommended the construction of a concrete trap dam above the children’s wading pool (the current upstream dam), sidewalks on the north and south sides of the pool, retaining walls on portions of the north and south sides of the pool and the removal of accumulated gravel from the pool. The work was completed along with added playground equipment, fences, and backstop improvements. Two huts, or clubhouses, were also built on the south side of the pool for Boy Scout and Girl Scout troop use.

Within a year of the final payment for Barton Springs Park, the grounds were filled with active recreational amenities, many intended for use by children. The concentration of organized recreational facilities – pool, playgrounds, athletic fields, clubhouses – was consistent with park design trends of the early years of the twentieth century. Reform or Playground Movement parks emerged in large urban cities, as a progressive response to the isolation and confusion of city living. Structured play in neighborhood-scaled parks “provided not just recreation but built a stronger sense of community.” In the case of Barton Springs Park, the active recreational facilities were built around the site of an enduring, spring-fed swimming hole, only recently transformed with dams, low walls, and paved walkways into a more structured natural pool.



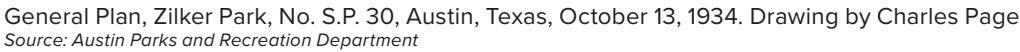
City of Austin and Suburbs, 1925, Dixon B. Penick. Excerpt showing Barton Springs as a “free tourist camp.” Texas General Land Office, Map 76203



Plan Showing Development of Barton Springs Park, 1928.
 Source: *A City Plan for Austin, Koch & Fowler*



Aerial view of improvements at Barton Springs Park
 Source: *Austin History Center*



In 1931, Zilker made a second donation of land to the public under the same arrangement as the first gift. He gave an additional 280 acres of land adjacent to the first gift to the school board on the condition that the city purchase the land for use as a public park for \$200,000. Perhaps beginning to feel the pinch of the Great Depression, the Council asked for more favorable terms, in the form of a reduction on the interest rate to be paid. Mr. Zilker declined, wishing to endow the school fund to the greatest extent possible. The question was put to the voters, who approved the purchase of the new parklands. Ultimately, the Council paid one-quarter of the purchase price in a lump sum, saving the interest expense that way. In 1931, Zilker was again named Austin's "Most Worthy Citizen." The deed for the new park was conveyed in August 1932. In May 1933, the Council passed a resolution creating a single park from the tracts of land, to be called Zilker Park, in appreciation of the generous gifts of Andrew Zilker.

old quarry, and clay pit sites into a beautiful recreational amenity. Once the plans were laid, another investment in the construction of the improvements would be required. For similar projects, such as Shoal and Waller Creek improvements, the city worked together with the Texas Reconstruction and Relief Commission (TRC). The city provided materials, tools, and technical supervision, and the TRC provided labor. The federal government provided the funding, which was administered by the state agency. A similar arrangement would be used for the work at Zilker Park. Throughout the development of the park during the Depression, several different federal relief agencies provided support and funding to the project with administration by companion state and local entities, including the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the National Youth Administration (NYA). The Works Progress Administration (WPA) may also have provided labor forces for work in Zilker Park.



Aerial view, Barton Springs Park and Zilker Park, circa 1934.
Source: Austin History Center

Charles H. Page, a local architect, was appointed to the Park Board in 1933. Page practiced architecture in Austin since before the turn of the century, and his firm specialized in the design of schools and courthouses. He completed work on the Travis County Courthouse shortly before his appointment to the Park Board. Page prepared the overall design for the development of Zilker Park, which he presented to the Park Board at the end of 1933.

The design of Zilker Park, a much larger and more expansive area than the original Barton Springs Park, reflected current trends in park design. Unlike the structured play areas for active recreation, much of Zilker Park was designed for more passive recreation activities with abundant hiking paths, bridle trails, and curved scenic drives. Striking natural features were highlighted, including rock outcroppings and wooded groves. The structures designed for the new park, including clubhouses, trail houses, overlooks, comfort stations, bridges, culverts, and entrance features,

followed National Park Service's rustic building patterns. Natural materials and forms were used for the construction, typically with rubble limestone, painted wood, broad roof overhangs, and shingled roofs.

The existing circulation patterns through the park were changed in dramatic ways, both to incorporate the current park design trends and to provide access to the large added area. The alignment of Bee Caves Road, which tightly hugged the north edge of Barton Springs Park, was shifted to cross the former pasture lands to the north and east. The new road alignment was curved to provide scenic views of wooded areas, the creek and river courses, and dramatic rock outcroppings. The northwest section of the park, which included a tall promontory overlooking the river, with dramatic views of the city center across the way, was left natural and rustic. This section of the park was designed to be used for hiking and horseback riding as a means of access, in addition to the rustic vehicle lane to the top of the point. Initially, Page worked with the RFC to begin



Sunken Garden, 1993.
Source: Alan Pogue

implementation of the park development plan by the construction of stone picnic units with tables, benches and barbeque grills, as well as pedestrian trails, roadways and bridle paths. He also secured the support and funding of the Civil Works Administration for the project. Funded for \$94,000, the Zilker Park project was the most generously funded CWA park project in the state. CWA workers constructed the stone entrance pylons, new Boy Scout and Girl Scout Huts, the Rock Garden (Zilker Ponds), Sunshine Camp and picnic tables, built park roads, planted trees and shrubs in the arboretum, rehabilitated the old Ashford-McGill House for use as a trail house and began work on the Mirror Pond in the bed of Dry Creek, in the western section of the park.

In the spring of 1934, the CWA was closed, and the Zilker Park project was shifted to the control of the National Park Service, through the Civilian Conservation Corps. CCC Company 1814 set to work in the park at the end of April. The CCC work diaries note that the rustic light standards at the entrance to the Barton Springs

area were built that spring, as was the Mirror Pond. CCC workers also rehabilitated the existing skeet house into a trail shelter and the police department pistol range into restrooms, built Lookout Point on the western promontory and a second lookout (demolished in 1937) at the confluence of Barton Creek and the Colorado River. They paved roads in the park and did general planting and beautification work.

Although the project emphasized the new, undeveloped tract to the north of the Barton Springs Park tract, there were changes and improvements made in the vicinity of the pool. A bandstand was added on the hill above the north bank, and above that a “rock garden” (the Zilker Ponds) was built. The entrance road and parking areas were also reconfigured. As the work was nearing completion, an enthusiastic article in the local newspaper described the project and the rerouting of traffic:



Aerial view, Barton Springs Park and Zilker Park, circa 1934.
Source: Austin History Center

“..... the old asphalt road from the bridge to the entrance of the swimming pool will be abandoned as a roadway. Cars headed for the pool in the future will enter the park, then bear to the left over a hill by the old reptile institute, pass through the old gravel pit and into the pool’s parking area at the present exit on the southwest. Returning autos will come out over a short stretch built from the old entrance to the county road. Traffic thus will be moved in a loop with congestion at the point of entrance to the pool eliminated. The old road will not be torn up, Dale said, but will be leveled down for use as a roller skating surface up to the old Barton Springs entrance point. Beyond that, it will be cut away to give a view of Charlie Page’s rock garden.”

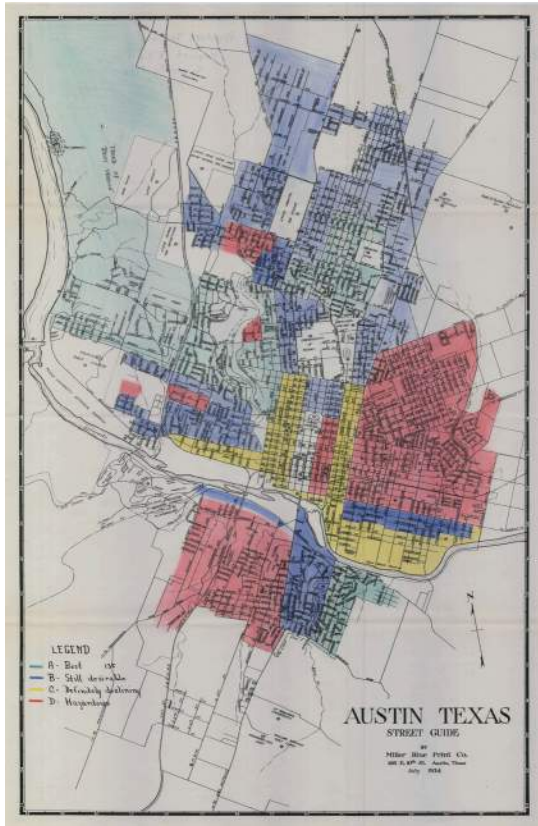
In April 1934, Andrew Zilker made a third gift to the city of 32.5 acres, located west of Barton Springs Park, on the north bank of the creek. Zilker suggested that this new park be called Page Park, in recognition of the work of Charles H. Page, Sr. in the design and construction of the improvements to Zilker Park under

the RFC, CWA, and CCC, but Mr. Page declined the honor. The three tracts make up present-day Zilker Park. This final gift of land was just that, a gift outright, without any money changing hands. The Council was again moved to publicly thank Zilker. Zilker, who had made the gift while ill and bedridden, died a few months later. His funeral was attended by dignitaries from the state, county and city government and the school board. In 1950, Zilker Elementary School was named in his honor.

The park was opened to great fanfare in the summer of 1934. It has been well and faithfully used by the citizens of Austin ever since the grand opening. The major activities of the 1930s were program and activity oriented. A tradition for organized entertainment at the pool was begun in these years, with swim meets, diving exhibitions, holiday pageants, celebrations, and regular dances at the dance pavilion and band stand. Large crowds of spectators looked down on the pool from the north bank. In 1933, the Lions Club petitioned the Council “to have erected at once long rows of cement seats on the north side of the Barton Springs bathing pool in order to better accommodate the large crowds that visit this resort.” The City Manager was asked to look into this, and several years later the gallery seats were built.

There were also two big flood seasons in 1935 and 1936, and the pool was closed for extended periods during those years. The flood of June 15, 1935, was perhaps the largest flood on record since 1869. The water coming down the creek and the water rising from the river converged at Barton Springs, ascending to the level of the roofs of the wooden bathhouse and concession stand. The bandstand was completely destroyed and washed away in the flood. It took six days of intensive cleaning by 65 laborers and the entire Recreation Department staff from lifeguards to playground leaders to clean the site and get it open in time for the big Fourth of July celebration at the pool that year.

After these floods, the Recreation Department made repairs to the wooden bathhouse and cleaned the grounds and the pool. Additional assistance was provided by another federal relief agency, the National Youth Administration. The NYA was created in 1935 to provide training and employment to youths 16 to 25 years of age. Again, the city provided supervision, materials, and tools, and the NYA provided funding and labor. In 1936, a new bandstand and comfort station



Austin Redlining Map, 1937.
Source: NARA II RG 195, Entry 39, Folder "Austin, Texas," Box 153.

AUSTIN REDLINING MAP, 1937

The neighborhoods around Zilker Park were among those ‘redlined’ in the 1930s by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), meaning they were given a poor rating that prevented their residents from accessing the types of federal loans that allowed other, more highly rated, neighborhoods to build generational wealth. Often poor HOLC ratings were given solely because neighborhood residents were not white.

were built on the hillside overlooking the pool. The bandstand, an open-air platform, was used for the singing and music events held in the park throughout the swimming season. The comfort station, restrooms for men and women at the level below the band stand platform, was a welcome addition to the site.

In 1938, another NYA project was begun at the Old Mill Spring, Austin’s first “municipal sunken garden.” The project was designed by Delmar Groos, one of the architects who designed the Deep Eddy Bathhouse for the Recreation Department the year before. Groos had worked for the Recreation Department in his youth as a lifeguard and basket boy at Barton Springs and was listed as the manager of the Pool in the 1935 city budget. He studied architecture at the University of Texas and established a practice with Dan Driscoll, an architectural engineer, in 1935. The Sunken Garden, a series of terraced flagstone platforms stepping up from the spring pool, was designed as a gathering and picnicking place. A flagstone stage and picnic tables to seat 300 were built on the stone terraces.

Even with the repairs to the wooden bathhouse made by the Recreation Department, the severe flood damage compromised the building. The floors of the dance pavilion heaved and buckled under the standing water, and dances were no longer held at the building as a result. The park and pool, though, grew in popularity, and 1938 was a record year for attendance.

POST-WAR PARK IMPROVEMENT

During World War II, Zilker Park and Barton Springs hosted large groups of bivouacked troops, with special swimming, musical and recreational events staged for the men. Community singing and musical performances continued at the hillside above the pool. Swimming declined in the summer of 1945 due to a polio scare, but music remained popular, particularly at the end of the summer when gasoline rationing was lifted. In 1946, an enclosed ballcourt (now used as a maintenance facility) was built near the Caretaker’s Cottage.

Also in 1946, the old wooden bathhouse was razed, and construction began on a new masonry bathhouse to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the city park. The new bathhouse was designed by Dan Driscoll, with assistance from Delmar Groos and Chester Nagel. Driscoll had worked as a staff architect for the Recreation Department in the late 1930s and was an architect with the City Engineering Department when the bathhouse construction drawings were prepared in 1945. The new bathhouse included a central service office with good views of the approach from the park and entrances to the public restrooms and dressing rooms. Tickets and basket tokens were issued from the service office. The basket rooms were efficient, sanitary rooms, with a custom designed basket-hanger system that took up a minimum of space.

The building materials were selected for maximum durability and minimum absorption. The project was published in *Architectural Record* magazine, a leading architectural journal, and described as a model of efficiency, beauty and durability. The new Bathhouse was dedicated on March 23, 1947, and the highlight of the year for the Recreation Department. A bronze plaque was unveiled with the inscription:

“In memory of Colonel Andrew Jackson Zilker. Friend of the people and of school children of Austin, he gave this beautiful park as a rich endowment dedicated to the happiness of the citizens of his beloved city, and their neighbors.”

In the 1950s, attendance at the park and the pool was strong. The Parks and Recreation Board found that more playgrounds were needed in the city, and plans were developed for a play area in Zilker Park in 1952. A permanent, concrete stage was constructed at the Zilker Hillside Theatre in 1952, to provide singing, fine arts, and theatre presentations. Nature and wildlife programs began at the new theatre the following year. A new, permanent band shell and lighting were added to the Zilker Hillside Theatre in 1957. On the south grounds, the parking area at the south entrance to Barton Springs was enlarged and graveled in 1952.

In 1955, the City acquired the old Rabb house and surrounding 29 acres of land on the south bank of Barton Creek. The Parks and Recreation Department had identified this as a vital property acquisition as early as 1953. The Builders Development Corporation assembled the Rabb land holdings and other adjacent parcels to create the new Barton Hills subdivision. The City purchased the property to provide a buffer between the new subdivision and the springs. The old Rabb house had partially burned in 1943, but Rabb family members continued to live there. After the City acquired the property, the remainder of the house was burned in 1956.

The old mill concession stand was demolished, and a new concession stand was built in 1960. The structure is still in use today, located between Eliza Spring and the Bathhouse.

In 1960, students from Austin High School, including a daughter of longtime Parks and Recreation Board member Joan Means Khabele, began holding swim-ins at the Pool to protest the tacit segregation that had occurred in years past. In 1961, Azie Taylor entered the pool for a swim with some white friends, bringing quiet attention to the need for integration. The following year, the tacit policy was officially changed, and the springs were integrated and open to all the citizens of Austin.

The Zilker Eagle miniature train was put into operation in 1961, a surprising source of revenue for the park ever since. The train station is located near Eliza Spring, close to a large children’s playground. The track runs along the south edge of the great lawn, overlooking the creek and river to one side and the rock island



A Baptism at Barton Springs, 1924.
Source: Pipkin and Marshall Frech, Eds. *Barton Springs Eternal*.



Improvements at Barton Springs, 1926.
Source: *Austin History Center*



Isamu Taniguchi in his Garden, 1970.
Source: *Austin History Center*



Zilker Christmas Tree, 1970.
Source: Austin History Center

ZILKER HOLIDAY TREE

The Zilker Holiday Tree stands 155 feet tall and is composed of 39 streamers, each holding 81 multicolored, 25-watt bulbs—totaling 3,309 lights. At the top of the tree, a double star measures 10 feet from point to point. The double star displays 150 frosted bulbs. This unique spiral pattern of lights was created by City of Austin electricians. At its circumference, the tree measures 380 feet. The base of the tree is made up of 19 utility poles, each 14 feet tall, arranged in a circle around the Moonlight Tower.

Source: Austintexas.gov

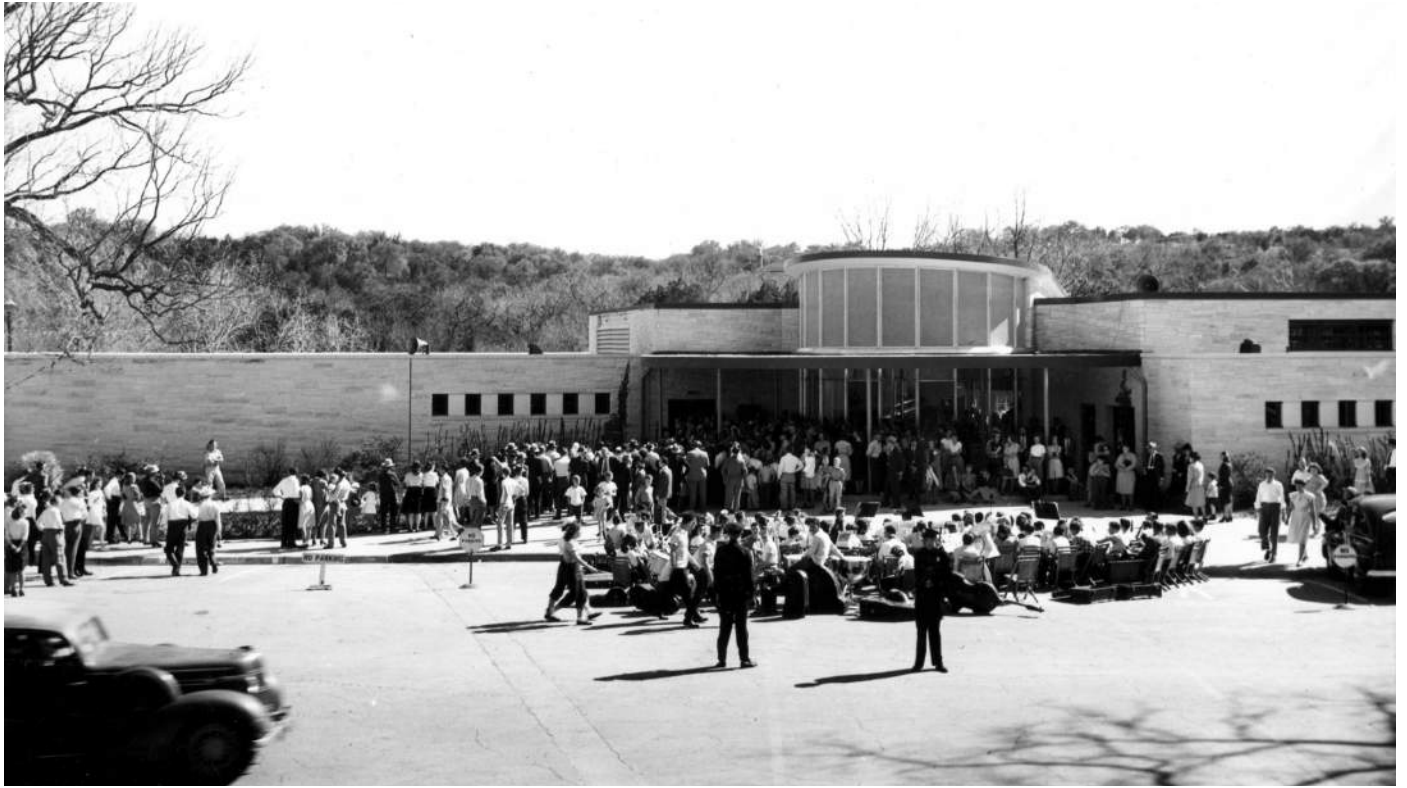
and great lawn to the other. The train and track are undergoing renovation and are expected to be back in operation soon. In 1971, the Zilker Playscape was opened adjacent to the train station.

The Zilker Botanical Garden and Austin Area Garden Center were opened in the northwest area of the park in 1964. The Austin Area Garden Center building sits on a hill overlooking the Zilker Botanical Garden and was designed by Kuehne, Kuehne and Milburn architects. Hugo Kuehne, who had designed some of the earliest buildings erected in the original Barton Springs Park in the 1920s and served on the early Parks Board, designed the garden center as one of his last architectural projects. The handsome, low-slung building uses the rustic material palette of rubble limestone, painted wood, and broad shingled hipped roof planes in an understated, modern building.

The Zilker Botanical Garden is a group of unique, individual gardens representing native and regional plant materials. The original landscape design was done by Parks Department landscape architect Fritz von Osthoff and includes ornamental, cactus, rose, fragrant, native plant, meditation iris, and day lily gardens. The garden design also includes small buildings and architectural relics of cultural and historic significance, which were saved and relocated to the Botanical Garden before the City Historic Preservation Office and preservation ordinance were established. The relocated structures include the Swedish log cabin, the Mamie Wilson Rowe Summer House, the cupola from the Bickler School, a masonry key-shaped window opening from the Michael Butler House, and a small curb footbridge from Congress Avenue. Antique light standards that once stood on Lavaca Street and the Esperanza Schoolhouse were also placed in the Botanical Garden.

The Taniguchi Japanese Garden was opened in 1969, a gift of Isamu Taniguchi, who spent 18 months creating the paths, ponds, bridges, tea house, and planting areas by hand. Taniguchi was a farmer who immigrated to the United States from Japan in 1915. He was moved to create the garden as a gesture of gratitude to the city where his two sons were educated, and as a symbol of universal peace.

The McBeth Recreation Center and McBeth Recreation Center Annex are in two buildings on the western edge of Zilker Park. The recreation centers provide programs for differently abled children and adults. Originally built by the Knights of Columbus as a local chapter building in 1958 and as a state headquarters building in 1960, the modernist buildings are sited in a heavily wooded area of dense tree canopy. The City of Austin acquired the buildings in 1981 and 1988 and renovated them for use as recreation centers.



Dedication Ceremony for the new Bathhouse, 1947.
 Source: Austin History Center



Taniguchi Japanese Garden, circa 1970.
 Source: Austin History Center



JOAN MEANS KHABELE

ONE OF THE PEOPLE WHO
WORKED TO END SEGREGATION
AT BARTON SPRINGS POOL

Joan Means Khabele.
Source: City of Austin



Equity, Diversity, and
Inclusion

"1960 spring, I went to Austin High School and the principal called me in and said, I consider you to be the leader of the black kids in your class so I want you to go and tell them that none of you can go to the senior picnic because Barton Springs and Zilker Park are segregated..."

They didn't really have it properly locked off. You just go around this way and you are in. You know how big Barton Springs is. How do you control all the people in there? So we started swimming...

It was spreading like wildfire across the country. Eventually, they changed the city ordinance. I found that almost everything that opened, we had to march, protest petition, and go to the council. These things just don't open by themselves."

CONTEMPORARY PARK IMPROVEMENT

The most significant change to Zilker Park since its creation was the construction of MoPac Boulevard over and through the western section of the park. The arterial highway extends from far north to far south Austin on the western side of the city. It flanks the Missouri-Pacific Railroad right of way in the segment north of the river, but the roadway itself continues to the south where the railroad turns to the east on the north bank of the river. The design and public engagement process took almost twenty years to complete, and construction took five years for the first phase of the project, which opened to use in 1974.

The highway bisects the park, with roughly the westernmost quarter of the park separated from the remainder of the park by elevated roadways and grade-level access roads. Barton Springs Road, originally designed as a scenic parkway route, now serves as a high-speed entrance to and exit from the highway.

In recent decades, historic designations and environmental conservation measures have been applied to Zilker Park, to preserve and protect the unique cultural and environmental resources of the place. In 1985 the Barton Springs Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1990 Barton Springs Pool was designated City of Austin Historic Landmarks. In 1992, citizens of Austin led the initiative for the Save Our Springs Ordinance to protect the aquifer and the springs. In 1996, the Austin Nature and Science Center opened a new satellite facility in the Bathhouse, including a gift shop, classrooms and an exhibit hall. In 1997 the Zilker Park Historic District was listed on the National Register. Also in that year, the Barton Springs Salamander was listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Degradation of the quality and quantity of water feeding Barton Springs was cited as a primary threat to the species. The Parks and Recreation Department and the Watershed Protection Development and Review Department formulated guidelines for the management of the surface habitats of the salamander, changing the operation and maintenance procedures at the Pool to gentler practices. The Austin Nature and Science Center

opened in 1982 and in 1998 the educational exhibit Splash! Into the Edwards Aquifer was opened at the Bathhouse by the Austin Nature and Science Center. The permanent exhibit tells the story of water migration through the Edwards Aquifer ecosystem.

Routes for hiking, biking and jogging were enhanced in recent decades in the park with the completion of the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail at Lady Bird Lake and the Barton Creek Greenbelt. The Butler Trail passes through the north edge of the park, along the bank of the Colorado River and Barton Creek. The Violet Crown Trail begins along the southwest section of the park on the area of Andrew Zilker's third and final land gift to the citizens of Austin to complete the original Zilker Park.

New elements and features have been added to the Zilker Botanical Garden and Nature Center areas of the park in recent years. A prehistoric garden, with fossilized dinosaur footprints, a small children's garden and a butterfly garden have been installed, as have sculptures, an arbor and a human sundial feature. A salamander conservation center and an aviary were added to the Nature Center compound.

Adjacent to the park and related to its cultural history, the road along the south edge of the original Barton Springs Park tract was renamed by the City Council in 2018. Once named Robert E. Lee Road, likely an association with the route traveled by Lee when he served in the US Army in the 1850s and was assigned to Texas to help protect the western frontier, the road was renamed Azie Taylor Morton Road. Azie Taylor Morton was the first and only Black person to serve as Treasurer of the United States, appointed by President Jimmy Carter in 1977. Azie Taylor grew up in St. John Colony, a Texas Freedom Colony in Dale, TX near Austin, and came to the city to attend high school and college. She graduated from Huston-Tillotson College with a Bachelor of Science degree in commercial education in 1956. Around 1961, she visited Zilker Park with some white friends and went swimming in Barton Springs Pool, helping to end segregation at the site and open the pool to all citizens of Austin.

SUMMARY

As Austin continues to grow the inadequate infrastructure at Zilker Park becomes more apparent. The erosion due to lack of controlled access to the water and poor stormwater management, the practice of using lawns as overflow parking lots, the lack of diverse transportation options, and unsafe or absent pedestrian routes and ADA accessible amenities all add up to a park in crisis. The Zilker Metropolitan Vision Plan's main objective is to provide a visionary framework to direct the preservation, future development, and care of Zilker Park, a treasured component of Austin's culture. The Park and the activities that take place there are the heart of Austin. Zilker Park needs a vision plan to make sure it is viable and accessible for future Austin residents. This framework involves identifying the need for recreational amenities, recommending improvements to the park's current facilities and programs, and putting an emphasis on the park's historic, cultural, and ecological characteristics.

Sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion, nature and ecology, history and culture, and accessibility are the five driving concepts for the goals. In planning for the Guiding Principles and Goals, the planning team consulted 15 prior master plans, site assessments, and reports. These documents covered topics ranging from the environment and climate change within our urban context, to transportation and accessibility goals, and the cultural landscape of the park. The results of these studies were folded into the process of studying the geographic, demographic, and environmental context of the park.

CHAPTER TWO

IN THIS CHAPTER

Purpose and Vision of Plan
Central Issues Facing Zilker
Guiding Principles and Goals
Relevant Planning Documents

PURPOSE, GUIDING PRINCIPLES, VISION, AND GOALS

PURPOSE AND VISION OF THE PLAN

THE SIX INFLUENCES ON THE VISION PLAN

- 1 Balancing Competing Interests
- 2 Urbanizing Recreation Within a Historic Context
- 3 Striving for Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity
- 4 Linking Programming, Funding and Maintenance
- 5 Improving Mobility to and Inside the Park
- 6 Protecting the Ecological Heritage of Zilker



Crowded Barton Creek Spillway



Accessibility Issue with Erosion along Barton Creek

THE PURPOSE AND VISION OF THE PLAN

Zilker Park is a well loved park at a turning point in its history. It is a vehicle centric park without adequate parking, infrastructure, accessibility, or stormwater management to meet the demands made on it. The primary goal of Zilker Metropolitan Vision Plan is to develop a visionary framework to guide the restoration and future improvement and stewardship of Zilker Park, which is a cherished part of Austin's culture.

The location is synonymous with everyday outdoor recreation – by people who swim, picnic, or enjoy walking the trails – to large festivals and events that are iconic and economic drivers for the city. Zilker Park is the setting for people's memories of childhood birthday parties, evenings under the stars watching a play at the Hillside Theater, or cooling off on a scorching summer day at Barton Springs. These pieces of the park and the events that occur within them make up the heart of Austin, and Zilker Park is in need of a vision plan to ensure that the Park remains viable and accessible for future generations of Austinites.

Natural areas and trails are some of the current elements of the park that meet people's needs, but parking issues, crowding issues and access were indicated as problems to solve for. Other issues are evident as one walks around the park, some of which are pictured here like areas that see intense storm drainage and erosion problems, and inaccessible areas along the Creek.

The Vision Plan develops a visionary framework to guide the restoration and future stewardship of Zilker Park. The recommendations were created using a comprehensive lens, starting with an understanding of how Zilker is used today, exploring broader City and Parks and Recreation goals, listening to community members and groups across Austin, and understanding urban park challenges and opportunities in other similar cities. The Vision Plan includes recommendations for programming, maintenance, environmental features and ecology, historical preservation, cultural resources, transportation, circulation, parking, concessions, operations, and management.

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ZILKER PARK



Crowded Informal Parking Lot during Weekends



Erosion Around Barton Creek

CALL FOR ACTION

As the population of Austin grows, so does visitation to Zilker Park. The environment has suffered, including degraded banks along the creek and erosion at points of stormwater runoff. Some of the facilities within the park need upgrades and have access issues, making it difficult for visitors to navigate between the various things to do within the park without vehicles.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES



Sunshine Camp
Source: Sunshine Camp, 2022. <https://www.sunshinecamps.org/zilkerpark/>



Barton Springs University
Source: Barton Springs University, 2022. <https://www.bartonspringsuniversity.org/bsu-2022-photos.html>

FIELD TRIPS

With its abundance of natural resources, Zilker Park today serves an educational function – from the Barton Springs University program to the abundance of science and nature camp programs at the Austin Nature and Science Center (ANSC). However, there are many desired updates and improvements to the educational aspects of Zilker Park that this plan will recommend.

First, in terms of physical planning, Zilker Park should provide improved and safer access for school groups taking field trips to the park. This includes bus drop-offs, bus queuing, and efficient, safe connections between the various Zilker Park facilities. During the regular school year, school groups often visit the ANSC and the area by Barton Springs Pool. The community feedback informed the team of some of the bigger challenges for these groups.

INCLEMENT WEATHER ALTERNATIVES

If storms or rain events occur during the field trip, class groups do not currently have a place to shelter. A centralized place for welcoming groups to the Park and accommodating shelter for inclement weather events is envisioned as a program within the Welcome Center.

MOVING BETWEEN FACILITIES

Currently there are not safe, comfortable connections between Park facilities such as Barton Springs Pool, the ANSC, Zilker Botanical Gardens (ZBG). Connections should facilitate class-size groups to move from facility to facility to expand the programming of a field trip day at the Park. Shaded sidewalk connections that avoid vehicular traffic are provided for in the plan, and an internal shuttle circulator, paired with the Zilker Eagle, would allow even large groups to spend a longer day in the Park and experience multiple Park venues.

Along with improved spaces for school groups, additional restroom facilities will be needed to accommodate the likelihood of more frequent groups. New restrooms are located within the plan, arranged to provide access throughout the park.

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

PARD should explore partnerships with grade-level schools (public, private, charter and homeschools), higher education institutions, and early care facilities like pre-K and daycare programs. With improved access and circulation to and within the park, school programs may be better able to plan for and accommodate learning within Zilker Park and in this way new sidewalk connections can be dotted with interpretive storytelling. Outdoor learning spaces will also be a new way to accommodate educational opportunities within Zilker Park's natural spaces.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Zilker Park's educational programs today create memorable, unique ways for Austin's students to learn about their natural environment. These programs are successful despite having "shoestring" budgets. The plan recommends building upon the long-lasting success of the existing programs and expanding programs to add more park rangers or other docent-type staff or volunteers that can orient visitors to the park, assist those with disabilities and create an inclusive environment, lead tours and provide interpretive oral storytelling of the park's history.

SHARED STORY ABOUT ZILKER PARK FROM COMMUNITY SURVEY I

"Zilker Park is an incredible teaching venue. Students from kindergarten to college visit to learn about hydrogeology, endangered species, and development. Educational components like the Splash! Exhibit are a critical part of the visitors' experience."



Girl Scout Cabin

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES



LACK OF PARKING

For visitors to Zilker Park that do not live directly adjacent to it, getting to the park and circulating around it are some of the top challenges today. Cars are the way that most people access the park today. On an typical busy day, the permanent and temporary parking lots are often full, causing cars to circle around the park in search of a space resulting in frustrated drivers and illegal parking on grass and in critical root zones. With park roads that were not intended for thousands of car trips during normal trips, there can be major traffic congestion on Lou Neff Road, Stratford Drive and Barton Springs Road.

The parking that exists today was built to serve a much smaller and car-centric city. The plan proposes a configuration of parking that accommodates the number of spaces currently found in the park, including the temporary lots, while removing above ground parking from the core of the park. In the plan parking is found at the perimeter of the park, along Barton springs road, and within three potential parking garages. A goal of the plan is to preserve access to the park while encouraging other modes of transportation, therefore even as Austin grows in population, the plan anticipates additional transit support, allowing the parking spaces remain the same and hopefully diminish over time.

Options for off-site parking include many privately-owned garages and surface lots. While ownership and management structures make contracting with the private entities difficult, there are now third party platforms that feature emerging parking management solutions and technology such as phone apps connected with private parking lots at the Q2 Stadium. Other large facilities and event programmers in Austin are using this platform to be the contracting and insurance-carrying entity for contracting parking spaces, including both surface lots and parking garages.

Today the ANSC and ZBG struggle with access and parking to their facilities. ZBG's singular vehicular entrance off of Barton Springs Road is challenging to enter, and traffic on Barton Springs Road prevents anything but a right hand turn out of the park upon exiting. The ANSC has very little parking, and access is mostly accommodated from Stratford Drive and the gravel lot under and to the east of MoPac. Both of these facilities heavily rely on the gravel lot on the landfill for visitor parking, and the ANSC must also use the gravel



lot for school drop-offs. Buses dropping off groups to these facilities use the gravel lot to park while the field trip occurs.

The Butler Landfill and the Polo Field are degraded landscapes that have been used for years for parking, construction tear down and setup areas for Austin City Limits Music Festival (ACL), and overflow parking lot for other major events. The plan shows an ecological uplift of these sites, growing the usable parkland area and allowing for more use of the park, even during large events like ACL.

REMOVAL OF PARKING

Personal vehicles have only been around since the 20th century, so we can only imagine what people will be using to travel in the future. It is not unreasonable to imagine that the need for parking could diminish as better transit options, micro-mobility and other modes of transportation, become used more frequently in Austin. It is realistic that parking lots in the park could be converted back to a park use. The following are ‘factors’ that the City should monitor so that as certain mobility

milestones are achieved, parking can be converted to park use:

- » Frequent bus route (every 15 minutes or less) that serves the population and requires no transfers
- » Project Connect line has a station within a 10-minute bike ride or 3-minute shuttle ride of the park
- » Internal Zilker Park circulator
- » Pavemint or similar parking space finding platform has a contract with same amount of spaces provided
- » Violet Crown Trail to land bridge to the Butler Hike and Bike trail connection is completed.

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990

- 1** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that was enacted on July 26, 1990. The ADA guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications.
 - 2** The Austin ADA Program Office ensures that all city services and programs are accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.
 - 3** The Parks and Recreation Department ADA Transition Plan aims to provide a framework towards providing facilities that are accessible and welcoming for all citizens. (<https://www.austintexas.gov/department/americans-disabilities-act-transition-plan>)
-

PRIORITIZING ACCESSIBILITY

In 2015, the City conducted an audit of accessibility issues within Zilker Park. Many of the recommendations have yet to be completed due to budgeting issues. The plan recommends revisiting this report and prioritizing improvements to those facilities that are not near-term suggested improvements or projects as part of this plan.

PUBLIC TRANSIT TO ZILKER

There is a bus line but it is infrequent and does not provide efficient, easy access for most Austinites. Even if a visitor takes the bus, once one steps off the bus, there are minimal to no sidewalk connections to get to most of the major destinations. The bus stops themselves are not shaded and most do not even have a concrete pad.

INTERNAL CONNECTIVITY

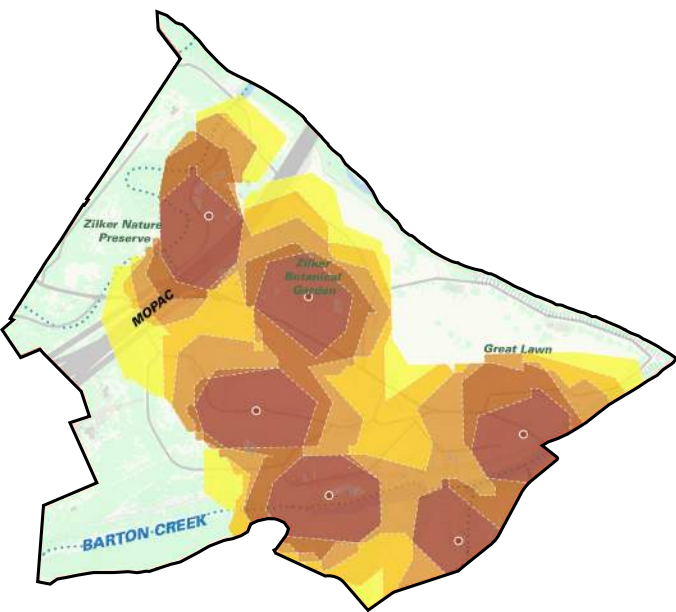
Barton Springs Road is a major divider of the park with minimal signed crossings. It is a very dangerous to cross as a pedestrian or cyclist and no internal circulation exists other than by bicycle or personal vehicle.

Zilker Eagle has been envisioned to take on a broader role in the park's future. Given the limitations of the Zilker Eagle's current location (steep grades, pedestrian-train conflicts, narrow space under Barton Springs Road), the plan envisions a future for the Zilker Eagle that moves and expands the loop to the north side of the park. This loop would have stations at a handful of locations – the land bridge, the parking area near the ZBG/ANSC, and the Toomey Road connection – allowing visitors to cover more areas of the park without having to walk the entirety. For successful operation, a maintenance yard and train storage area must be incorporated along the current rail alignment and on the north side of the park, if moved or expanded in the future.

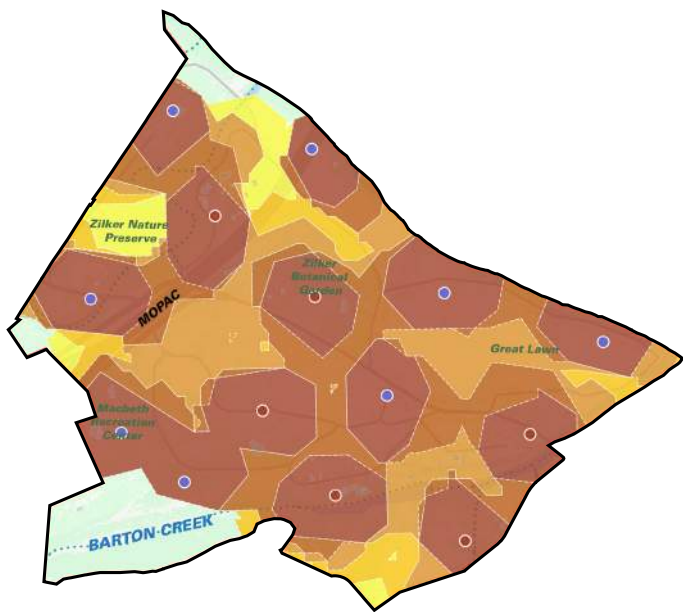
In addition to the Zilker Eagle, an internal shuttle that uses the existing roadways and wide shared pathways, and makes frequent stops, could allow greater access to and from bus stops, ANSC, sports area, ZBG, and pool.

INADEQUATE RESTROOMS

RESTROOMS



EXISTING RESTROOMS



PROPOSED RESTROOMS

There are 6 locations for public restrooms, excluding portable restrooms, in Zilker Park currently. This includes 2 within ZBG and ANSC facilities. This is not enough to serve the 350-acre park. The diagrams above are showing a 1 minute to 5 minutes walking radius from the current restrooms and how many restrooms are needed to serve the entire park. Based on the analysis, Zilker Park needs at least 8 more restroom locations to cover most of the parkland within a 5 minute walking distance.

LEGEND

- 1-min Walking Radius
- 2-min Walking Radius
- 3-min Walking Radius
- 4-min Walking Radius
- 5-min Walking Radius

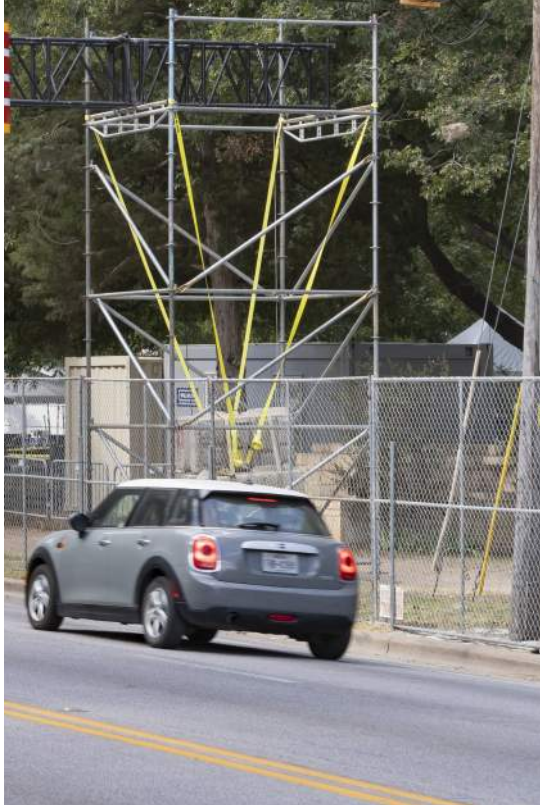


Zilker Park Trailhead Restrooms
Source: 2021. Malla Photography



Zilker Restroom on the South Side of Barton Springs Pool

PROGRAMMING CONFLICTS



Fenced Great Lawn



Metrobike Station along Barton Springs Road

EVENTS

Austin City Limits, Blues on the Green, Kite Festival, Zilker Summer Musical, Zilker Botanical Garden Events, and Trail of Lights are beloved events that occur in Zilker Park. 76% of respondents, from Zilker Park Vision Plan Community Survey #2 responded they enjoy all of the events in the park or at least one of the large events. However, there are programming conflicts and they need better synchronization.

The biggest issue identified by the community is that is that the large events close the park in the prime weather time. Austin City Limits Music Festival happens only for two weekends but the park is closed before for setting up and after to clean up. This conflict means visitors cannot access much of the park. City Ordinance Section 8-1-15 designates a maximum of 24 special event days for Zilker per calendar year. Additional closure days of portions of Zilker may occur for operations of the park, including limited access due to set-up, take-down, or maintenance. The plan identifies considerations to balance these closures so that park can be used even during major events.

Also, the events in Zilker Park should set an example for green best practices. Events cause an impact on the environment through intense human activities such as the construction of stages, energy use, transportation, and waste. Decisions in the early stages of planning can have a significant impact on the nature of the environmental impact an event will have. It is therefore advisable to put environmental sustainability at the heart of all decision-making and to develop a basic environmental assessment and event execution plan at the beginning of the preparation phase. Policies to address environmental issues should also take into account supplier behavior, such as through green procurement policies.

LACK OF SUPPORT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

The lack of appropriate infrastructure for park programming is also an issue. For instance, Zilker Hillside Theater is challenged due to the lack of utility support. The location of major utilities within the park should be reviewed for appropriate site uses. Additional infrastructure support will also reduce the reliance on generators which impact the environment.

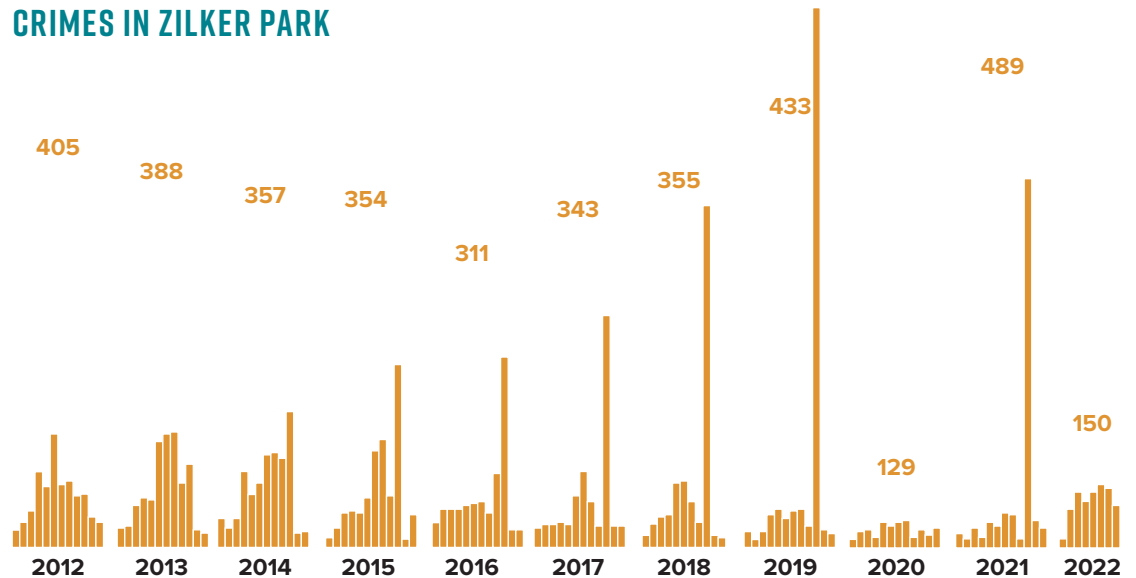
Additional transportation infrastructure is also needed. The two MetroBike stations and 7 bus stops within the park should be expanded along with additional ways to access the park for people from each part of the city and beyond.



SAFETY

This graph is based on [Austin Police Department Crime Dashboard](#) for the Parks and Recreation Department, showing total number of crimes by month.

CRIMES IN ZILKER PARK



Zilker Park is not a crime-free area, unfortunately. There are an average of 383 crimes per year in the past 10 years. 49.9% of the crimes are thefts and mostly happen during weekends. One fact worth noting is that most of the crimes happened in October, likely during Austin City Limits. For instance, in 2019, there were 355 crimes overall but there were 322 crimes in October, and 309 of them are during Austin City Limits weekends. In line with rates across the country, the total number of crimes have increased since 2016, except in 2020, with the influence of COVID-19.

The Vision Plan should consider environmental design factors that improve safety such as clear sight lines, creating greater visibility, and encouraging visitor traffic in high-risk areas.

LIGHTING IN THE PARK

A brighter park does not necessarily mean a safer park based on recent studies. However, park users report feeling safer. Lighting is critical to improving the perception of safety by maximizing visual and physical access to spaces.

When asked what keeps people from using Austin Parks during the PARD Long Range Plan process, “Lack of lighting” was ranked 6th and “Crime or safety concerns” was 1st. People often do not feel safe in Zilker Park, especially at night.

An overall increase in lighting for the park is beneficial to the community by daunting crime and encouraging after-dark community activities while respecting the nature experience and park aesthetic. The Parks and Recreation Department’s “Park Security Lighting Project” should be applied to Zilker Park to increase safety and security at parks by installing solar-powered LED lighting without grid-supplied power.

ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Zilker Metropolitan Park is central to the history, culture, and ecology of Austin, Texas. Ecologically, the site includes a diversity of plant communities influenced by topographic changes, variation in soils, hill country geology, impacts from a long history of site use, and periodic flooding that have shaped the landscape. These communities range from riparian habitat by the water's edge to woodlands on steep slopes. Zilker Park plays an indispensable role as a refuge for residents and wildlife. Lying along the eastern boundary of the Edwards Plateau ecoregion, Zilker Park contains four major springs and shoreline for three waterbodies, is home to two endangered salamander species, offers habitat for 33 bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and supports over 600 species of native flora and fauna. All of this ecological culture is at significant risk if the park continues down its current path.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2012, the City of Austin adopted the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, which included Priority Program #4: Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city. It also established a definition of green infrastructure as a strategically planned and managed network of natural lands, parks, working landscapes, open spaces, and green stormwater controls that conserve and enhance ecosystem services and provide associated benefits to human populations.

As climate change intensifies and results in higher temperatures and more extreme weather events, the many forms of green infrastructure will become increasingly important. Climate vulnerability and tree planting priority in Austin from the City of Austin Green Infrastructure Assessment shows areas that are climate vulnerable as a result of urban heat island temperature increases, lack of urban forest, and lack of shade over impervious cover. In addition, these areas coincide with higher levels of social vulnerability and worse health outcomes. The result is a park system that is adapting to and mitigating climate change. These same concepts must be integrated into the Zilker Park Vision Plan to create a sustainable park that addresses climate change. The plan proposes increasing shade over impervious cover, restoring degraded shoreline through terracing and the implementing green infrastructure and stormwater management techniques throughout the park.

WATER QUALITY IMPACT

The ecology of Zilker Park is defined by its waters. Zilker Park faces several critical water quality issues such as controlling and reducing stormwater runoff from impervious cover, reducing the impacts of users on waterways, and protecting the spring areas. Good water quality is a top priority for Barton Springs Conservancy because water from the springs supports the park's endangered salamanders and the park's overall ecological health. These issues can be addressed in part by adjusting land management practices within the park. The Vision Plan addresses these issues by proposing bank restoration that allows visitors controlled access to the water, a decrease in impervious cover throughout the park, and stormwater mitigation strategies.

AREAS OF POTENTIAL CONTAMINATION

Zilker Park has three main areas of environmental contamination concern—the Butler Landfill, the Pistol and Skeet Range, and the West Butler Landfill. In anticipation of future renovations planned for various areas on site, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment was completed for Zilker Park in 2019 by TRC Environmental Corporation. The following Site Analysis and Need Assessment sections detail the type of contamination present in each of these three areas. This information can be used to plan future mitigation and restoration actions.

ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS



Stormwater damage



Barton Springs Spillway Area

INVASIVE SPECIES AND SOIL DISTURBANCE

Invasive species and soil disturbance are the primary threats to ecological health in Zilker Park. Invasive species are generally introduced from other countries or regions and cause economic and/or ecological harm. They are one of the primary ecological threats in Zilker Park. Their aggressive growth threatens native plant communities by altering soil chemistry, direct displacement (“crowding out”), and changing the light in or below the canopy. In doing so, they also impact native animals and insects by interfering with their food, shelter, and protection. Any action or infrastructure that removes, compacts, or covers soil will have an impact on a site’s ability to support a healthy ecosystem. The primary causes of soil disturbance in Zilker Park are stormwater flow, poorly functioning or absent infrastructure, mowing and use of other heavy machinery, off-trail recreation, formal recreation without suitable supporting infrastructure, and erosion of trail material. Soil disturbance is problematic in all areas but is particularly concerning along environmentally sensitive waterways such as Barton Creek.

INTEGRATE ECOLOGY WITH PARK USE

Unfortunately, Zilker Park is being degraded by the volume of users coming to enjoy the park without adequate infrastructure or design to support them. Off-trail recreation, water access, and trail conditions are impacting Zilker Park’s natural areas. Many of these problems can be addressed by providing infrastructure that meets the needs and volume of park users. The Zilker Vision plan addresses the following needs: trails, water access, gathering locations, trail size and maintenance, as well as physical barriers to environmentally sensitive areas.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Zilker Park serves as a refuge and migration corridor for wildlife in the highly developed Austin area. More than 260 wildlife species have been observed in the park, including 6 amphibians (2 of which are endangered salamanders), 2 fish, 1 mollusk, 224 birds, 9 mammals, and 20 reptiles. The proposed plant communities described in the The Vision Plan have habitat features that support a variety of wildlife. For example, the 16 acres of enhanced and expanded meadows feature native grasses and wildflowers to attract pollinators. The meadows will create prime conditions for the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Eastern Meadowlark, both of which are classified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by the Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife (TPWD).



TREES IN ZILKER PARK

Most trees are relatively small, except for pecans, which have an average diameter at breast height of 19.5 inches. However, there are 70 trees over 19 inches, qualifying as protected by the City of Austin. Of those, 31 are heritage trees, 26 of which are pecans.

During the ice storm of 2023, many trees were damaged and are still being assessed.

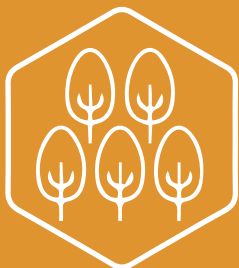
GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS



SUSTAINABILITY



EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



NATURE AND ECOLOGY



HISTORY AND CULTURE



ACCESSIBILITY

The Guiding Principles are fundamental values confirmed by the community that drive the overall purpose of the Vision Plan. They provide a framework for decision-making and exploring input through the lens of these shared values. The corresponding goals are tied to action. They are specific, measurable, attainable, and time-bound. The Guiding Principles are built on community engagement that took place early in the planning process.



Sustainability

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The plan should champion sustainability best practices for the park.
- » The plan should be forward-looking and should embrace both its challenges and its opportunities for future generations.
- » Zilker Park should serve as an example of sustainability, protecting and enhancing our natural spaces and assets.

GOALS

- 1** Implement adaptive management strategies to create a resilient landscape in the face of climate change and dynamic user needs.
- 2** Achieve balance between metropolitan use and ecological/environmental concerns.
- 3** Balance revenue and ecological/environmental health with operations and maintenance of the park.
- 4** Provide equitable opportunities for access to the park and enjoyment of amenities.
- 5** Explore new and harness existing partnerships that extend the reach of the Parks Department to accommodate new opportunities.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » Zilker Park should serve the entire community of Austin.
- » Programs should be aligned with community interest.

GOALS

- 1** Design park elements that are welcoming to individuals and small groups and able to accommodate large groups.
- 2** Support equitable access, with special focus on:
 - Safety
 - Accessibility
 - Events and programs for diverse cultures
- 3** Support new and enhance existing learning opportunities within the park.
- 4** Sustain the implementation and maintenance of the park and stewardship of the park utilizing volunteers and partner organizations.



Nature and Ecology

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The Plan should treat the Park as an ecological treasure.
- » The plan should recognize the park's relation to water and explore opportunities for interaction with the lake and creek without compromising environmental integrity.

GOALS

- 1** Protect, enhance, and restore land and waterscape elements that are imperative for ecological function.
- 2** Establish an interpretive program to educate visitors, especially for the youth about the park's sensitive features. Public stewardship should be developed as part of the interpretive program.
- 3** The Plan should champion best practices in green design, planning and land management.
- 4** Ensure safe and sustainable access to the water including entry to Lady Bird Lake and Barton Creek, while protecting them.
- 5** The Plan should protect Zilker's natural resources for generations to come.
- 6** Support and rehabilitate native plants and species.



History and Culture

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The park is a metropolitan park which has a regional draw and focus.
- » The Plan should treat the Park's historic and cultural resources as a valued legacy to be celebrated for future generations.

GOALS

- 1** The Plan should honor and respect the Park's historic and cultural resources and should integrate them into the future life of the park.
- 2** The Plan should offer a framework that provides a successful balance between historic preservation and current/future needs.
- 3** The Plan should tell the deeper and complete stories of the people and the history of the park to better enrich the visitor experience and to elevate a sense of public stewardship.
- 4** The Plan should create opportunities for local artists and art to be a part of park spaces. These opportunities may include music, performance, and temporary exhibits.
- 5** Celebrate the stories of the people that lived on the land throughout history, including the indigenous people, and bring to light those stories that are not often heard.
- 6** Establish and integrate education components such as an education center to encourage and convey cultural and historical aspects of the park.



Accessibility

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- » The plan should knit the segmented pieces of the park together, ensuring a more accessible, safe, and connected park.
- » The park should be a place you can reach with multiple travel options.

GOALS

- 1** Ensure there are multiple safe, enjoyable, and convenient modes of transportation to access the park.
- 2** Improve and incentivize non-automobile mode access to, from, and within the park, in support of the City's ambitious mode split and climate goals.
- 3** Improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation between the north and south side of Barton Springs Rd. Make travel through the park and to various parts of the park intuitive, safe, and easy by foot, bike, and accessible paths.
- 4** Examine the surrounding trail network to create and extend safe active travel within and through the park.
- 5** Create accessible multi-modal transportation networks within the park.
- 6** Improve the wayfinding to and from different park destinations. Provide clear circulation, entryways, gateways, and connectivity between facilities within the park and throughout the park elements.
- 7** Use transportation assets efficiently, to preserve park space for ecological and recreation systems.
- 8** Collaborate with CapMetro and TxDOT to review, analyze, and recommend the transportation system to and around the park.
- 9** Achieve a high level of ADA accessibility within the park.

RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS



PARD LONG RANGE PLAN FOR LAND FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

The Long Range Plan was finalized in 2019 and provides guidance for Austin's park system with goals that inspire and are achievable. The plan identifies how and where to invest in the system to ensure it supports our residents, employees, and visitors as Austin continues to grow and change. Some of the reasons for this document are that the population of and developed land within Austin are both increasing and the need for parkland is on the rise. The Parks Department is striving to keep up with growth. PARD partners with other city departments, non-profit organizations, conservancies, community groups, and businesses to enhance and improve parks, increase recreational and cultural opportunities, preserve natural areas, celebrate arts and culture, and maximize the public benefit at minimum taxpayer cost.

Priorities for future planning that came out of the community engagement for this document included improving connections and access, and investing in existing parks.

Recommendations specific to Zilker include upgrading and improving site conditions at the Zilker Clubhouse, continuing the Zilker Loop Trail development and Barton Creek Crossing upstream from the pool, constructing a loop trail extension and bridge, and implementing a master plan.

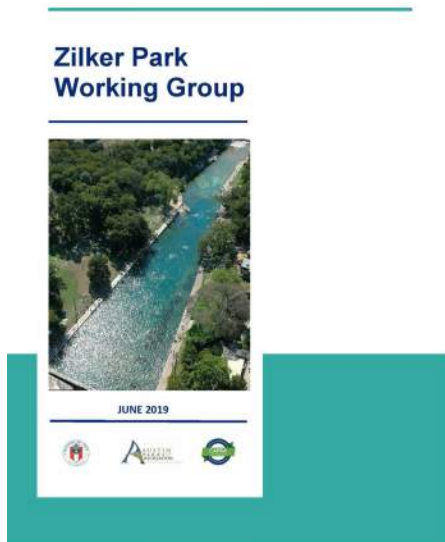
2019 ZILKER PARK WORKING GROUP REPORT

In 2019, City Council created a Zilker Park Working Group with representatives from each City Council District and key stakeholder groups. The idea for making the short-term recommendations was to initiate pilot programs and gather data that could help inform the Zilker Park Vision Plan process. These are just a portion of the relevant recommendations.

In regards to illegal surface parking on lawn areas, this plan recommends reducing available Polo Fields parking in phases over time. The Millennium Parking Garages (Chicago) are specifically referenced as a potential model. The Zilker Park Vision Plan uses this recommendation to remove parking on the polo fields entirely and implement an underground parking garage and parallel parking along Barton Springs Road to serve the parking needs in the area.

The alternative recommendations in this plan were issued in a joint statement from: Barton Hills Neighborhood Association, Zilker Neighborhood Association, Save our Springs Alliance, City Council District 7, City Council District 5.

These recommendations argue for a less gradual approach with hard Short-Term deadlines, citing specific concern over a lack of definitive plan for removing the gravel over the Butler Landfill. The Zilker Park Vision Plan incorporated these recommendations by removing surface parking and event access from the Butler Landfill, and creating a definitive restoration plan for the site within the Ecological Uplift programming.



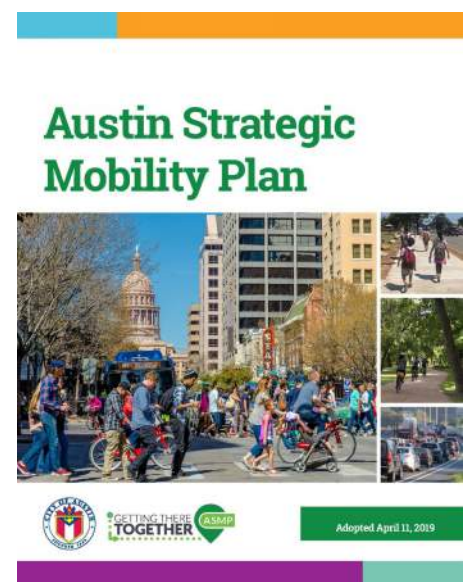
The alternative recommendations joint statement also offered the following medium and long-term recommendations. PARD should preserve and protect Zilker Park as an irreplaceable public asset to be operated primarily as open space for present and future generations. The Zilker Park Master Plan should establish a viable, actionable plan that minimizes vehicular traffic in and through the park and surrounding neighborhoods by identifying a range of alternative, affordable transportation and parking strategies for park patrons. The Zilker Park Vision Plan responded to these recommendations by preserving flexible open fields, while also offering more diverse programming as asked for in the Long Range plan and recommending that Barton Springs Road be put on a road diet and reduced to one lane in each direction following a traffic study conducted by the Austin Transportation Department. The Vision Plan also recommends increasing public transportation routes to the park, an internal circulator for the park, using the Zilker Eagle to connect amenities within the park, an increase in protected bike lanes, and other support for micro-mobility options.

AUSTIN STRATEGIC MOBILITY PLAN

Issued in April of 2019, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan outlines recommendations related to placemaking, economic prosperity, sustainability, and health and safety. The plan calls for the construction of a transportation network that encourages social interaction through quality urban design and connects users to the many places that make Austin unique. Lowering the risk of travel-related injury and promoting public health will protect Austinites. Active transportation access for all ages and abilities on sidewalk, bicycle, and urban trail systems should be built. Active transportation initiatives should be advanced and Austinites should be connected to services and opportunities for better health.

A review of the transportation network maps from the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan reveal the following priorities that affect Zilker Park:

- Barton Springs road is part of the High-Injury Network. The Vision Plan addresses this concern by recommending that Barton Spring road be reduced to one lane in each direction with protected bike lanes and pedestrian crossings.
- Stratford Drive is considered a substandard Street and Barton Springs Road is listed as a Bicycle Facilities improvement project. All Ages and Abilities Bicycle Facilities Map indicates that Stratford Drive is substandard street that needs sidewalk improvement and improved bicycle facilities. The Vision Plan addresses these concerns by recommending re-routing Stratford Drive along Mopac for vehicles, and creating a shared use path for pedestrians and cyclists in its place within the park. The Vision Plan also recommends protected bike lanes along Barton Springs Road.
- Bicycle facilities improvement is needed on Andrew Zilker Road. The Vision Plan addresses this need by recommending closing Andrew Zilker Road to vehicles and making it a pedestrian and cyclist shared use path.



RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS

- Barton Springs, Rollingwood Drive, Dellana Lane, Nature Center Drive, Stratford Drive have absent sidewalks, while Barton Springs Road has existing sidewalks on the sidewalk prioritization list. The Vision Plan addresses these concerns by recommending that all sidewalks be completed, connected, and meet ADA requirements.



BARTON SPRINGS POOL MASTER PLAN

Completed in 2008 the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan is driven by consideration of water quality and salamander habitat improvements, grounds improvements, infrastructure improvements and facilities improvements with the goal of returning the site to its rightful glory where the water was cleaner and the experience of the pool was more enjoyable and the ability to accommodate the significant user demands on Austin's most popular park amenity. Among the sprawling array of recommendations, these are specifically relevant to this planning effort:

- Create a Visitor's Center at or near the Beverly S, Sheffield Education Center. The Vision Plan responds to this recommendation by suggesting a welcome plaza near the Beverly S, Sheffield Education Center that incorporates other historic buildings in the park.
- Recognizing that about 75% of the existing trees were a single species (pecans)—diversify the tree canopy, The Vision Plan responds to this concern by recommending an increase to the shade canopy that also improves species diversity within the park.

The Barton Springs Pool Master Plan also acknowledged a few important issues beyond its scope:

- Recognizing the problem of overcrowding and lack of parking—improve transit connections. The Zilker Park Vision Plan responds to this concern by suggesting an internal circulator within the park, removing a majority of surface parking from the core of the park and offering parking options underground or at the perimeter, recommending contracts with third party parking facilitators and increased public transportation to the park.
- Recognizing the scarcity of public accommodations in the park and the burden it places on the facilities in the bathhouse—add more public restrooms. The Zilker Park Vision Plan responds to this concern by recommending the construction of at least 8 more restrooms throughout the park to ensure a 5 minute walkshed between each one.
- Recognizing the congestion around Eliza Spring and within the Barton Springs zone generally—relocate the Zilker Zephyr (Zilker Eagle) track route. The Zilker Park Vision Plan suggests a more northern route for the Zilker Eagle that could also support internal circulation.

2020 AUSTIN CLIMATE EQUITY PLAN

The signs showing climate change in Austin are clear and the natural system has significant role to handle this change. Completed in 2020, this reports set up goals and strategies to keep Austin's natural lands and farm land and reduce carbon emissions for a climate equity.

Some of the goals and strategies of this plan are:

By 2030, legally protect an additional 20,000 acres of carbon pools on natural lands and manage all new and existing natural areas (approximately 70,000 acres total) with a focus on resilience. Strategies to achieve this goal include protecting natural lands, managing natural lands for resilience, increasing community access and positive perceptions of public land, and protecting water sources. The Zilker Vision Plan Responds to this goal by recommending the implementation of the Ecological Uplift strategy, improving accessibility and safety within the park, and creek bank restoration and stormwater mitigation strategies.

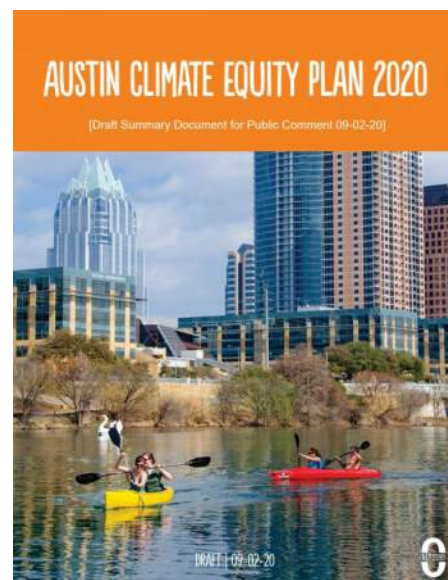
Achieve at least 50% citywide tree canopy cover by 2050, with a focus on increasing canopy cover equitably. Strategies to meet this goal include protect canopy cover on City lands, promote tree protections and landscape regulations, and increase community tree planting. The Zilker Park Vision Plan responds to this goal by recommending an increase in the shade canopy by XXXXXXXX percent through the use of diverse tree species and suggesting that all trails provide shade to visitors.

By 2030, include all City-owned lands under a management plan that results in neutral or negative carbon emissions and maximizes community co-benefits. Strategies to achieve this goal include prioritizing carbon neutrality for public lands, reclaim public space and prioritize green infrastructure, promote community stewardship and promote carbon farming.

WATERSHED PROTECTION STRATEGIC PLAN

The Watershed Protection Strategic Plan updated in August 2016, greatly expands the scope of the area evaluated for problem identification and solution proposal, building on the original 17 core watersheds studied in 2001 to present key parameters in 49 watersheds. The goals of the plan are to reduce the impact of flooding, erosion, and water pollution in the Austin communities. The detailed goals are below:

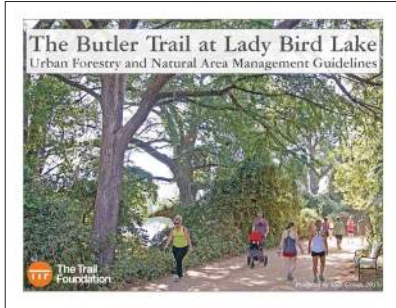
- Protect lives and property by reducing the impact of flood events. The Zilker Park Vision plan incorporates this goal by recommended implementation of stormwater mitigation strategies and the repair of eroded creek banks within the park.
- Protect and improve Austin's waterways and aquifers for citizen use and support of aquatic life. Similarly the Vision Plan supports this goal through stormwater mitigation, Ecological Uplift, and eroded bank repair with controlled access to the water for visitors.



RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS



Zilker Park Natural Resources Inventory & Management Guidelines



The Butler Trail at Lady Bird Lake

SIGLO GROUP

ZILKER PARK NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY & MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

This report was finalized in April 2021, and a summary can be found in the “Environmental” section of this report.

THE TRAIL FOUNDATION

THE BUTLER TRAIL AT LADY BIRD LAKE

The Butler Trail Urban Forestry and Ecological Restoration Guidelines Environmental Site Assessment presents thorough research of the history, plant and animal species, soil, and erosion in the area where Zilker Park meets Lady Bird Lake.

ZILKER NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

ZILKER NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Zilker and some surrounding neighborhoods do not currently have a formal neighborhood plan adopted by the City to guide land use decisions. However, in other planning documents the Zilker Neighborhood Association has prepared, there is an emphasis on decreasing the amount of parking in Zilker Park now, and instead using current parking areas for park use. There is also a desire for more public transit and bike options, and a wish to avoid privatization of park elements. The ZNA would like the issue of climate change mitigation addressed as part of the Zilker Park Vision Plan.



Zilker Park Bathhouse Zone Feasibility Study

CITY OF AUSTIN

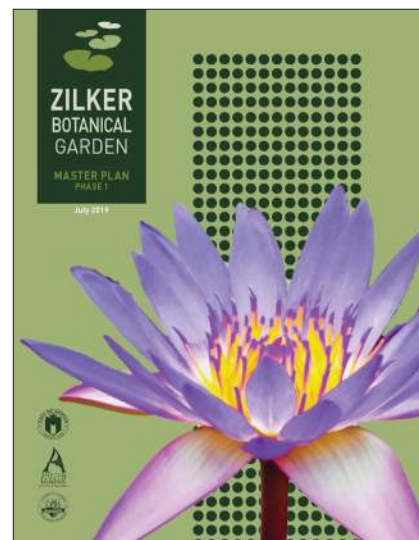
ZILKER PARK BATHHOUSE ZONE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Adopted in 2016, This study examines the feasibility of various improvements to grounds and facilities in the Barton Springs Pool area. Its recommendations incorporate the goals of the 2008 Barton Springs Pool Master Plan as well as the challenges of the numerous environmental, historical and local regulations that apply to this area. Move forward with planned and funded projects including:

- Install parking meters
- Daylight the Eliza Springs outlet
- Build the Violet Crown Trailhead restrooms
- Remove and relocate the existing maintenance facilities.

CITY OF AUSTIN 2019 ZILKER BOTANICAL GARDEN MASTER PLAN

Issued in July of 2019, the Zilker Botanical Garden Vision Plan is highly relevant to the Zilker Park Vision Plan and makes recommendations related to event facilities, wayfinding, mobility, and more.



Zilker Botanical Garden Master Plan

CITY OF AUSTIN ZILKER PARK NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Zilker Park Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. The National Register Historic District (NRHD) encompasses the entire area of Zilker Park, approximately 350 acres. The historic district designation is based on two of the four applicable National Register criteria for designation. Under Criterion A, for association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, the park is noted for conservation and entertainment/recreation at the local level of significance for its association with the development and design of municipal parks in Austin during the early 20th century. Under Criterion C, for a property that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, the park is noted for architecture and landscape architecture, again at the local level of significance, for numerous elements built within the park that represent the Reform Park Movement design philosophy and Depression-era public works programs. The Zilker Park NRHD describes a total of 69 resources within the district boundary, including buildings, objects, sites and structures.

Zilker Park National Register Historic District

CITY OF AUSTIN ZILKER PARK CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT

Prepared by Julie McGilvray in 2012, the Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report recommends the creation of a preservation management plan with appropriate treatment planning for historic buildings, structures, and sites within Zilker Park and states that an integrated approach to site management, preservation, and conservation is necessary. The report also suggests pursuing SITES certification in the future as many of the requirements are already in place, including an inventory of resources, the site history, native plants preference, recreational land use, educational land use, and integrity of hard and softscapes.

Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report

RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS



Environmental Site Assessment

TRC COMPANIES, INC.

ENVIRONMENTAL SITE ASSESSMENT PHASE I

The assessment's purpose was to identify Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs) at Zilker Park as defined by the ASTM E 1527-13 standard. Three RECs were identified: 1) Butler Landfill, due to the constituents of concerns at levels above their respective Protective Concentration Levels exceedances and the potential from comingling of groundwater within the landfill with surface waters at Lady Bird Lake. 2) Pistol and Skeet range area, including the wooded area to the north due to the presence or likely presence of lead at levels which indicate an impact to environment. 3) Area at the northwest portion of Zilker Park currently used as the West Butler Landfill, due to the storage of the asphalt, electric powered carts and small vehicles with lead-acid batteries, surplus lawn-maintenance equipment, and chemical containers without cover and/or impervious pavement, which represents a material threat of a release of hazardous substances and/or petroleum products to the environment.



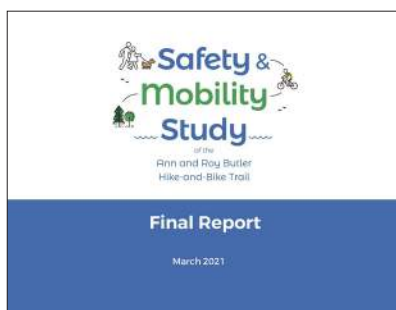
Capital Metro Transit Development Plan

TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT & DESIGN, INC.

CAPITAL METRO TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Route 30 (which serves Zilker Park) was proposed to operate every 30 minutes (on weekends and weekdays) (pg. 53). Proposed changes in this route would affect ADA paratransit coverage for customers served by route 30.

Connections 2025 also proposes a Mobility Innovation Zone, Zone H (Zilker/Barton Hills), located near Zilker Park. Mobility Innovation Zones pilot mobility solutions (such as shuttles, car sharing, and vanpools), especially where traditional fixed-route transit is difficult to implement.



THE TRAIL CONSERVANCY

SAFE AND MOBILITY STUDY RESULTS FOR THE BUTLER TRAIL 2021

The Safety and Mobility Study Results for Butler Trail include several recommendations, including the creation of a trail head in Zilker Park and incorporating a trail loop within the park that includes the Butler Trail as a segment. It also suggests making Zilker Park feel like an extension of the trail space. The study recommends considering adding a bridge across Barton Creek and closer to Lou Neff Point that can connect from the higher elevation both sides. Also, the study outlines recommended trail widths and surface material standards. These standards are under review with permitting and the update of the master urban trails plan for the city.

CITY OF AUSTIN

PARKLAND EVENTS TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Parkland Events Task Force convened in 2015 and 2016 to make recommendations for events in heavily used parks, such as Zilker Park, Auditorium Shores, and Festival Beach. They have all been subject to caps in the past. The Task Force recommended reducing the number of event days from 29 days to 24 days and suggested other parks such as Bolm Road, John Trevino, Onion Creek, and Walter Long as venue alternatives. The City should ensure all city costs are covered (fees, fines, etc.) for hosting large events. The report recommends developing and using a standardized pre-event and post-event evaluation matrix, ensuring vegetation, trees, and environmentally sensitive areas are protected, and that events are green.

THE CITY OF AUSTIN, ADA OFFICE

2015 ADA IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

According to the 2015 PARD Public Facility ADA Self-Assessment Survey, programs and services provided by both PARD and third-party vendors should be accessible to people with disabilities. Several Zilker park facilities are historic and will require creative design modifications to ensure accessibility.

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MOPAC EXPRESSWAY SOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY

In 2013, TxDOT and the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority started an Environmental Study for the MoPac Expressway, from Slaughter Lane to Cesar Chavez. This study determined the Express Lane(s) Alternative as the Recommended Build Alternative. These include the addition of two new Express Lanes in each direction from Cesar Chavez Street to Slaughter Lane.

ROLLINGWOOD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Although it is not included in any formal discussions, the City of Rollingwood has previously mentioned interest in 1) purchasing the Zilker Preserve, 2) being involved with decisions related to any activity that will affect traffic through the city, and 3) potential improvements to trails that connect Rollingwood and Austin.

CAMPO

CAMPO 2045 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Appendix A of the 2045 Plan Document, the Regional Transportation Plan Projects Lists, includes the following MoPac Expressway South Improvements near Zilker Park.



Parkland Events Task Force Final Report and Recommendations



2015 ADA Implementation Report



CAMPO 2045 Regional Transportation Plan

SUMMARY

Zilker Park has been shaped through the years by its hydrology, history of land use, and the needs of the city that now surrounds it. As the city grows so does its impact on Zilker Park.

By studying the park through its interaction with Austin's transportation network, its ability to be sustained and funded over time, and its place as a home for some of the city's largest events, we can see the park as an anchor within this vibrant city. This Vision Plan seeks to preserve the park's natural features, improve people's access, identify funding for necessary maintenance, and provide proper infrastructure for its millions of annual visitors. There is a healthy foundation of existing policy that can be built upon to protect this ecological and recreational treasure.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Regional Context
- Event Calendar
- Transportation/Mobility
- Ecology
- Regulations
- Utility
- Financial

SITE ANALYSIS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

REGIONAL CONTEXT



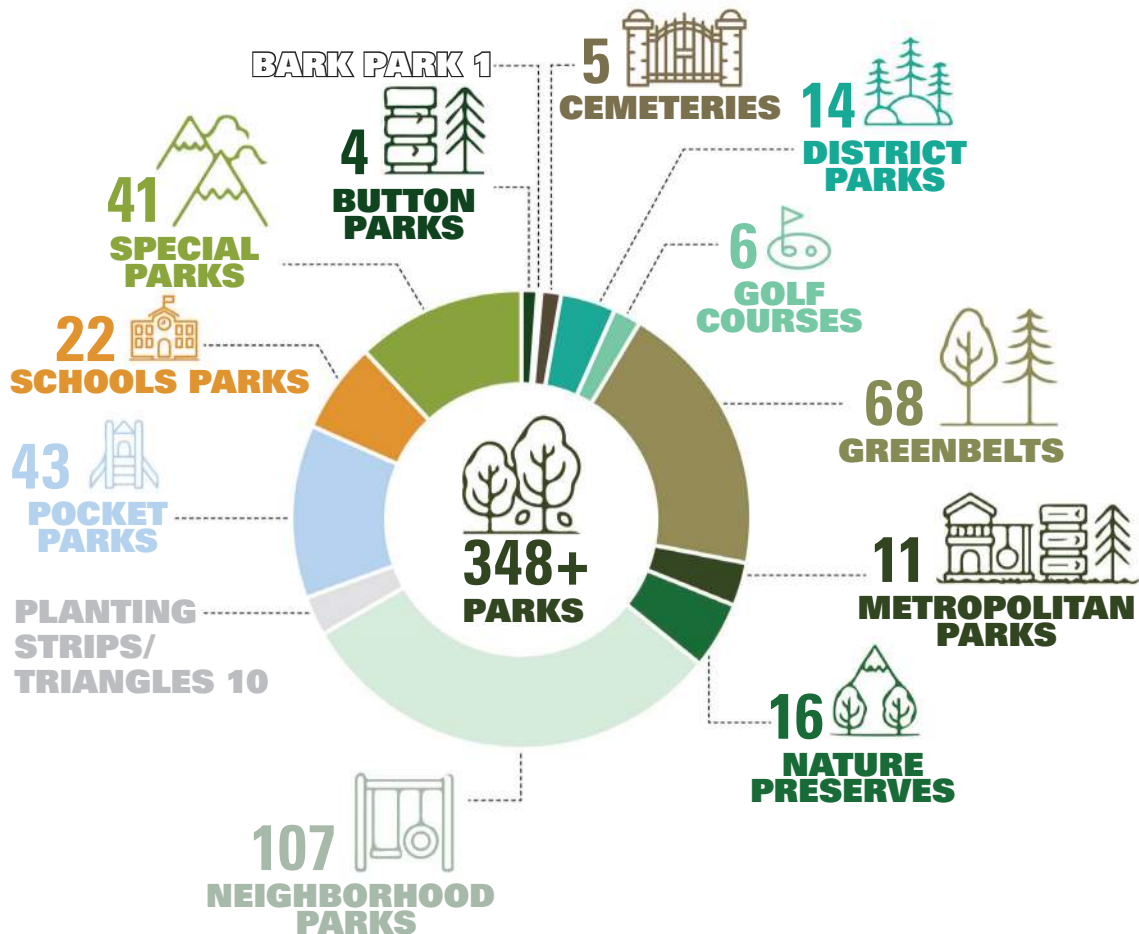
AN URBAN OASIS



Downtown and
High-Density

Zilker Park sees about 2.6 million visitors annually with an average of 7,200 people visiting per day. Located in the heart of Austin, this park is one of the most visited places in the city. Many of these visitors are drawn to the hiking and swimming options within and near Zilker Park. The Park is connected to the Roy and Anne Butler Hike and Bike Trail, the Violet Crown Trail, the Barton Creek Greenbelt, and Ladybird Lake. Barton Springs Pool is not the only swimming hole within this recreational area. Campbell's Hole, Sculpture Falls, Twin Falls, and Gus Fruh are all popular places to get into the water. On nice days, these swimming holes are filled with Austinites of all ages and backgrounds, united by the urge to swim in cool water on a hot day.

ZILKER PARK WITHIN THE AUSTIN PARK SYSTEM



ZILKER METROPOLITAN PARK

- Size: 351 Acres (Zilker Park Vision Plan boundary is 402 acres with 51 acres of Barton Creek Conservancy)
- Address: 2100 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas (78746)
- Facilities: Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin Nature and Science Center, McBeth Recreation Center, Austin Sunshine Camps, Barton Springs Pool, etc.

Zilker Park is classified as a Metropolitan park in Austin Park System. It means the park serves city wide population and has access to major arterials with more large and specialised features and facilities.

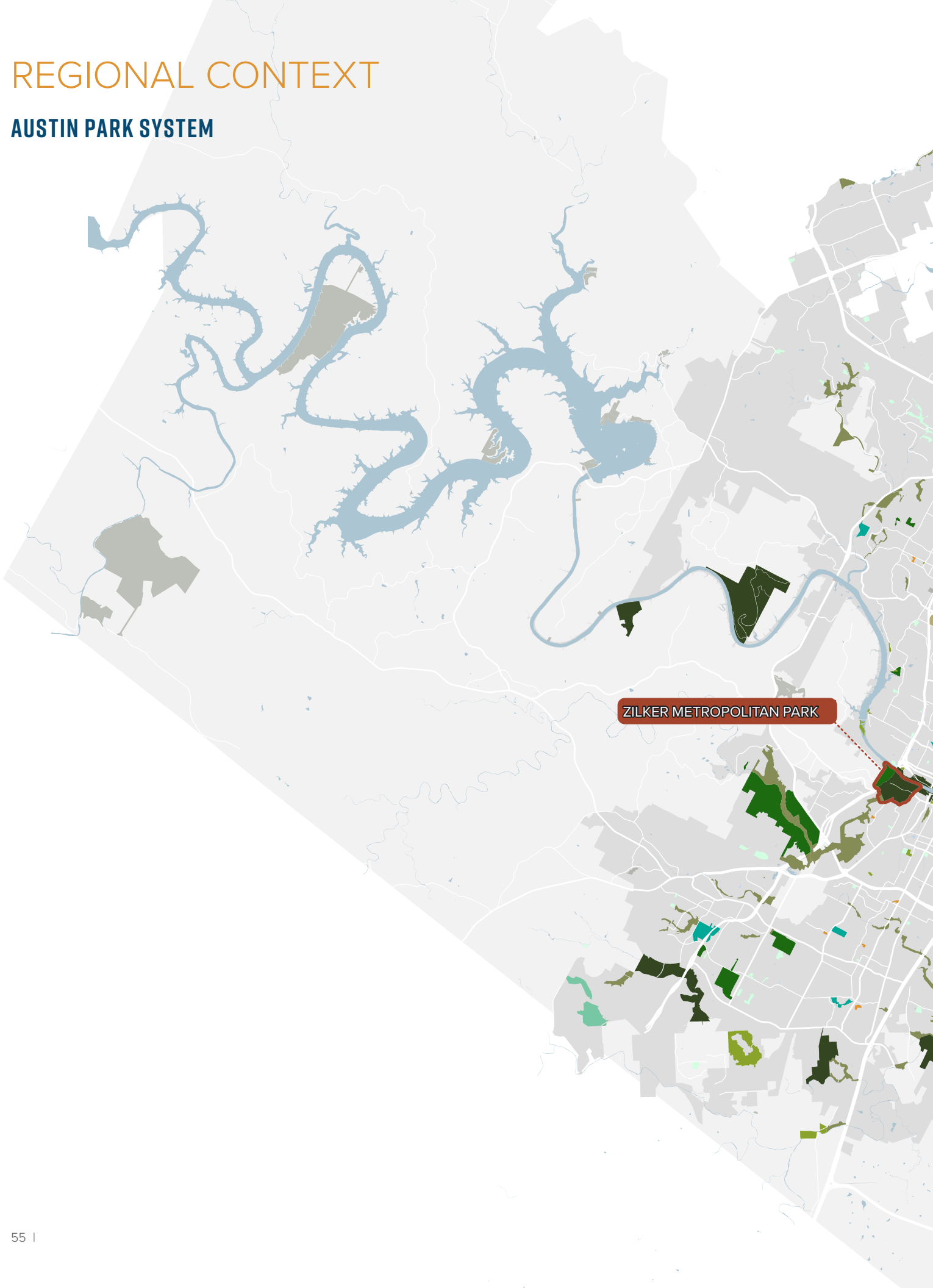
METROPOLITAN PARK

This type of the park focuses on natural resource values and recreational diversity. They often include water-based recreation and environmental education.

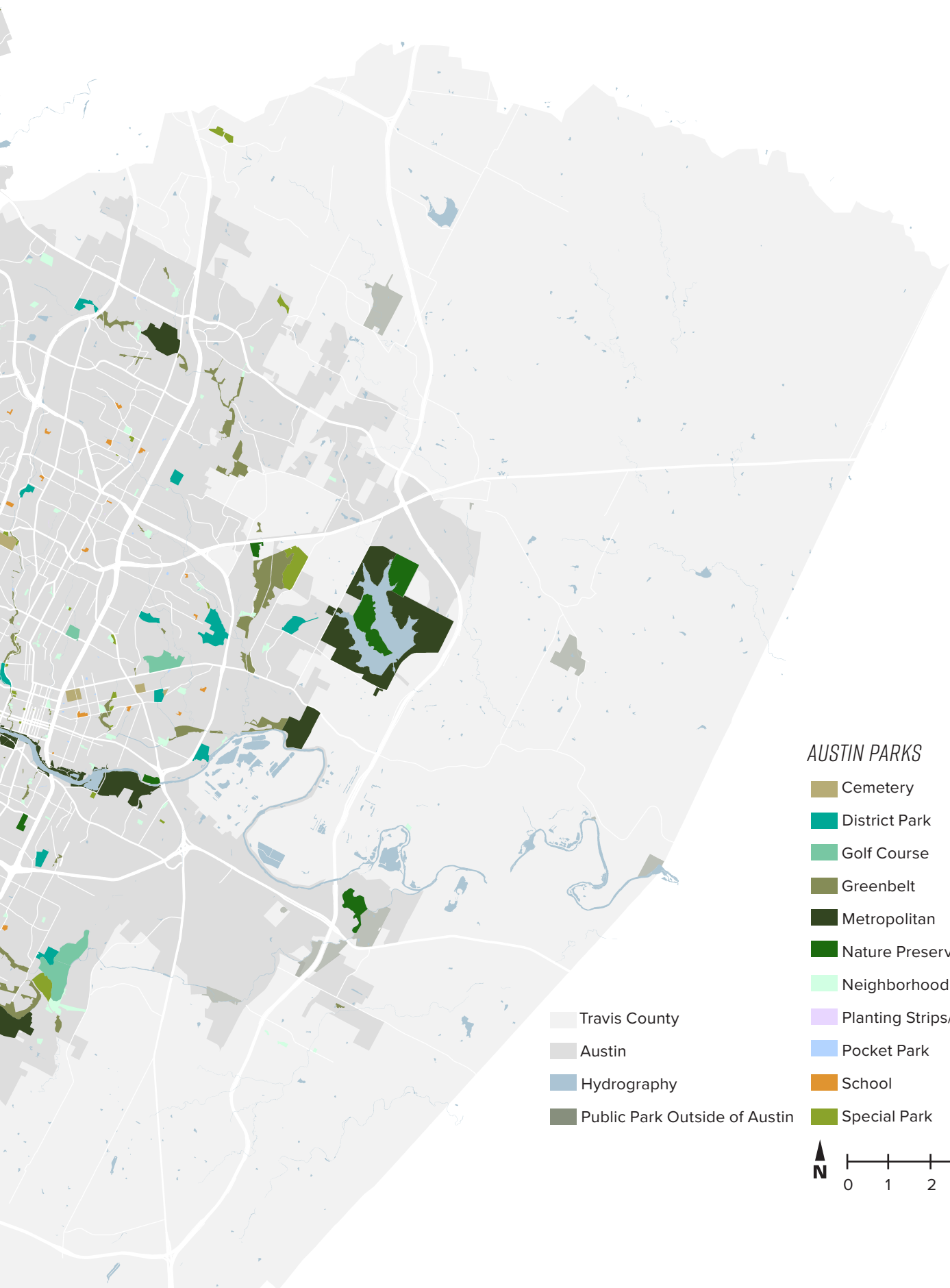
- Size: 201+ Acres
- Service Area: Citywide
- Access: Major Arterials (All Transport Modes)
- Feature: More Large, Specialized Features and Facilities

REGIONAL CONTEXT

AUSTIN PARK SYSTEM



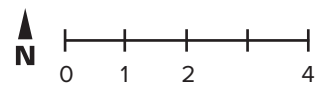
ZILKER METROPOLITAN PARK



AUSTIN PARKS

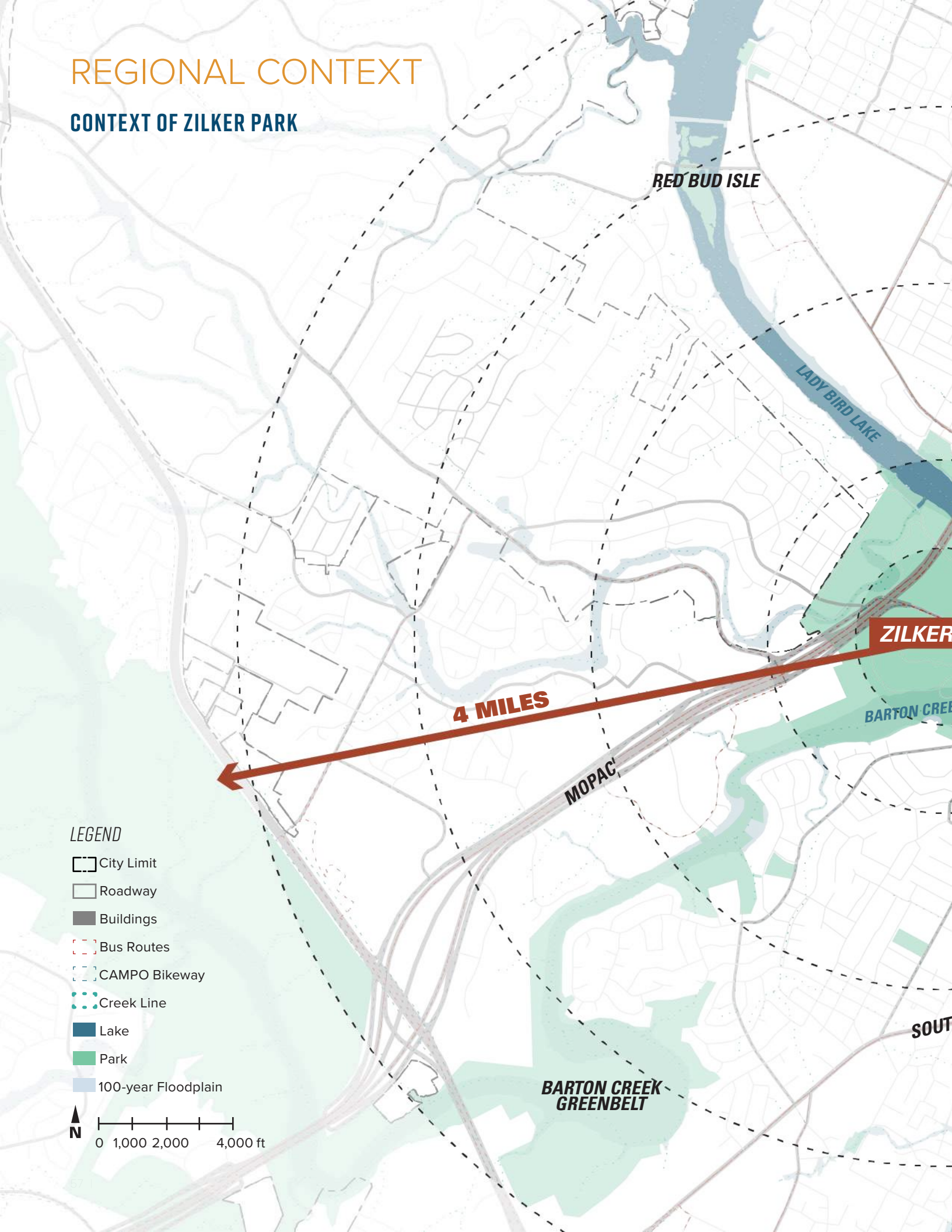
- Cemetery
- District Park
- Golf Course
- Greenbelt
- Metropolitan
- Nature Preserve
- Neighborhood Park
- Planting Strips/Triangles
- Pocket Park
- School
- Special Park

- Travis County
- Austin
- Hydrography
- Public Park Outside of Austin



REGIONAL CONTEXT

CONTEXT OF ZILKER PARK



RED BUD ISLE

LADY BIRD LAKE

ZILKER

BARTON CREEK

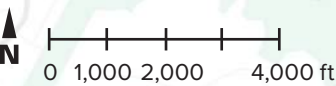
BARTON CREEK
GREENBELT

MOPAC

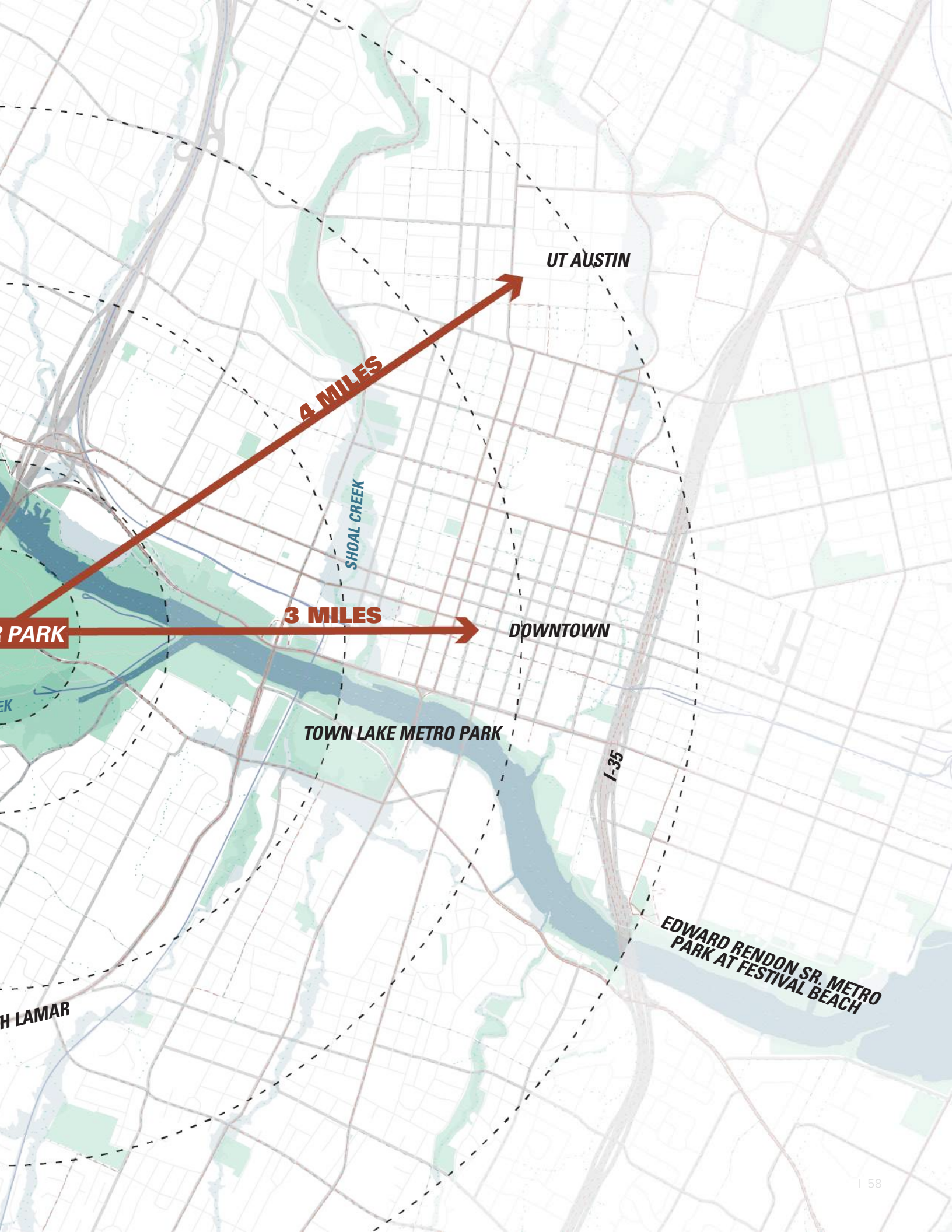
4 MILES

LEGEND

- City Limit
- Roadway
- Buildings
- Bus Routes
- CAMPO Bikeway
- Creek Line
- Lake
- Park
- 100-year Floodplain



SOUT



UT AUSTIN

4 MILES

SHOAL CREEK

3 MILES

DOWNTOWN

TOWN LAKE METRO PARK

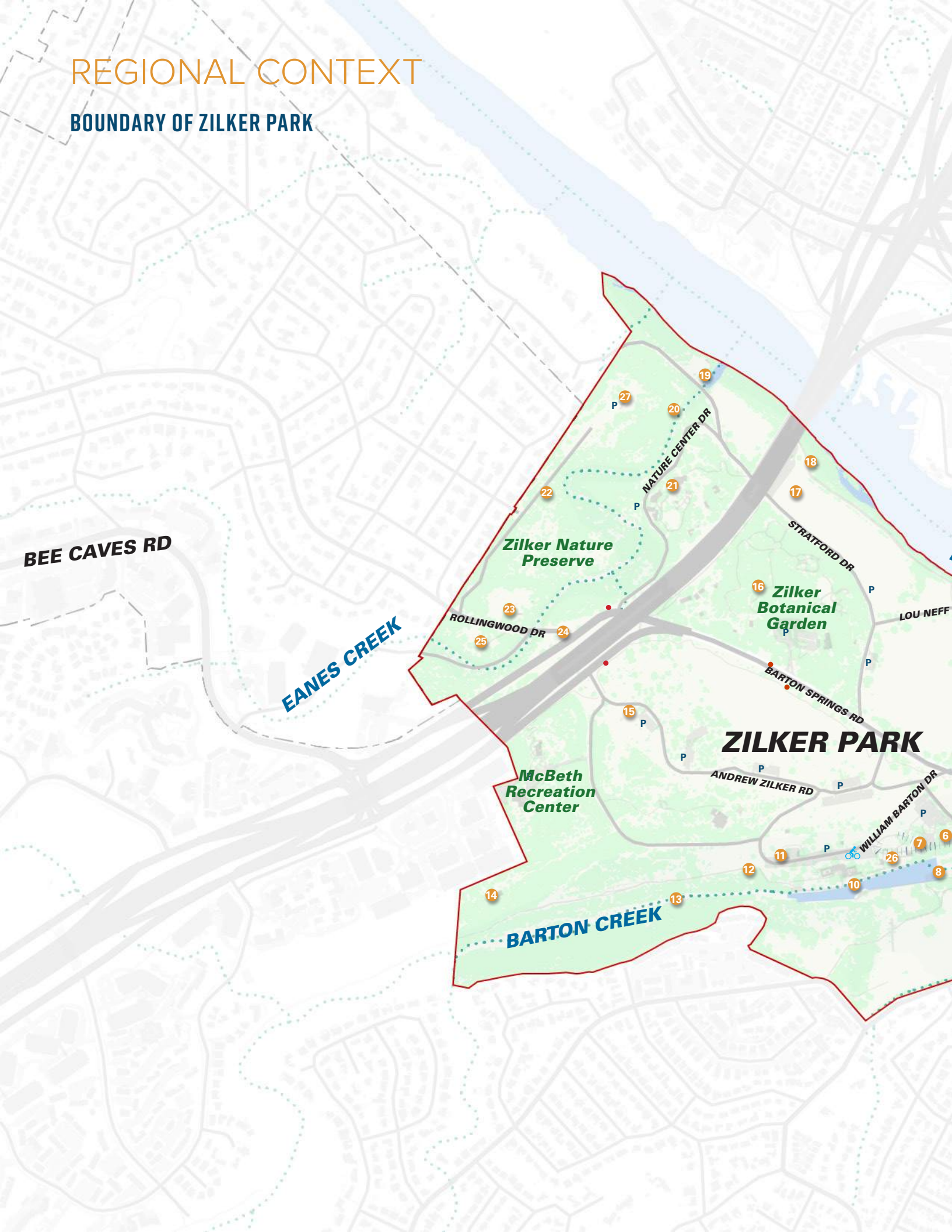
I-35

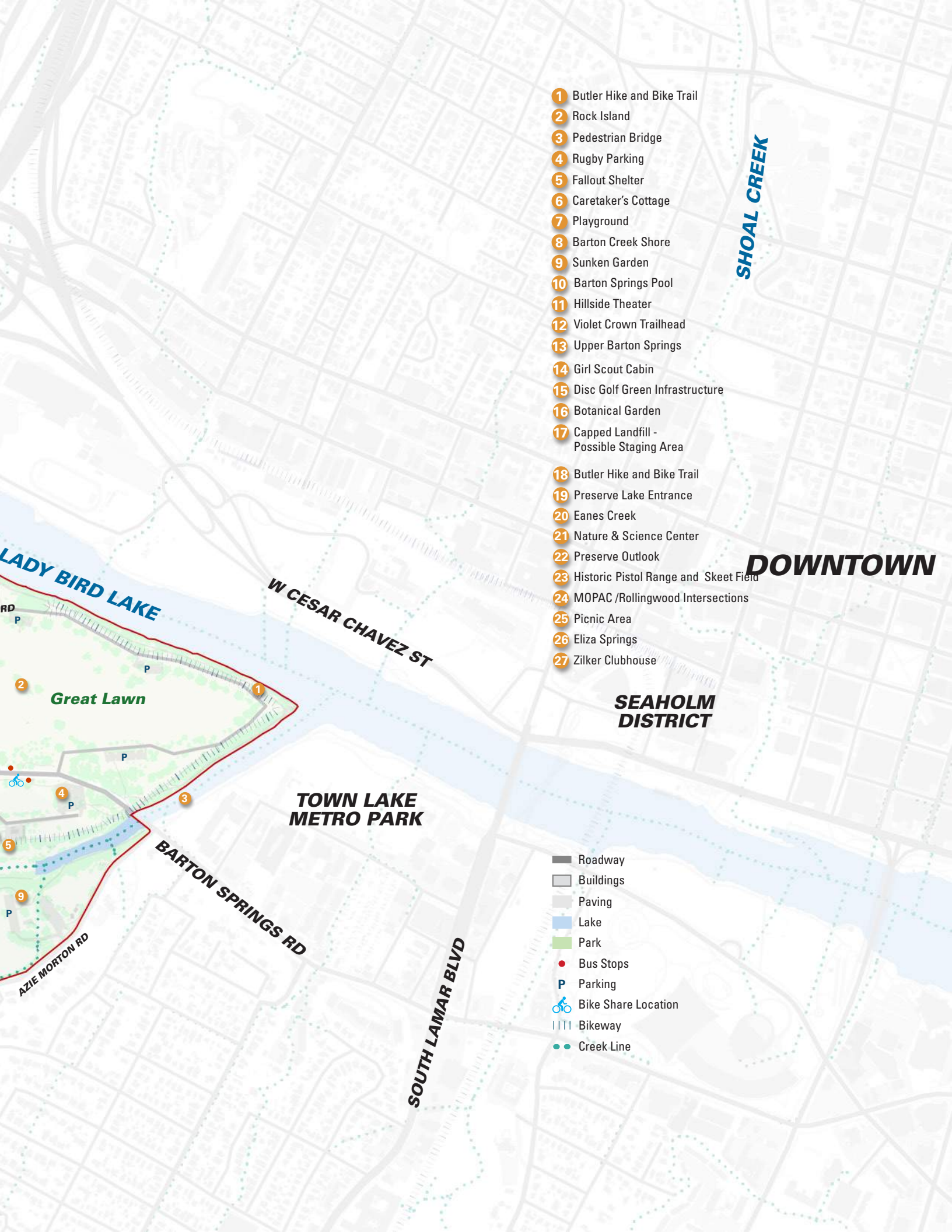
EDWARD RENDON SR. METRO
PARK AT FESTIVAL BEACH

H LAMAR

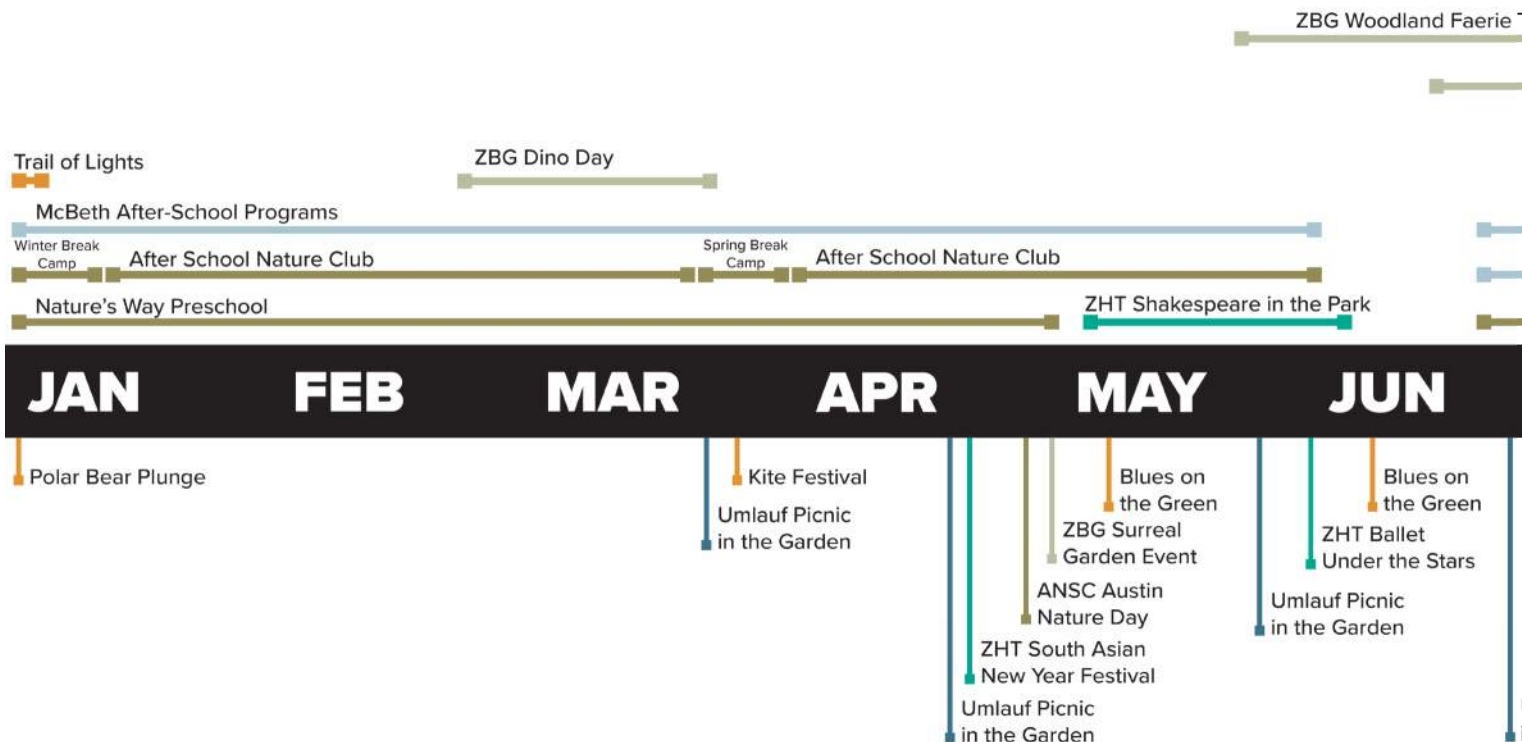
REGIONAL CONTEXT

BOUNDARY OF ZILKER PARK

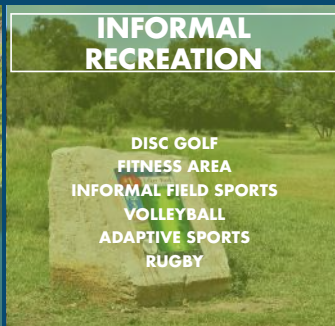




EVENT CALENDAR OF ZILKER PARK



TYPES OF PROGRAMS IN ZILKER PARK

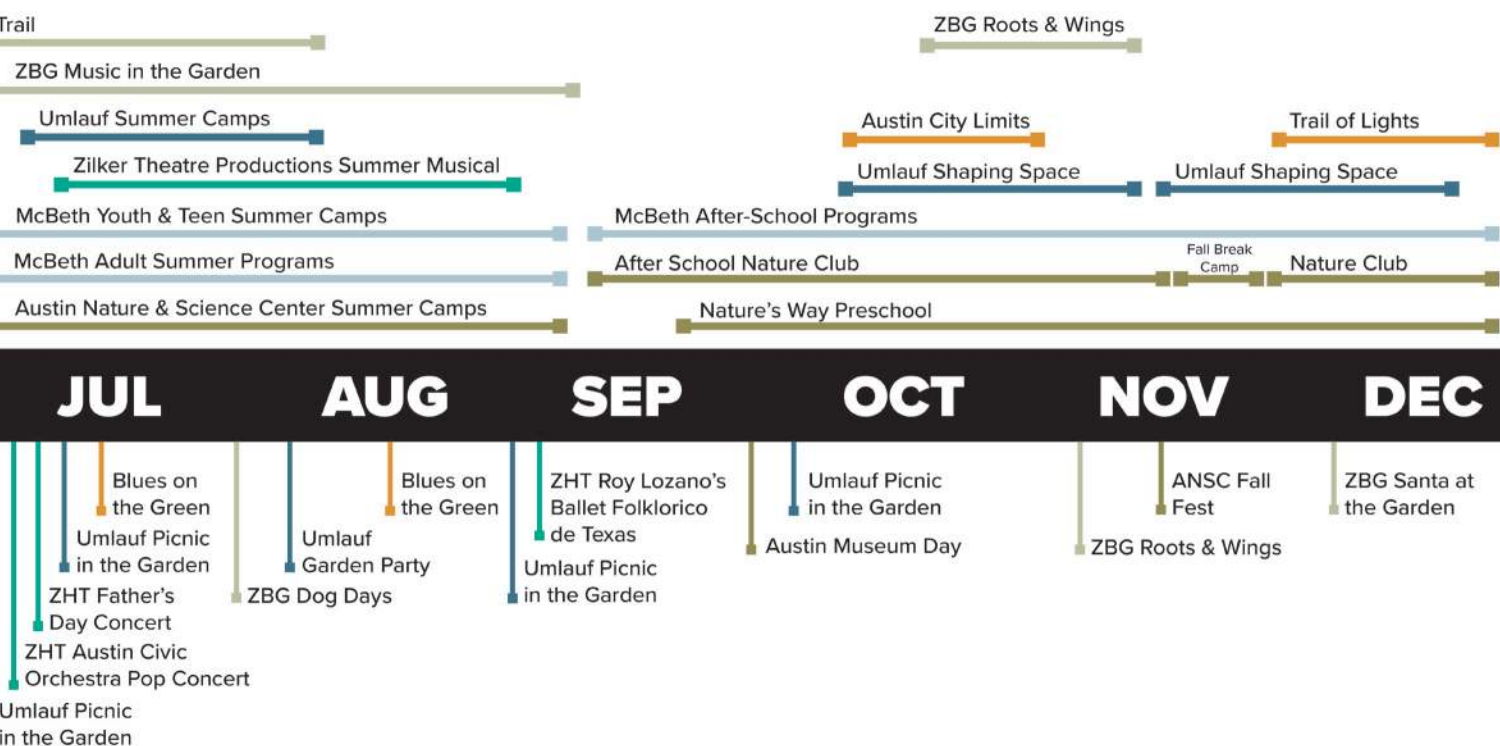


Zilker Park hosts a variety of events year round, the largest of which are Austin City Limits Music Festival, the Trail of Lights and the ABC Kite Festival. ACL and the Trail of Lights impact roughly 135 acres of the park, closing the Great Lawn and surrounding roads and using adjacent areas like the polo fields for supporting infrastructure. Both of these events bring over 400,000 visitors to the park while the Kite Festival brings in another 20,000. All three events draw visitors from throughout the state of Texas with ACL being the biggest draw nationally.

There are also many smaller events at the park throughout the year. Primary hosts include Zilker

Botanical Garden, Austin Nature and Science Center, Zilker Hillside Theater, Umlauf Sculpture Garden, the City of Austin, and McBeth Recreation Center. Most hosted programming is offered to all ages with the remaining programming being geared towards youth and children. The summer is the busiest time of the year for these events with the first quarter of the year being the least programmed.

City Ordinance Section 8-1-15 designates a maximum of 24 special event days for Zilker per calendar year. Additional closure days of portions of Zilker may occur for operations of the park, including limited access due to set-up, take-down, or maintenance.



Destinations such as the Zilker Botanical Garden would like to expand their programming to offer more evening or longer running events and to incorporate more artist collaborations or traveling exhibits. Much of their expanded programming is limited due to concerns over parking or circulation issues that a popular or well attended event might bring.

Self-guided recreation, nature exploration activities, and visits to Barton Springs Pool make up the bulk of consistent year-round visitation to Zilker Park. Visitors come to the park to swim, paddle, bike, enjoy the Great Lawn, and use the trail network within and connected to the park. Zilker Park Boat Rental and Rowing Dock

reported a combined total of 24,581 rentals and Barton Springs Pool saw a little over one million visitors in 2019. There are various sports that take place within the park including Little League, disk golf, rugby, soccer, and informal yoga and volleyball. The Great Lawn is the largest unprogrammed field for active or passive recreation and is a prominent destination within the park.

The need for more restrooms, shade and increased ADA accessibility limits the ability for visitors to enjoy the park. Traffic, congestion, and lack of parking were indicated as the largest barriers to frequent visitation and enjoyment of the park.

TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY MOBILITY AT ZILKER PARK

1 Although visitors today can access Zilker Park through a variety of transportation options, not all modes of travel to the park are equally convenient or safe. Because of this, most park visitors arrive via private automobile.

2 Barton Springs Road provides the primary vehicle access to the busiest parts of the park: from MoPac to west of Barton Creek. Barton Springs Road is the only vehicular connection across the creek and is the primary multimodal gateway into the park for most visitors.



GETTING TO THE PARK

TRANSIT

Zilker Park is currently served by one Capital Metro Route – Route 30 (Barton Creek Square route), which connects the Westgate Transit Center at US 290/SH 71 and Menchaca Road and Barton Creek Square Mall in Southwest Austin to Downtown Austin, stopping as far north as 12th and Guadalupe. Within the park, Route 30 operates on MoPac Expressway frontage roads and Barton Springs Road. The route serves seven stops within the park. However, there are no ADA compliant bus stops. Coming from Downtown, Route 30 stops at the following locations:

- At signalized pedestrian crossing of Barton Springs Road near Lou Neff Road
- At the entrance of the Zilker Botanical Garden
- At the Nature Center Access Road

Coming from Southwest Austin, Route 30 stops at the following locations:

- Along the MoPac Expressway frontage road near the McBeth Recreation Center
- Along the MoPac Expressway frontage road near the Disc Golf Course
- Across from the entrance of the Zilker Botanic Garden
- At signalized pedestrian crossing of Barton Springs Road near Lou Neff Road

The following map shows the alignment of Route 30 and ridership at stops near and within the park.

The busiest bus stop within the park is the stop pair located at Barton Springs Road near Lou Neff Road, which serves several of the park's primary amenities including the Great Lawn and Barton Springs. According to the most recent CapMetro data, in February 2020 eight people used this stop on a typical weekday,

while 25 people used the stop on a typical Saturday. However, it should be considered that 2020 was not a typical year, with the City taking official COVID-19 precautions starting in March 2020.

Route 30 typically operates approximately every 30 minutes, both during the weekdays and on weekends. Capital Metro temporarily increased the frequency of Route 30 to every 15 minutes during weekends in the summer months in 2019 as part of a pilot project.

Origin-Destination survey data collected by Capital Metro provides a snapshot of how transit users are accessing the park. Since Route 30 does not travel north or east of Downtown, nearly half of riders that use a stop within the park transfer to another route. Most transit riders walked to the bus and few riders took a bike with them on the bus, meaning that transit users are primarily on foot once they arrive at the park. Zilker Park is served by several of the city's highest profile trails – including the Butler Trail along Lady Bird Lake and the Barton Creek Greenbelt & Violet Crown Trail. Despite this trail access, getting to Zilker Park can be challenging by active modes (biking, walking, scootering).

BICYCLE

Bicycles are widely used throughout Zilker Park despite a lack of dedicated bicycle facilities. Due to the lower speeds of park roads, bikes are often seen on Lou Neff Road, Andrew Zilker Road, and Stratford Drive. There are partial bike lanes painted on Barton Springs Road but cyclists report the dangers of speeding cars and dropoff from road to grass or gravel. The park also features two MetroBike docks within the park boundary, one at the Capital Metro bus stop near Lou Neff Road, and the other at the entrance to Barton Springs Pool. While there are several additional docks located near the park there should be more within the park boundary to serve amenities such as the trail heads, the southern entrance of Barton Springs Pool, the Austin Nature and Science Center, and the Zilker Botanical Gardens.

MICROMOBILITY

Dockless scooters and bicycles, known as micromobility, are a popular way to access Zilker Park. Usage data shows that the peak of access to Zilker Park falls in the late afternoon to early evening, with the highest usage around 7 p.m. Access is about twice as high on weekends than at the same time on weekdays,

and access dips significantly in the early morning hours. Weekly usage follows the trend of most parks, with the bulk of access occurring on the weekends and the dip occurring mid-week.

PEDESTRIAN

Other than the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail and Barton Creek Greenbelt Trail, dedicated pedestrian facilities within Zilker Park are very limited. There is a paved, off-street sidewalk called the “Zilker Metro Park Loop” located to the east of the MoPac Expressway frontage road and south of Barton Springs Road. There is also a short segment of paved sidewalk between the Capital Metro bus stop and the Butler Trail on the north side of Barton Springs Road.

PARKING

Parking opportunities within Zilker Park are dispersed throughout the park, primarily in off-street parking lots that accommodate between 50 and 100 vehicles per lot. Between formal parking lots, on-street parking on Lou Neff Road, and informal lots such as the Polo Field and the former landfill gravel lot between Mopac and Lou Neff Road, there are almost 2,450 parking spaces within the boundary of Zilker Park. Of those spaces, approximately 875 of the spaces are located in formal lots (lots with marked spaces) and on-street parking stalls that serve general park attendees. These spaces require payment on approximately 57 days of the year on weekends and holidays from March through September. Of these spaces, approximately 230 are on-street spaces along Lou Neff Road.

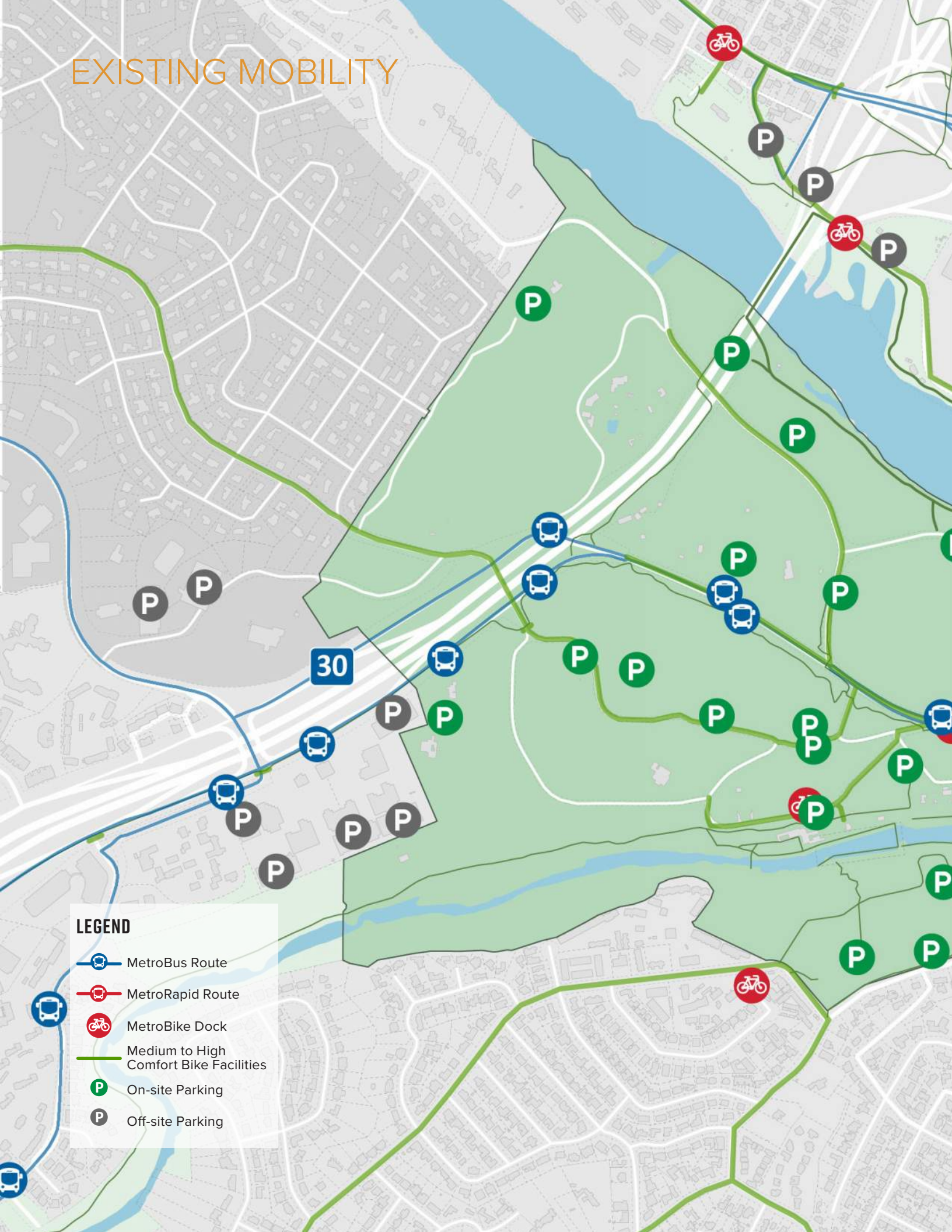
SAFETY

The highest incidences of crashes in the Zilker Park area were found at major intersections near the park, including:







- » MoPac Expressway / Bee Cave Road
- » MoPac Expressway / Barton Springs Road
- » Barton Springs Road / South Lamar Boulevard

Among crashes involving a cyclist or pedestrian, many of the incidents occurred primarily along South Lamar Boulevard, South Congress Avenue, and in the Downtown core. While there were crashes that occurred on Barton Springs Road and within the park itself, there were no recorded fatalities between 2016 and 2020 near or in the park.

EXISTING MOBILITY



LEGEND

-  MetroBus Route
-  MetroRapid Route
-  MetroBike Dock
-  Medium to High Comfort Bike Facilities
-  On-site Parking
-  Off-site Parking

A map of the Zilker Park area in Austin, Texas. The map shows the Colorado River flowing through the center. To the north, Highway 663 and Highway 4 are marked. To the south, Highway 803 and Highway 30 are marked. Various transportation icons are overlaid: red circles with a white bicycle icon for MetroBike Docks, blue circles with a white bus icon for public transit, and green circles with a white 'P' for parking. The map highlights the need for more MetroBike Docks, medium to high comfort Bike Facilities, and internal circulation options.

EXISTING MOBILITY FRAMEWORK

Although visitors today can access Zilker Park through a variety of transportation options, not all modes of travel to the park are equally convenient or safe. Because of this, most park visitors arrive via private automobile.

The map shows the primary transportation options within and near Zilker Park and highlights the need for more MetroBike Docks, medium to high comfort Bike Facilities, and internal circulation options.

SITE TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

SUMMARY

- 1 Vehicular circulation within the park is dominated by Barton Springs Road, which travels east/west through most of the park. Most of the park's parking lots and major destinations that are accessible by vehicle are accessed through park roadways.
- 2 During major events, Barton Springs Road and Stratford Drive are closed to general vehicle traffic, although closures are limited to event hours for all events other than Austin City Limits Music Festival.
- 3 Parking opportunities within Zilker Park are dispersed throughout the park, primarily in off-street parking lots that accommodate between 50 and 100 vehicles per lot.
- 4 Most transit riders walked to the bus and few riders took a bike with them on the bus, meaning that transit users are primarily on foot once they arrive at the park.

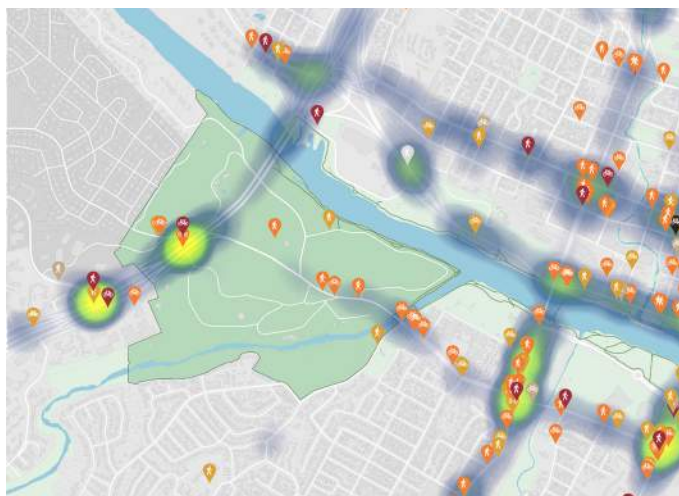
TRAFFIC CIRCULATION



LEGEND

- One-way Traffic
- Two-way Traffic
- Pedestrian Signal
- Adjacent Trails
- Butler Trail
- ADT Average Daily Traffic

SAFETY



LEGEND

- High Density of All Crashes
- Low Density of All Crashes
- Fatality levels of Bicycle and Pedestrian Crashes
- Unknown
- No Injury
- Potential Injury
- Non-Incapacitating Injury
- Incapacitating Injury
- Fatality

TRANSIT



LEGEND

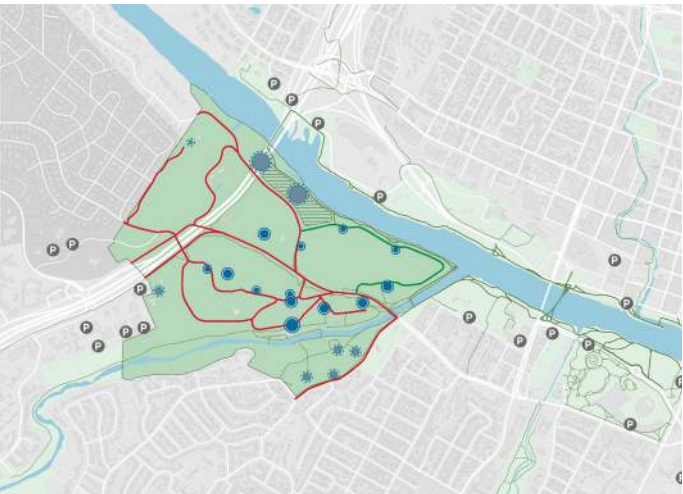
- MetroBus Route

MetroRapid Route
- Average Daily Rider Activity

Low

High

PARKING



LEGEND

- Total Spaces

Paid Lot

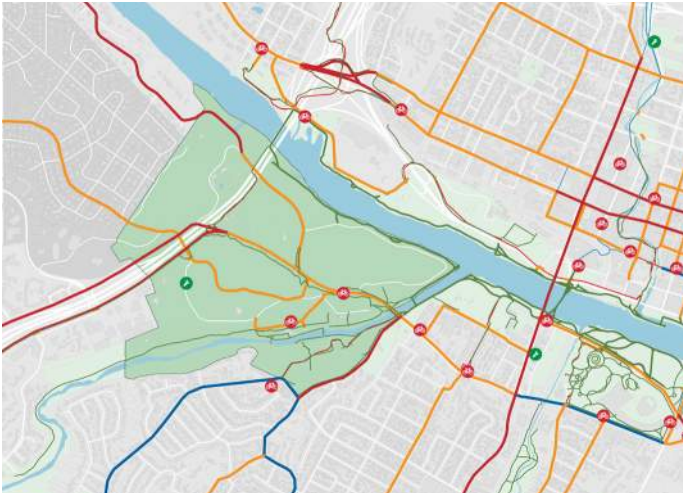
Free Lot

Informal Lot
- Off-site Parking

No On-Street Parking

On-Street Parking

BIKE



LEGEND

- MetroBike Dock

Bike Repair Station

Adjacent Trails

Butler Trails

Urban Trails Planned
- Level of Comfort for Bike

High

Medium

Low

PEDESTRIAN



LEGEND

- Sidewalk

Crosswalk

Stairs

Pedestrian Traffic Signal
- Adjacent Trails

Butler Trails

Urban Trails Planned

ECOLOGY

SUMMARY

- 1 The land known today as Zilker Park has been an important gathering place throughout human history.
- 2 There are three Recognized Environmental Conditions in the park that require remediation.
- 3 Zilker Park is an important part of the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone and presents opportunities for green infrastructure implementation.
- 4 Erosion within the park is primarily caused by unmanaged stormwater and human disturbance.

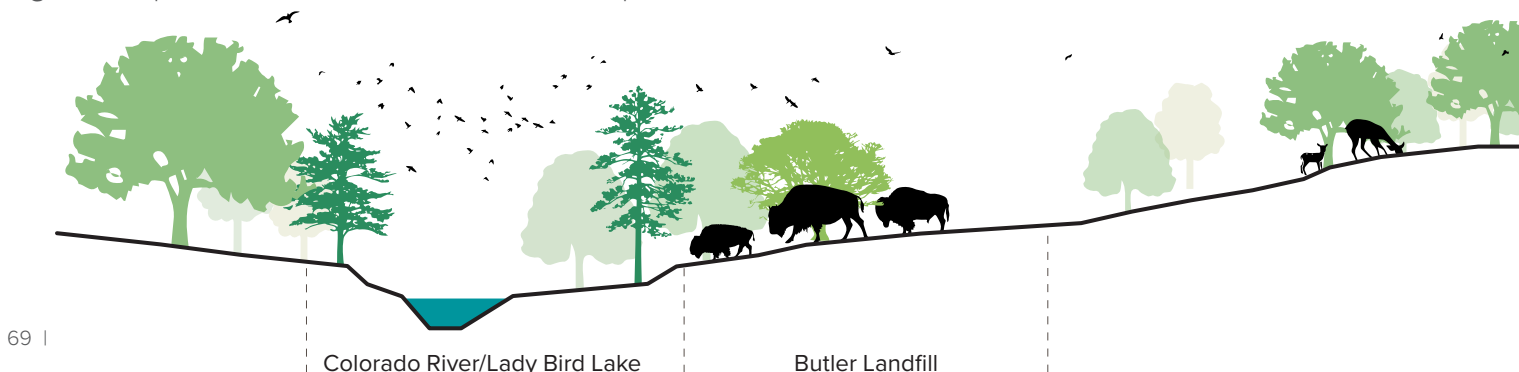


HISTORIC LAND USE CONTEXT

For the purposes of this report, Zilker Park's landscape history can be roughly divided into three periods: Forest, Savanna, and Springs; Industrial & Agriculture; and Recreational. The Forest, Savanna, & Springs period (7000 BCE–17th century) shows the landscape before widespread colonial settlements and represents thousands of years of Indigenous habitation. It highlights some of the tribes who frequented the springs, including the Tonkawa, Lipan Apache, and Comanche. This landscape was characterized by a

naturally dense forested landscape, a low and wide undammed Colorado River, plentiful wildlife, and naturally flowing spring water in Barton Creek. The Industrial & Agriculture period covers the 18th to 19th centuries and ends approximately 300 years after colonists first arrived. This time period in Zilker Park was characterized by highly extractive activities, such as mining, farming, and milling along Barton Creek's banks. These intensive land use changes removed tree canopy, decreased wildlife, and increased erosion. The final Recreational period (20th to 21st century) shows

Figure 1: Representation of Zilker Park before European settlement





land use up to today, which shows Zilker Park as a city-owned public space. The modern landscape in Zilker Park is characterized by a higher and more consistent water level on the north side of the park, created by the damming of the Colorado River and formation of Lady Bird Lake. Additionally, heavy public use, soil compaction, trampling, and contamination is also present throughout the park.

These sections highlight not only Zilker Park's accelerating landscape changes, but also how land uses have changed and why. Themes that have emerged from these three historic periods include:

ECOLOGY OF ZILKER PARK



Large numbers of visitors and lack of proper infrastructure increases soil compaction and erosion issues.



Barton Springs Pool is an amenity for people as well as a habitat for endangered species and important part of Austin's local hydrology.



50% of the park trails do not currently offer adequate shade.

- » A transition in land uses from a natural landscape to agricultural and finally to recreational;
- » A landscape where the proportion of wild lands decreases steadily over time;
- » A decrease in wildlife abundance and diversity over time, especially a decrease in megafauna; and
- » A transition from tribes camping along Barton Creek, to a few independent mill owners and homesteaders, to a modern landscape visited by hundreds of people daily.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION



Zilker Park has three main areas of environmental contamination concern: the Butler Landfill, the Pistol and Skeet Range, and the West Butler Landfill. In anticipation of future renovations on site, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment was completed for Zilker Park in 2019 by TRC Environmental Corporation.

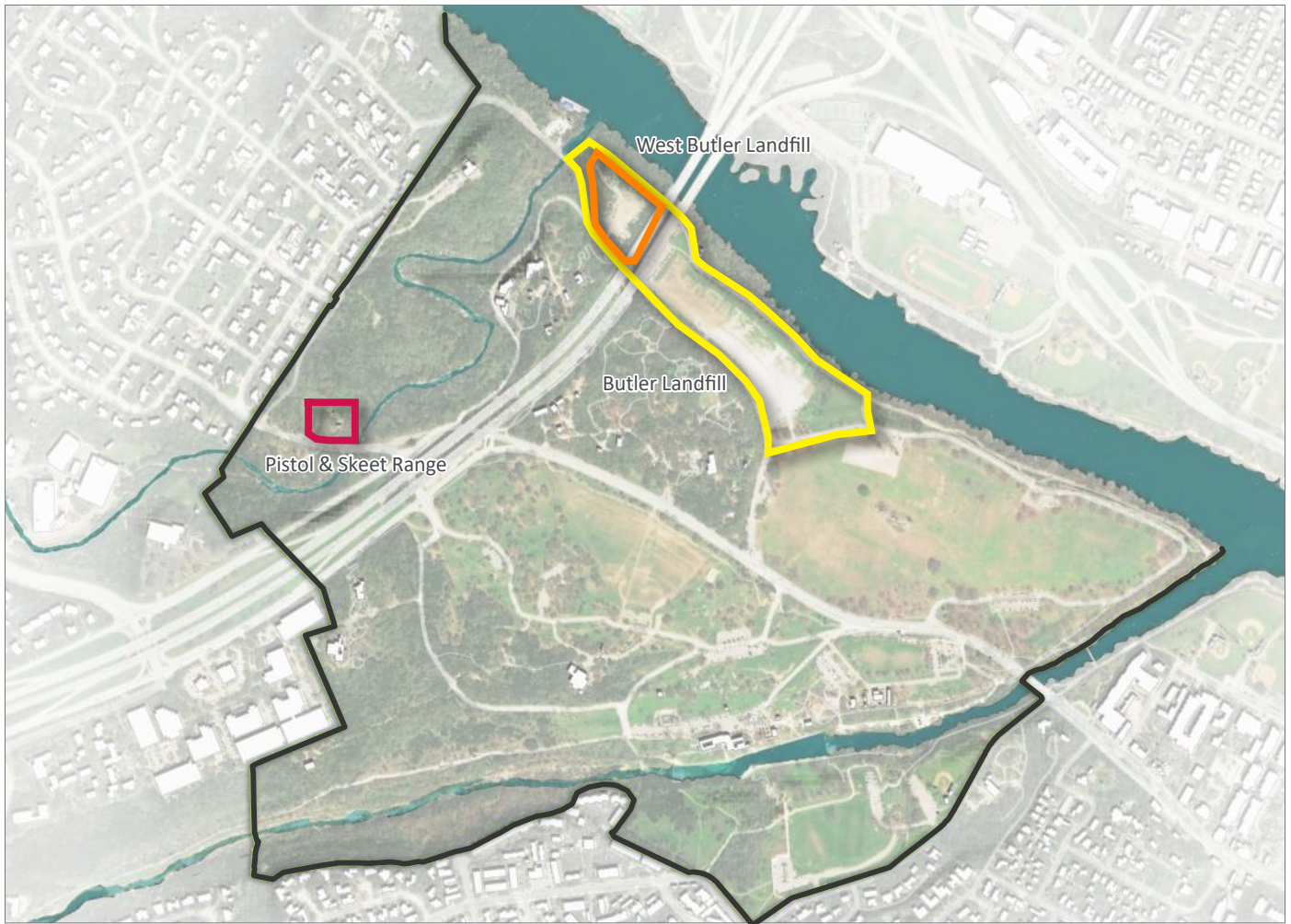
BUTLER LANDFILL

The 25-acre Butler Landfill has a maximum depth of 30 feet. This location originally served as a clay quarry for the Butler Brick Factory through the early 1900s, but after termination of quarry operations, the location was operated as a municipal landfill by the City of Austin from 1948 to 1967.

Several investigations and groundwater monitoring events have been conducted. While the earlier events did not find constituents of concern (COCs), later monitoring events did detect them. These later investigations found that waste materials were exposed in several areas throughout the landfill and that the lower portion of material within the landfill is saturated by the waters of Lady Bird Lake. A range of contaminants exceeded recommended maximum levels including arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, magnesium, lead, iron, and manganese. Due to this, the 2019 Environmental Assessment classified Butler Landfill as a Recognized Environmental Condition (REC).

Wetlands border the capped Butler Landfill on the eastern and northern sides. The Watershed Protection Department (WPD) advises that ponded areas should not exist over closed landfills. Based on the 1998 Task 5 Report, the boundary of the fill extends eastward towards the Zilker Zephyr tracks and under the eastern





ponded area. As of 2019, when the Zilker Park Working Group completed their report on the park, WPD and Parks and Recreation Department were planning to assess this area and consult with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to determine if additional action is necessary relative to this pond.

WEST BUTLER LANDFILL

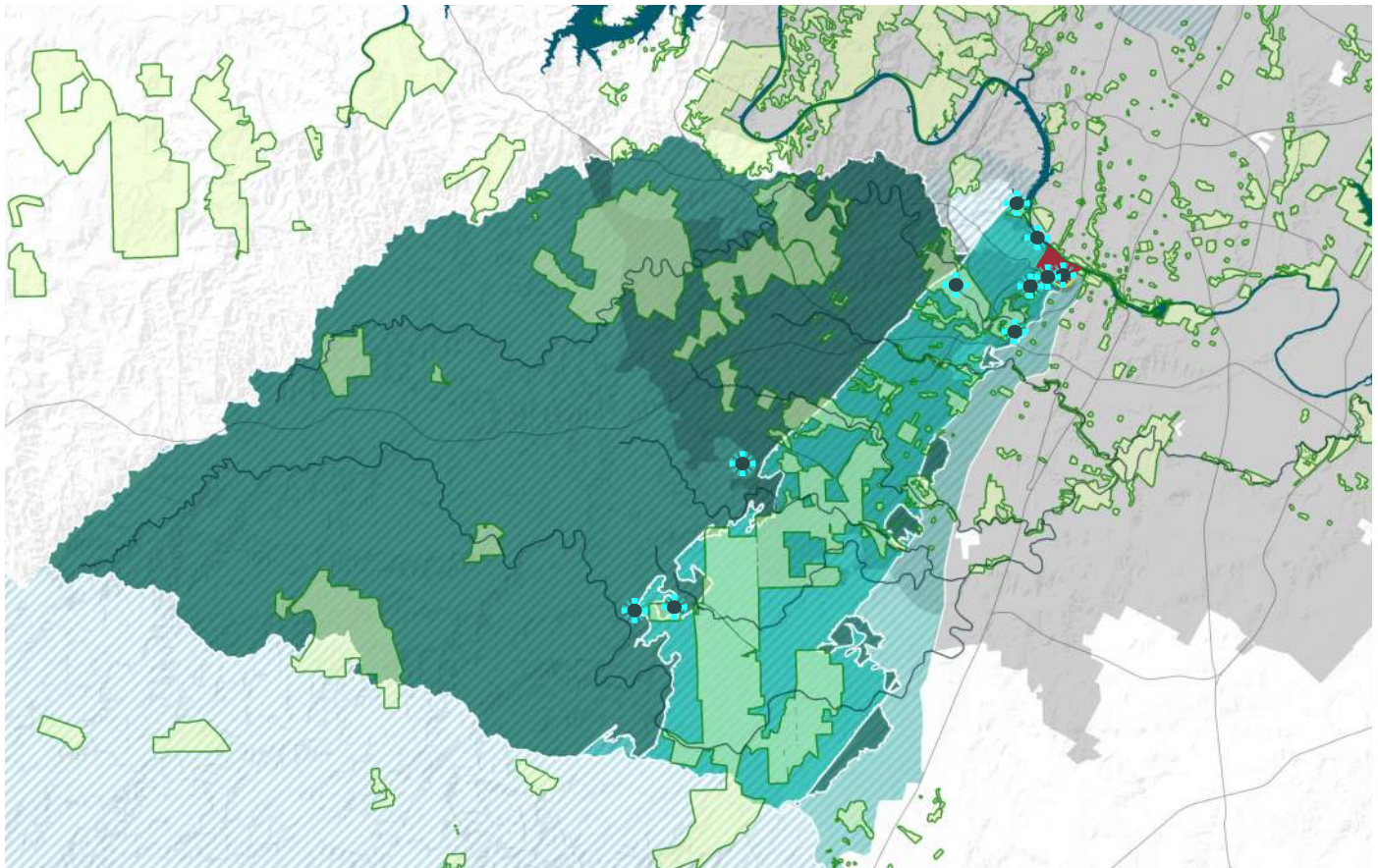
This area lies atop the northwest corner of the Butler Landfill and is currently used for storage of equipment and landscaping materials such as soil, brush, and gravel. Due to the presence of asphalt, electric-powered carts and small vehicles with lead-acid batteries, surplus lawn maintenance equipment, and chemical containers without cover or impervious pavement, this area has a possibility of leaking hazardous substances or petroleum products to the environment. This area is a REC, due to the material threat of a future release into the environment.

PISTOL AND SKEET RANGE

The 2.5-acre Pistol and Skeet Range was originally developed in the 1930s. Based on aerial photographs and interviews with PARD staff, the western portion was used for skeet shooting (Skeet Range), while the east side was used for pistol and rifle shooting (Pistol Range). The range was heavily used on a daily basis by the Austin Police Department and citizens between the 1930s and 1970s. The Pistol Range property was used by the Austin Nature & Science Center for archery, equipment storage, and supply storage in portable buildings after the mid-1980s. Historic and recent soil investigations have identified elevated concentrations of arsenic, antimony, and lead. The Pistol and Skeet Range, including the wooded area to the north, is therefore a REC.

ECOREGION & EDWARDS AQUIFER

ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT




Zilker Park lies in the transition zone between the Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie ecoregions, blending aspects of the two. Hydrologically, Zilker Park sits atop the Edwards Aquifer and within the Colorado River corridor. The park includes sections of both Barton Creek and Eanes Creek and is home to the iconic Barton Springs. These factors combine to create a beloved, ecologically significant landscape in great need of planning and stewardship. This section describes the site's hydrology, topography, geology, soils, plant communities, and wildlife. This information is the foundation of the Natural Resource Inventory Report's management guidelines.

The Edwards Aquifer lies under the eastern and southern borders of the Hill Country and gives rise to the iconic springs of Central Texas. The Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer covers 250,000

acres and includes the Barton and Eanes Creek watersheds. The recharge zone is the critical area where water enters the aquifer through cracks and pores in the limestone. The recharge zone covers over 56,000 acres including the 387 acres of Zilker Park. Water from the recharge zone flows out in the prolific Barton Springs system that feeds Barton Springs Pool and creates habitat for the endangered Austin Blind Salamander and Barton Springs Salamander. Because the limestone through which water enters the aquifer does not filter out contaminants, this critical, fast-moving water system is impacted by resource management decisions throughout the contributing and recharge zones. Activities in the park impact the recharge zone and areas immediately adjacent to the springs.

LEGEND

-  Springs
-  Major Roads
-  Ecoregion Boundary
-  Lakes and Waterways
-  Conserved Land
-  Edwards Aquifer
-  Contributing Zone
-  Recharge Zone
-  Transition Zone
-  Zilker Park
-  Austin City Limits



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2012, the City of Austin adopted the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, which included Priority Program #4: Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city. It also established a definition of green infrastructure as a strategically planned and managed network of natural lands, parks, working landscapes, open spaces, and green stormwater controls that conserve and enhance ecosystem services and provide associated benefits to human populations.

As climate change intensifies and results in higher temperatures and more extreme weather events, the many forms of green infrastructure will become increasingly important. Climate vulnerability and tree planting priority in Austin from the City of Austin Green Infrastructure Assessment shows areas that are climate vulnerable as a result of urban heat island temperature increases, lack of urban forest,

and lack of shade over impervious cover. In addition, these areas coincide with higher levels of social vulnerability and worse health outcomes.

While the general area around Zilker Park exhibits a low to moderate tree planting priority, this park serves as a city-wide refuge to enjoy the outdoors in a location that has relief from higher temperatures as a result of the urban forest, shading, and water-related cooling. In addition, the changes suggested in the Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Natural Area Management Guidelines recommend the improvement of canopy in the park and addition of green stormwater infrastructure. The result is a park that is adapting to and mitigating climate change. These same concepts are integrated into the Zilker Park Vision Plan to create a sustainable park that addresses climate change.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

TOPOGRAPHY

Zilker Park is comprised of low-lying lands near waterways and steep cliffs carved by creeks. The lowest points in the park are at roughly 428' in elevation and the high points in the park are between 554' and 562' in elevation.

GEOLOGY

Zilker Park includes 6 types of geology. The geologic layer is often exposed at the surface and lies on top of the Hydrogeology layer.

SPRINGS AND SEEPS

Zilker Park not only plays a role in the recharge of the Edwards Aquifer but is also home to the 4 springs complex and an additional 10 smaller springs and seeps.

SOIL

Zilker Park includes 15 soil types. These soils have been heavily impacted by agriculture and urbanization over the past 150 years as well as ecological changes in climate and topography.

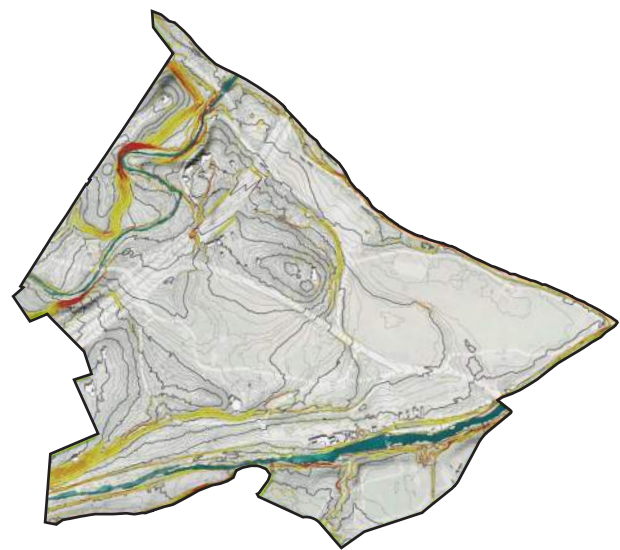
HYDROGEOLOGY

These are the geologic elements that define the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer. These layers dictate subsurface movement of water. The only hydrogeologic member within Zilker Park that is not within the recharge zone is Del Rio Clay.

HYDROLOGY

Floodplains play an important role in regulating water quality, because they filter water through their soils. The extra moisture creates denser plant growth, providing important wildlife habitat. Floodplains can be harmed by trampling and high runoff during storms that erode soil and wash away plants. The park also accepts flood waters on its 106.6 acres within the 100-year-floodplain.

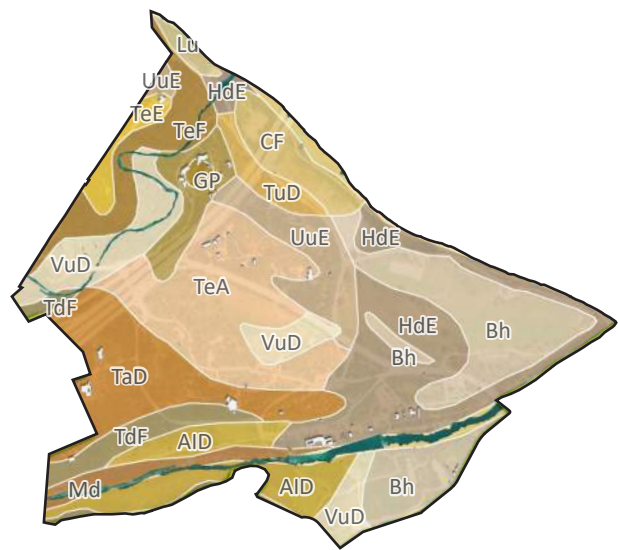
TOPOGRAPHY



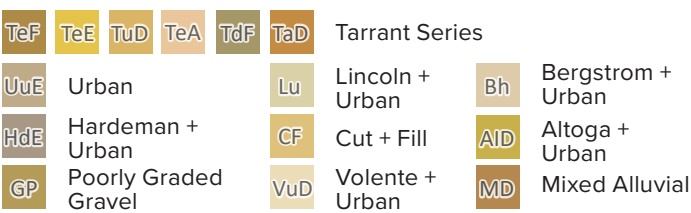
LEGEND



SOIL



LEGEND



GEOLOGY



LEGEND

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Edwards Formation | Lower Colorado River Terrace |
| Tributary Terrace Deposits | Del Rio Formation |
| Georgetown Formation | Alluvial |

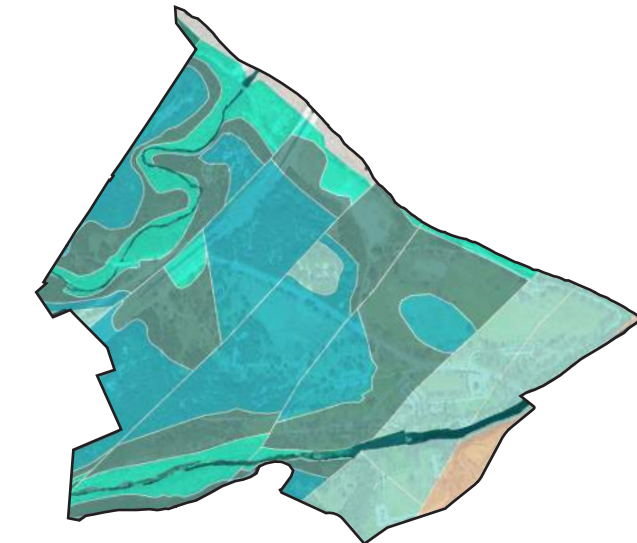
SPRINGS & SEEPS



LEGEND

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Main Springs | Seeps & Springs |
|--------------|-----------------|

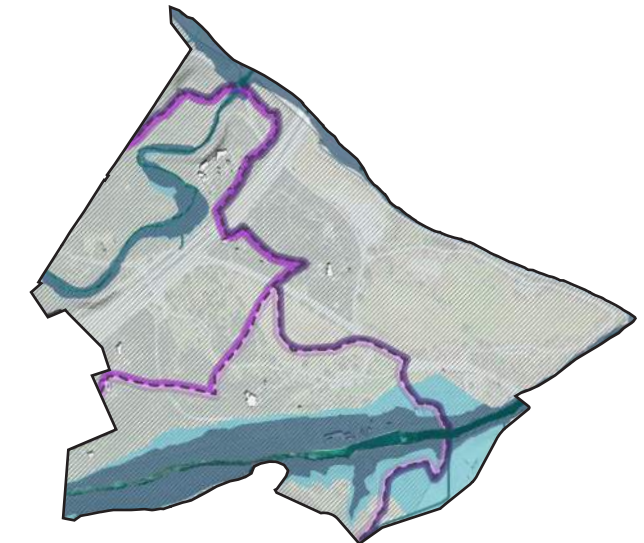
HYDROGEOLOGY



LEGEND

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Georgetown Limestone | Leached/Collapsed |
| Grainstone Member | Kirschberg Member |
| Regional Dense Member | Del Rio Clay |

HYDROLOGY



LEGEND

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Watershed Boundary | 25 Year Floodplain |
| Barton Creek Watershed | 100 Year Floodplain |
| Eanes Creek Watershed | Recharge Zone |
| Lady Bird Lake Watershed | |

PLANT COMMUNITIES

EXISTING PLANT COMMUNITIES



Zilker Park's habitats were grouped into 16 plant communities, which are influenced by the park's soil and geology as well as the history of human disturbance. These plant communities include over 380 plant species. The Oak/Juniper/Elm Woodland has 173 native plant species and 34 invasive and exotic species. The Barton Riparian woodland is inundated during floods, and in the lower areas, these plants must stay underwater for months. This woodland has a diverse canopy, understory and herbaceous layer with 78 native species and 15 invasive and exotic species. The plant diversity within the Intermittent creek bed is generally low, because it is often inundated. The Eanes Creek Riparian

Woodlands has 65% more species than the Barton Creek Riparian woodland, which is likely a result of less human impact. The Degraded Barton Riparian Woodland lies downstream of the pool and sees a high amount of human impact. The Degraded Barton Creek Shoreline could be one of the most robust plant communities in the area but overuse and upslope storm water outfalls prevent this. The Lakeshore Riparian Woodland is one of the few areas along Ladybird Lake that has not been cleared in the last 100 years. The Open Meadow is currently mowed at a rate that prevents native grass and forbs from being able to flower and seed.

LEGEND

- 1 Spring
- 2 Oak/Juniper/Elm Woodland
- 3 Barton Riparian Woodland
- 4 Intermittent Creekbed
- 5 Eanes Creek Riparian Woodland
- 6 Degraded Barton Riparian Woodland
- 7 Degraded Barton Creek Shoreline
- 8 Barton Springs Pool
- 9 Permanent Water
- 10 Lakeshore Riparian Woodland
- 11 Wetland
- 12 Open Meadow
- 13 Disc Golf Course
- 14 Zilker Botanical Garden
- 15 Austin Nature & Science Center
- 16 Maintained Parkland & Infrastructure

EXISTING PLANT COMMUNITY TYPOLOGIES





INVASIVE SPECIES

Over 70 non-native species were recorded during the plant survey, with 38 species considered invasive due to their aggressive growth and spread. Of these, 20 species were included in at least one of these three lists: Texas Invasives, the City of Austin's Top 24 Invasive Species list, or the Natural Resource Inventory by Siglo Group. The high priority species from this list include Arundo, bamboo, bastard cabbage, Bermudagrass, catclaw vine, Chinaberry, Chinese parasol tree, Chinese pistache, Chinese tallow, Nandina, hedge parsley, Japanese honeysuckle, Johnsongrass, King Ranch bluestem, Ligustrum, Malta star thistle, paper mulberry, sweet autumn clematis, and tree of heaven.

SOIL DISTURBANCE

The primary causes of soil disturbance in Zilker Park are stormwater flow, poorly functioning or absent infrastructure, mowing and use of other heavy machinery, off-trail recreation, formal recreation without suitable supporting infrastructure and erosion of trail material. Soil disturbance is problematic in all areas but is particularly concerning along environmentally sensitive waterways. Field data were taken on soil erosion issues at 140 points throughout the study area.

TREE SURVEY MAP



LEGEND

- | | |
|---|--|
| ● Hackberry | ● Huisache |
| ● Live Oak | ● Black Willow |
| ● Pecan | ● Cottonwood |
| ● American Elm | ● Green Ash |
| ● Cedar Elm | ● Red Oak |
| ● Juniper | ● Honey Mesquite |
| ● Box Elder | ● Other Oaks |
| ● Bald Cypress | ● Invasive Species |
| ● Sycamore | ● Other |
| ● Gum Bumelia | |

EROSION AND SOIL IMPACTS



Table 1: Erosion Types

| TYPES | DESCRIPTION |
|--------------------------|---|
| Informal Trails | Informal trails are paths created by foot traffic and are not created or maintained by park staff. Informal trails with trampled vegetation and compacted soils often lead to sheet erosion, rills, or gullies. |
| Trampling | Trampling is a result of off-trail foot traffic not confined to a trail. It destroys vegetation and prevents its reestablishment. |
| Compaction | Compaction is a loss of soil porosity. It inhibits plant growth and can lead to erosion. |
| Sheet Erosion | Sheet erosion is the removal of thin layers of soil due to precipitation and shallow surface flow. |
| Rill and Gully Erosion | Rill erosion is the formation of one or more small channels less than 1 ft deep; gullies are deeper than 1 ft. |
| Bank Erosion | Bank erosion is found along both creeks and the Lady Bird Lake shoreline. It is a result of their urban setting and the powerful force of water after major rain events. |
| Erosion on Formal Trails | In some areas, decomposed granite is leaving the trail and entering either natural areas or waterways. This material can bury native plants and make the soil more susceptible to erosion, thus lowering the quality of the natural area. |

Source: Zilker Park Natural Resources Inventory & Management Guidelines. Siglo. 2021

REGULATIONS

CWQZ, WQTZ, AND CEFs

Critical Water Quality Zones and Water Quality Transition Zones setbacks limit development. CEFs or Critical Environmental Features require that a Environmental Resource Inventory be obtained prior to site design.

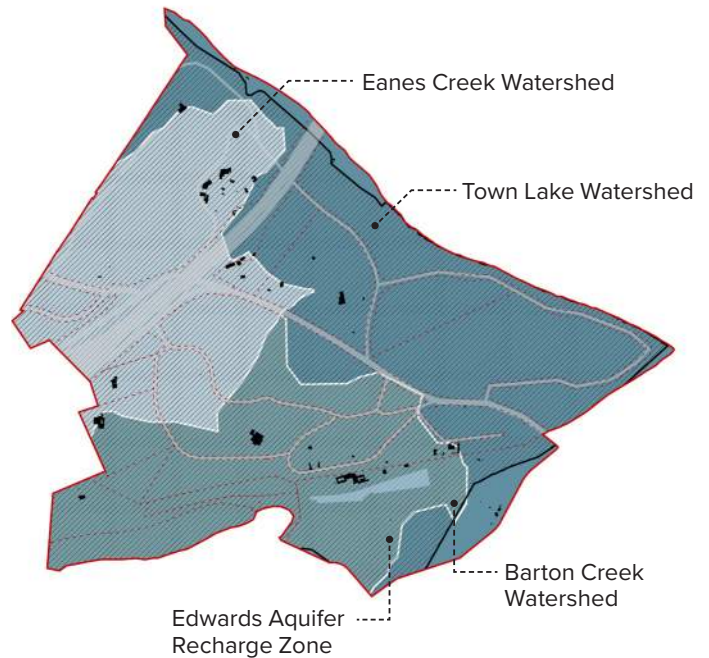
Most of the Zilker Park Vision Plan area is located within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone, which will require review by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Additionally, if applicable, development may be subject to §25-1-84 if development is proposed on top of previous landfill sites.

Many of the tracts contain Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) and/or Water Quality Transition Zone (WQTZ) setbacks, which restrict most development. Obtaining an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) is recommended prior to site design due to the presence of existing Critical Environmental Features (CEFs) on many of the parcels. Additional features and or revised buffer areas may be established that could impact site layout and development. Any proposed development should be located outside of these protected areas. Many of the tracts are also encumbered by the 100-year floodplain.

Generally, development applications may not be approved if a proposed structure encroaches on the 100-year floodplain. A variance may be granted if the following is determined:

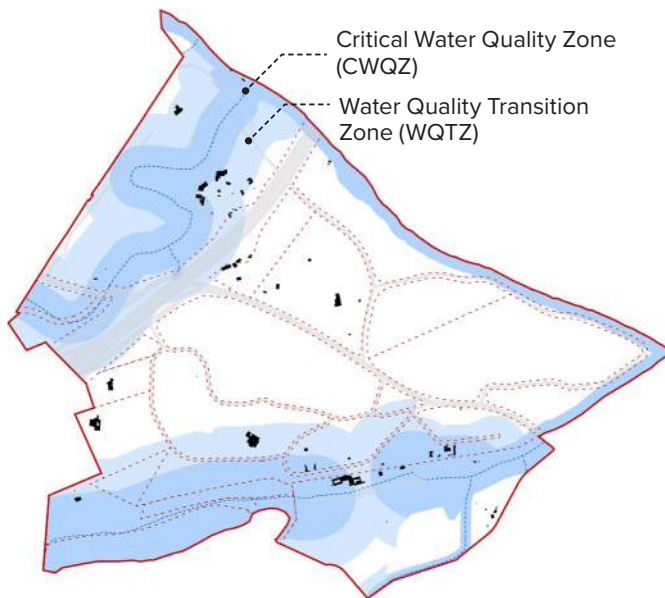
- The finished floor elevation of a proposed building is at least two feet above the 100-year floodplain;

WATERSHEDS

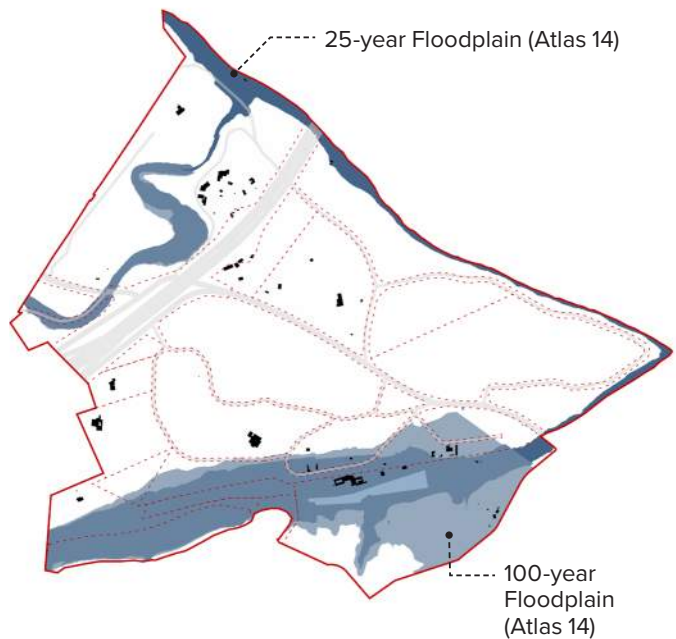


- Normal access to a proposed building is by direct connection with an area above the regulatory flood datum;
- A proposed building complies with the requirements of Flood Resistant Construction and Flood Loads;
- The development compensates for the floodplain volume displaced by the development;
- The development improves the drainage system by exceeding the requirements of Criteria for Approval of Development Applications, as demonstrated by a report provided by the applicant and certified by an engineer registered in Texas;
- The variance is required by unique site conditions; and
- Development permitted by the variance does not result in additional adverse flooding impact on other property.
- There is an exception for existing historic buildings within the flood plain to remain.

WATER QUALITY BUFFERS



FLOODPLAIN



Additionally, development applications with a proposed building or parking area that encroaches on the 100-year floodplain may be approved if the encroachment is:

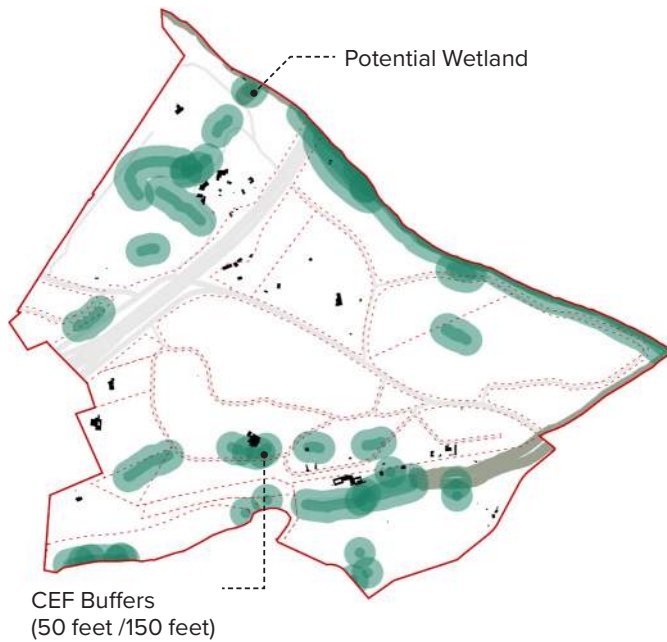
- A parking area that is smaller than 5,000 square feet or an unoccupied structure that has an area of less than 1,000 square feet, and the director determines that the proposed development:
 - » will not have an adverse effect on the 100-year floodplain or surrounding properties; and
 - » otherwise complies with the land development code requirements;
- A new building for residential use that replaces an existing legally constructed building for residential use on the same property and that does not increase the number of legal dwelling units on the property;
- A building authorized by a waterway development permit issued under Chapter 9-10 before September 25, 1983; or

- A building in the 100-year floodplain of:
 - » Lady Bird Lake;
 - » The Colorado River downstream from Longhorn Dam;
 - » Lake Austin; or
 - » Lake Travis.

To be approved, development in the floodplain must be no lower than 2 feet above the 100-year floodplain, as measured from the lowest elevation of any proposed building; comply with the requirements of Flood Resistant Construction and Flood Loads sections; compensate for the floodplain volume displaced by the development; and result in no adverse flooding impact on other properties.

REGULATIONS

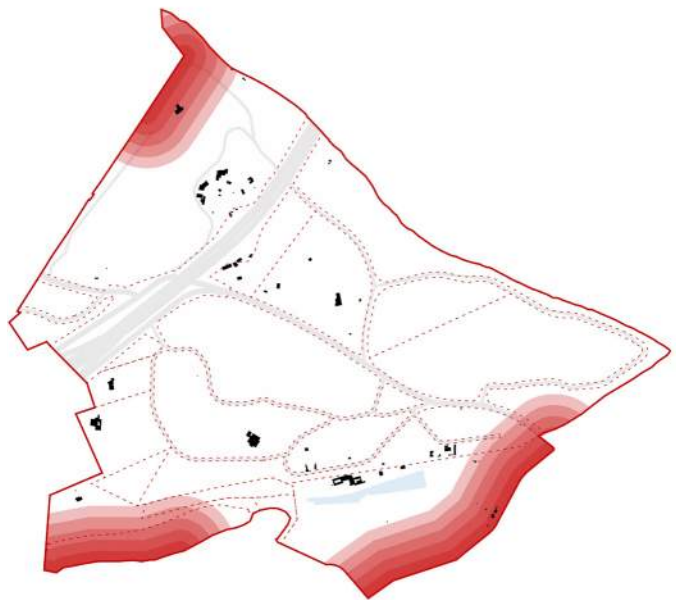
CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURE (CEF) BUFFERS



CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURE BUFFERS

Based on Austin City Code, a Critical Environmental Feature (CEF) buffer is most critical to preserving the function and characteristics of a CEF. This area should be covered by vegetation and any construction must be low-impact. Hiking trails are allowed within the buffer if they are at least 50' from the CEF.

COMPATIBILITY STANDARDS



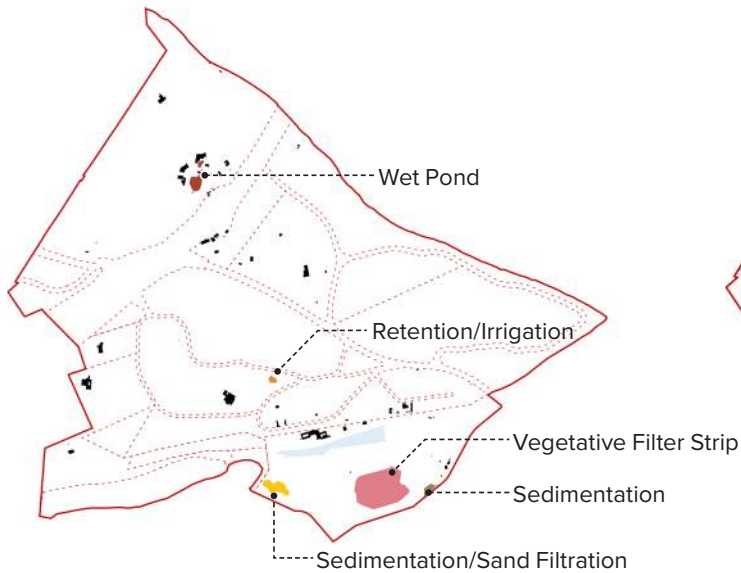
COMPATIBILITY STANDARDS

The Property along the southern and northwestern boundaries is subject to Compatibility Standards. These regulations may have a direct impact on the development or redevelopment of Tracts 1, 14, 17 and 18.

Any development in an SF-6 or less restrictive zoning district located 540 feet or less from property in an SF-5 or more restrictive zoning district/use will be subject to compatibility development regulations. A formal compatibility analysis is recommended.



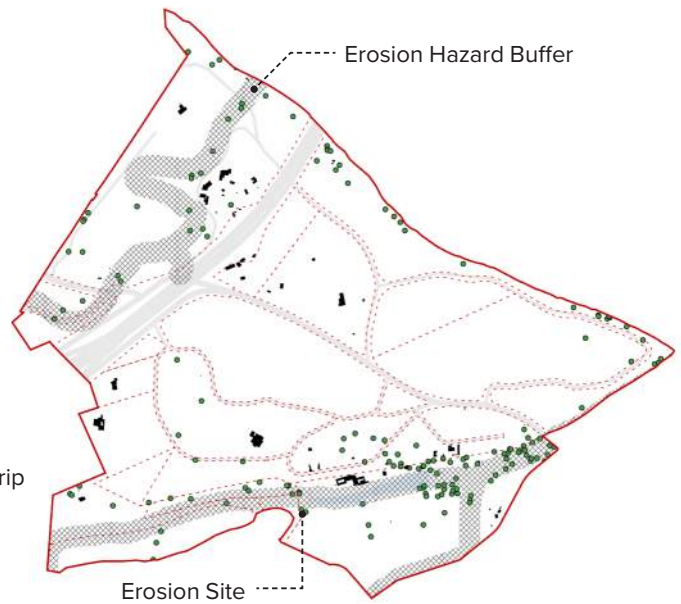
STORMWATER QUALITY CONTROLS



The following building setback and height step-back requirements are triggered because the property is 540 feet or less from property in an SF-5 or more restrictive zoning district/use

- 25 feet from triggering property = No Structures
- 25 feet to 50 feet from triggering property = Two stories or 30 feet, whichever is less
- 50 feet to 100 feet from triggering property = Three stories or 40 feet, whichever is less

EROSION



- 100 feet to 300 feet from triggering property = 40 feet plus one foot of height for each additional 10 feet in distance from triggering property
- 300 feet to 540 feet from triggering property = 60 feet plus one foot of height for each Four feet in addition to 300 feet from property



TRANSPORTATION

Consultation with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) or Austin Transportation Department will be required for any development that is proposed within State-controlled or City-owned right-of-way (ROW).

Portions of Barton Springs Road, Lou Neff Road, and Stratford Drive may not be considered Public ROW by the City of Austin, but rather a park roadway. This has design implications on impervious cover and detention and water quality treatment requirements, among other things (public ROW is not considered when calculating impervious cover, but park roads are considered when calculating impervious cover calculations). Parks and Recreation Department should provide definitive information regarding the categorization of these roads and the physical extents of the portions of these roads that are considered park roads.

TREE PROTECTION

Any proposed development or redevelopment will be subject to the current heritage and protected tree regulations per Land Development Code §25-8, Division 3 (above 19 feet height Heritage Trees). A permit granted by the City of Austin Arborist is required to remove protected and heritage trees. An administrative variance is required to remove heritage trees 24 to 30 inches in diameter; Land Use Commission approval is required to remove heritage trees 30 inches in diameter or greater.

Obtaining a tree survey is highly recommended prior to any site design to determine the size, species, and health of existing trees on the property.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A number of parcels also contain existing structures 50 years in age or older; demolition of such structures, along with any structures on the two parcels with the Historic Landmark Combining District in the zoning designation will require approval by the City of Austin Historic Preservation Office and potentially the Historic Landmark Commission. A Certificate of Appropriateness will be required should any changes to existing structures in Historic Landmark Combining Districts be proposed.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Coordination with the Austin Fire Department early in the site design process is recommended to determine if any of the underground storage tanks indicated on the site by City of Austin GIS data contain hazardous materials that require additional buffering, relocation, or removal.

SUBDIVISION AND PLATTING

The majority, if not all, of the Property does not appear to be subdivided. Correspondence with the program manager in the Land Use Review Division indicates that the City of Austin and its property, including Zilker Park, is exempt from the requirements of platting. Legal lot determinations and the requirement to subdivide to develop or redevelop, therefore, are not required to obtain the majority, if not all, permits.

In the past, the development or redevelopment of City of Austin-owned parkland encountered one issue related to the subdivision of land regarding Austin Water Utility or Austin Energy utilities crossing lot or tract lines. Although not platted, Zilker Park is made up of multiple tracts of land. Historically, a solution to this issue has been to use a Declaration of Easement, granted by the City of Austin to itself.

SITE PLAN REVIEW

Per §25-2-625(D), for tracts with “P” base zoning that are less than 1 acre in size, the site development regulations of an adjoining zoning district apply for a distance of 100 feet into the site. The minimum lot size requirement of an adjoining zoning district does not apply to a use by the City of Austin. For a site one acre in size or greater, site development regulations are established by the approval of a conditional use site plan, which require approval at the Land Use Commission. For a parks and recreation services (special) use, per §25-2-625(E), the minimum site area is 10 acres. Site plans must include the locations of sale of beer and wine, if applicable. The Land Use Commission may not consider a site plan for approval until it receives a recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Board.

Some tracts within the Zilker Park Visioning Plan boundary contain one or multiple site plans in review or approved. This Vision Plan recommends that a civil engineer review existing site plans for total impervious cover proposed or built on each tract to determine how much, if any, impervious cover remains for future projects.



This map shows the intensity of the regulations which apply to Zilker Park.

The regulations, if overlaid in their entirety on one map, indicate that areas that can be developed more than today's condition are limited. This indicates that variances, updates to ordinances, and/or a development agreement for Zilker Park should be examined.

LEGEND

- This area has multiple regulations prohibiting most of development. It is determined as Critical Water Quality Zone, 25-year floodplain, or erosion site.
- This area has a regulation prohibiting development which is Water Quality Transition Zone (WQTZ).
- This area can be developed but has several regulations or under other jurisdiction which needed additional approval.
- This area can be developed but has several regulations such as compatibility standards.
- All of Zilker Park site is within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone or Barton Springs Zone. This limits impervious cover to 40% for commercial and/or multifamily projects.

WATER WITHIN THE PARK

- 1 There is no reclaimed water system within the park at this time. City Code does not allow for these systems in the ecologically sensitive areas of the park.
- 2 There are 13 abandoned wastewater lines and 2 abandoned lift stations within the park. Wastewater outflows into Barton Creek are in disrepair and have caused erosion.
- 3 There is no formal storm sewer system within the park. Stormwater is primarily directed to outflows directly connected to Lady Bird Lake or systems adjacent to the park.

Summary provided below is based on the information available at the time of this report. All existing utilities should be verified prior to actual development of the subject property.

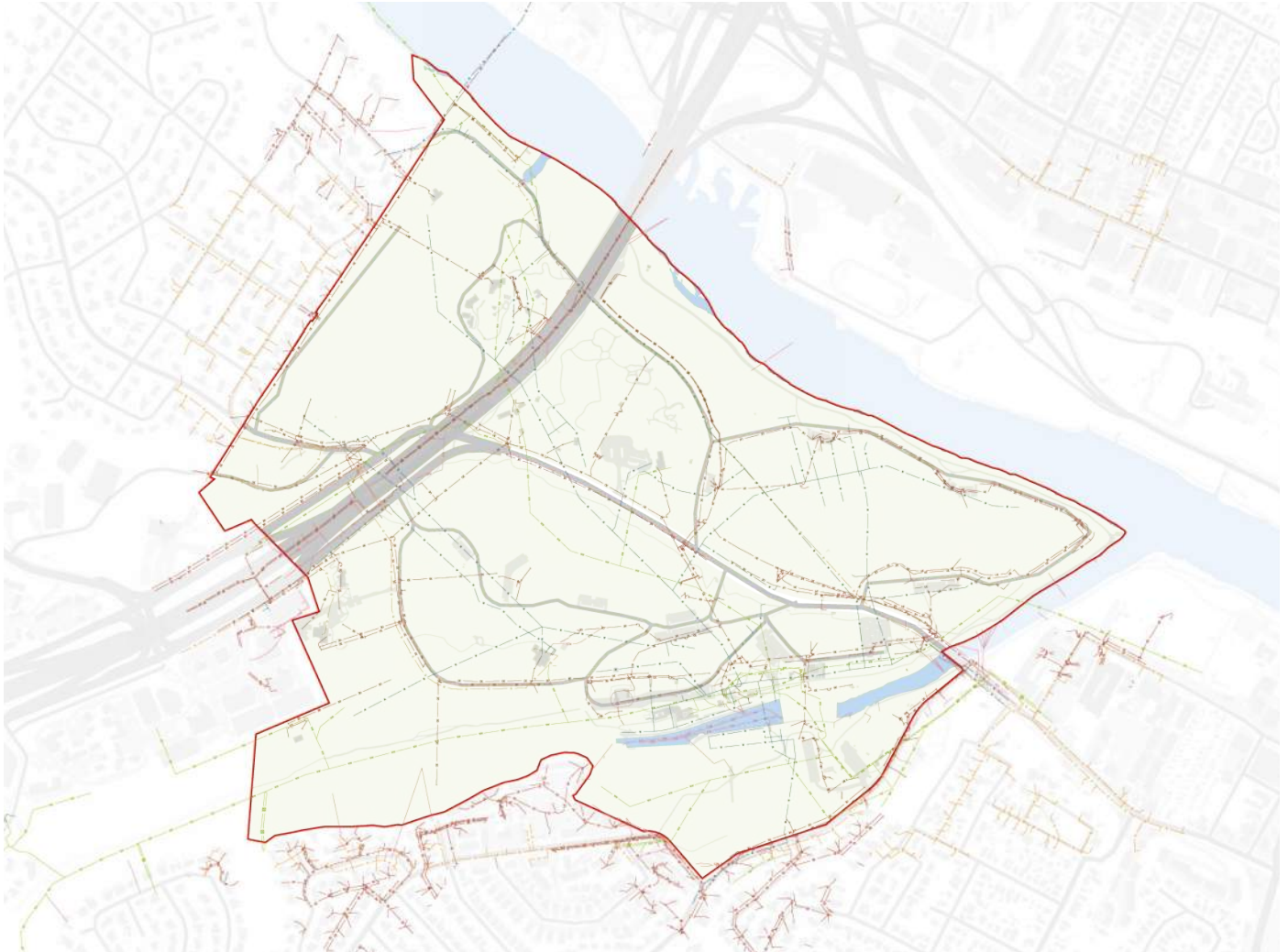
WATER

Austin Water Department (AW) is the water and wastewater service provider for the Zilker Park development. The area of interest is located within the Central South pressure zone. Several AW water and wastewater lines run through and around the park of the proposed site boundaries as as identified below:

- The largest mains within the site are a 12-inch Ductile Iron (DI) and 12-inch Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) water mains associated with project W-1987-2018 and W-1987-1500, respectively that run along South MoPac Expressway Northbound then turn east through the park. The 12-inch PVC main is currently proposed to tie into a proposed 12-inch DI main running along Andrew Zilker Road.
- A 2-inch Cast Iron (CI) watermain associated with Project W-1971-0053 that runs through the park from the Southwestern portion of the park to tie into the existing 3-inch CI watermain located in the central portion of the park. The main ties into the existing 6-inch CI running from the southeastern side of the park to northeastern side park to connect to the existing 12-inch DI running along Barton Springs Road.
- A 6-inch CI proposed for abandonment running from the center of the park to the southeastern portion of the park and ties into the existing 6-inch CI currently proposed to be abandoned and replaced with a 12-inch PVC main associated with Project W-2021-0014 at the Water Intersection 3305 located within Azie Morton Road.
- An 8-inch CI watermain that runs along Stratford Drive from the northwestern to the northeastern portion of the park with an associated project W-1964-1064.
- An abandoned 8-inch CI line located in the northwestern portion of the park running north across the Colorado River from Stratford Drive to Atlanta Street.
- Several interconnecting lines throughout the park that services the existing development.
- There are several existing fire hydrants within the site area.

WASTEWATER

All wastewater located within and around the project study boundary is collected at the South Austin Region Wastewater Treatment Plant through



the AW collection system and is maintained privately or by AW. Below are the wastewater lines:

- An 8-inch Concrete (Conc) gravity main located in the northwestern portion of the park which collects into the Bluffington #1 Lift Station.
- Bluffington #1 Lift Station waste is collected through an existing 8-inch CI force main associated with project A5811 running southeast to tie into an existing 15 PVC gravity main associated with Project A5810.
- A privately maintained lift station (Rollingwood #1), with a 6-inch (UNK) pipe material associated with Project No. 2002-0609 running north from the southwestern portion of the site area and ties into the existing 15-inch PVC associated with project A5810.
- The 15 PVC associated with Zilker Park A5810 ties into an existing 12-inch PVC, which ties into a 12-inch Concrete gravity main associated with Project A5809, which ties into a 10-inch Concrete gravity main associated with project A5808.
- The 10-inch concrete gravity main associated with Project A5808 ties into an existing 10-inch DI gravity main with associated Project S-1992-2011, which ties into the existing 33-inch FRPM gravity main at wastewater manhole (WWMH) number 29127.
- A 36-inch Fiberglass (FG) gravity main located in the southeastern portion of the park with the associated Project W-2001-0036 running northeast through the park and ties into an existing 42-inch Vitrified Clay (VC) gravity main, which ties into the existing 42-



951

feet of the Zilker Loop
Trail lies within an
erosion hazard zone

1007

feet of the Butler Trail
lies within an erosion
hazard zone

8

of 10 pieces
of stormwater
infrastructure lie within
an erosion hazard zone

inch Conc gravity main which ties into the existing 33-inch Fiberglass-Reinforced Polymer-Mortar (FRPM) gravity main associated with Project W-2005-0003 and S-2005-0006 at WWMH # 29127.

- A 24-inch Conc and an 8-inch VC gravity main running along Azie Morton Road along the eastern side of the site area that collects waste from surrounding developments from the southeastern portion of the park.
- A 10-inch Asbestos Cement (AC) main associated with Project A10435 and A10434 that ties into a 10-inch Conc main associated with Project A4430 and A4429 running southeast and ties into an existing 8-inch PVC gravity lines associated with project A4428 and A4427.
- An abandoned 8-inch CI line associated with project A5813 located in the northwestern portion of the park west of South MoPac Expressway Southbound.
- There are several abandoned lines and lift stations located east central of the park and listed as follow:
 - » 4-inch VC abandoned gravity main
 - » 6-inch VC abandoned gravity main
 - » 6-inch Conc abandoned gravity main
 - » 6-inch AC abandoned gravity main associated with project A7344
 - » 6-inch DI abandoned gravity main
 - » 6-inch PVC abandoned gravity main associated with project B440 and A3672
 - » 8-inch Conc abandoned gravity main associated with project A7344
 - » 8-inch DI abandoned gravity main associated with project A7344
 - » 8-inch PVC abandoned gravity main associated with project A4427 and A4428
 - » 10-inch CI abandoned gravity main associated with project A2664

- » 10-inch Conc abandoned gravity main
- » 6-inch DI abandoned gravity main associated with Project S-1977-0001
- » 24-inch Conc abandoned gravity main associated with project A2497
- » Abandoned Zilker Lift Station
- » Abandoned Barton Creek Lift Station
- The state of the pipes out-falling into the creek has caused the erosion issues.

RECLAIMED WATER

According to the AWD Maps, there is no reclaimed water associated with or around the site of interest. The nearest reclaimed water service is an existing 30-inch main that crosses Lady Bird Lake and extends to West Riverside Drive on the east side of South Lamar Boulevard, with a proposed service shown to extend towards South Lamar Boulevard. Furthermore, using reclaimed water within the critical water quality zone is prohibited by City of Austin.

NATURAL GAS SERVICE

Texas One Gas is the service company for the area. Gas service is presently available within the boundaries of the site area and are described as follows:

- A 6-inch Coated Steel (CS) gas line located in the northeastern portion of the site and has a short run from the east to west along Barton Springs Road. The gas line is tied into a 6-inch Polyethylene (PE) gas line at the southern side of Azie Morton Road and Barton Springs Road intersection. The 6-inch CS gas line continuously runs through the park westward across South MoPac Expressway until it reaches the Stratford Drive and Lou Neff Road intersection and starts running along Stratford Drive located northwestern portion of the site area.
- A 2-inch PE gas line located near the eastern side of the site that runs along Azie Morton Road and currently services developments located east of the park.

- A 6-inch CS gas line that runs along South MoPac Expressway Northbound and crosses South MoPac Expressway westward at the Andrew Zilker Road and South MoPac Expressway intersection and runs along Rollingwood Drive to service the developments located west of the site.
- A 2-inch CS gas line running along Dellana Lane with a sharp turn westward at the Dellana Lane and Rollingwood Drive intersection then runs along Rollingwood Drive.
- A 2-inch PE gas line tied into the 6-inch CS gas line, north of the Andrew Zilker Road and South MoPac Expressway intersection that services existing development inside Zilker Park.
- A 2-inch PE gas line tied into the 6-inch CS gas line, north of the Andrew Zilker Road and South MoPac Expressway intersection and runs along Columbus Drive that services existing development inside Zilker Park.

ELECTRIC SERVICE

Zilker Park is located within the Austin Energy service zone. Electric service is presently available within the boundaries of the site area as follows:

- A primary overhead wire located in the western portion of the park that runs north and south along Zilker Clubhouse Road. The primary overhead ties into an existing primary overhead located in Dellana Lane to the south and crosses the Colorado River to the north.
- A primary underground cable that runs along the southern side of Stratford Drive to service the existing development known as Rowling Dock.
- A service overhead wire located in Stratford Drive and Elgin Avenue that services an existing development east of Zilker Clubhouse Road.
- A primary overhead wire that runs eastward from the intersection of Vance Lane and Vale Street to Nature Center Drive that services the existing development enclosed by Nature Center Drive and

UTILITY

South MoPac Expressway. The overhead ties into an existing primary underground cable that ties into an overhead that runs along South MoPac Expressway southbound.

- A primary overhead wire is located at the intersections of Zilker Clubhouse Road and Rollingwood Drive running along Rollingwood, which ties into a primary overhead wire running along Dellana Lane and continues running eastward along Barton Springs Road. The primary turns southeast at the Barton Springs Road and Stratford intersection and cuts across the park to tie into an existing primary overhang west of the Barton Springs Pool, then runs north along Barton Creek to tie into an existing primary at Barton Springs Road and Barton Creek intersection.
- A streetlight overhead running through South MoPac Expressway.
- A primary overhead running along South MoPac Expressway southbound and ties into a primary overhead running along Dellana Lane.
- A primary overhead running along South MoPac Expressway northbound and ties into a primary overhead running along Barton Springs Road.
- A primary underground cable that runs along Stratford Drive from the intersection of S. MoPac Expressway and Stratford Drive intersection and crosses Lou Neff Road and ties into an existing primary overhead at the Stratford Drive and Barton Springs Road intersection.
- A primary underground that ties into the primary underground between Park Road and Barton Springs Road on Stratford Drive and runs along Park Road and ties back into Barton Springs Road on the western portion of the park.
- A service underground cable running along Barton Springs Road between Barton Creek and Stratford Drive.
- Service underground cables along Park Road.

- There exists a primary underground cable located in William Barton Drive in the western portion of the park.
- There exists a primary overhead that runs along Columbus Drive and ties into and services overhang running along Columbus Drive.
- There exists a primary overhead running along Azie Morton Road and Barton Hills Drive in the southwestern portion of the park.
- There exists a primary overhead running between Andrew Zilker Road and Columbus Drive to service existing development.

TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICE

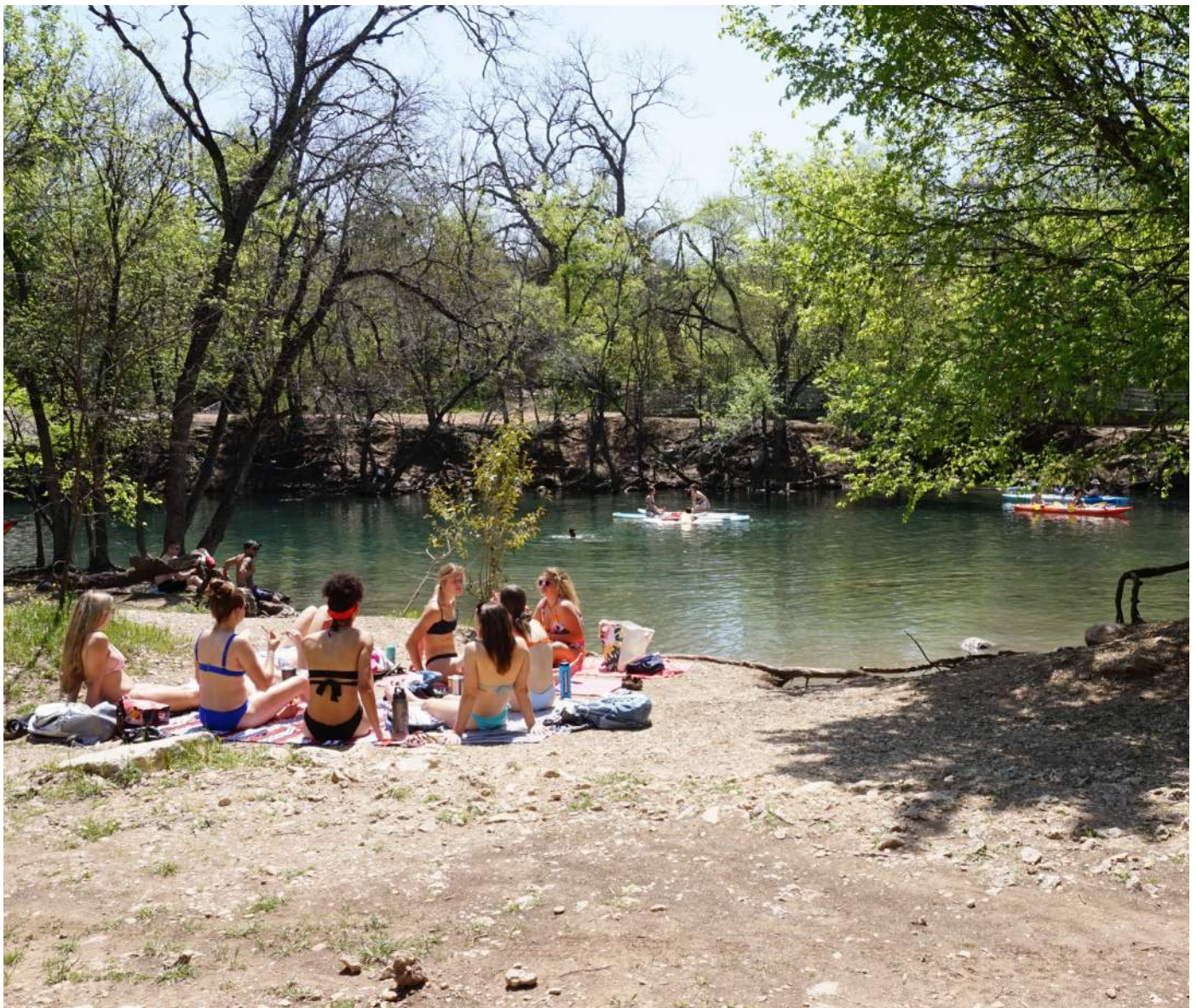
John D. Koughl with MCI has provided an email confirmation that MCI has aerial fiber along Azie Morton Road, however, no service maps were provided. Azie Morton Road is located on the eastern side of Zilker Park and runs north and south between Barton Springs Road and Barton Hills Drive.

STORM SEWER

Generally, there is not a storm sewer system within the Park area, but rather, storm sewer infrastructure associated with direct discharges to Lady Bird Lake, culvert crossings under roads, and connections to the storm sewer systems adjacent to the Park. Storm infrastructure are described below as seen in the City of Austin Property Profile:

- Storm network running along Barton Springs Road and runs from the east to drain into Barton Creek.
- Curb inlets along Barton Springs Road with drainage pipes that runs eastward and drain into Barton Creek.
- A drainage system located in the southeast portion of the park along the development and south on Barton Hills Drive and drainage pipes with header along Azie Morton Road, collecting storm sewer water and discharged into Barton Creek. In addition, the following ponds are identified to be within the Zilker Park area:

- A privately maintained pond identified as a Vegetative Filter Strip (VFS) area located adjacent to Azie Morton Road where it intersects with Lund Street.
- A City of Austin maintained pond identified as a sedimentation only pond area located adjacent to Azie Morton Road east of the VFS mentioned above. west of the VFS area mentioned above.



People enjoying Barton Creek along the degraded shoreline near the Pool Spillway.

FINANCIAL

Zilker Park, like many destination parks in cities across the US, saw temporary closures to Barton Springs Pool, the Zilker Botanical Garden, and the Austin Nature and Science Center, along with a corresponding drop in revenue. Despite the closures in 2020 and into 2021, visitors returned or moved to other destinations in the park or close by, especially Barton Springs Spillway, along Barton Creek, and in Lady Bird Lake. As result, expenses for operations and maintenance in Zilker increased while revenue remained low due to continuing closures and a lack of events. While events have resumed and the Pool, Garden, and Science Center have reopened, record usage at Zilker continues as well.

Funds collected by PARD at Zilker through concession agreements as well as park usage fees (pool admission fees, rentals of picnic sites, event locations like the Zilker Clubhouse or even large multi-day events like the Austin City Limits Music Festival) are paid into the City's general fund, a portion of which are "returned" to the Parks and Recreation Department via annual budget appropriations. The Parks Department, by and large, does not keep any of the fees collected by city ordinance directly but shares in them. This is true for most US city's park fees.

Finally, while nonprofits can raise funds and apply those funds for park improvements, programming, and operations, those funds are a small portion of total park spending. Based on research performed by The Trust for Public Land, six percent of annual spending in the 100 largest U.S. cities for parks comes from nonprofit park organizations. For Austin specifically, TPL's ParkScore index reported in 2020 that 13% of funding came from a dozen park nonprofits, totaling \$20.7M, putting Austin 17th out of 100 in terms of nonprofit funding share. The bulk of this spending is for capital projects by The Trail Conservancy, Waterloo Greenway, Pease Park Conservancy, and others.

REVENUE

This section will detail concession revenue for Zilker Park and event and other fee revenue. Events in Zilker are governed by city ordinances and practices that grew out of recommendations from the Parkland Events report in 2017.

Under chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, public parkland is protected by prohibiting the rental or lease of public parkland. In addition, to change the land from designated parkland, the city would vote to

CONCESSION AGREEMENTS

PARD enters into concession agreements with vendors doing business in the park. Concession agreements within Zilker park boundaries have not been updated since 2012. Additionally, payment structures are inconsistent and the current agreements present challenges to retaining and acquiring new vendors.

| CONCESSION | TERM | ANNUAL PAYMENT |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Zilker Park Boat Rentals | Originated: 2/2/06; Four amendments to 2/28/21, Extended to 2/28/24 (four amendments) | Minimum of \$18,000. Amounts reassessed 18 months, 36 months and every 12 months thereafter |
| Zilker Train | Austin Parks Foundation will operate the train. As of 12/1/2022, the train is not yet in operation | Proceeds will go toward operation and maintenance of parks |
| Zilker Café | No vendor under contract as of 12/1/2022. | \$70,000 (\$17,500 due quarterly) |
| Rowing Dock | Originated: 11/01/2000, Amended 10 times, expires 4/30/23 | \$667/month |

change the disposition or not. This limits private entities from taking of parkland and requires all amenities where fees are charged for reservable spaces, such as picnic shelters, Zilker Clubhouse, or other amenities, be for fair use of those facilities.

PARK CONCESSIONS OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Council authorizes the Parks and Recreation Department to operate permanent concessions in Town Lake Park/Lady Bird Lake Park area. Town Lake Park is defined as parkland on the north and south banks of Lady Bird Lake (formerly Town Lake) including Zilker Park and Auditorium Shores (City Code Section 8-1-71 to 8-1-73). Located within Zilker Park are four permanent concessions:

- Rowing Dock (kayak, canoe and stand up paddleboard (SUP) rentals)
- Zilker Park Boat Rentals (kayak, canoe and SUP rentals)
- Zilker Café (temporarily closed while awaiting new vendor)

- Zilker Zephyr (new contract with the Austin Parks Foundation, Foundation still working through mechanical and construction issues with the new train)

As shown in the table below, the concession terms that the city uses are traditional and the approach has not been altered in many years.

Permanent concession agreements in Austin parks are generally long-term contracts and held by long-standing operators who pay a combination of annual payments and a percentage of gross sales to the city. Concessions within Zilker Park are governed by the broader city code chapter mentioned earlier.

SUMMARY

- City Council has identified 4 permanent park concessions for Zilker Park
- Each Concession Agreement can take years to complete and are generally 5 to 10 years long
- Payment to the City is inconsistent and often puts financial burden of capital improvements on the vendor

| PERCENTAGE OF GROSS | CAPITAL INVESTMENT | EXTENSIONS | OTHER NOTES |
|---|--|---|---|
| 10% of revenue *gross revenue defined as gross income excluding sales tax | \$35,000 reinvestment obligations were included in the contract, but that does not represent the total amount of capital investment the business has provided over the contract term. The total amount spent is much more. | Reassess every 12 months | Structures and permanent improvements owned by the City, boats and equipment owned by the vendor. |
| | | | Previous vendor owned train. |
| 8% of the gross, payable in an annual lump sum | Any additional equipment required for food services | Up to two 5-year extensions | Pending new vendor |
| 1% of annual net revenue and 8% of annual net revenue above \$80,000, payable in an annual lump sum | The \$102,000 references the required commitments included in Amendment 7 (2012) for parking, etc. However, this doesn't include other optional capital improvements that the vendor has completed throughout the contract term. | Extended 10 times, four were extensions of time up to 4/30/22 | Boats and equipment owned by the vendor, as delineated in Amendment 11. |

FINANCIAL

OTHER FEE REVENUE IN ZILKER: RESERVABLE FACILITIES, LARGE EVENT PERMITTING

The Parks and Recreation Department's Office of Special Events manages the reservations, scheduling, and fee collection for Zilker Park, as well as other reservable facilities. The City has posted rules and fees on its [website](#). Fees, rules, and procedures are established by city ordinance and are reviewed annually by park staff and the City Council.

In addition to reservable facilities and special events, the Parks Department benefits from the transportation enterprise fund established by the City. Parking meters have been installed and are managed by the Austin Transportation Department with Zilker Park benefiting from the revenue obtained.

Events also create revenue for the City. These revenues, paid through the fees for usage established by the Parks and Recreation Department's Office of Special Events, with review and approval annually through the City Manager's Office, and City Council, are paid back into the City's general fund. The exception is the parking and gate entry fund, which allows fees collected for seasonal (May to September) and partial week (Thursday-Sunday) parking in Zilker lots to remain with PARD.

Large events, including the Trail of Lights, Blues on the Green, The ABC Kite Festival and Austin City Limits Music Festival are subject to the negotiation of an event agreement. Per the parkland event guidelines and ordinances, large events must cover all costs borne by the City as well as provide usage fees as determined by whether tickets are sold and how many days those events take place.

The city has formulas for payment for events that are included in the event agreements, including ticket sales, police, fire, EMS, transportation, and additional parks costs. Any ticketed events have a variable ticket fee assessed as well, often between \$1-\$3 per ticket per day, based on the ticket prices as well as length of the event.

For example, the ACL Music Festival in 2019 paid a total of \$2.4 million in city fees, including:

- \$1.62 million to PARD, including \$1.4 million in ticket fees.
- \$500,000 to Austin Police Department

- \$60,000 to Austin/Travis County EMS
- \$20,000 to Austin Public health
- \$30,000 Transportation fees (including Capital Metro)
- \$110,000 to Austin Fire Department

These are largely to cover the costs that City departments incurred in managing the festival. Additional expenses for security, first aid, inside the festival gates are borne separately by C3 Presents, the operator of Austin City Limits Music Festival.

REVIEW OF EVENTS, PROGRAMMING AGREEMENTS, ORDINANCES THAT AFFECT ZILKER PARK (CITY OF AUSTIN)

Special events in city parkland are governed by a set of ordinances passed by Austin City Council and managed by the Parks and Recreation Department Office of Special Events. Specifically, ordinances limit the number of days of events and the total number of unique events that can take place in Zilker Park, as well as other reservable sites such as Auditorium Shores. The parks department's revised ordinances have existed for some time. They reinforce the cap on large events at Zilker and how they have been managed and regulated.

The 2015 Parkland Events Task Force met over the period of a year and made several specific recommendations, many of which were codified in changes in city ordinances in 2016 and 2017.

- For Zilker Park, the recommendation was to reduce a total of 29 event days in Zilker to 24 through gradual attrition. The listed large events include:
 - » The Austin City Limits Music Festival: 6 days
 - » The ABC Kite Festival: 1 day
 - » Blues on the Green: 4 days
 - » Zilker Relays: 1 day.
 - » The performances at the Zilker Hillside Theater were not considered large events. Generally they have 22 performances per year.

The Task Force recommendations required that the city have its costs covered for hosting large events, as well as making sure that they have plans for sustainability, transportation, and other needs.

NONPROFIT PARTNERS OVERVIEW: PARKNERS

Several nonprofits work to provide programming, operations support, as well as capital dollars in and around Zilker Park. Most are small nonprofit groups that are volunteer in nature and have specific agreements with the Parks and Recreation Department. They are:

- Austin Parks Foundation
- Barton Springs Conservancy
- Friends of Barton Springs Pool
- Girl Scouts of Austin / Girl Scout Cabin
- Hill Country Conservancy
- Sunshine Camp / Young Men's League of Austin
- Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy / Austin Area Garden Council
- Zilker Theatre Productions (Beverly S. Sheffield Zilker Hillside Theater)

PUBLIC FUNDING

With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, most city parks agencies and nonprofit park partners saw tremendous drops in revenue as most events and in-person programming were. While this is slowly changing with the next phase of the pandemic, it is unclear how quickly such revenues will recover. Further, as documented by the National Recreation and Parks Association and researchers at Pennsylvania State University, economic downturns cause particular challenges for parks systems. Parks and recreation agencies are the first to see budget cuts and the last to see cuts restored, as documented by studies looking at the period 2003-2013.

CONCESSIONS AND EARNED INCOME

Further, any funds collected through concession agreements as well as park usage fees (pool admission fees, rentals of picnic sites, event locations like the Zilker Clubhouse or large multi-day events like the Austin City Limits Music Festival) are paid into the City's general fund, a portion of which are "returned" to the Parks and Recreation Department via annual budget appropriations. The Parks Department does not keep any of the fees collected by city ordinance directly, but shares in them. This is true in most U.S. cities for park fees.

The City of Austin uses a traditional concessions model that focuses on long-term contracts with concessionaires, usually 5 to 10-year terms. These contracts require a combination of annual payments plus a percentage of revenue from the vendors to the city.

In addition, the concessionaires are required to provide capital improvements in the areas of the public realm in which they operate. This is especially true for the majority of concessions that operate at Zilker or in the encompassing Lady Bird Lake Corridor, primarily focused on water-based recreation, including rowing programs, paddling or stand-up paddleboarding.

The City contracted with Huston-Tillotson University to undertake a (Lady Bird) Lake capacity study through its environmental justice academic program. A plan and recommendations, based on study and analysis of vendors, watercraft usage, and enforcement was delivered in January 2023, which will provide input on the possibilities and give more information as to the extent of usage and possible capacity of Lady Bird Lake and connected water bodies. While this is larger than Zilker, it affects the two existing watercraft-focused concessions operating from Zilker.

Apart from the Huston-Tillotson study, there are several key messages provided in the economic section of the Site Analysis and Needs Assessment (SANA) in the spring of 2021:

Both watercraft concessions operating in Zilker Park will be subject to changes in location, operating facilities, and access, based on elements of the vision plan if approved. Temporary or permanent relocation of amenities and access will likely be required.

The Zilker Eagle, as of this writing, is still testing and troubleshooting, but is expected to be operational by the end of 2023. Like watercraft concessions, it will be subject to changes in location, operating facilities, and access, based on elements of the vision plan if approved. Temporary or permanent relocation of amenities and access will likely be required.

For all of Zilker Park, only one location exists for a permanent food vendor at the Zilker Cafe. No vendor is currently under contract after the Department was denied a conditional use permit to sell wine and beer at this location.

SUMMARY

The Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan is for all of Austin. As the first comprehensive planning initiative for the entire park, the planning team recognized a need for comprehensive engagement to all 10 City Council Districts. While the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic limited much of the initial engagement, the planning team completed 5 virtual Community Meetings and a final in-person Open House along with more than 100 in-person pop-ups, and 50 small group discussions. In addition to the community meetings, online surveys, in-person pop-up events, and targeted small group conversations have provided greater access to people across Austin, emphasizing equitable outreach and inclusive opportunities from communities often left out of the conversation of citywide projects. With more than 5,500 participants and more than 8,000 comments received and using an equity-centered approach to explore the input, the process has connected with people across Austin with a vision for Zilker Park to be a park for all of Austin.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Vision and Goals
- Equity and Inclusion
- What We Did
 - Community Engagement
 - Technical Advisory Group
 - Other Opportunities
- What We Heard
- Who Took The Surveys

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

THE VISION AND GOALS

VISION

The Zilker planning team sought a transparent and well-documented community engagement process that engaged the city as a whole and also focused on key groups or people involved with the park, emphasizing equity as part of the process. The process was centered on the guiding values and built on community input throughout.

GOALS

The Zilker Vision planning team committed to creating opportunities for the entire Austin community to provide input on the future of Zilker Park, focusing on areas of accessibility, inclusion, history, and ecology. The community engagement goals included:

- » Educate the community about Zilker Park's history, current City of Austin programs, operations, and future City of Austin operational needs, and provide opportunities for comment.
- » Gather community input, feedback, and stories to develop a plan for the future of Zilker Park that represents the diversity of Austin.
- » Identify and educate the community on environmental considerations and respond to those considerations throughout the project.
- » Utilize equity strategies to develop community connections with and engage traditionally underserved and marginalized communities in Austin.
- » Provide opportunities for engagement that are accessible to all abilities.
- » Identify and engage with PARD Parkners and other organizations, concessionaires, and groups associated with park programming.
- » Connect with communities around interpretive storytelling and placemaking to identify key opportunities in the park.
- » Correct any misinformation about the vision for the park and acknowledge any concerns or challenges identified by community members.

- » Create an environment of excitement for the proposed Vision Plan and future park development.
- » Create community support for the proposed Vision Plan and future park development.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

For any project, the planning team identifies the anchors for making decisions. This decision criteria guides how it will evaluate the input that is received to incorporate it into each stage of the process. For the Zilker Park Vision Plan, the following criteria are considered when consulting the community input:

- » City Code of Ordinances
- » ImagineAustin
- » Strategic Direction 2023
- » Our Parks, Our Future: PARD Long Range Plan
- » Other Department Policies or Guidance, such as the Austin Climate Equity Plan
- » Zilker Park Vision Plan Guiding Principles and Goals
- » Previous rounds of community input

Input received on the draft Vision Plan goes through these criteria to be sorted and coded. All comments are read and compared. Comments in common are counted, though the process is not treated as a vote, since the same participants can share their comments multiple times through multiple methods.

The sorted comments are read through again to identify where consensus can be found, what could be possible, and what may not be possible due to the decision criteria or elements that fall outside the scope of the park plan. Every effort is made to balance competing interests.

The planning team also compares the input received in previous rounds of engagement from public comments and from key stakeholders.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

VISION

The City of Austin focuses on racial equity, recognizing that race is the most consistent predictor across all quality of life outcomes. With the focus on equity defined by the City of Austin Equity Office and a recognition of our conflicted history in this space, the Zilker Park Vision Plan team worked to develop an engagement process that emphasized that Zilker is for all of Austin across all intersectionalities.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles were identified in the Community Engagement Plan:

- » Invite community members that are representative of Austin's demographics, including a wide range of ages, races, ethnicities, abilities and disabilities, and traditionally underrepresented.
- » Reduce barriers to participation by creating a fun, culturally sensitive, inclusive and engaging process that allows for honest feedback.
- » Establish a respectful and reciprocal partnership with the community to better understand resident needs and priorities and to inform the development of the Vision Plan.
- » Increase education and understanding through tailored, engaging content that helps communities develop a deeper understanding of the Vision Plan.
- » Commit to ongoing learning and improving the approach throughout the process.
- » Develop and execute a process that advances systemic equity.

These principles were combined with common best practices of going to where community members are, connecting with community leaders, providing multiple meeting options and times, small group discussions, and disaggregating final data to explore differences among various demographic groups.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

Language access is a key component in outreach and engagement within Austin. It is well-known that many community members prefer communication in their primary language, so the Vision Plan team strived to provide opportunities for information and feedback to these community members for engagement techniques and events. American Sign Language (ASL) were available at each Community Meeting. In addition, various pop-up events were staffed by team members who speak Spanish, Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, or Korean.

DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL ACCESS

The planning team also acknowledges there is a digital divide when it comes to access to online materials. While many individuals do not have home computers, data shows the digital divide is shrinking, especially when considering smartphone access. Online efforts considered accommodations for smartphones where possible, and in-person opportunities were frequent through “pop-up” events throughout the city.

- » Additional Outreach and Communication
 - Community Ambassadors
 - Extra Pop-up Events
 - Flyer in Multiple Languages: English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Hindi
 - Small group meetings with community leaders and groups focused on equity and inclusion at Zilker Park



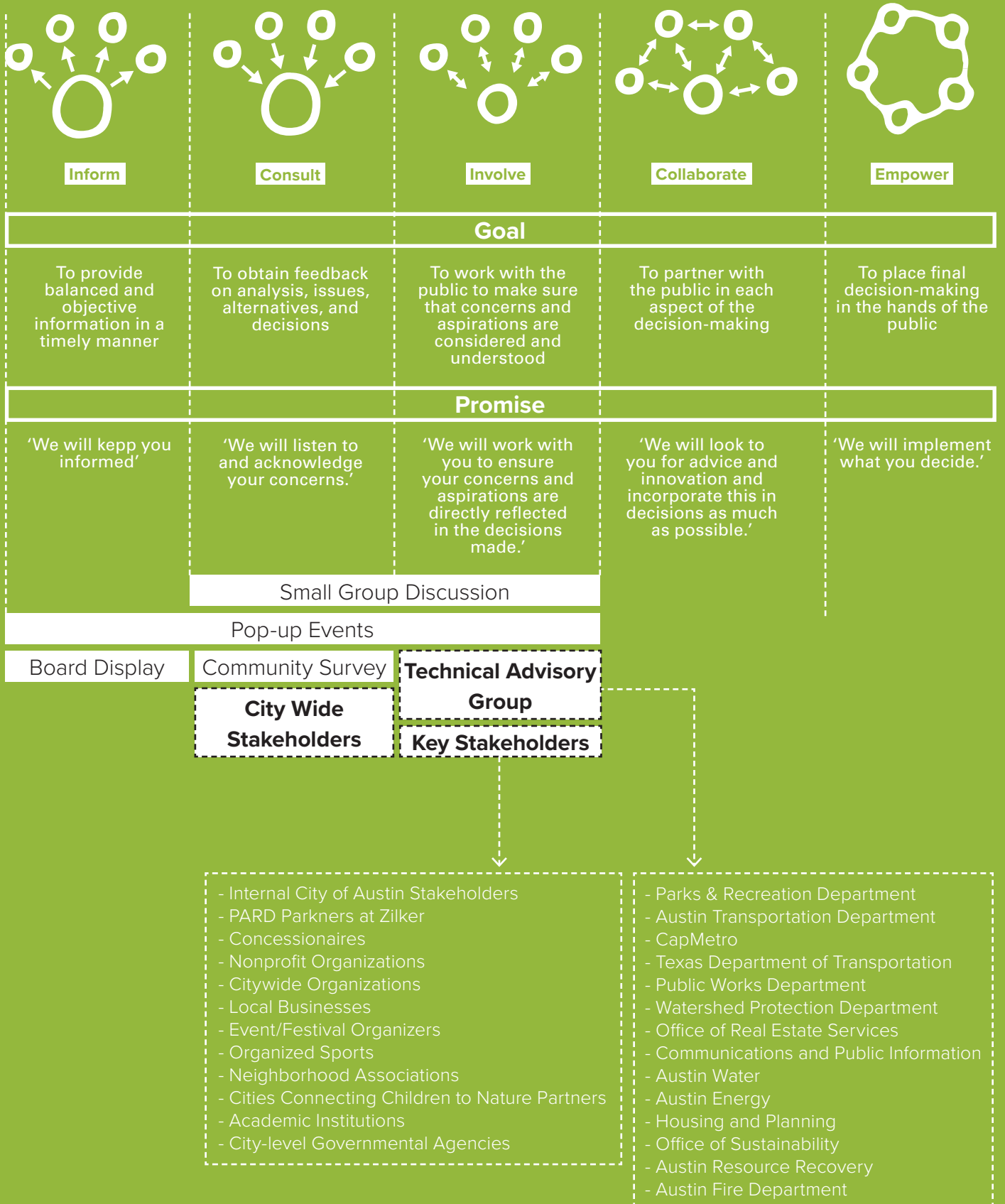
Community Meeting #2 Flyers in Multiple Languages



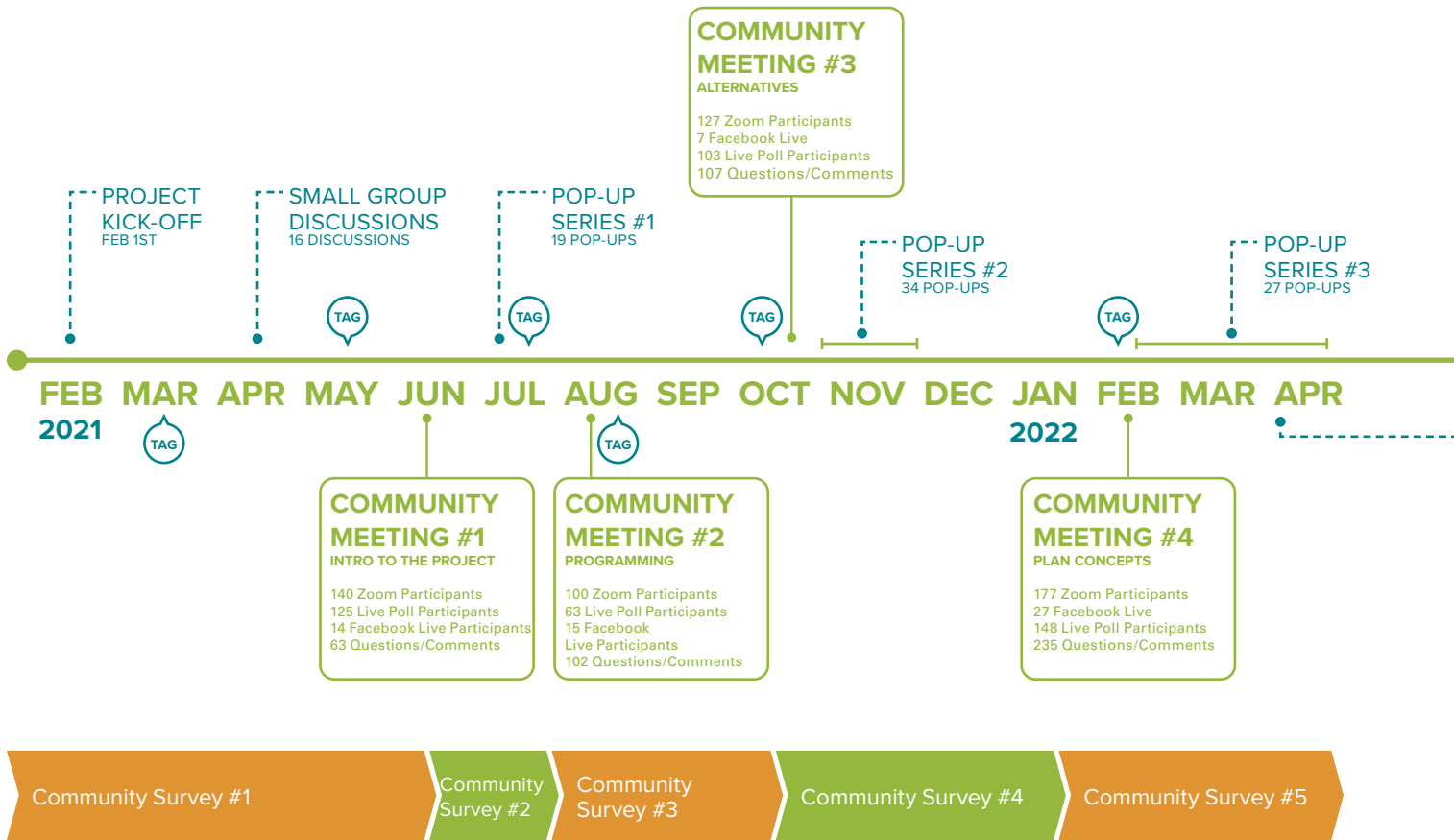
HOW THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INFLUENCES THE VISION PLAN

The project team uses the International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Participation to identify the level of engagement. For the public, the plan identified the participation level as "consult" with the purpose of obtaining feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions. At the "consult" level, the organization commits to "keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision" (IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation). Additional key stakeholders were noted at the "involve" level, including the Zilker Neighborhood Association and organizations now included in the Zilker Collective Impact Working Group. The team has worked with these organizations to ensure their concerns and aspirations are reflected in the process, even when it may not be possible to include all of them in the plan. As a standard method for identifying criteria-based decisions, the planning team created a set of planning values to guide how input should be assessed. The team presented a draft of these values, called "Guiding Principles and Goals" for community feedback. Since then, the community input and feedback have been explored through the lens of these shared park values.

IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES



COMMUNITY MEETINGS

The engagement process from community members included a series of five virtual meetings and one in-person Open House to connect with and receive feedback. To accommodate the special circumstances surrounding COVID-19, each meeting was hosted virtually with one final in-person open house. Each meeting provided information on the status of the planning process and welcomed input that was used in conjunction with feedback from other phases of engagement to help shape the vision plan.

- » Virtual Meeting Format
 - Hosted on Zoom and Facebook Live
 - Live polling and Q&A session
 - Translation and interpretation to ASL, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Hindi
 - Meeting recording, materials, and polling questions posted to the website
- » In-person Open House

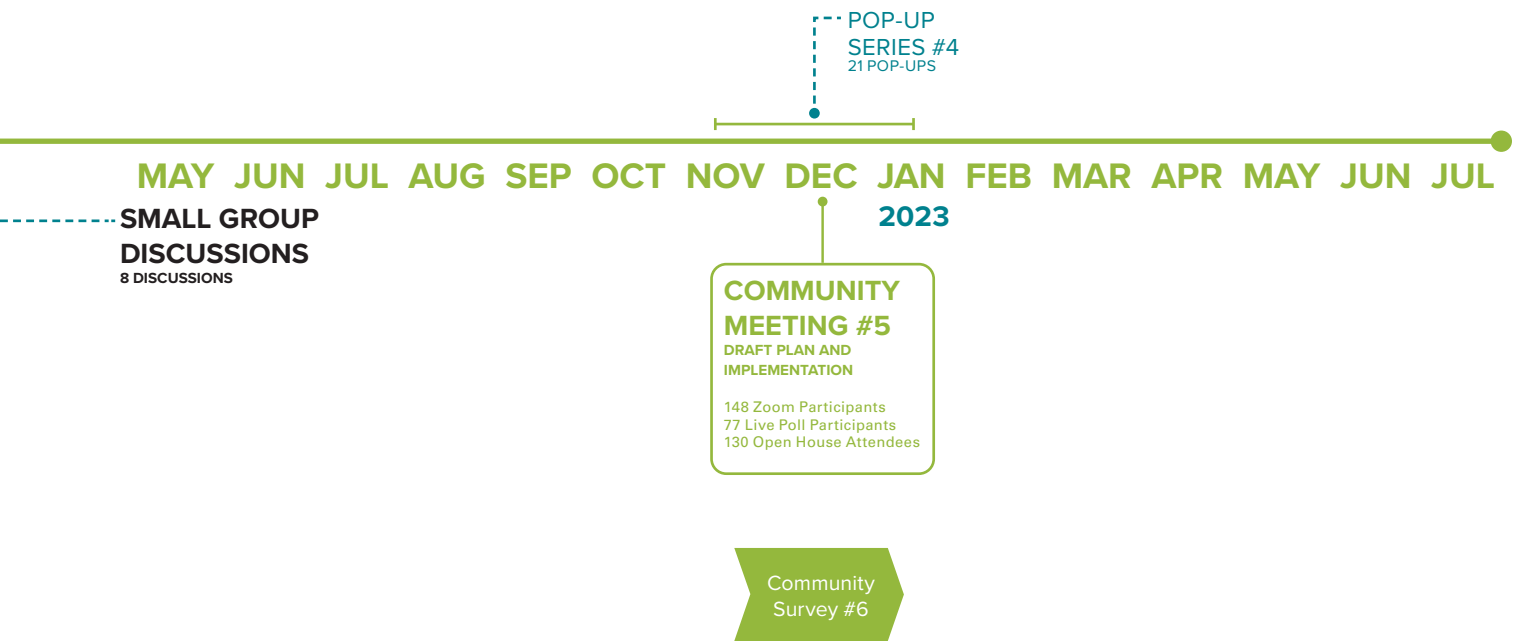
COMMUNITY SURVEYS

A total of six rounds of surveys were available, connecting 16,646 number of touches and/or participants throughout the process. Each survey focused on a different topic: Vision Workshop, Programming, Design Concepts, and Draft Vision Plan. Participants could respond to the survey questions during the live meeting, online, or in-person at various pop-up events held in each district and Zilker Park.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

SPEAKUPAUSTIN

The project team also invited the public to share stories and experiences as well as brainstorming ways “the future of Zilker can be inclusive to all” on the project SpeakUp Austin page. Participants had the opportunity to submit stories throughout the entirety of the vision planning process.



STORYMAP

The project team used Storymap, which is a web-based application to share maps and narratives about the context of the site.

PROJECT WEBSITE

The project website was updated throughout the process with community engagement opportunities and recordings and presentations from previous meetings. The site can still be visited at [AustinTexas.gov/ZilkerVision](https://austintexas.gov/ZilkerVision).

POP-UP EVENTS

Pop-Up events were organized to connect with members of the community at locations across Austin in all 10 districts and Zilker Park. These stations provided the community with an opportunity to reach a broader audience and receive additional feedback. Overall, the planning team hosted more than 100 pop-up opportunities.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Small group discussions were small-scale, focused conversations around particular topics or subjects. Conversations focused particular interests, such as equity and inclusion, partnerships, ecological uplift, and others. All meetings were documented and posted on the project website for transparency.

PILOT COMMUNITY AMBASSADORS

The Department piloted a community ambassador program in summer 2020 based on a similar program from the Office of Sustainability during the Climate Equity Plan process. Two ambassadors were selected who interviewed 10 community members each about Zilker Park, providing in-depth input that could have been missed otherwise.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP



Site Visit with TAG Members

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was comprised of City of Austin representatives from various departments who provided technical expertise on different elements and concerns in and around Zilker Park. The members of the TAG ensured the planning team understood the relationship with Zilker and other City of Austin goals, policies, plans, and constraints. All meetings were recorded and posted for review by community members.

TAG MEMBERS

- » City of Austin: Parks & Recreation Department, Austin Transportation Department, Public Works, Watershed Protection, Office of Real Estate Services, Marketing and Communications Office, Austin Water, Austin Energy, Housing and Planning, Office of Sustainability, Austin Resource Recovery, and Austin Fire Department
- » Other Governmental Entities: Capital Metro and TxDOT/CTRMA
- » Meetings
 - Meeting #1, March 3, 2021
 - Meeting #2, May 5, 2021
 - Meeting #3, July 7, 2021
 - Meeting #4, August 18, 2021
 - Meeting #5, October 27, 2021
 - Meeting #6, February 23, 2022
 - Meeting #7, October 18, 2022



OUTREACH AND MEDIA

Various methods were used to share information on the process and engagement opportunities to reach broad audiences across all 10 districts. All promotional materials and content were translated into Spanish and available in other languages upon request.

MEDIA

Press releases were distributed prior to each community meeting to share details, project background, and to raise awareness about the upcoming input opportunities. Several major media outlets covered and highlighted the planning process.

- Austin American-Statesman
- Fox 7
- KXAN
- The Austin Chronicle
- Community Impact
- Austin Monitor
- Austin Culture Map
- Towers
- Patch
- KAZI
- KVUE
- Reporting Texas (The University of Texas at Austin)
- Austin ParksCast
- Univision
- KUT

SOCIAL MEDIA

The City shared updates, community meeting details, and other opportunities on all of PARD's social media accounts, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Nextdoor.

EMAILS

PARD staff sent email notices to community members across several mailing lists. The email notices contained information about the project and engagement opportunities including, community meeting schedule and materials, survey links and results, and pop-up event schedules. Newsletters from facilities across the Department also shared information about the Zilker Vision Plan process.

SIGNS AND BANNERS

Signs and banners were placed in high-traffic areas throughout Zilker Park to promote the project website and engagement opportunities. Each sign had a QR code for park users to easily access the survey and project website using their phones throughout Zilker Park and in all metropolitan and district parks. The Department also invested in Over The Street banners through the Transportation Department.

FLYERS

The City distributed flyers with project information at the various pop-up events, parks facilities, and numerous local businesses throughout Austin.



WHAT WE HEARD

SUMMARY OF BASELINE SURVEY

- 1 4,062 Participants, 10,253 Views, 4,606 Comments
- 2 Most of the visitors use personal vehicles to get to Zilker Park but mostly walk, jog, or run within the park.
- 3 The biggest obstacle of visiting the park is lack of parking but with better trail connections, the visitors would walk, bike, or use public transit more.

COMMUNITY SURVEY I: BASELINE

[View Full Result](#)

The first survey was for setting up the baseline. It opened in November 2020 and has received over 108,000 responses from over 4,000 survey takers. Those who answered were mostly long-term Austinites, mostly white, within income over \$100,000. This determined a baseline of who were needed to reach out more to participate in the process. Below are the answers that had the largest percentages:

- » What would encourage you to walk, bike, or use public transit more to travel to the park? **19% Better Trail Connection**
- » When visiting Zilker Park, how do you get there? **86% Personal Vehicle**
- » Once at Zilker Park, how do you move around the park? **97% Walk, Jog, or Run**
- » What are your favorite recreational amenities or activities? **61% Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail, 61% Barton Springs Pool and Bathhouse**
- » What would you like to see improved at Zilker Park? **56% Restrooms**
- » If you do not visit or avoid visiting, why? **54% Lack of Parking**

COMMUNITY MEETING I: VISION WORKSHOP

This meeting focused on the overall Guiding Principles and Goals of the Zilker Park Vision Plan. During the meeting, the project team introduced the project, reviewed the results of the Baseline Community Survey, shared an overview of the Site Analysis and Existing Needs Report, and asked for feedback through polling questions and a live Q&A session.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Support for improved access to the park through transit and improved options for parking
- » Comments regarding large events in the park (funding, traffic, operation hours, accessibility, environmental impact)
- » Opposition to Zilker Café Conditional Use Permit

- » Questions regarding equity of engagement efforts
- » Ideas on how to generate funds for the park (pool operations, event days, allocation of funding, food/concessions)
- » Concerns for environmental impacts to Barton Springs Pool

OUTCOMES

- » Input received from Community Meeting #1 showed overall support for the Draft Guiding Principles and Goals from most participants. This informed the next phase of the plan and allowed the project team to develop concepts for potential programs including enhancements, amenities, activities, events, traffic, and parking.

[Meeting Recording](#)
[Meeting Presentation](#)

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

140
Zoom Participants

125
Live Poll
Participation

14
Facebook Live
Participation

63
Questions/
Comments

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY SURVEY 2

- 1 833 Participants, 370 Comments.
- 2 30% of the visitors spend money on pool entry and 24% on parking.
- 3 38% of people visit more than weekly.
- 4 61% of the visitors drive to Zilker Park.

COMMUNITY SURVEY 2: VISION

[View Full Result](#)

The responses received from the second community survey combined the results of the live polling exercise during the meeting and the online survey posted to the website after the meeting. The purpose of this survey was to gain an understanding of the community's top values within Zilker Park, mobility and usage patterns, and overall feedback on the Guiding Principles and Goals and Vision Plan process.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Barton Springs Pool, ACL Festival, and activities on the Great Lawn are the top favorite experiences for park visitors
- » Traffic congestion and lack of parking are the biggest barriers to enjoying the park
- » Overall support for the Draft Guiding Principles and Goals; additional feedback helped refine and improve them
- » Comments regarding improvements to transit opportunities

COMMUNITY MEETING 2: PROGRAMMING

The focus of the second community meeting was to share information on current park programming and get feedback from the community on future programming considerations. The meeting included information on input received from the first community meeting and survey, an overview of current programming, a review of other similar parks, and a discussion on current funding and strategies.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Support for additional cultural events and educational programs to make all Austin residents and visitors feel welcome
- » Support to improve park accessibility through transit upgrades

- » Comments and ideas regarding inclusivity in the park
- » Support for improvements to park amenities (restrooms, trails, parking)
- » Comments regarding equity of engagement efforts

OUTCOMES

Input received during Community Meeting #2 showed support for improvements and changes to programming at Zilker Park. During the meeting, the project team expanded the ideas presented through thoughtful discussion about strategy and priorities with the community. The input was used to form recommendations for future programming and design alternatives to support these programs, including enhancements, amenities, activities, events, traffic, and parking.

[Meeting Recording](#)
[Meeting Presentation](#)

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

100
Zoom Participants

63
Live Poll
Participation

15
Facebook Live
Participation

102
Questions/
Comments

WHAT WE HEARD

SUMMARY OF SURVEY 3

- 1 820 Participants, 370 Comments
- 2 Facilities: Provide accessible land and buildings for diverse recreation for all and parks maintenance throughout the city.

COMMUNITY SURVEY 3: PROGRAMMING

[View Full Result](#)

The purpose of the third community survey was to evaluate current and future programs of Zilker Park through understanding community preferences and priorities.

- » Several comments expressed a preference to move festivals, large events, and parking from the Great Lawn
- » Support for additional restrooms, nature parks, and walking trails
- » Support for improvements to accessibility through ramps, handicap parking areas and paved trails
- » Comments about disapproval of parking as a funding source and requests for more information about anticipated revenue from each funding source

COMMUNITY MEETING 3: ALTERNATIVES

The third community meeting focused on design alternatives for improving mobility and transportation, programming, environmental features, historical resources, and more. The meeting gave an overview of activities to date and input received and presented design alternatives that considered programming, accessibility, mobility, transportation and ecology. Participants answered live poll questions and shared comments via chat during the discussion.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Suggestions and ideas regarding parking and transit improvements such as shared parking garages, increased connectivity through trails and shuttle systems
- » Support for ecological enhancements such as a buried parking area with a green roof and trees, phytoremediation, and climate change mitigation

- » Comments about the relocation of Austin City Limits and Trail of Lights
- » Support for improvements to park amenities such as restrooms, volleyball courts, trails, car, and bike parking; and ideas for additional amenities like lockers, pickleball and tennis courts
- » Questions regarding the source of funding options are coming bonds, general funds, or community fundraising
- » Comments and ideas for additional programs such as educational programs and cultural events to make the park more inclusive

OUTCOMES

The feedback received during Community Meeting #3 provided ideas to refine the design alternatives presented and offered new ideas for accessibility, transit and ecological enhancements, preferred park amenities, and programs, and additional connectivity opportunities.

[Meeting Recording](#)
[Meeting Presentation](#)

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

127

Zoom Participants

103

Live Poll
Participation

6

Facebook Live
Participation

107

Questions/
Comments

SUMMARY OF SURVEY 4

- 1 955 Participants, 3,902 Views, 1,304 Comments
- 2 Several comments expressed the need for focusing on improvements to the ecological health of the park and reducing parking space and large events.
- 3 Participants support reducing pavement and increasing trees in the park.

COMMUNITY SURVEY 4: ALTERNATIVES

[View Full Result](#)

Due to the complexity of the project, multiple survey versions were created to provide varying levels of input from participants.

- » Support for utilizing some of the underused parts of the park for park programming, while keeping other spaces for less activity
- » Support for food and vendor options limited to 1 or 2 areas
- » In the Nature Preserve Zone, participants are most interested in exploring new trail entrance(s) to the Preserve
- » In the MoPac Zone, participants are most interested in exploring non-vehicular/active transportation paths
- » In the ZBG Zone, participants are most interested in exploring changes to landfill area by removing waste materials or adding soil
- » In the Great Lawn Zone, participants are most interested in exploring non-vehicular/active transportation paths
- » In the Polo Field Zone, participants are most interested in additional safe crossings on Barton Springs Road
- » In the Barton Springs Zone, participants are most interested in ways for increasing ecological function
- » In the Trailhead Zone, participants are most interested in increasing ecological function

COMMUNITY MEETING 4: PLAN CONCEPTS

The fourth community meeting focused on presenting three design concept themes: Stitch, Edges and Regenerate. The meeting gave an overview of activities and community input received to date and presented the elements of the three concepts. Participants answered live poll questions and shared feedback via chat during the discussion.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Suggestions and ideas regarding inclusion of diverse demographic participation such as additional pop-up locations and alternative community meeting times

- » Request for specific details regarding pavement square footage, cost of elements and funding for each concept
- » Support for the land bridge and underground parking
- » Support for preservation of natural and cultural heritage
- » Concern for relocation of the hillside theatre due to traffic noise and location inconvenience
- » Support for dedicated bike lanes for the hike and bike trail

OUTCOMES

The feedback received during Community Meeting #4 helped in the development process of the draft Zilker Park Vision Plan. The feedback provided ideas to refine the design concepts and shared views on preferred park elements and overall design.

[Meeting Recording](#)
[Meeting Presentation](#)

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

177

Zoom Participants

148

Live Poll
Participation

27

Facebook Live
Participation

235

Questions/
Comments

WHAT WE HEARD

SUMMARY OF SURVEY 5

- 1 708 Participants, 858 Comments, 6,485 Views
- 2 Concept A: 74% of participants like the land bridge concept
- 3 Concept B: 50% of participants like the additional pedestrian/bike bridge connections across Barton Creek
- 4 Concept C: 55% of participants support the boardwalk on Lady Bird Lake

COMMUNITY SURVEY 5: PLAN CONCEPTS [View Full Result](#)

To assist community members with different ways to think through the concepts, multiple versions of the survey were created to allow community members to share in ways they preferred.

WHAT WE HEARD: CONCEPT PREFERENCE

- » 35% of participants showed support for the idea that Concept A: Stich best meets the overall guiding principles and goals, 27% answered Concept B: Edges best meets the goals, and 21% answered Concept C: Regenerate best meets the goals
- » Support for keeping the rugby field, polo field, and disc golf course
- » Support for clearing invasive species, preserving water quality, and restoring the natural environment of Zilker Park
- » Conflicting opinions for the use of parking garages and Zilker Park for large events such as Trail of Lights and ACL
- » Support for the Great Lawn remaining an off-leash dog area
- » Preference for minimal impacts to the park
- » Debating result between keeping Zilker Hillside Theater where it is (52%) and desire for the new location (48%)
- » Concern for reduction of car lanes on Barton Springs Road
- » Preference for the kayak/stand-up paddleboard/canoe access to be near Butler landfill, east of MoPac
- » Preference for keeping Stratford Drive in its current alignment and allowing access to vehicles

COMMUNITY MEETING 5: DRAFT PLAN

The community was invited to participate in Meeting #5 (offered virtually and in-person) to review the draft Vision Plan and provide input.

VIRTUAL MEETING

During the virtual meeting, participants were split into breakout rooms where they listened to four 25-minute presentations about the draft plan's different aspects, including Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Nature and Ecology; Accessibility and Mobility; and Finance and Implementation. A brief Q&A session followed each

presentation with a final Q&A session with participants back in the main room.

OPEN HOUSE

In addition to the virtual meeting, the team hosted an in-person open house at McBeth Recreation Center in Zilker Park, where community members were encouraged to ask questions, visit with project team members, and provide feedback.

- » Saturday, December 10, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
McBeth Recreation Center
2401 Columbus Dr., Austin, TX 78746

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Concern over the costs of parking and equitable access to the park
- » Investment of PARD time and funding to support large events
- » Comments regarding tradeoffs of using space for new purposes and losing original function (e.g., Moving the amphitheater)
- » Landfill restoration process to support plants and wildlife
- » Discussion about the planning process, regulations, and collaboration with organizations and non-profits
- » Questions about spillway restoration: the impact of high traffic and dogs on the spillway
- » Questions/concerns about traffic impacts of parking and accessibility solutions
- » Impacts of mobility and accessibility on the ecology of the park
- » Questions about parking access to specific areas within the park
- » Concerns over the safety of parking plans and access during events
- » Ease of using shuttles for people with a lot of equipment, dogs, etc.
- » Funding and Implementation
 - Questions regarding funding availability and the timeline for implementation
 - Pricing strategy for parking
 - Discussion about consolidated sports area – space availability, terrain change, costs, parking
 - Costs and benefits of moving ACL to another park

OUTCOMES

With 130 attendees, the open house had representation from every council district in Austin. The highest number of attendees came from district 5 (25%) and the lowest from district 6 (2%). 298 written comments were collected during the open house with many more in-person discussions.

The feedback received during Community Meeting #5 helped finalize the draft Vision Plan, which will be reviewed by various boards and commissions and ultimately presented to the City Council for adoption.

[Meeting Recording](#)
[Meeting Presentation](#)

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

148

Zoom Participants

77

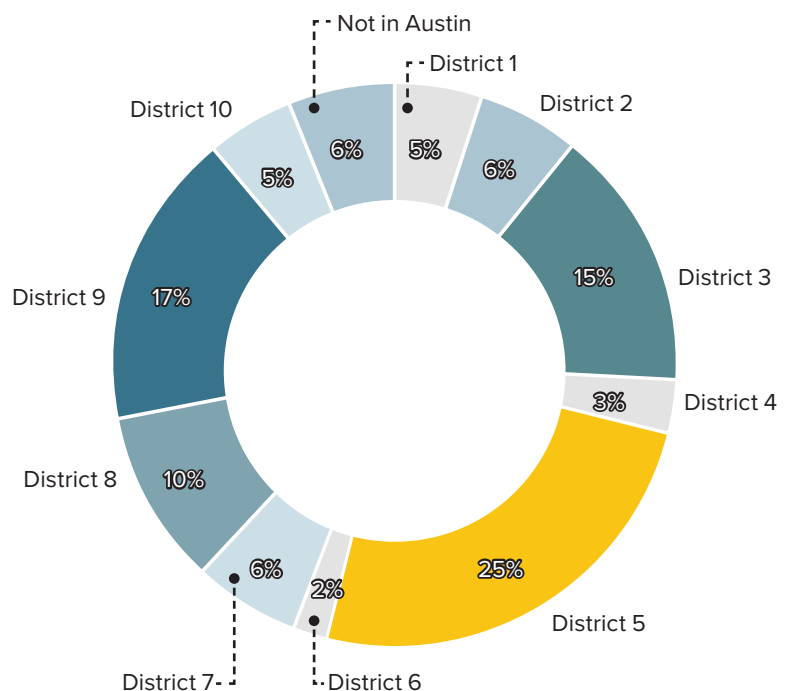
Live Poll Participation

130

Open House Attendees

298

Questions/
Comments from
Open House



WHAT WE HEARD

SUMMARY OF SURVEY 6

- 1 2,898 Participants, 3,430 Comments, More than 2,300 Commenters, 26,904 Views
- 2 Draft Plan was available to comment on from November 15, 2022 to January 8, 2023
- 3 Online Survey was from November 15, 2022 to January 9, 2023
- 4 The project team released 7-min draft walk through video online with the draft document
- 5 There are more than 6,000 views on the draft walk through video.
- 6 About 30% of commenters reside around Zilker Park (Zip Code: 78704, 78745)
- 7 About 85% said they see challenges in using the new or updated spaces.

COMMUNITY SURVEY 6: DRAFT VISION PLAN

There were several opportunities to provide input on the initial draft Vision Plan, including leaving a comment on the full draft plan document, reviewing the draft plan map, and completing the online survey. In addition to these opportunities, the community was encouraged to connect with the project team through community meetings, pop-ups, and the project email. Multiple Austin media outlets also shared about the opportunity to provide feedback.

WHAT WE HEARD

- » Among survey participants, 23% were ages 25-34, 19% were 35-44, 16% were 45-54, 16% were 55 - 64, 9% were 65-74, 8% were 18 – 24, and 4% were other.
- » 52% of participants were female, 42% were male, 6% preferred not to answer, and 2% were other.
- » Among participants, 68% were white, 14% were Latinx or Hispanic, 14% preferred not to answer, 3% were Asian/Asian American, 2% were Black/African American, 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1% Race or Ethnicity not listed.
- » Zip Codes: District 5 had the most participants (20%), followed by District 9 (15%), not sure (15%), District 8 (10%), I do not live in Austin (7%), District 7 (6%), District 3 (5%), Others (5%), District 1 (4%), and District 4 (4%).
- » Over half of the respondents said they were most excited about the land bridge (55%), followed by the reestablished banks of Barton Creek (49%) and the new pedestrian/bike bridges (39%). The sports area and welcome plaza had the fewest responses, with 9% and 4%, respectively.
- » About one-third of respondents said Accessibility (36%) “Fulfills” the vision plan’s guiding principles and goals, followed by Nature and Ecology (34%), Sustainability (27%), Diversity Equity and Inclusion (24%), and History and Culture (23%).
- » About one-third of respondents said they were “unsure” that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (36%) fulfilled the draft plan’s guiding principles and goals, followed by History and Culture (34%), Sustainability (28%), Nature and Ecology (34%), and Accessibility (27%).
- » Nearly half of the respondents said Sustainability (46%) “Does not fulfill goal” in the draft vision plan, followed by Nature and Ecology (44%), History and Culture (43%), Diversity Equity and Inclusion (40%) and Accessibility (37%).

POP-UP SERIES

Overall there were 4 rounds of pop-up series for the vision plan process. After the first pop-up series where community members were encouraged to provide feedback primarily through the survey (paper or online), the planning team heard comments were being missed and that participants who did not want to complete the survey did not have a clear way to share their thoughts. For the last two pop-up series, participants have been encouraged to share comments that are written down and posted, provide feedback on proposed amenities, respond to the survey, or review the full draft plan in person at the pop-up or online after. All comments collected are then entered on PublicInput.com and associated with the particular pop-up.

- » Series 1: 19 Pop-Ups (June 30 to August 8, 2021)
- » Series 2: 34 Pop-Ups (August 10 to October 4, 2021)
- » Series 3: 27 Pop-Ups (October 25, 2021 to January 9, 2022)
- » Series 4 : 21 Pop-Ups (November 15, 2022 to January 8, 2023)

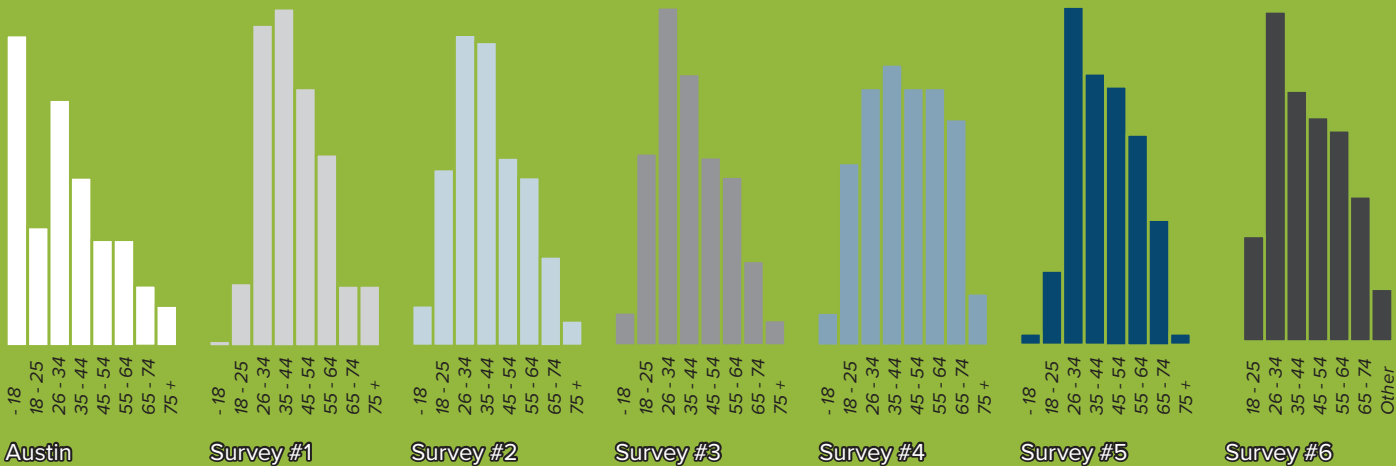
ADDITIONAL METHODS

Community Meetings and Surveys are still relied upon for connecting and hearing community voices. Additional methods are also used to reach community members who are often underrepresented in meetings and surveys. These methods included pop-ups in key locations, small group conversations with community leaders, and community ambassadors to connect more deeply and directly with people who may not participate otherwise. These efforts and the exploration of the comments are balanced with overrepresented demographic groups to seek a better understanding of thoughts from all of Austin.

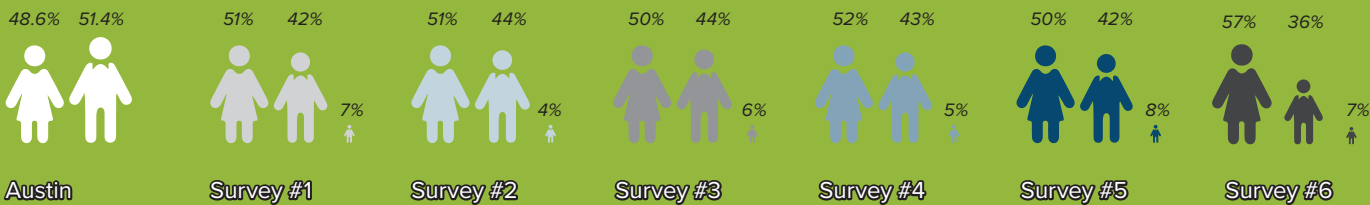


WHO TOOK THE SURVEYS

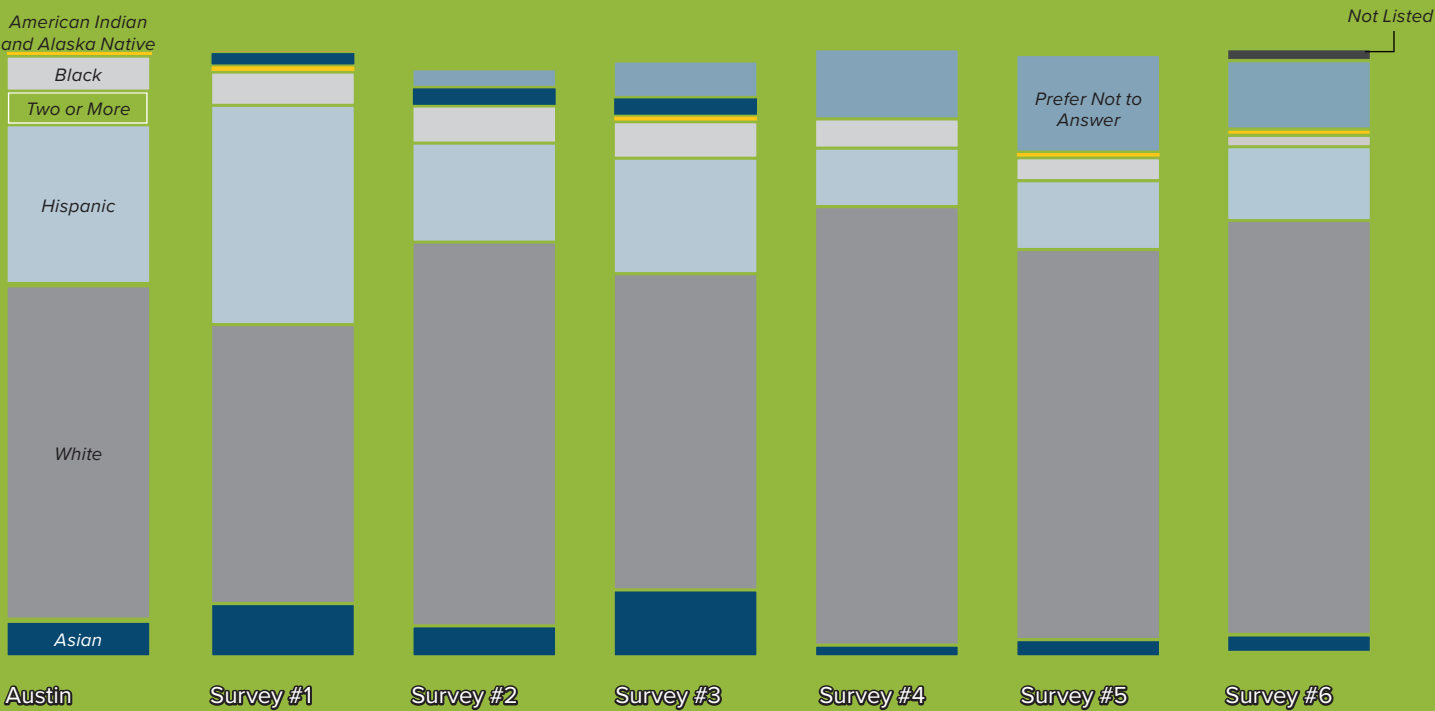
AGE



FEMALE, MALE, OTHER

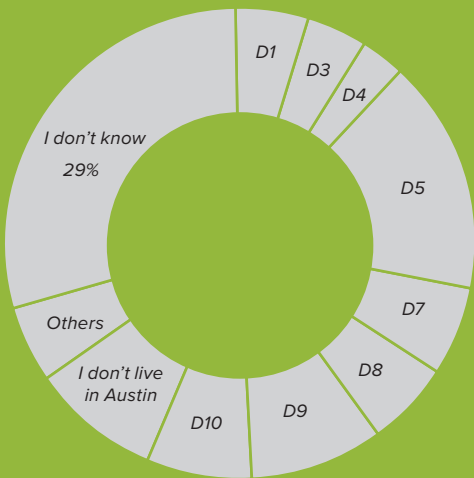


RACE/ETHNICITY

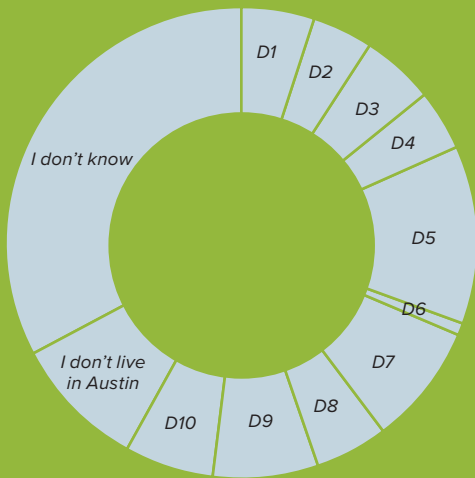


COUNCIL DISTRICT

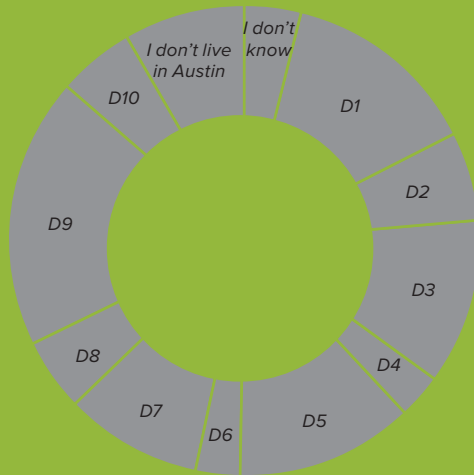
Survey #1



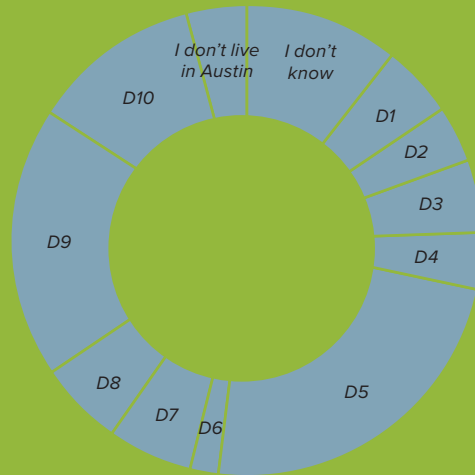
Survey #2



Survey #3



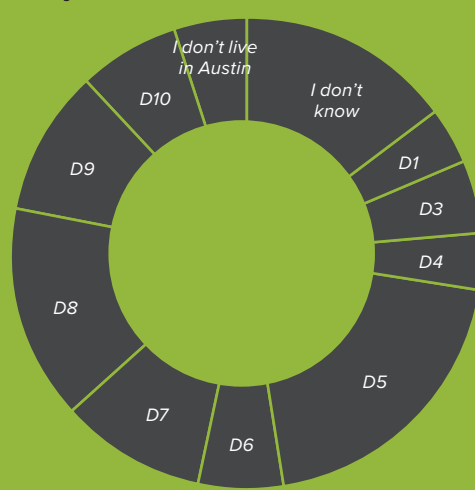
Survey #4



Survey #5



Survey #6



SUMMARY

One can think of Zilker Park as a complicated puzzle of elements that need to come together to create a holistic park. The decisions made for one element have impacts for the other aspects of the park – from ecological uplift to transportation initiatives to cultural programs and policies. It is also important to acknowledge that the plan needs to solve the challenges faced today, but allow for innovative solutions to address climate change, transportation, and generally being a park for a thriving, growing city. The park has been in existence since 1917; this is the first comprehensive plan for Zilker Park since its inception, so the plan needs to think 100 years forward to plan for a sustainable, thriving park.

This chapter outlines the plan recommendations which are based fully on the community outreach and stakeholder conversations that have taken place over the course of the planning process.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THIS CHAPTER

Vision Plan Overview
Vision Plan Structure

THE VISION PLAN

OVERVIEW OF THE VISION PLAN

PLAN FEATURES

- 1** Land Bridge to connect north and south sides of Barton Springs Road and more broadly connect with regional trail systems.
- 2** 93 acres of Ecological Uplift to heal back environmentally damaged spaces within the park.
- 3** Improved access within and into the park via shuttles and increased connections across the creek and lake.
- 4** Welcome Center that repurposes the Caretakers Cottage and Quonset Cabin to serve as a hub for visitors.

PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

The Zilker Park Vision Plan represents thousands of individual comments from the community, thousands of hours of work, and addressing today's challenges while looking into the future for a sustainable park for all of Austin. The park exists physically in the center of Austin and also at the center of many planning initiatives that will potentially shape the way people get around the city, to the park and enjoy the park spaces.

The Zilker Park Vision Plan will potentially take decades to realize the full vision. This serves as a roadmap for City leadership, decision-makers, and collaborators as implementation moves forward. The recommendations include projects, policies, programs and partnerships. It is understood that these elements will move forward as opportunities arise – funding opportunities, partnership opportunities, and other tangential City projects.





CURRENT CONDITION



ZILKER
CLUB HOUSE

STRATFORD DR

ROWING DOCK

NATURE
PRESERVE

AUSTIN NATURE AND
SCIENCE CENTER



THE VISION PLAN





NORTHERN AREA

- 1** Parking Garage under MoPac or just east will be used for the visitors to Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin Nature and Science Center, and the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail.
- 2** Stratford Drive would be realigned to the east of MoPac, along the Zilker Botanical Garden. If the road were to be built here, a sound wall could be built as part of that project to help mitigate noise.
- 3** The existing landfill area will be restored woodland and meadow with ecological uplift.

ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT ON LANDFILL AREA





CURRENT CONDITION



**MCBETH
RECREATION
CENTER**

**DISC GOLF
AREA**

**SUNSHINE
CAMP**

**VIOLET CROWN
TRAILHEAD**



ZILKER
ANICAL GARDEN

LADY BIRD LAKE

LOU NEFF RD

VOLLEYBALL
COURTS

STRATFORD DR

ROCK ISLAND

GREAT LAWN

SPRINGS RD

LO FIELD

MOON TOWER

BARTON SPRINGS RD

RUGBY FIELD

PECAN GROVE
PICNIC AREA

ROCK GARDEN

ZILKER
HILLSIDE
THEATER

PLAYGROUND

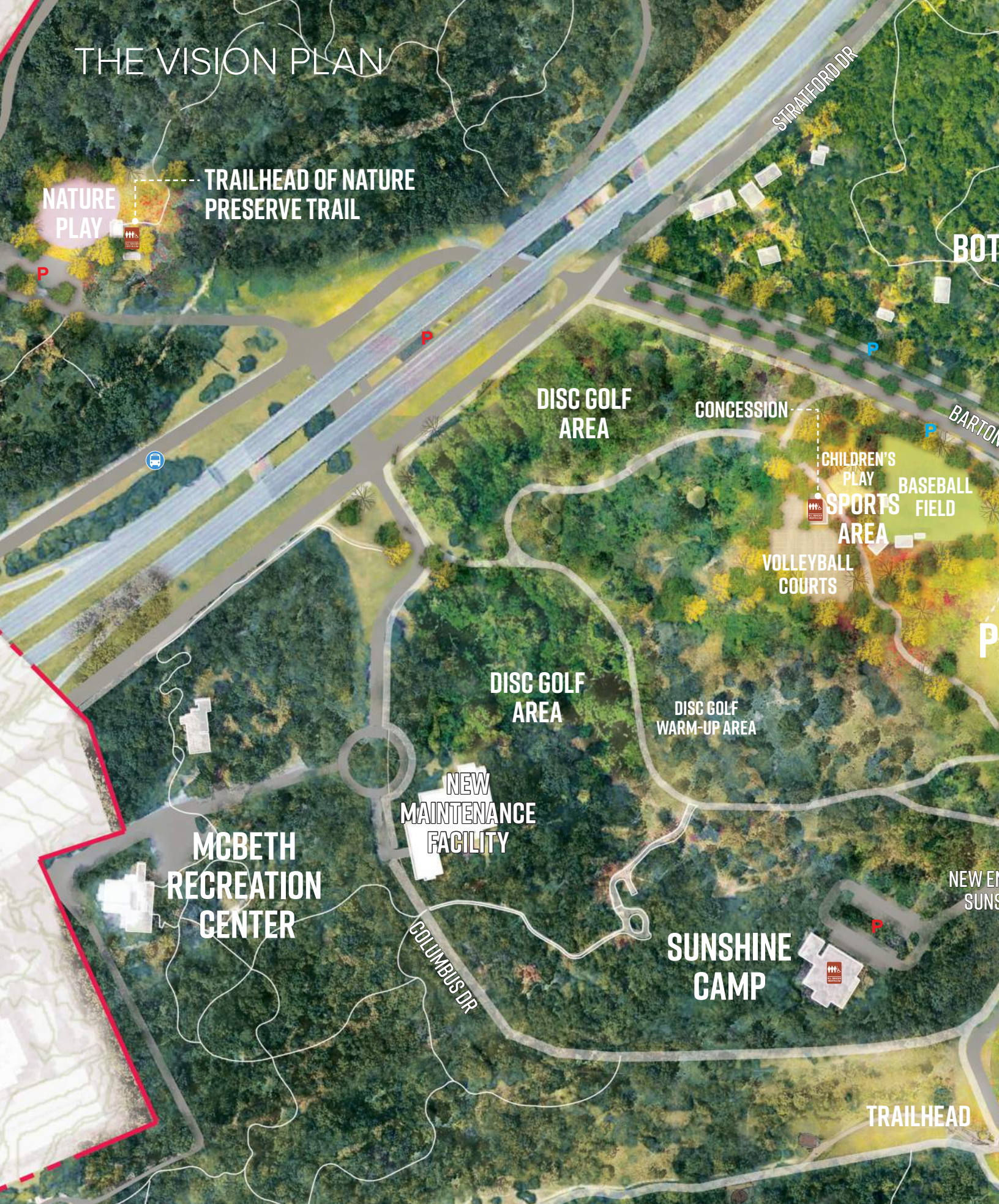
CARETAKER'S
COTTAGE

QUONSET HUT

ZILKER PARK
BOAT RENTALS

BARTON SPRINGS SPILLWAY

THE VISION PLAN





CENTRAL AREA

- 4** The land bridge will stitch the park back together by joining the north and south sides of the park with an underground parking garage.
- 5** Sports area will bring existing activities together, including baseball, volleyball, to the east side of Polo Field Lawn near existing Disc Golf courses.
- 6** The new Zilker Hillside Theater is integrated with the land bridge.
- 7** Barton Springs Road may be reduced to one lane of traffic each way, with on-street parallel parking and improved bus stops.

ZILKER LAND BRIDGE





ZILKER HILLSIDE THEATER





CURRENT CONDITION



VOLLEYBALL
COURTS

LOU NEFF RD

ROCK ISLAND

GREAT LAWN

MOON TOWER

BARTON SPRINGS RD

RUGBY FIELD

PECAN GROVE
PICNIC AREA

PLAYGROUND

CARETAKER'S
COTTAGE

QUONSET HUT

ZILKER PARK
BOAT RENTALS

BARTON SPRINGS SPILLWAY



THE VISION PLAN





EASTERN SIDE

- 8 Picnic area with concession and restroom is another gathering spot for the visitors around Great Lawn.
- 9 The pedestrian and bike bridge is relocated to along Toomey Road, increasing connectivity.
- 10 Lou Neff Road is becoming pedestrian and bike only trail with emergency or maintenance vehicle access.
- 11 The new bridge across Lady Bird Lake provides another crossing point between Roberta Crenshaw Bridge and Pfluger Pedestrian Bridge.

BARTON SPRINGS SPILLWAY





CURRENT CONDITION

POLO FIELD

ANDREW ZILKER RD

MOON TOWER

SUNSHINE
CAMP

COLUMBUS DR

ZILKER
HILLSIDE
THEATER

VIOLET CROWN
TRAILHEAD

BARTON

GREAT LAWN



BARTON SPRINGS RD

RUGBY FIELD

PECAN GROVE
PICNIC AREA

PLAYGROUND

BARTON SPRINGS SPILLWAY

SPRINGS POOL

SUNKEN
GARDEN

WRIGHT
FIELD

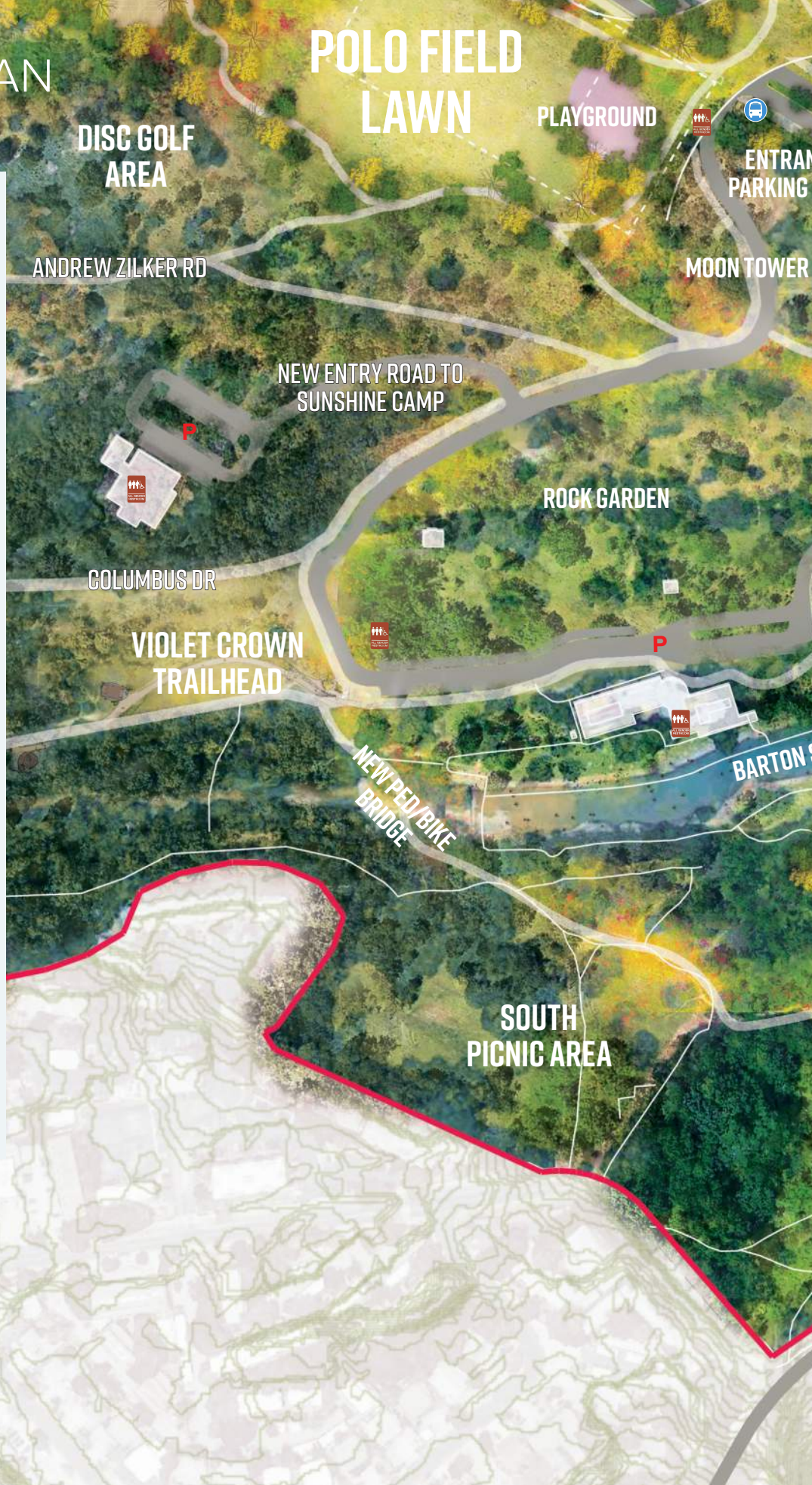
MONKEY
TREE LAWN



THE VISION PLAN

SOUTHERN AREA

- 12** A new bridge connects the parking garage to the Welcome Center.
- 13** Caretaker's Cottage and Quonset Hut in Welcome Center are repurposed to educational purpose.
- 14** The south entrance of Barton Springs Pool would remain available year-round with access to new playscapes for families.
- 15** Barton Creek will be rehabilitated with controlled water access and erosion treatments.



SOUTH SIDE OF BARTON SPRINGS POOL





CURRENT CONDITION

MCBETH
RECREATION
CENTER

GIRL SCOUT
CABIN

BARTON CREEK



DISC GOLF
AREA

POLO FIELD

ANDREW ZILKER RD

SUNSHINE
CAMP

COLUMBUS DR

VIOLET CROWN
TRAILHEAD

ZILKER
HILLSIDE
THEATER

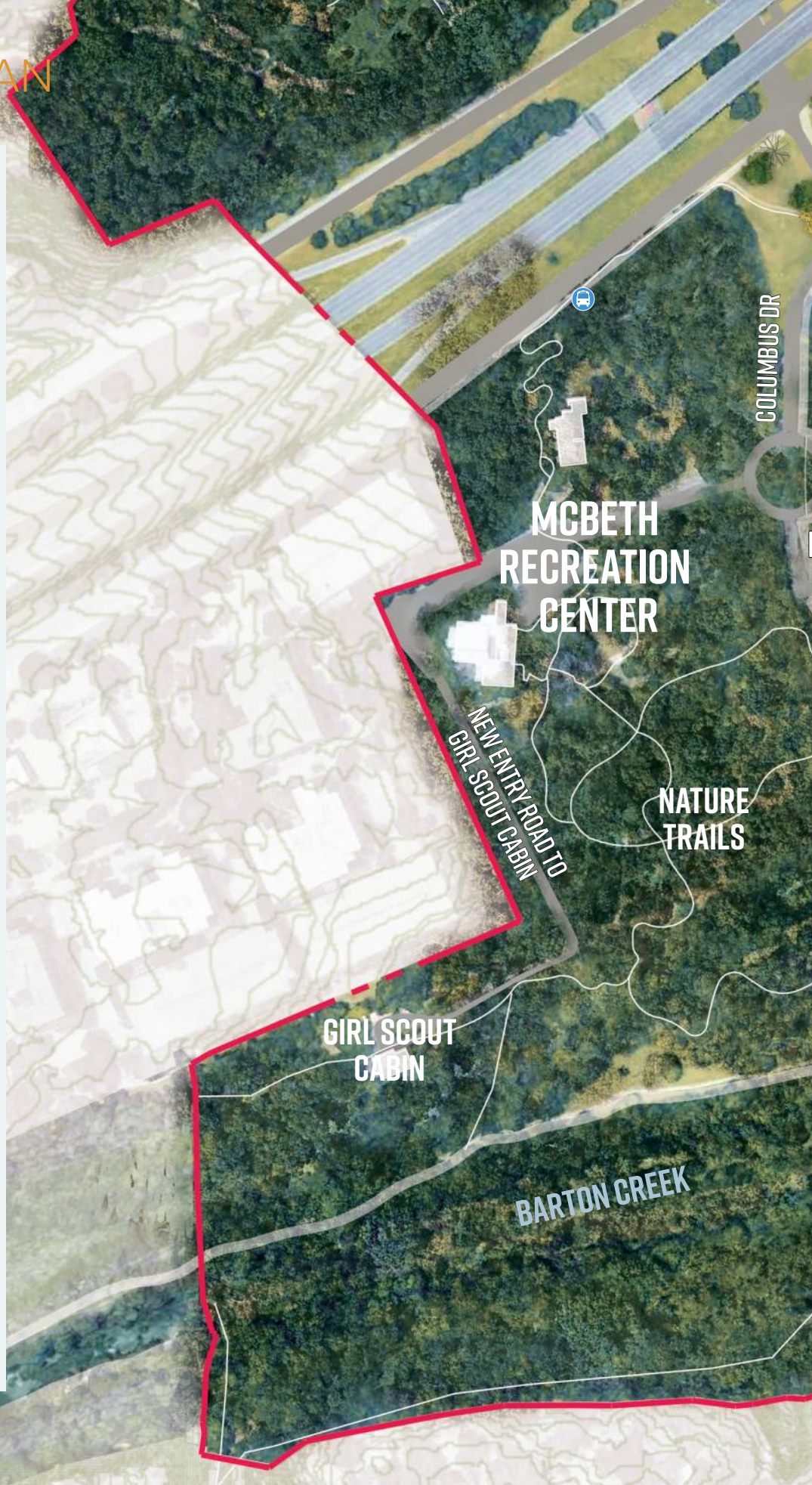
VIOLET
CROWN TRAIL

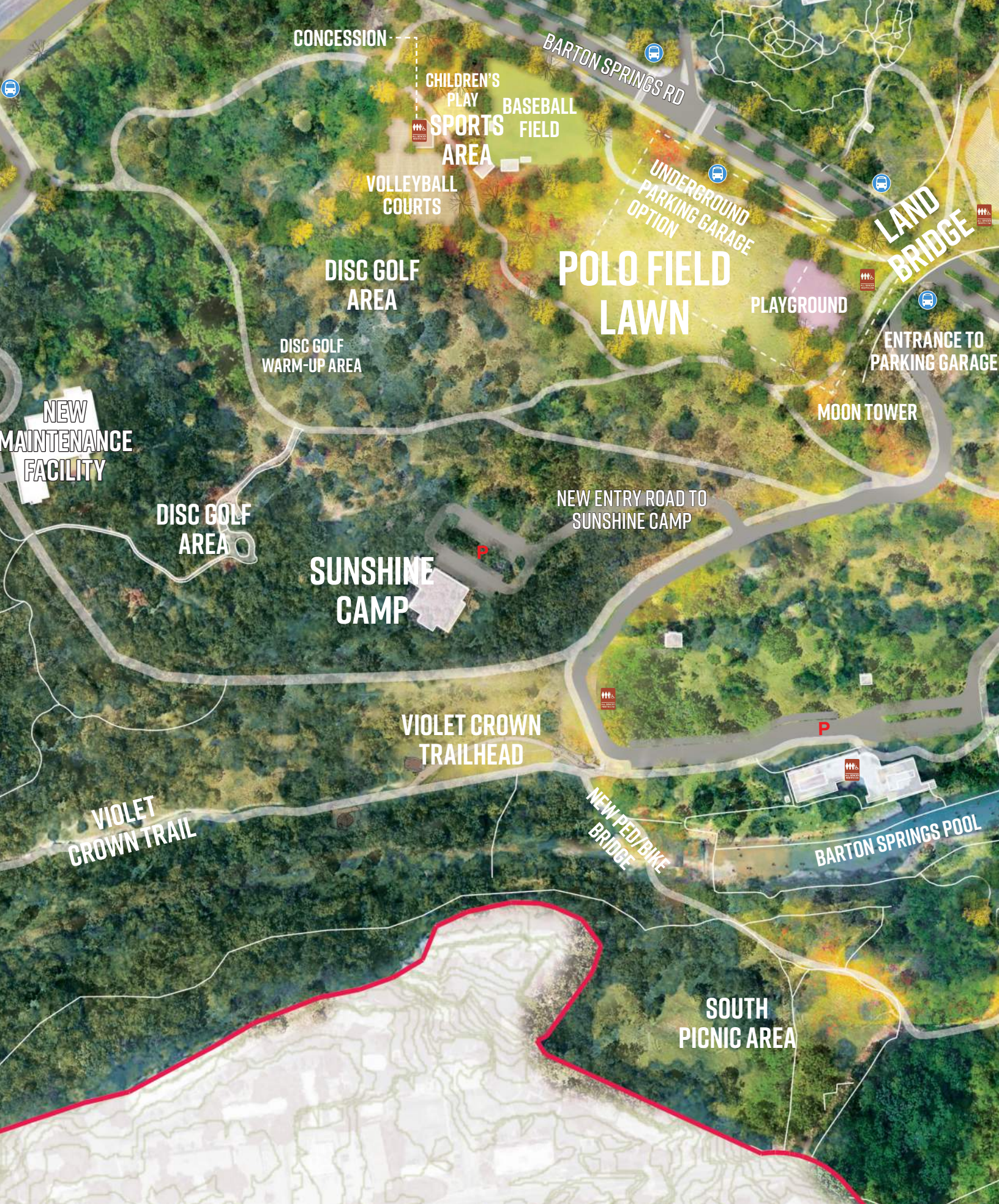
BARTON SPRINGS POOL

THE VISION PLAN

WESTERN AREA

- 16** With the new entry road to the Girl Scout Cabin, the southern part of Columbus Drive becomes a nature trail.
- 17** As Andrew Zilker Road becomes pedestrian and bike only trails, the Disc Golf Area can be extended to the south.
- 18** Columbus Drive will be partially closed with a roundabout. The nature trail will be continued from Barton Creek Greenbelt to Lady Bird Lake over the land bridge.
- 19** The new pedestrian bridge on the west side of Barton Springs Pool will improve connectivity across Barton Creek.





ZILKER SPORTS AREA





HOW ENGAGEMENT SHAPED THE PLAN



THE ZILKER METROPOLITAN PARK VISION PLAN IS A COMMUNITY- DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS



Equity,
Diversity, and
Inclusion

During the visioning process, the planning team utilized the feedback, received from community members from all 10 Council Districts toward the design. The following pages show how what we heard from small group discussions, pop-ups, surveys, and community meetings influenced the plan and how the Guiding Principles were used as a foundation. Survey results were not definitive in consistently providing a direction, so the team balanced feedback with other sources of input and drew from other city of austin plans, the guiding principles, and continued to explore and identify the most beneficial options in alignment.

BARTON SPRINGS ROAD CONFIGURATION OPTION

A-Stitch

2 lanes of travel

--> Ranked 4th on the Top 5
Element Question from
A-Stitch

B-Edges

2 lanes of travel, on-street
parking

--> Ranked 13th on the Top
5 Element Question from
B-Edges

C-Regenerate

1 lane of travel, on-street
parking

--> Ranked 10th on the Top
5 Element Question from
C-Regenerate

08.18.21 TAG Meeting

Barton Spring Road is one of the main connectors from Downtown to MoPac. For that, it is hard to reduce the number of lanes but is great to have separated pedestrians and bikers.

10.01.21 PARD Leadership Meeting

We need to think to use all options in different locations in the park. The level of crossing being over or underground would depend on a lot of factors.

12.21.21 Austin Transportation Department Meeting

Parking along BSR - parallel only; underpass preferred to land bridge due to cost; support medians and curb extensions.

Community Survey #5 Comments

- » Imagine the traffic due to the people parallel parking.
- » I like:... keeping parking on Barton Springs Rd for disabled parking or unloading spots to naturally slow down traffic...

08.26.22 Austin Transportation Department Meeting

ATD is supportive to reduce Barton Springs Road to one lane each direction with street parking.

PLAN DIRECTION

Move forward with one lane of travel in each direction with parallel parking. Allow flexibility for further considerations with Austin Transportation Department.

PLEASE RANK YOUR PREFERRED BARTON SPRINGS ROAD CROSSING OPTION.

A-Stitch

Land Bridge

31%

--> Ranked 1st on the Top 5
Element Question from
A-Stitch

B-Edges

Underpass

25%

--> Ranked 4th on the Top 5
Element Question from
B-Edges

C-Regenerate

Surface Crossing

22%

A,B and C

Pedestrian Bridge

22%

Community Survey #1 Comments

- » Consider a land bridge
- » Bury Barton Springs Road and Connect park to the pool area

10.01.21 PARD Leadership Meeting

A 'hybrid' combining under/over might be one way of implementing the land bridge concept.

Community Survey #5 Comments

- » Underpasses for peds/bikes are not inviting.
- » I've been dreaming of land bridge over Barton Springs Rd.
- » I love the land bridge and the additional crossings of Barton Springs road.

08.26.22 Austin Transportation Department Meeting

There is not technical issue with the realignment but it will not be mobility priorities cause Stratford Drive is not a major roadway like Barton Springs Road in case of the capacity.

PLAN DIRECTION

Use various types of crossing based on the locations and contexts.

HOW ENGAGEMENT SHAPED THE PLAN

WHAT IMPROVEMENT OF STRATFORD DR DO YOU PREFER?

A-Stitch

Align on east side of MoPac **35%**

--> Ranked 8th on the Top 5 Element Question from A-Stitch

B-Edges

Align on west side of MoPac **25%**

--> Ranked 12th on the Top 5 Element Question from B-Edges

C-Regenerate

1 lane of travel, on-street parking **40%**

08.18.21 TAG Meeting

There are a lot of buses approaching Nature and Science Center along Stratford Dr.

Community Survey #4

- » 45% Leave as it is
 - » 35% Reroute to the west side of MoPac
 - » 20% Reroute to the east side of MoPac
- 55%**

02.23.22 TAG Meeting

Realigning Stratford on west side of MoPac affects the preschool and facilities at Austin Nature and Science Center.

08.30.22 CTRMA Meeting

- » Underground option sounds concerning
 - 36' median current now: Shoulder to shoulder
 - Requirement of air vent, fire department
 - It is costly option and complicated
- » For the alignment on the east side needs more coordination

PLAN DIRECTION

Continue coordinating with CTRMA about the possibility of Stratford Dr realignment.

WHICH LOCATION FOR ZILKER HILLSIDE THEATER DO YOU PREFER?

A-Stitch

To Great Lawn **13%**

B-Edges

Move to Landfill/Lakeside **29%**

C-Regenerate

Current Location with Improvements **58%**

42%

05.19.21 Small Group Discussion with Park Staff

Don't actually think the existing location is the best place to have a theater due to not enough parking, accessibility, and outdated facilities.

04.14.22 PARD Facilities Group Meeting

Putting Zilker Hillside Theater on the water, people would love that.

Kite Festival Pop-Up Event

Expand Hillside Theater

Community Survey #5 Comments

Moving the theater seems to bring a lot of potential disruption to theater attendees with mixing with people on the Great Lawn, their music, their dogs.

04.08.22 Meeting with CTRMA

We are doing noise analysis and will make the level below 66 decibel with proper mitigation.

06.14.22 Zilker Hillside Theater Production Team

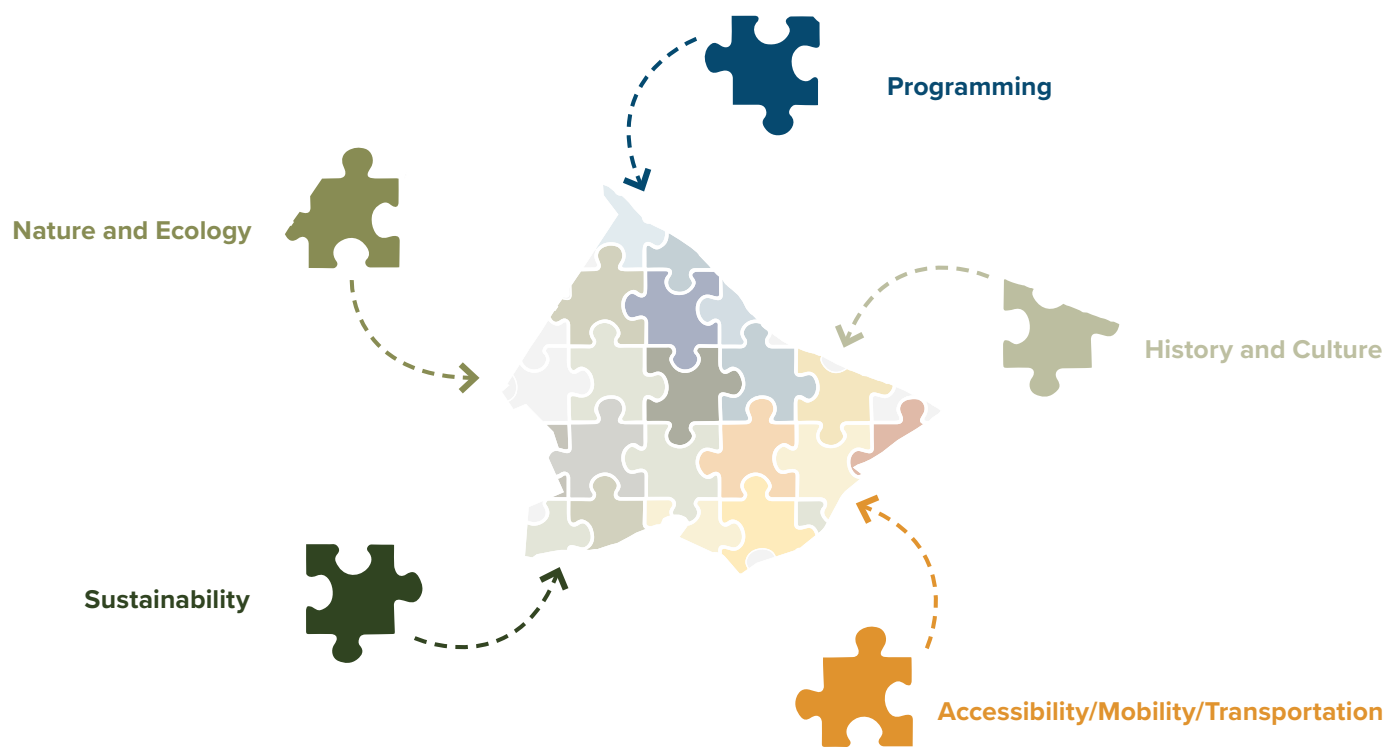
Prefer great lawn location than landfill area due to safety, liability, and noise issue.

PLAN DIRECTION

Show options in greater detail for both locations, detailing the pros/cons with each for more clarity.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE VISION PLAN

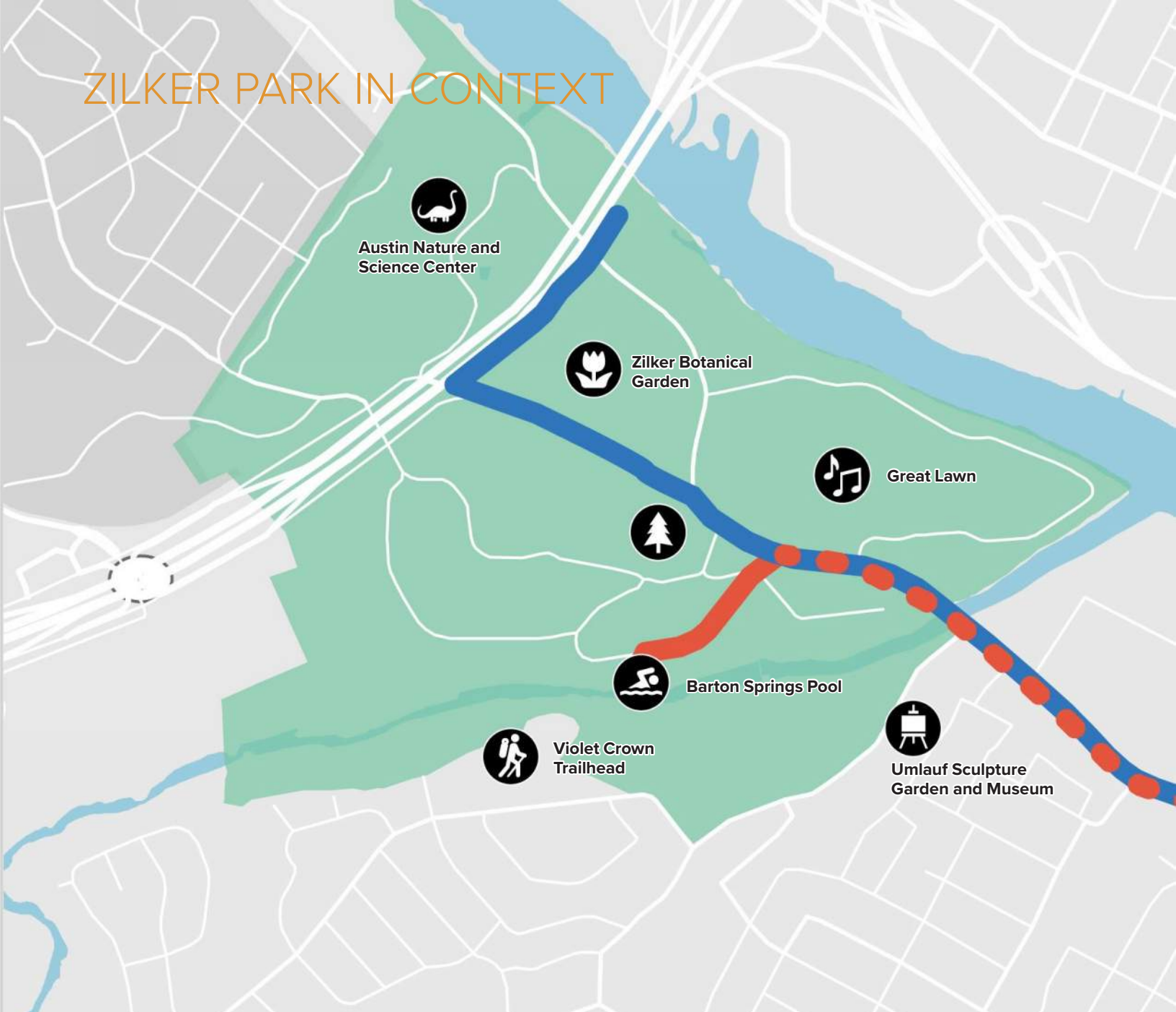
ZILKER PARK AS PUZZLE PIECES



Zilker Park is a complicated puzzle with many pieces - nature and ecology, programming, sustainability, history and culture and accessibility/mobility/transportation. All aspects are considered within the plan, creating a tension of possible uses. For example, how should the park address Austin's growing population and Zilker's draw as a destination, while respecting the precious ecological systems that exist on site? How should the plan address real access challenges (connectivity within the park, getting to the park) when limitations beyond the City's control (upcoming MoPac Expressway design, CapMetro plans) create potential roadblocks to implementation?

The answer to this question is by consistently returning the Guiding Principles and Goals and seeking clarity through community engagement where possible.

ZILKER PARK IN CONTEXT



EXTERNAL SHUTTLE OPTIONS TO ZILKER PARK

An external shuttle could help to decrease the need for parking, especially as Project Connect moves forward.

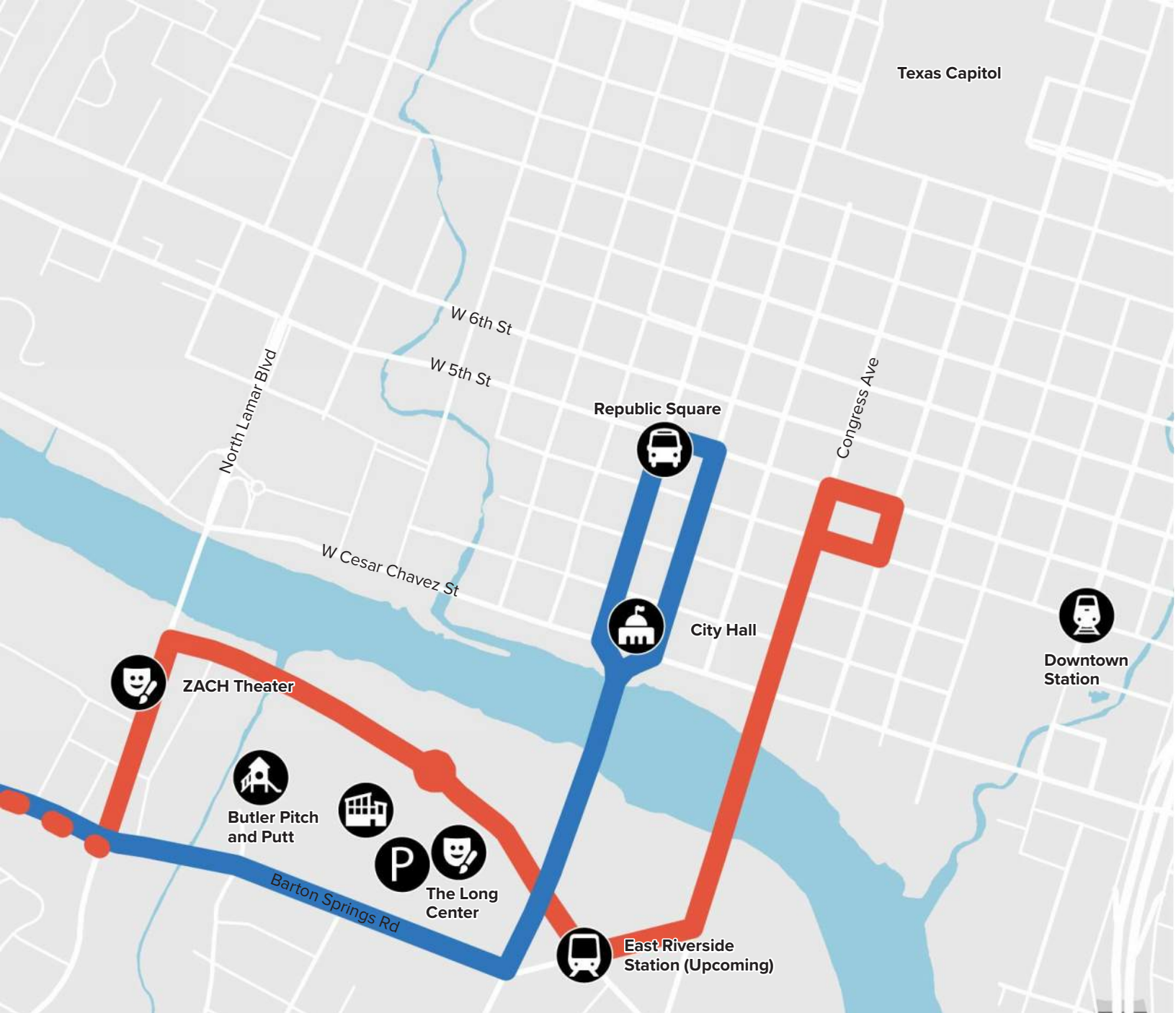
The purpose of the shuttle is to connect the Zilker Park to high frequency transit stations or downtown, bridging off-site parking sites and supporting travel throughout the park. As a result, Zilker Park will be more accessible to all community members.

As shown above, the Vision Plan suggests two options for off-site shuttle connections: Route Option A along East Riverside from Downtown to the DAC, and along Barton Springs Road into Barton Springs Pool and Violet Crown Trailhead area, and Route Option B is

from Republic Square and One Texas Center to Zilker Botanical Garden and Austin Nature and Science Center. Route Option A could connect to the nearest future light rail station located at Auditorium Shores, servicing the future Orange and Gold Lines, bringing high capacity transit within 1.25 miles of Zilker – within range of first/last mile goals.

Below are the elements that should be considered when evaluating the design of an external shuttle.

- » Bidirectional with clear start and end points (not a continuous loop)



LEGEND

- Zilker Metropolitan Park
- Route Option A
- Route Option B
- Hydrology

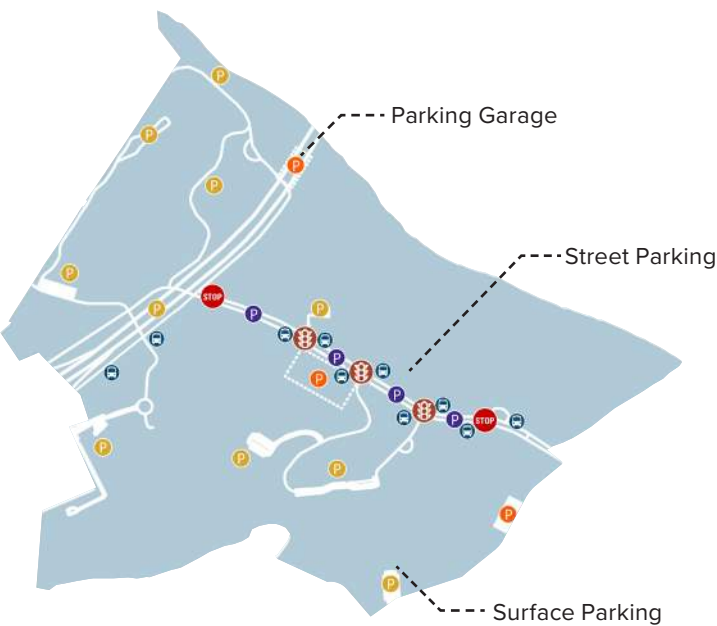
- » Protection from congestion-related delays
- » Appropriate speed and safety
- » Vehicles that load and unload quickly
- » Directly serves most significant flow of people
- » Permanence of origin and destination
- » Appropriate for park users such as dog owners and families
- » Capacity
- » Accessibility

FRAMEWORK OF THE VISION PLAN

Table 3: Comparison Table

| | | EXISTING | PROPOSED |
|-------------------|---|----------|------------------|
| Parking | Formal | 1,300 | 2,450 |
| | Informal | 1,150 | 0 |
| | Total Spaces | 2,450 | 2,450 |
| Impervious Cover | Roads | 20.9 | 19.9 |
| | Parking | 12.52 | 3.4 |
| | Programs/ Structure | 2.5 | 10.87 |
| | Total Acres | 35.92 | 27 |
| Ecological Uplift | Upland Woodland Acres | 96 | 114 |
| | Riparian Woodland Acres | 69.6 | 82.6 |
| | Meadow/ Savanna Acres | 0.4 | 49.3 |
| | Canopy Enhancement Acres | - | 10 |
| | Drainage Enhancement Acres | - | 2 |
| | Total Acres | 166 | 258 |
| Trails | Total Miles | 12.6 | 19.5 |
| Programs | Caretakers Cottage | | Renovated |
| | Quonset Hut | | Renovated |
| | Sunken Garden | | No Change |
| | Hillside Theater | | Relocated |
| | Girl Scout Cabin | | No Change |
| | Zilker Club House | | No Change |
| | Rowing Dock | | No Change |
| | Zilker Park Boat Rentals | | Relocated |
| | Lookout Point | | No Change |
| | Playgrounds | | Existing + 4 New |
| | Volleyball Courts | | Relocated |
| | Disc Golf | | No Change |
| | Baseball Field | | Relocated |
| | Rugby Field | | Enhanced |
| | Informal Parking Lots | | Removed |
| | Andrew Zilker Road | | Partially Closed |
| | Columbus Drive | | Partially Closed |
| | Lou Neff Road | | Closed |
| | All of the contributing resources for National Register of Historic Places will remain. | | |

VEHICLE CIRCULATION AND PARKING

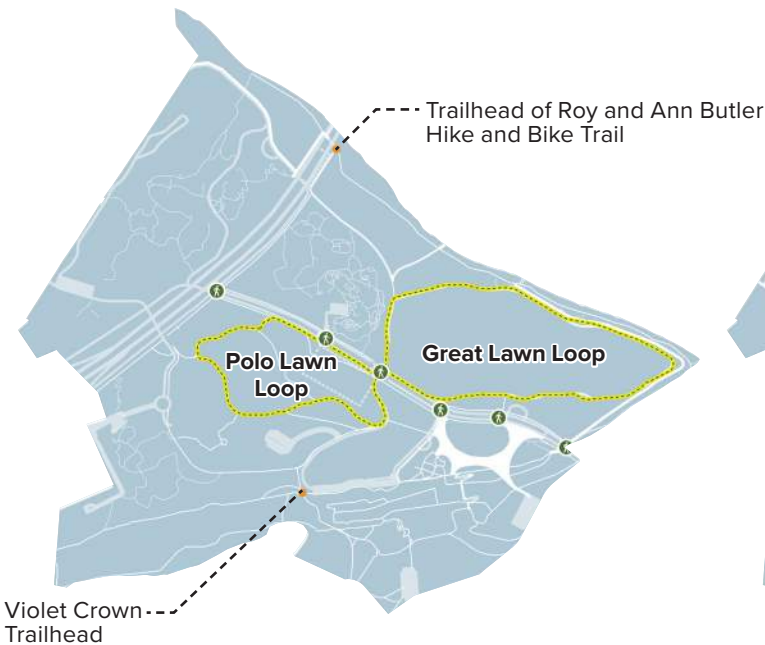


WAYFINDING / INTERPRETIVE STORY

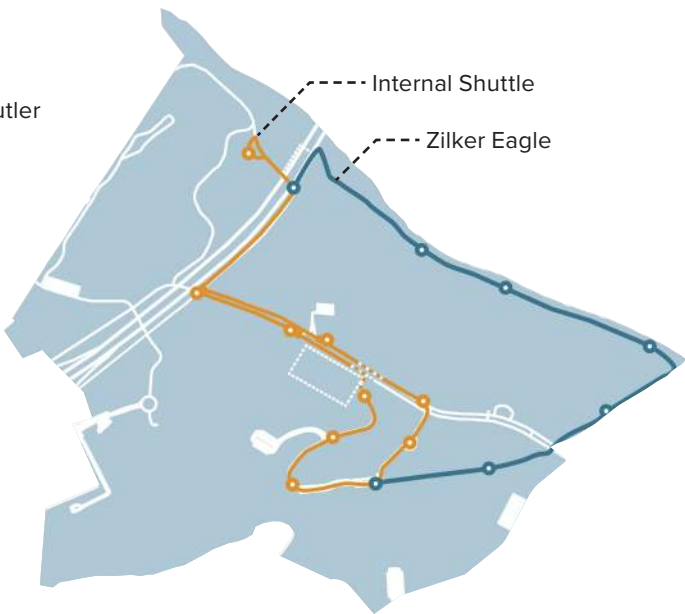


- Park Entry Sign
- Pedestrian Directional
- Facility Signage
- Park Rule
- Vehicular Directional
- Trailhead
- Interactive Signage

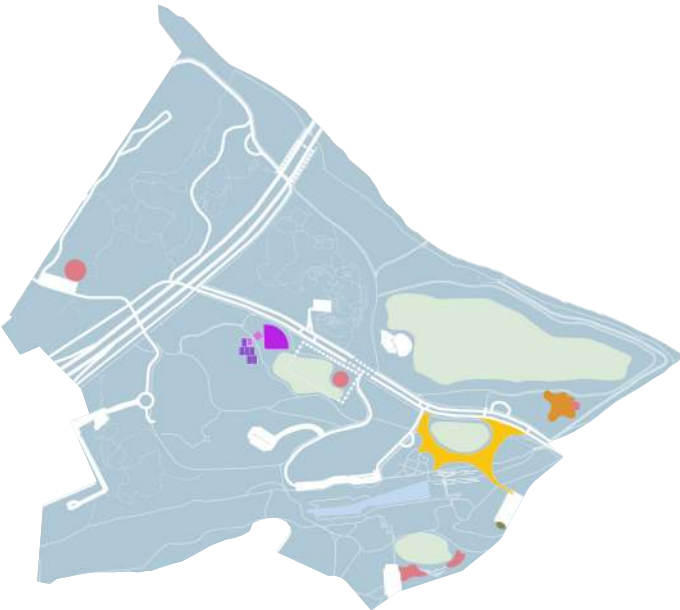
PEDESTRIAN/BIKE NETWORK



INTERNAL CIRCULATOR



NEW PROGRAMMING



ECOLOGY



- Playground
- New Picnic Area
- Barton Springs Pool
- Sports Fields
- Lawn
- Welcome Center

- Upland Woodland
- Riparian Woodland
- Meadow/Savanna
- Canopy Enhancement
- Drainage Enhancement
- Park Area with Regular Maintenance









TRANSPORTATION/MOBILITY



VEHICLE CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Accessibility was one of the top reasons visitors avoid Zilker Park. It is critical to support more attractive multimodal travel options are currently available. At the same time, the plan should be clear that people who drive to Zilker Park find a straightforward parking system that provides a range of affordable options and directs users straight to their parking space without creating excess circling in the park, endangering park users and creating unnecessary emissions. In the vision plan, the safety of park users is prioritized through road design without impeding the experience of those on foot or wheels. Accessible paths help users navigate between destinations and allow visitors to discover more of the park's amenities. For remote parking off-site, a shuttle easily connects people who park outside of the park into the heart of the park. Also, the better pedestrian connections at park entrances make remote parking connections realistic and attractive. The removal of impervious parking and roadway will be carefully planned with substitutional parking or traffic analysis to respect the goal of preserving natural environments in the park.

LEGEND

-  Traffic Light
-  Vehicular Stop Sign
-  CapMetro Stop
-  Internal Shuttle Stop
-  Zilker Eagle Stop
-  Parking Garage
-  Street Parking along Barton Springs Road
-  Surface Parking

The Vision Plan accomplishes this by:

- » Improving Barton Springs Road, including a road diet, traffic calming, creating a median, and reducing the speed limit from 35 to 25mph
- » Realigning Stratford Drive to run parallel to MoPac in order to streamline access to parking and minimize vehicular traffic in the heart of the park
- » Closing parts of Andrew Zilker Road, William Barton Road, and Columbus Drive in order to streamline circulation patterns while maintaining accessibility to parking at key park destinations such as Barton Springs Pool, the Sunshine Camp, and McBeth Recreation Center
- » Closing Lou Neff Road to vehicular traffic to improve the connection between the Great Lawn and Lady Bird Lake and Barton Creek.
- » Building accessible sidewalks adjacent to all roadways and parking locations
- » Consolidating parking lots into parking garages at strategic locations throughout the park
 - Parking garage construction can be phased as surface parking to assess demand before investing significant capital in parking capacity
- » Exploring reduced parking rates for individuals or families who qualify for assistance
- » Piloting long-term vision recommendations to understand impact on park usage
 - Such as Lou Neff closures or Barton Springs Road diet on weekends in early implementation years
- » Encouraging “Car-free park” days as both an interim and long-term measure
- » Creating passenger and rideshare pick-up/drop-off zones
- » Introducing a unified wayfinding system

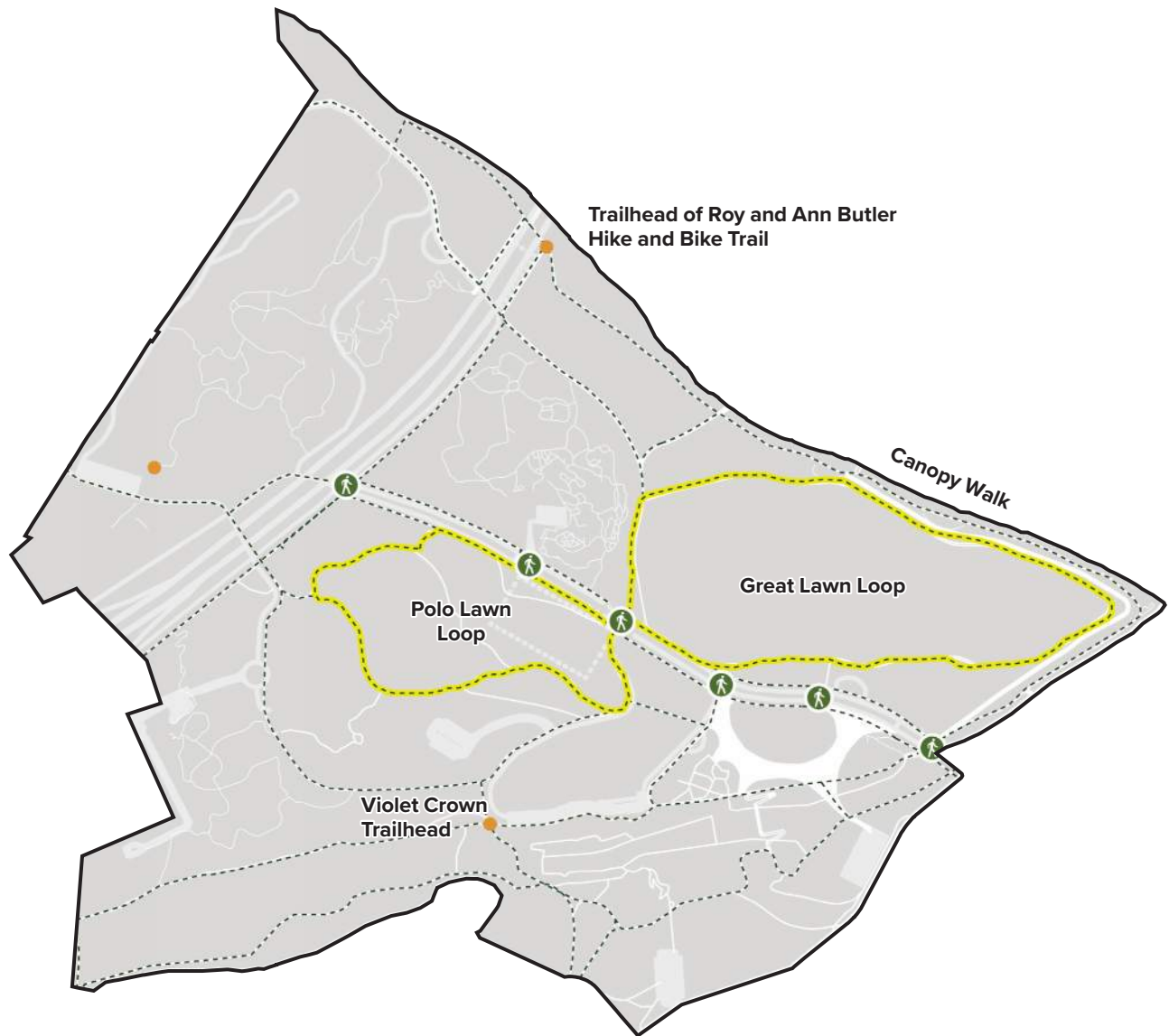
TRANSIT

In the Vision Plan, transit can be a viable and attractive option for a broad range of Austinites to get to and from Zilker Park. Multiple transit route options with easy transfers when needed can encourage visitors to take public transit without overly complicating the trip. Connections to and from the future Project Connect transit system will ensure transit. Transit users don't wait long for the next bus, shuttle, or train. Multiple travel options creates greater accessibility to Zilker Park for a wide variety of park users.

The Vision Plan accomplishes this by:

- » Creating an internal circulator that provides access to key park destinations
- » Creating an external circulator service that connects to nearby transit and off-site parking assets to serve as a first/last mile access option for Zilker Park such as the future Orange Line station
 - Combining internal and external access goals, providing frequent, linear access
- » Improving CapMetro service into the park by redesigning the route to serve more valuable connections for Zilker visitors, better connecting to the transit system, and improving service frequency during busy times
 - Park stakeholders have the opportunity to advocate for this service change within the City and CapMetro amid Project Connect service redesigns
- » Improving walking, micromobility, and bike connections with wayfinding between internal and nearby transit assets
- » Reestablishing the Zilker Eagle for recreational and light mobility purposes, including exploring extension of the route to serve on-site parking near MoPac and Stratford Drive
- » Introducing a unified wayfinding system to the park

TRANSPORTATION/MOBILITY



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY

Biking into the park should be easy, fun, and safe, regardless of the skill or ability of the rider. In the Vision Plan, the park entrances are connected to the surrounding and regional bike network and clearly marked. Once inside the park, biking conditions further improve, providing a sense of calm and relaxation that our city's park system provides for all users. Bikeways are protected and suitable even for children who are new to using a bike. Bike access is available to all the major park destinations and ends with attractive bike parking in front of destinations. Zilker Park becomes a major destination for the region's bike network and bicycle and motor vehicle conflicts are reduced.

Walking is an easy mode of transportation to choose, with direct, clear connections to enter the park from each direction and also between destinations within the park.

LEGEND

- Vehicular Network
- New Loop Trail
- Pedestrian and Bike Network
- 🚶 Pedestrian Crossing
- Major Pedestrian/Bike Trail
- Minor Pedestrian/Bike Trail
- Trailhead

The Vision Plan accomplishes this by:

- » An additional pedestrian/bike bridge crossing Barton Creek away from vehicles
- » providing direct access into the park crossing on Lady Bird Lake
- » Expanding the existing pedestrian/bike bridge north of Barton Springs Road and realigning it to Toomey Road
- » Improving the Roberta Crenshaw Pedestrian/Bike Bridge, including exploring possibility to partner with TxDOT and CTRMA to include pedestrian/bike path under northbound travel lanes
- » Building an enhanced trail/pathway system creating accessible non-vehicle pathways across the park, directly connecting major destinations
- » Making significant walking/biking enhancements for safety and comfort on the Barton Springs Road Bridge and street access approaching east and entering the park – to remedy significant existing comfort gaps and connect to current and future transit and bike networks
- » Creating additional safe pedestrian/bike crossings of Barton Springs Road
- » Calming traffic and speeds on Barton Springs Road
- » Improving connections to Butler Trail
- » Introducing a unified wayfinding system to the park
- » Extending the Violet Crown Trail/Barton Creek Greenbelt entrance/trailhead to higher visibility and more accessible location

BICYCLE SPECIFIC

The Vision Plan accomplishes this by:

- » Adding a network of bike and scooter parking, including E-bike charging, at key park destinations
- » Expanding MetroBike dock locations in coordination with Capital Metro

PEDESTRIAN SPECIFIC

The Vision Plan accomplishes this by:

- » Creating a connected inter-park path system with prioritized pathways and more direct walking connections to make distances between key features and parking easier to manage
- » Incorporate a walking/jogging loop into new trail/path system
- » Creating a Land Bridge Crossing to connect the two halves of park across Barton Springs Road
- » Incorporate a walking/jogging loop into new trail/path system
- » Enhancing and building new sidewalks – while the pathway system will provide the most direct access points, roadways to parking areas also need sidewalks (which are currently missing in many cases)

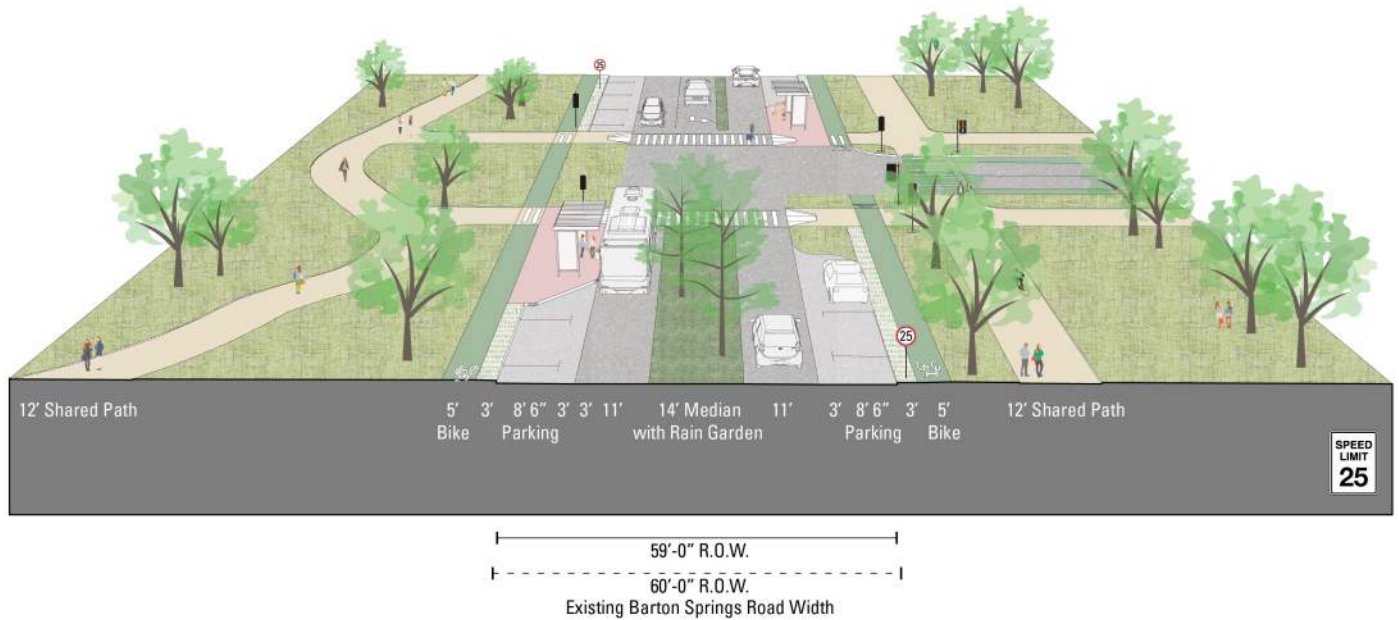


Canopy Walk in Serralves Park.

Source: <https://scalemag.online/architecture/the-canopy-walkway-in-serralves-park/>

TRANSPORTATION/MOBILITY

PROPOSED BARTON SPRINGS ROAD CONFIGURATION



Bus Stop with Green Roof

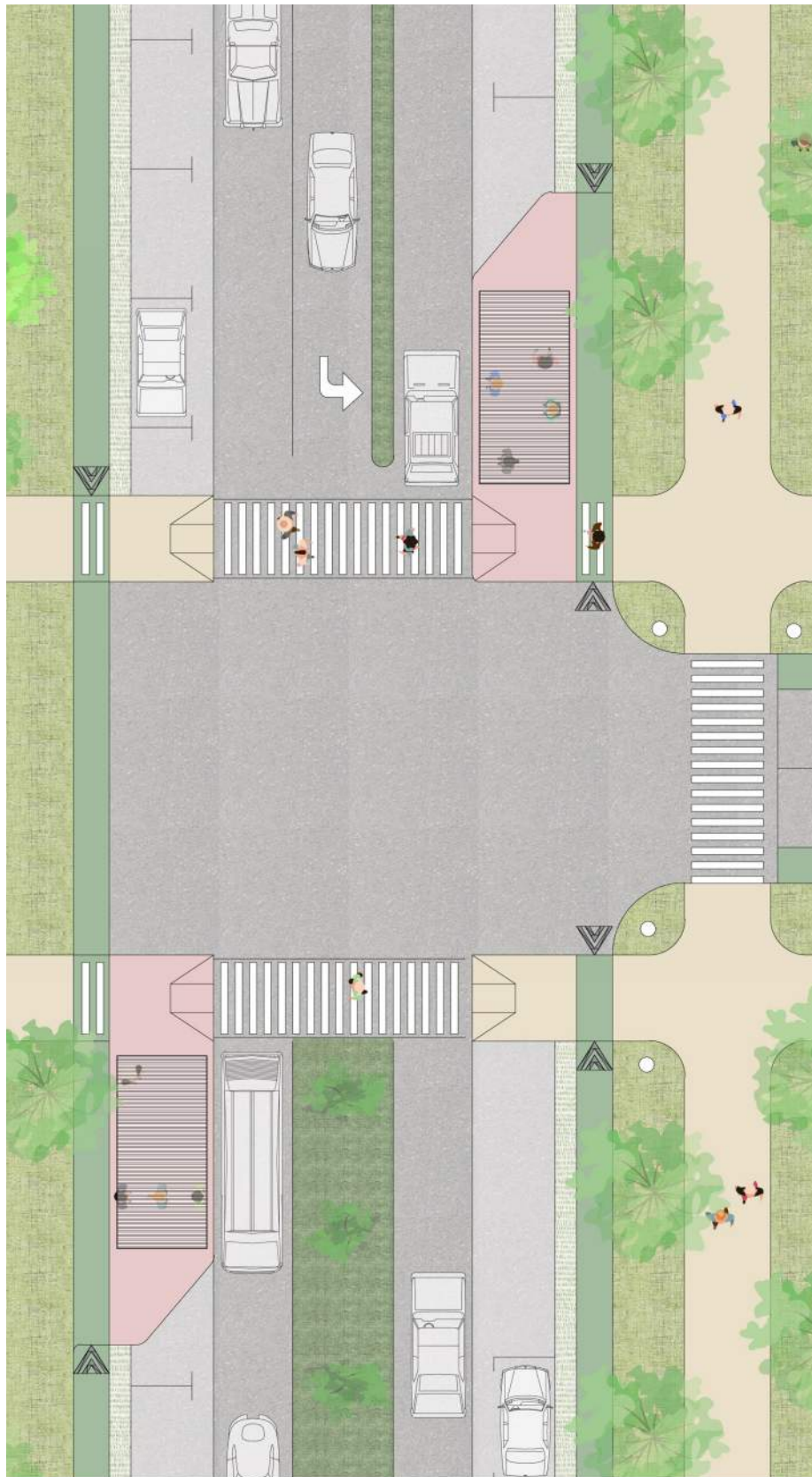


Raingarden in Median

Barton Springs Road cuts through the heart of Zilker Park without providing sufficient safe ways to cross from one half to the other. To make the park safer, traffic calming is necessary.

Traffic calming improves the safety of pedestrians and bicycles by slowing down the speed of vehicles through physical design of roads. Below are the strategies to achieve a safer Barton Springs Road through traffic calming:

- Modify the road to one-lane each way, parallel parking on both sides, and protected bike lane with 3-foot buffer from the road.
- Improve drainage, directing stormwater drainage into planting area and it needs to be done in collaboration with Austin Watershed Protection Department.
- Create a 14-foot median with trees to improve safety for crossing pedestrians while also reducing the heat island effect by providing shade over the road.
- Install shelters at bus stops along Barton Springs Road to increase visibility and provide shelter from the sun with strategies to reduce surface temperature, such as green roofs.



5' Bike 3' Parking 8' 6" 3' 11' 14' Median with Rain Garden 11' 3' 8' 6" 3' 5' 12' Shared Path

WHAT ABOUT CAPACITY?

There is often concern about reducing the capacity of a four-lane undivided roadway in half by converting it to a two-lane with a turn lane cross section. Practitioners have found some cases of the four-lane undivided road operating as a de facto two-lane with a turn lane roadway due to turning movements and driver behavior. Therefore, the effective capacity reduction is much less than the theoretical reduction assumed before implementation.

Source: Road Diet Informational Guide, FHWA Safety Program, US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road_diets/guidance/info_guide/rdig.pdf

ECOLOGY

ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT



Ecological uplift happens by repairing and restoring natural systems through active management. Ecological uplift can include increased biodiversity, increased soil health, greater water cycling, and more robust human and nature interactions. Manifestations of ecological uplift at Zilker Park can include increasing biodiversity in a parking lot through the planting of pollinator plants, enhancing climate resilience through increases in tree canopy and shade that mitigate and allow for adaptation to climate change, enhancing drainage to allow water to infiltrate into the ground and support photosynthesis, as well as the restoration of complete plant communities into forests with multiple levels of vegetation including tree canopy, understory, and groundcover. Areas of ecological uplift benefit the plants and animals that live there and connect humans to nature in more significant ways.

LEGEND

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| | Upland Woodland |
| | Riparian Woodland |
| | Meadow/Savanna |
| | Canopy Enhancement |
| | Drainage Enhancement |
| | Park Area with Regular Maintenance |
| | Road |

BUTLER LANDFILL

A 2019 Environmental Assessment classified the Butler Landfill as a recognized environmental condition (REC) due to contaminants like arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, magnesium, lead, iron, and manganese that exceed safe levels.

The Butler Landfill presents a great opportunity for ecological uplift and remediation of contaminants. The highest and best use for this area from an ecological perspective—considering its adjacency to the Lake and location within Zilker Park—is to extract the waste material or add additional soil to the top of the cap and restore the area to a woodland or savanna. This scenario results in the greatest increase to the ecological health of the park and enhancement of the user experience. The area is one of the last opportunities the city has to create lakeshore parkland that can alleviate pressure on other park amenities and create a robust passive recreation experience to interact with nature. The result could be up to 17 acres of robust plant and wildlife habitat with an integrated user experience. This use takes advantage of topographic changes, as a result of either extracting the landfill debris or increasing soil volume on top of it. While this is the best ecological use for the space, the importance of parking for the Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin Nature & Science Center, Butler Trail, and event facilitation is recognized. Therefore, this recommendation should be taken into consideration when attempting to find a compromise between ecological function and pragmatic use of the park space.

WEST BUTLER LANDFILL (FORMER 'BONEYARD')

The Zilker Park Working Group elected to eliminate the West Butler Landfill as soon as possible. This site is not officially considered a hazard, but because of the current use (storage of equipment, batteries, chemical containers, asphalt, etc.) it should be treated as a potential hazard and cleaned up prior to recreational use.

The highest and best use from an ecological perspective here is to return the area to woodland. This will widen the riparian buffer along Lady Bird Lake, creating new wildlife habitat, enhanced ecosystem services, and outdoor experiences for visitors. Appropriate recreation opportunities here range from nature trails to low impact play areas (like a climbing wall).

PRECEDENTS OF LANDFILL RESTORATION

The images below show other parks in the U.S. that have undergone active management to restore natural ecologies that can be enjoyed by visitors



Staten Island, NY



Crissy Fields, CA



Byxbee Park, CA

ECOLOGY

HISTORIC PISTOL RANGE

Soil investigations have identified elevated concentrations of arsenic, antimony, and lead within the Pistol Range. This area, including the wooded area to the north, is considered a hazard until remediated, and is not suitable for recreation and/or ecological restoration. Once remediated, this area could be appropriate for light recreation opportunities that do not alter the footprint of the woodland.

The first task within the Pistol Range should be to install drainage enhancement downhill from the contaminated area as soon as possible. This will intercept stormwater flows coming off the Pistol Range before contaminated waters reach Eanes Creek.



The Highland, MI

DRAINAGE ENHANCEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Drainage enhancement can address the root cause of erosion: fast-moving water often coming off roads, parking lots, and buildings. Rain gardens, swales, berms, and grading changes can slow water flowing across a landscape. When water moves more slowly, it has longer to soak into the soil, reducing erosion, preventing sediment and pollutants from entering streams and springs, and increasing groundwater supplies. Drainage improvements offers other benefits, including increased creek flow and wildlife habitat.

At Zilker Park, drainage improvement has already been used to decrease stormwater flows into Barton Springs Pool and at the existing Disc Golf Course. Just over 14 acres have been identified as potential locations for improving or installing drainage enhancement (Figure 5.4 from NRI). These areas have standing water after heavy rain, periodically carry large volumes of stormwater, are open with no active recreation, have significant water-related erosion, or are near impervious surfaces that create runoff. In addition, a well-planned and designed drainage enhancement can heighten the aesthetics and quality of the user experience in these areas.

RAIN GARDENS, SWALES, AND BERMS

A rain garden is a depression where water can pond after rain and soak in gradually. Swales are linear rain gardens, sometimes with water flowing through them. Berms are earthen mounds that reduce downslope travel of water and allow for infiltration. Swales and Berms are often used together to create an effective chain of rain gardens. Swales can be created from existing erosion paths (unless the erosion is too severe) either by hardening the path and directing water to a depression, or by slowing and spreading water flow to allow it to soak in. Both rain gardens and swales work best over soils that absorb water quickly. They also require plants that can withstand repeated wet-dry cycles (Table 5.2 from NRI). It should be noted that rain gardens and other types of water quality basins in the Barton Springs Zone may be required to have a liner to prevent infiltration of pollutant-laden stormwater and other contaminants (ECM 1.6.2.C).

UPPER BARTON CREEK

- » Main areas to prioritize installation of drainage enhancement by management unit (locations in management unit maps NRI pages 130 to 160);
- » Install drainage improvements south of Barton Springs Pool to intercept water as it moves downhill toward the pool.
- » Install drainage improvements south of Columbus Drive to capture and filter runoff from the roadway before it reaches the creek and pool.

LOWER BARTON CREEK

- » Install rain gardens between the trail and the streambank on the north side of the creek, near Barton Springs Spillway, to filter stormwater flows from slope.
- » Install drainage improvements upslope near Azie Morton Road.

BARTON SPRINGS POOL AREA

- » Substantial drainage enhancement installations are needed in this area to capture stormwater runoff before it enters Barton Creek and reduces runoff from the seven parking areas in the unit.
- » Installation of rainwater catchment systems on existing and new buildings will reduce runoff and create educational opportunities.
- » Install rain gardens in the pool areas to reduce sheet flow into the pool and create a more aesthetically appealing user experience.
- » Capture one half inch of each rain event from all impervious cover in Barton Springs Pool and associated maintained areas using drainage enhancement.

LADY BIRD LAKE SHORELINE

- » Install drainage enhancement to capture stormwater runoff from Mopac and all parking areas.

ZILKER NATURE PRESERVE

- » Evaluate potential for drainage improvements to address water from Arnulfo Alonso Way and the Historic Pistol Range before it reaches Eanes Creek.

ZILKER SAVANNA & MEADOW

- » Add rain gardens and swales in recommended areas to decrease runoff from roads and parking lots.
- » Incorporate drainage enhancement into new sports fields and on the downslope side of all new fields, buildings, and disc golf area.

BUTLER LANDFILL

- » Build rain gardens that capture stormwater from Stratford, MoPac, and any remaining parking.
- » If the landscape is altered by cutting or filling, incorporate low points for water to collect and percolate into the ground.

GREAT LAWN

- » Build rain gardens that capture stormwater from Lou Neff road and parking areas.

MOPAC

- » Where feasible, install rain gardens to capture stormwater.

CRITICAL INTERVENTION POINTS

SLOPE FAILURE ALONG BARTON CREEK

Riparian woodland enhancement is recommended for this entire area but should not be started until degrading factors including upslope stormwater and trampling are solved. Formal water access, formalizing the trail, and creating physical barriers to plantings in this area is critical. Once these issues are mitigated, invasive species control, woodland thinning of small caliper hackberries, and soil compaction remediation should proceed. This prepares the site for a combination of planting and seeding to enhance this very degraded, very used, and very ecologically significant piece of the park. A vignette for this area has been created to show a potential restoration path forward and its possible outcome.

- » Shoreline goals:
 - Repair and restore erosion and trampling issues along 1,000 linear feet of Barton Creek shoreline between the pool and Lady Bird Lake over the next 4 years.
 - Increase species diversity in this area by a 20 species over the next 2 years.

TREE CANOPY ENHANCEMENT

Canopy enhancement adds shade trees in the formal park areas where that expansion does not interfere with park use and improves the user experience. It is recommended where additional tree cover will provide shade, improve water quality, and reduce the impacts of impervious cover on localized heating. There are 66 acres of recommended canopy enhancement along the edges of roads, parking lots, and walkways (Figure 5.7 in NRI). Canopy enhancement should use live plantings whenever feasible with irrigation during establishment. Where possible, trees should be planted at the same time as drainage enhancement is installed, because the additional water in the soil will create healthier trees. By adding more shade trees, Zilker Park will increase in comfort, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and create a more naturalistic park aesthetic.

All new construction should promote a healthy urban canopy with the goal of at least 50% canopy cover in a 10 year period and should include a diversity of species in the canopy understory and groundcover layers. A list of canopy trees can be found in the Recommended Plant list by sorting for "Large Trees". Understory and groundcover layers can be found in Table 5.2 as well (Table 5.2 in the NRI).

- » Canopy goals
 - Plant at least 200 canopy trees in the next 2 years
 - Increase shade over the Butler and Violet Crown trails to 60% over the next 10 years (currently at 39%).



Swale at Hardberger Park near San Antonio



Limestone terraces along Waller Creek to slow down water flow



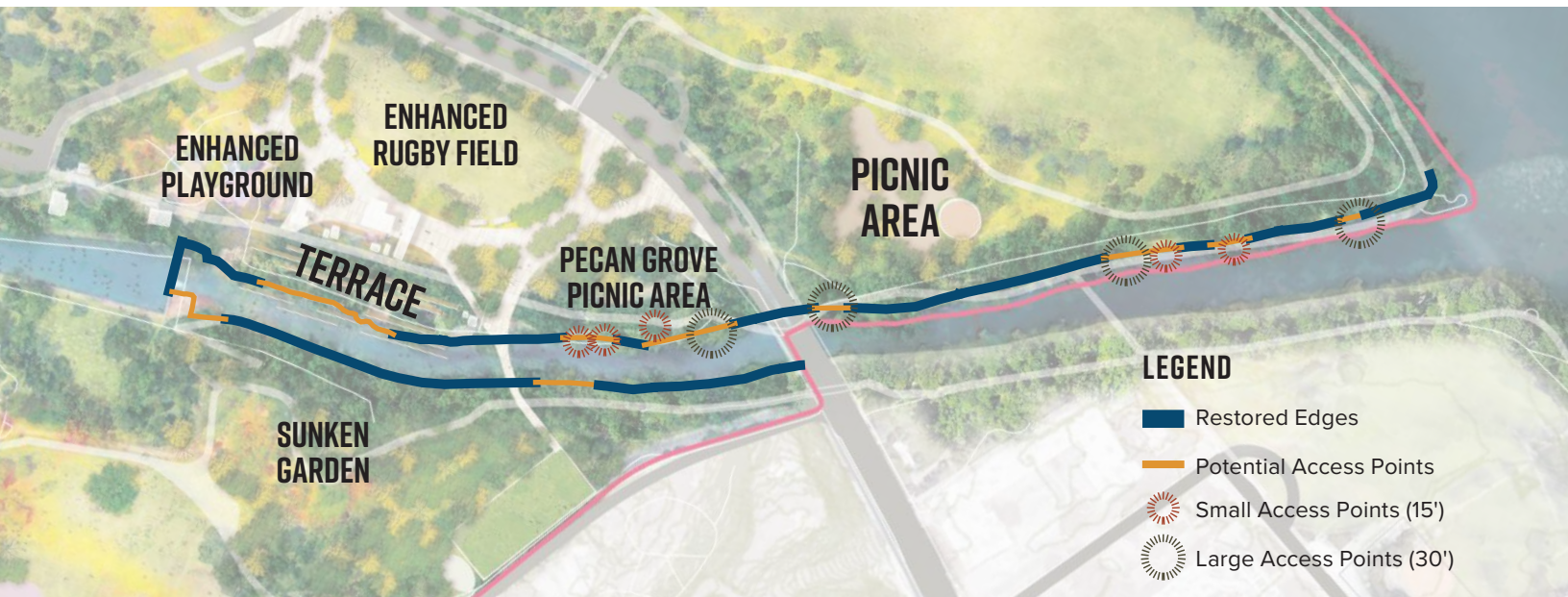
A rain garden at Dell Medical

BENEFITS OF DRAINAGE ENHANCEMENT

- 1 Encourages mental and physical health through outdoor activity.
- 2 Reduces the risk of soil bed erosion by retaining runoff in landscaped areas and slowing the water flow.
- 3 Reduces water management efforts by minimizing rainwater flowing into sewer systems.
- 4 Combats urban heat island effect through cooling effect of vegetation.
- 5 Increased educational opportunities, raising visitors' understanding of environmental issues

ECOLOGY

BARTON CREEK SHORELINE RESTORATION



Erosion along Lower Barton Creek is severe. It is not only making the area inaccessible and unsafe but also creating more unstable conditions for vegetation. To stop visitors from further harming the creek, controlled water access points need to be established. This can reduce the impact on water quality and native planting by restricting human impact and allow the environment to recover. This should be also done using low-impact development principles and land sensitivity analysis. Additionally, a personalized Operations and Maintenance Plan is needed to address the issue of economic stability and guarantee that the creek will continue to be a financially viable concessions area as it is now and into the future.

The plan for lower Barton Creek needs to address the items below:

- » Create site plan that addresses formal trails, water access, invasive removal, soil removal, along with a robust planting plan
- » Plant mottes in woodland expansion areas
- » Construct planned improvements that result in ecological restoration and an enhanced user experience
- » Stabilize Hike-and-Bike Trail and reduce gully erosion
- » Ongoing management

BARTON CREEK ACCESS POINTS GUIDELINES

Restoration of the Barton Creek shoreline will include water access points to support other areas of the shoreline. Access points will reduce impacts to other areas and mitigate existing erosion issues and prevent future issues while creating a better user experience.

Below are some guidelines to consider for future access points:

- » The map above shows potential water access points within the Zilker Park.
- » The small or large access points are existing desired water access points along the trail that currently need attention.
- » Access points should not be wider than 30 feet.
- » They should be spaced throughout the area. Their sizes suggest the complexity of the area. Steeper areas will be less/smaller access points and flatter areas will have more access points.
- » Spacing based on topography and existing areas should be used.
- » After determining the access points, ecological uplift for the rest of area should occur as a part of the project.

EXISTING CONDITIONS LOWER BARTON CREEK

Stormwater Flow

Stormwater flows quickly off of the hillside, along the trail, and eventually to Barton Creek.

Erosion

Severe erosion is occurring, exposing tree roots and making it difficult for plants to propagate on the shoreline.

Unregulated Water Access

Heavy human use accessing the water's edge has caused severe erosion as well as compaction.



Enhanced Woodland

Enhanced canopy and understory species will slow down water flow off of the slope and increase habitat for native species.

Trail Edge

Fences and large rock edges can deter people from exploring off trail.

Drainage Improvements

Established vegetation can slow down water on its way to Barton Creek as well as deter people from short cutting.

Formalized Water Access

By formalizing a trail and space near the water, ecological degradation will be minimized, allowing riparian communities to thrive.

PROPOSED CONDITIONS LOWER BARTON CREEK



This graphic demonstrates the Lower Barton Creek transformation. Drainage improvements work in collaboration with enhanced woodland and formalization of the trail edge and water access to create an exceptional space for humans and critters.

Existing condition shows degradation from lack of stormwater management upslope, trampling, and flooding that has resulted in compacted soils, erosion, an incomplete canopy, struggling vegetation, and a degraded user experience.

Proposed condition shows the ecological health and enhanced user experience that results by addressing upslope stormwater with drainage enhancement, formalizing trails and water access, installing physical barriers to plantings, decompacting soils, and planting robust native canopy, understory, and groundcover vegetation.



CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION



Sustainability

Climate change is integrated into the Vision Plan through adaption, mitigation, and resiliency strategies. The plan is aligned with the Austin Climate Equity Plan as well as the Climate Resilience Action Plan.

Adaptation refers to humans adapting to life in a changing climate. By expanding woodlands and increasing street trees, impacts of extreme heat and urban heat island effect will be reduced, making Zilker a refuge from climate change and a place where people can comfortably enjoy the outdoors.

Mitigation refers to the efforts to reduce or prevent climate change. Increasing vegetation and improving soil health will result in greater carbon sequestration, enabling Zilker to play a small role in pulling carbon out of our atmosphere and reducing global temperatures.

Resiliency refers to a landscape's ability to deal with the effects of climate change. By increasing native species diversity and building more drainage enhancement, the park will be less susceptible to catastrophic failure and reduces the chance of flooding, erosion, and water quality impacts, while preserving habitat.

IMPERVIOUS COVER CONCERNS

There are currently 51 acres of impervious cover within Zilker Park and the Vision Plan could increase this number if existing impervious cover is not removed. Impervious surface should be reduced from this number (51 acres), not exceeded. This can be done by removing existing parking lots, decreasing road width, transitioning paved paths to pervious cover, adding green roofs to buildings and parking structures, and other future strategies and they become viable. All remaining impervious surface should have adjacent, downslope drainage enhancement that will slow and filter stormwater runoff. All remaining impervious cover should also be lined with canopy trees in order to combat the heat island effect where possible. Reducing impervious cover in the floodplain and in water quality buffers is one of the best ways to increase water quality and the ecological health of Zilker Park. These actions should be prioritized throughout the park.

GREEN BUILDING CERTIFICATIONS

New facilities and projects costing more than \$2 million will need to be SITES certified, according to a recent ordinance established by the City of Austin. In our fast changing world, Austin is the first city to implement this legislation, doing its share to promote sustainable development and environmental health.

SITES provides a comprehensive framework for designing, developing, and managing sustainable and resilient landscapes and other outdoor spaces. Landscape architects, engineers, and others are guided by SITES, a framework with a sustainability focus, toward techniques that safeguard ecosystems and increase the variety of advantages they continuously provide our communities, such as climate regulation, carbon storage, and flood reduction. While encouraging project teams to be adaptable and creative as they create attractive, practical, and regenerative landscapes, SITES supports the specific requirements of each site by offering performance measurements rather than prescribing techniques. Landscapes with SITES certification help lower water demand, filter stormwater runoff, create habitat for wildlife, use less energy, enhance air quality, boost chances for outdoor leisure, and more.

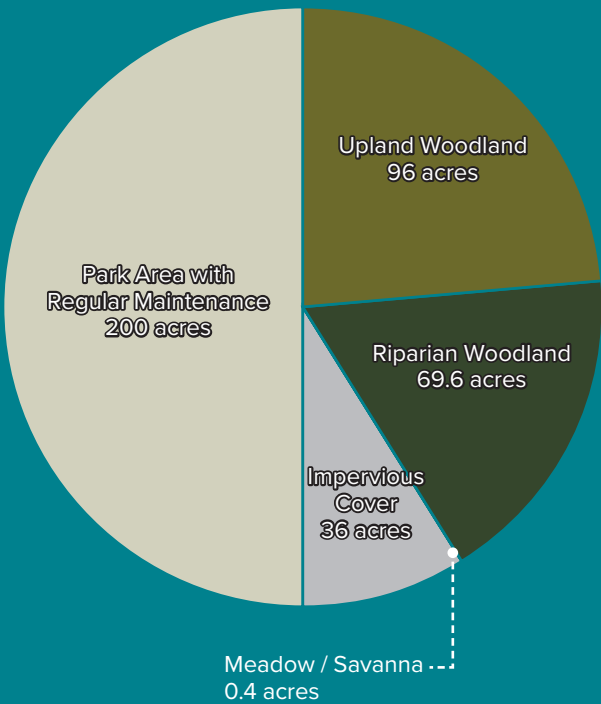
GOALS OF AUSTIN CLIMATE EQUITY PLAN

- 1 By 2030, legally protect an additional 20,000 acres of carbon pools on natural lands and manage all new and existing natural areas with a focus on resilience.
- 2 By 2030, protect 500,000 acres of farmland from development in the 5-county region through legal protections and/or regenerative agriculture programs.
- 3 Achieve at least 50% citywide tree canopy cover by 2050, with a focus on increasing canopy cover equitably.
- 4 By 2030, include all City-owned lands under a management plan that results in neutral or negative carbon emissions and maximizes community co-benefits.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

EXISTING CONDITION

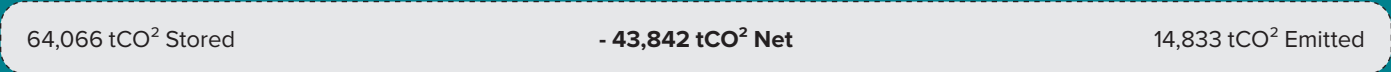
LANDCOVER



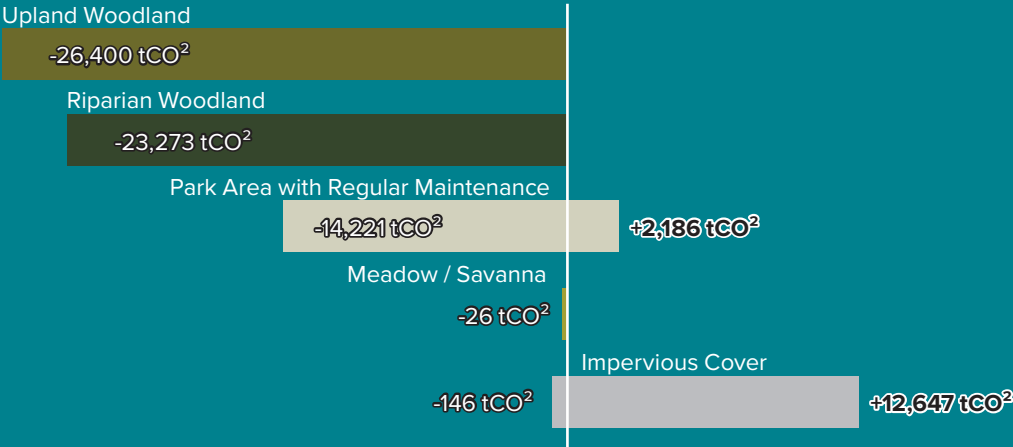
TOTAL CARBON IMPACT BY LANDCOVER

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| HARDSCAPE | |
| Impervious Cover | + 12,501 tCO ² |
| SOFTSCAPE | |
| Upland Woodland | - 26,400 tCO ² |
| Riparian Woodland | - 21,035 tCO ² |
| Meadow / Savanna | - 26 tCO ² |
| Park Area with Regular Maintenance | - 9,235 tCO ² |

STORED AND SEQUESTERED CARBON

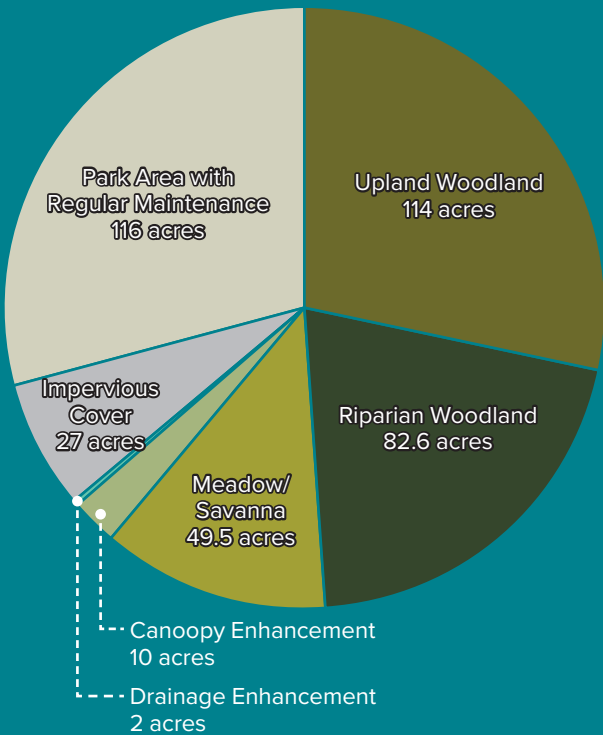


EMITTED CARBON



PROPOSED CONDITION

LANDCOVER



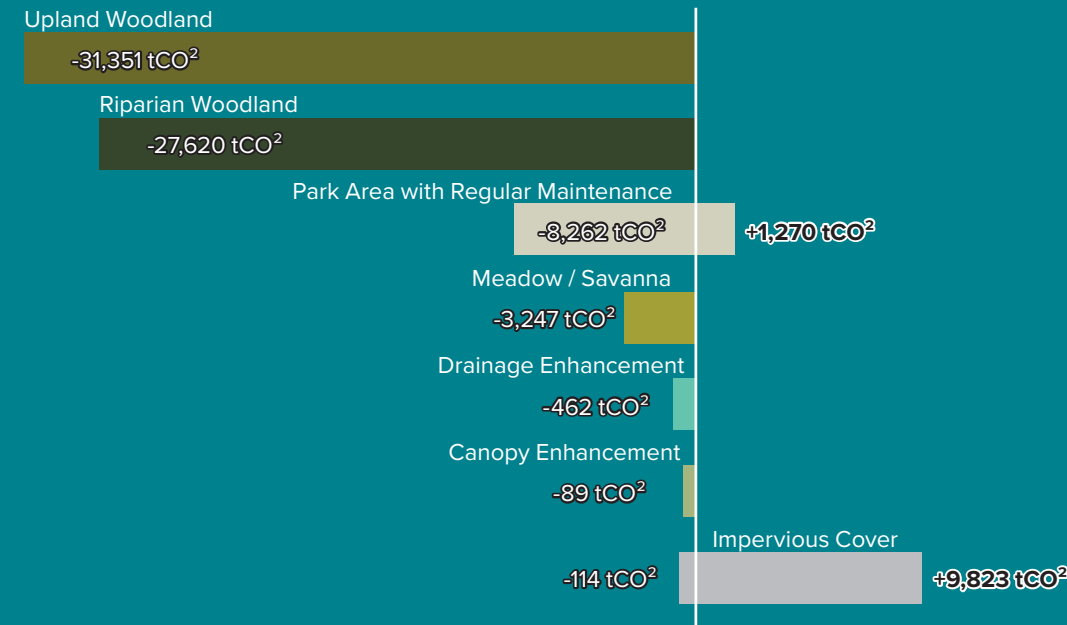
TOTAL CARBON IMPACT BY LANDCOVER

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| HARDSCAPE | |
| Impervious Cover | + 9,823 tCO ² |
| SOFTSCAPE | |
| Upland Woodland | - 31,351 tCO ² |
| Riparian Woodland | - 27,620 tCO ² |
| Meadow / Savanna | - 3,247 tCO ² |
| Drainage Enhancement | - 452 tCO ² |
| Canopy Enhancement | - 88 tCO ² |
| Park Area with Regular Maintenance | - 6,992 tCO ² |

+28%

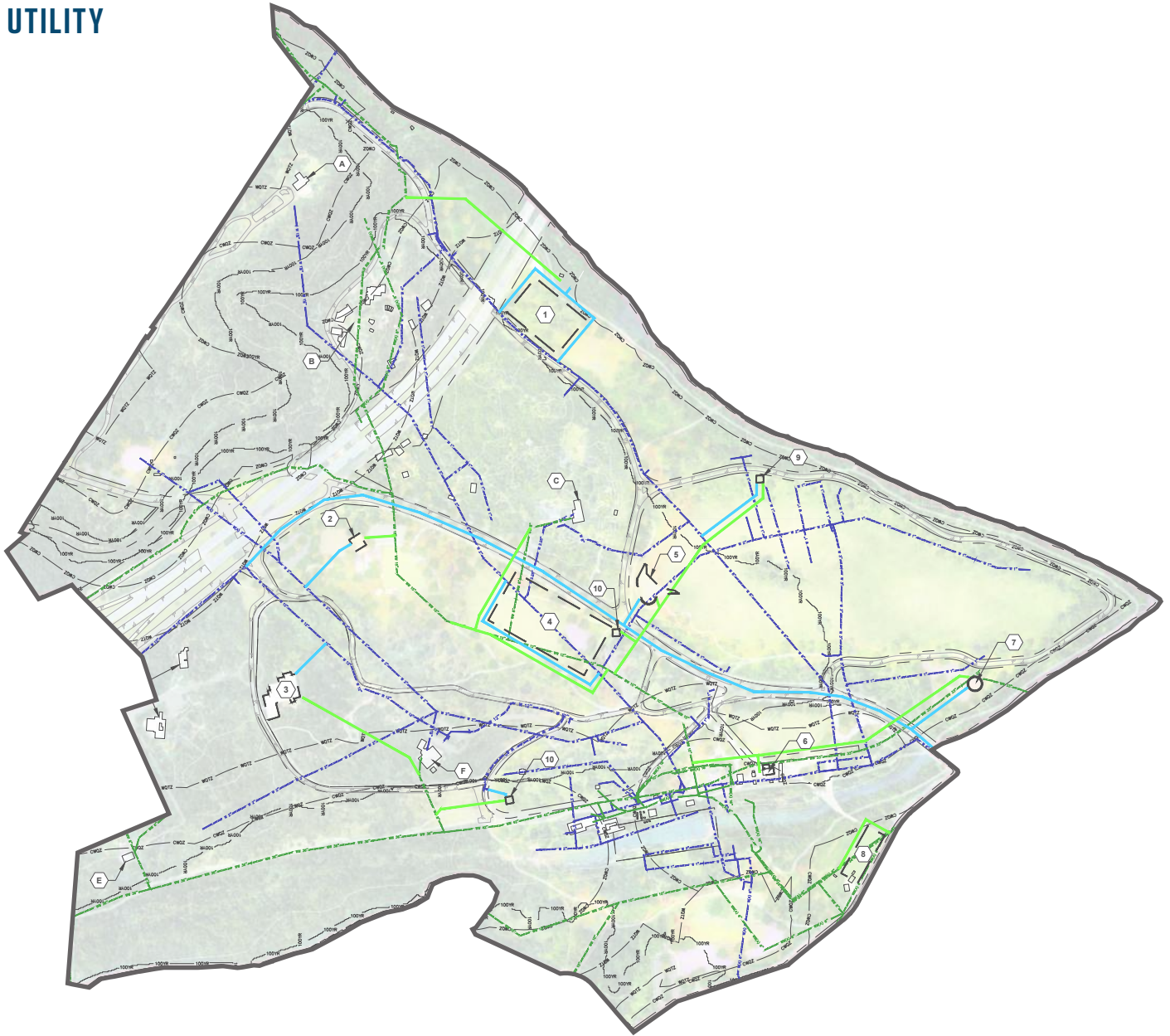
STORED AND SEQUESTERED CARBON

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 71,145 tCO ² Stored | - 56,025 tCO ² Net | 11,104 tCO ² Emitted |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|



INFRASTRUCTURE

UTILITY



LEGEND

- Existing Water Line
- Existing Wastewater Line
- Proposed Water Line
- Proposed Wastewater Line

- » Buildings with existing utility services to remain:
 - A – Zilker Clubhouse
 - B – Austin Nature and Science Center
 - C – Zilker Botanical Garden
 - D – McBeth Recreation Center
 - E – Girl Scout Cabin
 - F – Sunshine Camp
- » New buildings that will require new utility services:
 - 1 – Parking Garage #1
 - 2 – Sports Area
 - 3 – New Maintenance Facility
 - 4 – Parking Garage #2
 - 5 – Zilker Hillside Theater
 - 6 – Welcome Center
 - 7 – Concession
 - 8 – Parking Garage #3
 - 9 – Stand-alone Restrooms

UTILITY PLAN

WATER

- » There is existing water piping within the Park that is over 50 years old that should be evaluated during future projects for upgrades, including pipe material (from cast iron to PVC).
- » Provide additional fire hydrants and fire water coverage as needed for new buildings and structures (i.e., parking garages).
- » Coordinate with Austin Water to submit Service Extension Requests to determine if new infrastructure is required or upgrades to the existing system.
- » Improvements to address fire flow coverage are anticipated with new structures proposed.
- » Investigate existing water meters within the Park and consider if upgrades are needed or additional meters/sub-meters for the proposed improvements.
- » Explore opportunities to extend reclaimed water to park with future projects for irrigation water supply.

WASTEWATER

- » Existing wastewater gravity interceptor main through park conveys flows to the South Austin Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, and should be considered during project implementation.
- » There is existing wastewater piping within the park that is over 50 years old that should be evaluated during future projects for upgrades, including pipe material (from concrete to PVC).
- » Coordinate with Austin Water to submit Service Extension Requests to determine if new infrastructure is required or upgrades to the existing system.
- » The public wastewater trunk lines crossing through the park are connected to areas outside of the park and should be considered prior to relocating.
- » Maintain the existing Bluffington Lift Station #1 located in the northwest corner of the park.
- » Consider the removal of the abandoned Zilker Park Lift Station #5 and Barton Creek Lift Station located on the south side of Barton Springs/Barton Creek, which are both identified in the Austin Water GIS system maps.

INFRASTRUCTURE

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

- » Zilker Park is located within three different watersheds: Lady Bird Lake, Eanes Creek, and Barton Creek. Implementation of the Vision Plan should maintain existing drainage patterns such that rainfall runoff stays within the watershed in which is originated.
- » Provide water quality treatment for all new or redeveloped impervious cover.
- » Where prohibited by code (i.e., within CWQZ that is also within the 100-year floodplain), provide equivalent water quality treatment at an alternate location in the park.
- » For improvements within the Barton Creek watershed, which is part of the Barton Springs Zone watershed regulation area, provide water quality treatment that complies with current requirements.
- » Evaluate Eanes Creek and Barton Creek within the park for potential opportunities to improve stabilization, erosion, and other creek health concerns.
- » Evaluate existing impervious cover areas and consider providing drainage enhancement quality infrastructure for existing untreated areas
- » Investigate a regional or comprehensive approach to stormwater management for the entire park in lieu of a project-by-project approach
- » Provide stormwater detention as required by the Land Development Code for increases in peak flow runoff from existing conditions, unless otherwise not required (i.e., development immediately adjacent to and discharging directly to Lady Bird Lake is exempt)
- » Review existing stormwater management areas within the park and upgrade to current code requirements as needed, as part of the project implementation

FACILITIES

CARETAKER COTTAGE

The Caretaker Cottage was recently remodeled, and the existing infrastructure appears to meet the existing usage. Unless the intended use of the facility were to be revised, it is not anticipated that revisions would be necessary to the Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing (MEP) infrastructure for the building.

MECHANICAL

Based upon field observations, the Caretaker Cottage is heated and cooled by a heat pump split system manufactured by carrier. The four-ton split system was manufactured in 2015 and is in good condition. Barring any significant repurposing of the Caretaker Cottage or change of occupancy type the existing split will be usable for another 15 to 20 years. Use changes impact the outside air requirement. Any future use changes could require adjustment to the outside air intake size and location as well as impact the latent load experienced by the heat pump. This could require minor modifications to the existing system. Any changes which would add significant internal load (use as an assembly space, introduction of a server computer, etc.) will require modification to the HVAC system.

Based upon the condition of the existing system no modifications or repairs are required at this time.

ELECTRICAL

The Caretaker Cottage was recently renovated so that no further electrical work is needed within the interior.

The electrical service is routed overhead from a pole-mounted 25kVA transformer to a weather head on the exterior of the building. The service is then distributed from there to the Cottage and to the Quonset on one meter. If the Quonset is remain, that the building should have its own service and not rely on service from the Caretaker Cottage. This would allow more capacity for the Quonset site and utility costs could be recovered for private use of the Cottage. We also recommend, if budget allows, that overhead electrical distribution be revised to underground to avoid outages caused by tree limbs, wind, ice, or other possible risks.

PLUMBING

The existing facility has water and wastewater services serving the building, which is equipped with a restroom. No evidence of natural gas was found at the building. The rainwater from the roof was routed to a cistern, but the cistern was disconnected and not in use. The gutters were clogged and full of debris. It is recommended that maintenance be provided to clear the debris in the gutter and to reconnect the cistern. No other concerns were identified at the time of this report.



Ventilation of Caretaker's Cottage



Equipments of Caretaker's Cottage



Rainwater Treatment of Caretaker's Cottage



Electric Pole Beside Caretaker's Cottage

INFRASTRUCTURE

QUONSET MAINTENANCE BUILDING

The Quonset site is currently serving as a mechanical maintenance repair shop, vehicle storage and materials yard with a few offices for maintenance personnel. If the site is utilized for a different usage, the existing conditions may need to be revised. Below is the information on the existing MEP infrastructure.

MECHANICAL

The existing mechanical systems serving the Quonset maintenance bay and interior offices are in poor conditioned with inadequate air balance. The original Quonset appears to have been once heated with a natural gas unit heater. This heater is in poor condition and disrepair. Repurposing of this existing space (or renovation within its current use) will require ventilation as well as new unit heaters for heat. Ventilation could be naturally induced through use of low and high louvers, with free area equaling 4% of the total floor area. Ventilation could also be mechanically induced through the use of exhaust fans and louvers through the envelope. Modifications to the envelope would need to be carefully planned to preserve the historic nature of the space. If enclosed fully, the Quonset would require HVAC via split system or otherwise. The existing office space is heating and cooled by a split system located adjacent to the restroom. It appears this system is not providing adequate outside air as to pressurize the office area, as such the office can become humid during unfavorable outside conditions. The restroom is served by an in-ceiling exhaust fan. It is recommended any future modification or repurpose of the Quonset include all new HVAC systems according to the needs of the new use.

ELECTRICAL

The Quonset has electrical service from the same transformer and meter as the Caretaker Cottage (see above), routed overhead to a weather head on the exterior of the building. From there, it is distributed to various load centers within the building. The electrical equipment in the original portion of the building is in poor condition and should be replaced, as well as equipment located on the exterior. The panel and disconnect switches in the building addition are still in good condition and can remain, if that area is not modified.

PLUMBING

The original Quonset has natural gas serving a unit heater, but did not appear to be in service. This suggest that gas service is likely available for buildings on the site (or nearby), if not necessarily used currently. This would allow for natural gas equipment and heat if so desired. The natural gas service appears to be provided by service near the street.

No water or sanitary was identified in the original Quonset building, but the addition to the space has a restroom and electric water cooler with water and waste connections. Therefore, there is both a water and wastewater service nearby that could be used to provide utilities to fixtures and restrooms on the site. The existing domestic water pressure was sufficient to serve a flush valve water closet. This suggest that there is sufficient water pressure to serve other fixtures.

Existing condensate appears to discharge to grade in places it could freeze and be a nuisance. This is not compatible with current City of Austin code requirements and could be a hazard if algae grows or the water freezes, causing a slip hazard. It is recommended that the condensate be routed to an appropriate drain and comply with discharge requirement by the authority having jurisdiction.

HILLSIDE THEATER

The Hillside Theater usage may or may not be utilized differently in the future. There is existing infrastructure at the site for MEP that may require removal, modifications, or renovation, depending on how the site may be used in the future below are existing conditions.

MECHANICAL

The existing support spaces bordering the hillside theater are equipped with split system HVAC and roof mounted condensing units. Typical life span of this type of equipment is 15 to 20 years. It is anticipated that the reprogramming of the hillside theater space will require replacement or removal of these existing systems. New equipment will be sized and selected according to the needs of the back of house spaces and sound booth and may be limited to simply natural ventilation depending upon final programming.

ELECTRICAL

Over the life of the Theater, the electrical service has been modified to allow for added loads (sound system, air conditioning, theatrical lighting, etc.) and renovations. It is anticipated that the reprogramming of the space will require replacement or removal of the existing electrical equipment. When this occurs, capacity should be provided in the electrical service to allow for flexibility of Events and future loads. We recommend, if budget allows, that overhead electrical distribution be revised to underground to avoid outages caused by tree limbs, wind, ice, etc.

PLUMBING

The existing facility has water and wastewater services serving the theater, which is equipped with a restroom. No evidence of natural gas was found.



Ventilation of Quonset Hut



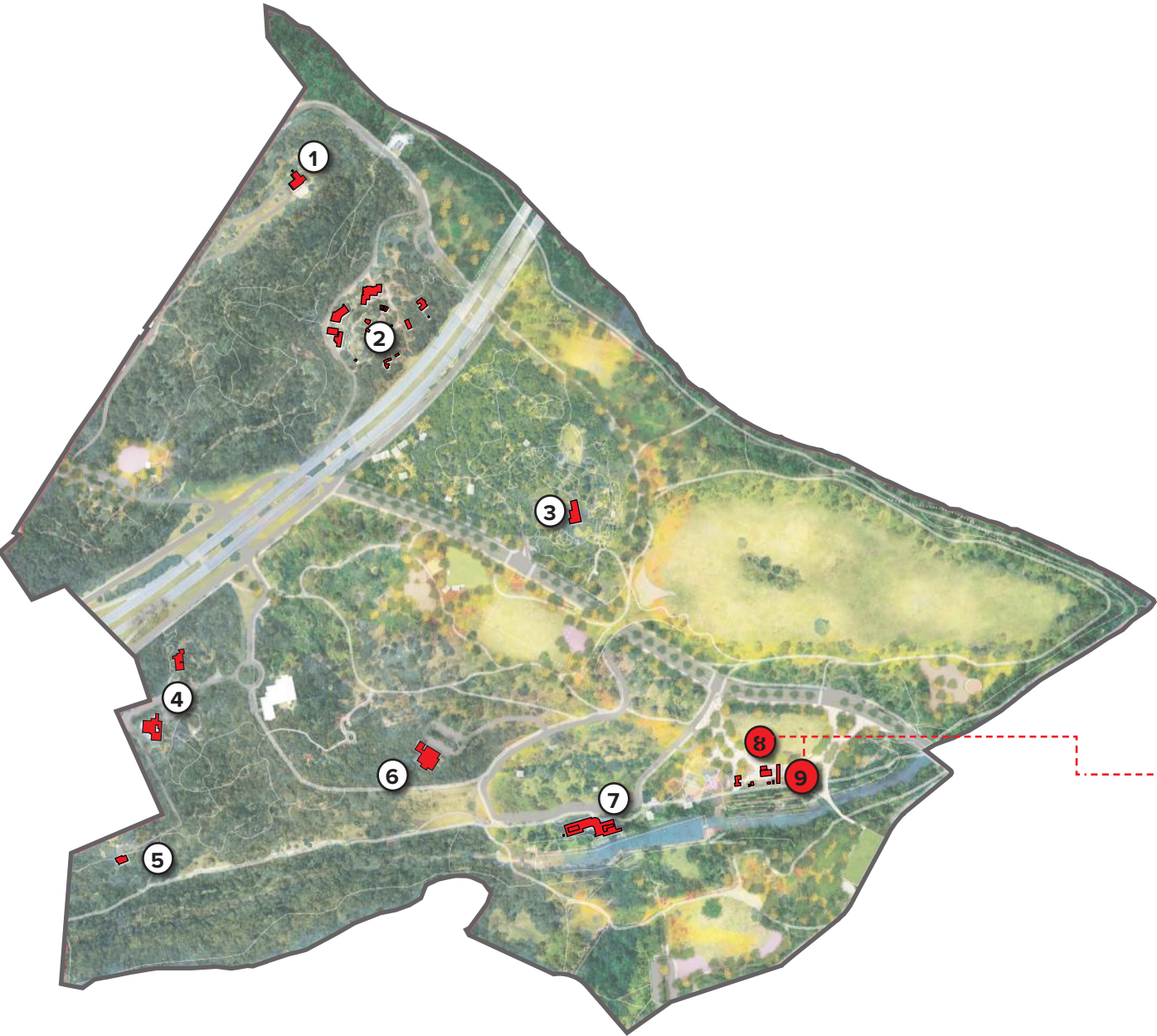
Equipment for the Quonset Hut



Equipment for the Quonset Hut

FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

EXISTING FACILITIES WITHIN THE PARK



POTENTIAL FACILITIES TO ACTIVATE

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 Zilker Clubhouse <i>Meeting Space, Conference Space</i> | 4 McBeth Recreation Center <i>Meeting Space</i> | 7 Barton Springs Pool Bathhouse <i>Exhibits, Meeting/Classroom Space</i> |
| 2 Austin Nature and Science Center <i>Exhibits, Hand-on Discovery Labs, Classrooms, Meeting Space</i> | 5 Girl Scout Cabin <i>Meeting and Program Space</i> | 8 Caretaker's Cottage <i>Exhibits, Meeting/Classroom Space</i> |
| 3 Zilker Botanical Garden <i>Multi-Purpose Meeting Space</i> | 6 Sunshine Camp <i>Office Space, Classroom Space, Exhibits</i> | 9 Quonset Hut <i>Outdoor Classroom, Exhibit Space</i> |

The plan proposed to utilize existing resources to offer public welcoming services and to support the mission of education—instead of adding a new building.

- » Barton Springs Bathhouse: Currently being fitted with 2,500 sq. ft. of exhibit and programmable space. Long-term potential as exhibit space, particularly as it relates to Eliza Spring. Additional possibility for small meeting space.
- » Eliza Spring: An important site for education and interpretation.
- » Sunken Garden: Enhance pedestrian access, create viewing prospects with interpretation.
- » Zilker Ponds: Connect by way of paths to other elements in the Bathhouse or Barton Springs Pool area. Rehabilitate and fit the site with interpretive content.
- » Austin Nature and Science Center, Zilker Botanical Garden, Girl Scout Cabin: Coordinate their yearly schedule to utilize the facility year-long such as meeting space or exhibits. It can prevent vandalism if the facilities have programs or visitors all the time.

WELCOME CENTER

Such a hub would be a major point of orientation for visitor to the park. It might contain educational or interpretive displays or be a staging area for recreational or educational programming for youth, seniors, or visitors or all ages. This does not have to be a new building but could be accomplished by repurposing an existing building such as the Zilker Clubhouse, Quonset Hut, Caretakers Cottage, or Girl Scout Cabin.

The visitor center functions in lower-key terms that don't endeavor to be a front-and-center face for the park. Instead, it focuses on existing historic resources—in particular, the Caretaker's Cottage and the historic Quonset Hut. These facilities are beneficial for their practicality and for their proximity to the pool, the creek and the spring activity. It is intended to complement ecological restoration recommendations in other parts of the Vision Plan.

The Caretaker's Cottage is repurposed for welcome and classroom activities. It would also hold office spaces. To complement this repurposing, the nearby Quonset Hut need to be used as an outdoor classroom. In this way, current educational activities that involve exploratory excursions to the creek followed by a classroom-setting review of findings is accommodated within a compact, convenient geography.



Example of Kiosk



Example of Shaded Pavilion

FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

GUIDELINES

- » Caretaker's Cottage: Single-topic exhibit, meeting/program space, office.
- » Quonset Hut :Outdoor classroom. Provides space for some programming for school-age children currently being hosted in the Bathhouse. Its proximity to the Creek is an asset.
- » Maintenance Yard: Repurpose as Welcome Center. Take advantage of elevated prospect to view across the creek (and provide interpretation) to the Sunken Garden outfall.
- » Zilker Park Boat Rentals: The planning process confirmed a desire for remaining the Zilker Park Boat Rentals concession in the park. However, ecological recommendations to restore and reduce erosion in Barton Creek may affect the location of this concession. The Vision Plan recommends consideration of a relocation of the concession upslope but the specific location will require coordination and guidance from the Watershed Protection Department and further environmental evaluation.
- » The 100-year floodplain presents a serious constraint to any visitation strategy centered around the Creek or the Pool. It dictates that allowable floor levels for new construction cannot be set lower than 24" above the 100-Floodplain.
- » Because new buildings within the floodplain are not a possibility, using the existing historic resources presents an logical option (within limits). Existing historic buildings are allowed to continue being used as long as the level of hazard is not increased. This suggests that the existing buildings become even more valuable assets because of their proximity to the attraction that is the creek and the Pool.

NEW ZILKER HILLSIDE THEATER

The new Zilker Hillside Theater should be designed for performing arts and theater, including the proper support areas.

- » Should be able to support more visitors than current location, up to 5,000 people in lawn seating.
- » Should have air-conditioned backstage area for actors dressing rooms, storage, and restrooms, and loading area.
- » The details of design should be consulted with Zilker Theatre Productions along with appropriate PARD staff.



Example of Shaded Seating Area



Example of Outdoor Classroom

PARKING STRUCTURE

The parking structures will require careful design to provide cohesion to the park's natural environment and atmosphere. The elevation should blend in to the park scenery by using vertical vegetation and green roof. The parking garage at Brackenridge Park in San Antonio is a good precedent.

In addition to the aesthetic design, the function and layout must be carefully considered. Such considerations could allow for multi-use such as a ground floor activated with restrooms, office or meeting space, or concession and flexible use as needs evolve in the future.

The rise of Electric Vehicles should also be accounted for, with charging stations included in future designs.

Most importantly, environmental studies and analysis will be required before proceeding with such a project.



Example of Vertical Vegetation



Parking Garage at Brackenridge Park



Example of Green Roof



Example of Retail under Parking Garage

INTERPRETIVE STORY

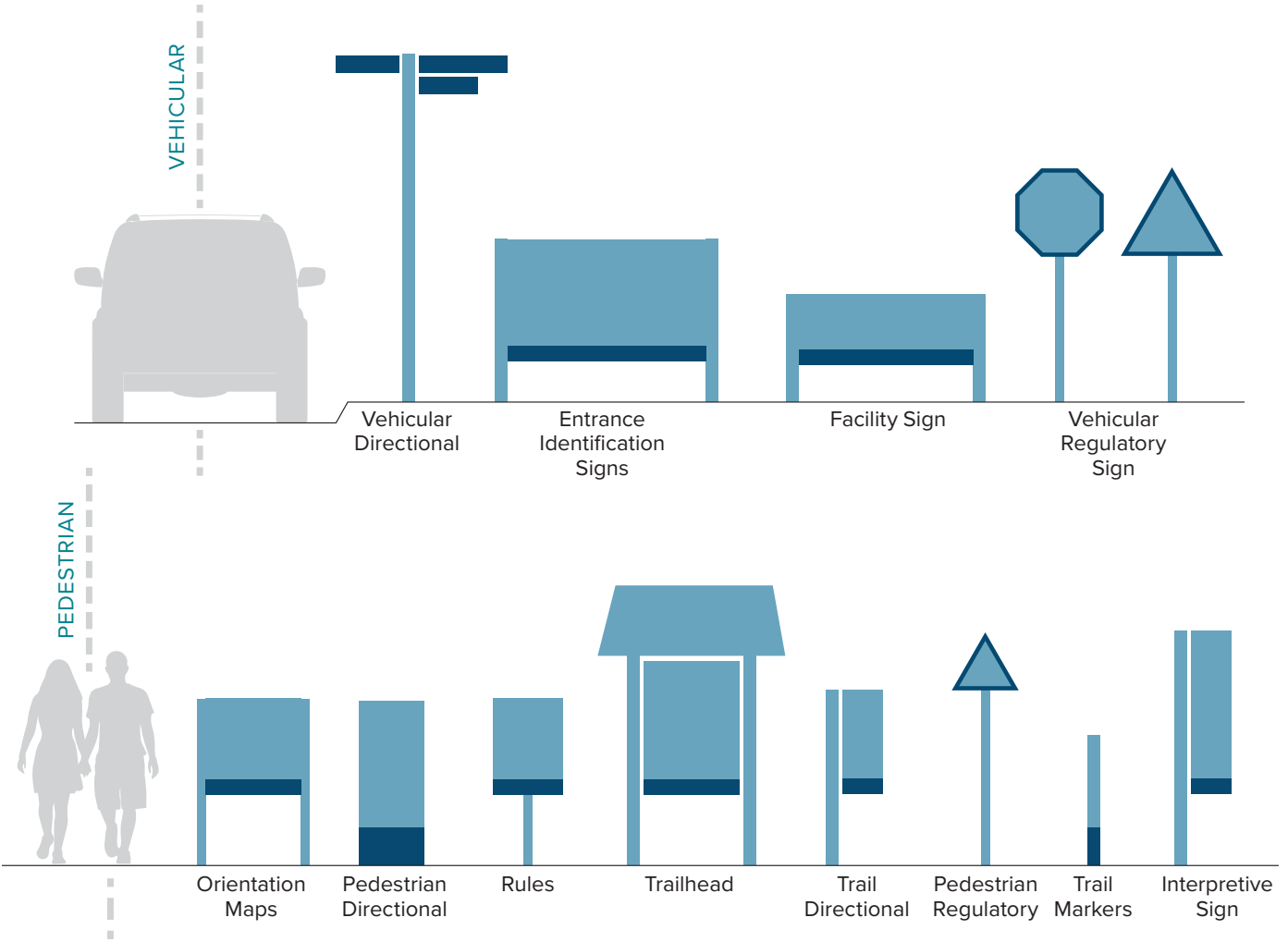
WAYFINDING / INTERPRETIVE STORY MAP



The storylines and the map in this chapter are only a road map. Anyone doing interpretive and signage planning in the future will need to conduct additional research and develop themes, in addition to writing the actual interpretive products and locating the signages.

- Park Entry Sign
- Facility Signage
- Vehicular Directional
- Park Rule
- Pedestrian Directional
- Interactive Signage
- Trailhead

SIGNAGE FAMILIES



A well-considered wayfinding program aids navigation but can also engage visitors when a thoughtful strategy is employed. Zilker Park does not have a cohesive signage system currently and this issue has brought up during community engagement process. The signage in a park can be divided into four types. Type 1 are such as entrance identification signs or facility/donor signs. Type 2 are directional signs which can be vehicular, pedestrian, or trail directional. The third type is about regulatory or rules in the park. The last type is informative signs like interpretive signs.

Besides the development of the vision plan, separate planning efforts is needed specifically to address wayfinding needs and opportunities, and present a unified the navigational strategy that defines the programming, function and visual character of the park signage. The wayfinding vision plan would provide a design framework to consistently inform future signage design and function.

Table 4: Types of Signage

| TYPES OF SIGNAGE | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| Type 1 | Entrance Identification Sign |
| | Facility/Donor Sign |
| Type 2 | Vehicle Directional |
| | Pedestrian Directional |
| | Trail Markers & Directional |
| | Rules Sign |
| Type 3 | Vehicular Regulatory Sign |
| | Pedestrian Regulatory Sign |
| Type 4 | Orientation Map |
| | Interpretive Sign |

INTERPRETIVE STORY

INTERPRETIVE STORYLINE

This framework focuses on Zilker Park as a whole. Specific destinations within the park (Barton Springs, Zilker Botanical Garden, and Austin Nature and Science Center) already have their own vision and interpretive plans that are in various phases of implementation, and are only mentioned as they relate to the larger whole. It is assumed they will be interpreted as stand-alone destinations as well.

STORYLINE I: BARTON SPRINGS HAS BEEN A CONSTANT, BUT EVOLVING, DESTINATION FOR HUMANS FOR AT LEAST 10,000 YEARS.

- » Indigenous occupation: Archeological sites reveal that Indigenous people camped, hunted, fished, and quarried rock here for at least 9,000-10,000 years before European colonizers arrived.¹ The Vara Daniels site, which lies beneath the Great Lawn and rugby fields, is one of the “largest deeply stratified sites known in Texas.”² Today, it serves as evidence of Indigenous people’s long-term presence on this land, and presents an opportunity for contemporary Austinites to learn more about the generations of Native people who preceded them here.
- » Euro-American settlement and business enterprises: Beginning in the 1830s, Euro-American settlers brought their agricultural traditions and commercial/ industrial enterprises to this landscape. Within the present-day park boundaries, men including William Barton, Ashford B. McGill, and Dr. Barclay Townsend farmed and ranched; Michel Paggi, Jacob Stern, and the Rabb family all operated mills on the creek; Michael Butler mined clay for his brickworks; and Andrew J. Zilker used the spring water for his icemaking business and pasture for the horses that pulled his delivery wagons. While Barton Springs was already a popular swimming destination by the mid-1800s, Paggi built a dam on Barton Creek in the 1870s to create a swimming hole and a bathhouse to accommodate swimmers.³
- » Park origins and development: Through a series of land deals between 1917 and 1934, Andrew J. Zilker transferred three parcels of land that would become Zilker Park to the City of Austin. However, Zilker did not profit from these transactions; rather, he specified that the proceeds from the first two deals be placed in a trust for Austin High School, and gifted the third parcel of land outright. The subsequent development of Barton Springs and the surrounding land reflected popular ideas about recreation at the time (active recreational facilities in a naturalistic environment). Under the City of Austin and various New Deal institutions, the park’s naturalistic features and recreational facilities were expanded and remnants of its commercial and industrial past were removed. As the city grew and automobile ownership became more accessible, the park became a popular destination for white, middle class Austinites.⁴
- » Modern gathering space: Today, Zilker Park is a blend of active recreational facilities (e.g., Barton Springs, hiking trails) and gathering spaces for events large and small, public and private (e.g., Zilker Clubhouse, Girl Scout Cabin, picnic tables for private gatherings; large open spaces for public events like ACL, Blues on the Green, the Zilker Kite Festival and Austin Trail of Lights). Austinites have also built a culture of informal gatherings at sites throughout the park, such as the Monkey Tree on Azie Morton Road.

STORYLINE 2: ZILKER PARK'S EXTANT BUILT ENVIRONMENT TELLS PART OF THE STORY OF AUSTIN'S SETTLEMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND EVOLVING IDENTITY.

- » Zilker Park's built environment reveals clues to some aspects of Austin's history:
 - Settlement and Early Industry: The old Rabb homesite and the location of the Paggi grist and ice mill (at Sunken Garden/Old Mill Spring) both evoke Austin's early industrial period and speak to how crucial access to flowing water was for many people and industries.
 - Expansion: As Austin's population expanded, it outgrew some of Zilker Park's facilities. One of these was the Barton Springs Bathhouse. Completed in 1947, architects Delmar Groos and Dan Driscoll designed the new bathhouse with a Streamline Moderne aesthetic. This style strayed from the rustic-style park buildings constructed during the 1930s, but both approaches had something in common: they took inspiration from Zilker Park's landscape. The bathhouse was sited around the location's large trees, and the low-slung building took inspiration from the horizontal limestone terraces found throughout the park.⁵
- » Zilker Park by Austinites for Austinites: Zilker Park's design was led by two local men: engineer Frederick A. Dale and architect Charles H. Page. Other Austinites were also involved in its design and construction: Hugo Kuehne designed the Caretaker's Cottage and the first Barton Springs bathhouse; plants for the Rock Garden came from the home garden of Dr. T.S. Painter on W. 33rd St.; young architect Bubi Jessen designed the iconic entry columns; materials and labor for custom light fixtures were donated by Gage Brothers, Weigel Iron Works, and Fox and Schmidt; and the Austin Police Department helped fund and build the shooting range.⁶
- » Zilker Park and the New Deal: Many of Zilker Park's most iconic features were developed under various public works programs during the Great Depression.
 - Funding: Most of the Texas parks projects that were developed during this time were intended to be state parks. Zilker Park was an exception, and it received funding thanks, in part, to Congressman James P. "Buck" Buchanan, who represented Austin in the House of Representatives and was able to use his position on the House Appropriations Committee to fund work in his district.⁷
 - Design: The park was developed under various New Deal programs, and its design was especially influenced by the National Park Service's emphasis on highlighting the natural topography and flora, and

BENEFITS OF SHARING INTERPRETIVE STORY

- 1 It illuminates the power of place. Clear educational messages and content inform the public of each site's historic significance.
- 2 It does more than provide just dates and facts, but also inspires a feeling of stewardship in site visitors, strengthening awareness of cultural and natural resources.
- 3 Thoughtful and well designed signage programs demonstrate community pride in local heritage.
- 4 It provides a high-quality interpretive experience without the requirements of staff or facilities to maintain.

INTERPRETIVE STORY

constructing rustic-style buildings using natural materials.⁸

- Construction: In 1933, Charles Page secured funding from the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to build the park, including the stone entrance columns and the beloved Zilker Clubhouse, both of which still stand today.⁹ In 1934, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Company 1814 designed and built roads, cleared land, and constructed park facilities (picnic tables, barbecue pits, and lighting).¹⁰ The National Youth Administration (NYA) repaired flood damage in 1935-1936 and built the Sunken Gardens in the late 1930s, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) helped improve the park's lily pond.¹¹ Without this substantial federal investment, Zilker Park would look very different today.

STORYLINE 3: ZILKER PARK HAS A LONG HISTORY AS A CONTESTED LANDSCAPE.

- » White settlement and white supremacy at Barton Springs:
 - Enslavement of African Americans. When William Barton settled on the banks of Spring Creek (known today as Barton Creek) around 1837, he brought his wife, children, and up to 30 African Americans he enslaved with him.¹² The Bartons ranched cattle here. The African American men and women whom Barton enslaved likely worked in the Barton Family's ranching and domestic activities, increasing the Bartons' wealth through their uncompensated labor.
 - Settlement on Indigenous lands. As a white settler in Indigenous people's traditional homelands, William Barton was in frequent conflict with Comanches who claimed the land as their territory.¹³
- » Exclusion of non-white and lower income citizens: When the City of Austin took ownership of Zilker Park in 1917, it instituted fee-based access, which solidified the pool as the domain of the white middle class.¹⁴ The implementation of the 1928 Master Plan, and specifically its recommendation for segregated facilities for Black citizens, codified this racial division. It wasn't until Black activists, such as Joan Means Khabele, Bertha Means, V. Saundra Kirk, and Willie Mae Kirk, fought to integrate Barton Springs that the park became officially accessible to Black Austinites. Nevertheless, racial disparities persisted: many Black community members continued to feel unwelcome in the park and at the pool well after the facilities were officially desegregated.¹⁵
- » Community organizing and activism: Since the late 1960s, community members and grassroots activist organizations, including the Zilker Park Posse, Save Barton Creek Association, Save Our Springs Alliance, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, have challenged development plans that would negatively impact the springs and the park (e.g., development in the Barton Creek watershed, construction of MoPac Expressway in the park).¹⁶ They have also supported scientific research and education, and advocated for better regulations to protect and preserve Barton Springs, Barton Creek, and Zilker Park.¹⁷



STORYLINE 4: THE EBB AND FLOW OF WATER INDELIBLY SHAPES THE ECOLOGY OF ZILKER PARK.

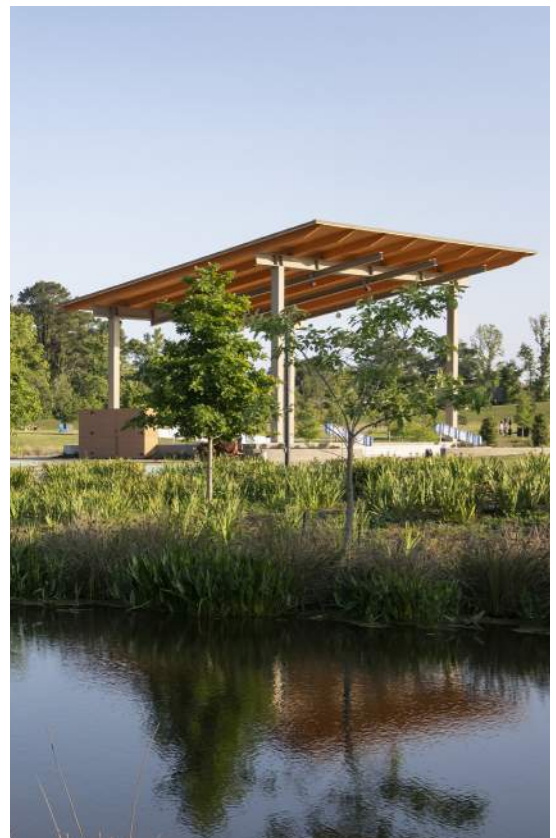
- » Water as it shapes the landscape: The creeks and river create riparian habitat where water-loving plants thrive, wildlife is drawn to the fresh water, and resident bird populations seek out prime nesting and feeding locations.¹⁸ In the western half of the park, which is more characteristic of the Edwards Plateau, oak-juniper woodlands grow in shallow soils that formed atop limestone rock. Here, rainwater flows down through the limestone and into the Edwards Aquifer far beneath.¹⁹ The plants that grow in this area are adapted to the faster draining soils.
- » Springs as habitat:²⁰ The springs in the park and the Edwards Aquifer beneath it support the endangered Barton Springs and Austin Blind Salamanders. As the park was developed and new buildings and features were constructed, the springs' flow was disturbed and the salamanders' populations decreased. Through careful planning, habitat restoration, and limited development, the salamander populations in Zilker Park are growing.²¹

STORYLINE 5: ZILKER PARK OFFERS AUSTINITES THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE GREAT BIODIVERSITY IN A RELATIVELY SMALL AREA.

- » Ecotone: Zilker Park provides habitat for more than 600 plant and animal species.²² It straddles the Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie ecoregions and blends characteristics of both. Within the park's 351 acres, Austinites can spot armadillos while hiking through oak-juniper woodlands typical of the Texas Hill Country, paddle along shoreline communities of bald cypress trees and snapping turtles, and wade in a natural pool fed by the same springs that support two species of endangered salamander.
- » Biodiversity: At least 224 species of birds – more than 85% of the wildlife species that call the park home – can be found in Zilker Park. They include a diverse array of species drawn to the varied habitats that make up the park. Migratory songbirds stop to rest in the park on their way to their northern breeding grounds, and egrets and herons hunt along the banks of the river and in the creeks.²³

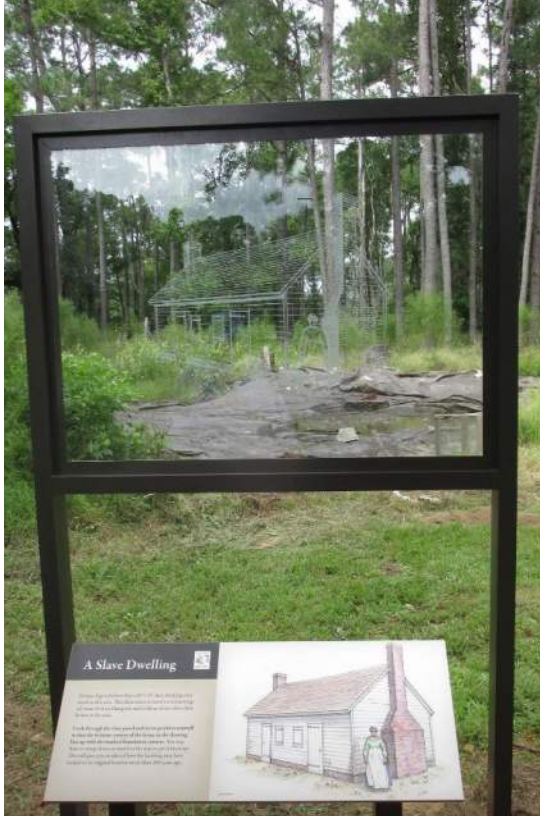


Donation Signs



Outdoor Classroom with Interpretive Signages

INTERPRETIVE STORY



Layering Interpretive Signage



Accessible from a multitude of Viewpoints



Interpretive Signage Located in Gathering Space

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

When developing interpretive signage, planners should consider the following factors:

LAYERING

Offering interpretive information in successive layers of depth allows visitors to engage with content based on their particular interest levels. The complete suite of interpretive signage should include high-level overview signs and more in-depth specialized signs. Individual signs should also be designed to accommodate those with passing, moderate, and deep interest in the content. Using headlines, lead text, body copy, captions, and sidebars to layer information allows users to engage with bite-sized "chunks" of information and decide how deeply they want to delve depending on their interest.

MODALITIES

Visitors learn in varied ways. Incorporating tactile, visual, text-based, manipulative, and interactive elements into signage offers a wide variety of users the opportunity to engage with the content they find most accessible.

CONSOLIDATION

Where possible, consolidating interpretive signage at existing gathering points (e.g., trailheads) and structures (e.g., restrooms, parking structures) will reach a larger number of users and also prevent the landscape from being littered with signage. However, consolidation of signage should be thought of as a guideline rather than a rule. Any efforts to consolidate signage into "nodes" will have to be balanced with the need/desire for visitors to be able to view and/or experience the resource being interpreted. In some cases, it will make more sense to locate an interpretive sign closer to a resource and away from an existing gathering point/structure.

ACCESSIBILITY

Community input revealed strong support for considerations of equity in the Zilker Vision Plan. In that same vein, planners should consider interpretive signs' accessibility from a multitude of viewpoints. In addition to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act, placement, legibility, language, and reading levels should also be considered.

Beyond the text and images on a sign, the design of the sign and its support structure are opportunities to engage visitors playfully and/or create a sense of place. At Zilker Park, appropriate design inspirations could include the park's New Deal-era architecture and its flora and fauna.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Michael B. Collins, "Vara Daniel Site," *The Handbook of Texas*, n.d. Accessed August 3, 2021. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/vara-daniel-site>; Julie D. McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, August 2012, 37; Eric Webb, "Before it was cool to live in Austin, early humans settled around these parts," September 26, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.statesman.com/news/20161012/before-it-was-cool-to-live-in-austin-early-humans-settled-around-these-parts>; Margaret Ann Howard and Peter Flagg Maxon, *Barton Springs Archeological and Historical District National Register Nomination Form*, 1984.
- 2 Collins, "Vara Daniel Site."
- 3 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 39-47.
- 4 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 54-80.
- 5 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 68-73.
- 6 Michael Barnes, "Life in the middle of Zilker Park," September 23, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.austin360.com/ENTERTAINMENT/20160906/Life-in-the-middle-of-Zilker-Park>; McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 60, 62-63; "Zilker Park is Haven of Rare Natural Beauty: Many Beautiful Features Added By Man's Work," *Austin American*, July 1, 1934: A10. At least one article states that Page also donated his services; see "New Zilker Park to be a Haven for Picknickers," *Austin Statesman*, May 31, 1933: 11.
- 7 L. Patrick Hughes, "New Deal Work Programs in Central Texas," 1999. Accessed on February 18, 2022. <https://www.austincc.edu/lpatrick/his2341/new.html>.
- 8 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 62.
- 9 "The Living New Deal," n.d. Accessed February 16, 2022. <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/zilker-metropolitan-park-austin-tx/>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 The author could not locate a definitive source that listed the names or exact number of people William Barton enslaved on this land. *The Handbook of Texas* notes that when Barton's father died in 1828, William continued to enslave the five African Americans his father had previously enslaved. In 1940, J. Mason Brewer wrote that when Barton settled along modern-day Barton Creek, he "brought with him twenty-five to thirty slaves." When Barton died in 1840, his will listed 11 enslaved people among his property. As primary source research is outside the scope of this project, the author elected to err on the conservative side and state that Barton enslaved "up to 30" individuals on this land. See Mary Jayne Walsh, "Barton, William," *The Handbook of Texas*, n.d. Accessed March 11, 2022; <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/barton-william>; J. Mason Brewer, *An Historical Outline of the Negro in Travis County* (Austin: Samuel Huston College, 1940), 12; and Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, *Barton Springs Pool Master Plan*, December 2008, 29.
- 13 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 42.
- 14 McGilvray, *Zilker Park Cultural Landscape Report*, 51, 60, 62-63; Michael Barnes, "Life in the middle of Zilker Park," September 23, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.austin360.com/ENTERTAINMENT/20160906/Life-in-the-middle-of-Zilker-Park>.
- 15 Koch & Fowler, *A City Plan for Austin, Texas*, 57; *Living Springs: A Multi-Platform Documentary Series about Barton Springs in Austin, Texas*, Joan Means Khabele profile. Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://livingspringsaustin.org/joan-means-khabele/>; Michael Barnes, "Life in the middle of Zilker Park," September 23, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.austin360.com/ENTERTAINMENT/20160906/Life-in-the-middle-of-Zilker-Park>; *Living Springs: A Multi-Platform Documentary Series about Barton Springs in Austin, Texas*, J. Saundra Kirk profile. Accessed October 5, 2021. <https://livingspringsaustin.org/v-saundra-kirk/>; Sarah Marshall, Private communication (PARD draft review feedback), September 30, 2021.
- 16 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 2021, 18-19; Michael King, "The Battle for Barton Springs: A Brief Timeline," *The Austin Chronicle*, August 3, 2012. Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2012-08-03/the-battle-for-barton-springs-a-brief-timeline/>; Glen Castlebury, "Park Plea Turned Down Criticized," *Austin Statesman*, December 9, 1966, 6.
- 17 Vice Chair, Parks and Recreation Board, an email to Zilker Park Vision Plan team, September 28, 2022.
- 18 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 40-42.
- 19 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 29, 37, 40.
- 20 Per PARD's request early on in the Vision Plan process, this Interpretive Plan does not delve deeply into interpretation of Barton Springs. That subject matter is more appropriately addressed in an Interpretive Plan specific to Barton Springs and interpreted in depth in the exhibits at the Barton Springs Bathhouse. See the 2008 Barton Springs Pool Master Plan for additional information (179).
- 21 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 14, 67-69.
- 22 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 28.
- 23 Siglo Group, *Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines*, 63-67.

SUMMARY

For a park like Zilker Park, the implementation will last decades due to complexity of the existing systems within the park, funding availability and external projects and considerations outside the park's boundary. There should be an appropriate implementation, budget, and operation/management plan. Each implementation project will need an appropriate budget and operation and management plan. The speed of each project will be determined by funding availability and park management.

The physical improvements recommended in the Vision Plan are divided into projects based on their location within the park. The projects may be combined into larger packages based on funding availability.

The chapter continues with plans for park operation, management, and funding with an outline of potential partnerships—the vital ties to organizations and communities for the project.

CHAPTER SIX

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Projects
- Project Packages
- Timeline
- Operation and Management
- Concessions
- Financial

IMPLEMENTATION

PROJECTS

ELEMENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR ZILKER PARK

- 1 Projects to improve the park physically and systematically.
- 2 Identify a variety of funding sources.
- 3 Changes in operation and management systems.
- 4 Partnerships to accomplish goals important to multiple organizations.

INTRODUCTION

The Zilker Park Vision Plan is too complex to follow the traditional implementation process for park vision plans. Implementation of the plan is divided into smaller projects rather than phases to achieve more flexibility and closer collaboration with partnerships such as other City departments.

The Vision Plan identifies four elements for implementation: projects that are tactile and make the parks system physically and systematically better, identifying a variety of funding sources, changes in operation and management, and partnerships to accomplish cross-organizational objectives. Physical and systematic changes are recommendations like investments in existing and proposed facilities and park renovations. Funding sources to explore include, General Funds, General Bonds, Parkland Dedication Funds, grants, and partnerships. Critical changes in operation and management have impact on how Zilker Park operates daily. Examples include suggestions for PARD staff roles and more sustainable maintenance practices. Finally, cross-organizational partnerships with Government organizations, other City departments, the City Council, neighborhoods, and nonprofits can help ensure the successful implementation of proposed projects.

PROJECT TYPES

The projects can be categorized into four different types. Administration projects provide a foundation for the Parks Department and its partners to ensure the implementation process makes progress, continues to be aligned with the goals established here, and is communicated. Ecological uplift projects are projects that concern the protection and health of the ecology of the park. Accessibility projects concern transportation, visitor circulation, connection to existing roads and trails, and pedestrian and bicycle network improvements. Facility and program projects include projects that improve existing facilities or programs and projects that create new facilities or programs.

ADMINISTRATION

- ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS
- ANNUAL BUDGET/ MAINTENANCE REVIEW
- DEPARTMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS
- ZILKER PARK UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION

ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT

RESTORATION OF BARTON
CREEK BANKS

RESTORATION OF LANDFILL
AREA

RESTORATION OF POLO
FIELD

RESTORATION OF OLD
ZILKER HILLSIDE AREA

MITIGATION OF EROSION
ISSUES

TREE CANOPY
ENHANCEMENT

INVASIVE PLANT CONTROL

DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS

ACCESSIBILITY

STRATFORD DRIVE
REALIGNMENT

ADDITIONAL BRIDGES
ALONG BARTON CREEK

CLOSING ANDREW ZILKER
ROAD TO VEHICLES

ZILKER TRAILHEAD

CANOPY WALK

PARKING GARAGES

EXTENDED ROUTE FOR THE
ZILKER EAGLE

ADDITIONAL TRAILS

NEW TRAILHEAD TO
NATURE PRESERVE

REMOVAL OF SURFACE
PARKING

BARTON SPRINGS ROAD
IMPROVEMENTS

CLOSING LOU NEFF ROAD
TO VEHICLES

INTERNAL SHUTTLE

PED/BIKE BRIDGE ON LADY
BIRD LAKE

FACILITY/PROGRAM

ENHANCEMENT OF
EXISTING PLAYGROUND

BARTON CREEK WATER
ACCESS

SOUTH SIDE NEW PLAY
AREAS

PLAYGROUND ON THE LAND
BRIDGE

NEW PICNIC AREA WITH
CONCESSION

INTERPRETIVE
STORYTELLING

NATURE PLAY

SPORTS AREA

ZILKER HILLSIDE THEATER

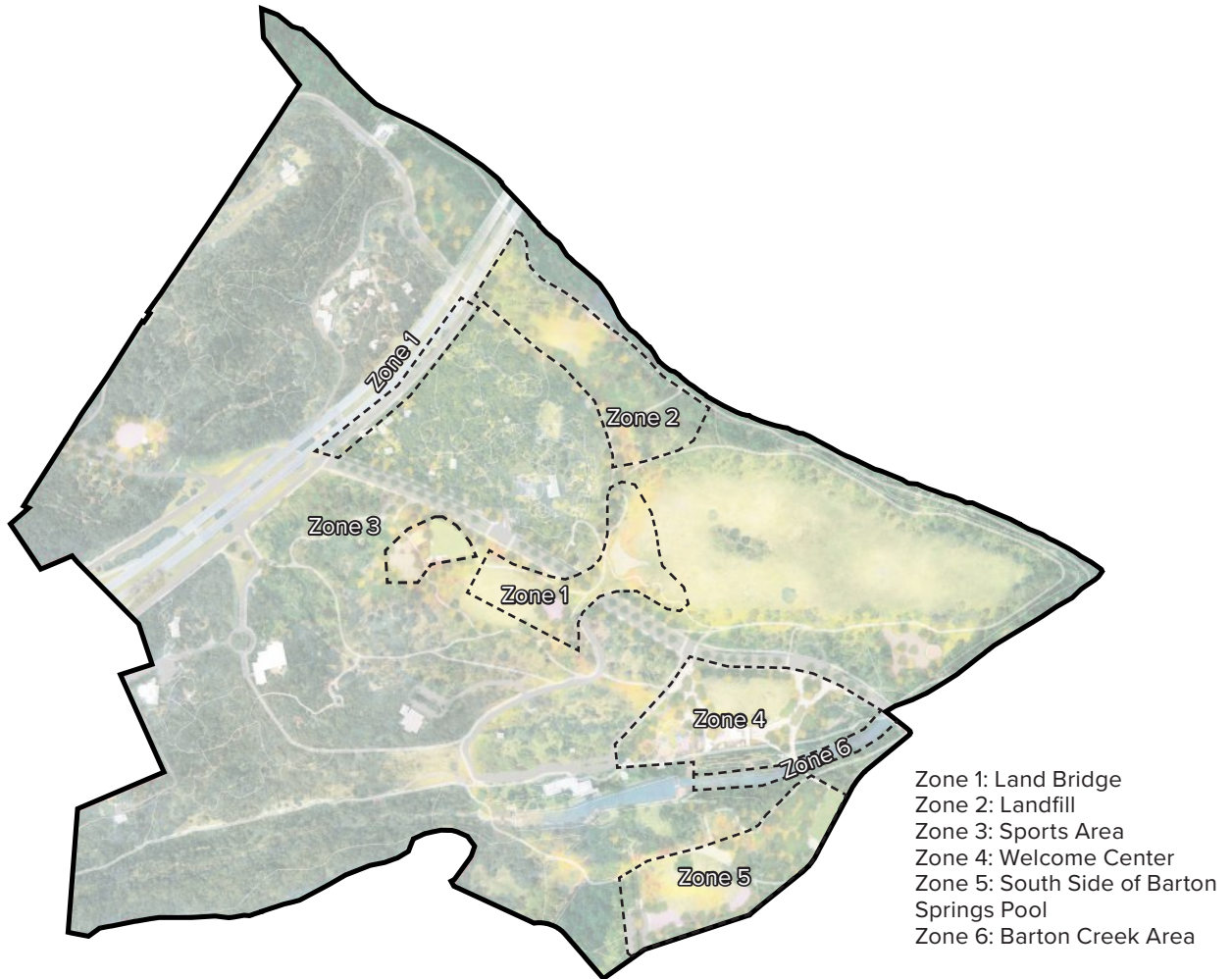
ADDITIONAL RESTROOMS

LAND BRIDGE

WELCOME CENTER

PROJECTS PACKAGES

ZONES



PROJECTS AND ZONES

The projects can be combined into a package based on zones within the park. This package can happen all at the same time or project-by-project based on available funding sources.

The zones as outlined are where most of the major improvements to Zilker Park will take place. Other projects like ecological uplift projects throughout the park, projects within the Zilker Preserve, and other miscellaneous projects could happen as funding becomes available and are not fully dependent on a sequential process.

ZONE 1: LAND BRIDGE

The land bridge area contains five different projects: the restoration of Polo Field from informal parking, realigning Stratford Drive to the west side of Zilker Botanical Garden, construction of an underground parking garage, construction of a land bridge, and the relocation of the Zilker Hillside Theater. The project

sequence can be changed based on operation and maintenance resources within the park.

ZONE 2: LANDFILL

Zone 2 is the Butler Landfill area which includes three different projects. The Butler Landfill will be restored to a natural area. A parking garage recommended under MoPac, and the Zilker trailhead to the Butler Hike and Bike Trail would be located next to this facility.

ZONE 3: SPORTS AREA

The Sports Area concentrates various sports amenities scattered throughout the park into a singular area to create an active node. The projects in this Zone are: of the Polo Field and construction of the Sports Area, including new fields, trails, and a surface parking lot

Table 4: Project Packages by Zone

| PROJECT PACKAGES BY ZONE | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------|
| Zone 1: Land Bridge | | | | |
| Restoration of Polo Field | Stratford Dr Realignment | Underground Parking Garage | Land Bridge | Zilker Hillside Theater |
| Zone 2: Landfill | | | | |
| Restoration of Landfill Area | Parking Garage | Zilker Trailhead to Butler Hike and Bike Trail | | |
| Zone 3: Sports Area | | | | |
| Restoration of Polo Field | Sports Area | | | |
| Zone 4: Welcome Center | | | | |
| Removal of Surface Parking | Enhancement of Existing Playground | Welcome Center | | |
| Zone 5: South Side of Barton Springs Pool | | | | |
| Parking Garage | Removal of Surface Parking | Drainage Improvements | South side new play areas | |
| Zone 6: Barton Creek | | | | |
| Controlled Barton Creek Water Access | Restoration of Barton Creek Banks | Additional Bridge along Barton Creek | Relocation of Ped/Bike Bridge along Barton Creek | |

under the MoPac with direct pedestrian crossing to the sports area.

ZONE 4: WELCOME CENTER

The Welcome Center is the front gate of Zilker Park and becomes the central space for school gatherings or tourists. The improvement of the area starts with the removal of the existing surface parking. However, this only can happen when parking is accommodated elsewhere as per the plan, such as the parking garage on Azie Morton Road, parallel parking along Barton Springs Road or the underground parking at the land bridge. Improvements to the existing playground and renovation of the Caretaker’s Cottage and Quonset Hut are projects within Zone 4.

ZONE 5: SOUTH SIDE OF BARTON SPRINGS POOL

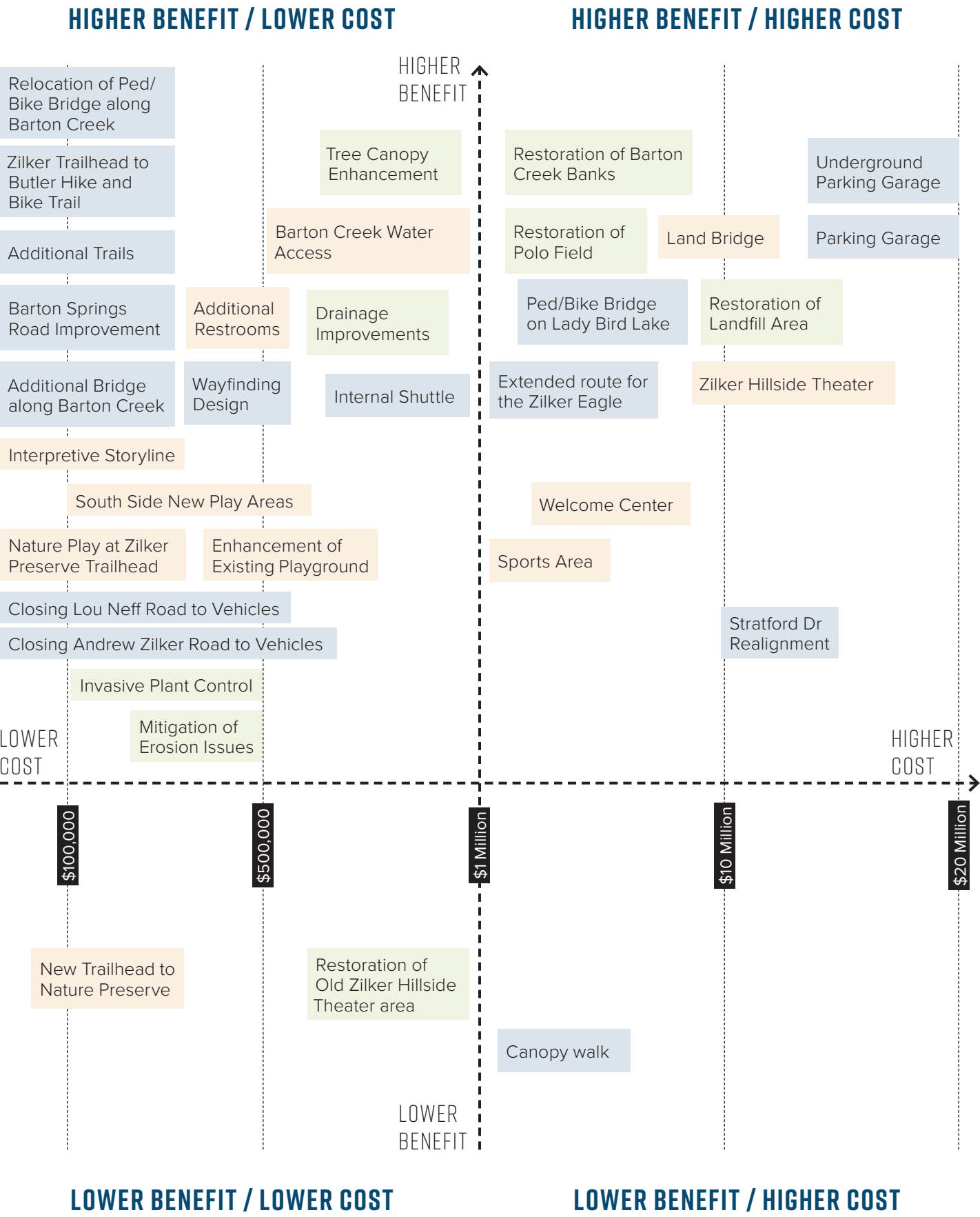
Existing surface parking will be removed to allow for drainage improvements and ecological uplift interventions. Furthermore, with the addition of new

playscapes and gathering spaces, this area becomes more activated for everyday use.

ZONE 6: BARTON CREEK

The restoration of the banks of Barton Creek is one of the most critical projects in Zone 6. It is envisioned that safe, accessible walkways elevated up from the creek level would be built with hardscape areas for water access. Planted areas would allow for restoration of vegetation and for future generations of heritage trees to be established. Pedestrian and bike bridges along Barton Creek at Toomey Road, the west side of Barton Springs Pool, and a crossing south of the Barton Springs Road bridge are included in this zone. These connections are vital to establish accessibility not only to this area but to the entire park.

PROJECTS BENEFIT AND COST RELATION

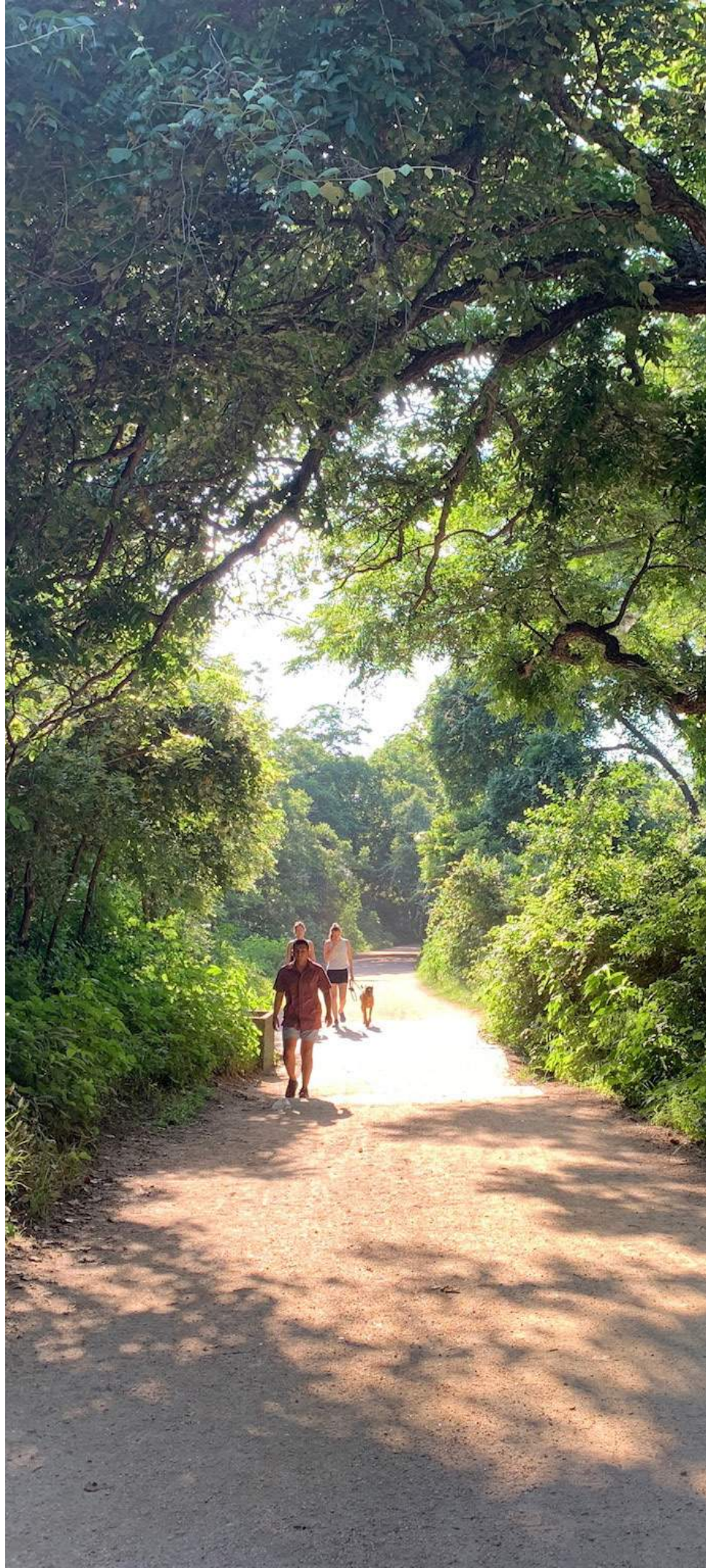


Benefit and cost relation analysis is a key strategy for prioritizing between multiple projects. The quadrants on the left side show the benefit and cost relation among the projects in the Zilker Park Vision Plan. Each quadrant indicates higher benefit/ lower cost, higher benefit/higher cost, lower benefit/ lower cost, and lower benefit/higher cost. The projects in higher benefit/ lower cost have been prioritized over the lower benefit/high-cost projects. This diagram helps the City to prioritize the projects, based on cost and stakeholder and community feedback.

The cost axis of the diagram indicates cost ranges based on estimations completed during the planning process. In the past several years, the market has been volatile as the world has experienced supply chain issues and inflation. It will be critical to reevaluate costs when each project moves forward.

In general, the benefit of each project is based on community input received throughout the duration of the project and discussions with City departments and various implementers.

This diagram is an excellent tool which helps to understand and compare the benefit/cost projections for each project. By integrating future community input, this diagram will be further informed by the priorities voiced directly from the public.



PROJECT TIMELINE

YEAR 1-3

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Restoration of Barton Creek Banks | Barton Springs Road Improvements |
| External Shuttle | Barton Creek Water Access |
| Additional Restrooms | Internal Shuttle |
| Drainage Improvements | Closing Lou Neff Road to Vehicles |
| Wayfinding Design | South side new playgrounds |
| Establishing Partnerships | Nature Play at Zilker Preserve Trailhead |
| Zilker Park Umbrella Organization | Departmental Partnerships |
| Mitigation of Erosion Issues | Interpretive Storyline |
| Tree Canopy Enhancement | |
| Invasive Plant Control | |

NEAR TERM

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Land Bridge | Zilker Hillside Theater |
| Closing Andrew Zilker Road to Vehicles | Underground Parking Garage |
| Restoration of Old Zilker Hillside Theater Area | Restoration of Polo Field |
| Enhancement of existing playground | Additional Trails |
| Removal of Surface Parking | |

TIMELINE

The project timeline was established based on the previous benefit and cost relation analysis. However, as mentioned earlier, the timeline of projects is fluid based on available budget opportunities. This timeline is a guideline for decision-making but is flexible.

The timeline spans from years 1-3, near term, mid term, long term, and ongoing projects, such as tree canopy enhancement, invasive plant control, reducing user impact, and removal of existing surface parking.

CORRELATION AMONG PROJECTS

The next critical factor in the timeline is the correlation between the projects. The Vision Plan is divided into smaller projects, some of which are dependent upon the completion of others before they can begin. An example of this is removal of surface parking lots

within the park. These are dependent upon other parking spaces becoming available, either through construction of a structured parking garage, addition of on-street parking along Barton Springs Road, viable transportation to the park via shuttle system, or increased public transit options.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARKING PROJECTS

Careful calibration of alternative ways to arrive at Zilker will be needed as existing surface and temporary parking spaces are removed. Surface parking should be removed to align with the plan when the following conditions are present: a. internal shuttle and external shuttle systems are running, b. shared use parking is viable through third-party software platforms, c. alternative parking spaces are constructed as projects are realized.

MID TERM

Parking Garage(s)

New Trailhead to Nature Preserve

Restoration of Landfill Area

Ped/Bike Bridge on Lady Bird Lake

Additional Bridge along Barton Creek

Welcome Center

Relocation of Ped/Bike Bridge along Barton Creek

Extended Zilker Eagle Route

Zilker trailhead to Butler Hike and Bike Trail

LONG TERM

Sports Area

Canopy Walk

Stratford Dr Realignment

- » Substitute Parking
- » External and Internal Shuttle
- » External Parking Garages

PARKING GARAGES

There are up to three parking garages suggested in the Zilker Park Vision Plan. However, the ultimate number of garages may change based on:

- » The capacity of each parking garages
- » Access to external and Internal Shuttles
- » The capacity of external parking garages
- » More frequent CapMetro bus service to Zilker Park

- » Project Connect light rail station at the Long Center comes online

The quantity and size of parking garages can be reconsidered as these other criteria are met.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships within City departments and outside groups can influence the timeline. Examples of this include funding from nonprofits, City departments, neighborhoods, or other sources. Partnerships with other groups are encouraged to successfully achieve the goals of the Vision Plan.

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



Zilker Volunteer Day by Austin Parks Foundation

Zilker Park is Austin's busiest park, given the many amenities and destinations located within its 351 acres, as well as its central location near downtown. Not only are individual community members invested in the future of Zilker but also organizations that have operated in Zilker for decades. To support the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, the Vision Plan recommends a nonprofit partner that can act as a liaison between the Department and the many active organizations and interested stakeholders in Zilker Park.

HISTORY OF ORGANIZATIONS IN ZILKER PARK

Nonprofit and volunteer groups as well as concessions have been operating in Zilker Park since its early days as a public park. For example, Girl Scouts have been meeting regularly in the park since the 1950s. Volunteer groups and nonprofits assist park programming and maintenance efforts. PARD is continuously challenged to keep up with the sheer volume of daily service requirements stemming from millions of visitors annually so this help is needed. However, with so many organizations and groups working in Zilker, the Department faces a significant challenge in coordinating and connecting these organizations to create sustainable, holistic improvements to the park as opposed to small improvements here and there.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

With the Vision Plan, there's an opportunity to create a coordinated effort between the Department and a partner. To be recognized as an official park partner, the organization must meet the PARD Partnership Criteria, and all significant agreements would go to City Council for final approval before being executed. Once executed these partnerships are actively managed by PARD staff to ensure Council-approved agreement standards and annual deliverable being met.

PARK COLLABORATIONS IN AUSTIN

Zilker Park is a collection of destinations that draw millions of visitors annually, as well as entities that have long-standing relationships and agreements with the City. Sunshine Camps and the Girl Scout Cabin are smaller, lesser-known destinations, while the Austin Nature and Science Center, the Botanical Garden, the Hillside Theater, and Barton Springs Pool serve a wide range of visitors arriving by a variety of transportation modes.

In the years leading up to the vision process, collaboration has been evident:

- » The Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy was organized by the many garden clubs and groups that have used the grounds for meetings, workshops, and events over decades. The

CURRENT NONPROFITS IN ZILKER

Zilker Park Collective, The Trail Conservancy, Barton Springs Conservancy, Friends of Barton Springs Pool, Austin Parks Foundation, Hill Country Conservancy (Violet Crown Trail), Girl Scouts of Austin, Sunshine Camp, Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy, Zilker Hillside Theater, McBeth Recreation Center, Friends of Austin Nature and Science Center

Conservancy now tackles fundraising, hosting events, and working hand-in-hand with PARD.

- » The Barton Springs Conservancy has raised millions of dollars for improvements in and around the pool, including the forthcoming bathhouse restoration. In addition, they supported the Vision Planning process by funding the Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines that gave the vision planning process a significant head start.
- » The Hill Country Conservancy, collaborating with PARD, is funding improvements to the trailhead for Barton Creek Greenbelt, on top of their ongoing efforts to build and maintain the Violet Crown Trail.
- » The Austin Parks Foundation has funded the return of a revamped Zilker Eagle train, as well as numerous other improvements throughout the park.
- » The Trail Conservancy continues to upgrade the much-loved Butler Trail, recently adding a joint effort to program, operate, and maintain the length of the trail around Lady Bird Lake.

Prior efforts across Zilker Park by these and other nonprofits and volunteer groups include improvements to the Great Lawn, planting and care of many of Zilker’s mature trees in the picnic groves, and funding of restoration work along the Barton Creek Greenbelt. While these efforts are welcome, they are, by nature, piecemeal or partial efforts.

Recognizing the benefits of partnering with nonprofits in parks, City Council passed Resolution 20200312-041, expressing its “support for the concept of parkland agreements between nonprofit organizations and PARD if the agreements further the mission and vision of the department with regard to non-enterprise fund public parks and trails in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner.”

These collaborative efforts are not limited to Zilker Park or Austin, but reflect a national trend of nonprofit park organizations working collaboratively with city parks departments to “fill the gap” in public park needs. In the past years, park nonprofits have contributed an additional \$12 to \$14M in funds annually for programming, operations, and capital improvements in Austin parks. While only 10 percent of the annual city parks budget, it can make a significant difference.

There are some excellent examples for such a model, including the Prospect Park Alliance in Brooklyn, NY; and the Bronx River Alliance in the Bronx, NY. Both organizations were formed by a coalition of “friends of” groups who work closely with the New York City Parks and Recreation Department to advocate for the park, raise public and private funds, organize, and deploy robust volunteer programs, and supply additional staff and resources to aid the city parks department in caring for the park. This model could be applied to Zilker Park as well.



Potential Partnerships

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

ROLE OF A ZILKER PARK UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION

Zilker Park has had nonprofit involvement in the park for decades. Dozens of nonprofit organizations support Zilker Park and the Parks and Recreation Department through programming, advocacy, stewardship, and fundraising. Over time, it's become clear that the multitude of nonprofit support could be organized in such a way that facilitates clear communications with the various organizations, ensures coordination with events and projects, and allows for focused advocacy that could benefit the park.

The Vision Plan recommends a unified (or umbrella) Zilker Park nonprofit that can serve as a main point of contact for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, acting as liaison and coordinating body between the many active organizations and interested parties. In a growing city that places more demands on the Parks and Recreation Department, PARD must find ways to streamline operations, increase efficiency, and better leverage outside funding for projects that benefit the public.

The idea that PARD should seek and support partnerships for a public purpose is based on policy direction from City Council and embedded within plans adopted by City Council. [Austin City Council Resolution 20200312-041](#) states:

The City Council expresses support for the concept of parkland agreements between nonprofit organizations and PARD if the agreements further the mission and vision of the department with regard to non-enterprise fund public parks and trails in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner.

In addition to the City Council Resolution, “[Our Parks, Our Future: PARD Long Range Plan 2020-2030](#)” identified partnerships as a sustainability strategy for developing, improving, maintaining and programming spaces (pp. 22, 125, 130, 179). The Long Range Plan went through significant community engagement before adoption by City Council. In addition, [Strategic Direction 2023](#)’s “Economic Opportunity & Affordability” outcome (SD23, p. 9) identifies “leveraging public-private partnerships” as a strategy for strengthening the small-business sector, which includes concessions at Zilker. SD23’s “Health & Environment” Strategy 8 identifies “leverage[ing] innovative financing models and partnerships to support, maintain, and expand parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and our urban trail network” (p. 22). The recommendations below align with the Council resolution and Council-adopted Long Range Plan and Strategic Direction 2023.

PARD will maintain a strong management and planning presence in Zilker Park, including phasing and implementation of the Vision Plan, overseeing capital improvements, day-to-day operations and maintenance, reserved area reservations, and permitting and management of large events (ACLMF, Kite Festival, Blues on the Green, Trail of Lights).

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Peter, a local food truck vendor, told us: “I’d love to spend time at Zilker. Every vendor wants to be there, but it’s so limited, if you miss it, you have to wait a long time. . . . I’m excited about the possibility of seeing more vendors offering diverse food options to all types of people at Zilker.”

The Vision Plan recommends that PARD formally review its current operations and capital plans to ensure implementation of the most efficient and accountable model for management of a complicated capital plan, increased operations and maintenance capabilities, and coordination with nonprofit partners, concessionaires, and volunteer groups.

In addition, a unified (umbrella) nonprofit, formalized as a partnership with the City per [City Council Resolution 20200312-041](#) and other City and Department guidance, could provide additional unique functions alongside PARD. Among the proposed features are:

- » Advocacy for the plan in both the final approved form (early 2023) and as implementation phases are determined by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department.
- » Work with the broader parks, open space and environmental coalition known as Austin Outside to campaign for public funds (bond elections, annual budget increases, allocation of previously approved bond funds) for capital improvements, restoration, and expanded operations and maintenance for Zilker and the entire Austin Parks and Recreation system.
- » Advocacy for operations and maintenance funding, as well as private fundraising for capital improvements, programming, operations, and maintenance. This includes advocating for an increase in annual funding to the Austin Parks & Recreation Department, solicitation of additional funds from private donors or grantmaking organizations and raising funds via fundraisers for specific improvements.
- » Coordinating efforts with existing nonprofit partners and focusing on park-wide efforts, including establishing and managing a park-wide volunteer corps. Building on the work of It's My Park Day, the bi-annual city-wide volunteer workday, to expand regular opportunities park volunteers. These efforts will require coordination with the PARD PARKnerships program which includes or is an umbrella program for the Adopt-A-Park

program managed by PARD and the Austin Parks Foundation.

- » Beyond this initial set of possibilities, the Zilker unified nonprofit could tackle a range of efforts from ecological restoration to enhanced levels of horticultural care, programming, enhanced concessions, and more. Such efforts will need to be considered in a partnership agreement, using the model that PARD has laid out and which is detailed below.
- » A unified nonprofit could create additional transparency through regular meetings with the Department, community engagement opportunities, and a central resource for understanding the calendar of events for families and visitors.

The City of Austin has the ability through its established PARKnerships program, City Council resolution, and state law to enter into agreement with parks nonprofits to provide public a range of services and benefits. In 2020, in response to Council Direction and Department Long-Range Plan recommendations, PARD spent eighteen months researching park partnerships in the state and nation, meeting with various stakeholders regarding our current partnerships and drafting a program and policy that reflects Austin's values and commitment to our green spaces. The PARKnerships Program is guided by Austin's values and commitment to trust, equity, collaboration, and stewardship. Such agreements lay out roles and responsibilities for the city and nonprofits, and ensure coordination, collaboration and city oversight.

Each agreement for a partnership for public good goes through a public process with final approval and adoption by City Council. The Vision Plan recommendation does not recommend specific details for the organization but does suggest exploration of partnership responsibilities. As with the implementation of other projects proposed in the Vision Plan, future community engagement will be part of the process.

On February 27, 2023, the Parks and Recreation Board (PARB) passed Recommendation 20230227-5. The recommendation stated the Parks and Recreation Board "cannot support the inclusion of the language in the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan referring to the Zilker unified (umbrella non-profit)" with reference to a public

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

engagement process. In addition, PARB recommended, “that this [recommendation] be presented to all boards and commissions and City Council along with the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan, until there is a public process of community engagement to discern the type of entity, if any, the public feels is appropriate to have a role in the operation, management, concessions management, advocacy, and fundraising for Zilker Park.”

The full recommendation along with the Department response can be found in Appendix A. The recommendation for the umbrella organization remains in the Vision Plan based on the City Council direction from 2020 and the PARD Long Range Plan, as well as successful examples in cities such as Dallas, Houston, Chicago, and New York, as articulated by Council.

To summarize, in alignment with City guidance, the Vision Plan recommends a collaborative approach between PARD and a unified parks nonprofit that coordinates and streamlines the existing partnerships at Zilker with a focus on advocacy, ecological restoration, ongoing volunteer stewardship of the park, funding, and coordination between the City and the many groups and organizations already working to care for and improve Zilker Park.

MOVING TO ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Austin Parks and Recreation Department is shifting toward sustainable land management techniques that bring urban ecology to the forefront of how the City manages open space and parkland. This is corroborated by much of the public input from the Vision Planning process and laid out as a framework within the Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines Report completed in 2021. The City Council policy to have every park improvement project over \$2 million in value as a SITES (a sustainable landscape certification) certified project points towards a paradigm shift in park management to ecological restoration through the lens of adaptive management. This shift is further supported by additional efforts by the Barton Springs Conservancy, The Trail Conservancy, and City staff associated with the urban forest and watershed protection. This paradigm shift also recognizes that much of our parkland in Zilker is utilized for passive recreation activities where the enjoyment of nature and the quality of that natural

experience are critical components of the user experience.

The management shift utilizes ecological restoration best practices to enhance the ecological health and immense value of Zilker Park. It repairs degraded landscapes by addressing erosion, invasive species, and soil health. It increases functionality through green stormwater infrastructure and canopy enhancement. It implements ecological restoration practices that enhance and expand meadows, savannas, and woodlands. The results:

- » Protect and maintain endangered species habitat and water quality
- » Repair environmental degradation
- » Restore and enhance plant communities
- » Repair and improve wildlife habitat
- » Enhance the user experience
- » Facilitate environmental stewardship.

These ideas are further articulated in the Zilker Park Natural Resource Inventory and Management Guidelines.



CONCESSIONS

As noted in the Site Analysis Need Assessment as part of Zilker Park Vision Plan issued in spring 2021, the City of Austin uses a traditional concessions model that focuses on long-term contracts with concessionaires, usually 5 to 10 year terms. These contracts require a combination of annual payments plus a percentage of revenue from the vendor to the City.

In addition, the concessionaires are required to provide capital improvements in the areas of the public realm in which they operate. This is especially true for the majority of concessions that operate at Zilker or in the encompassing Lady Bird Lake Corridor, primarily focused on water-based recreation.

The City has contracted with Huston-Tillotson University to undertake a (Lady Bird) Lake capacity study through its environmental justice academic program. This study includes a plan and recommendations informed by the analysis of vendors, watercraft usage and enforcement. This was delivered on December 2022 and provided input on the possibilities and gave more information as to the extent of usage and possible capacity of Lady Bird Lake and connected water bodies. While this is larger than Zilker, it does affect the two existing watercraft-focused concessions operating from Zilker.

In addition to the information from the Huston-Tillotson study, the Vision Plan updates key messages included in the SANA from spring of 2021. These include the following updates:

Both watercraft concessions operating in Zilker Park will be subject to changes in location, operating facilities, and access, based on elements of the Vision Plan as approved. Temporary or permanent relocation of amenities and access will likely be required.

The Zilker Eagle is expected to be operational by the end of 2023. Like watercraft concessions, it will be subject to changes in location, operating facilities, and access, based on elements of the Vision Plan as approved. Temporary or permanent relocation of amenities and access will likely be required.

There is only a single food vendor with a permanent location adjacent to the Zilker Café. In a well-publicized set of hearings in 2021, the approved operator was denied a conditional use permit by the Austin Planning Commission to serve beer and wine. The concession contract was terminated before the vendor started operations. The concession contract was terminated before the vendor started operations. As of December 2022, there is no vendor under contract.

Opportunities exist to provide additional food and drink concessions in multiple locations around the park, including but not limited to temporary or seasonal vending operators. Given the millions of people who visit the park annually, this seems like both a good placemaking opportunity as well as a revenue opportunity. The Vision Plan recommends consideration of the following opportunities:

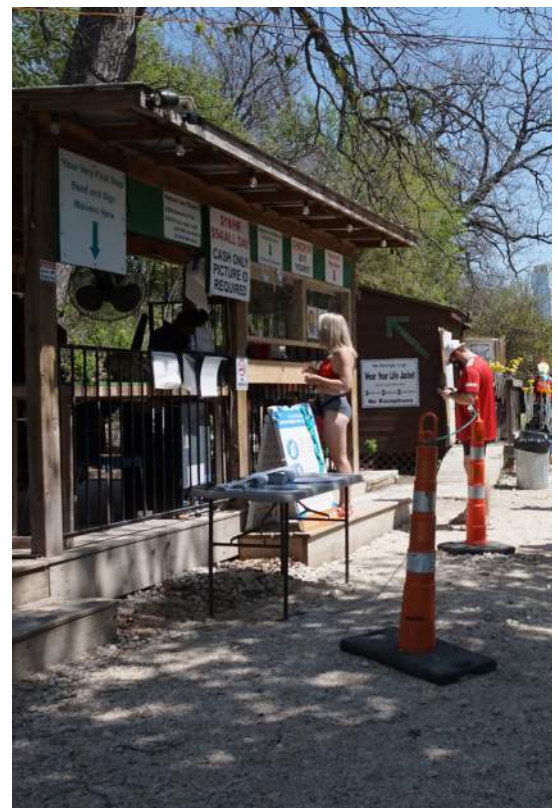
- » Encourage temporary vending opportunities for food and drink at Zilker in several designated locations. Such a pilot project could provide input for a longer-term concessions strategy. PARD has existing contracts with local mobile food and drink vendors that it could use to develop an initial season-long pilot program. Such an effort would provide great input on where (and what) food and drink concessions work best.
- » For pilot food and drink concessions efforts, consider moving to a flat fee per order versus a percentage of sales plus an annual fee. This is a growing trend in many city parks (with public/nonprofit partnerships) to bring greater diversity in services and

the types of concessions, while simplifying the accounting and verification duties of the city. Establishing a rotating set of vendors by days of the week for an entire season or year would also give PARD the ability to see which vendors are the most successful in terms of products offered and total sales.

- » Consider a concessions management role for the proposed unified Zilker nonprofit. Traditionally, city parks departments handle concessions in parks and public spaces. Such agreements, developed in accordance with city codes and approved policies, specify processes for vendor selection, management, and disbursement of revenues received from vending. These agreements can provide flexibility to adjust the number of vendors, locations, and offerings base on needs and successes. Such agreements specify processes for vendor selection, management, and disbursement of revenues received from vending, providing flexibility to adjust number of vendors, locations, and offerings based on needs and success. We'd recommend that any funds collected be directly spent on operations and maintenance efforts by the city / nonprofit parks partner, versus depositing them into the city's general fund.
- » Consider a change in city codes/ordinances that allows all concessions revenue to be dedicated to Zilker for maintenance and operations. As we noted in our presentations last summer, Zilker generates in excess of \$5.3 M per year from fees, events, space/site rentals, and concessions. All funds from Zilker are collected into the city's general fund, which funds a portion of the PARD budget annually. We cover this recommendation in greater detail in the O&M Funding section below.



Zilker Eagle



Zilker Park Boat Rentals

CAPITAL FUNDING

Public funds used for capital improvement projects have strict requirements based on how those funds were obtained. Most capital projects funding in Austin Parks is from general obligation bonds, approved by city voters and restricted for capital projects. A smaller source of funds, with additional restrictions, is the City's Parkland Dedication Ordinance, which focuses on adding parkland and improved amenities for growing populations. Neither can be used for programming, operations, or maintenance.

The Vision Plan intentionally focuses on funding for operations and maintenance, since more mechanisms are designed to support capital investments. As traditional sources like grants, donations, public funding, and value-capture tools become available, capital investments in Zilker Park can be completed in phases identified throughout the Vision Plan

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE FUNDING

The greatest challenge facing city parks departments as well as their nonprofit parks partners across the country is providing consistent funding for operations and maintenance. While programming can be funded through grants, sponsorships and fees, operations and maintenance (O&M) is often invisible. Given that the majority of funds for O&M come from the City's general fund, and the general fund is under constant pressure (and competition) from many other departments, other sources of revenue to fund O&M are critical.

O&M funding frequently is derived from a few major sources, including earned income, contributed income, and creative public funding approaches. The mix of sources, described below, will enable the sustainment and enhancement of the park envisioned in this planning process.

CURRENT OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE EXPENSES

Overall, expenses at Zilker Park continue to increase, which is no surprise given the steady increase in visitors and usage. Between 2017 and 2022, PARD spent an average of \$6.5 million, an increase of \$1.47 million since 2017. This included all operating costs for Zilker Grounds Maintenance, Barton Springs Pool, the Austin Nature and Science Center, Zilker Hillside Theater, and the Zilker Botanical Garden.

Looking specifically at Zilker Grounds Maintenance, the average annual cost between 2017 and 2022 is just over \$2 million. This has increased from \$1.47 million in 2017 to \$2.48 million in 2022.

Overall, Zilker Park expenses are just 6.2% of the total 2022 PARD operating budget of \$106.45 million. In turn, the PARD budget is just 2.26% of the total City operating budget for 2022.

The National Recreation and Parks Association reports on Park O&M costs through its annual Agency Performance Review. Their report is based on data gathered from over 1,000 public parks and recreation agencies. The 2022 report noted that the median for parks operations and maintenance is \$7,823 per acre, with the top quartile median at \$9,269 per acre and the bottom quartile median at \$3,959.

Determining Zilker Park’s cost per acre is a bit tricky, given that several areas are primarily staff costs for safety and programming (Barton Springs Pool, Austin Nature and Science Center) versus maintenance. Using the Zilker Grounds Maintenance 2022 budget, the cost is \$7,065 per acre. Using half of Zilker’s overall budget (essentially combining grounds maintenance and Botanical Garden costs), the cost rises to \$9,259 per acre. PARD should assume a minimum cost of \$10,000 per acre going forward.

FUTURE OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE SOURCES

Securing any additional funding for park operations is challenging. To support the argument for increased funding, this section aims to connect the beneficiaries of better maintenance (e.g., residents, visitors, businesses, public and private operating partners) directly to the funding sources. Selected sources were

specifically vetted for their relevance and precedent success in Austin and Texas.

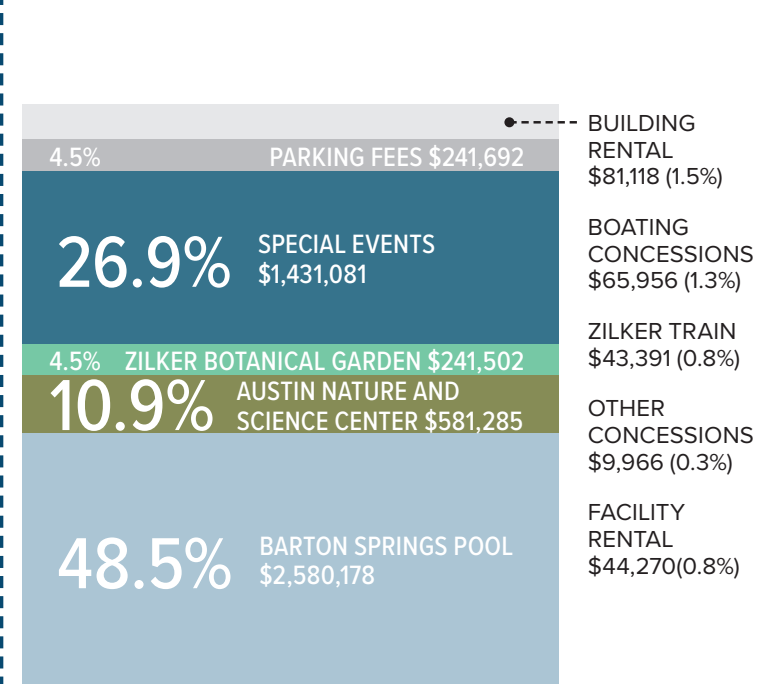
EARNED INCOME

Primarily, Zilker Park should explore expanding concession opportunities and revenues. Only one food and drink concession is currently permitted in Zilker, and it has not been operational for some years. The Vision Plan recommends piloting a temporary concession program with a rotating set of food and drink concessions in key locations in the park on a seasonal (annual) basis. To avoid confusion and unnecessary complication, concessions should be charged a standard fee per order (ticket) to level the playing field. The total number of food and drink concessions should be carefully managed to ensure that the park isn’t overwhelmed by commerce and that participating vendors are operating consistently and transparently.

REVENUE AND EXPENSES OF ZILKER PARK

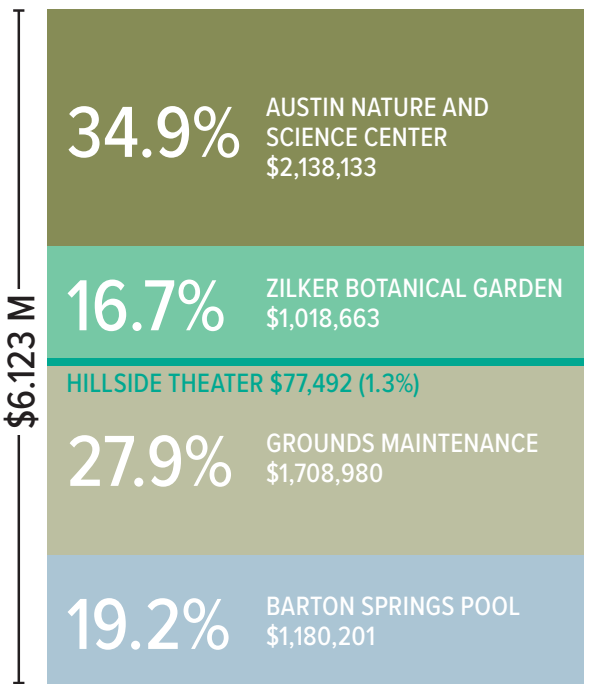
REVENUE ACCRUED IN ZILKER \$5.32 M

86.87% OF ZILKER EXPENSES
41% OF PARD GENERAL FUND INCOME



EXPENSES FOR RUNNING ZILKER PARK \$6.123 M

7.2% OF PARD OPERATION BUDGET
0.67% OF GENERAL FUND BUDGET



FINANCIAL

The seasonal pilot program could be implemented using existing PARD temporary food concession contracts or via an annual request for proposal process. The results of the pilot over several seasons can better inform if additional concessions are successful, where permanent food concessions in Zilker Park may be located, what infrastructure is required for temporary food concession hookups (water, wastewater, electrical, hardened pad, etc.), and how to manage such a program longer term.

Many community members expressed concern over the “commercialization” of Zilker Park through this process. The Vision Plan aims to avoid too many concessions while also supporting local businesses and the park by taking advantage of the ample opportunities to provide modest food and drink concessions in multiple locations around the park, including but not limited to temporary or seasonal vending operators. Given the millions of people who visit the park annually, thoughtful concessions would improve park experience for visitors, advance placemaking, and generate additional operating revenue. PARD should consider the following opportunities:

- » Encourage temporary vending opportunities for food and drink at Zilker in several designated locations. Such

a pilot project could provide input for a longer-term concessions strategy. PARD has existing contracts with local mobile food and drink vendors that it could use to develop an initial season-long pilot program to gather input on where (and what) food and drink concessions work best.

- » For pilot food and drink concessions efforts, consider moving to a flat fee per order versus a percentage of sales plus an annual fee. This is a growing trend in many city parks (managed by public/nonprofit partnerships) that allows a greater number of vendors to participate in such a program and simplifies accounting and verification duties. Establishing a rotating set of vendors by days of the week for an entire season or year would also give PARD the ability to see which vendors are the most successful in terms of products offered and total sales.
- » In conversations around equity and inclusion at Zilker Park, the planning team heard that one way to encourage people to enjoy Zilker who still do not feel welcome due to historic practices is



by inviting diverse concessionaires who represent historically marginalized groups. This is more likely under this recommendation.

- » Consider a concessions management role for the proposed unified Zilker nonprofit. Traditionally, city parks departments handle concessions in parks and public spaces. Increasingly, nonprofit parks partners are being contracted to provide these services for specific parks, subject to an agreement with the city. Such agreements specify processes for vendor selection, management, and disbursement of revenues received from vending, providing flexibility to adjust number of vendors, locations, and offerings based on needs and success. Any funds collected should be directly spent on operations and maintenance efforts instead of depositing them into the city's general fund.
- » Consider a change in city codes/ordinances that allows some concessions revenue to be dedicated to Zilker for maintenance and operations. As we noted in our presentations last summer, Zilker generates an excess of \$5.3 M per year from fees, events, space/site rentals, and concessions. All funds from Zilker are collected into the city's general fund, which funds a portion of the PARD budget annually.

Zilker Park could also increase parking fees and dedicate this revenue towards park operations.

The parking program generates several hundred thousand dollars in revenue at Zilker (after expenses are paid), PARD should explore whether parking fees can be increased or variable rates can be introduced, based on demand as is being done in a growing number of cities across the US. Restrictions on use of funds may be limited to capital improvements or repairs, but this could create a possible growing source of revenue that could support the growing needs of the park.

Finally, this report examined reserving all revenue from events, rentals, fees, concessions, and any other revenue that is currently deposited into the general fund to directly fund Zilker O&M. This would yield an average of \$5.05 million annually, 36.5% of PARD's annual general fund income of \$13.85 million. However, as Austin moves towards equitable citywide access to quality park space, this approach is unlikely to yield sufficient funding for the park system. Rather, Zilker Park and its supporters should be positioned as champions within park system to support increased funding for all parks.



FINANCIAL

CONTRIBUTED INCOME

- » When nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, or individual donors donate funds to support parks, this is called “contributed income.” One key strategy for funding Zilker O&M is through securing contributed income for this purpose. The proposed unified nonprofit partner would serve as an advocate for the park. As the Vision Plan begins implementation and for standard O&M, the unified nonprofit partner would work with other nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and individual donors to raise funds to support these efforts. The contributed income process could include the following:
- » Advocacy for public funding for O&M. As mentioned in the governance section, the unified Zilker nonprofit can take the lead in advocating for funding as part of the annual city budget process.
- » O&M funding built into donations for capital projects. As demonstrated by The Trail Conservancy and others in Austin, major gifts now frequently include 10 to 20% for a fund for replacement and repairs. This can help with increasing O&M funding across the park.
- » Sponsorships and support for programs and events. The unified Zilker nonprofit could seek out sponsorships for programming and events being held at Zilker. A portion of funds raised can be used for O&M costs associated with programs and events. While this will require careful coordination with existing efforts, it can open opportunities for funding for a range of programming at the Beverly Sheffield Education Center, the Austin Nature and Science Center, the Hillside Theater, and other locations around the park. Details, including recognition dos and don'ts, would need to be addressed in partnership agreement(s) with PARD.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

- » Volunteer Program development and management. A key part of the work of the unified nonprofit is to develop and manage a volunteer program for

Zilker Park as a whole. Organizations such as the Austin Parks Foundation, Pease Park Conservancy, and The Trail Conservancy provide a model for how an ongoing volunteer program can help with O&M efforts across the park, as well as care and maintenance of newly restored areas.

The unified nonprofit partner could raise funds to pay for project managers, tools and supplies, and recognition programs for volunteers. A key goal should be developing the best practice of creating zone horticultural care program, where regular volunteers are paired with City and/ or unified Zilker nonprofit staff working to plant, water, weed, and otherwise maintain different portions of the park, but especially in areas targeted for ecological restoration. Again, details in agreement(s) with PARD would be key.

While this proposal isn't a direct source of O&M funding, it can provide a growing and flexible resource in knowledgeable volunteers working side-by-side with City and nonprofit staff. Parks of similar size see thousands of hours of work donated annually. Strategies employed by other cities and nonprofit partners include:

- » Assumption of food and drink concession program management. As mentioned in the Concessions section, growing food and drink opportunities creates a new revenue stream.
- » Increasingly, nonprofit parks partners are being contracted to provide these services for specific parks, subject to an agreement with the city. Such agreements specify processes for vendor selection, management, and disbursement of revenues received from vending, providing flexibility to adjust number of vendors, locations, and offerings based on needs and success. We'd recommend that any funds collected be directly spent on operations and maintenance efforts by the city.

Additional contributed income may come from various donations, including both corporate sponsorships and individual donations. The creation of a park-specific organization, whether specifically on behalf of Zilker Park or supportive of Austin's entire park system, could include a membership structure that incentivizes

corporations and individuals to contribute annually to park operations.

Finally, grants at the regional, state, or federal level typically focus on capital projects; however, some may be available to support ongoing operations. In particular, the national momentum around both equitable programming and climate resilience may point towards opportunities for operating grants.

PUBLIC FUNDING AND VALUE CAPTURE

Austin's park system creates significant value for the city of Austin, including its residents, visitors, and businesses. Zilker Park, as one of the crown jewels of the park system, is positioned to help champion a new effort to raise operating dollars for both the park and the park system as a whole. At the local level, the following options are the most likely to generate substantial revenue, though the implementation considerations remain significant:

- » **Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT).** HOTs help to direct some of the spending from visitors back into the City's general fund by leveraging a sales and use tax on most overnight accommodations in Austin. Austin's HOT is currently at the state maximum of 17%, with 11% going to the City of Austin and an additional 6% going to the State of Texas. Zilker Park and the Austin park system are one of the core drivers of tourism in the city, suggesting there may be some ability to dedicate revenue to park operations.
- » **Public Improvement District (PID).** A PID sets a boundary around a specific set of businesses and/or residences to set a special additional property tax for the district. The funds from the tax are then directed back into the district to support operations and various programs. Austin already has three PIDs, including the Downtown PID, East PID, and South PID. To support operating funding for Zilker Park, funding opportunities could include extending the existing Downtown PID to include Zilker Park or creating a new PID around the Zilker Park area.
- » **Municipal Management District (MMD).** MMDs act similarly to PIDs, with funding typically based on

commercial property tax or a district-specific sales tax. An MMD establishes a board of directors for the district that oversees the funds. There is not a specific cap on the amount of funds that can be raised, but to levy an assessment, the board of directors would need to gather petitions in support of the plan. This is most successful in highly commercialized neighborhoods, unlike the mostly-residential Zilker Park area.

- » **Local Motor Vehicle Rental Tax.** The State of Texas allows local governments to impose a tax on motor vehicle rental companies located within the boundaries of the taxing entity. The City of Austin currently has a 5% local motor vehicle rental tax which is dedicated to financing capital investments at the Town Lake Park Community Events Center Venue project, currently generating roughly \$10M annually to the City of Austin (pre-pandemic). This could be replicated but applied to ongoing citywide park maintenance, creating a new source of dedicated funding.
- » **Parks Bond.** A voter referendum can be designed to create either capital or operating funding for parks throughout Austin. In 2018, Austin voters approved \$925 million in bond propositions including \$139 million for parks and recreation. With additional research, outreach, and modeling, a voter referendum could be designed to equitably and sustainably create a new source of operations and maintenance funding for Austin's park system.

CONCLUSION

Securing sufficient operating funding for Zilker Park, and more broadly, Austin's dynamic and quintessential park system, will require layering a series of funding sources that are appropriate and feasible for the desired program or use. By regularly evaluating earned income, contributed income, and public funding opportunities, Zilker Park can lead Austin in sustainably and equitably funding park operations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THIS CHAPTER

Glossary
Parks & Recreation Board Recommendation
Staff Response to Recommendation

APPENDICES

GLOSSARY

- » 100-year flood plain – p 93 – The land area predicted to flood during a 100-year storm, which has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year. The 100-year flood plain is used by the federal government to administer the federal flood insurance program and by the City of Austin to regulate development within the flood plain area.
- » Active modes – p 76 – Active modes of transportation and mobility, such as biking, walking, scootering.
- » ADA – p 30. 92 – The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities engaging in everyday activities. The law addresses access to government services and activities in public places. In 2004, extensive provisions were added to the accessibility guidelines to provide accessibility to recreational facilities, including boating facilities, play areas and swimming pools.
- » Adaptation – p 175 – Adjustment to environmental conditions, such as humans adapting to life in a changing climate.
- » Adaptive Management – p 28, 188 – An iterative process, sometimes called adaptive resource management, to work toward ecological restoration goals, tempered by simultaneous monitoring of the effects of previous management methods. Hypothesis testing is used to inform decisions about future actions and allows for shifting of goals and strategies as new information emerges.
- » Berm – p 170 – A linear mound or ridge of earth, typically used to direct the flow of surface drainage.
- » CapMetro – p 30 – The Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the public transportation provider in Austin. CapMetro operates bus, paratransit and commuter rail services in the city and surrounding region.
- » Carbon sequestration – p 175 – The process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide, as a method of reducing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in an effort to reduce global climate change. Specific to Zilker Park, the Vision Plan recommends increasing vegetation and improving soil health to enhance carbon sequestration.
- » City climate goals – p 30 -
- » Climate Resiliency – p 175 – Climate resilience is the ability to recover from climate-related shocks such as flood or drought, or the mitigation of vulnerability to those shocks. Increasing climate resilience is intended to reduce the climate vulnerability of communities to the effect of climate change.
- » Compatibility Standards – p 95 – A zoning regulatory tool used to protect and preserve existing neighborhood character and scale. In Austin, compatibility standards are applicable to property adjacent to residential zoned (SF-5 or more restrictive) property, and regulate allowable height, setback and building area on surrounding properties within which new development may occur.
- » Constituents of concern – p 65 – Any substance defined as a hazardous substance, hazardous waste, hazardous material, pollutant or contaminant, petroleum hydrocarbon, asbestos, PCB or similar substance, the generation, recycling, use, treatment, storage, transportation, release, disposal or exposure of which is subject to regulation under Environmental Law.
- » Critical Environmental Feature – p 93 – Critical environmental features (CEF) are defined and protection requirements outlined in the City of Austin Environmental Criteria Manual and Land Development Code. Critical environmental features include caves, sinkholes, springs, canyon rimrocks and bluffs, and protection of them by provision of a surrounding buffer area is required to protect water quality in the area of the CEF.
- » Critical Water Quality Zone – p 93 – Critical Water Quality Zones (CWQZ) are defined and development requirements outlined in the City of Austin Land Development Code. Critical water quality zones

occur in watersheds outside those defined as urban watersheds, including rural and suburban watersheds and the Barton Springs Zone. CRWZ boundaries generally follow those of the 100-year flood plain or are defined as a set number of feet from the centerline of the waterway, with the width increasing as the size of the waterway increases.

- » Detention – p 97 – A detention pond is a stormwater control measure, designed to provide controlled release of storm runoff during or immediately following a storm. Depending upon the design conditions and regulatory requirements, detention features may be off-site, on-site, on-stream or regional.
- » Dillo-type – p 36 – The Dillo was a downtown circulator shuttle bus operated by CapMetro between 1984 and 2009.
- » E- bike – p 161 – An electric bicycle, equipped with an electric motor to assist while one is pedaling. An e-bike provides assistance with pedaling but does not fully propel the rider.
- » Ecological uplift – p 36, 124, 167 – The quantifiable environmental benefit of restoration actions undertaken. The environmental gain, or uplift, resulting from conservation actions or projects.
- » Edwards Aquifer – p 63 - The Edwards Aquifer is an artesian aquifer and groundwater system, an underground layer of porous, water-bearing rock that is roughly 300-700 feet thick and 5,400 square miles in area. The Edwards Aquifer Region extends from Brackettville to Austin, in a gentle arc shape. It is divided into three primary zones – the contributing zone, the recharge zone and the artesian zone. Zilker Park and Barton Springs Pool fall within the Edwards Aquifer Region.
- » Edwards Aquifer Contributing zone – p 67 – The contributing zone of the Edwards Aquifer is the drainage or catchment area of the Aquifer and occurs in the Texas Hill Country.
- » Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone – p 93 - The recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer is the area

where Edwards limestones outcrop at the land surface. The Edwards limestones are fractured and faulted and allow large quantities of ground water to flow into the Aquifer. Zilker Park and Barton Springs Pool fall within the recharge zone.

- » Edwards Aquifer Transition Zone – p 93 – The transition zone is a thin strip of land south and east of the recharge zone, also with fractured and faulted limestones, with caves and sinkholes that allow surface water to pass. The transition zone is part of the artesian zone, where water is drawn out of the aquifer at wells and springs. A portion of the eastern end of Zilker Park falls within the transition zone.
- » Environmental Resource Inventory – p 93 – A document required under the City of Austin Land Development Code and Environmental Criteria Manual for proposed development on properties in select locations, including within the Edwards Aquifer recharge or contributing zone. The environmental resource inventory (ERI) must identify critical environmental features and propose protection measures for them and must provide environmental justification for proposed spoil disposal location and roadway alignments and propose methods to achieve overland flow. The ERI must include a hydrogeologic report, a vegetation report and a wastewater report.
- » External circulator – p 160 – Short distance, fixed-route, circular transit option that takes riders around a specific area with major destinations. Typical circulator vehicles are trolley, jitney or other small bus-type vehicles. The external circulator noted in the Vision Plan is envisioned as connecting transit hubs or destinations outside Zilker Park with an entry point to Zilker Park.
- » Forbs – p 71 – A herbaceous flowering plant, that is not a grass, sedge or rush. Sometimes referred to as phorb. Forbs have stems and leaves, produce seeds and die back at the end of the growing season. Forbs are found in grasslands and understory plantings.

GLOSSARY

- » Green infrastructure or green stormwater infrastructure – p 63, 68, 170 – Green infrastructure filters and absorbs stormwater where it falls. It augments so called “gray infrastructure,” systems of gutters, pipes and tunnels, which moves stormwater away to treatment plants or direct discharge to water bodies. Green infrastructure uses plant or soil systems, permeable paving, stormwater harvest and reuse and/or landscaping as ways to store, infiltrate, evaporate or transpire stormwater and to reduce flows to sewer systems or water bodies.
- » Guiding principles – p 27 – Sustainability, diversity and inclusion, nature and ecology, history and culture, and accessibility.
- » Hydrology – p 45 – The study of the movement, distribution and management of water on the planet.
- » Impervious Cover – p 97 – The area of any surface that prevents the infiltration of water into the ground, such as roads, parking areas, concrete paving and buildings.
- » Internal circulator – p 160 - Short distance, fixed-route, circular transit option that takes riders around a specific area with major destinations. Typical circulator vehicles are trolley, jitney or other small bus-type vehicles. The internal circulator noted in the Vision Plan is envisioned as connecting destinations within Zilker Park.
- » Interpretive program – p 29 – Interpretive programs are the methods used to connect people to places and sites through educational materials. Interpretive programs may include exhibits, websites, live programs, special events, publications, signage and audio or video presentations. Successful interpretive programs build intellectual or emotional connections to the stories told and information provided and will encourage the development of stewardship and support for the messages and places.
- » Invasive species – p 71, 73, 173 – An invasive species is a living organism that is not native or indigenous to a particular area or ecosystem and causes harm. The term is often used to describe plants that have been introduced to a site, often with good intentions, that have caused unintended consequences.
- » Land Bridge – p 184 – A manmade, engineered bridge connecting two sides of a site, typically over a traffic roadway. In park settings, earth and plantings are used at the surface of the land bridge to continue the natural experience of the park.
- » Lithostratigraphy – p 70 – The classification of rock formations based upon the lithological character of the rock strata and their stratigraphic relations. Lithology describes the composition of properties of rock units. Stratigraphy describes the rock layers and layering.
- » Low impact play – p 170 – Low impact play or activity includes movement that is gentle on joints and performed with a fluid motion. Common examples are swimming, cycling, yoga, nature hiking, disc golf and pitch ball games like bocce and petanque.
- » Megafauna – p 64 – Large or giant animals of a habitat or geological period, now extinct in many instances.
- » MetroBike dock – p 161 – A public bike share system in Austin, owned and operated by a partnership of the City of Austin, CapMetro and Bike Share of Austin. The bike share system is intended to support trips that are too far to walk but too short to drive.
- » Metropolitan park – p 54 – A metropolitan park serves city-wide population and is the largest park type operated by the Parks and Recreation Department in Austin, over 200 acres in size. Metropolitan parks in Austin are typically natural resource-based and include swimming areas, open play areas, picnic facilities and trails for hiking, bird watching and interpretation of nature.
- » Micromobility – p 76 – Use of small, lightweight vehicles operating at speeds below 15 miles per hour and driven by users. Micromobility vehicles include bicycles, e-bikes, scooters, skate boards and other small mobility vehicles without license plates.

- » Mitigation – p 175 – In the broad sense, mitigation is the process of making something less damaging, harmful or severe. In the context of the Vision Plan, mitigation refers to efforts to reduce or prevent climate change, and strategies to do so are described in the Plan document.
- » Mode split – p 30 – The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan outlines a 50/50 mode split between drive alone vehicles and other modes of travel, as a top strategy. The mode split includes non-vehicular modes of travel, including walking and bicycling.
- » Multi-modal transportation – p 30 – Multi-modal transportation includes a coordinated system of various modes of transportation, and not just cars, buses, rail, bicycles or walking.
- » Natural Resource Inventory – p 67 – A list and description of naturally occurring resources in a particular area, such as water bodies, forest land. Cultural resources, including historic , scenic or recreational resources, may also be included. A natural resource inventory provides reference information for land-use and conservation planning and informs local planning and zoning processes.
- » Park circulator – p 37 - Short distance, fixed-route, circular transit option that takes riders around a specific area with major destinations. Typical circulator vehicles are trolley, jitney or other small bus-type vehicles. The park circulator noted in the Vision Plan is envisioned as connecting destinations within Zilker Park.
- » Parkner – p 84, 101 – Non-profit, conservancy, neighborhood, community or business entities working with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department for park development, maintenance, management and programming.
- » Parknerships – p 188 – Austin Parks and Recreation Department Community PARKnerships program serves to coordinate the efforts of partners and volunteers.
- » Pervious cover – p 42 – Pervious surfaces allow water to filter into the ground, enhancing groundwater recharge, filtration of pollutants and reducing erosion and flooding.
- » Phytoremediation – p 109 – The use of plants to clean up contaminated environments. The method works best where contaminant levels are low, as high concentrations take longer to clean and may limit plant growth.
- » Placemaking – p 189 – A participatory process for shaping public space, creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.
- » Programming – p 25 – The provision of public activities to or in public spaces.
- » Protective Concentration Levels – p 49 - The concentration of a chemical of concern which can remain within the source medium and not result in levels which exceed the applicable human health risk-based exposure limit or ecological protective concentration level at the point of exposure for that exposure pathway.
- » Public/private partnerships – p 28 – Collaboration between a government agency and a private sector company or entity that can be used to finance, build and operate projects.
- » Rain garden – p 170 – A shallow vegetated depression designed to absorb and filter runoff and drainage from impervious surfaces, like paving, driveways, sidewalks and roofs. Rain gardens are typically landscape with native plants and grasses and help protect water quality and conserve water in an attractive way.
- » Re-wilding – p 42 – Conservation efforts intended to restore and protect wilderness areas and natural processes. Re-wilding is focused on restoring ecosystem health and biodiversity by protecting wilderness areas and providing connectivity between such areas.
- » Recharge zone – p 67 - The recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer is the area where Edwards

GLOSSARY

limestones outcrop at the land surface. The Edwards limestones are fractured and faulted and allow large quantities of ground water to flow into the Aquifer. Zilker Park and Barton Springs Pool fall within the recharge zone.

- » Recognized Environmental Condition (REC) – p 49, 63, 65, 169 – A REC, as defined in ASTM E1527-21 as “(1) the presence of hazardous substances or petroleum products in, on, or at the subject property due to a release to the environment; (2) the likely presence of hazardous substances or petroleum products in, on, or at the subject property due to a release or likely release to the environment; or (3) the presence of hazardous substances or petroleum products in, on, or at the subject property under conditions that pose a material threat of a future release to the environment.” (Note that this is the current version of ASTM 1527. The Phase I Environmental Site Assessment for Zilker Park referenced a previous version, ASTM E1527-13.)
- » Remediation – p 170 – Environmental remediation is the removal of pollution or contaminants from groundwater, surface water, soil, sediment or other environmental media.
- » Riparian – p 71 – Relating to wetlands adjacent to rivers and streams. The interface between land and a river, stream or creek.
- » Savanna – p 169 – A mixed woodland-grassland ecological system with trees widely spaced, so the tree canopy does not close.
- » Shared use pathway – p 37 – Paved, off-road pathways designed for use by a variety of nonmotorized users, including cyclists, pedestrians, skaters, joggers, scooters, skateboarders and others.
- » SITES certification – p 176 – The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) encourages projects that improve site sustainability and protect and restore ecosystem services. The rating system outlines minimum requirements (prerequisites) and different levels of performance-related points to achieve SITES certification ranging from Certified to Platinum. The program is administered by the Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI).
- » Stewardship – p 29 – Environmental stewardship is the responsible use and protection of the natural environment, achieved through active participation in conservation efforts and sustainable practices.
- » Stormwater runoff – p 26 – Rainfall or snowmelt that flows over the surface of the ground. Precipitation in an urban/suburban area that does not evaporate or soak in to the ground but runs across the land and into an adjacent waterway is stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff is a source of pollutants, picked up as it flows over streets, paving, sidewalks and lawns, including lawn and garden fertilizers, animal waste, sand, sediment, chemical contaminants and trash.
- » Sustainable Land Management – p 188 – Practices and technologies intended to integrate the management of land, water and environmental resources to meet functional needs while ensuring long-term sustainability, ecological system services and biodiversity.
- » Swale – p 170 - A linear shallow depression in the earth, typically used to direct the flow of surface drainage.
- » Tree canopy – p 173 – The above-ground portion of trees, covered in leaves, which form a canopy above the ground, providing shade below.
- » TxDOT – p 30 – Texas Department of Transportation, the state agency responsible for planning, designing, building, operating and maintaining the state’s transportation system.
- » Urban Ecology – p 188 – The study of ecological processes in urban environments.
- » Urban heat island – p 68 – Urbanized areas create heat islands that have higher temperatures than those found in outlying areas. Buildings, roads and infrastructure absorb and re-emit solar heat more

than undisturbed natural landscapes do, creating higher temperatures in urban areas.

- » Water Quality Transition Zone – p 93 –Water Quality Transition Zones (WQTZ) are defined and development requirements outlined in the City of Austin Land Development Code. Water quality transition zones occur parallel to all critical water quality zones and extend from the outer boundary of the CWQZ for a set number of feet, with the width increasing as the size of the waterway increases. Development and construction activity is limited in the WQTZ, with some exceptions and allowances for open space and parks/
- » Water Quality Treatment – p 97 – A water quality control structure, system or feature that provides water quality benefits by treating stormwater run-off.
- » Wayfinding – p 30, 160 – The Society for Experiential Graphic Design (SEGD) defines wayfinding as information systems that guide people through a physical environment and enhance their understanding and experience of the space.
- » Woodland – p 169 – Land covered with trees and woody vegetation, such as a timberland or forest.



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Parks & Recreation Board

Recommendation Number 20230227-5: Recommend further Public Engagement surrounding the DRAFT recommendation for a Unified Non-Profit Role in Operation and Management of Zilker Park

WHEREAS, Zilker Metropolitan Park is a significant public resource for the citizens of Austin, providing critical land for the preservation of the area's natural environment, recreational and exercise space for public enjoyment, protection of the pristine waters of Barton Springs, as well as habitat for the region's important flora and fauna;

WHEREAS, Zilker Park is currently undergoing a planning process known as the Zilker Park Vision Plan, for which a consultant was hired to engage with the public to discern the community members' desires for the future of Zilker Park and to create a draft Zilker Park Vision Plan; and

WHEREAS, the public engagement process for the Zilker Park Vision plan was seriously flawed and not representative of Austin's overall resident park goers, and just two examples of this are (a) information from participants at pop ups hosted across the city was not recorded and participants were simply told to answer the online surveys, and (b) the online surveys were confusing and heavily biased "push polls" designed to encourage support for massive building projects, including the leading questions on the final survey asking survey takers to identify which projects within the plan they were most excited about, most of the choices were construction projects, and there was no option to answer "none of the above," and

WHEREAS, no one or almost no one, during the public engagement process, asked for or supported the further privatization of Zilker Park management and operations and the vast majority of public input on this was opposed to continued and further privatization of park operations; and

WHEREAS, no community engagement surveyed the public desire to create an umbrella organization, a single-point-of-contact non-profit group to take over Zilker Park decision-making and management, ceding control that should belong to the publicly funded and accountable Parks and Recreation Department; and

WHEREAS, the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan was completed in November 2022, was open for public comment until January 8, 2023, and is planned to be presented to Boards and Commissions and the City Council; and

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board will be making a full review of the plan and recommendation to City Council in the future but only after it is reviewed by other Boards and Commissions; and

WHEREAS, the “Operation and Management” section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends “a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit, that can serve as a single point of contact for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, serving as a go-between for the many active organizations and interested parties”... “in a formalized partnership with the city...”; and

WHEREAS, the “Operation and Management” section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends the Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit be tasked with advocacy for the Zilker Park Vision Plan, to engage in private fundraising for capital improvements, and to work with a coalition known as Austin Outdoors to campaign for public funds and advocate for private funding, capital improvements, programming, operations, and maintenance, as well as many other potential roles; and

WHEREAS, the “Operation and Management” section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends the Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit be given a role in concession management within Zilker Park and further recommends changes in the revenue sharing and fee models for concessions contracts within Zilker Park; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, in overseeing park operations, maintenance, and programming, follows specific guidelines to keep taxpayer-funded spending accountable and transparent to the public;

WHEREAS, despite good intentions, non-profit organizations are not governmental entities subject to open meetings, public information, bidding, contracting, and other laws intended to allow for transparency and accountability to residents in expenditure of public funds and development of public assets; and

WHEREAS, the recommendation for a unified non-profit partner and recommendations for the partner’s role, the change to concessions structures, and other operations and management

recommendations would be a significant change to the management of Zilker Park and unprecedented for a municipal park in the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, there is no description of the public engagement undertaken during the engagement portion of the Vision Plan development regarding the role of a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit to oversee programming, concessions, advocacy, and other roles described, nor is there any indication of public support or lack thereof for a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RECOMMENDED that the Parks & Recreation Board:

- 1) Because of the above-referenced concerns about the public engagement process, cannot not support the inclusion of the language in the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan referring to the Zilker unified (umbrella non-profit); and
- 2) Recommends that this resolution be presented to all boards and commissions and City Council along with the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan, until there is a public process of community engagement to discern the type of entity, if any, the public feels is appropriate to have a role in the operation, management, concessions management, advocacy, and fundraising for Zilker Park.

Date of Approval: February 27, 2023

Record of the vote: The motion to recommend that the Parks & Recreation Board: 1) Because of the above-referenced concerns about the public engagement process, cannot not support the inclusion of the language in the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan referring to the Zilker unified (umbrella non-profit); and 2) Recommends that this resolution be presented to all boards and commissions and City Council along with the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan, until there is a public process of community engagement to discern the type of entity, if any, the public feels is appropriate to have a role in the operation, management, concessions management, advocacy, and fundraising for Zilker Park was approved on Chair Cottam Sajbel's motion, Vice Chair Faust's second on a 6-2 vote with two vacancies. Those Board Members voting aye were: Chair Cottam Sajbel, Vice Chair Faust, Board Members Moore, Hugman, Barnard Taylor. Those Board Members voting nay were: Board Members Villalobos and Flowers. Board Member Rinaldi absent

Attest: Tim Dombeck

Tim
Dombeck


Digitally signed by Tim
Dombeck
Date: 2023.02.28
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks and Recreation Board

FROM: Kimberly A. McNeeley, M. Ed., CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation Department 

DATE: March 21, 2023

SUBJECT: **Staff Response to Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan Umbrella Nonprofit (Recommendation No. 20230227-5)**

This memorandum is in response to the Parks and Recreation Board [Recommendation No. 20230227-5](#). The Parks and Recreation Department has received the recommendation outlined below.

The Parks and Recreation Board cannot support the inclusion of the language in the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan referring to the Zilker Unified (umbrella) non-profit.

[The Parks and Recreation Board] [r]ecommends that this [recommendation] be presented to all boards and commissions and City Council along with the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan, until there is a public process of community engagement to discern the type of entity, if any, the public feels is appropriate to have a role in the operation, management, concessions management, advocacy, and fundraising for Zilker Park.

The Parks and Recreation Board (Parks Board) recommendation to remove language associated with considering a partnership with a unified non-profit group in support of Zilker Park conflicts with previous City guidance. During public comment portion of the Parks Board February meeting, much of the expressed concern was directly connected to the “handover” or ceding of control of Zilker Metropolitan Park to a for-profit entity. To be clear, this has never been considered and is not part of the draft Vision Plan. In fact, Zilker, like all parkland, benefits from protections in place in local city ordinance and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code that prohibits the sale, conveyance, leasing, or gifting of a park to a private entity without a majority vote of the public. After careful consideration of the recommendation and public comment, the Department has developed its response to the recommendation as outlined below.

Department Response

The Vision Plan recommendation of the umbrella nonprofit will remain in the draft Zilker Park Vision Plan. The umbrella nonprofit recommendation is a response to citywide guidance through City Council resolution and City Council-approved plans and direction:

- [Austin City Council Resolution 20200312-041](#): “The City Council expresses support for the concept of parkland agreements between nonprofit organizations and PARD if the agreements further the mission and vision of the department with regard to non-enterprise fund public parks and trails in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner.”
- [Our Parks, Our Future: PARD Long Range Plan 2020-2030](#): The Long Range Plan went through significant community engagement before adoption by City Council. In Chapter 4.E. “Optimize & Improve Efficiency of Operations,” the Long Range Plan identified partnerships as a sustainability strategy for developing, improving, maintaining and programming spaces (pp. 22, 125, 130, 179).
- [Strategic Direction 2023](#): SD23’s “Economic Opportunity & Affordability” outcome identifies “leveraging public-private partnerships” as a strategy for strengthening the small-business sector, which includes concessions at Zilker (p. 9). SD23’s “Health & Environment” strategy 8 identifies “leverage[ing] innovative financing models and partnerships to support, maintain, and expand parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and our urban trail network” (p. 22).

When the draft Vision Plan goes before Council, the Parks Board recommendation will accompany it. At that time, Council may provide direction.

The second recommendation also identifies a need for a “public process of community engagement to discern” details of the organization. Consistent with the implementation of all park vision plans, additional community engagement typically takes place in the design or implementation phase. The Zilker Vision Plan will include clarification that a community engagement process should take place to receive input as to the roles and responsibilities of a future umbrella nonprofit and subsequent future agreement. Additionally, for awareness, governance by the Texas Business Organizations Code with additional IRS considerations guides the structure and formation of a nonprofit organization. The Vision Plan recommends a nonprofit organization due to the requirement of public benefit.

Before an agreement is entered into with any such entity by the City of Austin, the standard established public process would be in place, which will include Parks and Recreation Board recommendations and requires City Council approval.

Finally, as mentioned in the draft Vision Plan, the proposed umbrella nonprofit is not envisioned to have a role in the operations and management of the park.

The Parks Board recommendation is now attached to the draft Vision Plan in Appendix A with a notation in the “Organizational Partnership” section of Chapter 5: Implementation. Language has also been added to provide background information on the umbrella organization recommendation and clarify the rationale for its inclusion in the Vision Plan.

Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (512) 974-6717.

cc: Jodi Jay, M.B.A., CPRP, Assistant Director
 Liana Kallivoka, PhD, PE, LEED Fellow, Assistant Director
 Lucas Massie, M.Ed., CPRP, Assistant Director
 Suzanne Piper, DBA, Chief Administrative Officer

