



MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks and Recreation Board Members

FROM: Kimberly McNeeley, M.Ed., CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation Department

DATE: December 9, 2022

SUBJECT: Recycling Implementation Program Phase III



This memo serves to update the Parks and Recreation Board on the progress of the Parks and Recreation Department's Recycling Implementation Program. The Recycling Implementation Program was created to ensure that our parks and facilities are compliant with the [Universal Recycling Ordinance](#) guidelines and support the [City of Austin Zero Waste](#) goals and standards. The Parks and Recreation Department (Department) has begun Phase III, the final phase of the program, which focuses primarily on neighborhood-level parks and greenbelt trailheads. Previous updates on recycling implementation were provided to the Parks and Recreation Board in the form of memos sent in September 2020 and May 2021.

Background

In 2018, the Zero Waste Advisory Commission and the Parks and Recreation Board urged City Council to create a Parks and Recreation Recycling Task Force ([Resolution 20180614-072](#)). Based on those recommendations, the subsequent FY19 City budget included more than \$1 million dedicated to expanding recycling in parks citywide. The Recycling Program Manager was hired in June 2019 to implement comprehensive recycling and composting standards at all Department indoor and outdoor facilities to meet Zero Waste goals. In September 2019, City Council awarded bids for the purchase and installation of updated receptacles at parks.

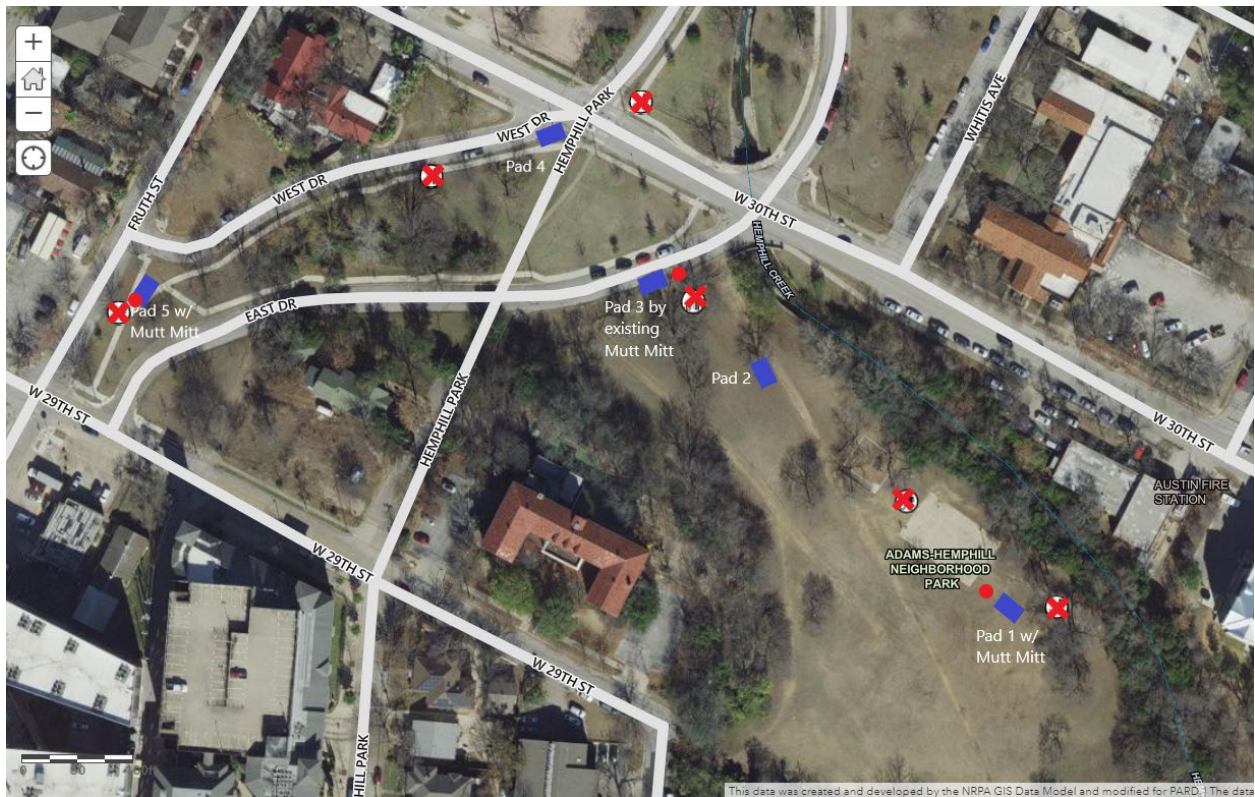
Recycling Implementation Program – Progress to Date

The Recycling Implementation Program focuses primarily on installing landfill and recycling receptacles as paired units on concrete pads with two-way dome lids and clear labels in English and Spanish. Phase I of this program was completed in summer 2021, and prioritized all metropolitan-level parks (the largest parks), athletics sites, aquatic sites, golf facilities, and recently completed Capital Improvement Projects. Phase II was completed in spring 2022, and prioritized district-level parks. In the summer of 2022, the Department began Phase III, which includes neighborhood-level parks, greenbelts, and other park spaces not previously covered. The Department is 35% of the way through recycling receptacle installations at neighborhood parks and greenbelt trailheads and expects to complete this phase by

2023. The Department is also investing in waste audits in FY23 to be able to better quantify the amount of material diverted from the landfill.



New Sitescapes metal receptacle pair on the Pfluger Bridge and new Max-R blue and brown recycled plastic receptacle pair at Beverly Sheffield Northwest District Park



Adams-Hemphill Neighborhood Park: Sample receptacle installation plan showing outdated receptacles to be removed, new locations and Mutt Mitt stations

Recycling Implementation Success

The Department saw an immediate improvement in the areas that previously did not have recycling receptacles and corresponding recycling dumpsters. Visual waste audits in 2019 and 2020 found 25% - 33% of the trash was comprised of recyclable material. For parks that now have recycling receptacles paired next to the landfill receptacles, that number is down to 5% - 10% of recyclable material in landfill

receptacles in 2021 and 2022. At the beginning of the Recycling Implementation Program, only 20% of parks had recycling receptacles in outdoor spaces, typically metropolitan parks. Since the Recycling Implementation Program began in 2019, 100% of metropolitan parks, district parks, pools, golf courses, tennis courts, softball and baseball fields, and 35% of neighborhood parks now have recycling receptacles available outdoors alongside the landfill receptacles. Most pocket parks are being transitioned to “Pack It In, Pack It Out” with no receptacles on site, with exceptions made for pocket parks with amenities such as picnic pavilions or playscapes.

Recycling Implementation Challenges

Vandalism and theft of newly installed receptacles is the most common challenge to implementation. Typically, the Department will repair or replace receptacles in a single location twice. If receptacles are vandalized a third time, the original concrete rectangular “trash coffin”-style receptacle will be re-installed. A limited number of concrete receptacles removed from parks are being stored to be used as replacement receptacles or turned upside down for use as barricades where needed.



Vandalized receptacles at multiple park locations

Organics Diversion Plan

As the Recycling Implementation Program approaches its conclusion, the Department anticipates a new focus on organics diversion to align with the (pre-COVID) 2020 PARD Organics Diversion Guidelines. The Department is partnering with Austin Resource Recovery to add green composting carts and regular composting collection where possible. Department facilities staff and recreation site supervisors are being trained in composting collection, organics diversion methods, and proper signage for events and regular day-to-day office use.



Collecting organic waste at internal Department event

Gathering Data on the Litter Problem

Litter is a challenging issue for park spaces because it has many sources: illegal dumping, homeless encampments, overflowing dumpsters and receptacles, “piling” next to receptacles, foraging animals, weather events, pet waste bags left behind, and careless park patrons. In May and June 2021, the Department partnered with TrashBlitz Austin, a community-based initiative that uses a network of nonprofits, volunteers, and local projects to collect litter-related data. Volunteers visited randomly selected transects to determine the source and type of litter in public spaces, including parks and creeks.



Highest concentrations of litter found at three park adjacent watersheds

Spatial analysis showed the highest concentrations of plastic were found at Walnut Creek, Shoal Creek, and Lady Bird Lake watersheds where 30% of plastic litter observed was at these 3 locations combined. Walnut Creek was the highest by far. Littered single-use items were observed most often in open spaces and parks. Litter analysis showed 68% of observed litter was made of plastic and single-use items such as food wrappers, bottle caps, and bottles. Glass and aluminum accounted for over 75% of the total weight of litter. Recommendations from TrashBlitz and Litterati included to “protect Walnut Creek, Shoal Creek, and Lady Bird Lake from plastic litter entering clean waterways” and “direct future clean-ups in District 3 and 7.” Please contact the Recycling Program Manager if you would like more information and the TrashBlitz Final Report (contact info below).

Solutions to Litter Problems

To combat the issue of oversized trash filling up existing receptacles early in the day, Austin Parks Foundation donated 11 oversized 45-gallon trash receptacles with extra-large openings which have been installed at park sites popular for birthday parties and other gatherings.



Full receptacles creating a “piling” and litter problem and sketch of new oversized trash receptacles



Oversized 45-gallon trash receptacles

Although prevention is the best way to keep Austin’s creeks clean, the Department’s partners and volunteers help with clearing the litter that does make it to the water. The Trail Conservancy organizes regular cleanup efforts, and the Rowing Dock park concession has a Kayak Clean-Up Crew that offers free kayaks for volunteers at a weekly cleanup event.



Photo of Lady Bird Lake Kayak Clean-Up Crew volunteers courtesy of the Rowing Dock

Additional Recycling Program Initiatives and Goals

The Recycling Program Manager continues to work on initiatives drawn directly from recommendations from Austin Resource Recovery, the Zero Waste Advisory Commission, and Parks and Recreation Board, as well as the Department's Long Range Plan for Land Facilities and Programs (2020-2030), [Our Parks](#), [Our Future](#). These accomplishments and priorities are listed below:

- Manage dumpster contracts with Texas Disposal Systems and Balcones Recycling and continue work to right-size dumpsters and ensure adequate frequency of pickups
- Continue work of Materials Reuse Group and Circular Economy Team to re-use office furniture, landscaping material, large appliances, etc., amongst Department Divisions and other City Departments
- Provide guidance for recycling difficult items from recreation centers and other Department Divisions (ex. fluorescent light bulbs, expired car seats, large appliances)
- Holiday Tree Recycling in partnership with Austin Resource Recovery

Should you have any questions, please contact Meredith Gauthier, Recycling Program Manager, at (512) 974-9494, or at Meredith.Gauthier@austintexas.gov, or Assistant Director Liana Kallivoka at (512) 974-9455, or at Liana.Kallivoka@austintexas.gov. For additional information about the Recycling Program, please visit: <https://www.austintexas.gov/department/recycling-program>

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