



## NOVEMBER 2015 CONVERSATIONS: SPECIAL EVENTS IN CITY PARKS

Throughout the month of November 2015, Austin area residents gathered at various community spaces to discuss special events in City Parks. Conversations addressed both the benefits and challenges that these events bring.

When asked about significant benefits of hosting special events on Austin parkland, many participants talked about the positive economic impact to the city, contribution to the positive image and desirability of Austin, and park maintenance improvements that accompany the events. Health benefits were also mentioned.

Concerns were also discussed, many of which revolved around the disruption of daily life. The issue of traffic, parking and street closures caused by these events was raised on multiple fronts. Safety for pedestrians was addressed, especially around schools that are on or near parkland. Monitoring of sound contamination to the surrounding communities was brought up during several conversations. Many participants showed concern when it comes to the number of parks used for these big events and want to see the events rotate between parks so that every park will get the same attention from the City. Fair and equitable use of the event revenue was of importance to many. Complaints of inadequate communication with neighborhoods and the lack of addressing residents concerns were made.

In addition, several of the conversations addressed potential solutions to these concerns. Suggestions included looking at what other cities are doing, appointing neighborhood liaisons, minimizing the length and extent of interruptions and use of traffic guards.

The feedback shows that although most people are happy that Austin is hosting these events, there are some specific and significant concerns which they feel need to be addressed.

## District 1

### Bennu Coffee

*Attendees 0*

## District 3

### Ground Floor Theatre

*Attendees 2*

- Concern shown over monitoring of sound on events with permits
  - Ensure they aren't going over the limit set in the permit.
  - Is there a monitoring committee/task force that actually checks the sound levels of these festivals?
    - Does the city enforce curfews or concert end times?
    - Example: A recent example is the last Fun Fun Fun Festival. The last Fun Fun Fun Fest was the loudest, according to our participant who could hear it from Daniel Street in Bouldin. Friends in Oak Hill and Hyde Park said it was too loud, too.
- Disrupting Daily Life:
  - Streets are closed during event planning, events, and event cleanup, leading to more traffic congestion and causing problems for those who do not attend the event
- Suggestion to look at Chicago's Festivals:
  - Tree Buffers around parks where festivals are being held so sound does not disturb those not attending
  - Direction speakers that ensure that sound does not go towards residences.
- The most important thing the festivals can do is have a liaison to work with the neighborhoods to establish dialogue and agreement.

## District 5

### Strange Brew

*Attendees 5*

- Citizens as Stakeholders
  - The city needs to do a better job at acknowledging and addressing resident concerns. In particular, park closure impact on children need to be attended to because children cannot vote and have no direct voice.
  - Residents want to feel that they are being heard and currently they do not.
- The city should invest in and develop neighborhood parks eg Onion Creek, for resident (family, children) use, particularly during times when the city's larger parks become inaccessible
- The city should work to minimize the extent and length of disruptions that festivals create
  - Example: Prepare sites in sections, make allowances for pedestrians and cyclists.

### Patika

*Attendees 0*

## **Orange CoWorking**

*Attendees 0*

## **District 6**

### **Hope Presbyterian Church**

*Attendees 0*

## **District 7**

### **Cafe Java**

*Attendees 2*

- Ensure that revenue secured from these events goes towards the development of all parks and not just the parks where they occur.
  - Work on larger piece of the pie and ensure the revenue (besides the economic growth) goes to the Parks in Austin and NOT only the one or two parks where they have the events.
  - Consider having festivals at other large parks like Walnut Creek
    - There are many large parks where it would work. Then different parks would all get the attention and the updates and funding that they need and Zilker wouldn't be the only one getting replanted and cleaned up every single year.
- Balance Parking Situations
  - You can't say that you can attend the festival or event as an Austin taxpayer, but then you can't park in the neighborhoods near the event.
  - Parking should be opened to everyone and if the people that live there don't like it, they have the option to sell their property and leave the populated area.
- Parkland Maintenance:
  - New Grass for parks like Walnut Creek. Better Grass for parks that already replace it on a yearly basis like Zilker.
- Add amenities in more parks that don't have them with the revenues the City gets.
  - Example: Walnut Creek: Unlit, unguarded, Pool falling apart, and needs lifeguards

## **District 8**

### **Starbucks at Escarpment**

*Attendees 0*

## District 9

### YWCA

*Attendees 0*

### Cafe Ruckus

*Attendees 2*

- Key Benefits:
  - Health benefits of the outdoors, electronic turn-off
  - Economic impact to the city and its businesses.
  - Contributes to positive image, desirability and publicity/marketability of Austin
  
- Key Challenges
  - Threat to ecosystem balance
  - Traffic and accessibility to events by local citizens
  - Affordability of events for local families
  - Current emphasis on a limited number of venues contributes to negatives; consider spreading out to multiple venues like SXSW has done.
  - Taxes to maintain the parks

### Austin High School

*Attendees 6*

- **Austin High is in the middle of the city parkland**, in fact they own much of it with an arranged agreement to have city to maintain their athletic grounds
  - A challenge is when events are put on by the city but use the school grounds both during school hours and after hours that impact much of what goes on at the school at any given time including weekends.
    - AISD owns property from RR tracks to Lady Bird Lake including Stephen F Austin Drive, hike & bike trail, tennis courts, and parking lot by tennis courts etc...
    - AISD has a partnership with the city for parking lots and tennis courts to only be used during school hours.
    - Tennis courts and ball fields have tournaments that require use and access of these facilities that are not always during academic hours.
  - Lamar Beach Development and use of the downtown park system has a significant impact on not only the local neighborhood, but more specifically student/parents/faculty at Austin High School.
    - AHS is already overcrowded and maxed out for the area when it comes to transit use.
    - S Mopac extension will change the face of AHS because they own the parkland nearby
      - They are not pleased with ANY of the South Mopac extensions and all for good reasons. They especially do not support the double deck tollways.
      - 3 of 6 S Mopac Extensions take property from AHS including 1 with bridge to go over tennis courts

- #6 plan extra lanes on side of mopac which will take up more of AHS land
  - Another plan brings roadway w/in 24 ft of Austin Art Center windows –
  - Yes fix traffic BUT don't bring in more!
- Coordination/Compensation/Communication/Consideration need to be the 4 C's to remember to remedy the needs for this area that is used by thousands every day that impact one of the most historic high schools in our country and for sure our city
  - Austin High School – 1<sup>st</sup> high school west of the Mississippi, Flagship School of AISD
- ACT weekend falls on ACL weekend – time is an issue –meaning getting in the door and in one's seat but they have to navigate traffic not to mention the distraction of the noise....also there are volleyball, football games etc that must take place those weekends too
  - Wind direction during ACL impacts NOISE into school building
  - Proven advantage for students to take college entrance exams at their home school
- City Council seems to NOT care about Austin High and cares more about growth and UT
  - We should not overlook students readiness for the college/business world for economic advantages
- **Road Closures and School Access**
  - Many city allowed events impact pick up and drop off of students! Mind you, they have times that they are required to be in their seats or at events.
  - Races downtown often will close needed roads without notification which impacts being able to transport students to and from school for academics as well as extracurricular activities that occur at all hours of the day including weekends.
  - AHS parents/students/faculty NEED access to school at all times!
  - Buses for football team and other extracurricular activities need to have access to school grounds during these kinds of events – this year they had to meet at Randalls on Lake Austin Blvd
  - City needs to consider the impact on AHS every time they close downtown streets for races, art events, etc And What it's impact is on the learning environment!!!
- **Traffic and Parking**
  - Biggest issue is parking and traffic for city residents, tourist, AHS staff/students/parents
  - Traffic is NOT going to get better for this area so we must come up with solutions now
  - Traffic guards for flow of traffic at east and west entrance
  - Traffic guards at row center – only access there is by AHS owned property – Regada weekends NUTS!
  - A better design to deal with the S Mopac extension designed to drop off onto Ceasar Chavez which is already a failed intersection
  - Need parking garage under Mopac
  - Meter Stephen F Austin Blvd provided AISD Can share in the proceeds
  - Uber needs to be moved to where the pedicabs are NOT the senior pkg lot by the tennis courts
  - Students let out at 4:15pm it takes any where from 15 to 45 minutes on Stephen F Austin
  - Random traffic for this area due to: U turns made, athletic use, random pedestrian crossings, young drivers

- Student #s have not changed much so this is an impact from residents/tourists
- When cold, damp not as much of an issue due to less usage of the surrounding parklands
- City needs incentive to have less cars and more people in them, incentives for businesses to have less drive time by employees
  
- **Use of funds**
  - Need an Actual cost of given to AISD for maintenance of their property by city vs income generated when used by city
  - Very difficult to reign in enforcing income from use of AISD property by public groups
  - Track is used heavily by public yet no revenue from City to maintain use of track that students must use to compete as well as student parking lots
  - AISD has the right to charge! AISD has the right to close the roads they own!
  
- **Safety Concerns**
  - Heavy use of AHS land prior to work day/academic day making for major safety issues especially for bikers when they have lots of new drivers
  - Pickup of students is out of control and dangerous
  - Barton Hill parents due to safety issues and being even able to get close enough to school are now dropping off their students on the south side of the bridge and they are having to walk over the school
  - Need to upgrade Johnson Creek Pkwy – lighting desperately needed since students must walk thru there in the dark
  - Clarksville, Enfield Pk access not maintained yet used by students walking and riding bikes
  - Put sidewalks on both sides of Stephen F Austin
  - Extend Lance Armstrong Pkwy to get pedestrians off the street
  - ACL – ambulance couldn't even get through due to the traffic congestion
  - Lack of coordination of traffic endangered ALL pedestrians
  - Signage for cyclist way too small especially on east side of AHS
  - Cyclist seem to think they don't have to yield
  - Lance Armstrong Pkwy ends at where S Mopac dumps out too – huge accident area
  - Needs at least flashing lights!!! Cant see the bikers – keep in mind lots of young drivers in this area
  - AHS Security needs to be a priority – lot of kids can walk off school property – no monitoring – will be trying something new in Jan by checking IDS driving in and out but that will slow traffic even more
  
- **Additional Notes:**
  - We didn't even have time to talk about impact of businesses at the parkland since there was so much concern over the welfare of the students at AHS
  - They do value what their students gain from having a venue like ACL!
  - AHS is in the view corridor
  - AHS is in a flood plain
  - In attendance: 2 AISD staff of AHS and 4 AHS parents that belong to Austin High Alliance Comm.
    - Of the 4 parents in attendance, one was a past aid to a City Council member, a former parkland commissioner, a vertical team leader, and an athletic booster mom. Also in attendance was the AHS principal and another staff member

whom serves on the Austin Alliance Comm. as well as liaison for the Lamar Beach Development.

## **District 10**

### **La Madeleine Country Cafe**

*Attendees 0*

### **Xiang Yun Temple**

*Attendees 0*