



Striving for National Excellence
Urban Parks Workgroup: Presentation to the Austin City Council
Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Subcommittee
November 2, 2010

870%

The percentage of people in Austin who say it is important to live near open space.

Striving for National Excellence Why We Need Parks in Our Central City

- **They are a central part of our health care infrastructure;**
- **Play is critical for children’s cognitive, emotional, and social development;**
- **Bottom Line – they are good for economic development;**
- **They attract families with children to our urban core.**

Striving for National Excellence Austin City Council's Goal

- Every resident should live within walking distance of a park;
- Walking distance = $\frac{1}{4}$ mile for urban core; $\frac{1}{2}$ mile outside urban core.
- Adopted in November 19th, 2009

Striving for National Excellence

Urban Parks Workgroup Report – 4 Tasks

- **Analyze where** new urban pocket parks are needed and which existing parks are in need of improvement;
- **Create strategies** to incorporate more innovative and diverse play opportunities for children in parks;
- **Create cost projections** to implement the plan;
- **Examine resources and policies** needed to facilitate the implementation of the plan.

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ACCESS & ACQUISITION

Key Findings: *Acquisition*

The GAP:

- Large number of central city residents cannot walk to a park;
- City still trying to meet 1-mile goal set in 1983;
- Per capita number of parks: Austin ranks 52/75.

The SOLUTION:

- Acquire and transform more land for smaller urban parks; particularly in rapidly densifying areas such as transit corridors;
- Leverage existing city land.

National Leaders...

Boston: 97% of children live within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a park;

Denver: 90% of residents live within 6 walkable blocks of a park;

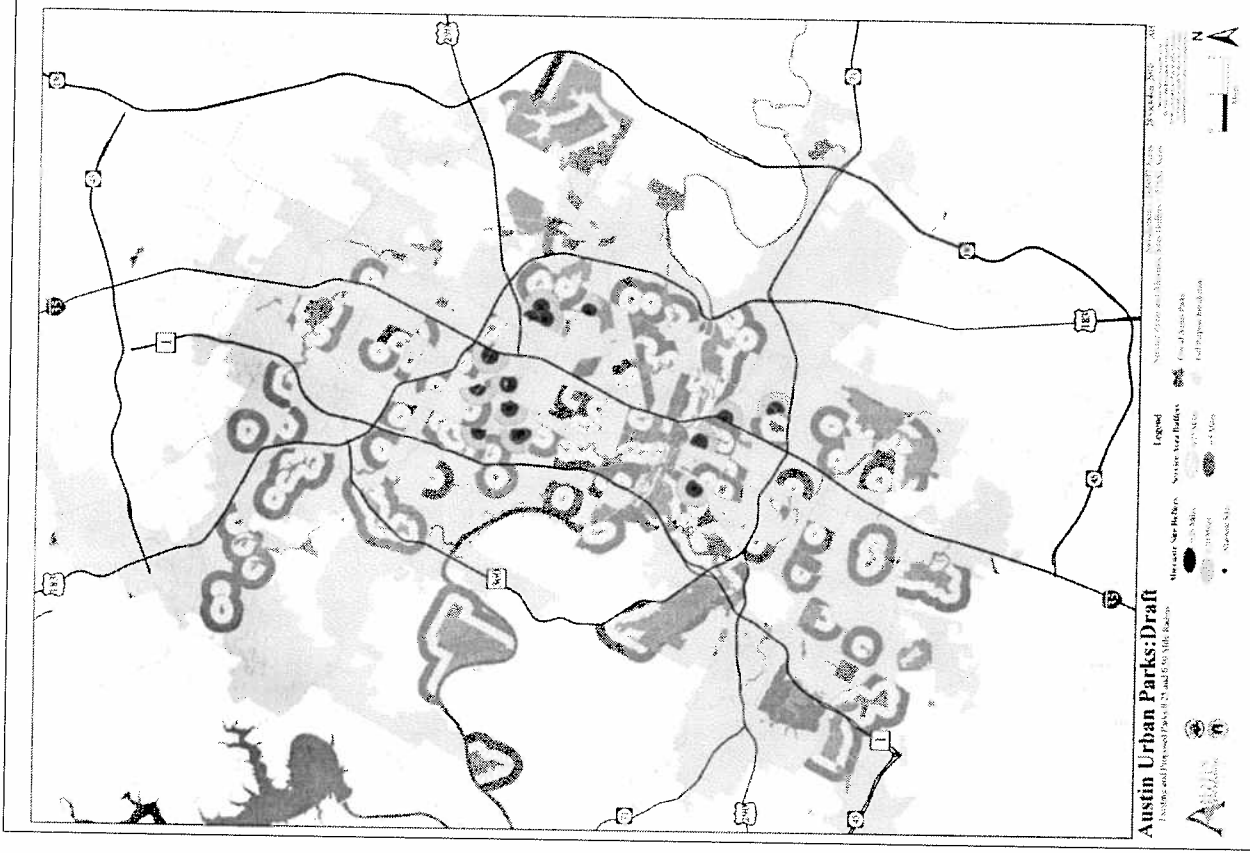
Seattle: 1/8-mile goal for urban parks;

Minneapolis: 99.4% of residents live within 6 blocks of a park;

Chicago: 90+% of residents live within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of urban play area; now has 1/10 mile goal for urban areas

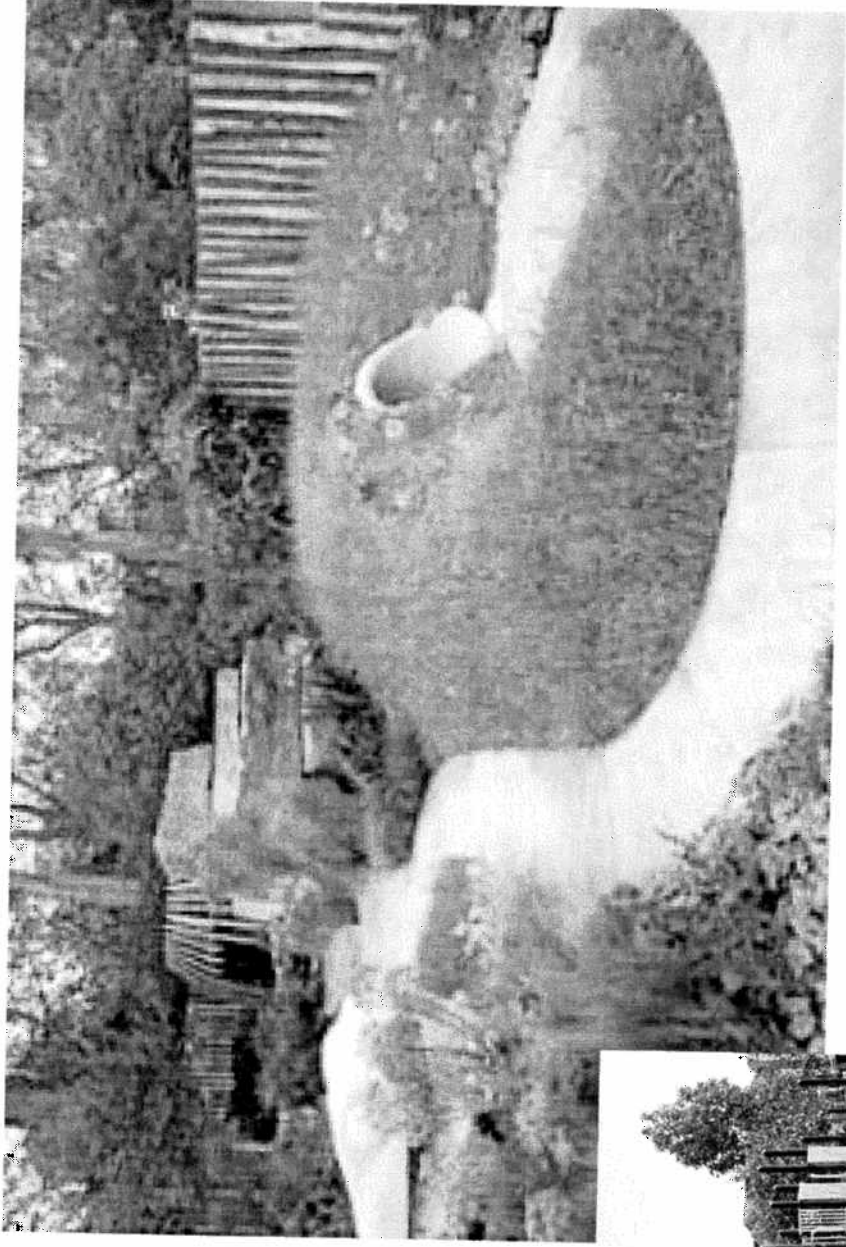
Key Policies: Access and Acquisition

- **2012/2013 bond referendum:** \$20 million to acquire and develop new urban parks
- Transform “**high opportunity**” city-owned land into urban parks.
- **Reform parkland dedication ordinance:** expand to commercial; require on-site decision in gap areas.
- Adopt **policy to require inclusion of family-friendly play spaces** in new city facilities. Pilot project at City Hall.



Opportunity: City-Owned Vacant Green space

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT



nature play site design



traditional play equipment

Innovative Park Design

Key Findings: Innovative design and family-friendly features

The GAP:

- Lack of maintenance crews for “nature-based” play areas;
- Lack of funding for comprehensive site design solutions;
- Lack of precedents.

SOLUTION:

- Address code and liability issues;
- Enlist the help of local childhood development and public health research and design expertise.

Key Policies: *Design and Development*

- Set up a workgroup to look specifically at **models for approaching liability;**
- Create work group to prepare **Austin-specific design and management guidelines** for natural play areas
- Create a list of **“low hanging fruit” projects** where innovative play environments can be incorporated at a smaller scale.

MAINTENANCE

Key Findings: *Maintenance*

GAP:

- City is impoverished in our upkeep and maintenance of parks. = Major barrier to expanding park access.
- Austin only 65th on funding for parks operations: only \$41 a resident vs National average of \$75.
- Only \$9 per capita spent on parks maintenance.
- Only 123 maintenance personnel for 14,911 acres of parks.

SOLUTION:

- More city funding for parks maintenance and operations is **CRITICAL!!**

Key Policies: *Maintenance*

- Provide adequate funding for **1 maintenance staff per 75 acres (vs 175);**
- **Adopt new benchmark:** \$19 per capita funding for parks maintenance;
- **Dedicate revenue from parks facilities** for parks maintenance.
- **Adopt new dedicated source of revenue**
 - ask legislature for authority to adopt a city-wide tax levy for parks (precedent: libraries and hospital districts);
 - voluntary or mandatory user fees on utility bills;

National Leaders...

Sample of Cities with Dedicated Revenue for Parks and Open Space

Seattle: \$24.3m/year property tax levy for parks and green space

Minneapolis: special parks property tax allows 99% of resident to live within 6 blocks of a park.

San Antonio: preservation of 10,000+ acres with surcharge on water bill for Sensitive Land Acquisition Program.

St. Louis, Missouri: \$10 million a year for interconnected system of greenways, parks, and trails, through voter approval of 1/10th of one cent sales tax.

Albuquerque: \$36 million for purchase of 2,000+ acres of land for open space through voter-approved 25 cent, two-year sales tax for parks and open space.

IMPLEMENTATION

Key Policies: *Implementation*

- **Develop ten-year action plan;**
- **Fund 1 new full time employee to oversee implementation of family-friendly urban parks policies;**
- **Fund 1 additional employee to leverage public-private partnerships;**
- **Pursue strategic partnerships with health-related entities.**