

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

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# 870%

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

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59%

The percentage of people in Austin's urban core who do not 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 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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# 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.**

# **Striving for National Excellence**

**ACCESS & ACQUISITION**  
**DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**MAINTENANCE**  
**IMPLEMENTATION**

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**Striving for National Excellence**

**ACCESS & ACQUISITION**

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# 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.

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## 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;

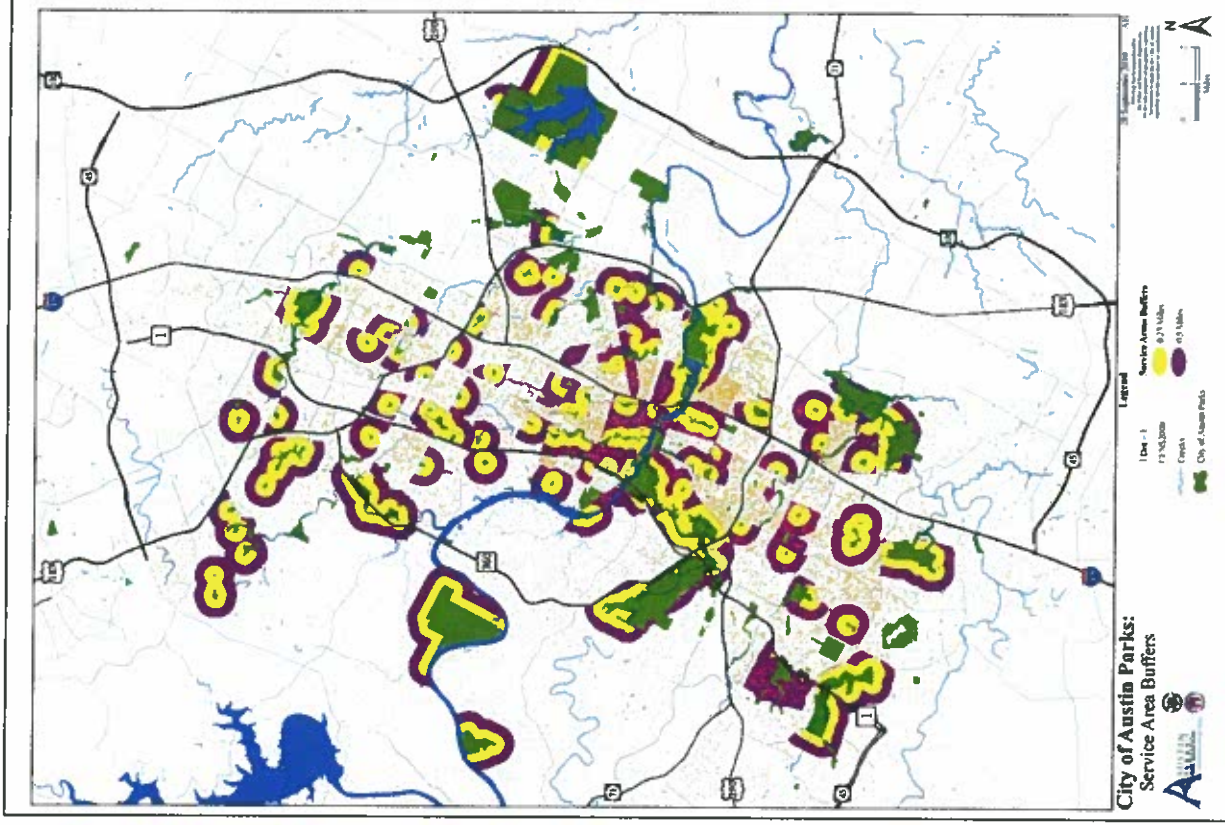
Chicago: 90+% of residents live within  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of urban play area; now has 1/10 mile goal for urban areas

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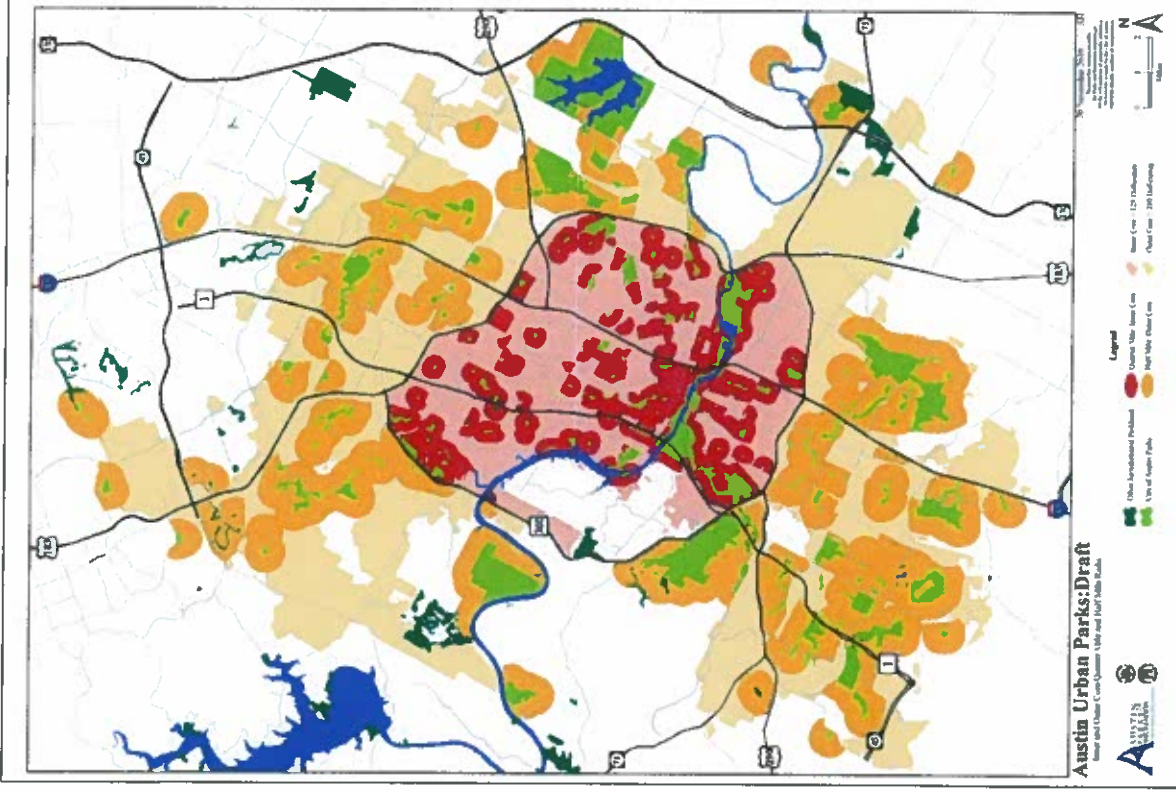
## **Key Policies: Access and Acquisition**

- **2012/2013 bond referendum:** \$20 million to acquire and develop new urban parks; and an additional \$20 million in both 2017 and 2022 to meet at goal of 90% in both the inner core and outer ring.
- Transform “**high opportunity**” city-owned land into urban parks.
- **Reform parkland dedication ordinance:** 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.

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# Existing Parks and Population Densities $\frac{1}{2}$

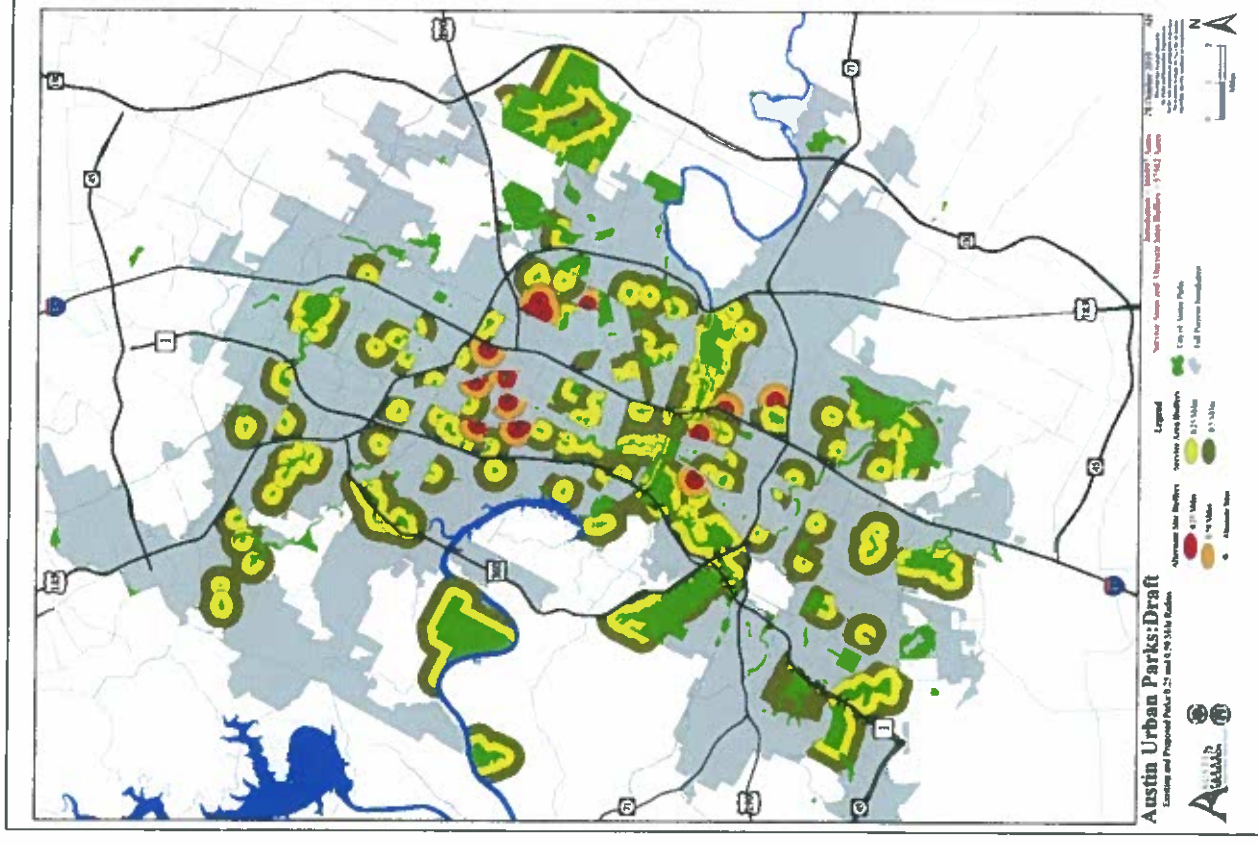


**Urban Core: 1/4 mile & Outer Ring: 1/2 mile areas** *13/C*





# Investigations: Possible City-Owned Properties $\frac{C}{14}$



# Opportunity: City-Owned Vacant Green space

# DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

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nature play site design



traditional play equipment

# Innovative Park Design

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Imagination Playground, New York City

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Tejo Remy: playground fence details

Innovations in Play: design details and material palettes <sup>C1</sup>/<sub>19</sub>

# **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.

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# 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.

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# MAINTENANCE

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# 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!!

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## **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;

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# 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.

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# IMPLEMENTATION

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## **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.

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