



**Striving for National Excellence**

Urban Parks Workgroup: Presentation to Parks and Recreation Board

September 27, 2011

# 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 November 19<sup>th</sup>, 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.

# 87%

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

*Source: Austin Community Survey, done in association with the Austin Comprehensive Planning Process*

# 37%

The percentage of people in Austin's urban core who do live near a park.

## Framing the Issue

# Acreage & Accessibility

*two ways of understanding our park system*

# Acreage

- With peer cities, Austin ranks 4<sup>th</sup> out of 33 cities in the total percentage of city land that is parkland,
- And 3<sup>rd</sup> in terms of amount of parkland per resident.

# Acreage

Looking in terms of acreage gives us the ability to:

- Address the environmental issues of:
  - Watershed protection,
  - land conservation, and
  - environmental protection
- Provide city-wide recreational facilities such as:
  - Golf
  - Disk Golf
  - Cycling
  - Trails - hiking
  - Sport Complexes



# Accessibility

- Accessibility means living with  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile radius from a given spot.
  - In order to be fully usable by all residents, features in the urban landscape need to be close enough to walk to.
  - Taken from studies that show people will tend not to walk to something more than 15 minutes away.

# Accessibility

**Framing our understanding of parks in terms of accessibility allows us to talk about them as *urban infrastructure*:**

- They are a central part of our **health care infrastructure** – **fight against obesity**;
- 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.
- They are a central part of our **environmental infrastructure**;

## Framing the Issue

# Acreage & Accessibility

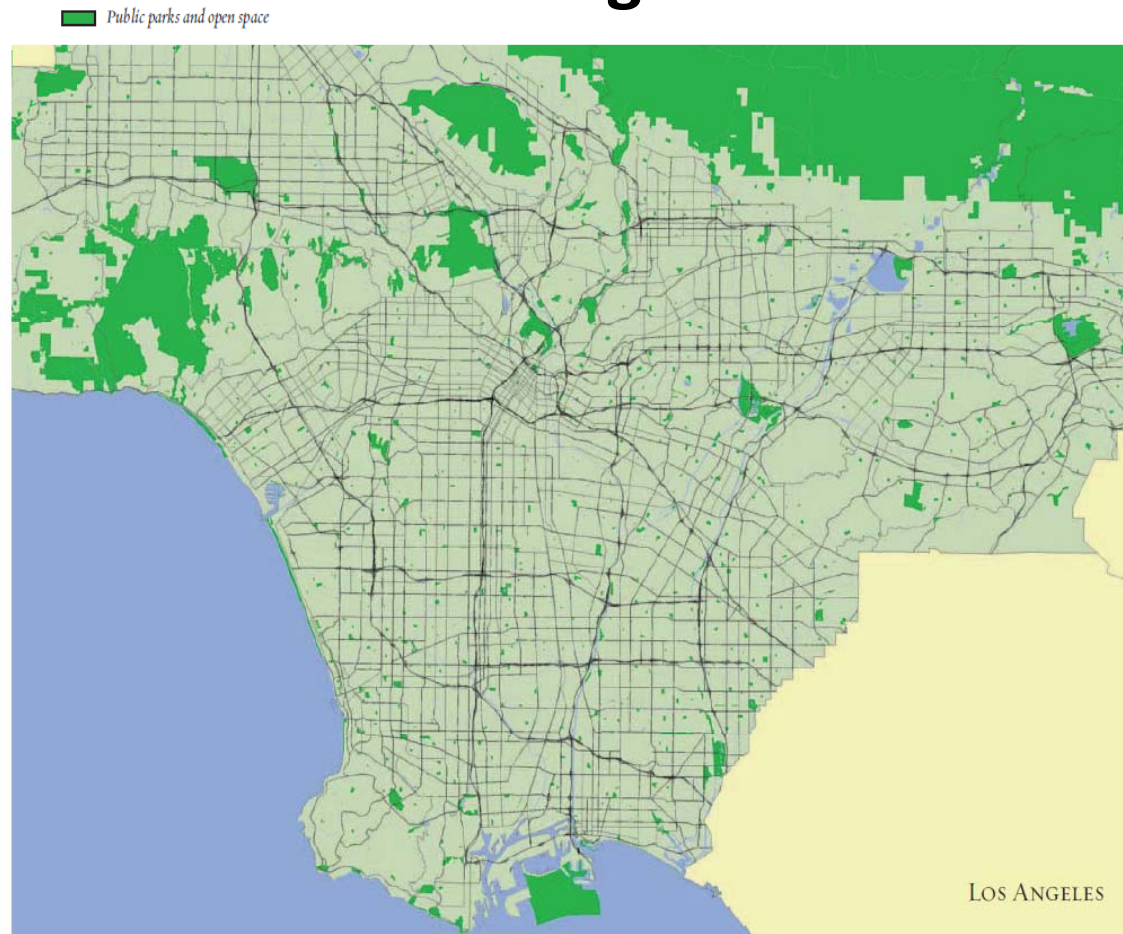
*parks as recreational amenities*  
*parks as ecological necessities*

*parks as urban infrastructure*

*Meeting Austin's Goals for:*

- *Sustainability*
- *Family Retention*
- *Obesity Prevention*

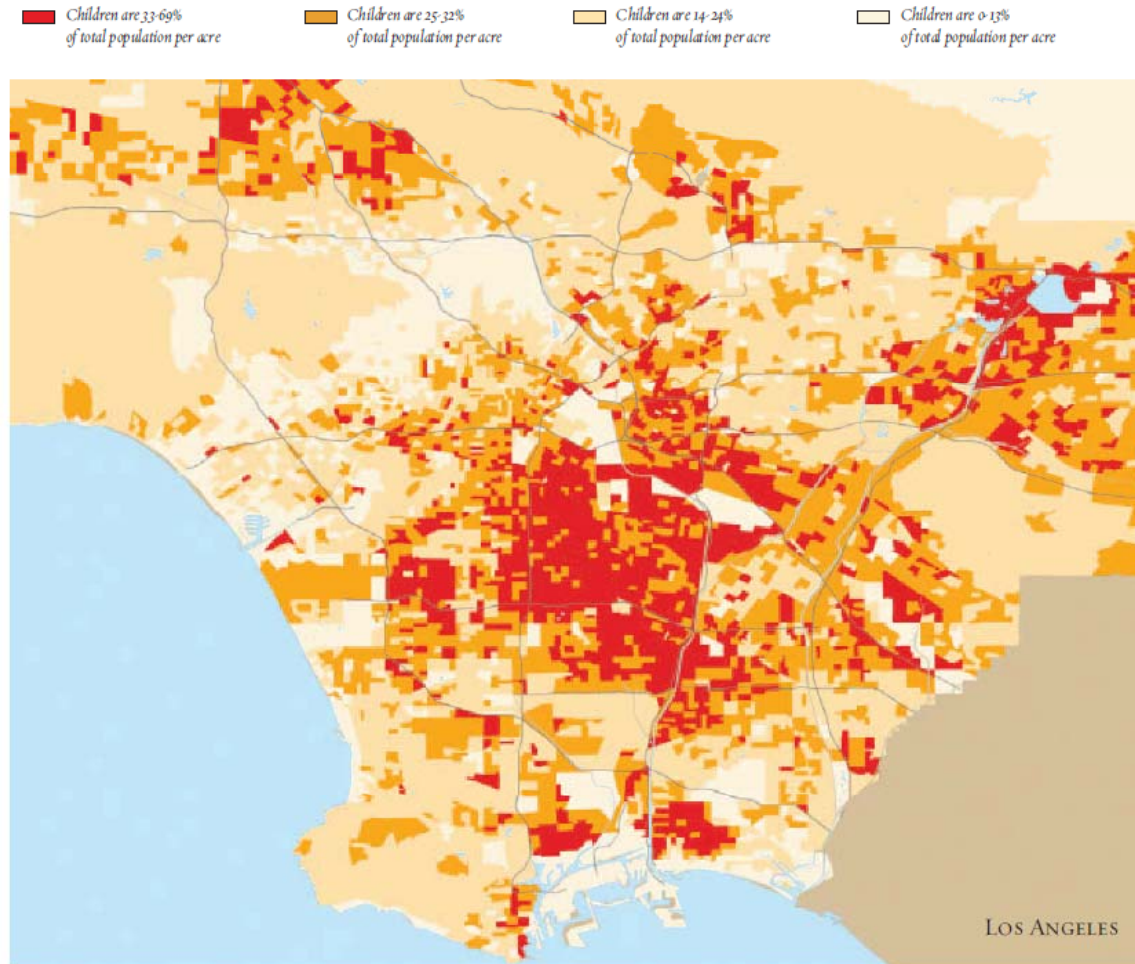
# Understanding Why Access is Important: The Example of Park Land in the City of Los Angeles



*Parks in Los Angeles are concentrated far from the city center.*

*"No Place to Play: A Comparative Analysis of Park Access in Seven Major Cities." Trust for Public Land, 2004.*

# High Children Population Density Areas in the City of Los Angeles



*Areas shaded red indicate high children's population density zones.*

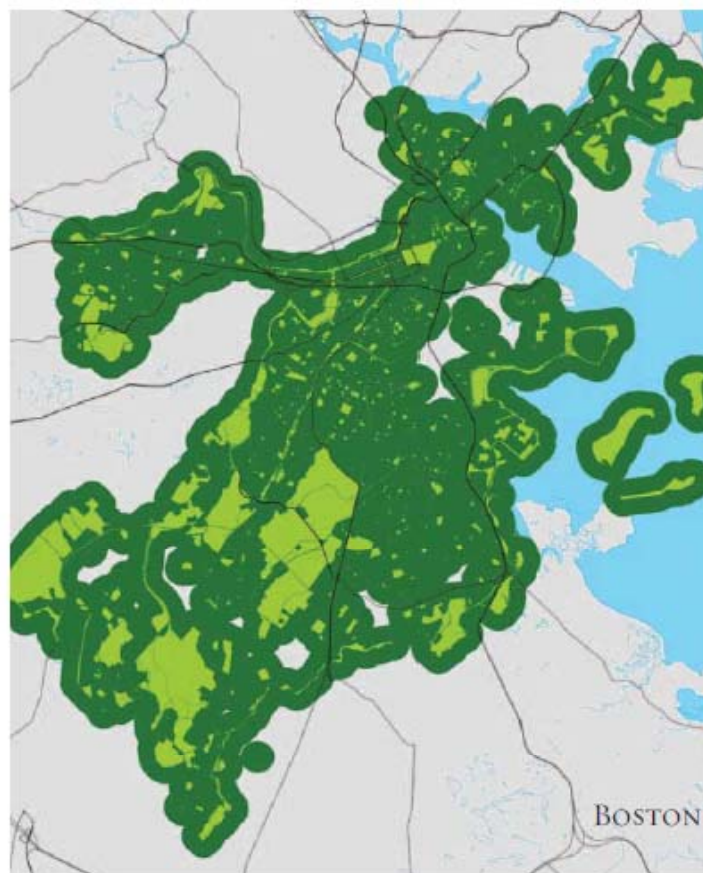
*"No Place to Play: A Comparative Analysis of Park Access in Seven Major Cities." Trust for Public Land, 2004.*



## New York and Boston: Areas Within Walking Distance of a Park

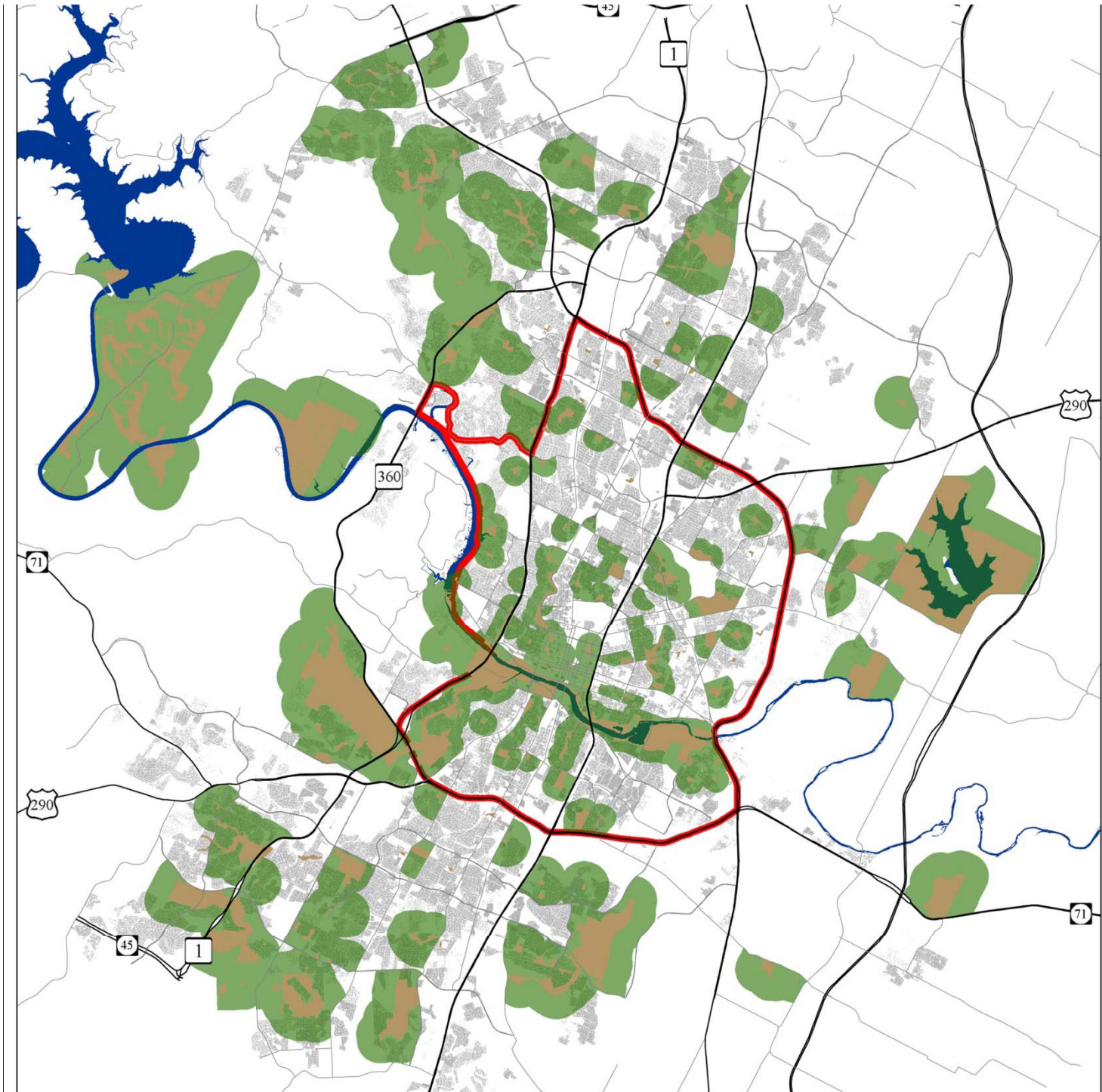


*Most children in New York enjoy easy access to parks.*

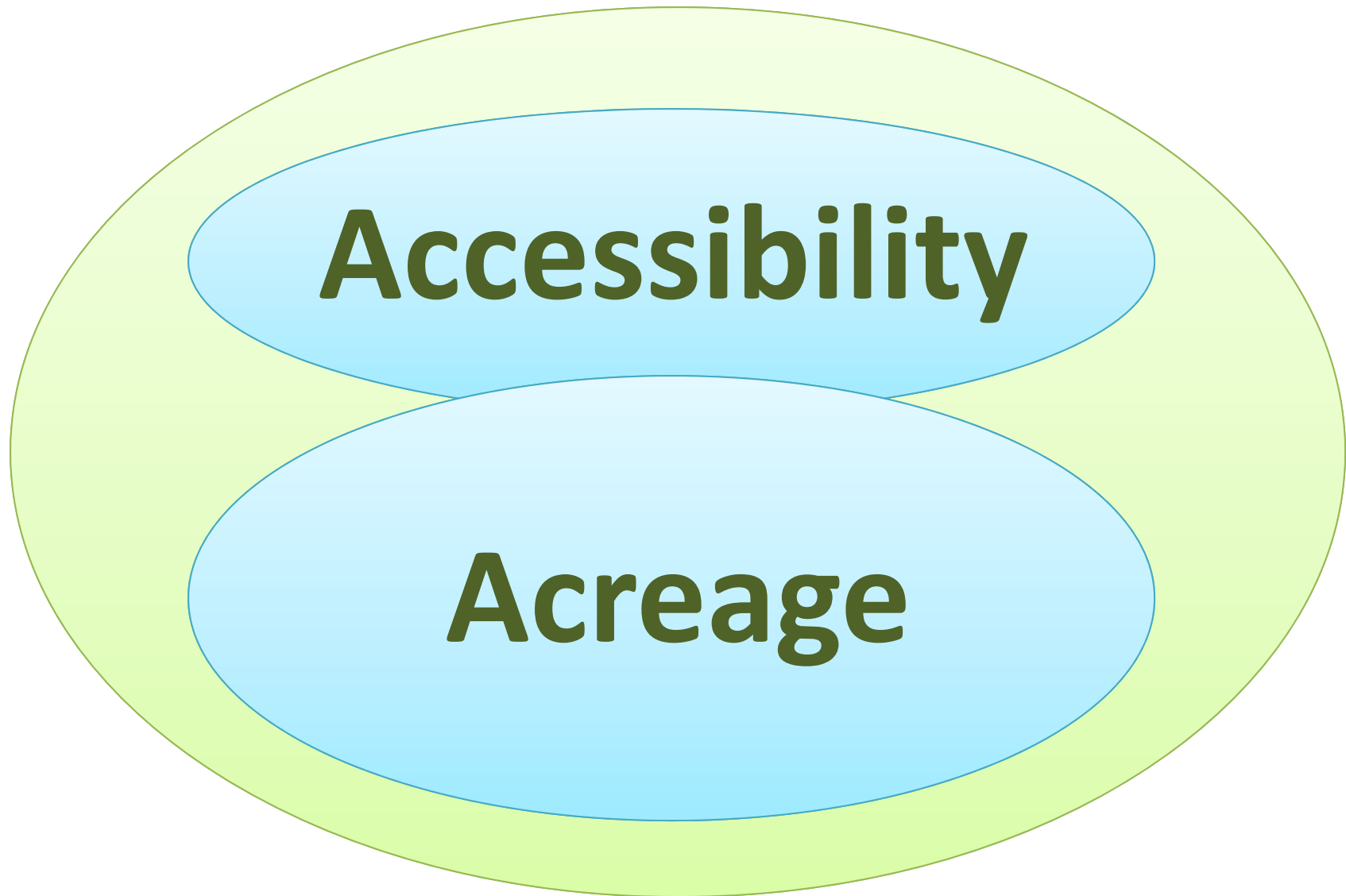


*Boston's extensive park system reaches 97% of the city's children.*

*"No Place to Play: A Comparative Analysis of Park Access in Seven Major Cities." Trust for Public Land, 2004.*

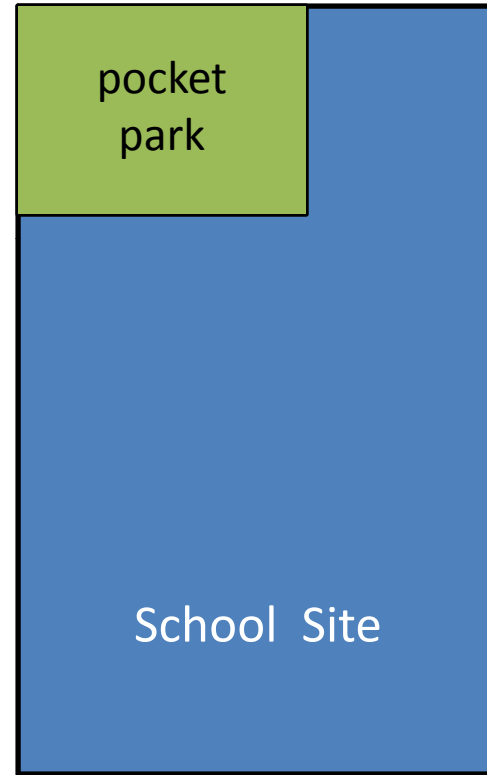
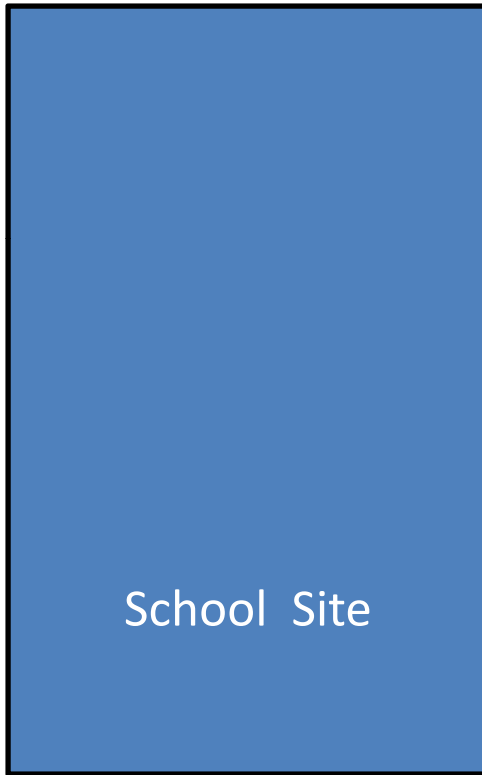


# Reframing the Issue










# Developing School Parks and Sites

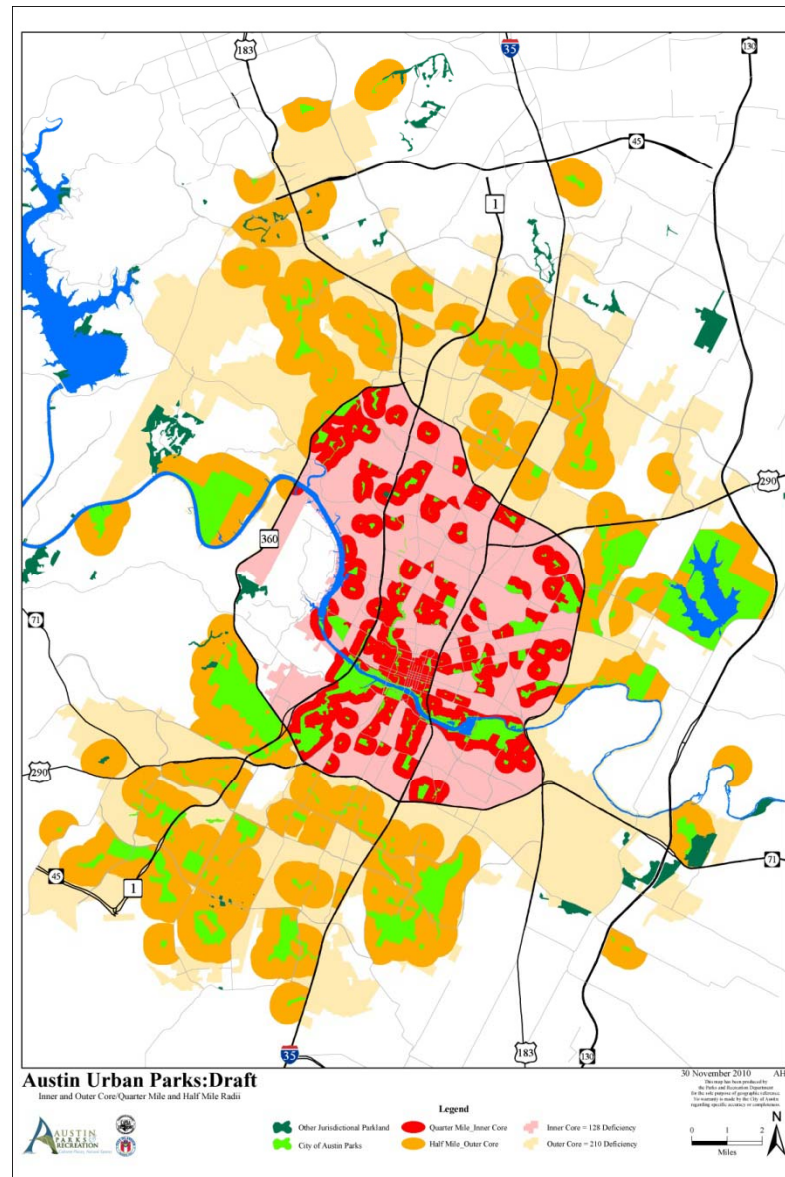


# Austin Parkland Opportunities

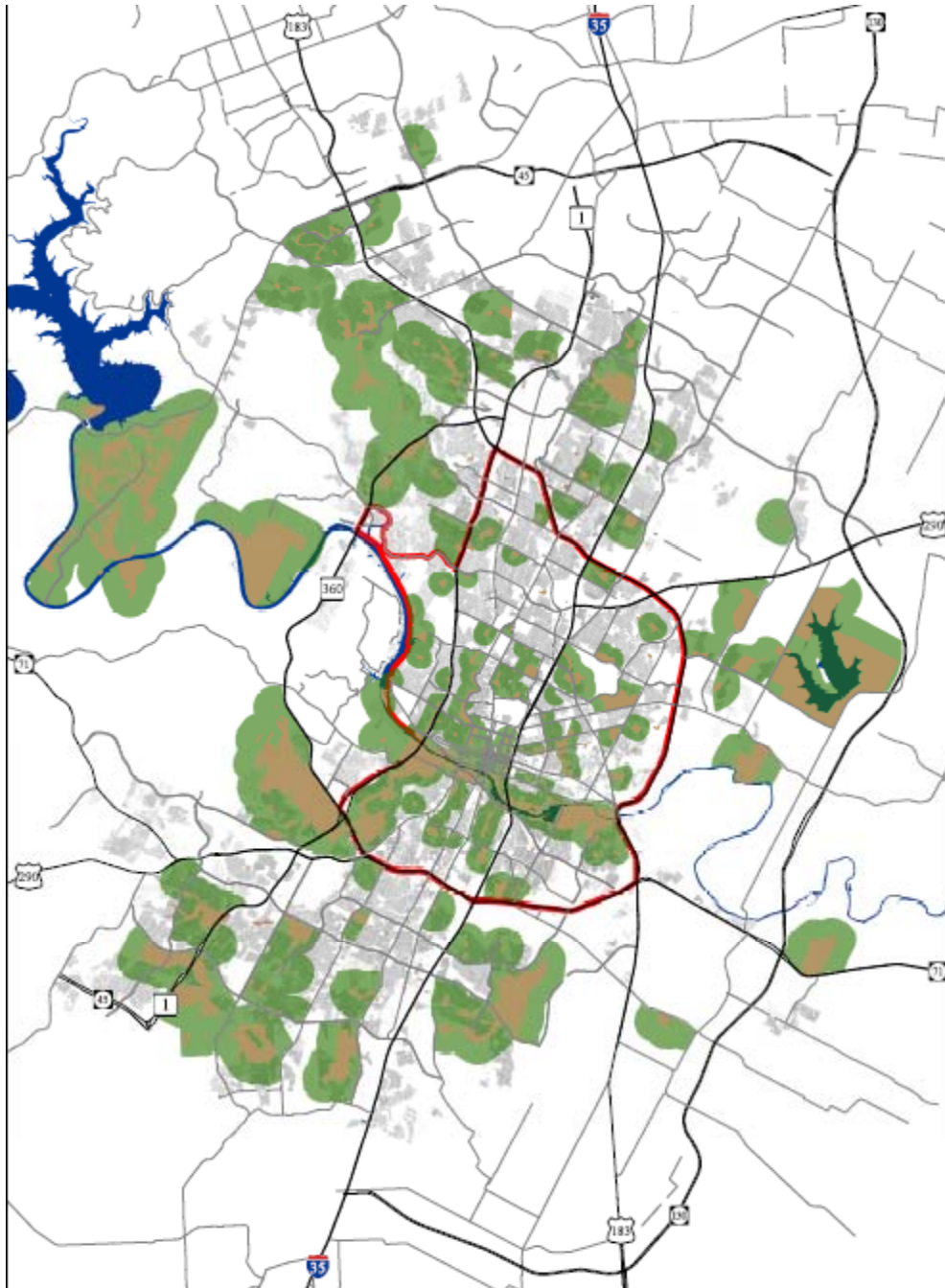
-  Developed Parkland
-  Undeveloped Parkland
-  Existing School Parks (PARD owns a % of the school property)
-  New School Sites (no PARD ownership)
-  High Opportunity Sites

# Meeting Austin's New Park Access Goal

	Inner Core Total % Pop Served	Outer Area Total % Pop	Total Development and Acquisition Costs	Total Additional Maintenance Costs
Developed Parkland (Map A)	37%	42%	<b>\$0 (existing)</b>	<b><i>\$0 (existing)</i></b>
Undeveloped Parkland (Map B)	43% (6%)	61% (19%)	<b>\$6,000,000</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>
Existing School Parks (Map C)	47% (4%)	65% (4%)	<b>\$4,400,000</b> (22 parks @ \$250,000 each)	<b>\$143,000</b>
New School Sites (Map D)	68% (21%) <i>(28 parks estimated)</i>	76% (11%) <i>(33 parks estimated)</i>	Inner Core: <b>\$5,600,000</b> Outer Area: <b>\$6,600,000</b> (\$200,000 each)	<b>\$413,000</b>
Alternate Sites (Map E)	69% (1%)	76% (0%)	<b>\$ 400,000</b> (2 sites at \$200,000 each)	<b>\$80,000</b>
Remaining Parks Needed	90% <i>(30 parks estimated)</i>	90% <i>(21 parks estimated)</i>	Inner Core: <b>\$30,000,000</b> Outer Area: <b>\$18,900,000</b> (\$1,000.000 each)	<b>\$1,380,000</b>

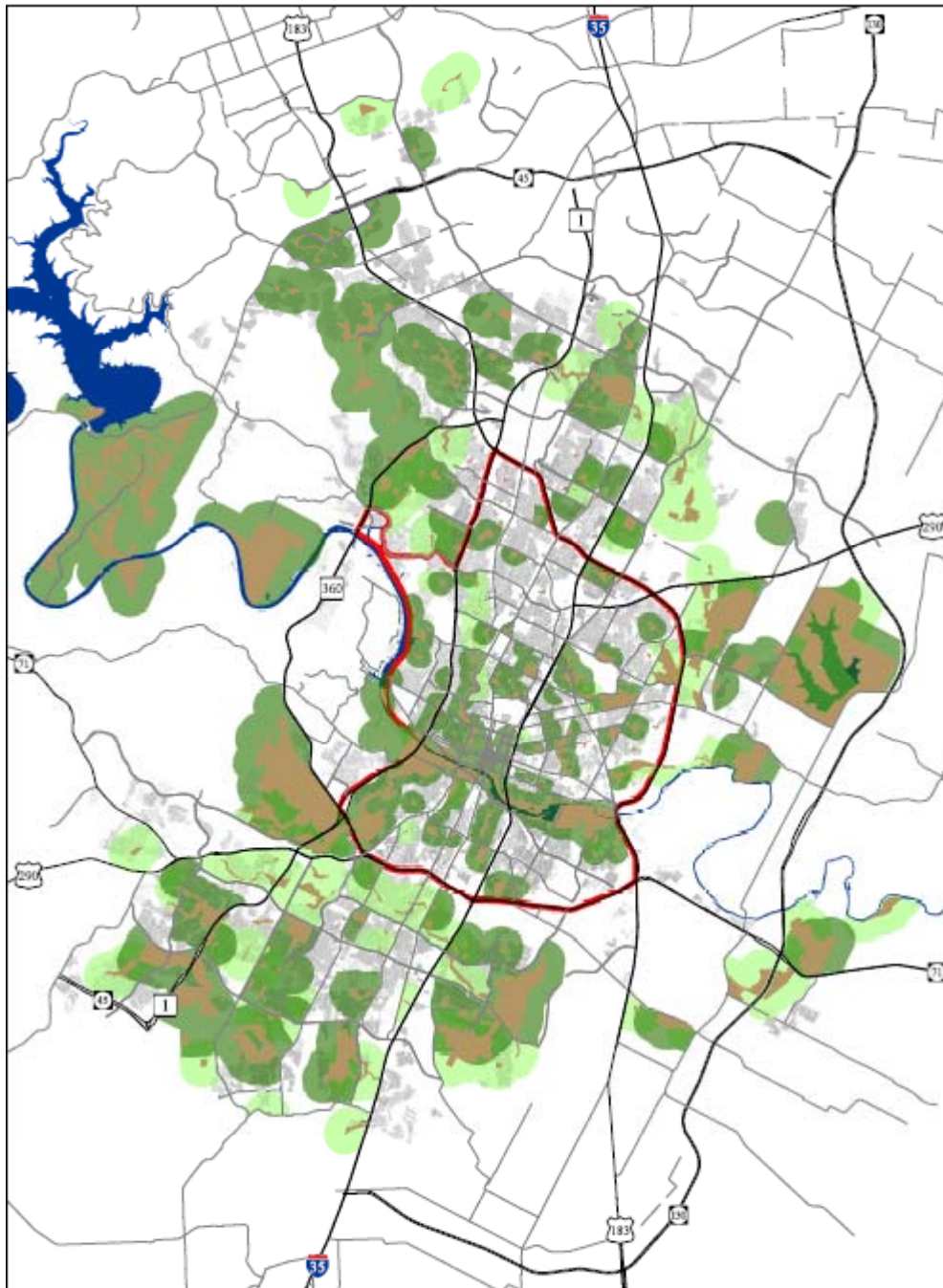


**Urban Core: ¼ mile & Outer Ring: ½ mile areas**





**Map A:  
Developed  
Parks in Austin**

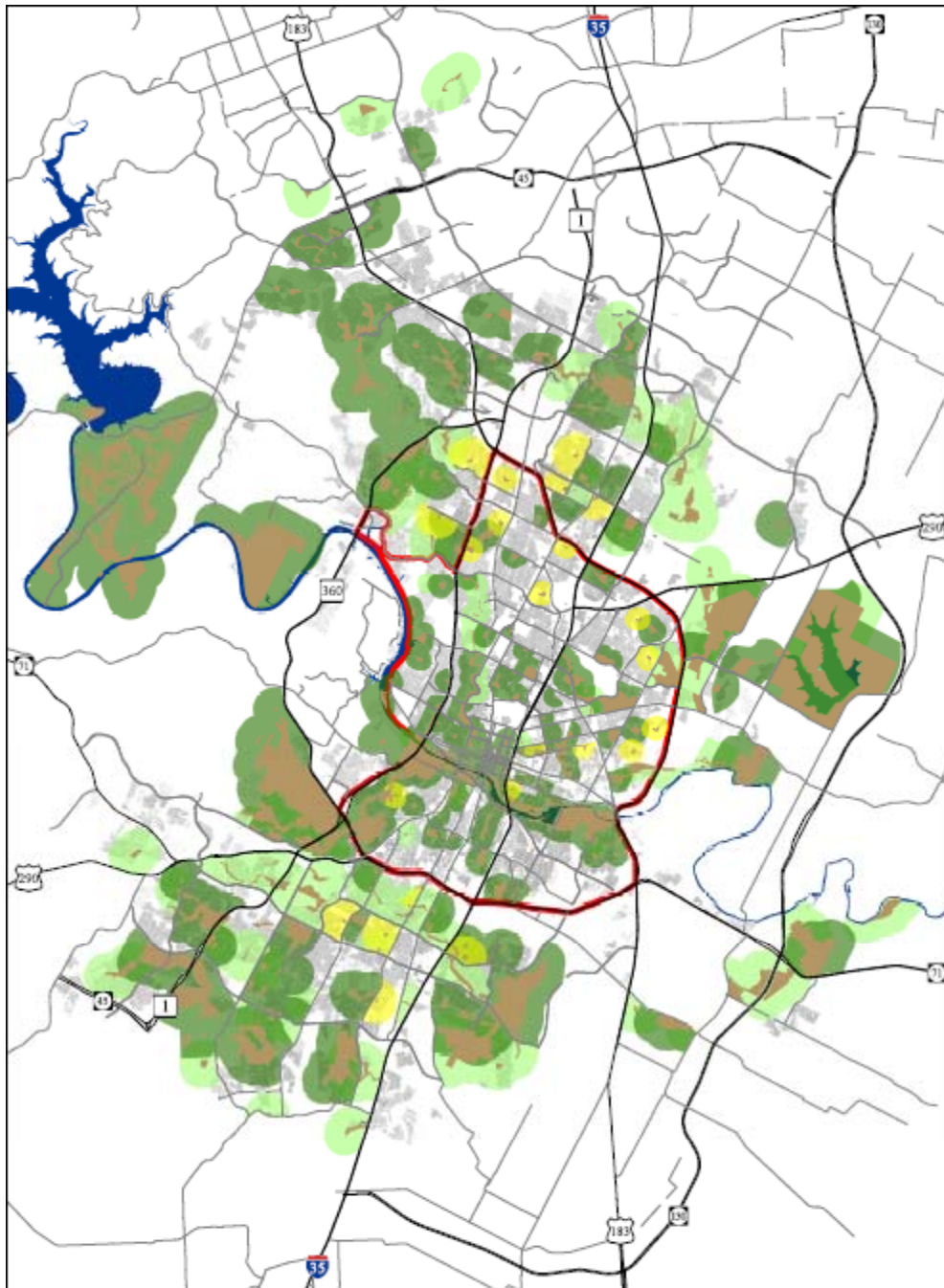
 Developed Parkland






**Map B:  
Undeveloped  
Parks in Austin**

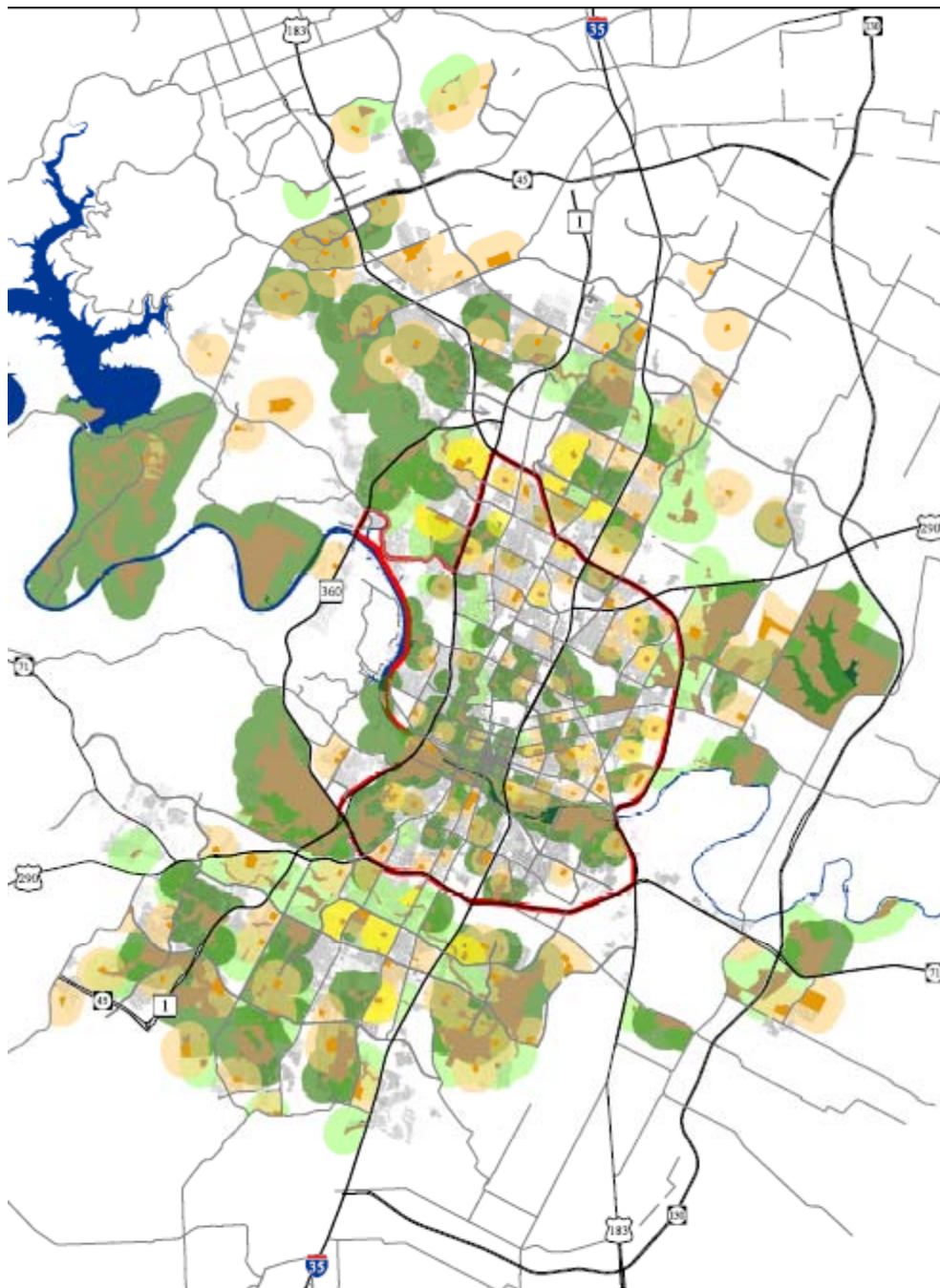
-  Developed Parkland
-  Undeveloped Parkland









**Map C:  
Existing School  
Parks**

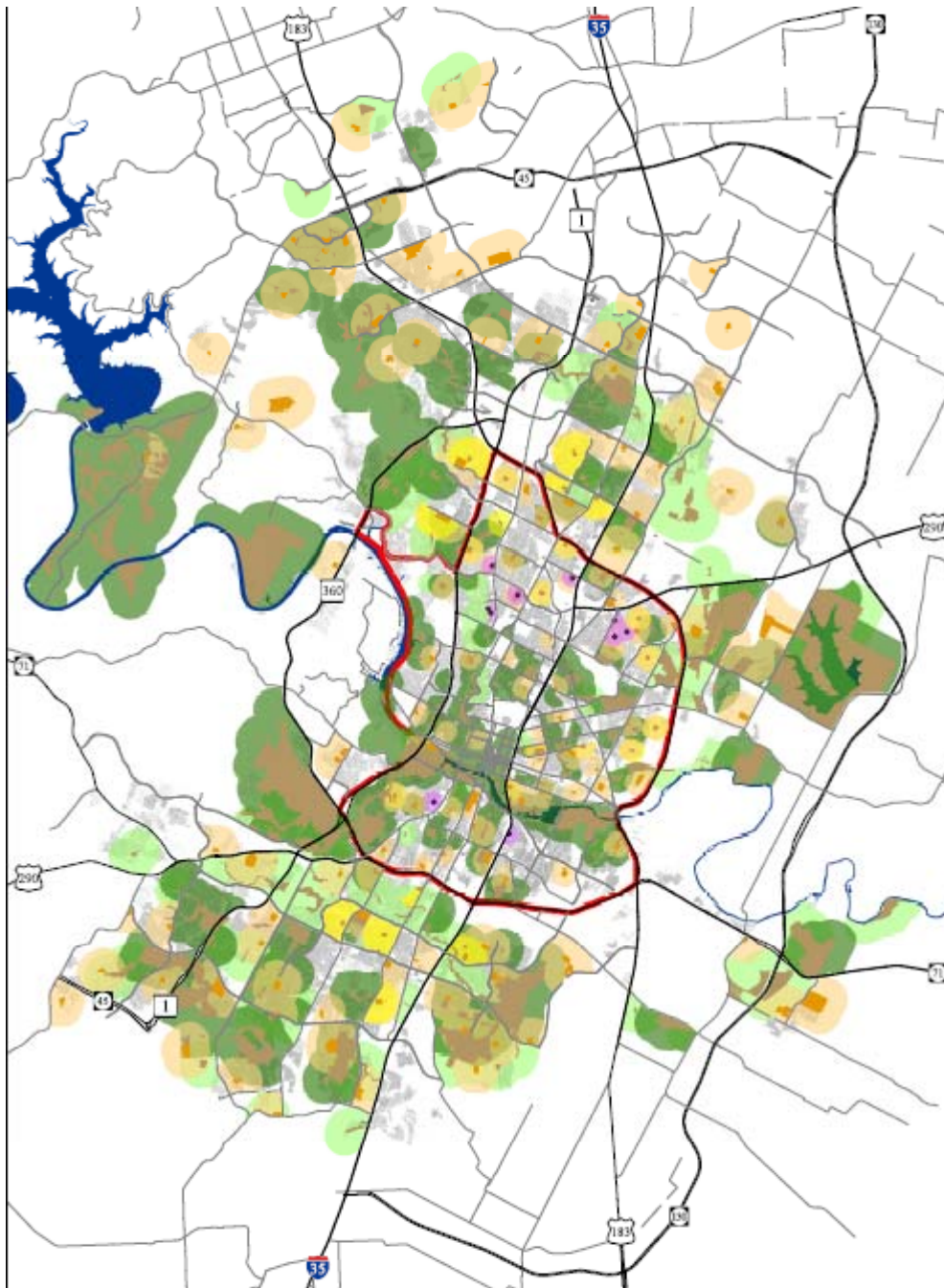
-  Developed Parkland
-  Undeveloped Parkland
-  Existing School Parks  
(PARD owns a % of the  
school property)








**Map D:  
Possible New  
School Sites**

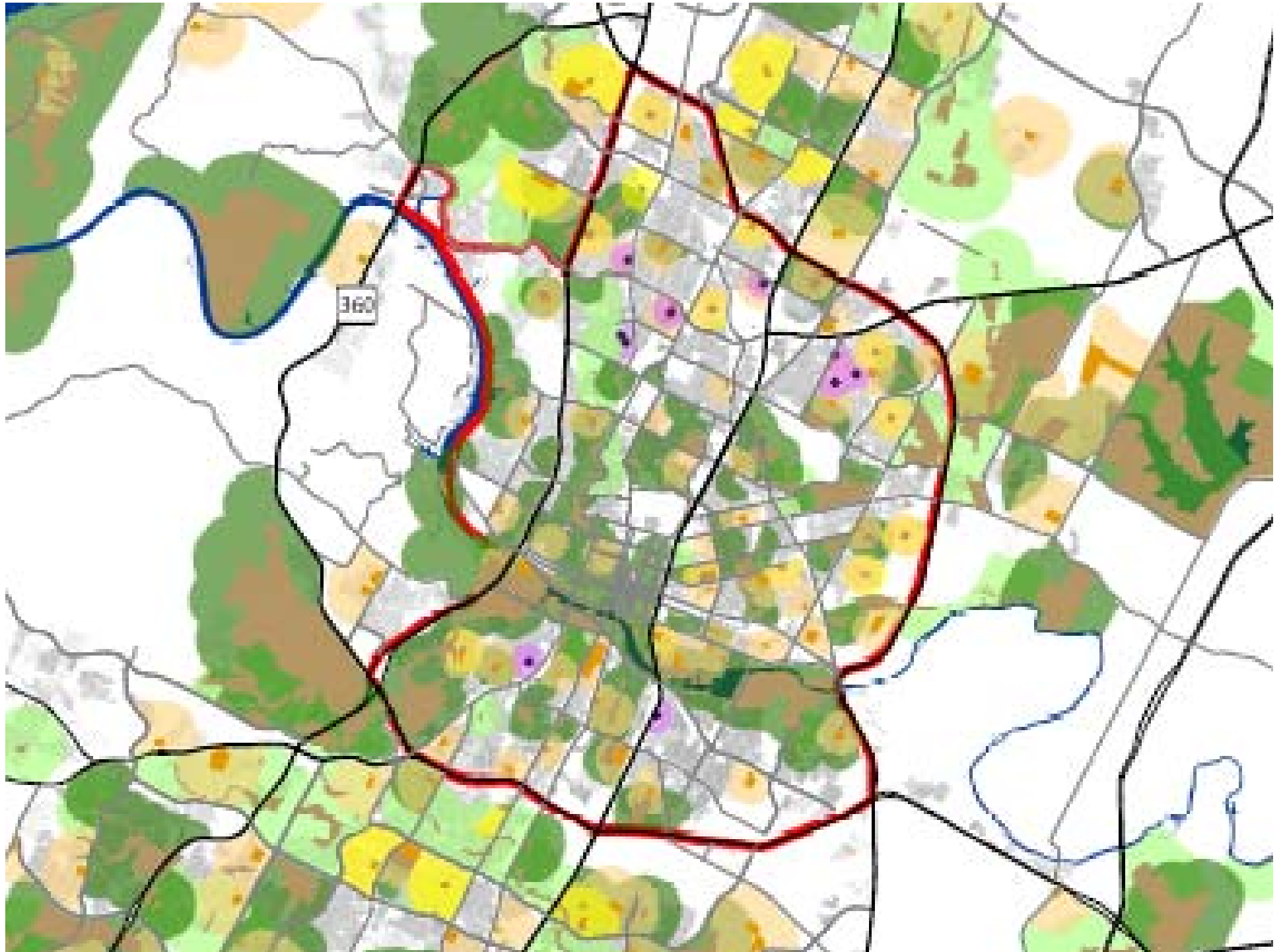
-  Developed Parkland
-  Undeveloped Parkland
-  Existing School Parks  
(PARD owns a % of the  
school property)
-  New School Sites (no  
PARD ownership)





**Map E:  
High Opportunity  
Sites**

-  Developed Parkland
-  Undeveloped Parkland
-  Existing School Parks  
(PARD owns a % of the  
school property)
-  New School Sites (no  
PARD ownership)
-  High Opportunity Sites



# **Striving for National Excellence**

**ACCESS & ACQUISITION**

**MAINTENANCE**

**DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT**

**IMPLEMENTATION**

# Top Three Policy Recommendations

1. **MAINTENANCE:** Provide annual funding for PARD to hire 1 full-time maintenance staff person per 75 acres of city parkland (right now PARD is at 1 maintenance staff person per 175 acres of park).
2. **BOND REFERENDUM:** include on the next bond referendum \$25 million in bonds for the acquisition and development of urban parks and incorporation of family-friendly features onto exiting public land.
3. **PARK DISTRICT:** Partner with other large Texas cities to ask the Texas Legislature to grant home rule municipalities the authority to create, via ballot referendum, a special city-wide parks district with authority to adopt a property tax levy dedicated to parks.

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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.

## Key Policies: *Access and Acquisition*

- **2012/2013 bond referendum:** \$25 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.
- Work with AISD to create clear policy direction for **school/parks partnerships**.
- **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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**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);

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**DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT**



nature play site design



traditional play equipment

## Innovative Park Design



Imagination Playground, New York City

# Key Findings: *Innovative design and family-friendly features*

## The GAP:

- Lack of funding for comprehensive site design solutions;
- Lack of maintenance crews for “nature-based” play areas;
- 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.
- Work with Austin design community to **create design strategy for small neighborhood parks adjacent to schools.**

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**IMPLEMENTATION**



## Key Policies: *Implementation*

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