

MEMORANDUM



To: Ms. Liz Johnston, Case Manager (Case No. C20-2013-001)
Planning and Development Review Department

From: Mr. James Nortey, City of Austin Planning Commission

CC: Mr. Dave Anderson, Chairman, City of Austin Planning Commission
Mr. Greg Guernsey, Director, Planning and Development Review
Ms. Dora Anguiano, Planning Commission Liaison

Date: February 28, 2013

RE: **Planning Commission Recommendation to Deny Staff Recommendation on Barton Springs Pool General Grounds Improvements (Case No. C20-2013-001)**

On February 26, 2013, the Planning Commission (the "Commission") addressed a draft ordinance relating to Barton Springs Pool General Grounds Improvements at its public hearing. After presentations from the Planning and Development Review Department ("Staff"), the project consultant, the general public, and other stakeholders, the Commission voted 5-2-0 to deny Staff's recommendation. The purpose of this memorandum is to explain the origins of my motion to deny (and the Commission's subsequent vote), hoping to place the vote in context of the concerns raised at the public hearing to aid the City Council ("Council") and Staff.

During the presentation of this case, Staff explained to the Commission that it had presented the same site plan to several boards and commissions with the goal of tabulating and circulating all of the recommendations to Council. Although there were several recommended improvements that the Commission was willing to support, there were a handful of proposed improvements that I felt required greater scrutiny and creativity. I think that it is vital for all recommended improvements to comply and resonate with the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan, and the practical real-time usage of the Barton Springs Pool. If the Commission were to move forward in support of Staff's recommendation in its current form, there would be no assurance that the concerns raised by the Commission would be thoroughly analyzed.

For that reason, and in an effort to send a clear recommendation to Council, I proposed to deny the requested variances to the draft ordinance and, subsequently, a majority of Commissions supported my motion to give Staff additional time to consider the following:

- Removing the South Overlook Trail;
- Installing a pervious/porous ADA path;
- Increasing bicycle parking by a minimum of 50% on the south side;
- Reconfiguring the pedestrian path that runs perpendicular to Robert E. Lee Road to avoid routing pedestrians through the middle of the South parking lot;
- Evaluating the idea of a shuttle system and other multi-modal alternatives to vehicular parking on-site;

- Preparing a cost-benefit analysis of re-arranging/offsetting parking on the South side to minimize impervious cover in the Water Quality Transition Zone ("WQTZ"); and
- Reducing total impervious cover as a result of this improvements project.

I believe that a denial of Staff recommendation is the best course of action (an idea supported by a majority of Commissioners) because it places the impetus back on Staff to bring forth alternate proposals which consider the concerns addressed above prior to Council approval.

A further note: there was not unanimous consensus on the Commission on my motion, with Chairman Anderson and Commissioner Smith in opposition to the motion, signaling significant concern with "derailing" the implementation of the Barton Springs Master Plan by not approving the variances on this case. Chairman Anderson referenced the significant level of effort that has been undertaken by Staff, stakeholders, and decision makers in the planning and design of the Pool and Grounds, and expressed concern that delays or additional evaluation now puts the ultimate health and viability of Barton Springs at risk for future Austinites.

I'd like to reiterate, along with I'm sure the entire Commission, my gratitude to Staff and the many stakeholders who sacrificed their free time to attend the public hearing and provided input on this important matter. In no way should the Commission's vote be interpreted as a rejection of the need to make improvements at the Barton Springs Pool. Rather, the denial of Staff recommendation is an opportunity to pause and provide more specificity to the proposed improvements to the treasured oasis which has delighted so many of its visitors.