

Prepared by: Alison Alter and Sunitha Downing, Ramsey Park Committee Co-chairs

Approved by the Rosedale Neighborhood Association on September 24, 2012

BACKGROUND

Between January 2011 and June 2012, the Rosedale neighborhood lost the use of a significant portion of Ramsey Park while the City of Austin's (COA) contractor used the northeast corner of the park as a staging area for heavy equipment and other materials required to support the Rosedale Storm Drain Project. When the staging arrangement was negotiated, it was agreed that the contractor would be responsible for restoring the park to its prior condition once the construction process concluded. In addition, at least \$241,000 was allocated for Ramsey Park renovations as restitution for this use of the park.

As per an April 2012 City Council Resolution, all COA parks are required to have a master plan in place before any new amenities can be added. The Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) is required to prepare a park improvement process for neighborhoods to follow. Currently, most COA parks do not yet have master plans. As a result, as the Storm Drain Project neared completion, PARD asked the Rosedale Neighborhood Association (RNA) to proceed in two steps. First, the RNA should prepare a master plan for Ramsey Park, one of the first COA parks for which such a plan is being developed. Second, the RNA should develop a detailed concept plan that proposes how to spend the available mitigation funds.

The master plan/vision for Ramsey Park will guide specific choices on how to allocate the mitigation fees. The master plan is considered a "dream plan", the vision for the park not just now, but 10 and 20 years from now. This document, the proposed master plan, includes items Rosedale residents (hereafter referred to as Residents) would like to see incorporated into the park in the future, even if they may not want to spend mitigation funds on some of these items now. For example, if Residents would like the pool bathrooms remodeled but do not want to spend the mitigation funds on this particular improvement, the recommendation should still be included in the plan. Then, over time, as funds become available, the COA or the Rosedale neighborhood can undertake this improvement. Moving forward, the master plan will guide how PARD spends funds allocated to Ramsey Park, and how PARD responds to any private funding opportunities.

The second part of the process is to prepare a detailed plan for how to spend the mitigation funds in accordance with the approved master plan. It is highly unlikely that the mitigation funds from the Rosedale Storm Drain Project can cover all the costs of the master plan. For these additional items, other revenue could come from fund-raising, grants, or COA bonds. Elements that may be funded via donations include benches, picnic tables, plants, and individual parts of play structures (e.g., swings, climbing structure, natural play area).

In February 2012 the RNA Steering Committee created the Ramsey Park Committee (hereafter referred to as Committee) led by Sunitha Downing and Alison Alter. While PARD's park improvement procedures are being developed, the Committee has been tasked to prepare a master plan as a prelude to spending the restitution funds on any new amenities. The Committee

is working with PARD to develop an appropriate planning process and ultimately a master plan, followed by a concept plan. The Committee is working closely with the RNA Steering Committee during the process and regularly provides status updates at monthly RNA meetings.

The Committee has solicited input and ideas via email from Rosedale, nearby neighborhoods (Ridgelea, Bryker Woods, Oakmont Heights, and Heritage), and parents and staff at Bryker Woods Elementary School. The Committee organized a public brainstorming session on April 26, 2012, which was attended by more than 30 neighbors and their children. The Committee has also met with vendors from four play equipment suppliers (Landscape Structures, Kompan, Gametime, and Shade and Net), with PARD representatives, and with three landscape designers. More details on process can be found at the end of the report.

The remainder of this document comprises the master plan recommended for Ramsey Park. The plan lays out a vision for the park and provides guidelines for subsequent investments and choices. It does not dictate where and how new elements will be implemented once Residents decide on how to spend the mitigation funds. Finally, the Committee reminds Residents that the mitigation funds alone will not permit full realization of the master plan, so that the implementation of the master plan implies significant fundraising and bond funding for the pool and play equipment. Once PARD approves the master plan, the Committee will elaborate on the detailed options, secure cost estimates, and make proposals as to how funds should be invested.

CURRENT USE

Residents of the Rosedale neighborhood consider Ramsey Park an important amenity and community resource. Ramsey Park supports a wide variety of activities that Residents and visitors value.

Key Infrastructure elements:

- basketball court
- pavilion/bathrooms
- picnic tables and benches
- playscapes and sandbox
- sidewalks
- softball/baseball field
- swimming pool and bath house
- tennis courts
- water fountains

Open space activities:

- dog walking (Mutt Mitt stations)
- field sports (e.g., baseball, softball, soccer, football, ultimate Frisbee, bocce ball, croquet)
- jogging
- kid games (e.g., capture the flag, freeze tag)
- kite flying
- star gazing
- tree climbing

Paved area activities (on the sidewalks, basketball court, tennis courts):

- basketball
- bike riding (especially learning)
- puddle jumping
- roller-skating
- scootering
- tennis

Relaxation activities (in shady areas):

- art
- eating lunch
- meditation
- reading
- writing

Community/Family activities:

- 4th of July carnival
- birthday and team parties
- neighborhood festivities
- picnics
- playgroups
- socializing with neighbors
- teenage hang out

Organized exercise/activities:

- for-profit fitness groups
- Parks tennis program
- Summer Parks Program
- swim team
- Tai Chi
- Yoga

VISION

We imagine Ramsey Park as a place where the community can play, gather, and grow together.

BROAD GOALS for the park looking ahead 5, 10, 20 years

1. To offer a multigenerational place to play and relax
2. To serve as a neighborhood retreat from the heat
3. To preserve the park's open spaces
4. To maintain and enhance the access to nature the park provides Residents
5. To increase opportunities for the community to gather on a regular basis
6. To enhance multipurpose and year-round use of different spaces around the park
7. To renovate existing infrastructure, install desired new infrastructure, and adopt park rules consistent with the first six (6) broad goals. As noted by PARD, Ramsey Park rules must be consistent with COA's park rules, although amendments to these rules may be considered for special purposes.

DESIRED TRANSFORMATIVE ELEMENTS consistent with the broad goals and in order by level of community support to date

1. Upgrade, maintain, and expand the playscapes for toddlers and older children, include challenging elements such as climbing
2. Improve pool, poolside area, structures, and increase hours and availability as per PARD's approval.
3. Embed water feature in new natural playscape
4. Overhaul pavilion/bathroom space and add adjacent natural amphitheater to create an outdoor performance space/community center with additional shade
5. Increase shade (prioritize shade in the design, via artificial structures and/or trees)
6. Landscape throughout to enhance new and existing amenities, including pool, pavilion, baseball field, and outfield near Burnet Rd.
7. Add significant seating strategically (e.g., benches, picnic tables, bleachers)
8. Install public art (e.g., tile art, donated artwork, mural)
9. Consider pathways to connect usage areas
10. Consider adding landscape feature such as a butterfly garden, xeriscape garden, or rock maze

DESIRED INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS — numbers are for reference only and do not reflect prioritization

1. Add community bulletin board/kiosk
2. Add more bike racks
3. Add more Mutt-Mitt stations
4. Add soccer goals
5. Consider appropriate surface material under picnic tables

6. Consider paint colors that are in the natural palette
7. Employ rainwater barrels
8. Improve bathroom facilities and consider allowing pool restrooms to open to the park side as well as the poolside
9. Improve fencing
10. Incorporate adult fitness equipment (replace the chin-up bars that were destroyed by a falling tree, add other equipment, although so far there has not been a great demand for a full circuit)
11. Incorporate better signage
12. Install irrigation systems for some park areas
13. Make adjustments to comply with ADA rules
14. Minimize dust bowl effect
15. Place lights on timer and use solar technology where possible
16. Provide regular arbor care
17. Remove grills
18. Replace and upgrade garbage receptacles and add recycling options
19. Update and revise rules for maintenance of the park to ensure that they preserve surfaces, landscaping, and the integrity of the park (e.g., to avoid cracking concrete, creating ruts, killing grass)
20. Upgrade and add water fountains with dog spouts
21. Upgrade lighting (safety and task)

DEBATABLE ELEMENTS

The following elements suggested by neighbors remain debatable. Debatable elements can be reconsidered as the process moves to the concept stage and the Committee works with a designer. There was simply not enough information on neighborhood preferences, costs, or design options to weigh in on these debatable items.

1. Commercialization: Should for-profit vendors, such as fitness trainers be allowed to obtain permits to use Ramsey Park for their classes?
2. Sandbox: Should the sandbox be replaced or removed? There is concern about its placement and size, but most importantly about the use of the sandbox as a litter box by many cats and the related health risks.
3. Technology: Should the master plan foresee WiFi access and tech-friendly amenities such as plugs and workspaces? Alternatively, should the park be a tech-free zone at least in terms of its infrastructural supports?
4. Tennis courts: Currently, the Committee recommends exploring options to resurface both, one, or none of the tennis courts, or to simply repair the concrete surface. The conflict here is if the tennis courts are resurfaced the City will prohibit the use of any non-tennis related use of the courts. If the courts are to be resurfaced, it would be important to provide an area or path elsewhere in the park to accommodate the bikes, roller-skates, etc. that currently enjoy the tennis court space. The new area would not need to be huge.
5. Volleyball court: Sand or grass. Takes up considerable space and would kill grass or require sand, which could be a maintenance issue. With the right design, a volleyball court could fit in with other aspects of the park.

INFEASIBLE ELEMENTS

The following elements the neighborhood considers not viable for Ramsey Park.

1. Dog park: The Committee determined that an off-leash dog run park is not feasible given current City rules. Many Residents expressed vehement opposition to this idea, with mild but frequent support.
2. Splash pad: A splash pad was deemed infeasible due to cost and proximity to Bailey Park. However, the Committee does recommend incorporating a small water feature in the play area for year-round use, as noted in the transformative elements section above.
3. Community garden: A community garden was deemed infeasible due to the many regulations associated with such an element. Monitoring and enforcement is not feasible for the RNA.

UNDESIRABLE ELEMENTS

The following represent components Residents do not wish to see in Ramsey Park.

1. A skate park is not an appropriate feature.
2. Ramsey Park should be a no-smoking area.
3. There should be no overnight usage.
4. Any plan should only include a limited amount of strategically placed new concrete/impervious cover.
5. A Frisbee golf course is not an appropriate feature.
6. A BMX track is not an appropriate feature.

ASSUMPTIONS

The recommendations made in this plan are based on the following assumptions.

1. The construction staging area in the northeast portion of the park will be restored to a condition that is at least as good as its pre-construction condition.
2. COA will provide supplemental watering for any new plantings.
3. The basic water access that exists in parts of the park will be leveraged for some irrigation.
4. All improvements will follow City, State and/or Federal requirements for play surface material and fall zone areas.
5. Exact design details for proposed mitigation fund expenditures will be worked out with the help of a designer, in conjunction with the City.
6. As allowed by PARD regulations, and as private funds are raised, demonstrable donation plaques for park elements (i.e., benches and picnic table donations) are acceptable additions, if tastefully done with a consistent design.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

The following offer some additional design guidelines when developing design choices and moving forward with the planning process:

1. Equipment-based activities intended for children under age 12 should, to the extent possible, be grouped near the existing playscapes (in the southern portion of Ramsey Park). Adult-focused activities should congregate towards the softball field (in the northern portion of Ramsey Park).
2. All designs will comply with ADA accessibility rules, without necessarily being Boundless.
3. Natural materials should be considered for play structures, but this should not be a limitation.
4. Residents value the variety of amenities and the options that allow different types of park users of different ages to enjoy Ramsey Park. Variety, but not necessarily all existing options, should be preserved.
5. Landscape choices should factor in irrigation supplies as well as potential drought conditions and should seek native plant options.
6. Landscape choices throughout Ramsey Park should be consistent, producing a cohesive result.
7. Design choices should maximize access to shade, keep clutter to a minimum, and strive to give a consistent look and feel to the park as a whole.
8. Design choices should factor in the long and short term maintenance requirements of any decisions.
9. While the pool area should be improved, this area should not be allocated a disproportionately large percentage of the mitigation funds.
10. To the extent possible, Residents favored incorporating some public art elements into the design. The master plan welcomes this suggestion, but does not specify the nature or location of such artwork.
11. Noise, late night use, and privacy consequences of any design choices will be factored into decisions.
12. Residents expressed serious concerns about how rules for the commercial use of Ramsey Park are being applied and whether commercial uses are appropriate for Ramsey Park. Generally speaking, Residents want to minimize commercialization and advertisements within the park.
13. A careful, complete design is an important investment.

PLANNING PROCESS AND TIMELINE

1. RNA appoints Sunitha Downing and Alison Alter as co-chairs of the Ramsey Park Committee and tasks them with leading the planning process. [February 27, 2012]
2. An email is sent to the Rosedale neighborhood to solicit input and feedback from Residents and to request volunteers. The same email is sent to Ridgelea, Bryker Woods, Oakmont Heights, and Heritage neighborhoods and to parents and staff at Bryker Woods Elementary School. The information is also posted to the RNA's Facebook page. Nine Residents form the Committee. [March 23 and March 30, 2012]
3. Committee members meet with four playground/shade equipment companies and visit several area parks. [March-April 2012]
4. An invitation to the brainstorming session is distributed via neighborhood listservs and the RNA Facebook group. [April 1, 2012]
5. The Committee solicits for a landscape architect via the RNA and other neighborhood listservs. [April 6, 2012]
6. Committee meets with PARD [April 19, 2012]
7. A reminder of the brainstorming session is distributed via neighborhood listservs and the RNA Facebook group. [April 25, 2012]
8. Public input/brainstorming meeting is held with COA staff, RNA, Committee, Residents, and surrounding neighbors. [April 26, 2012]
9. Additional input is requested via the RNA listserv. [April 28 and May 10, 2012]
10. Draft master plan is compiled based on meetings and input. [May 18, 2012]
11. Draft master plan is presented at RNA meeting. [May 28, 2012]
12. Between the brainstorming meeting, Committee meetings, and email requests, suggestions for improvements and feedback was received on 208 items from approximately 546 people.
13. Draft master plan and summary of all feedback and suggested improvements document are distributed via the RNA listserv and RNA website to Residents, email responders, and brainstorming attendees. [May 29, 2012]
14. Draft master plan is submitted to PARD for review. [June 6, 2012]
15. Link to the draft master plan is distributed to Residents via delivered paper neighborhood newsletter. [June 21, 2012]
16. Committee members meet with three different landscape architects. [May-August 2012]
17. PARD provides comments on draft master plan. [August 24, 2012]
18. Final draft of the master plan is distributed to RNA Steering Committee via email. [Sept. 17, 2012]
19. Final draft of the master plan is distributed to Residents via RNA listserv. [Sept. 19, 2012]
20. Final draft of the master plan is discussed, voted on, and passed at monthly RNA meeting. [Sept. 24, 2012]
21. Final draft of the master plan is submitted to PARD. [Sept. 25, 2012]