



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Director,  
Parks and Recreation Department

Victoria Li, Director,  
Watershed Protection Department

**DATE:** July 1, 2014

**SUBJECT:** Resolution No. 20130926-077 (In reference to City Property at 401 West St. John's)

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On September 26, 2013 the Austin City Council passed Resolution No. 20130926-077 directing the City Manager to consider options for the use of Watershed Protection property located at 401 West St. John's with the goal of utilizing the space to fill the greatest community need and also allow flexibility in the use of the site.

Staff from the City Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department hosted six (6) stakeholder meetings and presented to the Parks and Recreation Board twice; April 22, 2014 and May 27, 2014. Based upon community need, at the direction of City Council, the Watershed Protection Department has agreed to transfer a portion of the property located at 401 West St. John's to the Parks and Recreation Department at no cost, to be used as parkland. The following immediate recommendations are proposed by staff and supported by both the stakeholders and the Parks and Recreation Board:

- 1) PARD accept the transfer of a portion of Watershed Protection property located at 401 West St. John's to be maintained as parkland
- 2) Maintain in perpetuity a storm water management pond of approximately 1 acre of the existing 7.464 acres
- 3) Maintain the two 125 foot lighted fields currently located on the southeast corner of the property for tee-ball, coach pitch and kickball until the park master plan process dictates development
- 4) Retain the northern side of the property as open space, removing fencing to allow for open park feel and allow soccer to continue
- 5) Continue to explore partnership opportunities for youth sports delivery between Gus Garcia Recreation Center and University Hills Optimist
- 6) Limit park development or deconstruction in the immediate future and allow the master plan process to guide future park development
- 7) Include ball field space in the future master plan process to be located on the northern side of the property and utilize approximately 1.3 acres of space and temporary fencing as deemed feasible
- 8) In recognition of his contributions, it is recommended to rename the two 125 feet lighted fields located on the southeast corner of the property as Reznicek Fields. Any relocation of the fields shall include the same name recognition.

In order for the Parks and Recreation Department to accept the property from Watershed Protection and move forward with the immediate recommendations, additional funding is necessary. At the May 27, 2014 Parks and Recreation Board meeting, the Board made a unanimous recommendation to the City Council to support the immediate proposed use of the property as outlined, and to request that Council fund the initial \$22,525 needed for site preparation, and the annual need of \$12,525 for maintenance of the newly acquired property.

A full detailed report and executive summary is attached outlining the considerations and stakeholder input that led to the above recommendations. Kimberly McNeeley, Assistant Director, is available at 512-974-6722 to address questions or concerns.

cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager  
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager  
Sue Edwards, Assistant City Manager  
Mike Personett, Assistant Director, Watershed Protection Department  
Mike Kelly, Supervising Engineer, Watershed Protection Department  
Tom Franke, Engineer Associate B, Watershed Protection Department  
Kimberly McNeeley, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department  
Cheryl Bolin, Division Manager, Parks and Recreation Department  
Jim Kotick, Program Manager, Parks and Recreation Department

**Resolution 20130926-077 Full Report  
Recommendations for 401 West St. John's Property Usage**

Submitted by:  
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Parks and Recreation Department



### Executive Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the Watershed Protection Department has been directed via Resolution 20130926-077 to consider options for the use of Watershed Protection property 401 West St. John's with the goal of utilizing the space to fill the greatest community need and also allow flexibility in the use of the site.

In bringing this recommendation forward, the Departments considered the Urban Park Implementation Plan, the Parks and Recreation Department Long Range Plan and the Brentwood/Highland Neighborhood Plan. Additionally, the Departments considered storm water management needs, Resolution 861211-19, City Code Chapter 8-1, park design parameters, historical usage and stakeholder input.

The Departments hosted 6 stakeholder meetings and utilized SpeakUp Austin to gather stakeholder feedback. Each of the two main stakeholder groups, Highland Neighborhood Association and University Hills Optimist Club (UHO), authored position statements that are include in their entirety in this full report. The summary of their positions is as follows:

- University Hills Optimist Club

Supports shared use that allows many youth sports leagues to remain and a portion of the youth sports leagues to be relocated, accommodates the storm water management needs and provides for neighborhood park use. Ideally, UHO would like baseball programs through age 12 to remain at the 401 West St. John's site.

- Highland Neighborhood Association

Supports complete relocation of UHO, however, is open to kickball fields staying on site with an on-site relocation of the fields and use of temporary fences. Additionally, it is recommended that the existing tree line be preserved, the master planning process guides the future development of the park and the funding for park development be allocated immediately as well as through future bond programs.

The Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department recommend the following immediate recommendations. The immediate recommendations are made in consideration of both the recognized needs and resources estimated to be available in the immediate future to implement the immediate recommendations. The implementation of the immediate recommendations is not intended to supersede any future master planning decisions for a future reconfiguration of the site.

The immediate proposed use recommendations are:

- 1) PARD accept the transfer of a portion of Watershed Protection property located at 401 West St. John's to be maintained as parkland; the transfer is at the direction of Council
- 2) Maintain in perpetuity a storm water management pond of approximately 1 acre of the existing 7.464 acres
- 3) Maintain the two 125 foot lighted fields currently located on the southeast corner of the property for tee-ball, coach pitch and kickball until the park master plan process dictates development

- 4) Retain the northern side of the property as open space, removing fencing to allow for open park feel and allow soccer to continue
- 5) Continue to explore partnership opportunities for youth sports delivery between Gus Garcia Recreation Center and University Hills Optimist
- 6) Limit park development or deconstruction in the immediate future and allow the master plan process to guide future park development
- 7) Include ball field space in the future master plan process to be located on the northern side of the property and utilize approximately 1.3 acres of space and temporary fencing as deemed feasible
- 8) In recognition of his contributions, it is recommended to rename the two 125 feet lighted fields located on the southeast corner of the property as Reznicek Fields. Any relocation of the fields shall include the same name recognition.

The costs associated with the immediate recommendations\* include:

- Initial Park Readiness                      \$10,000 immediate site preparation
- Annual Maintenance                        \$12,525 annually

\*This is an unfunded recommendation. The Department will need to request funding from Council via the standard budget process to appropriate resources to complete demolition and maintain the park as immediately recommended.

The costs associated with future development range between \$1 million and \$2.8 million depending upon the amenities desired by the community. At this time, parkland dedication funds are not available for this planning area. Therefore, future park development will require future bond funding allocations, grant applications/awards, or partnerships like community initiated park projects to begin development.

As directed by Resolution 20130926-077, the Departments prepared relocation options. Each of these relocation options present inherent challenges and operational inconsistencies. While included for review, neither is recommended by City staff.

- Relocation Option I
  - Relocate all of baseball and kickball to Bartholomew Park to coexist with Delwood Northeast Optimist
  - Relocate soccer to Roy G. Guerrero Park
- Relocation Option II
  - Relocate all of baseball and kickball to Bartholomew Park to coexist with Delwood Northeast Optimist
  - Relocate soccer to Gus Garcia Recreation Center/Park

**Resolution 20130926-077 Full Report  
Recommendations for 401 West St. John's Property Usage**

The Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the Watershed Protection Department has been directed via Resolution 20130926-077 to consider options for the use of Watershed Protection property 401 West St. John's with the goal of utilizing the space to fill the greatest community need and also allow flexibility in the use of the site.

**Considerations**

In bringing forward a recommendation, the Departments considered the following key elements:

**Urban Park Implementation Plan**

In 2009, the Austin City Council passed a resolution with the goal that all residents living in the urban core live within a (¼) quarter mile of a publicly accessible and child friendly park. Council also adopted a similar (½) half mile goal for residents outside the urban core. Furthermore, in 2009 City Council set a vision for becoming the most family friendly city in the country, and added family friendly to its four citywide strategic priorities. The Parks and Recreation Department created an implementation plan commonly known as the Urban Park Implementation Plan as a strategic component to reaching Council's goal. The execution of this plan will require in upwards of \$114 million (in today's dollars) and multiple bond cycles to complete.

**Parks and Recreation Department Long Range Plan 2011-2016**

The goal of the Park and Recreation Department Long Range Plan 2011-2016 (Plan) is to provide for future growth and development of Austin's parks and recreation system. The Plan responds to citizens needs for parks, trails, programs, preservation, park standards, best management practices, land stewardship and national/departamental standards.

A needs assessment was conducted as part of the Plan development and consisted of two approaches: a demand-based survey (gathering information from public input meetings and existing plans) and a resource-based analysis (analysis of natural resources and assets).

Interestingly, the needs assessment produced differing outcomes with regards to community needs and desires. Over-all assessment results suggested:

- administering services that address developing sports trends such as kickball
- develop new athletic leagues
- the need for youth baseball/softball fields was rated among the top 20 priorities, along with other priorities (dog parks, sports courts, community gardens, non-traditional sports amenities, etc.)
- Provide multi-use fields not dedicated for programming or organized league use and renovate existing youth fields



Needs assessment results for central Austin and the review of the Brentwood/Highland Combined Neighborhood plan suggested:

- moving the University Hills Optimist to create a park
- Ensure there is adequate lighted sports fields in or near the neighborhood (the recollection is that this may be a Brentwood Neighborhood specific recommendation)

#### **Athletic Field for Youth Recreation**

In 2010, the Austin City Council repealed Resolution 861211-19 and amended city code Chapter 8-1 relating to the use of athletic fields for youth recreation. In this process Council expressed support for

- providing organized recreational opportunities for the youth of Austin as an essential part of the health of Austin's future citizenry;
- developing a cooperative relationship with youth sports organizations to provide recreational opportunities for youth of Austin on private and public fields; and
- the need to coordinate with youth sports organization in an even handed manner and to balance the use of city athletic fields for youth programs with other needs of the city

#### **Brentwood/Highland Neighborhood Plan**

In 2004, City Council adopted an amended Brentwood/Highland Neighborhood Plan which among many recommendations, included recommendations to:

- preserve and enhance existing parks, green spaces and recreation facilities and add new parks and green space to ensure that all residential areas of the neighborhood have a park or green space nearby, and
- improve drainage along neighborhood creeks and streets, and using natural materials prevent erosion
- Develop a public park in the Highland Neighborhood
- Develop the city owned land at the intersection of St. John's and Northcrest into a public park

#### **University Hills Optimist Club Historical Perspective**

Beginning in the late 1960's, City Council expressed support for the University Hill's Optimist Club (UHO) to utilize the property at 401 West St. John's for sports via council action requiring UHO to comply with existing City Council Resolution "Regarding Junior Baseball Fields on City Land," as approved by the City Council October 6, 1966. Evidence of continued support includes various council actions and building permit approvals for the construction of a sports complex dating back to 1970 and continuing through the early 1990s. Currently, UHO is a youth sports provider partner with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department who is subject to annual agreement terms and conditions.

### **Park Design Parameters**

The Parks and Recreation Department has specific standards for park development and makes recommendations with regards to amenities in accordance with the established standards, property topography, and community needs. The Department's Long Range Plan is the guide that influences development options along with stakeholder input.

### **Storm Water Management**

Resolution 20130926-077 directed staff and stakeholders to consider four options for the future use of 401 W. St. John's:

- Use entire tract for storm water management (SWM);
- Use entire tract as a park including SWM and relocating UHO sports;
- Reconfiguring the site to allow both public park uses, a storm water pond and continued youth sports activities;
- Maintaining the site in its current use and configuration with modifications necessary to include a storm water pond.

Following three stakeholder meetings, Watershed Protection recommends that Option 3 be adopted. From a Watershed perspective, Option 3 would include the previously proposed Water Quality biofiltration pond. In order to satisfy neighborhood concerns about aesthetics, the pond footprint would need to be expanded by about 25% in order to minimize vertical walls and restrictive fencing, allowing for vegetated side slopes with less severe fencing.

### **Stakeholder Input**

The Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department utilized the services of City of Austin employee Larry Schooler, Mediator/Facilitator/Community Engagement Consultant to facilitate (3) three community meetings hosted on the following dates:

- November 14, 2013
- December 4, 2013
- January 28, 2014

At the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Board on April 22, 2014, the Parks and Recreation Department hosted a fourth community meeting, between staff, Highland Neighborhood Association and UHO, without a consultant. While the meeting was considered a community meeting, only representatives from each of the above stakeholder groups attended.

Additionally, there was a healthy and informative conversation on SpeakUp Austin about the 401 West St. John's Avenue tract. While SpeakUP Austin is an informative tool, it is important to note it lacks the



required control mechanisms to be considered a scientifically valid survey tool. Individuals who chose to utilize SpeakUp Austin were provided the following options from which to choose:

- Use the entire tract as a park, including a storm water management pond and relocate University Hills Optimist sports (138 votes)
- Reconfigure the site to allow both public park uses, a storm water pond and continued youth sports activities (59 votes)
- Maintain the site in its current use and configuration with modifications necessary to include a storm water pond (5 votes)
- Continue leasing as-is. If storm water improvements are required than cut other spending in the budget to pay for it (5 votes)
- Use the entire tract for storm water management (5 votes)

The sentiments expressed during the online discussion forum were as followed:

- The vast majority of participants supported the options to use the tract as a public park while including a storm water management pond and relocate University Hills Optimist
- Whether or not to relocate the University Hills Optimist (UHO) was where most participants differed. Many participants supported the mission of the UHO and wished for their continued success, while at the same time favoring an open park that “can be enjoyed by all”.
- Plans to keep the site “as-is” or use all the land for a storm water pond were least supported.

The similar sentiments expressed during the three original community meetings were reflective or similar to that of the online forum.

It is important to ensure the true sentiments of the two prominent stakeholder groups, Highland Neighborhood Association and University Hills Optimist Club are articulated accurately. ***As such the italic text below has been authored by representatives of the individual stakeholder groups and is unedited.***

**Highland Neighborhood (Meeting dates February 18, 2014 and May 14, 2014)**

*Highland neighborhood is excited that PARD has recommended a neighborhood park at 401 W. St Johns, and is very grateful to Kim McNeeley, Cheryl Bolin, Mike Kelly and all the members of PARD and Watershed for their hard work in preparing this recommendation.*

*Highland is very pleased with the recommended amendments to the storm water pond. The laid back, vegetated slopes and fencing options they allow will create a storm water structure that will not detract from the park and neighborhood aesthetics.*

*Highland Neighborhood Association's position is that 401 W. St. Johns would best serve Highland neighborhood, the community of North Central Austin, and the City as a whole as a neighborhood park and stormwater management pond. This is based upon assessment of community need, including park gap, park size, availability of sports programming in and just outside of Highland and zip code 78752, and numerous City of Austin policies and goals regarding parks and open space.*

*Highland neighborhood respects UHO's history of serving the youth of Austin and surrounding areas, and UHO's desire to stay on site. As such, Highland supports the Parks and Recreation Department recommendation including:*

- *Master planning process will guide park development*
- *UHO will have priority use of multi-use field not to exceed 1.3 acres, leaving almost 4 acres for amenities to serve residents in park deficient North Central Austin*
- *Kickball fields will be relocated from their current location to a multi-use field on the northern side of the property after/per master planning, optimizing park design by allowing access to heritage trees*
- *UHO will utilize temporary fences on the interior of the multi-use field, allowing neighborhood access when fields not in use by UHO and eliminating the unwelcoming environment fences create on such a small space*
- *Master planning will prioritize space immediately surrounding heritage trees for community amenities*
- *The baseball fences will be removed beginning July 2014*

*Highland neighborhood is lacking in parkland, and City Council priorities dictate 401 W. St Johns be developed into a park to serve members of the community who live within walking and biking distance of 401 W. St Johns. After years of neighborhood support for urban densification, we ask the City to stand by its land use policies and goals by funding master planning and initial park development now. Developing a park on this site was in the 2003 Highland Neighborhood plan, and no action has been taken in the last 10 years to realize this recommendation. For over 8 years Highland has been discussing a park at 401 W. St Johns with City departments. We have spent the last year in a process to determine that the only City owned open space in a dense, mass transit neighborhood in the urban core and 2 Transit Oriented Districts become a park. We cannot wait another 4 years for planning to begin so that this City owned space can finally serve the greater Austin community.*

*Highland asks that City Council vote to fund the master plan in next year's budget:*

- *There is significant and immediate parkland need in Highland as identified by the PARD Gap Analysis and the criteria of the Austin Urban Parks Report priority matrix*
- *Park need is increasing due to current development and densification in Highland*
- *The Austin Urban Parks Report states North Central Austin has a "critical need for new parks" and is one of 4 areas that "should be the primary focus of initial in-fill park development"*
- *An expedient master planning process will allow amenities to be phased in upon completion when funds become available through grants and parkland dedication fees*
- *The minimal cost of land acquisition substantially decreases immediate investment in site*
- *Initiating master planning now will utilize community momentum and energy to create a planning process that will be inclusive, participatory, and will yield a plan that truly reflects the needs of all stakeholders*



- *There is a pressing need for a park on this site to increase neighborhood presence and monitoring to deter crime, which the existence of the sports fields has not done, as evidenced by seventy-eight 911 calls in the last 10 years, including assault, drug use, prostitution and homeless camping*

*Highland also asks that City Council vote to fund with next year's budget an initial \$237,750 for park development, to be prioritized for kickball field relocation to the multi-use field on site. Visualization from the road is a major challenge for this site. In its current configuration only the parking lot and kickball fences can be seen. Field relocation on site will allow placement of magnet amenities to be visualized from the road, drawing people into the park. The primary asset of this site is a strip of heritage trees. Kickball field relocation is required to provide access to these trees. This site is a rare opportunity to create a new park in an area of the urban core so lacking in amenities. Design is crucial to maximize this space, and relocation of these fields on site, out of the mature trees, will be the first major step for park development.*

*Despite the immediate need for parkland in North Central Austin, overwhelming neighborhood support for UHO relocation, 22 acres of private sports fields within 1 mile of this site, and the PARD Long Range Plan recommendation for multi-use fields not dedicated to organized league use, Highland has agreed to UHO programming remaining due in large part to Council and City department support for compromise. While there are relocation options for UHO's programs, Highland's residents have no other site for a neighborhood park. Highland will be obtaining grants to fund initial development and begin providing amenities to Highland and North Central Austin as soon as possible. The time and the funding needed for field relocation and renovation so that UHO programming can remain on site should not stand as a barrier to utilization of grants and parkland dedication fees. Council cannot allow the compromise Highland has made to hinder much needed park development.*

**Funding Requested:**

**Master Planning \$100,000**

**Park Development (prioritized for kickball field relocation to Multi-use field) \$237,750**

<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Estimated Cost (given by PARD)</b>
2 dugouts	\$10,000
2 backstop fences	\$10,000
Two dirt infields	\$20,000
1 acre of sport turf (6" good soil base)	\$150,000
Irrigation for 1.3 acres	\$25,000
Bases/pegs	\$750
Scoreboards, wireless (w/out installation)	\$10,000
Temporary Fencing- two fences	\$12,000
<b>Total for Field Relocation</b>	<b>\$237,750</b>

**Community Need**

**Park Gap:**

- *This is the only City owned open space in Highland on which to develop a neighborhood park for Highland's 4500 residents, including 700 children*



- 1% open space in Highland and North Central Austin compared to the 5% in Central Austin
- Highland is identified in the PARD Gap Analysis as deficient in adequate parkland (Attachment A)
- There are no park amenities outside of school property in all of zip code 78752 to serve the 1,223 youth under the age of 5, an estimated 7% increase from the last census period
- Highland's population is projected to double by 2030

**Existing Sports Programming:**

- There are 3 programs and 22 acres of private youth sports fields within 1 mile of 401 W. St Johns providing soccer, baseball, softball, football, and cheerleading
- There are 3 other youth sports programs, one within zip code 78752 and two less than 2 miles away, providing baseball, softball, football, cheerleading and soccer
- 99% of UHO's 406 participants are not from Highland, and a substantial number are not COA residents, therefore participants do not need to be on this particular site
- Multiple relocation options exist for all UHO programs, filling the needs of UHO's participants
  - Options that allow UHO to keep its name with programs separated between 2 sites
  - An option that allows all UHO programs to stay together less than 1 mile away under another YSO
- UHO has stated their program is half the size it was 10 years ago

**Park Size:**

- 10 acres is median Park size in Austin
- 5-10 acres is the national recommendations for a neighborhood park (more recommended in densely populated neighborhoods)
- The 6 acres remaining after the storm water pond will barely fill the needs of our 4500 residents,
- All other YSO's using public land are on significantly larger green spaces, mainly district and municipal parks
- No other park of this small size bears the responsibility of providing organized sports

**City Goals and Policies**

- **2003 Brentwood/Highland Neighborhood Plan**, adopted by City Council May 13, 2004, recommends developing a public park at 401 W. St Johns
- **PARD's Long Range Plan**
  - Central Austin Public Input Meetings voted relocating the University Hills Optimists to create more park opportunity among top five votes
  - Recommendation for athletics include providing multi-use fields not dedicated for programming or organized league use and renovating existing youth fields
  - Recommend multiple park amenities including community gardens, tennis courts, playgrounds for young children, and splash pads evenly distributed throughout Austin
  - Need based analysis prioritized numerous park amenities including playgrounds, dog parks, tennis courts, splash pads, community gardens, all ranked higher than ball fields, and nontraditional amenities such as skate and BMX parks and rock climbing
- **Austin Pedestrian Advisory Council** recommends this site be a park focused on providing amenities to pedestrians accessing the site from the neighborhood, Highland train station, Crestview train station, North Lamar (the heaviest transit corridor in Austin) and bicyclists utilizing the 3 bike lanes that connect to the site

- **Austin Urban Parks Workgroup Report:**
  - *Identifies North Central Austin as critically lacking in parks and one of the areas for initial park infill*
  - *Highland fits ALL criteria of priority matrix for park infill as defined in Workgroup report- neighborhood density, low income residents, accessibility, location relative to transit corridors (higher priority), high obesity, and transit-dependent areas*
  - *To lower the cost of acquiring new parkland, the Workgroup recommends the City aggressively target under-utilized public land for transformation into parks*
  - *States "it is on a neighborhood level that we can most clearly see parks vital role in terms of health, community, and economic development"*
- **Imagine Austin:**
  - *Numerous policies regarding parks as community gathering spaces, play areas for children, leisure for all ages, especially within activity centers, dense communities, and redevelopment areas*
  - *¼ mile radius around this site includes numerous existing multi-family dwellings, Highland Neighborhood Plan zoning for multi-family and multi-use, and TOD zoning for multi-use and high density residential*
  - *Highland neighborhood includes the Highland and Justin/Lamar Transit Oriented Developments, Airport Blvd. Redevelopment, and Highland ACC*
  - *Growth Map shows Highland neighborhood as Town Center and Regional Center with highest density and tallest buildings*
- **City Council Policy**
  - *All residents in urban core live within ¼ mile walking distance of park*
  - *Family Friendly among top 4 priorities, and parks play an essential role in attracting and retaining families according to the Urban Parks Report*
  - *Desire to make Austin the MOST family-friendly city in the nation*
- **Families and Children Taskforce:**
  - *Recommend by 2018 a park or public green space access within a quarter-mile radius of all existing and planned housing located in the urban core*

*While sole use as a neighborhood park would fill the greatest community need and is supported by numerous City policies and goals, the Highland neighborhood supports the Parks Department's recommendation, and is grateful to the Parks Department, Watershed, and the Park Board for their support in providing walkable park access to Highland's residents and an open public amenity to the greater community. We ask that City Council take steps now to begin filling the immediate and significant need for a park in Highland and North Central Austin by funding master planning and initial park development to create a safe play area for children, a neighborhood destination for exercise, recreation and relaxation, and a gathering space where neighbors and friends will form the ties that make a stronger, safer community.*

**University Hills Optimist Club (Meeting dates February 20, 2014 and May 14, 2014)**

*UHO understands Highland Neighborhood Association's desire for a family park located at 401 W St Johns. UHO believes that a shared use facility as recommended in this report is a win-win for both organizations. The City recommendation recognizes the need for a reconfiguration for both unorganized*



*community activities and youth sports which help the wellbeing of our families and youth by developing healthy minds and bodies. The attached letter to Ms. Kimberly McNeeley further expresses UHO's position regarding the usage of property at 401 West St. John's. (Attachment B)*

*Youth sports teach youth the importance of team play and that working together for success is a goal which will assist them in later life. Team sports keeps youth active and less prone to get involved in undesirable activities.*

#### *Reconfiguration of 401 W St Johns*

*During the February 20, 2014 meeting, there was a comment to the effect that future redevelopment of the site would likely consider moving the Kickball fields to the NW corner of the property. UHO has studied this concept and believes that such a move would work best for all parties. UHO therefore offers an alternative configuration which would provide one contiguous **sports field area** which could be configured as a soccer field, two Kickball fields and a baseball/softball field **with more open feeling space than this report suggest**. Also **some of** the existing fences could be utilized hence minimize the demolition and renovation costs. We understand that this configuration would be a shared use of the facility.*

***As stated throughout this process, a shared use of the 401 West St Johns property has been supported by UHO in accordance with the YSO agreement.***

#### *Relocation of UHO Baseball to Bartholomew*

*The idea presented herein by PARD that the older Boys Baseball could merge with the program at Delwood might be workable, so long as the group relocated would be ages 13 and above. We appreciate that these recommendations respect the need to have UHO's baseball, kickball and soccer programs to remain together at 401 W St Johns.*

*We believe that it is important for families with players through the age of 12 be able to play at the same location thus eliminating the need for the various family members being split between two different sports complexes.*

#### *Recognition of UHO's 43 years of service to the City of Austin.*

*UHO appreciates the recommendation that one or more of the fields be shown as "Reznicek Field". We do request that a plaque be placed at an appropriate location which recognizes the dedicated efforts of The Members of The Optimist Club of University Hills, players, families and civic minded citizens of Austin who planned, built and maintained the facilities for the Youth of Austin and local community. Such plaque includes an aerial relief photo of the site as it exists today. UHO would like to provide additional script information related to the development of the PARK.*



**Proposed Staff Use Recommendations:**

Based upon the above summarized considerations, the Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department offer the following **immediate recommendations** for consideration. **The immediate recommendations are made in consideration of both the recognized needs and resources estimated to be available in the immediate future to implement the immediate recommendations.** The Watershed Protection Department and Parks and Recreation Department recommend future park development be guided by the master planning process.

It is important to note, these immediate recommendations are made with the heightened awareness that funding for redevelopment of this property does not currently exist and the Park and Recreation Department's ability to allocate funding necessary to development is limited. Essentially, in the foreseeable immediate future, the park will remain in its current amenity free state, minus fencing barriers for a considerable amount of time.

The semi-secluded location of this property makes it vulnerable to undesirable activity. The immediate recommendations are not only an attempt to balance the community's competing needs, but to also guard against potential undesirable activity within the neighborhood park. It has been the professional experience of the Parks and Recreation staff that one means of deterring undesirable activity is to schedule activity in the park.

The immediate recommendations take into account recent population census data that indicates the population in zip code area 78752 (inclusive of the Highland Neighborhood Association) is comprised of the following youth population:

- 1,223 youth under the age of 5 and estimated 7% increase from the last census period
- 1,113 youth between the ages of 5 and 9 and estimated 6.5% increase from the last census period
- 1,020 youth between the ages of 10 and 14 an estimated 5.9% increase from the last census period

The immediate recommendations provide field space for organize youth sports tailored to the age group that has demonstrated recent growth in the zip code area.

The immediate recommendations provide regular activity as the neighborhood works with the Department to develop the park. The implementation of the immediate recommendations is not intended to supersede any future master planning decisions for a future reconfiguration of the site.

- At the direction of Council, the Watershed Protection Department transfer a portion of the property located at 401 West St. John's to the Parks and Recreation Department be maintained as parkland
- Maintain in perpetuity a storm water management pond to be built in the current footprint, next to the channel to receive the water, expanding as necessary to achieve a configuration in keeping with the desire to minimize or limit vertical walls and restrictive fences;

- To the extent possible, utilize natural barriers and aesthetically pleasing fence material to ensure public access is limited and patrons are safe;
- Current records reflect that 80% of the University Hills Optimist (UHO) program is kickball. The other 20% of youth sports programming offered by UHO also is comprised of soccer and baseball programs. Therefore, it is possible to create a park to serve the majority of youth sports programming and provide a public park.
  - As per the immediate recommendations, maintain the two 125 feet lighted fields and bleachers currently located on the Southeast corner of the property. These two fields meet the regulation size for kickball, T-ball, and Coach Pitch leagues and have the capacity to accommodate 26 teams per league season including practice times. The two fields and associated bleachers utilize approximately 1 acre of the total property. This recommendation will allow UHO to offer:
    - Kickball (serving female youth ages 4-18)
    - T-ball Shetland League (serving youth ages 4-6) and
    - Coach pitch Pinto League (serving youth ages 7-9)
  - As per the immediate recommendation remove the three baseball fields including all the fencing and bleachers located in northern half of the property. Retain the northern side of the property as open space sufficient to accommodate a U14 65 yards x 100 yard regulation soccer field which will utilize approximately 1.3 acres of the property. A soccer field has the trait to be mobile; allowing its disappearance when there is no season and does not require any type of fencing eliminating the feeling of being “shut out” from the park space provided to the community. This one soccer field will have the capacity to accommodate 15 soccer teams per league season and can accommodate youth 14 years of age and younger. The soccer seasons typically play from mid-February through May and mid-August through November. When not utilized for soccer games/practice, this space would remain open for public use with or without painted field lines.
  - Per Resolution 861211-19 and amended city code Chapter 8-1 relating to the use of athletic fields for youth recreation, the Parks and Recreation Department shall execute an agreement with UHO to reflect the above field usage recommendations as follows:
    - July, 2014 through to September, 2014
    - Annual agreement beginning September, 2014, as dictated by the resolution and reflective of future master planning decisions
    - Future annual agreements to be reflective of the future master planning decisions
  - The park includes a two story structure that has traditionally been used for concessions, restrooms, and storage. A building permit and Certification of Occupancy was received

during and at completion of construction. It is recommended that the future status of the building be determine by the customary park master planning process.

- Relocate UHO's baseball program offered to the youth ages 10 and above (typically middle school and high school youth) to Delwood Sports Complex located in Bartholomew Park. The Delwood Sports Complex has adequate field space and resources to meet the youth's needs.
- Because the centrally located large baseball field is currently named after Edward Reznicek for his advocacy in the development of youth sports, in recognition of his contributions, it is recommended to rename the two 125 feet lighted fields located on the Southeast corner of the property as Reznicek Fields. The rename is recommended because the large baseball field will cease to exist if this recommendation is accepted. Any relocation of the fields shall include the name recognition
- The Parks and Recreation Department will explore UHO partnership opportunities with Gus Garcia Recreation Center specific to soccer programming.
- Monitor parking to ensure vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic patterns ensure maximum access and safety of park patrons.

The property is estimated to be 7.464 acres of land. The proposed immediate recommendations will require the following space usage:

• Storm water management structure	1 acre
• Parking	.5 acre
• Two kickball fields and associated bleachers (as described above)	1 acre
• Current building	.3 acres
• Shared use soccer field space	1.3 acres
• Open park space	3.364 acres

It is important to note, when the sports fields are not in use, they will remain open for public access. Because the soccer field will not have a fenced boundary, when it is not is use, it will provide 4.664 acres of open park space.

#### **Future Park Development Recommendations**

The Parks and Recreation and Watershed Protection Departments recommend a future master planning process guide park development. The Departments recommend support of the following:

- Preservation of the existing tree line to the extent possible
- The master plan shall recommend ball field space, the total space utilized should be approximately 1.3 acres and temporary fences should be used to the extent possible



- It is most desirable for the master plan process to reflect the above mentioned ball field space as relocated from the current location to a location on the northern side

### **Actions Necessary to Implement**

Upon PARD's ownership of the land, the Park Development Process serves as a guideline for phased park development. While the levels of development serve as targets for typical development, the timing, technique and procedures for accomplishing each level of development may vary significantly depending upon available funding, constituent preferences, natural characteristics of the park or the necessary amenities.

### **Acquisition/Land Type Distinction**

The Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department recommend the property at 401 West St. John's be utilized as a park provided a storm water management component be incorporated into the development and remain in perpetuity. Additionally, the Departments recommend allowances for flexibility regarding the storm water structure type and size should future conditions dictate a change in management requirements.

In order to develop the land as a park, it is recommended the Watershed Protection Department transfer only the portion of the property at 401 West St. John's to the Parks and Recreation Department and retain the portion necessary to construct the storm water management system. The Watershed Protection Department is prepared to officially give the non-storm water management portion of the land to the Parks and Recreation Department via an inter-department transfer. The Parks and Recreation Department is prepared to accept the land as park land.

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| • Timeline for inter-departmental transfer | 6 to 9 months |
| • Cost                                     | No Cost       |

### **Park Development Process**

The Departments recommend the immediate removal of barriers that minimize the ability to enjoy open space, repair of structures recommended to remain on site for the execution of youth sports programming, a renewal of the youth sports provider agreement to be amended to include only those recommended youth sports and the refurbishing of the park to meet Level III maintenance standards, which include, but are not limited to, mowing at least once every 14 to 21 days, control weeds to less than 20% of turf surface, trash cans emptied two to three times per week, graffiti inspections completed weekly and if discovered removed within 24 hours, restrooms serviced every 2 to 3 days and park inspections completed weekly to determine safety hazards.

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| • Timeline | To begin July, 2014   |
| • Cost     | \$10,000 demolition and initial refurbishing of open park space<br>\$12,525 annually* |

\*This is an unfunded recommendation. The Department will need to request funding from Council via the standard budget process to appropriate resources to complete demolition and maintain the park as recommended

### Initiate Park Development Process as appropriate for a Neighborhood Park

A Neighborhood Park is typically located in the center of a single neighborhood or in conjunction with an elementary school or greenway. Access to the parks is typically from collector streets, bike routes and greenways. Neighborhood Parks can range from 2 to 30 acres, typically have a service area of a 1 mile radius and provide basic recreational opportunities close to home. In the case of the property at 401 St. John's, access will also be by vehicle and appropriate parking will need to be considered as a part of the Development Process.

Level I Development includes the creation of a park master plan and construction in the first phase may include picnicking areas, trails, signage and a play scape. Level II Development may include multipurpose fields, playfield equipment, basketball courts, tennis courts, landscaping and irrigation. In the case of the property at 401 St. John's some amenities typical of Level II Development currently exist and restoration or refurbishing of the exiting amenities will need to be taken into consideration during Level I Development. Finally, Level III Development includes the construction of special interest facilities (recreational facilities, aquatic facilities, skate parks, etc.). The size and scope of the property at 401 St. John's may or may not lend itself to Level III Development.

### Funding

It is important to note, at this time, there is no funding allocated for the acquisition or development of the property located at 401 St. John's with the exception of the funding associated with the storm water management structure.

The Parks and Recreation Department will rely on the following funding sources over the course of many years to conduct the various phases of development and ultimately construct the desired amenities. Funding sources to be considered include: 1) 2012 Bond Funding for Land Acquisition, 2) 2018 Bond Funding for park development, and 3) Parkland Dedication (PLD) Funding for park land development. It is important to note, currently, there is no PLD funding available to develop this park, but as private construction continues throughout Austin, this may change in the future.

- Timeline                      5 to 10 years
- Cost                              See chart below

The chart below outlines typical construction and amenity costs and is *for comparative purposes only*. *A true cost of development will not be known until a master plan is completed. The cost below does not include acquisition cost as the inter-departmental transfer will not require substantial funding.*

Item Description	Typical Cost
Master Plan	\$100,000
Environmental Controls/Land Survey	\$200,000
Site Preparation (clearing, grading, surface striping)	\$200,000
Playscape	\$250,000
Parking lot (including landscaping, irrigation, curbing, asphalt, approaches)	\$350,000
Large Pavilion (12 tables)	\$205,000
Covered Picnic Area (6 tables)	\$135,000



Splash Pad	\$400,000
Dog Run	\$290,000
Ball field Construction with lights	\$750,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,880,000</b>

Grant programs are available to citizen groups that wish to support park development through a Community Initiated Park Project. The Parks and Recreation Department has one (1) dedicated staff member to assist community members with Community Initiated Park Projects, however, the grant application process and grant award management is the responsibility of the community.

### **Relocation Analysis**

As directed by Resolution 20130926-077 the Parks and Recreation Department explored complete relocation of UHO youth sports leagues. The following outlines relocation options and the pros/cons associated with each option. It is important to note, there is currently no single property that can accommodate the needs of the UHO program complement; therefore, relocation options, as with the staff recommendation, will require UHO to operate from multiple locations. Of the 18 Youth Sports Providers the Parks and Recreation Department partners with, 7 organizations currently use multiple sites to provide programming.

**Option I-** Relocate all baseball and kickball to Bartholomew Park, 5201 Berkman Drive and relocate soccer to Roy G. Guerrero Park, 400 Grove Blvd.

Athletic Fields at Bartholomew consist of 2 softball fields, 3 baseball fields and 1 multipurpose field and are currently utilized by the Delwood Northeast Optimist Youth Sports Provider (Delwood) via the standard Youth Sports Provider Agreement as dictated by city code Chapter 8-1. Upon review of the Delwood baseball participation numbers and the UHO baseball participation numbers the 5 baseball fields can accommodate both baseball programs. It is recommended for the two groups to coexist in the same space each offering their baseball programs simultaneously.

Delwood currently schedules a flag football program that utilizes the single multipurpose field during the same time UHO offers soccer; therefore, UHO soccer will need to relocate soccer to Roy G. Guerrero Park. Although the Montopolis Little League Youth Sports Organization currently operates out of Roy G. Guerrero Park, this organization does not offer a soccer program. The Montopolis community must be formally surveyed to determine their support of relocating soccer to Roy G. Guerrero Park before a final decision were made; anecdotal feedback suggests the Montopolis community does not support this option. .

There are inherent challenges and operational inconsistencies with regards to relocation to Option I-

- 1) The Department does not require any other youth sports providers to share space and operate in co-existence with each other because it creates competition.
- 2) Delwood and UHO currently offer baseball programs for the same age groups through differing sanctioning bodies. The philosophies and rules associated with the sanctioning bodies differ. While the expectation is co-existence, this option essentially creates a competition for the same ages of youth at the same facility.



- 3) The Parks and Recreation Department met with Delwood Wednesday, April 9, 2014 to discuss the relocation option. Delwood was open to absorbing the baseball participants and beginning a Delwood soccer program but not open to co-existence of both organizations in the same space.
- 4) Delwood did not support the kickball program and objected to this program being relocated to Bartholomew Park and asked the Department to consider Delwood's needs as a part of the decision making process.
- 5) Relocating kickball to Bartholomew Park will require UHO to purchase temporary fencing to be assembled and disassembled before and after each kickball practice/game (or a series of kickball games) and a storage unit for the fencing. The "daily" assembly/disassembly is considered labor intensive and an unmanageable expectation by the UHO volunteer group.
- 6) If Delwood absorbed baseball under the Delwood Youth Sports Organization, this would dissolve the baseball portion of UHOs historical youth sports programming.
- 7) UHO is not in support of dissolving the baseball portion of the league and hesitant about co-existence.

**Option II-** Relocate all baseball and kickball to Bartholomew Park, 5201 Berkman Drive and relocate soccer to Gus Garcia Recreation Center, 1201 East Rundberg Lane

The Parks and Recreation Department's Gus Garcia Recreation Center and surrounding park has a single multipurpose field. The Recreation Center currently uses the space for youth sports programming, including a spring, summer and fall youth soccer program for youth ages 3 years to 12 years old. The Parks and Recreation Department recently surveyed community representatives regarding the relocation of UHO to Gus Garcia. The community representatives were receptive to the UHO program relocation and requested the center staff consider partnership opportunities. Follow up conversations regarding the relocation did include the concept of absorbing the existing UHO soccer program, but nothing definitive has been decided.

There are inherent challenges and operational inconsistencies with regards to relocation to Option II-

- 1) Typically, Youth Sports Provider organizations are located within the parks system at locations that do not have Recreation Centers\*\*\*\*. This is intentional because the Department does not have resources to offer youth sports programming at locations not associated with Recreation Centers. This allows the Department to "fill the gaps".

\*\*\*\*An exception is the fields located on 2215 Riverview Street and 33 Robert T Martinez. These fields are located next to the Lorraine "Grandma" Camacho Activity Center. This center specializes in offering outdoor adventure activities (mountain biking, canoeing, camping, archery, etc.) and does not offer youth sports activities.

- 2) Similar to the coexistence issue stated above, placing the UHO soccer league at a field utilized by the Recreation Center creates competition; something the Department typically tries to avoid.
- 3) Currently the Gus Garcia Recreation Center offers soccer league opportunities at a substantially lower registration fee than UHO.

- 4) The Gus Garcia Recreation Center must balance league play with public access. Adding the field usage of a partner organization in addition to the existing youth sports leagues will pose challenges regarding the health of the turf and allowing public access.
- 5) All issues associate with the relocation and coexistence of both Delwood and UHO baseball and UHO kickball at Bartholomew are also applicable to this relocation option.

The Department remains open to discussing partnership options with UHO for the use of Gus Garcia Recreation Center's multipurpose field including but not limited to coexistence with age group parameters for each league to avoid league competition. However, relocating the soccer league to a park with a Recreation Center is inconsistent with the Department's current practice.

#### **Parks and Recreation Board Recommendation**

A presentation was provided by Kimberly McNeeley, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department, to the Parks and Recreation Board on April 22, 2014. The agenda action item requested the Board make a recommendation to Council regarding the use of City property at 401 West St. John's. After considering the presentation recommendations, stakeholder input and participating in an extensive question and answer session, the Parks and Recreation Board recommended the Parks and Recreation Department and stakeholders reconvene to further discuss the recommendations.

As such, stakeholders and Parks and Recreation Department staff participated in a sixth stakeholder meeting on May 13, 2014 and presented a substantially unchanged recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Board on May 27, 2014. The second presentation resulted in the following Parks Board action:

The Parks and Recreation Board recommends to the City Council the immediate proposed use of City property located at 401 West St. John's with the addition that University Hills Optimist will be included in the future use of the site, and to request that Council fund the initial \$22,525, with recognition of the annual need of \$12,525 for maintenance.

The immediate proposed use recommendations are:

- 1) At City Council's direction, PARD accept the transfer of a portion of Watershed Protection property located at 401 West St. John's to be maintained as parkland
- 2) Maintain in perpetuity a storm water management pond of approximately 1 acre of the 7.464 acres
- 3) Maintain the two 125 foot lighted fields currently located on the southeast corner of the property for tee-ball, coach pitch and kickball until the park master plan process dictates development
- 4) Retain the northern side of the property as open space, removing fencing to allow for open park feel and allow soccer to continue
- 5) Continue to explore partnership opportunities for youth sports delivery between Gus Garcia Recreation Center and University Hills Optimist
- 6) Limit park development or deconstruction in the immediate future and allow the master plan process to guide future park development

- 7) Include ball field space in the future master plan process to be located on the northern side of the property and utilize approximately 1.3 acres of space and temporary fencing as deemed feasible
- 8) For his advocacy in the development of youth sports and in recognition of his contributions , it is recommended to name the two 125 feet lighted fields located on the Southeast corner of the property as Reznicek Fields in recognition of Edward Reznicek. Any relocation of the fields shall include the name recognition.



ATTACHMENT A



Map C: Existing School Parks

- Developed Parkland
- Undeveloped Parkland
- Existing School Parks (PARD owns a 0% of the school property)

ATTACHMENT B

May 22, 2014

MS Kimberly McNeeley

Assistant Director

Austin Parks and Recreation

200 South Lamar

Austin, Texas 78704

RE Executive Summary – Resolution 20130926-77

MS Kimberly McNeeley

UHO finds the draft resolution which you sent to me on May 15, 2014, totally unacceptable.

There are a number of items which are misleading and other things which should have been included.

The main item which is a deal breaker is on page 13, specifically

- Should the master plan recommend ball fields space, the total space utilized not to exceed 1.3 acres and temporary fencing should be used to the extent possible

The wording of this bullet places a continual cloud over the future of UHO at 401 W St Johns, an even greater cloud than what has existed over the past 3 plus years. The words "Should the master plan recommend ball field's space" can be interpreted," PARD and PARD Board question inclusion of ball fields in the Master Plan".

This recommendation is in direct conflict with MS Sara Hensley's specific statement that she believes youth sports fields should be included as part of the of the Park Master Plan. I heard no objections to such a proposal from any of the PARD Board members. Clearly HNA representatives who visited with me and other UHO representatives following the Board meeting had the same understanding confirming their willingness for shared use and working toward that goal.

Please revise the bullet to read:

- The master plan **shall include** ball field's space, the total space allocated should not exceed **2** acres and temporary fencing should be used to the extent possible, **temporary fencing**

**to be installed at the beginning of the season and remain in place throughout the program season.**

At the meeting of May 14 with PARD staff and HNA representatives, a discussion centered on where and how the sports programs would be located confirms the recommended changes to the above bullet.

This protracted process has caused our program leadership, coaches and participants to drift away to other programs and a continued cloud will only intensify the loss if change recommended above is not made. Is that the goal of this process, “wear down UHO and cause UHO to go away”?

UHO desires to continue the programs which we have carried on for 43 years. UHO will continue to welcome HNA youth and all City of Austin community youth to participate in UHO’s YSO Sports Programs.

On Page 7, the report implies that UHO has not maintained the facility, while the park as it exists today does need significant work to bring it up to quality standards, it is important to note that PARD Staff and a City Council Member specifically instructed UHO representatives “DO NOT SPEND MONEY ON THE COMPLEX. While UHO understood this very specific instruction, UHO has performed critical safety repairs and continued to do basic maintenance on the facility.

Also on page 7 HNA makes a point that 99% of UHO program participants are not from the HNA area. That is in no way UHO’s fault, rather it is an indication that HNA community family’s lack of interest in encouraging their youth to participate in youth sports which would provide them an opportunity to get the exercise they need for healthy bodies, an understanding of team play and an opportunity to interface with other youth their own age. UHO has always and always will welcome everyone who wished to participate in our programs.

On May 20 I and two other UHO representatives plus one HNA representative attended the Phase 3 planning meeting for the Gus Garcia complex to get an understanding of how the process would likely work for 401 W St Johns. What we witnessed was disturbing. Community leaders were stating that the survey of proposed improvements which Publics Works was asking those present to prioritize did not represent what the community has always wanted for the Park. There were questions as to what various items might cost and what the total cost of all 15 would be. The only cost shared was the cost of parking lot for 100 cars which was estimated at \$200,000 and 2 softball fields at \$247,000. Question was asked as to what the total estimated cost of all items was and the answer was, we do not have that estimate as cost will escalate with the passage of time.

There was also discussion about the time it has taken to first get from the initial discussions of planning for the construction of the recreation building which was over 10 years and the time which has passed since regarding the other amenities now being discussed. It was also stated that only about \$800,000 of the original budget allocation of \$1.4 million remains available for construction in today’s dollars.



Using the cost estimates for Gus Garcia planning of \$200,000 for 100 cars (\$2,000 per car) and \$247,000 for 2 softball fields and adjusted to what is being proposed at 401 W St Johns we estimate that relocation of the 2 Kickball fields and construction of a 25 car parking lot and plus estimated demolition costs of \$20,000 will exceed \$200,000.

A 25 parking space parking lot cost would be about \$50,000. Adjusting the cost for 2 softball fields based 2 kickball fields which are 43% the size of a softball fields, kickball fields would cost about 107,000. One must add engineering and other costs of 10% + to the above 2 dollar values, the cost of 2 kickball fields and a 25 car parking lot for a cost of \$172,000 in today's dollars. Add estimated demolition costs after relocation of Kickball Fields. Where is that money coming from and when it will be available for construction to start?

Your summary indicates that the time line for the project is 5 to 10 years in the future.

Considering all these factors, UHO estimates that money for any substantive development at 401 St Johns is not likely to happen before 2020 and possibly as late as 2025.

The planning process has not officially started. That brings forth the question of why destroy what exists, why not use it for the benefit of the Youth and community. It has already been agreed that some of the baseball fences are to be removed shortly and that the existing facilities will be open to public use except for those times that PARD approves for UHO Youth Sports.

I am including a copy of Ed Reznicek's review comments regarding your Executive Summary with which UHO representatives concur.

Optimistically yours

Victor Mannella

President UHO Board of Directors

Cc Sara Hensley

Jim Kotick