




MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks and Recreation Board

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

DATE: August 26, 2014

SUBJECT: Disc Golf Removal from Pease Park

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Parks and Recreation Board (PARB) members additional information regarding the removal of disc golf from Pease Park in 2010 as requested by the Land, Facilities and Programs Committee at their July 9, 2014 meeting.

Background

In 2006, discussions about the environmental degradation of Pease Park began among representatives of Parks and Recreation (PARD), Watershed Protection Department (WPD), Austin Parks Foundation (APF) and several concerned citizens. As a result, APF commissioned the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to conduct an environmental assessment of Pease Park. The report documented serious ecological concerns and identified the need for a large-scale restoration project to re-establish ecological balance to one of Austin's oldest parks. In 2008, WPD initiated a comprehensive preliminary engineering study to prioritize integrated watershed solutions related to flooding, erosion, and water quality for Shoal Creek along Pease Park and the Shoal Creek Greenbelt. This study confirmed that the riparian zone within the park suffered from severe deterioration of the landscape as evidenced by severe erosion along stream banks, overly compacted soils, poor water quality, invasive species dominance and a weakening of the park's mature trees. The environmental degradation was attributed to both anthropogenic causes such as recreational use and natural causes such as urban stormwater runoff, floods, and drought. Following these studies, WPD and PARD began collaboration on the design of a project to address the erosion, water quality and landscape issues and improve the trail system along Shoal Creek including Pease Park. As a part of the process, PARD made the difficult decision to remove disc golf from Pease Park to allow for the restoration of the watershed.

Disc Golf Engagement Process

On October 30, 2009, City Council was briefed by PARD on plans to engage key stakeholders, including the disc golf community, in a public engagement process about the environmental issues facing Pease Park and the planned WPD stream restoration project. (Attachment A).

On March 9, 2010, WPD briefed PARD on its recommendations for the restoration of Pease Park and expressed concern about the long-term sustainability of the improvements unless alternative locations for disc golf were provided (Attachment B).

On April 16, 2010, City Council was briefed on PARD's completed and scheduled disc golf improvements which included the renovation of two courses with future improvements planned (Attachment C).

On November 9, 2010, City Council was briefed on the closure of the disc golf course at Pease Park slated for December 31, 2010, and the development of a new disc golf course at Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park, which opened in Summer of 2011 (Attachment D).

On February 21, 2014, PARD sent a memo to the PARB about the Pease Park master planning process with a special reminder of the disc golf issue (Attachment E) and why disc golf would not be a recommended use for the park in the master plan.

The removal of disc golf from Pease Park was not taken lightly and the process spanned several years, including many public meetings. Disc golf is a beloved sport in Austin and the course at Pease Park was very popular in the community. PARD has to balance the needs of our recreational park system with the ecological impacts that may result. I have included some of the media coverage about this issue so you might understand the scale of this previous engagement process (Attachment F).

Shoal Creek Restoration

In April 2014, WPD began construction of a \$6.2 million restoration project on Shoal Creek along Pease Park. The project includes stream bank erosion control, invasive plant removal, rain meadows, relocating portions of the wastewater sewer currently in the creek bed, trail improvements, de-compacting soils and planting new trees and native plants. Completion of construction is expected by early of 2016 and then a 3-year landscape maintenance period follows thereafter. The scope and design of this large-scale restoration project was predicated on PARD's commitment to nurture the fragile watershed, which includes limiting recreational uses that may have an adverse effect on the environment. For the long-term sustainability of the restoration project, adverse impacts to the landscape by recreational uses along the creek will be reduced by the use of designated pathways, creek access points and creek crossings. For more information about this project, please visit: <http://www.austintexas.gov/ShoalCreekRestoration>.

Update on Disc Golf Improvements

PARD is committed to providing quality recreational disc golf opportunities throughout Austin and is a leader in the implementation of progressive disc golf planning. In 2014, PARD and WPD jointly invested \$250,000 in the Zilker Park Disc Golf Course, including drainage improvements, vegetation management and improvement of course features. PARD invested \$300,000 in the development of a new 18-hole disc golf course at the Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park, which opened in 2012. In recent years, PARD has made improvements to disc golf courses at Slaughter Creek Metropolitan Park and Mary Moore Searight Metropolitan Park.

For updated information about the master plan process, please visit <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/pease-district-park-master-plan>.

Should you have further questions or require additional information, please contact Ricardo Soliz, Division Manager, at (512)974-9452.

cc: Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Cora D. Wright, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Ricardo Soliz, Division Manager, Parks and Recreation Department


Attachments:

Attachment A – PARD Memo to Council, October 30, 2009
Attachment B – WPD Memo to PARD, March 9, 2010
Attachment C – PARD Memo to Council, April 16, 2010
Attachment D – PARD Memo to Council, November 9, 2010
Attachment E – PARD Memo to Parks and Recreation Board, February 21, 2014
Attachment F – Media Coverage



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

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

DATE: October 30, 2009

SUBJECT: Public Process Regarding Pease Park Water Quality and Stream Restoration

Pease Park, gifted to the City of Austin in 1875, is a popular disc golf location located north of 15th St. and Lamar Blvd. and within blocks of the University of Texas. In addition, the park has been the home to the annual Eeyore's Birthday Celebration since 1974. This yearly celebration brings thousands of people to the park. This memo concerns the relocation of the disc golfers and the Pease Park Project Master Plan which includes the following projects: Streambank Stabilization, Stormwater Treatment Systems and Riparian Restoration.

- A. **Streambank Stabilization:** Specific locations of the Shoal Creek streambank are eroding and have been identified as requiring stabilization. Stabilization techniques will include limestone boulders, erosion control fabric and native riparian vegetation.
- B. **Stormwater Treatment Systems:** Proposed water quality facilities within the park will intercept runoff from numerous storm sewer lines which transport stormwater to the creek. The types of treatment systems that are anticipated primarily include biofiltration ponds and rain gardens. The systems will promote infiltration, increase residual soil moisture and replenish the ground water table. These landscape features will be integrated into the Park and shall serve as enhancements.
- C. **Riparian Restoration:** The project will tackle landscape restoration efforts in areas near the creek and within 60 feet from top of the bank.

Several different activities in Pease Park have contributed to the erosion and to the compacted soils, which have worn away grass, and understory vegetation. Also, these activities specifically disc golf has damaged the bark of mature trees in several areas of the Park. These activities contribute to the erosion and sedimentation in Shoal Creek and the decline of the trees along the creek. The arrangement of the golf tees and baskets, as well as a certain random quality in the golfer's aim, carries the disc golf impact across a wide area, including areas where the topography is steep and/or the vegetation is shaded. The opportunity to play at a location near the University of Texas and downtown Austin,

through an interesting, varied, and largely shaded course, attracts hundreds of golfers on a typical week or weekend day. Riparian soil and vegetation through the disc golf course on steep or shaded ground cannot be maintained within the context of this daily impact.

An alternative course at another convenient location will reduce the disc golf traffic in Pease Park.

Staff will conduct public discussions to collect feedback from the all the stakeholders in the area of Pease Park. Key dates in the communication process are:

August 26, 2009	Met with key stakeholders of Pease Park that included Pease Neighborhood, Trees for Pease, Eeyores and Parks Foundation. The consensus was to move forward with the project as quickly as possible. Disc golfers were invited but none attended.
November 4, 2009	Targeted brainstorming session with Waterloo Disc Golf Association and Austin Parks Foundation regarding restoration plan and staff proposal.
January - February 2010	Staff briefing at Joint Environmental/Parks Board Subcommittee.
February 17, 2010	Environmental Board staff briefing
February 23, 2010	Parks Board staff briefing
April - May 2010	Public hearings. Place the proposal for action and public input.
Week of September 1, 2010	Memo to Council and City Manager detailing final plan following public meetings.
October 2011	Park closed for Project.

I appreciate your continued support as we work to protect our public resources. Should you have any further questions please advise.

CC: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Farhad Madani, PARD Assistant Director
Bill Wells, PARD Division Manager



MEMORANDUM

TO: Farhad Madani, Assistant Director
Parks and Recreation Department

FROM: Nancy McClintock, Assistant Director
Watershed Protection Department

DATE: March 9, 2010

SUBJECT: Pease Park Restoration

As requested, this memo documents the Watershed Protection Department perspective on the need for restorative activity in Pease Park to preserve it as a functioning, sustainable natural resource and the potential timeline for such a restoration.

Over the past 15 years, scientific monitoring and informal observations by staff and citizens have documented the degradation of the land and water resources of Shoal Creek and its adjacent floodplain as it flows through Pease Park. Lower Shoal Creek (including Pease Park) has consistently ranked in the bottom 20% of COA waterways in terms of polluted water, poor vegetation conditions and stream erosion. This information is measured by the Environmental Integrity Index on a regular basis by the Watershed Protection Department. Additionally, over the past three years concerned neighbors and park users have brought to the City's attention the degraded conditions of Pease Park.

The primary causes of the degradation include: 1) upstream urbanization that has resulted in increased flood flows causing streambank erosion; 2) wastewater lines laid in the bottom of Shoal Creek that leak sewage into the stream; 3) high park use from disc golfers, dog users, hike and bike trail users and special events that cause soil compaction, native plant deterioration, high bacteria levels and additional streambank erosion from uncontrolled access to the creek.

As a result of the increasing citizen awareness of the degradation of Pease Park, the Austin Parks Foundation and several volunteer groups have organized and implemented several small scale projects to begin restoring the damaged soils and vegetation in Pease Park.

In response to monitoring data and citizen group requests for the City to begin addressing the problems in Pease, the Watershed Protection Department, in conjunction with PARD staff, has proposed a suite of Capital Improvement Projects designed to: 1) improve the water quality in

Shoal Creek; 2) repair significant streambank erosion that threatens and consumes usable park land; 3) restore healthy soil and vegetation along the creek.

Watershed Protection has completed a Preliminary Report that documents the existing conditions and suggests specific projects that could be undertaken to provide immediate and lasting improvement to the land and water resources within Pease Park. The projects include: 1) small scale Green Infrastructure improvements- like rain gardens and vegetated filter strips- to remove pollutants from runoff that flows through the park and to increase groundwater recharge; 2) streambank stabilization projects to prevent additional loss of park land and reduce hazards associated with tall, steep precipices; 3) rejuvenation of depleted soil and replanting the near-creek zone with a diverse mix of hardy, native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers; 4) re-locate wastewater lines from the creek bottom to the over bank area, similar to the Austin Clean Water Program projects in Upper Pease Park.

However, such projects will be unlikely to succeed if the current disc golf course remains in place. It is apparent that the soil compaction, erosion and damage to vegetation, which are observable throughout much of the narrow park, have resulted in large part from this activity. The timeframe for the City to move forward on the proposed improvements is dependent upon the community reaching consensus on the future land uses of Pease Park; the nature of the restoration is largely dependent upon whether or not disc golf remains a component of Pease Park. If disc golf is relocated from Pease Park, WPD will be able to implement the full suite of solutions. If disc golf remains in its current configuration, WPD will be limited to isolated streambank stabilization projects and relocation of the wastewater lines. A preliminary investigation by WPD and PARD staff was unable to identify an alternate layout for disc golf on this tract of land.

If disc golf is moved to another park, Watershed Protection can initiate the project according to the following estimated timeline:

Transform Preliminary Plans into Design Plans	1 year
Permitting	3 months
Bid and Award	4 months
Issue Notice to Proceed	2 months

If permitting proceeds via the General Permit, the timeline can be reduced by three months. The earliest forecasted time by which the City can begin construction is 18 months from the time that PARD has finalized plans for future uses in the Park. Total construction time will in all likelihood stretch over a two year period, with the projects being implemented in three to four phases so that the entire park is not closed down for that period of time.

We appreciate the ability to partner with Parks and Recreation on the unique opportunity to restore one of Austin's most beloved parks. Please call me at 974-2652 or Mike Kelly at 974-6591 if you need additional information at this time.

Pease Park Restoration
Page 3 of 3
March 9, 2010

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy McClintock".

Nancy McClintock, Assistant Director
Watershed Protection Department

MK:

cc: Victoria Li, P.E. Director, WPD
Sara L. Hensley, Director, PARD



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

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

DATE: April 16, 2010

SUBJECT: Disc Golf Courses

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update on completed and scheduled disc golf program improvements. There are five (5) disc golf courses throughout the park system. Recognizing the growing demands for disc golf in the Austin area, as evidenced by the wear and tear in certain areas, the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) has been progressively evaluating increased usage, unintended environmental impacts, as well as overall playing quality of the disc golf courses for the past two years.

To date, we have successfully renovated two of the disc golf courses and are planning additional improvements and possible relocations of two courses over the next 18 months.

Pease Park

The disc golf course at Pease Park is an over utilized, 18 hole course, that was constructed in 1989 in central west Austin. The impact of over use of the course has resulted in significant deterioration of the park. PARC and the Watershed Protection Department (WPD) are working jointly to finalize plans for environmental remediation to impacted areas. These improvements include incorporating sustainable bank stabilization solutions, vegetative buffers along the creek's edges, and invasive species removal. This will require closure of the course no later than December 30, 2010 to allow the park to rest in preparation for the WPD project. As a result of this closure, an alternate disc golf course is being considered at the Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park, located along the Colorado River at Pleasant Valley Road. This 18 hole disc golf course is estimated to be completed in the spring of 2011. The park can accommodate a disc golf course on the southern end adjacent to Austin Community College, without impacting the master plan for the park.

Bartholomew Park

Located in northeast Austin, adjacent to the Mueller Development, Bartholomew Park offers a 14 hole disc golf course that was constructed in 1982. PARC plans to work with the community to master plan the park and look at a re-purpose opportunity to the current disc golf course.

Mary Moore Searight Park

Mary Moore Searight Park is located in south Austin at Slaughter Lane near South 1st Street. The park offers an 18 hole disc golf course that was constructed in 1991. PARD completed a number of improvements to minimize negative environmental impacts to the park in April 2010, including the installation of permanent erosion controls throughout the course, invasive species removal, and installation of hard surface tee pads to prevent further erosion.

Circle C Ranch Metropolitan Park

Situated in far south Austin, Circle C Ranch Metropolitan Park offers an 18 hole course that was constructed in 1992. In collaboration with the Circle C neighborhood, substantial improvements were made to the course at Circle C Park in May 2009. These improvements resulted in reducing the number of holes from 21 to 18, the installation of permanent erosion controls, invasive species removal throughout the course, and installation of hard surface tee pads to prevent further erosion.

Zilker Park

Located on the west end of Zilker Park in central Austin, this park offers an 18 hole disc golf course that was constructed in 1987. PARD plans to renovate the existing disc golf course in 2011 to reduce the environmental impacts, and to increase the playing quality similar to the other previously mentioned courses.

Little Walnut Creek Greenbelt

In 2006, PARD began to evaluate this property, located in east Austin at 51st Street and Springdale Road, as the site for the Raul Alvarez disc golf course. PARD has now determined that the property is not feasible for the development of a disc golf course facility due to financial and environmental constraints.

PARD continues to be committed to providing quality recreational disc golf opportunities throughout Austin. This requires the department to correct unintended adverse impacts to the environment, park system and community, by incorporating responsible land management techniques, and implementing progressive disc golf course planning and design standards for the future.

The Department is making improvements to the Mary Moore Searight, Circle C and Zilker Park disc golf courses. In addition development is underway of the new 18 hole course at Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park. These improvements will offer ample quality disc golf courses to the city of Austin residents as well as guests.

If you require additional information, please contact Tony Arnold, Project Manager, at 974-9471.

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Cora Wright, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

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

DATE: November 9, 2010

SUBJECT: Update on Disc Golf at Pease Park

Sara L. Hensley

In June 2010, a meeting was held with the Disc Golf community hosted jointly by the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) and the Watershed Protection Department (WPD). At that time, we shared with the community plans to close the Disc Golf Course at Pease Park, as well as closing the greater Shoal Creek Greenbelt at a later date for improvements to the Shoal Creek Corridor.

PARD has continued to meet with the Disc Golf community to develop long range plans for the placement and development of disc golf facilities in the Austin park system. As a result, a goal has been set to locate a facility on the east side of Interstate 35. At this time, the newly acquired property located adjacent to the Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park is being discussed with the community, (two meetings have been held with another planned for November 29, 2010). All new and reconstructed disc golf courses are being designed and built with sustainability best practices.

PARD had planned to close the Disc Golf course at Pease Park at the time a new facility was identified, which would be no later than the end of February 2011. However, since we are making good progress on an alternative site, I am recommending we close the course on December 31, 2010.

The Contract and Land Management Department has established May 2011 as the date by which WPD should have a design firm under contract to begin the design process for the Shoal Creek Corridor project. The final design should be completed by early summer 2012, and construction in the Pease Park should physically commence in spring 2013. During the construction phase there should be continued public access, but some areas will be restricted while others will remain open.

If you have any question, please feel free to contact me at 974-6717.

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Sue Edwards, Assistant City Manager
Victoria Li, Director, Watershed Protection Department
Kelly Snook, ASLA, Assistant Director, PARD



MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks and Recreation Board

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

DATE: February 21, 2014

SUBJECT: Pease Park Master Plan Update

The Pease District Park Master Plan process is off to an excellent start with more than 500 people providing input through the planning process. The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department will host the second public input meeting for the Pease Park Master Plan on **Thursday, February 27, from 6:00-8:00 p.m.** at the Lamar Senior Activity Center at 2874 Shoal Crest Avenue. The design team will review the input received to date and will present initial concepts and options that reflect the community's desire to protect and enhance one of the city's oldest parks.

The Pease Park Conservancy has raised funds for the master plan, which will be developed by Wallace, Roberts & Todd, LLC (WRT). WRT and the Pease Park Conservancy are undertaking the master plan process in close partnership with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

As a part of the public input phase, PARD has received a great deal of feedback from the Austin community about their vision for the future of Pease Park. PARD has also received feedback from the disc golf community about their desire to see disc golf reintroduced in Pease Park. Disc golf was removed from Pease Park in late 2011 after several years of study and discussions with Urban Forestry Division and the Watershed Protection Department about the park's ecological degradation including severe erosion and tree health issues. The decision to remove disc golf was made after much deliberation and at least two public meetings were held with concerned stakeholders. To mitigate the loss of the Pease Park disc golf course, PARD developed an 18-hole golf course at Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Metropolitan Park. The \$300,000 course opened in June, 2012, and has been a great success. Currently, improvements such as erosion control, revegetation and enhanced amenities are also being made in the Zilker Metropolitan Park Disc Golf Course and are slated to be completed in Summer, 2014. In recent years, PARD has made improvements to disc golf courses at Slaughter Creek Metropolitan Park and Mary Moore Searight Metropolitan Park.

As part of continuing community engagement throughout the Pease Park Master Plan process, PARD may continue to hear requests for disc golf to be returned to Pease Park. We value this input as it informs our future planning with respect to the community's recreational needs. Further, PARD can look for ways to better market our many disc golf courses throughout the city. At this time, PARD does not recommend the reintroduction of disc golf in Pease Park.

In 2014, the Watershed Protection Department will embark on a major restoration project in Pease Park and Shoal Creek. The project will include erosion control, invasive plant removal, planting new trees and plants, adding water gardens and relocating the portions of the sewer drain currently located inside the creek. This project is just the beginning of efforts by the City of Austin and the Pease Park Conservancy to restore ecological balance to Pease Park.

A third public engagement meeting will be held in this summer to present a draft of the Pease Park Master Plan. The City of Austin held a well-attended public meeting in November, 2013, and conducted public surveys to solicit input from community members in the formulation of the Master Plan, which should be completed in the early fall of 2014. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department, Austin Parks and Recreation Board and City Council must review and approve the Master Plan before its presentation to the City of Council for final approval.

For updated information about the master plan process, please visit <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/pease-district-park-master-plan>.

http://www.austin360.com/recreation/content/recreation/stories/2009/03/0309fi_tcity.html

RECREATION

Worn-out Pease Park still needs saving

Volunteers pitch in to remove invasive species and plant trees as disc golf use debated.

By **Pamela LeBlanc**

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Sunday, March 08, 2009

Two years after an ecological study described the condition of Pease Park as critical, the park still looks as if an Old West cattle drive just rolled through.

Trampled ground, eroding creek banks and dying trees have turned parts of the city's second-oldest park, which snakes along Shoal Creek between 15th and 24th streets, into a barren landscape. A tree-snapping wind storm in May and a worsening drought have dealt more blows, and invasive species such as chinaberry, nandina and ligustrum are choking out native plants.

"It's past the point where, if we let it rest, it will recover," says Jill Nokes, a horticulturist and ecologist who specializes in native plants and landscape restoration. "It can't recover without intervention."

That intervention could include restrictions unlikely to be welcomed by some of the park's most enthusiastic users.

The ecological assessment, done by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in 2007, recommended removing undesirable species, aerating the hardened soil, putting in compost or mulch and planting new trees. It also suggested installing stairs and terraces to keep foot traffic on established trails and away from damaged areas.

Adopting the recommendations could mean blocking access to certain parts of the park while they recover, says biologist Dick Davis, who worked on the study. "That doesn't necessarily mean putting up big barbed-wire fences, but trying to direct traffic onto selected pathways," he says.

Then and now

The park was once a lush, mostly unmanicured oasis near Austin's center. As the city's population grew, the number of park users swelled, compacting the shallow soils. Periodic flooding worsened by upstream development scoured the creek and eroded its banks.

"It's in pretty bad shape," agrees Sara Hensley, the new Austin parks director. "It's tired. It's been loved to death."

Today, Pease Park is the scene of the drum-circling, tie-dye-drenched annual Eeyore's Birthday Party each spring. It's popular with hikers, picnickers, cyclists and dog walkers. And ever since 1989, a wildly popular 18-hole disc golf course has put unique pressures on the narrow, fragile strip of parkland along North Lamar Boulevard.

On warm weekend afternoons, up to 700 disc golfers converge on Pease, criss-crossing the creek and scrambling off trail as they pitch flying discs into metal baskets. The constant activity along the environmentally sensitive creek corridor, the assessment says, exacerbates the park's decline. Park activists point to bare ground and tree trunks damaged by errant discs.

While some Austin parks with disc golf alternate between two courses, letting one recover for part of the year while the other is in play, there's barely enough room for one course at Pease, much less two.

Some fans of the park, including Nokes and Tina Contros, an architect who is involved with the Old Enfield Homeowners Association nearby, suggest it's time to redesign the course or close it down. At the least, the city could charge disc golfers a greens fee to help pay for park maintenance and repair, they say.

"It's just not the right use anymore," Contros says.

The disc golfers say they're not the only ones to blame, and point out that they've held workdays to maintain and enhance the course.

"We're trying to do things more environmentally friendly, minimizing trips across the creek and off trails," says Damon Neth, an avid disc golfer and owner of Disc Nation store. "It's in everyone's best interest for parks to be in good playable condition for disc golf and other users as well. We don't want to be in conflict or overrun the park. We want to be able to play disc golf in all these great courses around Austin."

Lou Moreno, a board member of the Waterloo Disc Golf Club, says disc golfers are working at Circle C Ranch Metropolitan Park on Slaughter Creek to find ways to reduce their impact. "If it works, it's something we would like to spread to other disc golf courses," Moreno says.

Planting trees

The condition of the park has galvanized people such as lawyer Richard Craig, who created the nonprofit Friends of Pease Park.

"I would get mad driving by, thinking why wouldn't somebody do something," Craig says. "The soil was compacted, the trees need an arborist. Other cities' parks look better. We're a green city, an environmentally friendly city — why can't we do as well as Waco does with their parks?"

In a matter of months, he raised \$18,000 to pay for irrigation for 100 new trees that were planted by volunteers in February. Now Craig hopes to make tree planting an annual event.

The Austin Parks Foundation, led by executive director Charlie McCabe, has sponsored more than 50 workdays at the blighted park in the past three years. Volunteers have attacked invasive species and made trail improvements. In February, they buried erosion check logs on the hillside and strategically arranged brush barriers to slow runoff. "It's triage, really," McCabe says.

Park activists say the city must take more drastic steps to save Pease.

Hensley, the city's parks director, says she wants to meet with the disc golf community to discuss whether there are more suitable locations for a disc golf course. Disc golfers also play at Bartholomew District Park and Mary Moore Searight Metropolitan Park in addition to Zilker, Circle C and Pease parks. The city does not charge them fees.

"I'm not going to come out right now and say 'Let's close it down,'" Hensley says of the Pease Park disc golf course. "But anybody who has worked with turf management knows you can't use and reuse and reuse without letting it rest."

If it's going to be saved, the park needs more funding to pay for soil aeration, more trees and trail maintenance and improvements. But first it needs a commitment from the city and its people to keep it alive.

"So many people ride or run through the park and just get angry," Craig says. "Instead of getting angry, we need to get busy."

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Updated: 11:08 p.m. Thursday, June 3, 2010 | Posted: 11:07 p.m. Thursday, June 3, 2010

City plans to close Pease Park disc golf course

Officials say sport damages park; disc golfers oppose closure.

By Lindsey Bomnin

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

The City of Austin will close down the disc golf course in Pease Park by the end of the year as part of a restoration of the park.

Most of the restoration will occur along Shoal Creek, where most of the disc golf course is, said Sarah Hensley, director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

"The good news is, people love our park," Hensley said. "The bad news is, people love our park."

Disc golf and other park activities have overly compacted the soil, damaged tree bark and led to unstable creek banks and poor water quality at the park, Hensley said.

"Putting a disc golf area close to the road, in and across major areas of a park that are (used for other purposes) is not the right thing to do in the environment," Hensley said.

Disc golfers such as Damon Neth, founder of Austin-based Disc Nation, were upset by the decision, which Hensley said was made about a week ago.

"Pease is part of Austin's disc golf's history," Neth said. "For a city that has a 'Keep Austin Weird' culture, disc golf is a natural fit."

Neth said disc golfers have done volunteer work to improve courses and to maintain Austin's parks. Players also donate some of their tournament proceeds to organizations such as Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Ronald McDonald House Charities.

"We seem to get cast more as users and takers rather than givers," Neth said.

Veteran disc golfer Kurt Standiford said players will still go to Pease even without a course, but they will resort to playing "object golf," where the targets will probably be trees.

"The whole idea of shutting down the whole course is just ludicrous," Standiford said. "We can work around almost any plan that the city has."

Jill Nokes, a board member of the Austin Parks Foundation, said Pease's rocky, flood-prone areas are difficult to maintain when they are overused.

"People are very vociferous about their rights, but nobody lobbies for Mother Nature," Nokes said. "For the sake of the landscape, we have to make a change here."

Plans are already in the works to build a state-of-the-art 18-hole disc golf course at Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park before the closing of the Pease course.

"What we want to do is create areas for disc golf, BMX, what people might consider nontraditional, and they are just as important to us as any other thing that people do," Hensley said.

She said her department will enlist disc golfers' expertise to help develop the course and will continue to work with them for future disc golfing projects.

lbomnin@statesman.com; 445-3812

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Disc golfers urge city to keep favorite Pease course open

Park to be restored; course not part of future plans

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By Lindsey Bomnin

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Dozens of disc golfers packed a meeting room Thursday night and urged city officials to scrap a plan to permanently close a favorite Central Austin course.

Austin parks and recreation officials decided late last month to remove the disc golf course in Pease Park as part of plans to restore the park, which has suffered from overuse, they said.

"We're just at a point where we really need to do something to help save the beauty of this park," said Danny Castro, division manager of the department, who led the meeting. "I'm just surprised people think we pulled this information out of a hat yesterday."

The city said it would review the disc golfers' request to keep the course, but didn't make any promises Thursday.

"I know it's possible to bring back an environmentally friendly course to Pease Park," said Lisa Fajkus, an avid disc golfer.

The golfers said they're being unfairly blamed for compacted soil and creek erosion.

Pease is one of five disc golf courses in Austin, but the only one convenient to the University of Texas campus and Central Austin, noted some speakers at the Lamar Senior Activity Center off North Lamar Boulevard. The five courses serve about 900 disc golfers, according to data collected by the Waterloo Disc Golf Club.

The city plans to build a new 18-hole course at another park, and is considering Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park, Onion Creek District Park, Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park and Davis/White Northeast Park. Officials said they won't close the course at Pease until the new course is built.

"We need to put in more disc golf courses in the city to take the pressure off of Pease Park," Gordon Maxim-Kelley, president of Waterloo Disc Golf Club, said.

Many disc golfers said they agree the park restoration is necessary.

"Pease Park isn't playable. It's got holes everywhere," said Dan Mueller, a disc golfing enthusiast. But, he said he thinks disc golfers can help the city improve the course.

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Disc Golfers Vent on Pease Park Closure

June 17, 2010 10:00 pm by: Nathan Bernier

Parks and Recreation gave disc golfers a chance to ask questions and to vent last night over a decision to close the Pease Park course permanently.



About a hundred disc golfers showed up to the Lamar Senior Activity Center Thursday night. Parks and Recreation officials showed them a power point presentation explaining why the disc golf should be removed from [Pease Park](#).

Then they opened up the floor to comments and questions. There were a lot.

"If you could understand that that place is what's sacred to us, not some park that we've got to get in a bus or get in our car [to access]," said Justin Davis, a disc golfer.

"I mean, that place is where we play disc golf, and you're taking away and you cannot replace it. We need you to understand what you're doing to hundreds and hundreds of people. That cannot every be changed if you take those baskets out."

Parks and Recreation assistant director Kelly Snook was there to respond to disc golfers concerns.

"I think we're saying the same [thing] that the place is sacred, and if we don't do something right now to protect it, nobody's going to get to play there or do anything there," Snook said.

The Parks and Recreation Department says Pease Park is in desperate need of a break, and a repair. There is significant erosion on the banks of Shoal Creek, which runs right through it. Soil is so compacted in some parts of the park that plants can't grow.

Snook said the city does not blame disc golf alone for the problems, but she said it wasn't helping either.

Some disc golfers actually agree with her. Dan Mueller has been playing for fifteen years.

"I've thought there's been problems in that park forever," Mueller said while smoking a cigarette outside the public meeting.

"I mean, I golf to be in nature, and I think that once the restoration is in place, a nine hole course there would probably be beautiful. We could probably do an erosion control aspect to it," he said.

There may be political support among elected officials for disc golf to return in some form at Pease Park. The only City Council member to show up to the meeting was [Chris Riley](#).

"I'm hopeful that there's some way that we can preserve some form of disc golf in the long term," Riley said.

Earlier this month, Parks and Recreation director Sara Hensley echoed that optimism in [an interview with KUT News](#). She said she hoped there could be something for disc golfers after the Pease Park restoration project.

But last night, Hensley's assistant director Snook was much less optimistic.

"We would be open to that, but really and honestly right now, we're not seeing a good solution. So it's hard for us to promise that there is one," Snook said.

Parks and Recreation will be opening a new disc golf course at [Roy G. Guerrero Park](#) on the East Side. Officials say more meetings are planned before Pease Park course is closed at the end of December, but exact dates have not been announced.

Disc golfers have set up a Facebook page for supporters [here](#).

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No Discs, No Pease

City to move disc golf course from Pease

It was a sad day for local disc golfers when, in early June, the city of Austin announced the eventual shutdown of the course at **Pease Park**, along Lamar Boulevard. A favorite of disc golfers for years, the course and its surrounding park have suffered visibly from the constant traffic and play of the disc golfers, the impact of the park's other patrons, assaults by Mother Nature, and a lack of city resources to adequately fund proper maintenance. While the disc golfers have been hoping to work with the city to redesign the course at Pease and save it, this week that does not seem likely.



A city report points to "trampling and soil compaction" in the area surrounding this disc golf basket at Pease Park.

Asked if the city will reconsider closing the Pease course, Parks and Recreation Department Director **Sara Hensley** said: "No, not really ... because I'm not going to shut it down until we have an alternative course. I want to make sure the disc golfers have another course that is just as good, if not better than Pease. I'm not going to do anything until I know another course is up and running – and I mean a brand-new course."

Hensley added that the city would like to work with the disc golf community to make the changeover as painless as possible. The most likely location for the new course, she said, would be at the **Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park**, west of Airport Boulevard and south of Cesar Chavez, near the 183 interchange. But the course would not take away any of the land currently in use at the park. "This is an additional piece that's next door to it. I don't want people to get the impression that we're taking away a piece of property that had already been master-planned," Hensley said.

The new facility would be a stand-alone course and not part of a multiuse park. **Lou Moreno** of the **Waterloo Disc Golf Club** commented, "There are some players – especially people with families, couples, people with kids – that feel more comfortable in a multiuse park as opposed to being isolated." Moreno did concede that Guerrero "is a good option, but there still is a need for disc golf in more Central Austin." He listed **Hancock Park** as one location that is suitable and easily accessible for players, especially those without cars. For their part, Austin's disc golfers have amassed thousands of volunteer hours working on improvements at Pease during their 20-plus-year history with the park.

Hensley stressed the advantages in locating the new course at Guerrero. "The reason we selected that area by Roy G. was that it was on the bus line, that it was an area that was not heavily treed, and had more open areas but some trees where you could work around it like we did at Slaughter Creek Park that worked so well – and truthfully, if you want to look at how to do a disc golf course, the best ones to look at are the ones that our disc golf friends helped us build at **Slaughter Creek** and **Mary Moore Searight**. And those were both done in conjunction with disc golf groups

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who helped us put it together and do it right."

Hensley is quick to point out that there are many usage and wear issues at Pease, not just those related to disc golf. "There was a study conducted by the **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center** on Pease Park as a whole, and it's not just disc golfers ... but it is a sport that has taken a toll on the park. But just as well has the weather ... and then of course our lack of maintenance, quite frankly. And it's not our staff's fault," she added. "It's the lack of resources."

"The problem is we've lost a lot of trees, and we're wanting to go in and plant new trees. But we can't go in and plant a bunch of trees when you're throwing that disc in the middle of the trees. So what we want to do is give Pease Park a chance ... and to really try to get the park back to its beautiful state. If you look at a map or picture of this park back when we received this park [from] Gov. Pease, it was a beautiful, lush park. And now the foliage, if you take an aerial shot of it, we've lost a lot of our foliage, and not just from disc golf."

"There's two things, that is one. The fact is that we've gotta bring the park back. And two, this is also in anticipation [of a] major undertaking of a watershed project there, and it doesn't start until next year. What we wanted to do was let the park rest a bit before they come in and start staging equipment. And they'll be taking out a handful or more of those disc golf sites anyway for this yearlong construction."

The closure of the course at Pease Park is certainly a blow, but there is hope that the city and the disc golf community can work together to build a brand-new course almost as accessible as Pease. To help make that happen, there will be a stakeholders meeting Thursday, June 17, at 6:30pm at the Lamar Senior Activity Center (2874 Shoal Crest) on the Existing Conditions of Pease Park and Shoal Creek Greenbelt.

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Planting a Place in the Shade

Volunteers help Pease Park turn new leaf

BY MICHAEL KING PHOTOS BY MICHAEL KING

In 2007, the **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center** released an "ecological assessment" of **Pease Park** concluding that the park "is being loved to death." Heavy use by hikers and runners, disc golf and volleyball players, dog owners in the leash-free area, and ordinary parkgoers, the study said, had produced "significant deterioration and depletion of the landscape" including "increasing areas of bare rock and eroded, compacted soils found throughout the park." Indirect effects included "degraded wildlife habitat, less species diversity, and death or weakening of the park's mature trees with little natural regeneration of desirable plants to replace them." The result is not just a loss of natural beauty, concluded the study, but increasing deterioration of Shoal Creek as a watershed and the landscape's defenses against floods.



Young trees take root at Pease.

The Wildflower Center recommended "a sustainable restoration and management plan ... to preserve the scenic appeal of this precious slice of open space in the city center for both today's park users and those in generations to come." Specific recommendations included "soil amendments, mechanical manipulation, native plantings, as well as changes in the current use patterns of the park. ... Degradation at the park is to the point that it cannot recover without active intervention."

The report was a spur to the **Parks and Recreation Department's** plan, scheduled to begin major work next year, to restore Pease as the city's "Central Park." The project area will include the creek and its neighboring floodplain in the parkland just south of Gaston Avenue to 15th Street and will address the water quality in the creek, repair the substantial stream bank erosion, and restore healthy soil and vegetation, including more native species.

Currently, the most visible aspect of the park's restoration is "**Trees for Pease**," the volunteer-based project that's a collaboration of the forestry staff of the Parks and Recreation Department, **Austin Parks Foundation**, and most centrally, **Friends of Pease Park**, one of the more than 60 volunteer groups that have adopted parks throughout the city. Members include many of the park's immediate Westside neighbors, as well as miscellaneous volunteer organizations such as **Eeyore's Birthday** organizers, **Waterloo Disc Golf Club** members, and university and community service organizations, that help whenever they can. According to APF Executive Director **Charlie McCabe**, the project proceeds



Katherine Beisner and daughters Ruby and June pitch in at a 2009 volunteer event.

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"under the APF umbrella," where the funds raised are held in trust, then paid against PARD-approved work for planting, irrigation, and maintenance. Like many other local organizations – the Eeyore's Birthday group is a major source – APF also helps recruit volunteers for the big work days. (Planners are well aware of the importance of the annual picnic; PARD's Marty Stump reports that there is "close coordination ... right down to beer truck delivery route and turning radius.")

Friends of Pease Park founder, attorney **Richard Craig**, said that following the group's formation in 2008, 100 trees were planted in the first year, another 200 in 2009, and now the total is more than 350 – with about 98% of them rooted and thriving. Among the trees are 28 different species, he said, all but one (ginkgo) native to Austin. "The park was just losing its tree canopy," Craig said, "with no younger trees appearing to replace the older ones. Over time, that would mean losing all its shade; in Austin, a park losing its shade is not much use to anybody in the summer." On a walk through the park now, among hundreds of newly established young trees, it's possible to imagine in 20 years a dramatically restored canopy of summer shade. With the help of more than \$125,000 in donations, turf-grass has been sodded on the big lawn near Kingsbury Street, along with an automated irrigation system. All this has been accomplished with a combination of PARD resources – from engineers to backhoes – and volunteer handiwork. "Our aim is nothing less than restoring the park to be a public space of the first class, unrivaled in Texas," reads the Trees for Pease Facebook page. "Hundreds of new trees, irrigation, grass, native wildflowers and community friendly amenities are all envisioned."

Praising the inventiveness and energy of city staff and volunteers alike, Craig described the project's recent "third phase," completing the Kingsbury streetscape, planting trees around the splash pad, and adding limestone blocks for parents to sit on while watching their kids. There's also a new roof on the Tudor cottage restroom; Craig envisions a possible refreshment booth to help raise money for the park.

One major concession to the park's fragility is the city's decision to close the popular **disc golf course** at the end of the year, with an expected move to **Roy G. Guerrero Park** or another prepared space, in the short term for the creek restoration, and more permanently because the intensive use is simply too hard on Pease's fairly restricted land, trees, and creek banks. Craig praises the golfers' engagement with the park and their help in the restoration but says the park and creek simply can't sustain the heavy impact. "I always say you could have a golf course that had a herd of elephants run over it every day – if you threw enough money at it, as they do at a country club. The city just doesn't have the money for that kind of intensive maintenance."

Craig hopes the Trees for Pease project will be synergistic for more projects, including additional tree plantings and perhaps a more permanent nature trail – and that it will inspire similar projects elsewhere in Austin. "Austin prides itself on being such a green city," Craig said. "We're a little bit smug about it to some degree, and so we don't put the money and work into maintaining it, like some other cities that might not be naturally endowed with these features. There's no free lunch. If we don't take care of our environment and maintain it, we could look up one day and find we've lost the natural beauty that we've taken for granted."

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