



## **COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORT**

### **OPEN SPACE, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE**

**Date:** October 28, 2015

**Agenda Item #:** 7

**Agenda Item:** Parkland acquisition including  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile park gaps and the progress made, as well as strategic plans for those gaps; utilizing city land for parks; Parks and Recreation Department method for seeking parkland in growth zones and transit nodes.

**Vote** No action taken.

**Sponsors/Department:** CM Pool/Parks & Recreation Department

#### **Summary of Discussion**

Lynn Osgood and Heather K. Way with the City's Urban Parks Workgroup spoke on the importance of parks and how they positively affect the community. Ms. Osgood also shared the findings of the Urban Parks Workgroup Report indicating the need for accessible parks in certain areas of the city. The report focused on where new urban parks were needed; creating strategies to incorporate more innovative and diverse play opportunities for children in parks; creating cost projections to implement the plan; and examined resources and policies needed to facilitate implementation. Steven Zettner with Sustainable Neighborhoods of North Central Austin spoke on the proposed changes to urban parks acquisition policy and shared the organization's proposal on incorporating Village Centers in Austin which is a model based historically for development in Victorian London. Randy Scott with PARD presented a history and overview of the City's urban infill park initiative implementation plan. In 2009 Council passed Resolution No. 20090514-036 directing PARD staff to research how residents in Austin could live within  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of a park, set a vision for becoming the most family friendly city in the country, and added family friendly to its four citywide strategic priorities. As a result, in September 2012 PARD presented their implementation plan to Council and a Bond Election was held in November 2012.

- *2012 Bond Package of six million for parkland acquisition*

CM Pool asked if the six million bond money was used to purchase neighborhood or urban parks. Mr. Scott with the PARD explained that from the six million received, two million was identified for the head waters of Country Club Creek, and the remainder four million was used for other park acquisitions. Mr. Scott also added that the bond language did not specify the acquisition of urban parks but explained that PARD did try to purchase infill parks with the funds. CM Pool recommended a separate meeting to further discuss the bond language and locations of the properties purchased. Additionally, CM Pool requested that staff revise the maps to include parkland locations as well as describe targeted acquisition areas that currently have a

deficit in parkland for the full Council. Mr. Scott offered to provide individual maps for each parkland acquisition purchased with the 2012 Bond Package.

- *City owned property as parkland*

Ms. Way shared that the City owns property that could be transformed into parks with little effort as the City already owns the land and no cost will be associated with acquisition. She further added that it is going to take City Council support and action to help facilitate conversations among City departments to help convert the City owned tracts to parks. In addition, Ms. Way explained that better communication between the City and outside organizations that have similar goals must be improved to better understand Austin's parks and accessibility. CM Pool agreed and hopes to convene a workgroup that will ultimately get the concepts into some resolution language moving forward.

- *Current per capita spending on parks*

CM Pool explained that she would be interested in seeing a graph that would show what the per capita spending is with the central core broken out. Mr. Scott explained that he did not have that information available, but he would send it with the revised maps. CM Pool believes that having this information will be helpful in establishing a foundation of data to better understand expectations and service gaps. Mr. Scott shared that total parkland acreage includes land that is not accessible to the public as well as land that is accessible. CM Pool provided the example of the Balconies Canyon Land Preserve that has specific requirements for it not to be open to the public as its mission is water quality protection. CM Pool suggested that the total parkland acreage be separated into two categories for not accessible and accessible parkland.

- *Agreements between AISD and the City regarding playgrounds*

MPT Tovo understood that PARD may be moving forward with agreements between the City and AISD for additional playgrounds. Mr. Scott explained that PARD has met with AISD to discuss utilizing AISD property for parkland and he shared that AISD is open to the idea and provided PARD with feasibility studies identifying locations where parks can be incorporated. Mr. Scott further explained that PARD does not have funds to develop the parks. MPT Tovo asked what the next steps were for implementation. Mr. Scott said that the City and AISD would have to enter into an agreement on each site, which would also include maintenance agreements. In addition, Mr. Scott explained the bond dollars cannot be used on AISD property and confirmed that the use of general fund money or parkland dedication money was an option. Furthermore, Mr. Scott explained that there are twenty-eight AISD sites on the inner core of the City, and thirty-three AISD sites on the outer core. Ms. Sara Hensley, Director of PARD, shared that the progress, although slow, is moving forward with AISD. Further adding that discussions involve factors about joint development, maintenance concerns, and inspections of playgrounds so that there is no difference in how the City and AISD maintains the quality of playgrounds.

- *Parkland open space for transportation*

Mr. Zettner discussed the opportunity to use open space for transportation functions that could improve the quality of transportation in the City. CM Pool shared some history about the City partnering with the school districts in the 1950s or earlier and how it was common practice to have shared space between organizations. Further adding that it makes sense to look at the open

space where it exists with the transit stops. In addition, CM Pool also mentioned about the possibility of working with surrounding school districts that would be interested in working with the City. She further recommended that PARD make presentations to the Mobility Committee.

**Public Comments**

None

**Direction**

CM Pool suggested that the presentation be taken to the Mobility Committee. CM Pool and MPT Tovo will continue to have conversations about convening a workgroup and will discuss how private-public partnerships can help meet the goals of the City and the interested parties.

**Recommendation**

No action taken.