

A G E N D A



Recommendation for Council Action

Austin City Council

Item ID

66673

Agenda Number

22.

Meeting Date:

1/26/2017

Department:

Parks and Recreation

Subject

Approve a resolution supporting the Austin Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights to increase opportunities for children to learn and play in nature. (Related to Item # 23)

Amount and Source of Funding

Fiscal Note

A fiscal note is not required.

Purchasing Language:

Prior Council Action:

For More Information:

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Council Committee,
Boards and
Commission Action:

September 27, 2016--Unanimously approved by the Parks and Recreation Board on a 9-0-0 vote.

MBE / WBE:

Related Items:

Additional Backup Information

Summary of Austin's Cities Connecting Children to Nature Planning Grant:

In March of 2016 the Austin Parks Department was awarded a \$25,000 Cities Connecting Children to Nature grant by the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network with goal of discovering how the city's government can help connect more children to nature.

From March to September 2016 PARD led a strategic planning process with representatives from ten City departments, AISD, the health sector and non-profit organizations to understand what major gaps and barriers exist in Austin that prevent children from spending more time outside. This work led to the creation of a three-year implementation plan to increase nature connection for children in Austin, specifically for children from low-income areas and minority children.

The Implementation Plan has four key strategies:

1. **Greening School Yards:** Creating a new network of “school parks”
2. **Citywide Public Awareness Campaign:** Informing residents on the importance of regular nature access for overall healthy development
3. **Program and Park Activation:** Creating a comprehensive nature-based program directory and aligning programs with available park space in neighborhoods of need
4. **Policy Creation & Tracking:** Developing and proposing nature access policy initiatives for inclusion in city development code and department master plans

Within strategy # 4 (Policy Creation & Tracking) the Cities Connecting Children to Nature planning team created the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights as a means to express the core tenants of our project and the vision we have for Austin’s children. The Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights is a strategy used by other cities and communities in the United States.

Research has increasingly shown that children who have regular interaction with the natural world are more likely to be healthier, happier and perform better in school. Children who have safe access to park space, nature centers, and natural areas are more resilient, have higher self-esteem, are more confident, better problem solvers, and more creative. Furthermore, communities in disadvantaged areas with access to nature benefit from greater health equity and lowers rates of mortality and disease.

Staff is asking the City Council to adopt the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights to bring public attention to the issue. It gives Council the opportunity to, once again, publically express support for the idea that city government has a role to play in ensuring children of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities should have access to safe natural environments. By passing the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights, the Council will be saying that they believe that nature access provides benefits for children’s emotional, physical and cognitive development, and the city should be promoting nature connection for the health and well-being of their constituents.

Adoption of the Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights does not have a fiscal impact and this action does not commit the City to funding new programs in the future.