



Recommendation for Action

File #: 20-1264, **Agenda Item #:** 39.

9/3/2020

Posting Language

Approve the adoption of the Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park Vision Plan as developed in conjunction with Halff Associates and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

Lead Department

Parks and Recreation Department.

Fiscal Note

This item has no fiscal impact.

Prior Council Action:

September 14, 2016 - Council approved Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Parks and Recreation Department Capital Budget, including allocation of funding, to initiate the planning process for the Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park Vision Plan.

February 16, 2017 - Council unanimously authorized award, negotiation and execution of a contract with Halff Associates to provide consulting services to develop a vision plan for Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park.

For More Information:

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Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:

June 25, 2019 - Approved by the Parks and Recreation Board on a vote of 9-0 with Board Members Taylor and Cottam Sajbel absent.

July 17, 2019 - Approved by the Environmental Commission with conditions on a vote of 6-0 with Commissioners Creel, B. Smith, Neely and Ramberg absent.

Additional Backup Information:

City Council initiated the vision planning process for Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park through the allocation of funding in the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Parks and Recreation Department Capital Budget. Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park is Austin's largest metropolitan park and is located on the far eastern boundary of Austin, just west of State Highway 130. The park is 3,695 acres, including a 1.165-acre lake.

The goal of the planning process was to determine a vision for Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park that considers the growth of the city as a whole and in the immediate area, as well as an opportunity to meet current and future recreational needs. Further, the proposed vision plan reflects the most recent and evolving trends in park planning and design and examines the options for innovative funding mechanisms to ensure that implementation is supported in a feasible and achievable manner.

Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park was first developed in the mid-1960s with the construction of the Decker steam turbine plant, which necessitated the development of the man-made lake. Despite early planning

efforts, which most notably proposed the development of a golf course, full park development has yet to take place. The park currently includes two existing nature preserves and the Travis County Exposition Center, as well as hike and bike trails, picnic areas, volleyball courts, boat ramps, fishing piers, a skeet shooting range, and a model airplane range.

Halff Associates, a local landscape architecture firm, was procured through a Request for Qualifications process in February 2017 with a contract not to exceed \$350,000. The public engagement process began in March 2018 and a draft vision plan was completed in May 2019. The public engagement process included four public meetings at Decker Middle School, three online surveys, a park intercept survey and two days of small focus group meetings. Focus group meetings were conducted with numerous stakeholders, including existing users of the park such as the skeet and aero-modelers; special events organizers; conservation organizations; developers with active site plans in the area; nearby neighborhood associations; members of the City's Parkland Events Task Force; the University of Texas at Austin Rowing Team; and Rodeo Austin. A Technical Advisory Group representing City departments, including Watershed Protection, Austin Energy, and Austin Water, as well as other public entities such as Travis County and Capital Metro, was organized to provide technical assistance. The Advisory Group met four times throughout the process.

The proposed park vision plan was developed based on citizen feedback and includes program and amenity elements such as a nature center, multiple camping areas, a comprehensive trail network, visitor center, cultural center and premier event spaces with supporting facilities. The vision plan divides the park into two distinct areas: (1) the southern portion, which is more developed and hosts more active recreational opportunities and facilities such as the existing Travis County Exposition Center, a new event facility, access to the public fishing area, boat ramps, and family day area; (2) and the northern portion, which is less developed and is better suited to natural and passive recreation uses such as camping, and also features the two existing nature preserves.

The vision plan is reflective of robust public engagement efforts and will serve as a guide for the future development of Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park to maximize its benefit for the public that uses the park.

Strategic Outcome(s):

Health and Environment; Culture and Lifelong Learning.