



October 12, 2020

Re: Support for Item 21 on 10/15/20 City Council meeting agenda – parkland acquisition at 702 Wood Street

Mayor Adler and City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of Shoal Creek Conservancy (SCC) to express support for the acquisition of 702 Wood Street as public parkland. Our understanding is that this acquisition would be funded through Parkland Dedication funds, which are used to acquire parkland ideally ½ mile or less from the developments which paid the fees in question.

702 Wood Street is a unique and worthy candidate for acquisition in terms of its cultural heritage, its creekside location, and the opportunities it affords to improve safety and accessibility for trail users along this busy link in Austin’s growing trail network.

About Shoal Creek Conservancy

SCC champions the Shoal Creek watershed in order to create a healthy and vibrant community. We envision the Shoal Creek Trail and Bikeway as part of a citywide network of urban trails that makes being active a safe, easy, and daily choice for all Austinites. We work to restore fishable, swimmable waters and mobilize a citywide community to steward public and private lands within the watershed.

In 2018, SCC completed the Shoal Creek Trail Plan, a community-guided vision for the future of the Shoal Creek Trail. The Trail Plan represents the culmination of a year-long stakeholder process facilitated by SCC with active participation by 75+ community stakeholder groups. The Trail Plan envisions a seamless, connected pathway of hike-and-bike trails throughout the Shoal Creek corridor, accessible to all ages and all abilities and connected to other citywide trails. Indeed, the Shoal Creek Trail is poised to become a major link in a planned 30-mile “Big Loop” of urban trails and bikeways traversing the city (in the City’s Urban Trails Plan).



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ivey Kaiser

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Clinton Sayers, President
Sara Koeninger, Vice President
Ulf Habermann, Treasurer
Shannon Stagner, Secretary
Ted Siff, Founding Board President

Kristin Chiles
Brian Greig
Perry Lorenz
Felicia Peña
Carson Sartain
Michelle Slattery
Amy Wanamaker
Catlin Whittington

About the Site

702 Wood Street is part of the Wood Street Historic Settlement, which originated as a community where formerly enslaved people made their homes in Austin at the end of the Civil War. Later, Mexican American families built their lives here in the early 20th century. A Texas Historical Commission Undertold Marker currently commemorates the Wood Street Historic Settlement onsite. Additionally, The Duncan Park Focus Area within the Shoal Creek Trail Plan includes recommendations for interpretation of the Wood Street site. There has been active public interest in conserving this site as public land. As one example, in 2019, community volunteers organized an Austin Design Week event to explore ways to activate the site and interpret its cultural and ecological heritage through programming and design.

As parkland, 702 Wood Street would provide multiple benefits to the public, including the following considerations:

Opportunities to enhance the Shoal Creek Trail

The Shoal Creek Trail from 5th-15th Street, which encompasses the creek frontage at 702 Wood Street, poses a number of challenges to trail users. It is a narrow stretch of the corridor with uneven surfacing and is in need of repairs to ensure its long-term structural integrity. The *Shoal Creek Trail 5th-15th Street Preliminary Engineering Report* (PER), completed in 2017, identifies improvements to bring this trail segment up to urban trail standards and allow it to safely accommodate a high level of use by people of all ages and all abilities. Additionally, the PER identifies opportunities for streambank restoration and landscaping to improve water quality and the ecological health of the Creek. Conserving 702 Wood Street as public land gives us breathing room to create bigger and better changes in the area and create a world class trail for all users.

Creating an accessible trailhead

There is currently an informal entrance to the Shoal Creek Trail situated on a steep slope on the north side of the 6th Street Bridge, less than 450 feet from 702 Wood Street. This entrance is located on private property and is maintained by SCC during volunteer service days. That this entrance developed over time as a “desire path”, despite its suboptimal conditions, reflects the need for a convenient entrance point to the trail in this area. Acquisition of 702 Wood Street presents the opportunity to create a fully accessible trailhead in the vicinity.

In a dense urban area, there is the need for frequent entrance/exit points to a trail since destinations may be located close together in absolute terms, but separated by multiple lanes of traffic. When crossing the street is dangerous and time consuming for cyclists and pedestrians, frequent entrances to an off-street trail make their trip safer and more convenient. Not only is downtown the destination for many commuters on the trail; the Shoal Creek Trail is also the go-to route for making local trips within downtown.

Creekside natural areas

The site’s very nature as creekside land makes it uniquely desirable as a park. No matter where in the world, rivers and creeks call people to their banks. We find that people are drawn to Shoal Creek year-round, whether it is dry or flowing. They go fishing, explore the creek bed, or rest in the natural shade that flourishes along the waterway. We should invest in these special natural places where people want to be. By their very nature, opportunities to create these creekside public places are limited, and we should take advantage of them whenever possible.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ivey Kaiser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "I".

Ivey Kaiser, Executive Director
512-813-9711
ivey@shoalcreekconservancy.org