

# Barton Springs Pool Joint Committee Tree Planting Briefing

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# South Lawn Current Condition

- ▶ **Current canopy is predominantly Pecan**
  - ▶ Nearly monoculture - upwards of 75% of trees around Barton Springs
  - ▶ Mature to over-mature in age
  - ▶ Similar condition
  - ▶ History of branch failures
  - ▶ Overall downward trend (but don't worry!)
- ▶ **Future needs**
  - ▶ More intensive proactive management
  - ▶ Select reduction in spread to prolong life

# Forest Succession Basics

## ▶ Pioneer species

- ▶ Ashe Juniper, Chinaberry, Mesquite, Ligustrum, Cottonwood, Hackberry

## ▶ Young Forest

- ▶ Cottonwood, Hackberry, Cedar Elm, Oak, Pecan, Ash

## ▶ Mature Forest

- ▶ Cedar Elm, Oak, Pecan, Bald Cypress

## ▶ Climax Forest

- ▶ Live Oak, Bur Oak, Chinquapin Oak, Bald Cypress

## ▶ All phases based on tree characteristics

# THE SOUTH GROUNDS

## SOUTH LAWN

The South Lawn is generally characterized by St. Augustine grass under a canopy of pecan trees. It extends from the diving board all the way to the eastern fence, some 400 ft. In the other direction, it slopes up from the Pool deck to level ground some 30 ft. higher. The slope faces the water, and is a popular place for sunbathing, and, clearly visible from sight-seeing points along the northern edge of the Pool, it is one of the enduring icons of Barton Springs. Further from the water, where the ground flattens, it is popular for yoga, tai chi and other life-affirming activities.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Plant more trees*

The huge pecans on the South Lawn towering over the lush lawn is one of the most inviting vistas of Barton Springs. Because the South Lawn is such a beloved feature, care should be taken to avoid temptations to either re-imagine it or to use it to solve functional problems. (Handicapped accessibility or maintenance truck accessibility come to mind.) It is a tree-covered lawn today. It should be a tree-covered lawn going forward. It should not be a tree-covered lawn with accessways cutting through it.

The tree canopy should be inspected to determine the health of the trees and to make recommendations for remedial action or tree replacement. Regardless of the inspection outcome, new trees should be planted to preemptively replenish the canopy and to densify the shade. More shade will reduce irrigation requirements. As with all new trees at Barton Springs, they should be selected from the native Texas tree palette, and should be chosen for their beauty, their durability and their appropriateness to their waterside location. In general, this plan recommends diversifying the canopy from a close to pecan monoculture, to a forest of more diversity but similar form. Where there is sufficient sun, Chinquapin oak, a stately native tree that can grow beside creeks in the Hill Country, would be lovely and have a form similar to the existing large pecans. Another suitable oak may be the Bur Oak. Both of these native oaks are large, majestic, long-lived trees.

#### *Intensify lawn maintenance*

The lawn should be cared for using approved methods that acknowledge the environmental sensitivity of the site. Thus, soil aeration should be considered, but fertilization should not. A more specific description of lawn maintenance issues is included in the 'Grounds



*The South Lawn as seen from the Tree Court.*



# Current Condition



# Current Condition - Pecans



# 2019 Planting Proposal



# Formal Rendering



Questions?



*South Lawn*

- A. Plant more native Texas trees to add shade and to diversify the tree stock at the Pool.
- B. New, more attractive fence.
- C. New turnstiles
- D. New, modest South bathhouse.



Overview' part of this document.

*Replace difficult to maintain lawn areas with planting beds*

Beside the steps up from the Pool sidewalk, beside the downstream dam, the lawn is too steeply sloping to be easily maintained or usable. Replace the lawn with a planting bed, planted with a spreading native groundcover like mountain pea, stemodia or gregg's dalea.

*Minimize runoff into south path*

The existing path to the south gate should be maintained without any changes, at this time. It is the kind of casual, almost accidental element that makes the Barton Springs Pool seem to work so effortlessly, and is used by City staff for small vehicular access to the Pool deck. In heavy rains, however, runoff can course from the south parking lots down

where that works for people visiting the Pool. The second is to recognize that parts of the Pool landscape – the Tree Court in particular – are some of the most heavily used pedestrian areas in Austin. Maintaining and, especially, keeping plants alive in such a landscape requires careful design and comparatively intense maintenance. A goal of this master plan is to keep the springs area landscape green, healthy, and sustainable, while accommodating the ever increasing crowds of visitors.

### **TREES**

Most of the trees around Barton Springs are pecans. Pecans are a majestic native tree that occurs naturally around springs in the Hill Country. Naturally, however, one would expect pecans to occur in a diverse forest with many other kinds of trees. With about 75% of the trees around Barton Springs being pecans, the Barton Springs area is close to a forest monoculture. The problem with a monoculture is that the weaknesses of the dominant species are magnified. In the case of Barton Springs, the weaknesses of pecans are their large, heavy branches, and their tendency to develop often hidden areas of decay within branches and trunks, causing them to drop branches or break without warning. This makes pecans difficult to manage in heavily used pedestrian areas, like Barton Springs. The other prevalent tree around Barton Springs is the cottonwood, which according to the Texas Native Plant Database at Texas A&M has limited use “as a street or landscape tree (because of their) shallow root system, weak wood, and the fact that they are relatively short lived (30-60 years)”. The large cottonwoods around Barton Springs are nearing the end of that range. Management of large old pecans and cottonwoods is an issue wherever they occur. The City of San Antonio removed the largest cottonwoods from the Riverwalk in 1978, as a safety precaution after one of them dropped a large limb. The City of San Marcos has been assessing the park canopy, removing problematic pecans as necessary.

Recognizing the importance of the trees to the ambiance of Barton Springs, the planning team undertook a visual evaluation process in an effort to better understand their condition. The process took the simple approach of assigning a grade from 1 to 5 for each tree. The purpose was never to use these findings as a final word. Instead, it was to gain a general understanding of the general condition of the collection, so that recommendations for further action could be better targeted. The evaluation was performed by the team’s landscape architect and a licensed arborist. They then consulted with the Parks Department’s staff arborist to compare notes.

### **Recommendations**

#### *Tree Assessment*

Of the more than 125 trees evaluated, about one-third of them suggests that a more thor-



*The landscape at Eliza Spring before the influence of the suburban aesthetic.  
PICA 00972, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.*