



To: Mayor Adler and Austin City Council

Protect the right to access parkland- VOTE NO on ITEM 20 on October 21st.

Council Members,

Item 20 on your October 21st council meeting agenda aims to gut critical funding for Austin's parks. The Council is being asked to vote on whether parkland dedication (PLD) fee structure should be revisited (presumably significantly reduced). The pandemic has illustrated just how important our parks are to our health and mental well being. The city's population continues to grow, creating a need for more parkland to serve existing and new residents. The PLD allows the City to purchase parkland and work toward meeting Austin's goal of all residents living within a half mile walk of a park. **Please vote no on item 20 and direct staff to stop any work revisiting the parkland dedication fee structure.**

We understand that this effort is being spearheaded by RECA (Real Estate Council of Austin). It is disturbing that real estate interests were able to push for changes to parkland and get this item on a city council agenda, without council sponsorship, and with no notice or discussion with the parks community. It is also disturbing that staff seem to be moving forward with this "study process" without any guidance from Council that asked them to revisit the fee structure.

RECA helped write the formula for parkland dedication in a collaborative process in 2015-2016, when the current ordinance structure was decided upon. It is therefore not reasonable to believe that they were not aware that the fee could go up since the fee is partially based on the cost of land (reflecting the money needed to purchase parkland).

False arguments are being made over the parkland dedication ordinance influencing affordability. If affordability is the real issue, it should be tackled holistically and with a look at all City fees and all of the non-City determining factors, rather than singling out the public good that is our parks. Apartment dwellers and low income Austinites rely strongly on parks including free summer and after school programs, public pools and playgrounds, and sports facilities.

There are conversations happening at the parks board right now about additional funding mechanisms for parks. The parks community is trying to solve the problem of underfunded parks so that we can meet city-wide goals for parks access and the goals of PARD's long range plan. Parks are also critical in meeting goals in other city plans and planning processes including the Climate Equity Plan, Urban Forest Plan, and ATX Walk Bike Roll.

Austin Parks Foundation urges you to vote No on this item and direct staff to stop any work revisiting the parkland dedication fee structure.

Sincerely,
Colin Wallis, Chief Executive Officer
Austin Parks Foundation