

Mayor Adler, Mayor Pro Tem Harper-Madison, and Council Members,

Since we issued our letter (attached) several insights have come up on this item that we'd like to make sure each of your offices understand. We are asking again that you **please vote No on item 20.**

First and foremost we believe that an ordinance should be clear about what problem it is trying to solve. In speaking to various council offices it was clear that there was a lot of confusion and disagreement over what the problem was that this ordinance would address.

- 1. There is zero evidence that the fee calculation was implemented incorrectly in any way.** The fee is consistent with the formula that has been used each year since 2016.
- 2. The fees were in this year's budget and made accessible to the public during that process.**
- 3. There was no error in notifying the community.** PARD has not historically provided notice outside of meetings over projects and through the public budget process. They acted consistently with years past. Prior to the fees taking effect, PARD published the new fees on their website and sent out notification through the DSD Newsletter.
- 4. Because the fee increase was larger this year (due to rising land costs in Austin), PARD already offered grandfathering to those who submitted an application prior to October 1st.** Those that submitted prior to October 1st were allowed to use last year's fees. This is atypical and a reflection of PARD's good faith effort to be accommodating.
- 5. The cost of land in the PLD calculation is much less than the actual cost of land** because it is a five year average. Fees are about half of what the current cost of buying parkland is.
- 6. PLD fees are not enough to maintain Austin's level of service for parks access.** The PLD calculation asks for 9.4 acres/ 1000 residents. Austin's current park service level is 18 acres/1000 residents. The parks board and others continue to discuss additional strategies to fund Austin's park needs for our growing population.
- 7. As I've mentioned to many of you, if affordability is the true aim, then there are much more thoughtful and comprehensive strategies for achieving these goals.** SMART Housing is exempt from the PLD ordinance. If the target are a handful of affordable housing developers that are not in the SMART program, then that should be the problem statement being discussed.
- 8. There continues to be misleading information including a statement that item 20 is supported by the Parks Department and that APF is not in communication with the Parks Department.** Neither of these are true.

The above points illustrate that there is no valid problem statement that this item is going to address. **Item 20 should never have been posted and we urge all of you to Vote NO on this item.**

Sincerely,
Angela Richter
Advocacy Manager



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