

*Agenda Item 7 Backup: Congress Avenue Bat Colony
Animal Advisory Commission
October 10, 2022*

The Animal Advisory Commission makes the following recommendations concerning the Mexican Free-tail bat colony under the Congress Ave. bridge:

1. We recommend that the City of Austin posts a QR code prominently on the east side of both ends of the Congress Ave. bridge, scannable by a smart phone, that links to a City website where detailed information about Austin's bat colony can be provided. This website should contain information about bat viewing opportunities, safety around bats, and what to do about injured bats. We further recommend that for detailed biological and historical information about these Austin bats, including seasonal cycles that affect viewing opportunities, bat behavior, and the ecological significance of this colony, the City site should be linked to a site specifically designed and frequently updated for this detailed information by Merlin Tuttle's Bat Conservation (MTBC).
2. We recommend that the dysfunctional string of lights on the western side of the Congress Ave. bridge be removed. This structure is a hazard to bats, particularly young bats, as they start their nightly flights for food.
3. We recommend that MTBC specifically be consulted concerning the design and placement of any publicly accessible bat-viewing areas being considered.
4. We recommend that as soon as The Statesman PUD plans become finalized and the positioning of any proposed bat-viewing areas or decks has been determined, the City judiciously trims some of the trees along Lady Bird Lake for better public bat-viewing. Trees do not need to be removed, but some of the lower branches could be trimmed for better sight lines, depending on the location of the bat-viewing areas.
5. Bats inhabit the spaces between the box beams at the south end of the Congress Ave. bridge. These joints are above land. (The spaces have been cemented closed above the Hike and Bike trail.) Vegetation beneath the bats' south-end roosting spaces should not be permitted to grow more than one meter tall. (Bats will abandon this area if vegetation is permitted to grow taller.) A more sophisticated planting could also be designed for this area, as tall vegetation beneath the bridge that interferes with the bats demands more maintenance. We believe this is a project best handled by a collaboration between the Watershed Protection Department and the Austin Trail Conservancy.
6. When it rains, water drains from under the bridge and runs over the Hike and Bike Trail and into Lady Bird Lake. Currently, there is erosion damage to the Trail itself from this stormwater flow. There is a need for some kind of rainwater detention structure to be built on the uphill side of the Trail that overflows into culverts beneath the path and into the Lake to control this flooding.