



PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation Number: (YYYYMMDD-XXX) (XXX is the agenda item number): Recommend further Public Engagement surrounding the DRAFT recommendation for a Unified Non-Profit Role in Operation and Management of Zilker Park

WHEREAS, Zilker Metropolitan Park is a significant public resource for the citizens of Austin, providing critical land for the preservation of the area's natural environment, recreational and exercise space for public enjoyment, protection of the pristine waters of Barton Springs, as well as habitat for the region's important flora and fauna;

WHEREAS, Zilker Park is currently undergoing a planning process known as the Zilker Park Vision Plan, for which a consultant was hired to engage with the public to discern the community members' desires for the future of Zilker Park and to create a draft Zilker Park Vision Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan was completed in November 2022, was open for public comment until January 8, 2023, and is planned to be presented to Boards and Commissions and the City Council; and

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board will be making a full review of the plan and recommendation to City Council in the future but only after it is reviewed by other Boards and Commissions; and

WHEREAS, the "Operation and Management" section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends "that a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit, that can serve as a single point of contact for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, serving as a go-between for the many active organizations and interested parties"... "in a formalized partnership with the city..."; and

WHEREAS, the "Operation and Management" section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends the Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit be tasked with advocacy for the Zilker Park Vision Plan, to engage in private fundraising for capital improvements, and to work with a coalition known as Austin Outdoors to campaign for public funds and advocate for private funding, capital improvements, programming, operations, and maintenance, as well as many other potential roles; and

WHEREAS, the "Operation and Management" section of the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan recommends the Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit be given a role in concession management within Zilker Park and further recommends changes in the revenue sharing and fee models for concessions contracts within Zilker Park; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, in overseeing park operations, maintenance, and programming, follows specific guidelines to keep taxpayer-funded spending accountable and transparent to the public;

WHEREAS, despite good intentions, non-profit organizations are not governmental entities subject to open meetings, public information, bidding, contracting, and other laws intended to allow for transparency and accountability to residents in expenditure of public funds and development of public assets; and

WHEREAS, the recommendation for a unified non-profit partner and recommendations for the partner's role, the change to concessions structures, and other operations and management recommendations would be a significant change to the management of Zilker Park and unprecedented for a municipal park in the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, there is no description of the public engagement undertaken during the engagement portion of the Vision Plan development regarding the role of a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit to oversee programming, concessions, advocacy, and other roles described, nor is there any indication of public support or lack thereof for a Zilker unified (umbrella) non-profit;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Parks & Recreation Board:

- 1) Recommends the Parks and Recreation Department remove all language in the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan referring to the Zilker unified (umbrella non-profit) before the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan is presented to any Boards and Commissions; and
- 2) Recommends City Council direct the Parks & Recreation Department to remove the language; and
- 3) Recommends that this resolution be presented to all boards and commissions and City Council along with the Draft Zilker Park Vision Plan, until there is a public process of community engagement to discern the type of entity, if any, the public feels is appropriate to have a role in the operation, management, concessions management, advocacy, and fundraising for Zilker Park.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote: (Unanimous on a 7-0 vote, 4-3 vote with names of those voting no listed)

Attest: _____

(Staff or board member can sign)