



## PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20230424-8

Date: April 24, 2023

Subject: Safety in Parks

Motioned By: Nancy Barnard

Seconded By: Kim Taylor

### **Recommendation**

Resolved that the Parks Board recommend that that City Council form a Parks Safety Task Force that would put much needed resources into this effort and would be tasked with evaluating the following:

- Funding and reinstatement of a parks police unit
- 311 and 911 calls regarding safety concerns in parks
- Strategies to address homelessness at parks by working with the Austin Homeless Strategies Office
- Increased funding to greatly expand our Park Ranger program
- Improvements of lighting, signage, security equipment within our park system
- Equitable resource distribution across park systems in all parts of the city
- Impact of enforcement based solutions on those who disproportionately experience them

### **Rationale:**

Whereas, the Parks Board recognizes that all of the City's parks and amenities should be safe, secure and welcoming for all community members; and

Whereas, data and community reporting show that incidents of crimes against society, people and property continue to grow across our park system including theft, vandalism, threatening, violent and unsafe behaviors, unleashed dog issues, etc.; and

Whereas, the Parks Board created a Working Group to evaluate and make recommendations on improving safety in our parks and which would include representation from the Public Safety Commission and the Austin Police Department; and the group studied the recent history of park safety; and

Whereas, in 2020, the Austin Police Department's park police division was dissolved and the Park Rangers serve as a uniformed presence and point of escalation for safety issues in the parks; currently there are over 300 parks; and furthermore, the Park Rangers lack official authority to enforce compliance of most laws; and

Whereas, the Working Group studied alternative factors with the potential to mitigate crime such as lighting, signage, security equipment, etc. and their impact; and be it

Resolved that the Parks Board recommend that City Council form a Parks Safety Task Force that would put much needed resources into this effort and would be tasked with evaluating the following:

- Funding and reinstatement of a parks police unit
- 311 and 911 calls regarding safety concerns in parks
- Strategies to address homelessness at parks by working with the Austin Homeless Strategies Office
- Increased funding to greatly expand our Park Ranger program
- Improvements of lighting, signage, security equipment within our park system
- Equitable resource distribution across park systems in all parts of the city
- Impact of enforcement based solutions on those who disproportionately experience them

Working Group Members:

Dawn Lewis, Former Parks and Recreation Board Member, District 10  
Nancy Barnard, Parks and Recreation Board, District 7  
Patrick Moore, Former Parks and Recreation Board Board Member, District 3  
Kathleen Hausenback, Public Safety Commission, Mayor's Appointee  
Donald Baker, APD  
Justin Berry, APD  
Lt. Chief Todd Smith, APD  
LeAnn Ishcomer, Park Ranger Program Manager

**Vote**                    **The motion to recommend that City Council form a Parks Safety Task Force that would put much needed resources into this effort and would be tasked with evaluating the following: Funding and reinstatement of a parks police unit, 311 and 911 calls regarding safety concerns in parks, Strategies to address homelessness at parks by working with the Austin Homeless Strategies Office Increased funding to greatly expand our Park Ranger program, Improvements of lighting, signage, security equipment within our park system, Equitable resource distribution across park systems in all parts of the city, and Impact of enforcement based solutions on those who disproportionately experience them was approved on Board Member Barnard's motion, Board Member Taylor's second on a 10-0 vote. Board Member Cottam Sajbel absent.**

For:                    Board Members Barnard, Bazan, Becker, Flowers, Hugman, Merritt, Reed, Rinaldi, Taylor and Villalobos

Against:            None

Abstain:            None

Absent:             Board Member Cottam Sajbel

Attest:              Tim Dombeck, Board and Council Liaison, Parks and Recreation Department

*Tim Dombeck*