



## PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20230522-2

Date: May 22, 2023

Subject: Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan

Motioned By: Stephanie Bazan (D5)

Seconded By: Lane Becker (Mayor)

### **Recommend that the City of Austin Council Support the Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan**

Whereas the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (“PARD”) recognizes that Zilker Park requires significant maintenance, development, and restoration to address current and future issues relating to, but not limited to, preservation of green space, ecological degradation, accessibility challenges, and overuse due to increased visitation<sup>1</sup>;

Whereas the PARD has undertaken a multi-year, community-driven process to develop the Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan (“Vision Plan”) to address the multitude of issues facing Zilker Park<sup>2</sup>;

Whereas the guiding principles of the Vision Plan are: 1) Improving accessibility to allow for a safer and more connected park; 2) Protecting, enhancing, and restoring the ecological treasure that is the park; 3) Respecting and celebrating the park’s historic and cultural resources; 4) Championing sustainability best practices for the park; and 5) Serving the entire community of Austin<sup>3</sup>;

Whereas Zilker Park serves all, no matter their zip code, and is a destination for domestic and international tourists;

Whereas community input into the development of the Vision Plan was sought, including 122 pop-ups, 24 small group discussions, 7 Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings, 5 virtual meetings, 1 in-person open house, 6 community surveys, and 5 Parks and Recreation Board working group meetings<sup>4</sup>, with proactive outreach to underserved communities that historically have not been taken into consideration and have often been left out of the conversation;

Whereas the concerns of visitors to Zilker Park, who care deeply about their ability to use and enjoy the Zilker Park, have had a significant impact on the direction of the Vision Plan;

Whereas the residents of the City of Austin have diverse needs, access Zilker Park differently, and enjoy Zilker Park in a variety of ways meaningful to them,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.austintexas.gov/ZilkerVision>

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning\\_and\\_Development/Zilker\\_Vision/Zilker%20Park%20Vision%20Plan%20Draft%20updated%202023-05-11%20web.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning_and_Development/Zilker_Vision/Zilker%20Park%20Vision%20Plan%20Draft%20updated%202023-05-11%20web.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

Whereas enjoyment of nature and the quality of that natural experience are critical components of the Zilker Park user experience;

Whereas multimodal access is critical to Zilker Park and allows visitors to choose to walk, bike, use public transit, drive, or any transportation combination thereof;

Whereas the Zilker Park Unified Non-Profit (“Non-Profit”) will serve as the main point of contact for PARD and be the coordinating organization for Zilker Park stakeholders, organizations, and interested parties<sup>5</sup>;

Whereas the Non-Profit allows PARD to streamline Zilker Park operations, increase park efficiency, and better leverage funding for projects that benefit the public<sup>6</sup>;

Whereas PARD will retain ownership of the park and define the terms of the Non-Profit partnership<sup>7</sup>;

Whereas PARD will retain management and planning presence, including but not limited to implementing the Vision Plan, overseeing capital improvements, undertaking day-to-day operations and maintenance of the park, handling reserved area reservations, and permitting and managing large events<sup>8</sup>;

Whereas the Non-Profit is aligned with Austin City Council Resolution 20200312-041, which states, “The City Council expresses support for the concept of parkland agreements between nonprofit organizations and PARD if the agreements further the mission and vision of the department with regard to non-enterprise fund public parks and trails in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner.”<sup>9</sup>;

Whereas the Non-Profit is aligned with Strategic Direction 2023’s “Health & Environment” strategy 8, which identifies “leverage[ing] innovative financing models and partnerships to support, maintain, and expand parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and our urban trail network”<sup>10</sup>;

Whereas the Non-Profit is aligned with Our Parks, Our Future: PARD Long Range Plan 2020-2030: In Chapter 4.E. “Optimize & Improve Efficiency of Operations,” the Long Range Plan identified partnerships as a sustainability strategy for developing, improving, maintaining and programming spaces<sup>11</sup>;

Whereas public/non-profit partnership models are used as a best practice nationwide for metropolitan parks, such as Central Park Conservancy for Central Park<sup>12</sup> and the Prospect Park Alliance<sup>13</sup> for Prospect Park in New York City, New York; Hermann Park Conservancy<sup>14</sup> for

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[https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning\\_and\\_Development/Zilker\\_Vision/Zilker%20Park%20Vision%20Plan%20Draft%20updated%202023-05-11%20web.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Planning_and_Development/Zilker_Vision/Zilker%20Park%20Vision%20Plan%20Draft%20updated%202023-05-11%20web.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=337546>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=341820>

<sup>11</sup>

<https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/longrangeplan/Our%20Parks%20Our%20Future%20FINAL%20Plan%202019-12-27.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.centralparknyc.org>;

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.prospectpark.org>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hermannpark.org>

Hermann Park in Houston, Texas; Golden Gate Park Conservancy<sup>15</sup> for Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, California, and the Boston Natural Areas Fund<sup>16</sup> for the East Boston Greenway in Boston, Massachusetts;

Whereas the City of Austin has established comprehensive guidelines to vet non-profit parks partnerships, ensure their sustainability, and continually evaluate their efficacy<sup>17</sup>;

Whereas the current Hillside Theater is insufficient to accommodate programming, in need of repairs, unable to meet visitor demand, and will need to be possibly relocated in order to better serve Zilker Park visitors and program attendees;

Whereas the Vision Plan is the first step in the park's future development, operations, maintenance, preservation, and restoration, and community members will have frequent opportunities to participate in the public engagement process during every significant stage of execution of the Vision Plan;

Whereas the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board acknowledges the critical need for the Vision Plan to improve environmental conditions, mobility to and within the park, equitable access to the park, and the experience of Austin residents using the park;

Whereas the members of the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board value equity, access, inclusion, and sustainability;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board:

- 1) Recommends that the Austin City Council approve the Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan;
- 2) Recommends that appropriate environmental, financial, safety, equity, design, and traffic studies be undertaken before the implementation of any project or phase of the Vision Plan in order to encourage advancement of the Vision Plan;
- 3) Recommends that both traffic and parking studies be undertaken in the planning phase to determine whether the suggested Vision Plan improvements (including reducing Barton Springs Road to one lane) are anticipated to provide sufficient multimodal and public transportation access and passage to and through Zilker Park;
- 4) Recommends promoting close coordination and collaborative efforts of the Vision Plan with CapMetro during the Project Connect design to help maximize opportunities for effective public transit options;
- 5) Recommends that an environmental study be undertaken regarding the current impact and the potential impact of removing the existing surface parking lots, as well as the impact on the local environment of adding the proposed parking garages;
- 6) Recommends further evaluation of the placement of the Hillside Theater, including consideration of alternate locations other than the proposed location;
- 7) Recommends that access, drainage, and ecological enhancements along shoreline restoration areas should maintain a naturalistic design where possible for aesthetic benefit;
- 8) Recommends that the agreement governing the relationship between PARD and the Non-Profit ensures a high degree of transparency into the financial and contractual obligations of

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.parksconservancy.org>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cityofboston.gov/parks/pdfs/os5b.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://cityparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Combined-PARKnership-Configurations-and-Base-Terms.pdf>

the Non-Profit in order to allow PARD to vet the partnership in accordance with PARD's adopted partnership policies;

- 9) Recommends an annual summary update of progress toward identified Vision Plan goals be shared publicly to help promote understanding and accountability;
- 10) Recommends the Zilker Park Vision Plan implement a study to determine the historic under-use of Zilker Park by historically disadvantaged City of Austin residents and how this may be corrected;
- 11) Recommends retaining the historic concessions in Zilker Park (Zilker Boat Rental, Zilker Eagle Train, and Zilker Café) as they are part of the history and culture; and
- 12) Affirms that this Recommendation shall supersede and replace Parks and Recreation Board Recommendation 20230227-5<sup>18</sup>.

**Vote**

**The amended motion to recommend to Austin City Council to: 1) Recommends that the Austin City Council approve the Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan; 2) Recommends that appropriate environmental, financial, safety, equity, design, and traffic studies be undertaken before the implementation of any project or phase of the Vision Plan in order to encourage advancement of the Vision Plan; 3) Recommends that both traffic and parking studies be undertaken in the planning phase to determine whether the suggested Vision Plan improvements (including reducing Barton Springs Road to one lane) are anticipated to provide sufficient multimodal and public transportation access and passage to and through Zilker Park; 4) Recommends promoting close coordination and collaborative efforts of the Vision Plan with CapMetro during the Project Connect design to help maximize opportunities for effective public transit options; 5) Recommends that an environmental study be undertaken regarding the current impact and the potential impact of removing the existing surface parking lots, as well as the impact on the local environment of adding the proposed parking garages; 6) Recommends further evaluation of the placement of the Hillside Theater, including consideration of alternate locations other than the proposed location; 7) Recommends that access, drainage, and ecological enhancements along shoreline restoration areas should maintain a naturalistic design where possible for aesthetic benefit; 8) Recommends that the agreement governing the relationship between PARD and the Non-Profit ensures a high degree of transparency into the financial and contractual obligations of the Non-Profit in order to allow PARD to vet the partnership in accordance with PARD's adopted partnership policies; 9) Recommends an annual summary update of progress toward identified Vision Plan goals be shared publicly to help promote understanding and accountability; 10) Recommends the Zilker Park Vision Plan implement a study to determine the historic under-use of Zilker Park by historically disadvantaged City of Austin residents and how this may be corrected; 11) Recommends retaining the historic concessions in Zilker Park (Zilker Boat Rental, Zilker Eagle Train, and Zilker Café) as they are part of the history and culture; and 12) Affirms that this Recommendation shall supersede and replace Parks and Recreation Board Recommendation 20230227-5 was approved on Board Member Bazan's motion, Board Member Becker's second on a 7-3 vote with one vacancy. Those voting aye were Chair Villalobos, Vice Chair Flowers, Board Members Bazan, Becker, Franklin,**

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<sup>18</sup> <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=403720>

**Merritt and Rinaldi. Those voting nay were Board Members Hugman, Reed and Taylor.**

*For:* Nina Rinaldi (D1), Pedro Villalobos (D2), Nicole Merritt (D3), Kathryn Flowers (D4), Stephanie Bazan (D5), Jennifer Franklin (D9), Lane Becker (Mayor)

*Against:* Lisa Hugman (D6), Kim Taylor (D8), Holly Reed (D10)

*Abstain:* None

*Absent:* None

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

*Tim Dombeck* \_\_\_\_\_