

Parks and Recreation Board Fiscal Year 24/25 Budget Recommendation:

Reed Additional Recommendation #1:

Funding for three (3) FTE positions to implement PARD's Land Management Plan.

Rationale:

- On Sept. 21, 2023 the Austin City Council approved the Recommended Land Management Strategies and Climate Vulnerability Analysis for Austin Parks and Recreation Department natural areas
- Five (5) FTEs needed to implement the plan, 0 FTEs were assigned
- 2 FTEs were allocated in FY24 budget amendment
- The estimated need is ~\$200/ac ongoing for staffing and O&M, based on internal cost estimates and comparisons with similar programs
- The Land Management Plan supports Austin's Climate Equity Plan Goal #1:

By 2030, legally protect an additional 20,000 acres of carbon pools on natural lands and manage all new and existing natural areas (approximately 70,000 acres total), focusing on resilience.

- The Land Management Plan supports Austin/Travis County Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP), Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan for 2020-2030, and Green Infrastructure Strengths and Gaps Assessment for the City of Austin

Reed Additional Recommendation #2:

Funding for 14 additional FTEs for PARD Grounds Maintenance Team, to align with same level of service in FY14.

Rationale: (This information was provided by my appointing Council Member Alison Alter's office from research by Budget Office Staff and PARD.)

Budget Office and PARD Staffing has identified that funding for CIP (Capital Improvement Projects) has not always included funding for ongoing Operations and Maintenance staff for new projects.

PARD has provided data for its ground maintenance team comparing FY14 with FY23 budgeted and actual expenditures.

PARD's analysis shows that attaining 'ideal' service levels would require 190.4 FTEs for their grounds maintenance team, an increase of 70.4 FTEs from its current authorization.

PARD has provided data for its ground maintenance team comparing FY14 with FY23 budgeted and actual expenditures. Over this nine-year period, the budget for this team has grown from \$7,279,052 to \$13,296,168, an increase of \$6,017,116, or 82.7%. Actual expenses by this team were \$7,083,168 in FY14 and \$12,960,218 in FY23, an increase of \$5,877,050 or 83.0%. This increase was primarily driven by an increase in labor costs associated with significant increases in the City's living wage. For instance, while Parks Grounds Assistants earned as little as \$12.31 per hour in FY14, the current base wage for these positions is \$20.80 per hour.

PARD has created a model for FY23 based on estimated man hours for various tasks such as mowing and other vegetation-management tasks; litter, restroom, and natural area inspections and servicing; and preventative maintenance and work order completion. This model shows that at current levels of service, this team requires man-hours equivalent to 115.7 FTEs. This team currently has 110.0 authorized FTEs and 28.5 temporary employees. The number of authorized FTEs for this team was reduced by 2.0 in FY22 due to a PARD internal transfer from this team to the Cemetery Operations team.

From FY14 to FY23, total acreage under management by the ground maintenance team has grown from 15,872.70 to 16,517.67, an increase of 644.97 acres, or 4.1%. PARD's model shows that, at current service levels, this additional acreage has required additional labor requirements equivalent to an estimated 3.3 FTEs.

PARD does not have historical data showing actual service levels in FY14, but applying current service levels to FY14 acreages shows that PARD would have required man-hours equivalent to 96.1 FTEs in FY14 to perform services at the same level as they provided them in FY23. In FY14, this team had an estimated 105 authorized FTEs [number is approximated due to the transfer out of graffiti/playground employees in intervening time period] and 22.0 temporary employees.

This data suggests that in order to maintain service frequency and response time at the same level as in FY14, PARD's ground maintenance team would have required the equivalent of an additional 19.6 FTEs by FY23. Over this time, the grounds maintenance team has actually grown by approximately 5 net FTEs [analysis of labor hours across the two years across FTEs, overtime, and temps shows that productive hours worked has increased by an amount roughly equivalent to 5 FTEs as well]. This increase reflects positions added to PARD's grounds maintenance team over this nine-year span, as well as PARD's reallocation of two positions from this team to the Cemetery unit in FY22.

Tentative conclusions:

- PARD's grounds maintenance authorization has increased sufficiently in recent years to absorb the additional demands associated with acreage added to PARD's ground maintenance portfolio. Analysis shows that the labor hour increases associated with these parcels are equivalent to 3.3 FTEs. Meanwhile, City budget processes have added 7 FTEs to PARD's ground maintenance budget over this time span, 2 of which PARD chose to re-purpose to its Cemetery unit.
- In order to maintain service frequency and response times at their FY14 levels, PARD would have needed to add 19.6 FTEs by FY23. 3.3 FTEs of this number can be explained by the additional acreage added to PARD's portfolio of park assets under management. The additional demand for labor hours equivalent to 16.3 FTEs was primarily driven by additional maintenance and servicing requirements associated with existing assets that were improved through capital projects, or for which service demands increased over the FY14-FY23 time period. The most significant of these increased demands include:
 - Walnut Creek Greenbelt Development – PARD has responsibility for edge mowing and litter along these urban trails
 - Southern Walnut Creek (8.7 miles)
 - Northern Walnut Creek Phase 1, 1A, 2A (4.4 miles)
 - Auditorium Shores improvements
 - Alliance Children's Garden
 - Buyout area of Onion Creek – developed and dedicated to PARD by Army Corps with approximately 30 picnic shelters/pavilions and a new restroom
 - Colony Park District Park: 9 acres raw land as well as 2 pavilions, loop trail, large playground, exercise equipment, baseball and soccer field, and ped bridge
 - Brush Square Park improvement
 - New bathrooms including at the Barton Creek Trailhead (by Zilker Hillside Theater) and Rosewood Neighborhood Park (new year-round restroom replacing what was only a seasonal bathhouse)
 - Recycling program implementation involved installing new recycling receptacles throughout the park system that require servicing
- While an additional 14.6 FTEs [19.6 FTEs as shown by service model minus 5 net FTEs added since FY14] would allow PARD to return to FY14 levels of service delivery with respect to parks ground maintenance, FY14 was chosen only as a point of comparison with the present-day and not as a year in which service levels were 'ideal'. PARD's analysis shows that attaining 'ideal' service levels would require 190.4 FTEs for their grounds maintenance team, an increase of 70.4 FTEs from its current authorization.
- While the City should remain sensitive to the additional demands placed on PARD's ground maintenance team by the acquisition of new assets, it is equally important to recognize the additional service demands created by improvement of existing assets. The City should continue to work to improve cost-estimate coordination across the operating and capital components of its budget.