



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

**Urban Transportation Commission**

Recommendation Number 20240709-004:

Accelerating and Enhancing the City of Austin Urban Trails Network

**WHEREAS**, the Urban Transportation Commission (UTC) recognizes the value of urban trails in promoting health and physical activity, recreation, safe alternative transportation, and environmental sustainability;

**WHEREAS**, urban trails provide critical connectivity for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users, enhancing mobility and reducing traffic congestion;

**WHEREAS**, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) calls on the city to “recognize the Urban Trail System as an integral part of the transportation network,” “provide high-quality Urban Trails that can serve all users,” and “pursue opportunities to connect to and expand the Urban Trails System;”

**WHEREAS**, the ASMP and the 2023 Urban Trails Plan set the goal of building out all 94 miles of the Tier 1 Urban Trails network by 2043;

**WHEREAS**, the projected timeline of completing the Tier 1 Urban Trails network by 2043 is inadequate to address the pressing needs for enhanced mobility within the city, environmental sustainability, and public health benefits that urban trails provide;

**WHEREAS**, the current allocation of 0.4% of the Transportation and Public Works Department operating budget to urban trails is insufficient to meet the growing needs and demands for an expansive and well-maintained urban trail network;

**WHEREAS**, the City of Austin has lagged behind peer cities like San Antonio, Houston, and Atlanta in creating opportunities for trail-facing development that helps activate the surrounding community and create naturally walkable communities;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Urban Transportation Commission recommends that the City Council initiate the development of an equitable Urban Trails Oriented Development strategy, directing staff to evaluate opportunities to:

- Develop a cross-departmental task force with the Departments of Capital Delivery Services, Parks & Recreation, Planning, and Transportation & Public Works to ensure

staff capacity is appropriately distributed and improve coordination on development near Urban Trails;

- Strengthen staff's abilities to secure trail easements during the site plan review process.
- Review current building codes to verify if trail-friendly retrofits are allowed on existing buildings and evaluate ways to minimize barriers to trail-facing development in City Code;
- Provide incentives for land uses that enhance trail access and expand adjacent amenities (i.e. trail connections, restaurants, bike shops, public plazas, etc.), including, but not limited to:
  - reduced setbacks,
  - maintenance agreements, and
  - securing trail access for emergency vehicles;
- Prevent current residents' displacement and create affordable housing opportunities near urban trails;
- Conduct robust public engagement to determine what amenities residents want near Urban Trails and what trails, or segments of trails, should remain separated from development in a more park-like context, and what safety measures they would like to see implemented along the trails, including but not limited to lighting, signage, emergency call stations; and
- Establish a community outreach plan at the development stage to promote the benefits of urban trails through educational programs, events, and outreach initiatives to encourage public use and support;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Urban Transportation Commission recommends City Council revise the Urban Trails Plan goal of completing Tier 1 Urban Trails by 2043 to a goal of 65% buildout by 2032 and 100% buildout by 2038, ensuring all Tier 1 Urban Trails are built within two 6-year bond cycles (2026 Bond and 2032 Bond);

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Urban Transportation Commission recommends the Department of Transportation and Public Works take the following actions to accelerate the development of Urban Trails:

- Identify and secure funding sources, including federal, state, and private grants, as well as public-private partnerships, to support the development of urban trails;
- Direct a minimum of 2% of the Transportation and Public Works Operating budget to ensure adequate resources are available to develop and maintain urban trails; and
- Ensure multiple full-time employees within the Sidewalks Program are focused solely on Urban Trails, or consider creating a separate Urban Trails Division;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that Transportation and Public Works staff be directed to report semi-annually to City Council and the Urban Transportation Commission on the progress of the urban trails initiative, including updates on new funding, community engagement efforts, trail development, and any challenges encountered.

Motioned by:

Seconded by:

Date of Approval:

Record of the vote:

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_

(Staff or board member can sign)

DRAFT