

7/30/2024

Dear Parks Board Members,

We are requesting that the Parks Board recommend that City Council rescind the December 2019 Expedition School ordinance which without stakeholder notification or input went against the whole letter and spirit of the Holly Shores/Edward Rendon, Sr. Parks Master Plan, (Master Plan) by creating an unauthorized private enterprise in a public park.

The Expedition School (TES) plans to construct a large dock in the Master Plan area of Festival Beach. TES is a for profit entity with a non-profit component. The group prospers by rentals and luxury adventure group consulting for substantial fees. TES began using the Camacho Activity Center in 2006. After taking over much of the activity center, TES decided to expand further in our park and even opened a facility in San Antonio.

In 2019 a December City ordinance passed that circumvented stakeholder involvement and gave the TES the opportunity to use one end of a Festival Beach Lagoon for a large dock with storage buildings. Locals did not know of the ordinance until well after it had passed. Now TES is poised to move ahead, creating a park concession that is not and never has been part of the vetted Master Plan.

In short, TES is responsible for the following breaches and oversights:

- Blatant disrespect & disregard for community and stakeholders
- Employing highly questionable possibly illegal methods to circumvent official processes
- Misrepresenting the enterprise status as a 501C3
- Ignoring and bypassing environmental checks of the proposed expansion/dock
- Overlooking the local mandate for a wild/tranquil park

The above concerns cast doubt upon a positive outcome of any current or future TES project within the Master Plan area. Moreover, TES recently employed a lobbyist to represent them at city hearings which raises questions about their use of donor funds. Does the group deem itself too wealthy to meet stakeholders face to face?

This questionable deal is the tip of the iceberg. In past months we've seen an erosion of the trust in city park administration, much of it surrounding the non-profits. A handful of non-profit businesses and enterprises are carving up our parks for their own interest—in the guise of providing vital services. It's time to rethink how we interact with non-profit entities.

Meanwhile, injustice is never a done deal. It's not too late to rescind the shadowy TES ordinance amendment—which should never have passed. Let us eliminate or reform PARD working groups and move forward with the Holly Shores/Edward Rendon, Sr. Parks Master Plan that was approved by both the city and the stakeholders after countless hours of costly work and negotiations—without added, unauthorized /unapproved concessions and/or developments.

The parks belong to the people and the people love their parks. If the public response to the proposed Zilker Master Plan did not convince leaders of that, then we need to reexamine our entire Austin City governance.

Sincerely,

Tanya Payne/Rewild ATX

Elisa Montoya & Bertha Delgado/ ETLCA

Cedar Stevens & Dana Hegar/Free Zilker Coalition

Carol Stall & Phil Thomas/Deep Holly Advocates