

RESOLUTION NO. 20241121-072

WHEREAS, City Council is committed to providing equitable access to quality parkland for all Austin residents and to ensuring a high standard of ongoing maintenance, repairs, and improvements; and

WHEREAS, Council is also committed to improving and maintaining the parks system to ensure that it can meet residents' needs today and in years to come; and

WHEREAS, *Imagine Austin* noted in 2012 that "The city has an above-average amount of parkland, but funding for maintenance and upgrades has not kept up"; and

WHEREAS, over the past decade, the City has acquired over 96 additional parks and more than 1,500 new acres for a total of roughly 15,200 acres maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department ("PAR"); and

WHEREAS, nonetheless, Austin is not on track to meet the first recommendation in PAR's *Our Parks, Our Future Long-Range Plan* to "maintain or improve upon current standards of parkland and add between 4,000 and 8,000 acres of new parkland over the next 10 years"; and

WHEREAS, PAR's long-range plan, which uses 2029 as a planning horizon, also includes the goal of providing equitable access for all residents to parks and open spaces, defined as within one-fourth mile of urban core residents and one-half mile for those outside of the urban core; and

WHEREAS, the Financial Services Department ("FSD") reported in May 2024 that "Newly acquired park acreage is often unimproved" and thus "initially requires a low level of services," but, once improved, meaningfully increases PAR's maintenance responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, FSD also reported that this rapid increase in responsibilities and improvements, without an accompanying strategy for increased maintenance, has caused the level of service for grounds maintenance to decline over the past decade, stating that increased maintenance demand was “primarily driven by improvements to existing parkland and new amenities developed or acquired over the FY 2014 – FY 2023 time period”; and

WHEREAS, the Trust for Public Land annually prepares the ParkScore index to provide a national comparison of park systems across the most populous cities in the United States, and in 2024 Austin ranked 44th with a score of 53.5 out of 100; and

WHEREAS, the ParkScore methodology includes an evaluation of public and private investment, including non-profit contributions and volunteer service hours; and

WHEREAS, PARD has reported that the cost of developing or replacing a neighborhood park as of fiscal year 2023 exceeds \$1.4 million per park; and

WHEREAS, the *Our Parks, Our Future Long-Range Plan* states that “In considering new park development projects, it is essential to include operational costs, including staff, equipment, and materials, as part of the overall ‘total cost of ownership’” and that “Together, capital investment, operations and maintenance, and lifecycle replacement represent the total cost of ownership of a parks system”; and

WHEREAS, cities like Minneapolis, Minnesota, have had great success in holistically managing their parklands from a regional perspective, creating a taxing authority and governing body responsible for the management, acquisition, and upkeep of its regional park system; and

WHEREAS, PARD relies on the General Fund to support its vast system of parks, recreation centers, museums, gardens, programming, facilities, and general operating needs; and

WHEREAS, the General Fund is a limited resource that also supports other critical City services such as police, fire, emergency medical services, public health, libraries, planning, municipal court, and animal services; and

WHEREAS, Council is committed to overcoming these financial limitations and developing a quality parks system that is equitable, financially sustainable, well-maintained, and accessible to residents of all means and resources; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF AUSTIN:

Recognizing the competing priorities limiting the General Fund, the City Manager is directed to convene a team of City staff that may include members from PARD, FSD, the Law Department and other departments in the City Manager's discretion, to explore additional funding sources for parks management, land acquisition, amenities, facilities, and maintenance.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The Council reaffirms the goal of providing equitable access for all residents to parks and open spaces, defined as within one-fourth mile for urban core residents and one-half mile for those outside of the urban core. Council also reaffirms PARD's long-range plan strategy to "Invest in the acquisition of new parkland that can make parks a part of everyday life in existing and future underserved areas," as a means of achieving this goal. When making recommendations under this resolution, the City Manager shall consider this goal, identify the funding amounts necessary to achieve it, and recommend which

funding option would be best suited to balance parkland acquisition with commensurate funding for the appropriate level of maintenance service to reach this goal.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

In addition to the General Fund, the staff team should consider the following funding structures including but not limited to:

- Park Districts;
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF);
- Public Improvement Districts (PIDs);
- PARD fee setting and cost recovery policies;
- Public/Private Partnerships (PPPs);
- Expanding the Community PARKnership Program;
- Park User Fees;
- Resources from other departments, including the reassignment of Austin Convention Center employees during the Convention Center construction process; and
- Examine opportunities to reduce internal City charges as a cost saving strategy, including examining fees that PARD pays to other City departments.

The Council recommends enlisting the assistance of external consultants with expertise in park system funding to advise the staff team on funding methods to sustain and expand the available funding for Austin's parks, as well as establishing a means of comparing funding methods used by other park systems in

Texas, and in other states, and providing financial scenarios to compare funding options along with any opportunity costs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to hold at least two public input sessions at Parks and Recreation Board meetings to review and gather feedback on the staff team's draft public recommendations prior to returning to Council.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager should provide a progress report to Council by March 31, 2025, regarding the status of the staff team's efforts to identify additional sources and methods of funding to expand the available resources to achieve long-term parkland acquisition goals primarily in park-deficient areas of the City in historically underserved communities, enhance service levels across the City, and sustain Austin parks, and a final report back to Council with recommendations on the funding strategies no later than May 31, 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to provide an annual report from FSD and PARD regarding total parkland, preserve, and open space assets and maintenance costs that includes the following:

Citywide land assets and amenities report:

- List the overall land assets managed by PARD citywide as well as by Council district; and
- Total maintenance costs for these land assets and any amenities installed on site.

Parkland Dedication Fund report:

- Total amount of fees collected that have yet to be appropriated to Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) in the Parkland Dedication Fund;
- Total appropriation, encumbrances, and expenses to date in the Parkland Dedication CIP;
- Current project appropriations, encumbrances, and expenses in the Parkland Dedication CIP;
- Projected annual amount of Parkland Dedication fees for the upcoming year;
- Total amounts since the adoption of the Parkland Dedication ordinance in 2016:
 - Fees-in-lieu of land dedicated;
 - Park Development Fees collected; and
 - Land and amenities dedicated; and
- Amount estimated to maintain the land, amenities, and facilities built with the Parkland Dedication fee funds.

Park Partnerships:

- A list of existing public-private partnership or PARKnership agreements, as well as the status of any partnerships or agreements under negotiation; and
- An annual report on the value created by each partnership, including capital contributions, operating or production expenses assumed, and volunteer service hours provided.

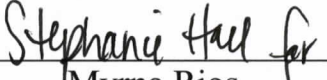
Maintenance and staffing report:

- Reports on the maintenance staffing and service levels for current parkland, building on the model developed by PARD and FSD in the Spring of 2024, and should include metrics that at least measure mowing, restroom maintenance, tree trimming, trash management, preventative maintenance, natural area maintenance, and work orders.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to work with Travis County, surrounding counties, and other regional partners to explore the feasibility of creating a regional park management, acquisition, and maintenance strategy and provide an annual progress report and any recommendations to Council.

ADOPTED: November 21, 2024 **ATTEST:**


Myrna Rios
City Clerk