



PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20250324-005

Date: March 24, 2025

Subject: Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget

Motioned By: Kathryn Flowers

Seconded By: Stephanie Bazan

Recommendation

WHEREAS, the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board Budget Working Group met over the course of several months, taking into account both Board member and resident input, as well as input from City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) staff, and provided the Parks and Recreation Board with its unanimous recommendations; and

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board notes that no finalized PARD FY 2026 Operating Budget is yet available, and as of now no Under Resourced Service Expectations are being solicited by PARD during this process;

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board recognizes the demand for Parks and Recreation facilities, maintenance, programming, and safety measures will continue to grow significantly during the 2026 fiscal year, as it has the past several years;

WHEREAS, Park Rangers had 41,914 contacts and managed 505 directed patrols at 36 different parks in FY24;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin PARD has 378 parks in its system (excluding cemeteries), of which 36 parks represent only 9.5% of the system;

WHEREAS, cemetery maintenance continues to be a challenge for existing PARD staff and the department is consistently understaffed for the maintenance requirements of the cemeteries under their purview, with 32 FTEs currently across the entire division and 7 vacancies;

WHEREAS, according to a 2024 report by CoreLogic, Austin ranks fifth in number of homes with moderate or greater wildfire risk, with a reconstruction cost value of over \$40 billion, and the number of homes at risk in the city is the highest of any metropolitan area outside of California;

WHEREAS, most city parkland natural areas have not been managed for ecosystem health and are degraded, and as a result are threatened by heat, drought, disease, and wildfire and present safety risks to both park users and neighbors;

WHEREAS, land management efforts within City of Austin PARD have been very successful where they have occurred and are ready for additional scaling to more quickly address areas of need across the system;

WHEREAS, in 2020 PARD created a Land Management Program, which developed a land management plan approved by City Council in 2023 to guide the restoration of natural areas to improve climate resilience and reduce wildfire risk;

WHEREAS, this Land Management Program program is currently underfunded, with a budget of only \$828,000 and four FTEs, who oversee the entire 10,300 acres under city management;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin Joint Sustainability Commission is considering a recommendation for adoption on Wednesday, March 26, containing support for wildfire prevention efforts and additional funding to support them in order to appropriately reduce the overall risk to the City of Austin;

WHEREAS, urban forests serve as carbon sinks that promote climate mitigation efforts, but the city does not yet have a comprehensive tree inventory that would allow for effective urban forest planning and maintenance;

WHEREAS, developing and maintaining a robust catalog of existing trees is necessary to ensuring the city can maintain the health of the overall tree ecosystem and also supports the increase of our overall tree canopy to the 50% goal outlined in the Climate Equity Plan;

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board strongly believes the City should strive to meet the needs of residents today while also strongly supporting efforts to reduce future risk to residents for the City of Austin;

THEREFORE, The Parks and Recreation Board recommends to the Austin City Council:

1. The allocation of sufficient additional funding on top of any proposed PARD FY2026 Budget to begin the process of increasing staffing in the Park Ranger program to provide consistent oversight for responsible use of our city's resources, including:
 1. Eight additional year-round FTEs (instead of summer only) to provide more appropriate coverage of parks across the Austin city limits, including specific efforts to deter property crime in targeted locations (~\$382,720)
2. The allocation of additional funding on top of any proposed PARD FY2026 Budget to address cemetery maintenance at an appropriate level, with increased staffing in cemetery maintenance as required. (~\$250,000)
3. The allocation of sufficient additional funding on top of any proposed PARD FY2026 Budget to appropriately fulfill the need for additional land management efforts focused on wildfire prevention, including:
 1. Fully funding the existing Land Management Program at an estimated cost of \$250 per acre per year, for a total cost of \$2,575,000, which would require the allocation of an additional \$1,747,000 beyond the \$828,000 currently allocated to the Program. (\$1,747,000)
 - i. Using a portion of this fully funded budget to fully staff the Land Management Program by hiring an additional 5 FTEs to complement the 4 FTEs currently employed.
4. The allocation of sufficient additional funding on top of any proposed PARD FY2026 Budget to begin the process of addressing the under resourcing of recreation centers and senior centers, both in programming and physical capacity, including:
 1. Additional part-time and/or hourly staff to accommodate more children during summer camps at facilities where space has been identified and expansion is possible, to total no fewer than 5 FTE (\$150,000)
5. The allocation of \$10,000,000 to fully fund a comprehensive public tree inventory across all City-owned properties, as directed by [Council resolution 20240418-051](#). This data will enable the city's Urban Forester to implement a comprehensive urban forest management plan including robust tree planting and replacement efforts. Methods should follow national best practices and involve collaboration with relevant partners. Data should be stored for easy access and sharing across departments.

6. The allocation of additional funding on top of any proposed PARD FY2026 Budget to address funding for 6 additional FTE for the PARD Operations & Maintenance team in order to further move toward an ideal level of service for PARD maintenance.

Vote: 7-0 with one vacancy.

For: Luai Abou-Emara, Stephanie Bazan, Lane Becker, Kathryn Flowers, Jennifer Franklin, Nicole Merritt, Holly Reed.

Against: None.

Abstain: None.

Absent: Shelby Orme, Kim Taylor, Pedro Villalobos.

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

Tim Dombeck _____