



PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20260427-4

Date: April 27, 2026

Subject: 2026 Bond Program Recommendation for Austin Parks and Recreation

Motioned By: Pedro Villalobos

Seconded By: Kathryn Flowers

Recommendation

WHEREAS, bond programs are a primary source of capital funding for Austin Parks and Recreation (APR) projects, including pool replacements, land acquisition, new park development, recreation and senior centers, and other capital improvements;

WHEREAS, the most recent parks-focused bond proposition was Proposition C in 2018, which provided \$149 million for parks in 2018, and the anticipated 2024 bond cycle was delayed;

WHEREAS, APR has substantially assigned and spent its 2018 bond funding, while maintaining only modest contingency funds for urgent failures that may arise before new bond funds could be received if a 2026 bond is approved by voters;

WHEREAS, APR staff conducted a department-wide capital needs exercise that identified approximately \$1.4 billion in capital improvement needs, and staff subsequently developed a supportable proposal of approximately \$410 million based on departmental capacity, urgency, and market conditions;

WHEREAS, current citywide bond discussions contemplate a total bond package substantially below that amount, including scenarios around \$750 million total citywide, requiring APR needs to be scaled accordingly;

WHEREAS, APR staff have outlined multiple funding scenarios between \$140 and \$250 million dollars, where lower-dollar scenarios largely fund emergency repairs, critical system failures, and limited high-priority projects rather than meaningful expansion of park and recreation assets;

WHEREAS, lower-dollar scenarios are also burdened by the potential need to fund the Central Maintenance Complex, estimated at roughly \$50 million to \$80 million, due in part to uncertainty related to the Oracle land swap and the adequacy of replacement maintenance facilities;

WHEREAS, the City's aquatics system includes multiple pools that have reached or exceeded their expected useful life, and at least two facilities were already identified as critical failures in the 2018 aquatics assessment, and under lower-funded bond scenarios the Department would be limited largely to emergency responses rather than proactive replacement, increasing the risk of pool failures and extended closures before construction funding is available;

WHEREAS, a funding level of \$250 million would allow the Department to move beyond emergency stabilization and support critical projects across the parks system, including senior centers, recreation facilities, aquatics, neighborhood and district parks, trails, electrification, and parkland acquisition;

THEREFORE, the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board (PARB) recommends that Austin City Council should:

1. Advance a 2026 bond program that includes a strong and clearly defined parks proposition at a funding level sufficient to address both critical deferred maintenance and meaningful capital investment across the parks system;
2. Prioritize parks funding in recognition of the fact that the department did not receive funding from the city's 2016 and 2020 transportation bonds or the 2022 housing bond, and that the department's existing 2018 bond resources are effectively exhausted;
3. Fund a parks allocation at or above the staff-presented \$250 million scenario, as it is the option that best allows APR to address urgent system needs while also delivering visible, community-serving capital improvements across parks, aquatics, recreation, senior centers, trails, and land acquisition;
4. Support APR's programmatic approach to bond funding, rather than overly restrictive project-by-project allocations, to preserve flexibility in responding to inflation, design development, community engagement, and changing project viability over the life of the bond program;
5. If the Central Maintenance Complex is excluded from the bond package, make a clear and timely commitment to fund that facility through an alternative mechanism so that parks bond funding is not diverted from public-facing capital requirements such as community-serving park, aquatics, trail, senior, recreation, and acquisition needs; and
6. In advance of the 2026 bond election, look for opportunities and channels to promote to the public the success of the projects that were accomplished by APR as a result of funds brought in by the previous 2018 bond.

IN ADDITION, while PARB strongly affirms that all identified program areas represent critical and worthy investments, the Board recognizes that, in the event the final parks allocation falls below \$250 million, difficult prioritization decisions may be required. While only the \$250 million amount can meet all the current needs of the city's park system, if a lower amount is determined to be required, Council should make every effort to ensure the final amount remains as close to the \$250 million level as possible.

THEREFORE, PARB FURTHER RECOMMENDS that in such a scenario, and only as a contingency, Council should prioritize funding:

1. Critical health and safety repairs and the prevention of system failures, including aging aquatics facilities, as lower-funded scenarios could leave APR unable to replace or rehabilitate vulnerable facilities in time to avoid extended closures;
2. Preservation and rehabilitation of existing assets such as recreation centers, senior centers, and neighborhood parks;
3. Strategic land acquisition to support access to parks for our growing city population; and
4. Other projects that deliver visible, community-serving capital improvements across parks, aquatics, recreation, senior services, and trails.

Vote: 10-0

For: Stephanie Bazan, Kathryn Flowers, Luai Abou-Emara, Lane Becker, Ted Eubanks, Jennifer Franklin, Diane Kearns-Osterweil, Nicole Merritt, Shelby Orme, Pedro Villalobos.

Against: None.

Abstain: None.

Absent: Kim Taylor.

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

Tim Dombeck _____