



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

Through: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, LMSW, Assistant City Manager

From: Jesús Aguirre, MBA, CPRE, Austin Parks and Recreation Director

Date: October 1, 2026

Subject: **Zilker Botanical Garden Agreement Expiration**

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you that the Austin Parks and Recreation (APR) agreement with the Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy (ZBGC) to serve as the primary operator of the Zilker Botanical Gardens expired on September 30, 2026. The agreement has been in place since 2019.

The ZBGC board of directors voted to decline APR's proposed contract renewal. As such, APR is preparing to resume direct management of front-gate operations and full site operations as of today. APR remains fully committed to collaborating with all dedicated garden partners, including maintaining its long-standing and important partnership with the Austin Area Garden Council (AAGC) and evaluating how the future of the partnership with ZBGC may evolve.

ZBGC Partnership Overview

During their tenure as an operating partner of ZBGC, the Conservancy worked to enhance visitor experiences through a membership program, provide garden programming, and support the overall mission of the gardens. ZBGC operated the entry gate, brought in additional visitors, led programming, and supported cactus and succulent horticulture. APR appreciates everything ZBGC brought to the gardens' operations.

Under the 2019 contractual agreement, admissions revenue was distributed through a three-part allocation: 36% was remitted to the City General Fund (guaranteeing a baseline of \$237,309 annually), 20% was restricted for mutually agreed-upon garden enhancements, and the remaining 44% was retained by the ZBGC to support its internal operations and site management.

APR proposed a restructured pay-for-service model that would allow the conservancy to focus on its core strengths. APR proposed paying ZBGC an annual allocation in exchange for managing membership, marketing, and philanthropic development. The ZBGC board of directors voted not to renew the agreement; therefore, APR is proceeding with an operational transition effective today.

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Throughout this process, APR will actively maintain its long-standing partnership with AAGC and continue collaborating with all affiliate garden clubs, volunteers, and community partners. Further, as the Conservancy determines its long-term status, we will continue to explore ways in which they may also remain engaged and supportive.

To facilitate the handover, Zilker Botanical Garden will temporarily close during the first two weeks in October due to major events in Zilker Park. APR will utilize this window to complete essential site improvements, including auditorium maintenance and abatement, general facility enhancements, and critical repairs to a main irrigation line.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Jodi Jay, Austin Parks and Recreation Assistant Director, at (512) 974-9459 or Jodi.Jay@austintexas.gov, or Amanda Ross, Austin Parks and Recreation Division Manager, at (512) 978-2601 or Amanda.Ross@austintexas.gov.

cc: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Erika Brady, City Clerk
Jason Hadavi, City Auditor
Mary Jane Grubb, Municipal Court Clerk
Judge Sherry Statman, Municipal Court
CMO Executive Team
Department Directors