ORGANIZATION OF BIOLOGICAL FIELD STATIONS
Advancing field-based research, education, and stewardship across the globe
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November 9th, 2026

The Honorable Kirk Watson, Mayor, City of Austin
Mr. T.C. Broadnax, City Manager, City of Austin
Dr. Eric Johnson, Assistant City Manager, City of Austin
Members of the Austin City Council
301 West 2nd Street, Austin, TX 78701

Re: Letter of Support for the Brackenridge Field Laboratory – Protecting a Cornerstone of the City of Austin's Research, Teaching, and Public Engagement

Dear Mayor Watson, City Manager Broadnax, and Members of the Austin City Council,

I write in my capacity as President of the Organization of Biological Field Stations (OBFS), the professional association representing the 1,200+ field stations and marine laboratories across the globe. OBFS's mission is to support the field station and marine laboratory community and to advocate for the long-term protection of the places where field science and education happen. It is in this capacity that I write to **express OBFS's strong support for The University of Texas at Austin's Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL)**, and to **urge the City to ensure that BFL is permanently protected** as the University and the City of Austin consider amendments to the 1989 Brackenridge Development Agreement. We applaud the effort to preserve the Lions Municipal Golf Course, and we urge the City not to approve amendments to the 1989 Brackenridge Development Agreement that would open BFL to development.

Field stations and marine laboratories, like BFL, are critical and irreplaceable components of scientific research infrastructure. They **protect land that provides the ecosystem services every community depends on, including clean air, water, and habitat**, and they provide the long-term, undisturbed field conditions needed to understand how those systems respond to change. **Field stations are also community assets**: places where residents, schoolchildren, and volunteers engage directly with science. A field station within an expanding city is exceedingly rare, and once it is built over, it cannot be recreated elsewhere. Decades of research and a community's access to a living laboratory are lost with it.

BFL is a particularly strong example of what this stewardship offers a city. Established in 1966 on 82 acres of the Brackenridge Tract, **BFL is the only active, formal research site within greater Austin** that contributes to our understanding of the region's urban ecology, with findings that matter to the State and the Nation. Its research on invasive species of importance to Austin and Texas, including fire ants, tawny crazy ants, cactus moth, buffelgrass, and pasture mealybug, has led to management through biological controls and non-chemical methods. Its student-led

restoration and monitoring of Schulle Creek, its studies of aquifer responses, and its research on drought and land management all speak directly to Austin's environmental challenges. BFL supports hundreds of independent student studies and its habitats hold roughly 1,200 species of butterflies and moths, 200 species of native bees, 370 species of plants, and 180 species of birds, all within minutes of downtown.

BFL is also deeply woven into Austin's community life. Its Science Under the Stars program, in which graduate students give monthly public talks, has earned national acclaim. BFL hosts an annual BioBlitz with large community participation, tours for K-12 classes and neighborhood associations, volunteer days with Master Naturalists and community members, meetings of natural history associations, and regular public surveys through eBird and iNaturalist. **For many Austinites, and for many UT students, BFL is a first serious encounter with the natural world**, and it is a living observatory of Austin's own natural systems. As the community has long valued greenspace and the knowledge that worthwhile research and teaching happen on its doorstep, BFL is an asset in preserving the quality of the City.

Much of **BFL's value depends on** qualities that are easy to overlook precisely because they are not built infrastructure: the **continuity of the land** and the long-term records that continuity makes possible. BFL hosts the longest-running urban ant community surveys in the world (45 years), a weekly phorid fly survey now in its 20th year, more than 4,000 individually tagged trees, the international DroughtNet experiment, and documentation of landscape change since the 1890s. As Paul Ehrlich and Peter Raven wrote in 2009, relocating BFL would destroy "*the grand experiment that is BFL"* because data collected over decades cannot be reproduced. Development of the land and its buffers would not simply shrink the acreage available for study; it would erase the unaffected setting and the continuity on which this body of research depends.

As we understand the proposal, the amended agreement would define the parameters for future private development in the Brackenridge Tract, including land on which BFL sits. Saving Muny preserves one precious greenspace; it should not come at the cost of another. Protecting Muny's fairways and BFL's habitats are complementary goals, and the City has the opportunity to secure both.

In short, allowing development on BFL would permanently degrade its unique habitats, forfeit Austin's only formal urban ecology research site, and end a public science and education resource that thousands of Austinites rely on.

OBFS encourages the City of Austin to:

(1) Understand the scale of what will be lost, not just now, but for generations, if BFL's land, natural areas, or buffers are opened to development.
(2) Ensure that any amended Brackenridge Development Agreement expressly excludes BFL's existing footprint, natural areas, ecological buffers, and supporting infrastructure from development, and designates them for continued research, education, and conservation, with enforceable protections.
(3) Engage the BFL scientists, UT faculty and students, and the community members, schools, and volunteer groups who use BFL before Council acts, and, if more time is

needed to do so, separate the provisions affecting BFL from the Muny conveyance so that the two can be resolved on their own merits.

Field stations like BFL take decades to build and cannot be relocated or recreated once their ecological integrity is broken. OBFS would welcome the opportunity to speak further with the City about the role BFL plays in Austin and in the broader field station community, and to support a process that preserves the Brackenridge Field Laboratory for the benefit of all Austinites.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Conner Philson, PhD
President, Organization of Biological Field Stations

Statement for the Meeting of the Austin City Council Planning Commission, November 10, 2026

Chase Rakowski, Ph.D.

I received my Ph.D. from UT Austin in Ecology, Evolution and Behavior in 2023, and I am now a Research Scientist at the University of Colorado. My development into a scientist and educator, including the research, training, mentoring, and teaching I performed as a graduate student, was possible in large part due to the Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL). BFL is a world-class research, education, student training, and public outreach facility. It is crucial that BFL be preserved in its present state because its status as a critical asset for UT, the Austin community, and the world is dependent on its location.

As a graduate student I was able to perform intensive field research, despite having to take and teach classes on UT's main campus, thanks to BFL's location a short drive from campus. Similarly, I was able to mentor undergraduates as they participated in field research, and serve as a teaching assistant for field courses, because BFL's proximity to campus allows undergraduates to commute to and from the lab in between other classes.

Not only is it invaluable to have a field laboratory near UT's main campus, but BFL's specific location now carries a priceless legacy of long-term datasets which provide a rare resource for environmental research. Decades of research by UT professors, as well as decades of data collection by undergraduate students in UT's Field Ecology Laboratory course, have produced historical ecological records that provide baselines for studying the effects of global change. Losing the ability to continue tracking the ecosystems of BFL as environmental change progresses would represent a tragic loss of scientific potential.

BFL is also a hub for community outreach. For example, the monthly Science Under the Stars series invites families from the community to tour the laboratory grounds and learn from graduate students about a diverse array of scientific topics. The great success and popularity of this program hinges on BFL's proximity to so many of Austin's communities.

Lastly, the entirety of BFL lies within a flood zone. The land is characterized by a thick layer of sediment deposited in a previous flood. Climate change is drastically increasing flood risks in Texas as recent tragedies from Camp Mystic to Hurricane Harvey have shown, so it is more important than ever to preserve floodplains with minimal impervious cover.

BFL is an invaluable asset to the Austin community and to the world through the research, training, education, outreach, and flood protection it provides. However, the ability of BFL to provide all these benefits is inherently contingent on its current location. Therefore, it is critical that the Brackenridge Field Laboratory be preserved as-is in perpetuity.

From: Laura Miksch
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Planning Commission 11/10 Meeting Statement
Date: Monday, November 9, 2026 6:10:35 PM

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Hello,

I wanted to make a statement about agenda item 15 for tomorrow. I was previously a student at the University of Texas at Austin and a full time research assistant at the University of Texas at Brackenridge Field Lab (BFL). While I was an undergraduate, I was able to work as an undergraduate research assistant and conduct research at BFL. BFL was fundamental to my education: I was able to learn about the ecology of Texas, get experience with conducting research which jumpstarted my career, and be mentored by experienced ecologists. Without BFL, I wouldn't have access to any of these experiences and BFL offers an accessible field station where natural resource students can gain experiences that will shape their future. During my time as a full time research assistant with BFL, I was able to contribute significantly to research into invasive grasses in South Texas, lead environmental education outreach for Texans and students, and continued to develop skills that allowed me to begin my career in conservation. Beyond the opportunity that BFL provided me and so many others, preserving an undisturbed ecosystem within the urban center of Austin is an irreplaceable treasure that must be protected. BFL is home to a diverse array of plants, wildlife, and fungi which are treasures representing the heritage of Austin and serve important functions in the overall ecosystem of the city.

The agreement being discussed was made and branded under the guise of preserving green space and keeping MUNY accessible to people. While this is a great initiative and MUNY should be protected, the lack of protections for BFL go in direct opposition to the stated mission of this agreement. Preserving one community asset should not require sacrificing another. When considering the recommendations the planning commission plans to make concerning the proposed amendments to the Interlocal Agreement between the City and the University of Texas related to the Brackenridge Tract, I urge the commission to recommend:

- Permanently protecting all 82 acres of Brackenridge Field Lab
- Shift expanded development agreements away from Brackenridge Field Lab
- Reject public financing that incentivizes development of irreplaceable habitat
- Make the full agreement available for public review and allow meaningful public input before any decisions are made to approve the agreement

Thank you for your time,
Laura Miksch

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[1]Dear Planning Commission,

I would like to make a case for why Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL) needs to be preserved in its entirety instead of being moved to a new location or making the decision to only keep a portion of the property intact and safe from development. The views and opinions expressed here are my own, and I do not represent UT or BFL. I am submitting this recommendation in my personal capacity as a scientist and ecologist who is familiar with BFL.

BFL is a diverse and integrated research landscape whose scientific, ecological, and educational value depends on its size, continuity, diversity, and long-term integrity. Preserving only a portion of BFL does not preserve its true value. Its value would be lost disproportionately as the property is reduced.

Scientific research and long-term data

1. Biodiversity is distributed throughout the property. Different areas support distinct habitats, species, ecological communities, and environmental conditions. No single portion represents the full biological diversity of BFL.

2. Long-term baseline studies depend on the entire property. Foundational studies of ants, trees, plants, and other organisms are distributed across BFL and studies must be continued on a site-specific basis. Losing substantial portions would undermine existing datasets and decades of accumulated scientific knowledge.

3. Thousands of student research projects have used the property. Student studies span the entire landscape, creating a substantial body of historical research that cannot simply be relocated or replicated elsewhere.

4. Experimental replication requires sufficient space. Independent replicates must be sufficiently separated to minimize spatial autocorrelation and avoid confounding effects. Reducing available land limits the scope, impact, and scientific rigor of future experimental studies.

5. Landscape-scale ecological processes require a substantial footprint. Processes such as oak wilt progression, invasive species dispersal, succession, population dynamics, and wildlife movement cannot be adequately studied within small, fragmented areas.

1

6. Environmental gradients provide essential research opportunities. Differences in topography, soils, moisture, vegetation, and disturbance history allow researchers to investigate ecological responses across natural environmental variation.

7. Undisturbed reference areas are essential. Researchers need intact areas for controls and comparisons when studying development, disturbance, invasive species, climate change, and restoration. There are no other spaces within Austin that could be used for these comparative research purposes.

8. Future research opportunities depend on available space. Field stations must accommodate new experiments, long-term plots, controls, manipulations, and emerging research questions. Land developed today is permanently unavailable for future studies.

Ecological integrity and conservation

9. Development creates disproportionate edge effects. Even relatively small development footprints can alter surrounding habitat through changes in light, temperature, noise, invasive species, human activity, and wildlife behavior.

10. Fragmentation compromises habitat connectivity. BFL functions as part of a larger network of greenspaces along the Colorado River. Retaining isolated remnants is not equivalent to maintaining continuous habitat.

11. Ecological processes extend beyond field station boundaries and development footprints. Changes in noise, lighting, drainage, runoff, sedimentation, vegetation, and can affect ecological processes such as wildlife movement over much larger areas than those directly developed.

12. BFL provides an increasingly important urban wildlife refuge. As surrounding areas become more developed, the value of maintaining a large, continuous area of relatively undisturbed habitat increases.

13. Large, intact landscapes provide climate resilience. Environmental variation and microclimates provide refugia for organisms responding to extreme temperatures, drought, and other environmental changes.

14. Type localities make BFL scientifically irreplaceable. More than ten species have type localities at BFL, with different species occurring in different portions of the property. These locations have lasting scientific and historical significance.

15. Cumulative impacts can fundamentally alter ecological integrity. Light pollution, noise, altered drainage, invasive species, and increased human activity interact over time, potentially compromising habitat well beyond the immediate development footprint.

Education and institutional value

16. BFL is an irreplaceable outdoor classroom. Students need access to a functioning, diverse ecosystem where they can conduct independent investigations, collect data, and observe ecological processes firsthand.

17. BFL's location a short ride from campus allows students to incorporate field-based studies and research experiences into their class schedules. These opportunities open career avenues for students, particularly those who must work and cannot otherwise acquire these skills outside their school schedules.

18. BFL's urban location is itself a unique research resource. Its proximity to UT Austin allows convenient field-based teaching and research while providing opportunities to investigate urbanization, fragmentation, invasive species, and ecological change.

19. Multiple classes and research programs require simultaneous access. BFL supports independent courses, student projects, faculty research, and visiting researchers. Its current capacity is already challenging to manage, and reducing the available footprint would intensify competition for space.

20. BFL supports education and research training across numerous disciplines. Its value extends beyond ecology to evolution, botany, entomology, mycology, zoology, geology, hydrology, and environmental science. Different disciplines require different habitats, locations, and levels of disturbance.

21. The property represents decades of institutional investment. Research infrastructure, established plots, collections, historical datasets, institutional knowledge, and relationships with researchers and students have accumulated over nearly 60 years.

Long-term planning and preservation

22. The entire property is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Its scientific and ecological value depends on the interaction of habitats, species, environmental gradients, and research areas across the landscape.

23. There is no scientifically defensible basis for identifying expendable portions. Areas that appear less diverse or are not currently used for research may provide essential habitat, connectivity, controls, or opportunities for future studies.

24. Relocation cannot replace what would be lost. Another greenspace or field station cannot reproduce BFL's particular combination of student accessibility, ecological communities, environmental conditions, historical datasets, and established research infrastructure.

25. Future institutional expansion should not come at the expense of habitat. Previous plans have increased the building footprint through consolidation of Collections and Outreach and expansion of Research and Teaching. Further building expansion will reduce habitat and compromise the resource that makes BFL valuable in the first place.

Habitat is the currency of the field station. Buildings and infrastructure exist to support the use and study of the land, not to replace it. Established habitats, ecological communities, research sites, and the opportunities they provide cannot be recreated once developed. The long-term success and expansion of BFL’s research, teaching, and outreach mission depend on preserving the entire property.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Elizabeth Bowman, PhD

From: Elena Adams
To: Garcia, Ella
Cc: LandUseLiaison
Subject: Written Comment for 11/10/26 Planning Commission Meeting Agenda Item 15
Date: Monday, November 9, 2026 10:47:27 PM

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To whom it may concern:

I am a proud graduate of UT Austin, and I wish to make the Planning Commission aware of the concerns that myself and many other UT graduates and community members share regarding the proposed amendments to the Brackenridge Tract agreement.

First, we do not wish to position ourselves in opposition to preserving the Lions Municipal Golf Course. The Muny golf course is an important historical community resource and greenspace which should be preserved. The same is true of the Brackenridge Field Laboratory, which is currently unlabeled and unmentioned in the proposed amendments, lying squarely within the area designated for potential development.

Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL) sits on land that was donated to the university in 1910, with the field station being established in 1966. Because this land was never developed, it serves as a time capsule: to this day we can still see evidence of the sediments deposited in 1900 when the nearby Colorado River dam collapsed, the quarry from which the dam was built, and a myriad of artifacts from people who lived on and near the land over the decades. We can track changes in the cultural and ecological history of Austin, from cultivated plants escaping from residential backyards into the ecosystem to the infamous red imported fire ant being tracked pace by pace as it spread through the field lab in the 1980s. Brackenridge Field Lab is a living piece of our city's history, and, as it approaches its 60th birthday, we as Austinites must recognize that it deserves preservation and protection.

Since its inception, the Brackenridge Field Lab has produced high-impact research and has jumpstarted the careers of numerous high achieving scientists and community members, myself included. It is incredibly rare for a university in an urban center like Austin to boast a high-quality, protected research station so close to the university for students and researchers to use freely and regularly. It provides a safe, easily accessible environment for everyone from first-year undergraduates to tenured faculty to learn, train, and advance scientific knowledge just minutes away from the main campus. Groundbreaking discoveries in invasive species control, global change biology, and animal behavior have been made possible by Brackenridge Field Lab. Species which were not yet known to science have

been discovered and named at the field station, rare native orchids which had not been spotted for over 50 years in the area have been found growing at BFL, and the field station serves as a vital refuge for unique species like American porcupines, which cannot live anywhere else in the surrounding area due to development and habitat loss.

UT Austin is a world-class research institution. If it intends to keep this reputation, there must be a reconsideration of the proposed amendments to the Brackenridge Tract agreement, which currently provides no protections for the field lab and research station. BFL is a unique resource which draws international research talent to UT, and has provided a training ground for countless UT graduates who have gone on to become influential researchers and community members. In addition, the people of Austin deserve to have their history preserved. Opening the field station to development not only erases an important piece of Austin's cultural history, but it destroys a unique remnant of habitat which embodies the natural heritage of central Texas.

Brackenridge Field Lab should receive permanent protections to preserve its resources for all students, researchers, and community members to use and enjoy for generations to come, as so many have done before them.

Thank you for your time and attention,
Elena Adams

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Good afternoon,

I'd like to speak out regarding the proposed plans for the Brackenridge Field Lab. We live in a time when it too often feels like we are losing things we can't ever fully get back. Preserving this land is important. Protecting diversity, speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves, and fostering an environment for curiosity are integral to what makes Austin and UT great. What we can gain from preserving this place is priceless and what could be lost is devastating.

I attended talks here during my time at UT. While I can't remember every fact I learned, I will never forget how it made me feel. It brought a spark to my love for nature and reminded me how vast and wonderful our world is. I felt inspired to do my part and to feel the embrace of nature, not just in looking at it but also in learning about it and protecting it. I can only imagine the wealth of knowledge and joy that others have gained from the BFL.

Preserving this piece of land does not just benefit the students who will get to learn there, but also the community as a whole and all the lives they will touch as they bring their passion and knowledge into the world. I feel lucky to have been a part of it in any small way.

Thank you,

Julia Daniel

From: Laura Springer
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Re: the Muny agreement and the Brackenridge tract
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 8:25:34 AM

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Dear Planning Commission,

I work at Brackenridge Field Lab but I am speaking as a private citizen. I am writing in support of adding language to the agreement that sets aside Brackenridge Field Lab as protected from future development. The field lab is a hotspot and a refuge of biodiversity in central Austin and protecting it protects wildlife. It hosts at least 163 species of birds, 20 mammals, 373 species of plants, 68 species of ants, 1200 species of moths and butterflies, and 200 species of native bees. Among these species BFL is home to larger mammals like porcupines and bobcats that benefit from a small protected area of wild land.

One of the things that Austin is known for is our respect for the environment and for nature. It's one reason I am proud to live and work in this city. Protecting Brackenridge Field Lab from future development would be in line with our values as Austinites.

Thank you for your consideration.

Laura Springer

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From: Megan Inglis
To: LandUseLiaison
Subject: Brackenridge Lab
Date: Monday, November 9, 2026 4:44:26 PM

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I respectfully ask the University to consider leaving the Brackenridge Tract as is. The Brackenridge Field Lab is a vital resource for UT Austin students and researchers and should be protected as such. I remember taking the MS bus (convenient for students!) out to the Field Lab to conduct studies on European Honey Bees - in 1980! Please do not place property development over and above the original use of the Field Lab and core mission of the University as a whole: EDUCATION and RESEARCH.

Thanks and regards -

Megan Inglis, BA Biology, UT Austin 1981
[redacted]

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From: protectATX
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Agenda item tonight - Brackenridge Tract
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 11:13:25 AM

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Hello Ella,

I am writing with concern about the Brackenridge Field Lab, which would be impacted by the current proposed interlocal agreement with the University of Texas.

I volunteer there to care for native, some endemic and rare, plants that have been rescued from development. The access to the greenhouse ensures we can care for plants and propagate more for placement in public gardens throughout Austin. With the rate of development in our area, this is vital work for conserving biodiversity.

I also have been very impressed by the range of programs and other volunteer opportunities at BFL. I strongly urge the Planning Commission to slow down the process of approval for this land swap and put in strong protections for all of the BFL site.

Thank you,
Laura Carbonneau

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From: Lauren Wojcik
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Written comment to the Planning Commission (November 10 meeting)
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 11:50:01 AM

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RE: Item 15, *Discussion and action on a recommendation to City Council regarding the proposed amendments to the Interlocal Agreement between the City and the University of Texas related to the Brackenridge Tract. (Sponsored by Chair Woods and Secretary Maxwell)*

Commissioners,

I have had the privilege of visiting the Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL) for the purposes of birdwatching and community science (reporting our species observations to the online eBird platform.) The BFL has been maintained for nearly 60 years as an accessible urban living laboratory and environmental research station. It affords the opportunity for longitudinal studies, which are of great importance to UT's research and our communal understanding of the natural world.

Today, I join others in requesting a slowdown of the progression of the Interlocal Agreement through the City approval process to allow timely review of an as yet unseen proposed agreement by all stakeholders. BFL should be protected in perpetuity.

Sincerely,

Lauren
Lauren Wojcik
[redacted]

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From: Abigail Moreland
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Comment for November 10th Planning Commission Meeting, Discussion and Action Item 15
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 11:02:19 AM

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Hello,

My name is Abigail Moreland, I am a current researcher at Brackenridge Field Laboratory and undergraduate at the University of Texas at Austin in the Environmental Science major. I am writing to express my opposition to the removal of the 82 acres of Brackenridge Field Laboratory from the authority of the University of Texas at Austin and its Field Station Network as a public comment for the November 10th planning commission meeting. My time at Brackenridge Field Laboratory has provided fundamental education and experience in ecological statistics, observation, land management, plant collections, and conservation. During my time applying for jobs and graduate school, many of my interviewers have cited my time and experience from BFL as the sole compelling reason they decided to review my application and go forward to interviews. I owe BFL my career for providing an ecological research area close enough to campus to use the Austin bus system. My classes at the University of Texas at Austin have also heavily relied on the 82 acres of BFL. My plant systematics class utilized the area for our plant collections final project (something worth a third of our grade) and my ecology lab, a class required for my graduation, utilizes the infrastructure present at BFL and the entire 82 acres as our classroom. Without BFL, the quality and availability of my education would have been significantly diminished. To see BFL be removed from the education of future undergraduates, graduates, and national researchers is incredibly disheartening, making me disappointed as a soon to be BFL and UT Austin Alumni.

Thank you for your time,
Abigail

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From: Olivia Haun
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Written Comment for November 10 Planning Commission Meeting - Protect Brackenridge Field Laboratory
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 1:19:36 PM

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Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Commission,

Please include this written comment in the public record for tonight's (11/10) discussion of the Muny Interlocal Agreement and proposed amendments to the Brackenridge Development Agreement.

As a former UT Austin graduate student and educator, I urge you to support permanent protection of Brackenridge Field Laboratory and allow sufficient time for public review and meaningful stakeholder involvement before advancing these agreements.

After moving to Austin from across the country in 2014, BFL became my living classroom and my first home in a new city. I came to know Austin through its plants and animals: the textured bark of hackberries, fields of gayfeather in bloom, and salamanders discovered beneath logs. Having a place to wander, observe, ask questions, and conduct research was one of the most formative gifts of my graduate education.

Teaching field ecology there, I watched my students' eyes light up as they began to notice the life that had been around them all along. I recognized that wonder because I felt it too. BFL solidified my path as an ecologist, naturalist, science communicator, filmmaker, and educator, and strengthened my commitment to helping others build relationships with the natural world.

The value of a place like this extends far beyond any one course or research project. Its influence travels outward through the students, scientists, teachers, and community members whose lives it shapes. My own work still carries what I learned there.

Please ensure that any agreement moving forward explicitly protects BFL's land, ecological integrity, and continued role in research and education in perpetuity. Future generations deserve the chance to walk those trails, make their own discoveries, and fall in love with the living world.

Thank you for considering my comment.

Olivia Grace Haun
Ecologist, Environmental Educator & Filmmaker
UT Austin alumna - Ecology, Evolution & Behavior
Former Field Biology instructor at Brackenridge Field Laboratory

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From: alex gomez
To: Garcia, Ella
Subject: Agenda Item 15 Written Comment
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2026 1:40:14 PM

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Dear Planning Commission,

My name is Alejandro Gomez-Leos. For tonight's planning commission meeting, **I wish to provide a written comment in opposition to Agenda Item 15 and in support of Brackenridge Field Lab's protection**. My comments are made on my own initiative, as a concerned citizen, and not as an affiliate of UT Austin or the City of Austin.

I grew up here. As a boy, my dad would take us out to the Barton Creek greenbelt almost every weekend, to hike, to explore, and to admire the dense urban wilderness it readily offers. I spent my early years adventuring in the off trails, drying off after an afternoon swim, or following an imagined treasure map with my neighborhood buddies. Later on, family road trips would bring surprise — I was taken aback in discovering that large cities elsewhere have not preserved their green spaces like Austin has. I thought about the others my age, those angsty teens who also needed clarity, and could not, like me, walk off their emotions in that meditative haze, that natural tranquility that this part of the Edward's Plateau biome so effortlessly inspires.

Now, if the Barton Creek greenbelt is the jewel of Austin, then the 82-acre tract at Brackenridge Field Lab is its crown. Unfettered by internal fencing and high human activity, the research station effectively stands as one of the most extraordinary urban wildlife sanctuaries to over 3,000 species which have been driven out by development in the surrounding areas over the past six decades. And this is not just a number; visitors at BFL need not walk long to spot lizards, armadillos, birds, or snakes that are unusual to find in the more heavily trafficked areas of Austin's green spots. My trips to BFL have been as a part of their public outreach program, Science Under the Stars, and as a lone visitor. My most recent trip to BFL, for instance, was fortuned by the sighting of one of the rarest mushrooms in the world, *Chorioactis geaster*, the Texas Star mushroom, only historically found in select parts of Texas and Japan due to their delicate ecological dependencies. Ironically, I was informed at BFL that the Texas Star, is in fact, the state mushroom of Texas. One has to wonder what other rare species may reside at BFL, and how has such a unique piece of Austin persisted, right under the public's nose? We owe it to the protections provided by BFL's scientists, those budding students and seasoned researchers who observe the outstanding ecosystem provided by BFL as the site of internationally renowned science. We owe it to the maintenance provided by BFL's caregivers, the volunteer naturalists and tour guides who have devoted themselves to bringing awareness of BFL's special status to the rest of us, and allowed us to explore this irreplaceable habitat in the heart of our city.

But these protections are not enough, as indicated by the proposition concerned in Item 15. If this proposal were to pass as is, BFL would be put at severe risk for development that would kill and drive out thousands of unique organisms, halt half-a-century of world-renowned ongoing science, severely impact Austin's status as an ecological research hub, and exchange it for what amounts to no more than a pawnshop building permit. Importantly, the protections which this proposition affords for Muny should not have to come at the devastating cost of losing BFL.

I am confident I speak on behalf of the greater Austin community when **I demand permanent protections for both BFL and Muny alike**. Moreover, I urge the commision to carefully inquire into the deceptive disposition offered in the agreement, particularly in regards to the lack of forthrightness offered by UT's legal representatives in this matter. Green spaces are a key part of Austin's identity. Therefore, as Austinites, we ought to be unyielding in their long-term protection.

Alejandro Gomez-Leos

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Jen Schlauch Written Statement for the Austin Planning Commissioner Meeting
November 10, 2026

My name is Jen Schlauch, all opinions are my own. I am an ecologist who received my undergraduate degree from UT in 2019. Among thousands of alumni with personal stories, I speak today on the critical importance of BFL for UT's science and education mission, and to its individual importance to researchers. Over the last week, we have gathered over 2,000 signatures on our petition in support of the preservation of BFL.

My arguments tonight are twofold: First, BFL's land is worth more to the University as a platform of scientific discovery, hands-on instruction, and positive community engagement than it would be as a developed property. Second, BFL's location is critical for biodiversity and researcher accessibility. The field station cannot simply be relocated.

In 2018 I discovered a rare new species of ant in BFL's trails, one of two new-to-science ant species found here and nowhere else on the planet. As an ecologist currently working in restored sites, I can tell you that paving over this property would cause damage irreversible in our lifetimes. BFL serves as a critical biodiversity island in urban Austin for many of the butterflies, birds, and other wildlife that make the city a special place to live.

Exploring BFL's grounds as a young researcher introduced me to a life in ecology more beautiful than I could have imagined. BFL is a source of wonder and curiosity for UT students and the broader public alike. The individually studied trees, rocks, and populations, the decades of scientific knowledge based here, are critical to the mission of impact that the College of Natural Sciences claims. If BFL is so valuable to the mission of research, education, and public outreach, why are we rushing a deal that would open it up for destruction?

I am arguing for the preservation of BFL in perpetuity, for education and biodiversity. At the least, I am asking the City to pause, and give this huge decision the time it deserves, and follow the amendments made on October 21 by the Environmental Commission. The university needs to consider the uniquely valuable asset it has with Brackenridge Field Lab. By working together on a reasonable timeline, we can come to a solution that will be better for both UT and the City of Austin.

FORMAL PUBLIC COMMENT / AGENDA ITEM 15

Preserve Brackenridge Field Laboratory

November 10, 2026
To: Chair Alice Woods and Members of the Austin Planning Commission
Re: Proposed amendments to the Brackenridge Development Agreement

Dear Chair Woods and Commissioners:

I am a UT Austin alumnus and Austin resident writing to urge the Commission to recommend **permanent, enforceable protection of the entire 82-acre Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL)** as part of any amended Brackenridge Development Agreement. The City can secure the future of Lions Municipal Golf Course without placing another irreplaceable public resource at risk.

BFL is an exceptionally rare **urban ecological field station only three miles from the UT campus**. Since 1967, its prairies, woodlands, river habitats, laboratories, and decades-long studies have enabled hands-on field courses, undergraduate and graduate research, and discoveries about biodiversity and ecological change. Students can work in functioning ecosystems without the travel barriers associated with remote field stations. Once continuous research sites and established habitats are destroyed, they cannot simply be recreated elsewhere.

The 1989 agreement expressly restricted non-university development of BFL, and the UT System Board of Regents unanimously voted in 2009 to retain the laboratory. Yet the proposed framework for roughly 190 acres of UT land does not clearly carry permanent BFL protection forward. The Commission should resolve that uncertainty **before** key development terms are approved, not leave the question solely to a later regulating plan.

I ask the Planning Commission to recommend that City Council:

1. **Protect all of BFL permanently.** Identify its full boundaries on binding maps; prohibit non-university development; and pursue a conservation easement or equivalent protection compatible with continued UT research and teaching.
2. **Exclude BFL from transferable development rights.** Do not count the protected acreage toward floor-area or impervious-cover allowances that would facilitate construction elsewhere.
3. **Require environmental review and buffers.** Assess baseline habitats, trees, waterways, drainage, and impacts from neighboring construction before establishing final development parameters.
4. **Make protections explicit before approval.** Require written, legally enforceable commitments in the amended agreement and meaningful consultation with BFL researchers, students, and conservation experts.

A fifty-year retention provision would be helpful, but it is not permanent preservation. **Please make protection of Brackenridge Field Laboratory a clear condition of the Commission's recommendation to Council.** Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,
Stuart Robertson
UT Austin alumnus | Austin resident

References: UT Field Station Network (research site); UT System Regents, Dec. 22, 2009 (retention decision); City of Austin Planning Commission agenda, Nov. 10, 2026; UT Brackenridge Tract Task Force report, 2007 (1989 agreement history).

FORMAL PUBLIC COMMENT | AGENDA ITEM 15

Preserve Brackenridge Field Laboratory

Austin Planning Commission • November 10, 2026

To: Chair Alice Woods and Members of the Austin Planning Commission

Re: Agenda Item 15 — Opposition to rezoning Brackenridge Field Laboratory for sale and development

Dear Chair Woods and Commissioners,

I am writing as the founder of Central Texas Plant Rescuers, a volunteer native plant conservation program that uses a greenhouse at Brackenridge Field Laboratory (BFL). I strongly oppose rezoning BFL for sale and development and urge the Commission to recommend its permanent protection.

BFL is a rare urban ecological field station, located just three miles from the UT Austin campus. Since 1967, it has provided an exceptional setting for student education, university research, and the study of biodiversity in functioning natural habitats. This resource cannot simply be recreated if it is developed.

BFL is also essential to our community conservation work. We are currently nurturing four species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) in its greenhouse before donating them to preserves and pollinator gardens. We also plan to propagate Texas orchids listed as SGCNs. This year, Central Texas Plant Rescuers donated over $5,000 worth of native pollinator plants to the Austin chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas, making dozens of pollinator host plants and endemic species available to the community and its pollinators.

Losing BFL and its greenhouse would seriously diminish our ability to care for and distribute these important plants and to conduct research on locally vulnerable species of conservation need. It would also mean losing a unique resource for UT students, researchers, and the broader Austin community.

I ask the Planning Commission to:

1. Oppose rezoning BFL for sale and development.
2. Recommend permanent, legally enforceable protection of the entire 82-acre laboratory.
3. Ensure BFL is excluded from transferable development rights and development allowances.
4. Protect continued access to its research, teaching, and greenhouse facilities.

The 1989 agreement restricted non-university development of BFL, and the UT System Board of Regents voted unanimously in 2009 to retain the laboratory. These commitments should be carried forward in clear, binding protections.

Preserving Lions Municipal Golf Course should not require sacrificing Brackenridge Field Laboratory. Both are valuable community resources, and BFL’s scientific, educational, and conservation functions deserve lasting protection.

Thank you for considering my comments and for recommending against rezoning BFL for sale and development.

Sincerely,

Ali Baucom

Founder, Central Texas Plant Rescuers