



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation

DATE: September 14, 2012

SUBJECT: Urban Parks Implementation Plan

On March 1, 2012 the City Council passed a resolution that directed the City Manager to present the Draft Urban Infill Park Initiative Implementation Plan to the Parks and Recreation Board, Planning Commission and the City Council for feedback. This correspondence accompanied by the attached power point presentation and worksheet accomplishes that objective.

The Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) staff presented the Draft Urban Infill Park Initiative Implementation Plan to the Parks and Recreation Board on June 26, 2012 and to the Planning Commission on July 10, 2012. Both the board and commission asked questions regarding the process Staff used to prioritize the location of future parks and how PAR envisioned the partnership with AISD would be structured. Prioritizations of future parks are based on various factors. The primary factors may include residential densities, neighborhood incomes levels, childhood obesity rates, and current recreational deficiencies. One strategy identified in the plan is to work closely with AISD and identify those schools that are within our park deficient areas of the city and analyze them to determine if space could be allocated for a pocket park. PAR would then work to develop a partnership agreement to develop these Pocket Parks. This strategy would be combined with our acquisition efforts for new parks in those neighborhoods where partnerships would not be possible.

Background

In 2009, the Austin City Council passed a resolution with the goal that all residents living in the urban core live within a ¼ quarter mile of a publicly accessible and child friendly park. Council also adopted a similar ½ mile goal for residents outside the urban core. Furthermore, in 2009 City Council set a vision for becoming the most family friendly city in the country, and added family friendly to its four citywide strategic priorities.

There are numerous benefits to the goals set by Austin City Council for having parks within walking distance of residents.

- Families living close to parks are more likely to exercise regularly, leading to weight loss, increased energy, and overall health.
- Children who can access parks and unstructured outdoor play receive a host of other benefits, including cognitive growth and socialization benefits.
- Parks attract families to neighborhoods, foster a sense of community through increased opportunities for social and recreational interaction, and
- Produce economic benefits such as enhanced property values.

- Currently only 36% of Austin residents in the urban core and 42% outside of the urban core live within walking distance of a park. PARD has developed an Implementation Plan that provides over 90% of residents a public park within walking distance of their homes.

PARD has developed an implementation plan for meeting Council's goal of the ¼ quarter mile and ½ mile of a publicly accessible and child friendly park. This Implementation Plan requires \$30 million dollars in acquisitions, and \$84 million dollars in design and development. The implementation plan includes the following sites:

- 84 *PARD School Parks and **School Sites;
- 51 Newly acquired parks;
- 45 Existing undeveloped parks;
- 2 City of Austin undeveloped properties;
- 10 Downtown sites;

The *first two years* of the Implementation Plan focuses on completing a Feasibility Assessment on the AISD school sites, school parks, undeveloped parkland and other COA property (alternative sites) to identify the opportunities and constraints of each. *Years two through nine* utilize design consultants to prepare the design and construction drawings for the parks. *Year three through ten* begins the construction phase of the parks, which requires new FTEs for maintenance and funding support to AISD to maintain the school sites.

Priority of park acquisition and development is placed on beginning the assessments in the urban core primarily based on the limited parkland availability, dense population, and development pressure. Further priorities are placed on park deficient areas of town with lower income levels and high obesity rates. Other factors may include park projects that may be incorporated with neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and private organizations. Other opportunities may include an urban acupuncture approach, which is a design approach that proposes minimum intervention for maximum gain and focuses on connections and settings of social interaction rather than objects. These examples may include oddly shaped public rights-of-way that maybe wider sidewalks and water hydrant spots that can easily incorporate a park amenity.

The acquisition plan for urban parks assumes \$30.6 million in bonds expended over an 8 year period beginning year 2 and ending in year 9. The design and construction plan assumes \$82.8 million in park development bonds.

PARD realizes that the implementation plan will take multiple bond cycles to complete the goal. However, it is important to document the cost associated with implementing this plan will increase significantly in future bond cycles due to several factors. These factors include: 1) land availability; 2) increasing property values; and 3) escalating construction costs due to inflation. If we can provide you with more details, you can reach me at 974-6717.

Attachment: Urban Park Implementation Plan Power Point and Spreadsheet

Cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
 Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
 Kim McNeeley, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department
 Ricardo Soliz, Division Manager, Parks and Recreation Department