City of Austin

Urban Parks Workgroup

Report Recommendations

October 6, 2011

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Mr. Mark Ott
The Honorable Lee Leffingwell
Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole
Council Member Mike Martinez
Council Member Laura Morrison
Council Member Chris Riley
Council Member Bill Spellman
Council Member Kathie Tovo

Re: City of Austin Urban Parks Workgroup Report

Dear City Manager, Mayor and Current Members of the City Council:

Enclosed is the report to the City Council from the Urban Parks Workgroup. As members of the Workgroup, we were honored to serve the city in this capacity. We recommend the report to Council for further consideration and action.

The Workgroup has worked diligently for over a year to analyze where neighborhood parks are needed within the city, strategize on how to integrate best practices from other cites, project possible costs associated with new park development, and examine the resources and policies needed to put park development goals into effect. Through this work, we developed a set of recommendations that will provide a strategy for reaching of the goal of providing neighborhood parks within walking distance to all citizens in City of Austin.

The Workgroup was comprised of a diverse group of volunteers, representing park advocates, educators, urban planners, policy professionals, and business leaders among others. We met with experts in the fields of park and play development to learn the most innovative strategies being practiced in other cities. We believe that the product of these efforts is an important step in the long term strategy of creating a sustainable and family-friendly city.

We submit these recommendations to the Council and we remain willing to participate in dialogue and review these items as the City works to make Austin the best city for Austin citizens.

In closing, we want to acknowledge the hard work of the city staff, in particular, Jason Garza, Steve Barney, Ron Hubbard and Jacob Browning, for their assistance in our efforts. We also extend grateful appreciation to TBG Partners for the formatting of the report.

Sincerely,

City of Austin Urban Parks Workgroup

List of Urban Parks Work Group Participants

Urban Parks Workgroup Members

Hayden Brooks, Austin Parks Foundation, Downtown Austin Alliance, and Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin

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Executive Summary

Austin is a city in love with its parks. For it is in our parks that we as a City find a central part of our identity – in the civic gems of Barton Springs and Town Lake Trail, and in the smaller neighborhood and community gathering spots of Stacy Pools, Red Bud Isle, and Festival Beach, and in the our large natural preserves that surround our city. But our ability to take care of our parks and to have them serve as vital components of our urban infrastructure is in danger. Lack of funding for acquisition and maintenance, lack of accessible neighborhood parks in the poorest areas of town, and lack of vital and strategic partnerships are preventing the Austin parks system from standing among its peer cities.

Although Austin ranks high in the country in terms of percentage of city land devoted to parks,[i] other strategic elements are missing from our park system when we compare the system to other cities — this disparity can be seen quickly when we compare our park system on a number of key factors:

- *Percentage of Population Living within Walking Distance of a Park:* With only 37% of residents in the urban core living within ¼-mile of developed parkland, Austin falls far outside the national models set by Boston (97% of children), New York (91% of children), Denver (90% of residents), San Francisco (85% of children), Seattle (79% of residents), Minneapolis (99.4% of residents), and Chicago (more than 90% of residents).[ii]
- *Number of Parks per Capita:* Austin also ranks poorly in terms of the number of parks. Austin ranks 52nd out of 75 cities surveyed in the per capita number of parks, with 3.1 parks per 10,000 residents. The national average is 4.2. National leaders include Madison with 12.7 parks per 10,000 residents, Seattle with 7.2, Corpus Christi with 6.8, Atlanta with 6.6, and Denver with 5.9.[iii]
- *Park Spending per Capita:* Austin ranks 65th in the country on per capita spending on parks operations, at $41 per capita a year, with just $9 per capita ($7.1 million a year) spent on parks maintenance. The top ten cities spend an average of $148 annually per capita.[iv]
- *Park Staff per Capita:* Austin ranks 29th in the country on the per capita number of park staff, with 7.5 regular, non-seasonal park staff per 10,000 residents. In contrast, the top ten cities have an average of 14.9 park staff per capita.[v]

Today in Austin, while 87% of people feel it is very important to live close to public parks, more than 63% of Austinites in the urban core and 58% outside the urban core do not have this access.[vi] As a city that prides itself on its networks of parks and open spaces, it is startling to realize that the majority of its citizens do not live within walking distance of a park and therefore do not have local access to the health and social benefits that parks provide.

Today we know that parks must serve many more functions if they are to be used to their full potential as key elements of our ever-increasing urban fabric. Through research and on the ground experience, we know today that parks serve as vital components of our urban infrastructure. Parks on both a metropolitan

and a neighborhood level serve the essential ecological roles of providing biological diversity, habitat, and often water management. But it is on a neighborhood level that we can see most clearly their vital roles in terms of health, community, and economic development.

The Austin City Council created the Urban Parks Workgroup to move Austin towards the national forefront in providing park accessibility and innovation and to help formulate a plan for meeting the City's new park access goal. The City's old goal, of one mile, was adopted 28 years ago in 1983 and followed the older model of relying on car access to parks. The City's new goal, adopted by the City Council in 2010, is that all residents in Austin's urban core will live within a quarter mile of a park and all other residents will live within a half mile.

The City Council asked the Workgroup to examine four specific areas related to implementing the new park access goal:

- An *analysis* of where new urban pocket parks are needed and which existing parks are in need of improvements;
- *Strategies* to incorporate more innovative and diverse play opportunities for children in parks;
- *Projections* of costs to implement the plan; and
- An *examination of resources and policies* needed to facilitate the implementation of the plan and to meet national benchmarks for maintenance of parks, including an examination of funding mechanisms, land use planning tools, and the utilization of public-private partnerships.

The Workgroup's major findings include:

- Only 36% of Austin residents in the urban core and 42% outside the urban core live within walking distance of a park, in stark contrast to the national leaders (Denver, Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston, and New York), where 90% or more residents have park access within walking distances of their homes.

- A total of 112 new parks are needed in Austin to provide 90% of residents a public park within walking distance of their homes - totaling an acquisition and development budget of $64,300,000 with an added annual maintenance cost of $2,366,000. To meet the City's ¼-mile goal for 90% of the urban core population, the City would need to add 58 new neighborhood or pocket parks. To meet the ½-mile goal outside the urban core, an additional 54 parks would need to be created.

To address these issues the Workgroup has proposed policy recommendations for both City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department. The major policy recommendations include:

1. ***Bond Referendum***: Include on the next bond referendum $25 million in bonds for the acquisition and development of urban parks and incorporation of family-friendly features onto exiting public land.

2. ***Parks District:*** Partner with other large Texas cities to ask the Texas Legislature to grant home rule municipalities the authority to create, via ballot referendum, a special city-wide parks district with authority to adopt a property tax levy dedicated to parks.
3. ***Prioritize Maintenance Funding***: Provide annual funding for PARD to hire 1 full-time maintenance staff person per 75 acres of city parkland (right now PARD is at 1 maintenance staff person per 175 acres of park).

Austin has a long way to go to catch up to cities such as Boston, New York, Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, and Chicago. But with the creative capital, research power, design community, and citizen body that loves their parks almost to their death, it is possible to not only meet the standards set by these cities – but to surpass them as a city that actively defines – and in turn becomes defined by – its parks.

Introduction

On November 19th, 2009, the Austin City Council adopted a city policy goal that "[u]rban parks should be provided so that all residents living in the urban core [defined in the resolution] will live within ¼ mile walking distance of a publicly-accessible and child-friendly park or green space."[vii] The Council adopted a similar ½-mile goal for residents outside the urban core. The resolution also charged the City Manager with setting up a working group of stakeholders to develop an implementation plan to reach these new parks goals.

The urban parks resolution followed an earlier resolution from 2009 in which the City Council set a vision for becoming the most family-friendly city in the country, and added "family-friendly" to its list of four citywide strategic priorities.[viii] Both resolutions came out of recommendations from the Austin Families and Children Task Force, which the City Council created to pursue policies that will make the City more attractive to families with children and offset the growing loss of amenities for families in the urban core. The full Task Force report is available on the City's website at: www.ci.austin.tx.us/council/downloads/factf_report.pdf.

Mission: Urban Parks Workgroup

In accordance with the City Council's resolution, the City Manager created the Urban Parks Workgroup with the focus of developing an implementation plan for meeting the ½-mile and ¼-mile goals, including the following:

1. An analysis of where new urban pocket parks are needed and which existing parks are in need of improvements;
2. Strategies to incorporate more innovative and diverse play opportunities for children in parks;
3. Projections of costs to implement the plan; and
4. An examination of resources and policies needed to facilitate the implementation of the plan and to meet national benchmarks for maintenance of parks, including an examination of funding mechanisms, land use planning tools, and the utilization of public-private partnerships.

The City Council also charged the City Manager to investigate opportunities for the inclusion of small or innovative play spaces for children in public spaces utilized regularly by families with children such as city libraries and city-owned properties downtown. This particular charge was outside the direct focus of the Urban Parks Workgroup and is an item that still needs to be addressed, although several of the Workgroup's recommendations help further this goal.

The Urban Parks Workgroup met for 10 months, beginning in January 2010, examining national best practices, visiting city park sites, meeting with PARD staff, and analyzing the city's current policies and needs concerning the accessibility, maintenance, and design of parks. The Workgroup included stakeholders from the Austin Parks Foundation, Downtown Austin Alliance, Families with Children

Taskforce, Austin Independent School District, and Parks and Recreation Board. A list of the Workgroup participants is contained in Appendix A.

WHY: THE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

As the Workgroup began it became apparent that the diverse group of members needed to carefully define and articulate why parks were critical urban investments. Polling various professionals and looking at parks literature readily helped to form a list of why having accessible urban parks was essential. It was found that parks are essential for:

- Addressing the issues of community obesity rates and weight reduction;
- Promoting cognitive development in children;
- Raising overall physical and mental well-being;
- Contributing vital space for fostering community;
- Laying the foundation for an environmentally sustainable city;

- Encouraging local economic development;
- Helping attract and retain families in the city.[ix]

One of the key issues that emerged was the necessity of having ***accessible public parks***, especially in denser urban areas and where homes lack yard space. The national benchmark for an "accessible" park is one that is within a ¼-mile safe walking distance.[x] Typically, families will not walk to a park that is more than a ¼-mile away.

The accessibility of parks is a top priority for Austin residents. According to the 2010 Community Survey,[xi] 87% of Austinites responded that it was important for them to live near parks and recreation facilities. In another recent city-wide survey, Austin families identified lack of access to child-friendly neighborhood parks as one of their top concerns with the City.[xii] Meanwhile, the Workgroup's recent GIS analysis found that 63% of residents in the City's urban core do not live within a ¼-mile of a public park and 58% of resident in the City's outer area do not live within a ½-mile of a public park

There are numerous benefits of implementing a "walkability" goal. Families living close to parks are more likely to exercise regularly, "leading to weight loss, increased energy, and overall health."[xiii] The role of accessible parks is especially important in the battle against the growing epidemic of obesity in Austin and across the nation. "[O]besity is growing faster than any previous public health issue our nation has faced," and merely freezing obesity rates would save the nation $200 billion a year.[xiv] A startling fact: Unless ambitious public action is taken, our children today will live shorter lives than us as a result of the obesity endemic.[xv] Expanding park accessibility needs to play a key role in addressing this health crisis.

Children who can access parks and unstructured outdoor play receive a host of other benefits, including cognitive growth and socialization benefits.[xvi] Park access attracts families to neighborhoods, fosters a sense of communities through increased opportunities for social and recreational interaction, and produces economic benefits such as enhanced property values.[xvii]

Because of the wide range of benefits that come from living near a park, the accessibility of parks by foot is now recognized as a more important measure of success than the absolute amount of parkland in a city.[xviii] For example, take the cities of New York and Los Angeles: New York City has 4.6 park acres per 1,000 residents, while Los Angeles has 9.1 park acres per 1,000 residents. But New York's park system is considered more successful. More than 91% of children in New York City live within walking distance of a park, while only one-third of children in Los Angeles do.[xix] In contrast, many areas of Los Angeles, especially areas with high concentrations of low-income children, are "dead zones" of no parkland. Like Austin and many other cities discussed in the next section, Los Angeles has recently recognized the importance of park accessibility and has adopted a new quarter-mile walking distance goal for the city.

National Best Practices

Park Access

Recognizing the importance of accessible parks, cities across the country have adopted specific goals for park access based on walking distance. The national leaders in terms of park access include Boston, New York, Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, and Chicago:

- In **Denver**, more than 90% of residents live within 6 walkable blocks of a park, which is tracked with GIS analyses to ensure the parks are safely accessible by pedestrians. The city recently raised the park accessibility goal to four blocks for urban areas.
- **Seattle** has a 1/8-mile goal for urban parks in urban areas, and ¼- to ½-mile for neighborhood parks. More than 79% of children live within ¼-mile of a park.
- **Minneapolis** adopted its 6-block goal more than 50 years ago, and now more than 99.4% of the city's residents live within 6 blocks of a park.
- In **Boston**, 97% of children live within ¼-mile of a park. Only 2,900 children do not live within walking access of a park.
- In **New York City**, 91% of children live within ¼-mile of a park
- In **San Francisco**, 85% of children live within ¼-mile of a park.
- In **Chicago**, more than 90% of the city's 2.9 million residents live within ½-mile of a park or play lot. The City's current goal is for each city resident to live within 1/10-mile from a "mini park" in urban areas, ¼-mile from neighborhood parks, and ½-mile from community parks.

Other cities have followed foot by adopting similar accessibility goals, as shown in the chart at Appendix B. St. Paul, Minnesota; Miami, Florida; Detroit, Michigan; and Long Beach, California, are all working to meet a ¼-mile goal for urban areas, while another 21 cities, including El Paso, Texas, are working to meet goals ranging from a 5-minute walk to ½-mile distance.

PARK FUNDING

A key component of great urban parks is city funding. A city cannot expect to meet a quarter or even a half-mile goal without securing and dedicating adequate resources to acquire and develop parkland and, even more importantly, *to maintain them as vital long-term assets*. Relying largely on city general funds for parks operations leaves parks at the whim of city budget cycles, and one of the first victims of the budget axe in economic downturns. In addition, lack of funding for ongoing maintenance means that staff are often left with the decision to let maintenance issues remain until they can be addressed as capital improvements within bond packages – in other words, park facilities come to the point of physical deterioration before they can be addressed. In a city that prides itself on innovation, this is not a sustainable model.

One of the most successful national models for secure parks funding is the use of voter-approved tax levies (either property tax or sales tax) dedicated for parks acquisition and maintenance.[xx] Voters routinely approve such levies. In Minneapolis, for example, the voters approved an annual $176 per resident tax levy, which funds 70% of the parks department's operating budget in a city where more than 99% of residents live within 6 blocks of a park.

Additional cities with tax levies for parks include (a longer list is available in Appendix C):

- **Albuquerque:** In 1997, voters in Albuquerque approved a quarter-cent, two-year sales tax for parks and open space, raising approximately $36 million to purchase over 2,000 acres of land as open space.
- **Carson City, Nevada:** The State of Nevada approved a special .25% sales tax increase for Carson City, to be used for parks and open space.
- **Minneapolis:** Voters approved a $176 per resident annual tax levy, which pays for 70% of the parks department's operating budget in a city where more than 99% of residents live within 6 blocks of a park.
- **Seattle:** The City of Seattle has a Parks and Green spaces levy, which is funded by local property taxes. The Parks and Green Spaces Levy was last approved in 2008 by 59% of Seattle voters and will last 6 years, generating $146 million for parks, open spaces, trails, and recreation projects. The levy will cost a total of $80.78 (paid over 5 years) for the owner of a home assessed at a value of $450,000. The levy covers both operating and capital costs.
- **St. Louis, Missouri:** Voters approved a .10 cent sales tax, which generates $10 million a year to develop an interconnected system of greenways, parks, and trails.

PARK DESIGN

As vital parts of our urban infrastructure, comprehensive park design is essential for maximizing the potential each park has for the larger community. Through comprehensive design strategies our parks, along with other policy measures, can help address the urban issues of:

- Obesity,
- Community development,
- Contact with nature,
- Local economic development,
- Ecological diversity.

To have parks meet these challenges they must be well-designed and maintained.[xxi] Being well- designed does not mean only meeting code requirements for safety and durability. Investing in good, comprehensive site design helps to maximize parks' capacity to attract and engage users.[xxii] And it is most often through innovative design solutions that our complex urban problems can be best addressed. New York City's Imagination Playground, which converted a small car parking lot into a nationally-known, and highly interactive play environment is one such example. (For a listing of current trends in park design see Appendix D.)

INNOVATIONS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Once parkland is acquired and development funds are put in place, it is essential to develop parks that are accessible, inviting and capable of accommodating many different populations – from children, to adults, to the elderly, to whole family groups. To accommodate the diverse populations of Austin and the many activities these different groups choose in outdoor spaces, it is important not to have single, homogenous model for what parks spaces can do. Many cities have developed programs and partnerships to help support the multiple functions that contemporary urban parks must fill:

- **Kalamazoo, Michigan:** Kalamazoo is partnering with the Trust for Public Land to develop a map that shows the relationship of vulnerable populations to outdoor nature-based recreational opportunity. These maps have then been used to identify key sites for developing new parks as the city grows.[xxiii]
- **New York, New York**: The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation has partnered with the Design Trust for Public Space to create *High Performance Landscape Guidelines: 21st Century Parks for NYC.* This document serves as comprehensive, municipal design primer for sustainable parks and open space. The *Guidelines* cover every aspect of creating sustainable parks, from design to construction to maintenance, and lists hundreds of best practices for making parks a powerful component of urban infrastructure.[xxiv]
- **Houston, Texas**: The Houston Parks and Recreation Department is partnering with local law enforcement and the non-profit organization CAN DO Houston to combat childhood obesity by working with police to address safety concerns at local parks and increasing youth participation in the department's after-school physical activity programs.[xxv]

The State of Austin's Urban Parks:

Falling Behind on a National Level

In developing our policy recommendations, the Urban Parks Workgroup examined the state of Austin's urban parks in three core areas: (1) park access, in terms of the number of city residents who do not live within walking distance of a park, and what areas are deficient; (2) park funding; and (3) park design, in terms of how the city's parks can incorporate national models for best practices and become opportunities for innovation.

Austin has many challenges to address in order to reach a national level of parks excellence in these three core areas. Even though Austin is a city of park system innovation, for historical and budgetary reasons, our City has fallen behind national best practices in all three of these core areas. Some highlights of how Austin ranks compared to other cities:

- 52nd in the per capita number of parks.
- 56th in playgrounds per capita.[xxvi]
- 65th in funding for parks operations.[xxvii]

These are rankings that must change if we are to maintain Austin's leadership as a sustainable, family-friendly city.

Where We Are Today: Park Access

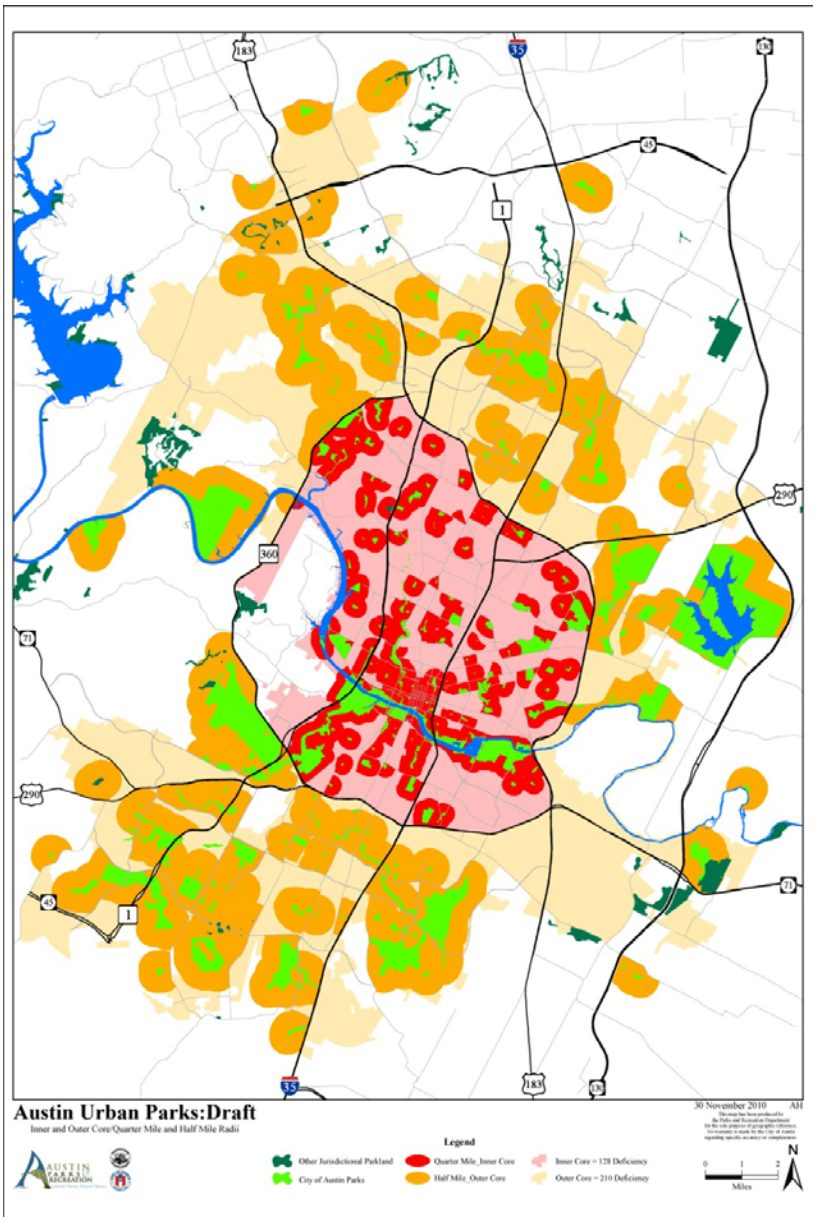
The City of Austin currently has approximately 14,911 acres of parks (not counting water and golf acreage). While the City has paid close attention to total park acreage over the past 25 years, the accessibility of parks is a new focus.

In 1983, the City of Austin adopted a one-mile walking distance goal for its parks. In working towards this goal, the City focused largely on a suburban model of developing 5-acre neighborhood parks that area residents could drive to in their cars. Even with this minimal goal, the City has fallen short: As of 2007, there were still 20 high priority areas of the City outside the one-mile radius—all in areas with a dense population and a lower socioeconomic status.

Assessing Current Inventory

One of the first tasks of the Urban Parks Workgroup was to assess the City's performance under the City's new park access goals: How far off is the City in meeting its new ¼-mile and ½-mile park accessibility goals? What areas of the City do not have ¼-mile and ½-mile walking distance access to parks? How many new parks need to be created to meet the City's goals?

To answer these questions, the Urban Parks Workgroup coordinated the development of maps and GIS data with PARD and TBG Partners that analyze park-deficient areas in the city.[xxviii] The map below, for example, shows which areas of the City are within ¼-mile and ½-mile of a publicly-accessible park. The maps are based on "as the crow flies" distance rather than actual walking distance. If a more complex analysis of actual walking distance was completed, the width of the circles would be smaller in most cases. The circles (or "buffers") are cut off at major roads, such as I-35 or Lamar Boulevard, to reflect areas where a park could not be safely accessed by children on foot.



The key findings from this analysis include:

- 63% of residents in Austin's urban core do not live within ¼-mile of a developed park; 58% of residents outside the urban core do not live within ½-mile of a developed park.

- To meet the ¼-mile goal for 90% of the urban core population, the City would need to add 58 new neighborhood parks. In the areas outside the urban core an additional 54 parks would need to be created.

Looking at National Averages

While Austin fares well nationally in terms of total park acres (14,911 acres), PARD's new GIS data reveals that the city fares quite poorly when it comes to park access. With only 37% of residents in the urban core living within ¼-mile of a park, Austin falls far outside the national models set by Boston (97%), New York (91%), Denver (90%), San Francisco (85%), Seattle (79%), Minneapolis (99.4%), and Chicago (90+%).

Austin also ranks poorly in terms of the number of parks. Austin ranks 52nd out of 75 surveyed in the per capita number of parks, with 3.1 parks per 10,000 residents. The national average is 4.2. National leaders include Madison with 12.7 parks per 10,000 residents, Seattle with 7.2, Corpus Christi with 6.8, Atlanta with 6.6, and Denver with 5.9.

When it comes to providing opportunities for play and sports in parks, Austin again falls short. The city has 155 public playgrounds, or 2 playgrounds per 10,000 residents, ranking 56th in the country. Madison, the highest-ranking city, has 7.4 playgrounds per 10,000 residents, Boston has 3.6, and Pittsburg has 4.2. The city ranks 71st in the country in the number of ball diamonds per resident, and 52nd in the country in the number of basketball hoops per resident.

Creating New Target Access Goals

Based on GIS calculations and estimates, PARD has the capacity to reach the ¼-mile goal for inner core city residents if an additional 58 neighborhood or pocket parks are created. To reach the ½-mile goal for those areas of the city outside of the urban core an additional 54 parks would be needed.[xxix]

Adding 112 new parks is a daunting prospect and surely will take more than a decade accomplish, and therefore will need to be part of the City's long-range plans. As the Austin City Council and PARD begin to long-term work towards this new goal, the City will need to develop a matrix with priority areas to be targeted in the shorter-term. The exact nature of the matrix would need to be developed in the course of developing the larger implementation plan, but it is recommended that the matrix would rank areas based on the following:

Matrix Criteria

- Density of neighborhoods, especially areas with a high percentage of multifamily housing;

- Concentration of low-income residents;
- Accessibility;
- Location relative to transit corridors (transit corridors receiving higher priority);
- High obesity areas;
- Transit-dependent areas: where higher number of residents live who are dependent on public transit.

ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE AREAS OF CONCERN

When these priority items are weighted together, specific areas of the City come up as in critical need for new parks. These areas correspond to neighborhoods that currently lack access to parks and that have large populations of low-income children who suffer from higher than average obesity rates. Based on these factors, these areas should be the primary focus of initial in-fill park development.[xxx] These areas include:

- East Riverside Corridor
- South-East Austin
- North Central Austin
- South Central Austin (near Ben White)

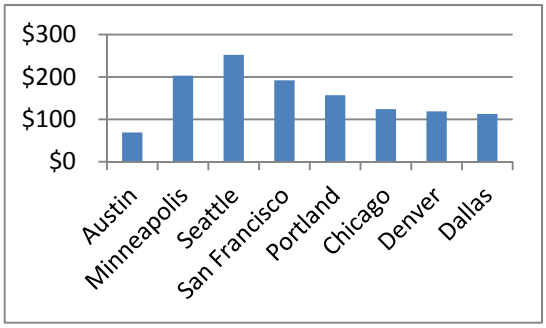
Where We Are Today: Park Funding

As with park access, when it comes to city funding for parks, Austin falls far behind national benchmarks:

- Austin is 65th in the country on per capita spending on parks operations, at $41 per capita, with just $9 per capita ($7.1 million) spent annually on maintenance.
- Austin has almost $1 billion in deferred maintenance for its current parks.
- Austin has only 123 maintenance personnel (based on FTE) maintaining the City's 14,911 acres of parks, which is equivalent to 1 maintenance personnel per 128 acres.[xxxi]

Reviewing Austin's Parks Budget

The City of Austin spends $69 a resident on parks each year—a number *significantly* lower than the national average of $91 for major cities, and lower than 50 other cities around the country.[xxxii] Cities with some of the most robust parks systems spend substantially more per capita, including: Minneapolis ($203), Seattle ($252), San Francisco ($192), Portland ($157), Chicago ($124), Denver ($119) and Dallas ($113).



City Spending on Parks Per Capita

The bulk (80%) of the $50.9 million annual budget[xxxiii] for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department comes from general revenue: $36.7 million, at a rate of $47 a year per city resident for not only parks maintenance but also administration and other expenses.[xxxiv] The remaining funding comes from the City's enterprise funds ($10.5 million) for baseball, softball, and golf as well as grants and other smaller sources, including an average of $1.4 million a year from parkland dedication fees.[xxxv] City expenditures on parks and recreation are a small portion of the overall city budget: approximately 6% of the general revenue budget is spent on parks and recreation. In contrast, public safety constitutes 65% of the City's general revenue budget.[xxxvi]

Funding Acquisition and Development of Parks

To make meaningful progress towards the City's new park access goals will require a significant on-going investment of new resources for parkland acquisition and development. To reach the City's park access goals for 90% of the population will require the acquisition and development of approximately 112 new pocket parks, at an approximate cost of $700,000 park ($500,000 for acquisition and $200,000 for development), or a total of $64,300000 million. While the total figure is daunting, if the City Council adopts a strategy of reaching the 90% park access goal within the next twenty years, the funding needed for acquisition and development — $3.2 million a year — becomes very doable and within the City's financial means. This level of funding could be accomplished with an allocation of approximately $20 million for acquisition and development of pocket parks, in each of the next three city bond referendums, together

with the leveraging of additional resources such as public land, partnerships with AISD, and more strategic utilization of the City's parkland dedication ordinance, discussed further below.

To lower the costs of acquiring new parkland, the Workgroup recommends that the City aggressively target under-utilized public land for transformation into parks. Through a window survey, the Workgroup and PARD staff identified a preliminary list of high opportunity public land sites located in areas without access to a park. The results of this analysis are contained in Appendix E. The City should further analyze additional opportunities to incorporate small pocket parks on public land outside a ¼-mile or ½-mile park access zone, such as underutilized city parking lots, surplus Austin Energy properties, and land owned by other public entities.

The Workgroup also analyzed opportunities for the City to partner with the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to include publicly-accessible play areas on AISD schoolyards in areas of the City without public access to a park. The City of Austin has a range of relationships with parks on or next to AISD schoolyards, including sites where the City of Austin owns a complete interest in parkland adjoining a school, and other sites where the City of Austin owns a partial interest. There are also AISD schools where the City has no ownership interest or relationships with the school's play areas. In many instances, especially sites where the City has no ownership interests, the play areas are not available to the public or only available after school children are no longer onsite, which can be as late as 6pm.

AISD schools offer a great opportunity for city partnerships to create additional park sites available immediately after school hours, in addition to small designated play areas accessible all day for younger neighborhood children and their families. Models for transforming underutilized schoolyards into innovative, publicly-accessible playgrounds include SPARK Parks in Houston, Schoolyards to Playgrounds in NYC, and Learning Landscapes in Denver.

A third opportunity for leveraging resources to lower the City's park acquisition and development costs lies within the City's parkland dedication ordinance. Under the ordinance, a certain percentage of each new residential development is required to include a dedication of public parkland. Currently, the City routinely grants developers permission to pay a fee in lieu of the parkland dedication, even when there is no parkland within the vicinity of the development. While for certain sites, especially smaller developments, the dedication of parkland is unfeasible and a fee in lieu makes policy sense, there are other instances where the dedication of parkland would be more appropriate. PARD's policy of routinely waiving onsite parkland dedication for larger development sites appears to be driven mostly by the Department's lack of funding for the development and maintenance of the additional parkland.

The Workgroup recommends the City take better advantage of this important opportunity to leverage parkland acquisition, by requiring a partial or 100% onsite dedication in larger developments located in areas without a ¼-mile park access. In some cases it may be appropriate to allow a developer to provide off-site parkland dedication within a ¼-mile range of the development. To the extent parks maintenance remains underfunded, the City should pursue allowing for public easements on privately-owned and

privately-maintained parkland as an alternative to dedication of parkland in appropriate developments, or pursue public-private partnerships similar to the Triangle and Mueller developments where parkland maintenance is paid for by surrounding residents.

Additional opportunities for leveraging resources for parkland acquisition include expanding the parkland dedication ordinance to cover commercial, hotel, and office developments. For developments where the in lieu fee is granted, the fee needs to be indexed to inflation.

FUNDING MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

One of the key barriers to expanding park access in the City of Austin is the limited funding currently available for maintenance and operations of park. Additional maintenance staff, and specific training for that staff, is needed in order to meet the City's goals of bringing more engaging, healthy park spaces to the City's residents.

In terms of parks maintenance, the City has 123 maintenance personnel (based on FTE) maintaining the City's 14,911 acres of parks, which is 1 maintenance personnel per 128 acres. In FY 2011, the City will spend just $7.1 million on parks maintenance, which is just $9 per capita.[xxxvii] These statistics place the City is way below national standards for funding of parks operation and maintenance. In a recent national survey, Austin was 65th in the country on per capita spending on parks operations, spending only $41 per capita, compared to the national average of $75 per capita.[xxxviii] As of May 2010, the City's Parks & Recreation Department calculated it had close to a billion dollars in deferred maintenance costs, making the City the second worst in the country in this regards, just behind Los Angeles.[xxxix]

From facilities, programs, concessions and other services, PARD generated $3.8 million in revenue in FY 2010, which went back into the general fund.

One of the greatest challenges in meeting the City's accessibility goal is the lack of maintenance funding. Without funding for even basic maintenance, alternative site designs that would bring the design of Austin's neighborhood parks to a national level of. For example, many of the trends in both research and practice have furthered the creation of nature-based playgrounds, which help kids connect to the natural environment through the design of playscapes based on natural shapes and materials (logs, grasses, climbing rocks, etc.). However, the ability to create such environments depends directly on the capacity to maintain these play spaces. Current maintenance staffing does not allow for anything other than the care of standard playground equipment. Equipment and training of staff is geared specifically towards the care of trees and cutting of grass. The ability to develop more comprehensive site designs that incorporate other natural plant materials such as grasses and perennials to heighten the sensory environment and create attractive as well as accessible sites is currently not feasible.

Where We Are Today: Park Design

By adding a focus on park *accessibility* — a City where everyone can live within walking distance of a park — Austin faces a new series of design challenges as it looks for opportunities to create hundreds of new smaller "pocket parks" and urban play spaces in the coming years. Expanding the City's design portfolio for pocket parks will be a key component to making the most out of these smaller spaces for children.

Historically, building a play area in a park has meant adding a traditional play structure. While these can be wonderful and engaging, this design model is limiting and does not maximize opportunities to provide play and engagement for all age ranges. Thinking of play in terms of play "environments," instead of play "objects," is now essential in making the best and most efficient use of our urban parks. As studies show, traditional play equipment can be engaging, but its rigid structures and forms do not allow for creative engagement and can be less effective than nature-based play environments in supporting the development of motor skills such as balance and coordination.[xl] Three of the major developments in park design include:

- **Kinetic Playscapes:** Kinetic play equipment distinguish themselves from standard playground equipment in their use of non-linear play environments that challenge children to make their own "play narratives" which can teach them more about risk taking and problem-solving. This type of play is critical for today's children who spend much less time in unstructured play than children did in previous generations.[xli]
- **Nature Based Play:** Nature Based play, or Natural Play is an orientation towards the design of the children's play areas that reincorporates the materials, textures, objects, and opportunities found in natural settings. With a focus towards reversing the alarming trends of increasing childhood obesity, attention disorders, and depression Nature Based Play uses the findings from childhood development and health specialists to make specific recommendations for how play areas can be developed.[xlii]

- **Mobile Play:** Mobile Play capitalizes on the idea that fixed play equipment can be a hinderance to a child's imaginative engagement with their environment. By creating pieces that can be moved, stacked, laid out, tilted, braced, and balanced on each other children will have a greater opportunity to manipulate their environment. This process of manipulation of the external

environment both physically and imaginatively is what lays the foundation for cognitive development.

Many issues stand in the way of fulfilling this shift in thinking for developing and designing innovative, engaging, and high quality parks for children. Austin's key challenges in the area of park design can be understood in three main categories: budget, liability, and current practices.

BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

maintenance staffing

Today, because PARD has such limited funding for maintenance, the plant palette that is available for park spaces is predominantly limited to grass and tress – thus precluding the use of alternative materials and grasses and other native vegetation in the creation of play environments. The types of park equipment utilized are also constricted by limited maintenance funding. Addressing the structural issues of funding and training for maintenance personnel will be necessary to broaden the types of plants and materials and innovative play equipment that can be used to develop play environments that meet the city's health and childhood development goals.

comprehensive site planning and design

Funding is needed to support comprehensive site planning and design work that can help parks achieve their maximum potential to contribute to neighborhoods in the areas of physical and cognitive health, community development, and economic development by supporting the development of well-designed parks that are strategically located within walking distance of other daily amenities such as restaurants, libraries, and grocery stores. When funding is not in place to support comprehensive design solutions opportunities are lost for maximizing park's potential contributions to their surrounding urban environments.

ADDRESSING LIABILITY

code requirements

Cities are often hampered in making changes to parks by the very real need to meet all code requirements and address safety issues. While this document does not lay out the many detailed code-based issues that need to be addressed when developing new types of play environments, the Urban Parks Workgroup recommends that PARD create a working group to specifically look at case studies from other cities in Texas and the nation to understand how other cities have brought forward innovation in park design while simultaneously addressing concerns for safety and liability.

liability (for contracted architects and PARD)

Layered with the need to meet code requirements is the need to make sure that PARD, and the architects they hire, designs parks in a manner that addresses liability concerns. As discussed above, the Workgroup recommends that PARD engage in a study to look closely at what other regional and national cities have done in this area.

EXAMINING CURRENT PRACTICES

lack of current tracking and metrics

Implementation will always be difficult unless specific metrics and methods of tracking progress are in place. Currently there are a lack of specific research-grounded metrics in the area of park design. Anchored in a city with many research institutions, the Austin parks system has the opportunity to reach out and form partnerships that can bring a new level of understanding about how to create vibrant urban in-fill parks and how to measure the success of these spaces.

lack of engagement with the larger Austin design and research community

Austin has a rich and thriving architecture and design community that have not been fully engaged in the creation of our parks and the larger conversation around parks' potential in the City. By creating links to this larger community, the City can launch forums for additional idea generation and design explorations. Venues such as small local design competitions, relationships with the University of Texas School of Architecture and the School of Design, and additional partnerships with the architecture and design community will strengthen and further distinguish the parks we design and develop.

public/private partnerships

Because of Austin's strong history of advocating for the preservation of it's natural resources and beauty there has been a desire to keep "nature" and "business" in separate zones of the city, and because of this separation the City of Austin has not been at the forefront of developing public/private relationships to help support the development of its park system. Thankfully, a fuller vision for how private partnerships can support our public parks is now starting to develop. To support this new vision, PARD is currently developing specific partnership policies and many on-the-ground examples can be seen, ranging in scale from formal agreements with local neighborhood groups to the creation of the Waller Creek Conservancy. However, these new efforts are just beginning and require more staffing to bring public-private partnerships to their full potential.

Striving for National Excellence

Recommendations from the Urban Parks Workgroup

Austin's park system faces many challenges, but the park system's potential for national excellence is even greater. Not only does Austin benefit from having tremendous resources, but it fosters a population that is devoted to its parks. After looking at academic research, national models, and local initiatives, the Workgroup offers the following policy recommendations for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) and the Austin City Council.

Recommended Strategies and Policies for the Austin Parks and Recreation Department

Funding

1. Increase park-related **revenue from events on city parkland**, sponsorships, and concessions to support the enhanced maintenance and operations of parks.

   Stakeholders identified this as a tremendous area of opportunity for raising revenue.

2. Allow for **more graduated fees** in parks based on the type of payor (e.g., non-profit vs for-profit organization); allow for rental of smaller sections of parks.

   The current fee policy is broad and encourages PARD to dismiss the fees for smaller groups and events. By making a graduated fee structure, reasonable fees can be collected for smaller-scaled activities.

3. Investigate opportunities for **more creative funding streams** and encourage and promote opportunities for more public donations to parks and recreational facilities such as pools, benches, and trees.

   Many cities encourage creative strategies for gathering funding such as a program that facilitates the donation of a tree for a newborn child.

Acquisition and Development

4. Set up a workgroup to **look specifically at models for approaching *liability issues*** (national as well as other Texas cities) in the development of more innovative play features on city parkland.

   Innovative features and designs are often dismissed in early planning phases because of the lack of clear guidelines on liability and code related issues. Looking at such issues up front will open up more opportunities for the incorporation of innovative features and designs in the City's parks.

5. Create a Citizen/PARD staff work group to prepare **Austin-specific comprehensive *design and management guidelines*** for natural play areas for the review and action of City Council by December 1, 2012. These guidelines should include and build upon the best practices identified in the "Natural Play and Learning Areas National Guidelines Project" currently being developed as a joint project of the National Wildlife Federation and the Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University.

   In tandem with the work being done on liability issues, design and management guidelines should also be developed. Austin is fortunate to be the home for the National Wildlife Federation's new program on developing national standards for natural play. PARD is invited to use these in the development of Austin-specific guidelines.

6. **Engage the Austin design and research communities** (such as UT faculty working in the areas of play, public health, and cognitive development) in the creation and development of innovative playscapes.

   Some of Austin's greatest resources are its cultural and intellectual capital. Strategic partnerships with both university initiatives and the design and arts communities have the potential to bring the innovation needed to help Austin perform on a national level in park design. Rather than waiting for others to approach PARD, PARD should take the initiative to indentify and engage the research and design communities.

7. As part of the process for developing guidelines for natural play areas (see #5), **create a list of "low hanging fruit" projects** where innovative play environments can be incorporated (funded, designed and constructed) at a smaller scale with specific partners (such as neighborhood groups, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and private organizations).

a. While developing these project use the opportunity to create comprehensive design and management guidelines for natural play areas (see #5).
b. Create **methods for monitoring and evaluating** completed parks. Consider working with existing organizations and university faculty to augment PARD's monitoring capacities.

Often the reason for not developing innovative play environments is simply the reason that it has not been done before – liability issues have not been addressed, code issues have not been fully outlined, public opinion has not been gauged. By starting with the most promising sites and partnerships, PARD can work to build a repertoire of dynamic and innovative site designs.

Maintenance and Operations

8. Encourage **more public-private partnerships** with neighborhood groups, surrounding developments, and local businesses, along the lines of the Triangle Development, Sparky Park, Foundations Communities/UT at the MLK TOD, and the numerous existing "friends of parks" agreements with neighborhoods. Hire one additional full-time employee to support the growth of such partnerships.

There will never be enough funds to maintain and improve city parks from the public side alone; there are simply too many other priorities that demand attention. A more aambitious pursuit of public-private partnerships will expand the City's capacity to create and maintain more parks and further the ability of the City's to meet its ¼-mile access goals. Currently there are over 90 community groups who have adopted and are working to improve parks across Austin, but many more need to be fostered to achieve the results we need.

Implementation

9. Incorporate the recommendations of this report into **PARD's long-range plan**.

PARD's Long Range Plan is an opportunity to tie this report's findings and recommendations into the Department's larger growth and development strategies.

10. Adopt a **10-year plan for meeting the ¼-mile and ½-mile parks access goal**. Set annual benchmarks with data tracking mechanisms including the use of GIS mapping. Examine annually what percent of residents and children live within ¼- and ½-mile of a park and identify areas with increasing levels of density without ¼-mile access to parks. Prioritize gaps by identifying areas with the highest densities and largest number of children.

a. Within the 10-year plan **lay out design, development, and maintenance needs** as they pertain specifically to the characteristics of small inner-city parks.
b. As part of the plan, lay out strategies for creating strategic and synergistic alliances with initiatives such as the Children's Optimal Health Plan from the UT School of Public Health and the Austin Travis County Anti-Obesity Plan in the planning and development of new parks.

Today in Austin there is a renaissance of research and policy initiatives being formed that focus on the links between health and public space. Alliances and opportunities for joint projects should be actively pursued for the development of new parks, renovations of existing parks, and ongoing assessment.

11. Create a PARD/AISD workgroup to develop **a work plan for creating park sites available after school hours**, following models such as SPARK Parks in Houston, Schoolyards to Playgrounds in NYC, and Learning Landscapes in Denver; and a **plan for small designated areas for continually-accessible play spaces for younger neighborhood children and their families**.

Many cities are undertaking initiatives to address high-risk, low-income populations, through targeting of school sites. By incorporating playground renovations, community gardens, nutrition education, physical education teacher training, and other programs, cities and schools are partnering to transform once-neglected school sites into dynamic learning environments and centers of their communities. With existing resources and expertise Austin has the potential to be a leader in this area.

12. Convene **interdepartmental work group to create an action plan for addressing development and maintenance issues** for new and potential pocket park sites on city properties overseen by departments other than PARD. As part of that action plan, draft a general interdepartmental maintenance agreement and lay out specific interdepartmental maintenance scenarios so that current concerns regarding liability and maintenance do not stop potential projects from happening.

Working interdepartmentally to create and maintain public open space is often unsuccessful because of ambiguity over terms of ownership and maintenance. By addressing such issues up front, many existing city property holdings can be used immediately to develop central city parks.

Striving for National Excellence

Policy Recommendations for Austin City Council

Overall

1. **Support the acquisition, development, and maintenance of urban parks** so that, within the next 20 years, 90% of Austin residents live within a ¼-mile of a well-maintained park for the urban core, and ½-mile for outside the urban core. Provide adequate funding to PARD and other appropriate departments to acquire, develop, and maintain these urban parks.

Funding

2. **Bond referendum**: In the next general obligation bond election, make closing the ½-mile and ¼-mile park access gaps a priority by putting on the ballot approximately **$20 million in bonds for the next three bond cycles specifically for the acquisition and development of new urban parks and incorporation of family-friendly play features onto existing public land**. To minimize land acquisition costs: (1) utilize where possible the conversion of city-owned vacant land; (2) add play features to existing city facilities such as libraries and health centers; and (3) partner with AISD to transform underutilized public school yards into enhanced, multi-use outdoor resources for the children and community, along the lines of Denver's nationally-recognized Learning Landscape Program. Funding for the acquisition of new urban parks should prioritize areas with high densities, particularly areas along transit corridors.

   In order to meet the ½-mile and ¼-mile goals and to provide innovative family-friendly play features across the City, general obligation bond funding is essential, for both the acquisition of land and developing the new urban parks and play features.

3. **Adopt a new dedicated source of revenue for parks maintenance and operations**, utilizing one or both of the following two options:

   a. Partner with other large Texas cities to ask the Texas Legislature to grant home rule municipalities the authority to create, via ballot referendum, a **special city-wide parks district with authority to adopt a property tax levy dedicated to parks** (similar to library districts and hospital districts).

As discussed above in this report, one of the most successful models for parks funding is the use of voter-approved tax levies (either property tax or sales tax) dedicated for parks acquisition and maintenance.[1] For example, Minneapolis voters have approved an annual $176 per resident tax levy, which funds 70% of the parks department's operating budget in a city where more than 99% of residents live within 6 blocks of a park. In 2008, Seattle voters approved a $146 million parks and green space levy which will cost the owner of a $450,000 home $80.75 over five years. A list of other cities and states relying on voter-approved tax levies is contained in Appendix B. Austin should be able to build strong alliances with other large cities for legislation allowing the city to create a parks district and submit to voters a tax levy. The Legislature has already approved similar initiatives for library and hospital districts.

4. Provide **annual funding for PARD to hire 1 full-time maintenance staff person per 75 acres of city parkland** (right now PARD is at 1 maintenance staff person per 175 acres of park).

The lack of adequate maintenance funding is currently the largest barrier to acquiring and developing new parks. Meeting the ½- and ¼-mile urban parks goals is contingent on the city allocating more funding for parks maintenance. Current funding for parks maintenance at 1 staff person per 175 acres falls well below national benchmarks and has resulted in the city being unable to adequately maintain its current parks portfolio.

5. Set a **per capita funding benchmark of $19 a person for maintenance of parks**, similar to the City's policy for police funding.

As the city grows in population and the demand for parks grows, so should city-funded maintenance for parks. A per capita benchmark helps ensure that the City keeps pace with its growing parks maintenance needs. The $19 a person figure is based on the above recommendation that the City budget include enough funding to allow PARD to hire one full-time maintenance staff person per 75 acres of parkland owned by the City, which would currently cost the City $19 a person, using the City's 2010 population of 783,000.

6. **Dedicate revenue** from parks facilities and concessions to operations and maintenance expenses within PARD versus city general revenue.

[1] One caution with tax levies: The use of these levies for parks funding, especially sales taxes, can have a regressive impact on low-income families unless exemptions or other policies are adopted to minimize the impact on these families.

Currently, $3.8 million in revenue from park facilities and concessions goes back into the City's general fund rather than directly supporting parks operations and maintenance, leaving less incentive for parks staff to pursue new and improved revenue streams.

7. Expand financial support for providing **safe pedestrian and bike access to city parks and other outdoor public spaces**, in line with the City's Strategic Mobility Plan, through implementation of the Fall 2010 and succeeding bond referendums.

In addition to adding new urban parks, ensuring safe pedestrian and bike access to these parks is just as critical in order for the City to meet its ½-mile and ¼-mile park accessibility goals.

Acquisition and Development

8. **Amend the City's parkland dedication ordinance to support the ¼-mile family-friendly parks goal**:
   a. **Require parkland dedication onsite** (i.e., eliminate PARD discretion to allow fee in lieu) on larger developments when there is no park within ¼-mile of the development, except in exceptional circumstances.
   b. In the event of exceptional circumstances where there is no park within ¼-mile of the development, allow the developer to provide a smaller percentage of the parkland onsite and adjust the fee in lieu accordingly, or allow the developer to provide off-site parkland within a ¼-mile range of the development.
   c. Target any fees in lieu collected under the parkland dedication ordinance to the creation or improvements of parks within a ¼-mile of the development versus the one-mile range under current policy.
   d. Adjust the calculation for the fee in lieu: (1) index the fee to inflation; and (2) tie the fee to the square footage of a unit versus a flat per unit assessment (otherwise, the fee falls harder on smaller units in terms of cost per square foot).
   e. Expand the parkland dedication ordinance and fee in lieu to **cover new, larger commercial and office developments**, based on the number of employees to be employed in the development.
   f. Allow public easements on private land as an alternative to dedication of parkland in appropriate developments where needed to support the creation and maintenance of parks, family-friendly public plazas, and other outdoor family-friendly outdoor spaces, especially along transit corridors.

9. Adopt a policy requiring all city departments to **include outdoor family-friendly features such as creative play spaces, nature-based play areas, and interactive art spaces at all new city facilities that are oriented to the public**. In addition, direct the City Manager to oversee the development of policies for maintaining and operating these features.
   a. In particular, all new libraries should include a pocket park or micro play space.
   b. The addition of family-friendly play features at the City Hall plaza should be a top priority and set a model for other city facilities.

   The adoption of this policy would further the City's commitment to being the most family-friendly city in the country, and further the City's strategic priorities. The incorporation of family-friendly play features into existing city facilities utilized by families is one of the most cost-effective ways to expand family access to outdoor play opportunities in the City, since these opportunities would not require the acquisition of new land. Appropriate play features depend on the site and can range from small interactive art exhibits to larger nature-based playscapes. A similar policy directive exists requiring green building features in new city buildings.

10. Direct the City Manager to initiate and oversee a process for **transforming under-utilized public land into innovative, child-friendly pocket parks, targeting the following resources: (1) transform the "high opportunity" city-owned sites** identified by the Urban Parks Workgroup and listed in Appendix E; (2) further analyze additional opportunities to incorporate small pocket parks on public land outside a ¼-mile or ½-mile park access zone, such as underutilized city parking lots, surplus Austin Energy properties, and land owned by other public entities; and (3) **partner with AISD to transform underutilized public school yards that are not currently accessible to the public**. Provide funding for the development and maintenance of the approximately 22 available high opportunity sites.

    In Summer 2010, members of the Urban Parks Workgroup and staff from the Parks and Recreation Department visited 40 different sites owned by the City of Austin or the Austin Independent School District to assess whether the sites would be appropriate for inclusion of family-friendly play features or conversion into an urban park. The surveyors looked at factors such as topography, surrounding incompatible uses, distance from residences, and access. Many of the city-owned sites surveyed are already being maintained by city staff from a department other than PARD. Fifteen sites were identified as high opportunity sites for conversion into family-friendly urban parks, while another 10 sites were identified as medium opportunity sites. All but two of the areas fall within a gap area, where residents do not currently have ¼-mile walking access to a park.

Additional analysis was done to assess the potential for developing school sites as viable pocket park sites. Twenty two potential sites were found. Using a combination of high opportunity sites and school sites the City has the potential to provide accessible park space for an additional 33% of the Austin citizens. [xliii]

Implementation

11. Provide funding for one full-time employee at PARD to oversee the implementation of Council policies pertaining to family-friendly urban parks. Provide funding for an additional full-time employee to leverage the potential of public-private partnerships to support the ¼-mile urban parks goal.

12. Direct the City Manager to aggressively pursue strategic partnerships with health-related entities and government and private grants to facilitate the creation of more outdoor play and recreational opportunities for children in the fight to address the nation's obesity epidemic. Health-related entities to approach include the Children's Optimal Health, AISD, Seton Hospital, Dell Children's Hospital, St. David's Hospital, UT School of Public Health, Travis County, and the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department's Obesity Prevention Program.

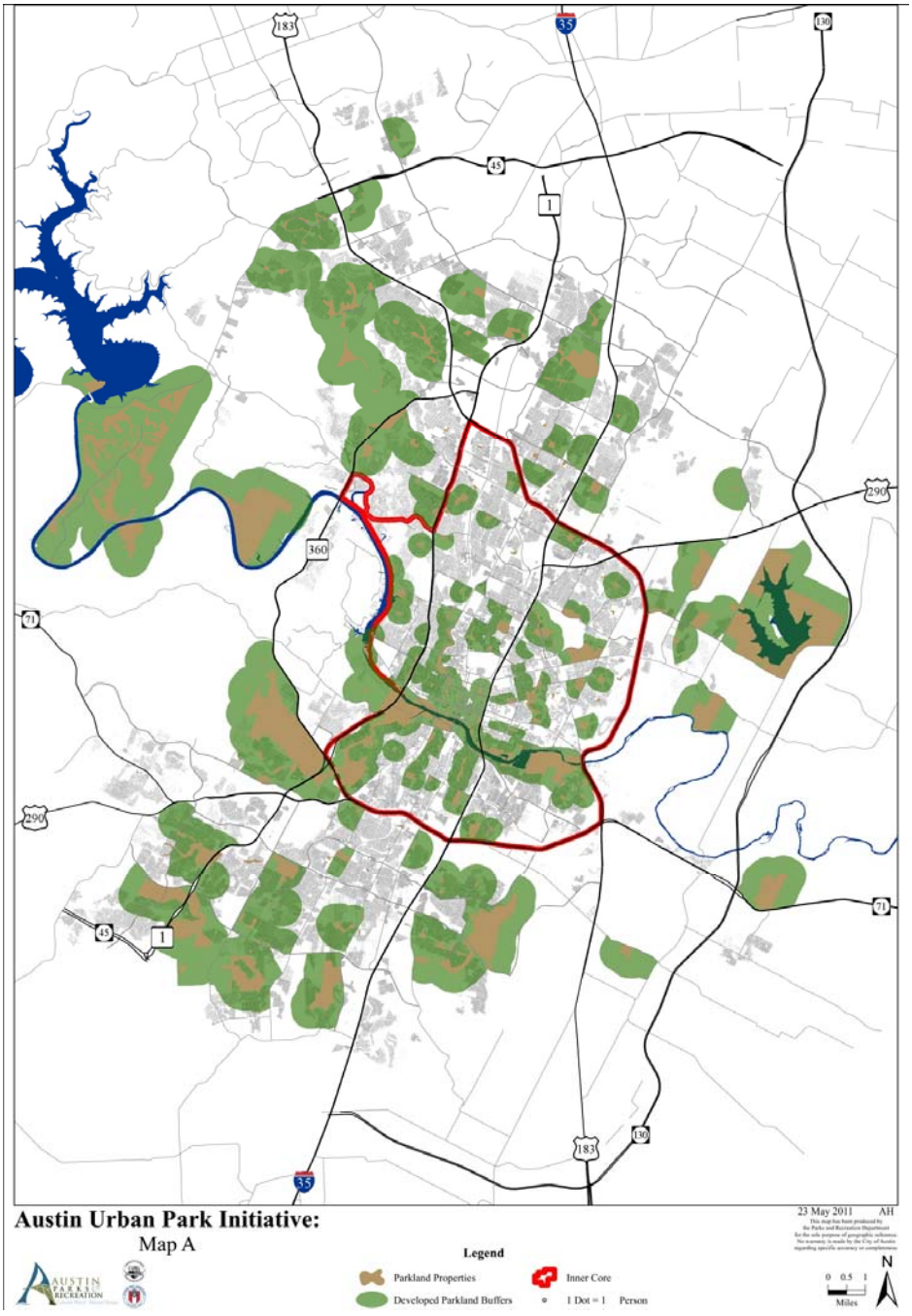
13. Direct the City Manager and staff to develop a ten-year action plan laying out strategies, goals, and measurable outcomes for implementing the acquisition, design, and maintenance policies for family-friendly urban parks.

14. Direct the City Manager and staff to look for ways to increase revenue from park-related events, sponsorships, and concessions and to apply these funds exclusively to parks maintenance and operations and park improvements.

15. Direct the City Manager and staff to look at implementing a graduated fee structure for the renting of park facilities for events.

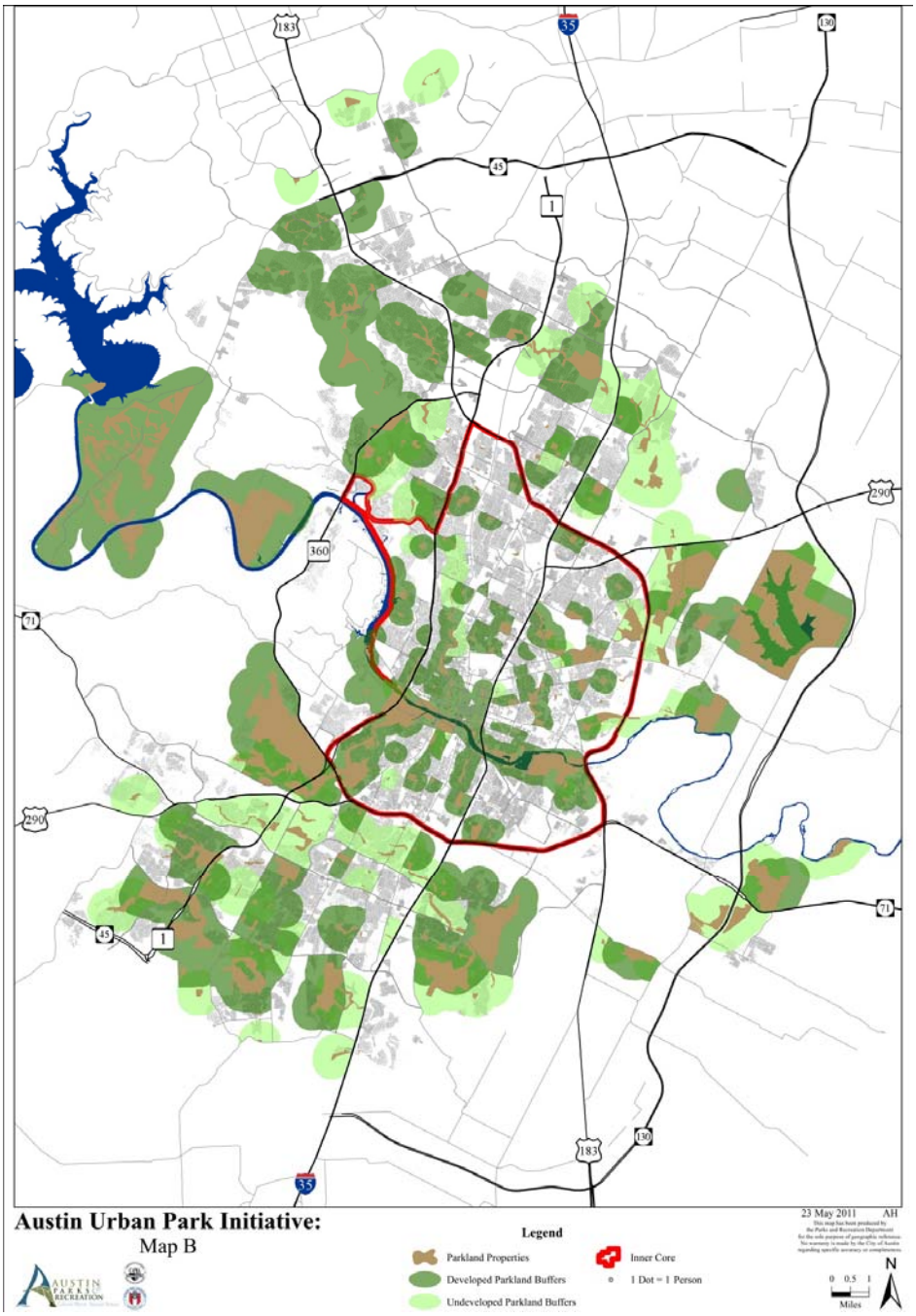
16. Direct the City Manager and staff to consider allowing organizations renting park facilities to provide improvements instead of fees, based on the needs of the specific park as determined by city parks staff. These needs could include park furnishings (benches, chairs, trash cans, lighting), grass, irrigation, planting, or even ongoing maintenance.

Appendix A: Park Development GIS Analysis Maps



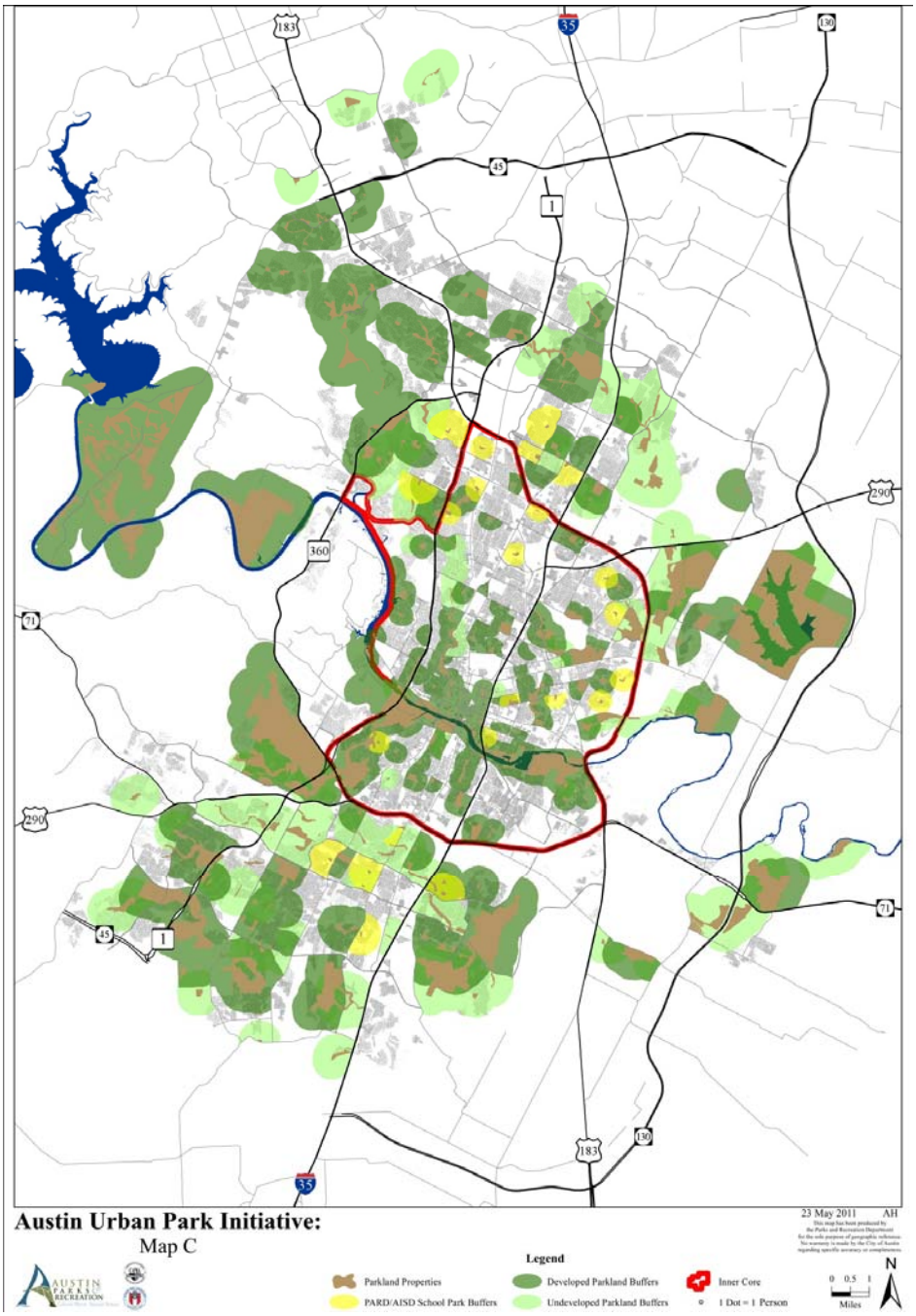
Map A: Developed Parks in Austin

Developed Parkland



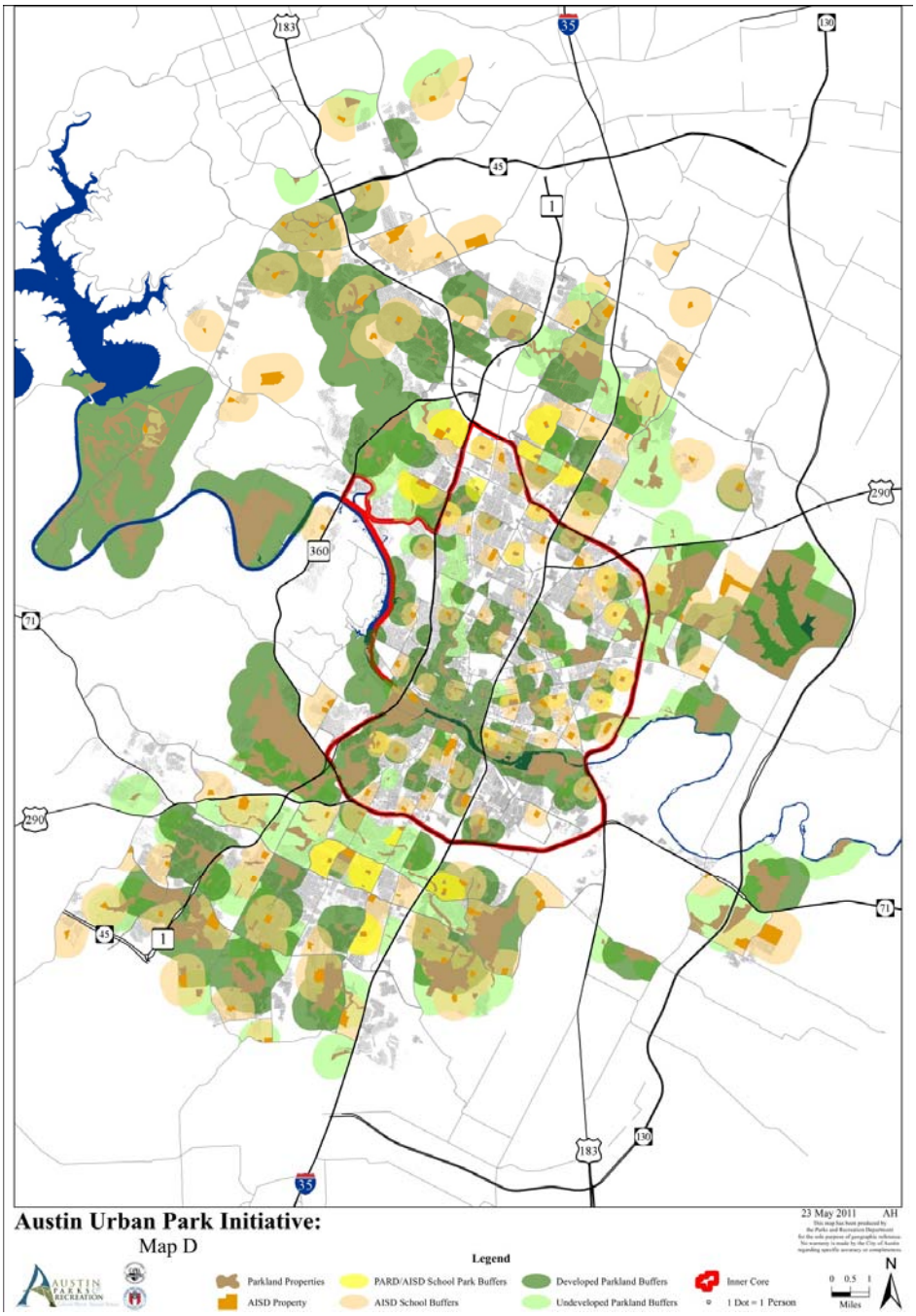
Map B: Undeveloped Parks in Austin

Developed Parkland
Undeveloped Parkland



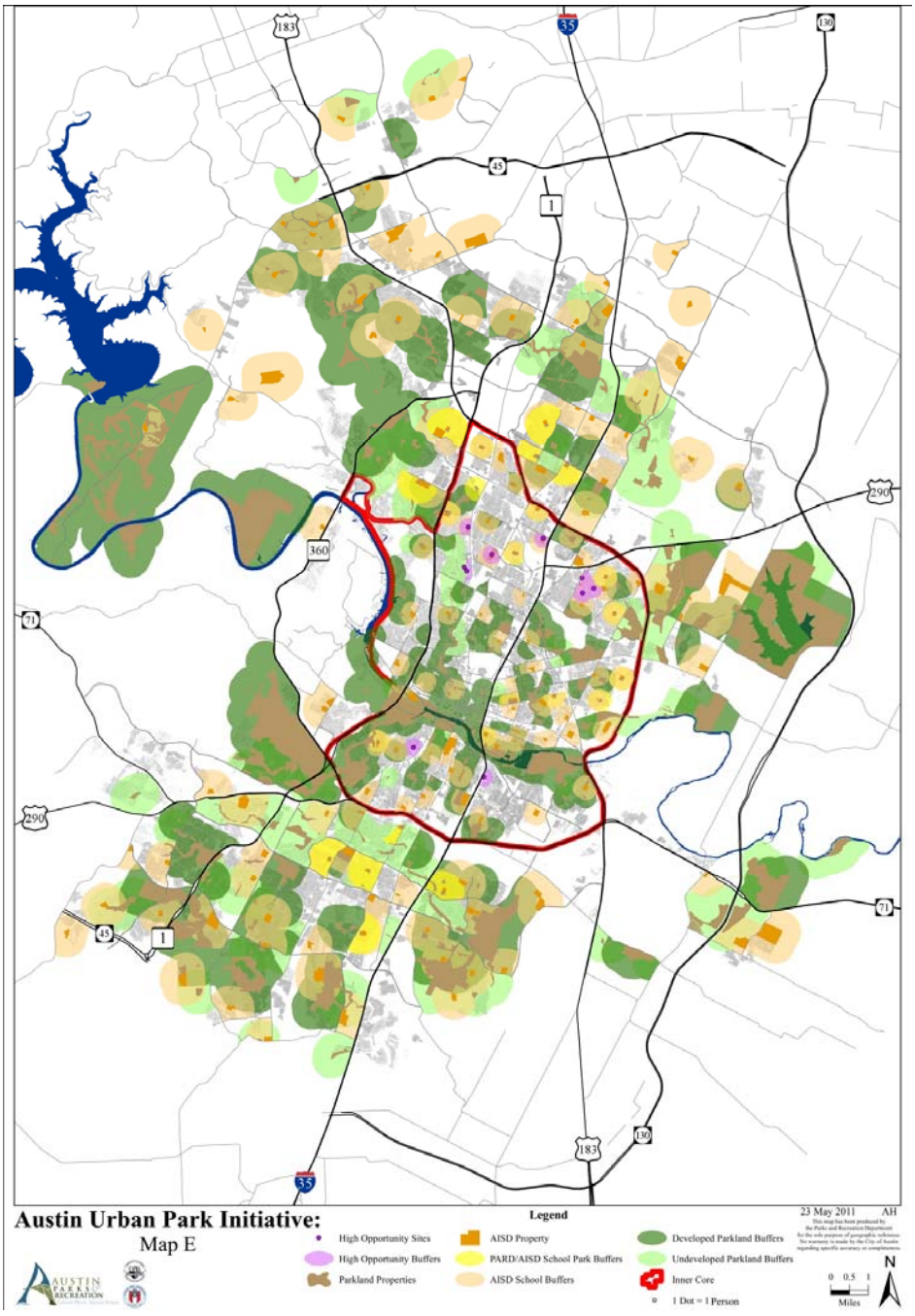
Map C: Existing School Parks

Developed Parkland
Undeveloped Parkland
Existing School Parks (PARD owns a 0% of the school property)



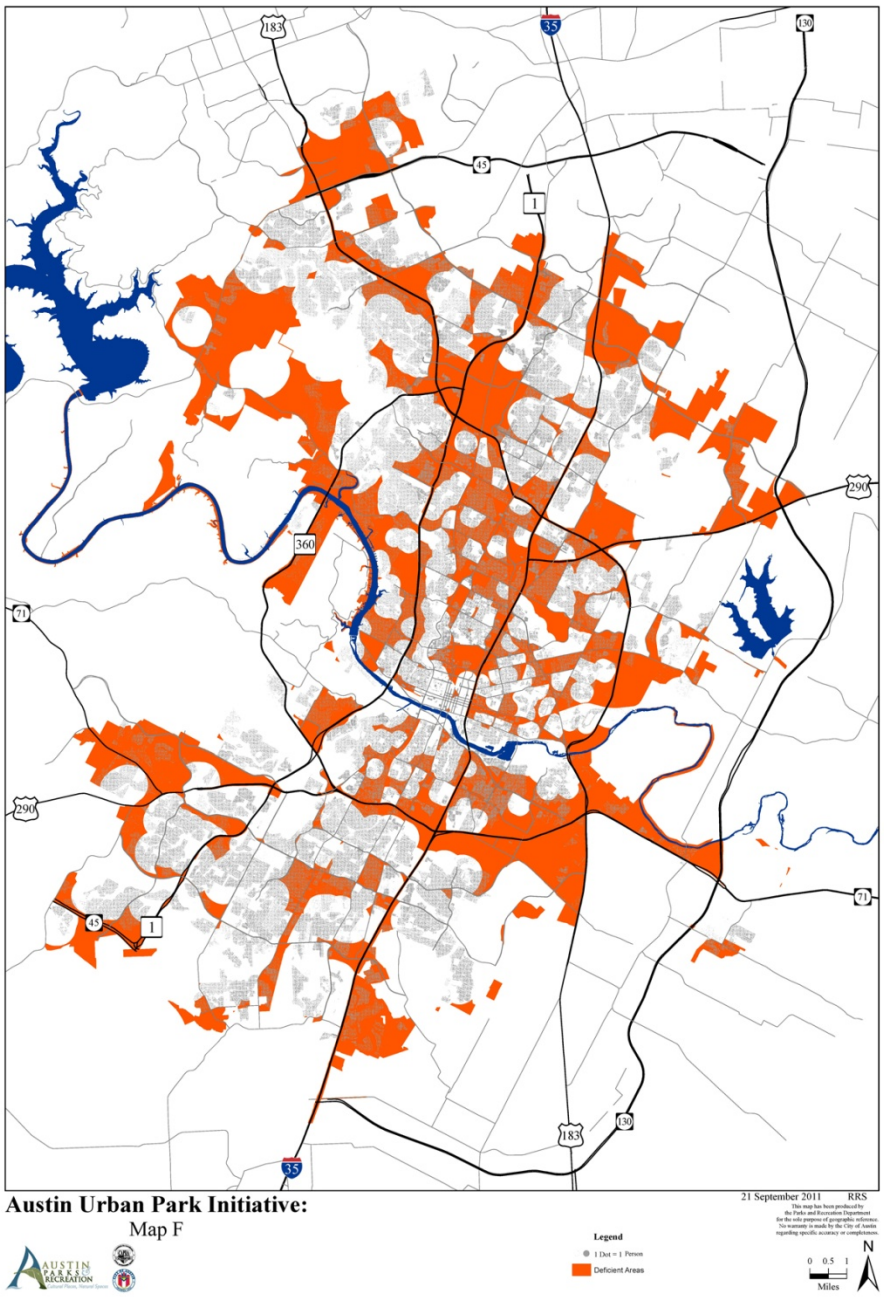
Map D: Possible New School Sites

- Developed Parkland
- Undeveloped Parkland
- Existing School Parks (PARD owns a 0% of the school property)
- New School Site (no PARD ownership)



Map E: High Opportunity Sites

- Developed Parkland
- Undeveloped Parkland
- Existing School Parks (PARD owns a 0% of the school property)
- New School Site (no PARD ownership)
- High Opportunity Sites



Map F: Areas Left without Accessible Parkland (with Population Density Dots)

Appendix B: Cost Projections

PARD Urban Parks Workgroup

Total Acquisition, Development, and Maintenance Costs for 90% Park Access Goal

	Inner Core: Number of Sites Contributing to Total	Outer Area: Number of Sites Contributing to Total	Inner Core: Total % Pop Served (increase in total %)	Outer Area: Total % Pop Served (increase in total %)	Inner Core Acquisition Costs	Outer Area Acquisition Costs	TOTAL ACQUISITION COSTS	Development Costs	TOTAL DEVELOPMENT COSTS	TOTAL ADDITIONAL ANNUAL MAINTENANCE COSTS
Developed Parkland (Map A)	N/A	N/A	3.7%	42%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Undeveloped Parkland (Map B)	N/A	N/A	48% (6%)	61% (19%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	$6,000,000	$6,000,000	$350,000
Existing School Parks (Map C) (% PARD Ownership)	12 sites	10 sites	47% (44%)	65% (4%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	$200,000 ea.	$4,400,000	$143,000
New School Sites (Map D) (No PARD Ownership)	28 estimated	33 estimated	68 % (21%)	76% (11 %)	N/A	N/A	N/A	$200,000 ea.	$12,200,000	$413,000
Alternate Sites (Map E)	2 sites	N/A	69% (1%)	76% (0%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	$200,000 ea.	$400,000	$13,000
Remaining Parks Needed	30 estimated	21 estimated	90%	90%	$500,000 ea.	$400,000 ea.	$23,400,000	$500,000 ea.	$23,400,000	$1,350,000
TOTAL	58	54	90%	90%			$23,400,000		$46,400,000	$2,356,000

Appendix C: Best Practices – City Goals for Park Walking Distance

- **Albuquerque**: ½ mile
- **Anchorage**: 1,250 feet (~ ¼ mile)
- **Aurora, Colorado**: ½ mile
- **Boston**: ¼ mile
- **Chicago**: 1/10 mile for "mini parks" in urban areas, ¼ mile from neighborhood parks, and 1/2 mile from community parks.
- **Cleveland**: ½ mile
- **Colorado Springs**: ½ mile for neighborhood parks
- **Columbus, Ohio**: ½ mile
- **Denver**: 4 blocks for urban areas
- **Detroit**: ¼ to ½ mile
- **El Paso**: ½ mile
- **Las Vega**: ½ mile
- **Long Beach**: ¼ mile pocket parks in high density neighborhoods; ½ mile community parks
- **Lincoln, Nebraska**: ½ mile
- **Charlotte, NC:** 6 blocks for neighborhood parks
- **Minneapolis**: 6-block goal
- **Milwaukee**: ½ mile
- **Miami**: ¼ mile
- **Nashville**: ½ mile
- **New York City**: 10-minute walk to park of at least ¼ acre
- **Oakland**: 5-minute walk
- **Phoenix:** ½ mile for neighborhood parks
- **Portland**: ½ mile for neighborhood parks
- **Sacramento**: ½ mile
- **St. Paul, Minnesota**: ¼ mile
- **San Jose**: 1/3 mile
- **Seattle**: 1/8-mile goal for urban parks in urban areas, and ¼ to ½ mile for neighborhood parks.
- **St. Louis:** ½ mile for neighborhood parks
- **St. Petersburg:** ½ mile

Appendix D: Best Practices: How Other Cities Are Funding Parks

Many approaches have been taken by cities to raise dedicated funding for parks. Below is a listing of some of the more successful and innovative approaches taken by other cities:

1. **Citizen-approved tax levies**. Special tax levies have been a popular and successful source of dedicated funding for parks. Nationwide, voters consistently approve funding measures for parks and open spaces, adopting more than 70% of local and state finance measures at the ballot box.[xliv] These levies are typically done through property taxes or sales taxes. Property tax levies provide a more stable source of funding and are more equitable. States and cities have also adopted new real estate transfer taxes for parks, affordable housing, and other important city amenities. These tax levies require state legislative authority.

   States and cities with special parks levies include:

   - **Albuquerque**: In 1997, voters in Albuquerque approved a quarter-cent, two-year sales tax for parks and open space, raising approximately $36 million to purchase over 2,000 acres of land as open space. The public approved the initiative via a unique "vote-by-mail" special election which took place over a 2-week period.
   - **Carson City, Nevada:** The State of Nevada approved a special one-quarter of one percent sales tax increase for Carson City, to be used for parks and open space.
   - **Massachusetts**: More than 65 cities and towns have adopted a property tax levy under the Community Preservation Act for open space, affordable housing, and historic preservation.
   - **Milwaukee**: Voters approved dedicated sales tax funding for parks.
   - **Minneapolis**: Voters approved a $176/resident annual tax levy, which pays for 70% of the parks department's operating budget in a city where more than 99% of residents live within 6 blocks of a park.
   - **Missouri**: The State of Missouri has a law, the Neighborhood Improvement District Act, allowing for communities to adopt a special taxing district, which can be used to fund local parks. The law requires the support of 75% of the property owners and 66.6% of the lot owners. Lee Summit Missouri was the first community to adopt a taxing district, where voters approved a special assessment for 10 years with all revenues dedicated to capital improvements for a park. Missouri has also state enabling legislation that provides city voters with the authority to enact a half-cent sales tax levy for parks and storm water control.
   - **New Jersey**: The State of New Jersey enacted state enabling legislation that allows voters in cities and counties to adopt a special property tax levy for open space acquisition, farmland protection and recreation, along with maintenance and improvement of existing open space. Since the

adoption of the legislation in the 1990s, voters in more than 65 New Jersey communities have adopted the levy.

- **North Carolina**: The Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act allows cities and other government entities to levy special taxes to fund a variety of facilities and services. The taxes can be used for direct funding and to pay off bonds.
- **Ohio**: The State of Ohio gives local communities property tax authority for parks.
- **Seattle**: The City of Seattle has a Parks and Green spaces levy, funded by local property taxes. The Parks and Green Spaces Levy was approved in 2008 by 59% of Seattle voters and will last 6 years, generating $146 million for parks, open spaces, trails, and recreation projects. The levy will cost a total of $80.78 (paid over 5 years) for the owner of a home assessed at a value of $450,000. The levy covers both operating and capital costs. The levy seceded an earlier Pro Parks levy of $198 million to implement citizen-developed neighborhood open-space plans and secure new properties for parks in denser, underserved neighborhoods.
- **St. Louis, Missouri:** Voters approved a 1/10th of one cent sales tax which generates $10 million a year to develop an interconnected system of greenways, parks, and trails.
- **Wayne County, Michigan:** Voters approved a $11m property tax assessment for local parks.

2. **Voluntary Fees**. Asking for direct fees from park users is another strategy used by cities.
   - New York requests a $10-25 annual donation for use of recreation centers which gotten at the time that people enroll for their membership cards. The fee raised two million.xlv

3. **Utility Fees**. Some cities around the country including Texas assess a fee on water and wastewater bills for park-related amenities. These fees appear to be almost always tied to watershed land conservation.
   - **Clear Lake City Water Authority, Houston**: has adopted fees that are being used to purchase a golf course for use as a detention area and park and recreation amenities.
   - **Salt Lake City:** city council approved a .50 per bill surcharge, which has been used to purchase 1,400 acres of watershed land.
   - **Lenexa Missouri:** using storm water utility fees to pay for park-like detention basins connected by trails.
   - **San Antonio:** levies a surcharge on water bills to help fund the Sensitive Land Acquisition Program, which has preserved more than 10,000 acres of land.

4. **Graduated Fee Structures**: Currently, City of Austin's the rental facilities fee schedule is a one size fits all model (apart from reservable picnic facilities), resulting in desire for many smaller organizations to seek waivers from fees through Council action. Requiring fees from all users (large and small) would allow for increased funding of maintenance and operations of parks, which is sorely needed. A number of cities and non-profit organizations across the United States have implemented a graduated fee structure that takes a broader number of factors, including:

- whether the renting organization is a non-profit or for-profit entity;
- the size of the space (are they using a picnic pavilion, a stage or an entire park;
- the number of people attending;
- certain holidays and event timeframes that may allow the city to charge more due to demand.

Appendix E: Best Practices: Innovative Trends in Park Design and Development

While making sure that a city has enough accessible and well-maintained parks is an essential measure of success, the design of parks is a critical but often overlooked component to ensuring a park system meets the needs of families with children. And while we often think of parks as simple areas of grass and trees we need to acknowledge that these more simplistic images do not acknowledge the complex series of services that parks must provide today in their role as essential parts of our social and ecological urban infrastructure. To meet the needs of all city residents, parks need to provide opportunities for physical exercise, unstructured play, contact with nature, and sites for community gatherings.

While older and more traditional models of benches, trees, and paths still serve us well, many cities are looking for unique and innovative ways to meet today's challenges.

Play

A great deal of contemporary innovation in urban park design focuses on the idea of "play". As a concept, play addresses the need parks have to attract children and their families and engage children's natural instincts to explore, take risks, and imagine themselves into new situations. As the City of Austin develops new infill parks to meet the ¼ and ½ mile goals laid out by Council, we have the opportunity to bring many new ideas forward and expand the traditional repertoire of how we construct and program family-friendly parks and open spaces. To provide background to the PARD policy recommendations laid out in this document, the following innovative approaches are laid out as examples of many of the types of play environments that other cities are using.

Though Austin is at the forefront of many creative enterprises, the City lags behind in its development of innovative family friendly park features. Across the country many cities have begun to explore how findings in the social sciences, child development, environmental sciences, and public health can contribute to the creation of new play features that engage not only the body, but the creative and imaginative capacities of children and their families. These new findings focus primarily upon the creation of new types of play environments. Below are listed six primary areas of development in park design: kinetic play structures, nature based playscapes, and mobile play environments.

These innovations and many more provide the space and equipment needed to help parks meet the challenge of providing engaging play environments for a generation of children that are growing up in a media-saturated world that encourages sedentary behavior.

Different Ways of Thinking about Play

KINETIC PLAYSCAPES

What is it?:

Kinetic play equipment distinguish themselves from standard playground equipment in their use of non-linear play environments that challenge children to make their own "play narratives" which can teach them more about risk taking and problem-solving. This type of play is critical for today's children who spend much less time in unstructured play than children did in previous generations.[xlvi]

Where are examples happening?:

Kinetic play equipment is now just becoming standard on the market. Many companies such as, Playworld Systems and Kinetic Recreation Design are now focusing on their development.

Many cities across the United States (including Austin) are also adopting kinetic play equipment that is specifically designed for active and creative engagement and that challenges children's' bodies to move and play in different ways. This equipment challenges children to engage play structures more actively and thus helps in the fight against obesity.

Some cities in England have even turned our thinking about children and obesity on its head by actually adopting the structure of videogame play to create playground environments that encourage children to move and interact in an effort to gain "points" – what the designers call "stealth exercise."[xlvii]

Where are we developing examples here in Austin?:

The Parks and Recreation Department is staring to move in the direction of bringing in kinetic type of equipment for children to complement traditional play structures. Parks such as Davis-White NE District Park, Franklin Park, and Gus Garcia Park all have been the recipients of new kinetic play equipment.

How we can do more?:

Because kinetic play equipment is new to the market they tend to cost more than traditional play equipment. It also does not make sense to take out current well functioning equipment in order to replace it. As such the City's best opportunity for developing parks with this type of equipment is to find specific public/private partnership opportunities that can help to fund the added costs.

NATURE-BASED PLAY

What is it?

Nature Based play, or Natural Play is an orientation towards the design of the children's play areas that reincorporates the materials, textures, objects, and opportunities found in natural settings. With a

focus towards reversing the alarming trends of increasing childhood obesity, attention disorders, and depression Nature Based Play uses the findings from childhood development and health specialists to make specific recommendations for how play areas can be developed.[xlviii]

Where are there examples happening?

Because of the known cognitive benefits of Nature Based play many projects have been developed at local schools where the play areas are designed for both play and integration into existing curricular needs.

Where are we developing examples here in Austin?

In Austin experiments are beginning to look at how more nature-based play environments can be created for children and their families. Such examples can be seen at the Dittmar Recreation Center, and Mary Moore Searight Park. Most recently, development efforts are underway to develop Little Stacy with a nature-based play framework with the help of Robin Moore, director of the Natural Learning initiative at North Carolina State University.

How we can do more?

The development of nature-based play environments must confront many challenges such as budget constraints that inhibit the creation of comprehensive site design plans, maintenance concerns, and most primarily liability concerns. It is for this reason that it is suggested to PARD to set up a partnership project with the National Wildlife Federation to work with their newly developed Natural Play and Learning Area National Guidelines Project in order to make Austin specific recommendations.

MOBILE PLAY

What is it?:

Mobile Play capitalizes on the idea that fixed play equipment can be a hinderance to a child's imaginative engagement with their environment. By creating pieces that can be moved, stacked, laid out, tilted, braced, and balanced on each other children will have a greater opportunity to manipulate their environment. This process of manipulation of the external environment both physically and imaginatively is what lays the foundation for cognitive development.

Where are there examples happening?

In New York City Imagination Playground transformed a former parking lot into a site specific play environment that incorporates large-scale, lightweight, loose building objects that allow children to creatively manipulate their play environment.[xlix] This new idea for "mobile play" has now taken off

across the country and allowed many communities to foster family play spaces in areas not originally thought of as “children’s’ playgrounds.”

Where are we developing examples here in Austin?

In Austin the Austin Parks Foundation has recent acquired one of the playsets from Imagination Playground. This playset will be set brought to Republic Square Park at regular hours and with trained volunteer play leaders.

How we can do more:

Mobile play requires more onsite supervision than traditional play environments. In order to achieve this in Austin it will be necessary to train and coordinate volunteer play leaders. Such coordination can happen through joint coordination between the Parks Department and the Austin Parks Foundation.

Appendix F: High Opportunity Public Land Sites for Park Development

In Summer 2010, the Urban Parks Workgroup conducted an informal field survey with PARD staff of public land located in park-deficient areas of the urban core. The sites were evaluated for potential redevelopment as urban parks or smaller play spaces, based on factors such as accessibility, compatibility with surrounding uses, topography, and existing uses. The sites were then ranked as low, medium, or high opportunity sites.[2] The sites listed below were the ones identified as high opportunity sites. The public owner of the site is listed in the parentheses: "COA" is City of Austin, "AISD" is the Austin Independent School District. Appendix F contains a list of all the high and medium opportunity sites identified in the field survey, along with notes about the sites.

High Opportunity Sites

Webb Middle School: land near sport fields (AISD)

McCallum High School: land near sport fields (AISD)

Austin Energy Property at Justin Lane (COA)

Moore Hancock Farmstead at Sinclair @49th (COA)

Lamar Middle School, Koenig @ Burnet: land at sports fields (AISD)

AISD Disaster Relief Center, Next to Skyview Neighborhood Pocket park (AISD)

Blue Property south of Riley Elementary/ Denson @ Dillard (COA)

Tannehill Drainage Project/ Manor @ Lovell Dr. (COA)

Austin Energy Property at Wheless Lane and N. Hampton Dr. (COA)

Windsor Library at Westminster Dr. and Northridge Dr. (COA)

Fire Station #18 at Hickman Ave @ Patton Dr. (COA)

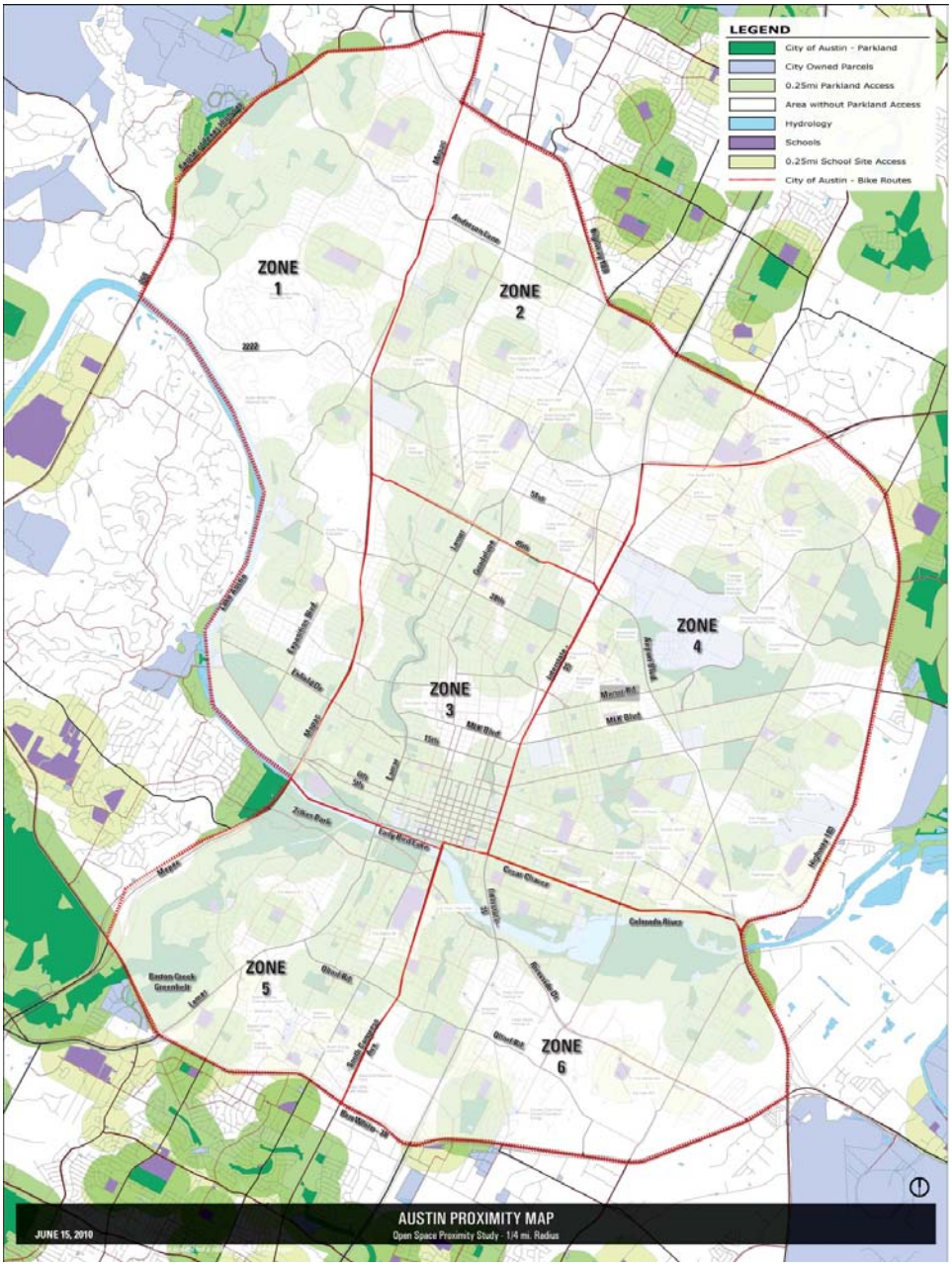
Fire Station # 11 at Kinney @ Collier (COA)

[2] The surveys were informal field visits. Further analysis would be needed to make a final determination as to whether the sites are appropriate for redevelopment as parks.

Public Works Parking Lot #1 (COA)

Garfield Substation (COA)

Map of Zones Defining Areas for High Opportunity Sites Team Research



Appendix G: High and Medium Opportunity Park Sites on Public Land in the Urban Core From Field Survey

Address	Field Observation	High/ Medium Possibility for recreational amenities
Zone 2 & 3 (North Central and Downtown)		
Webb Middle School	Sport fields	High
McCallen High School	Sport fields, tennis courts	High
Austin Energy Property/ Justin Lane	Austin Energy Storage Yard	High for potential acquisition
Moore Hancock Farmstead Sinclair @49th	Historic Structure; privately owned;	High
Lamar Middle School Koenig @ Burnett	No significant trees; tennis courts,	High
AISD- Diaster Relief Center- Next to Skyview Neigh Pocket park	One large tree; about 1/8 ac.	High
Park Drainage	open space; flat & lots of shade; 1/3 ac., passive recreation	High
Yarborough Library; 2200 Hancock	Can block off parking spaces in the front of the library for play;	Medium
Baker School- AISD	Large trees; parking lot used for playing basketball; (4 courts); ½ ac. open space adjacent to school used for soccer;	Medium
Public Works Island; Bruning @ Evans	Young trees; ¼ ac. public art; streets on all sides; nicely maintained	Medium

Fire Station #12 Hancock@ Lynnwood	Very small space; maybe an art piece could be incorporated in the front of building.	Medium
Village Branch Public Library	Courtyard in front of the building; possible board games could be incorporated	Medium
University Hills Club Ball fields	3 fields; large trees; nice creek; existing playscape near the ball fields;	Medium
Blue Property south of Riley Elementary/ Denson @ Dillard	1 ac.; could be used for fields sports if mowed;	High
Fire Station #2- MLK	Very tight space; possible historic signage, public art;	Medium
ZONE 4 (NE and East)		
Tannehill Drainage Project/ Manor @ Lovell Dr.	Small site but flat; 2 big trees;	High
Pecan Springs @ E 51st. St. / Watershed Floodwater Area	Small site, but overgrown; May be conductive to a pocket park;	Medium
Austin Energy Property: Wheless Ln. and N. Hampton Dr.	Lots of trees; good size space; Ideal for a park amenity	High
Windsor Library: Westminster Dr. and Northridge Dr.	Large trees; good site for a park amenity	High
Fire Station #18: Hickman Ave @ Patton Dr.	Fenced site; big trees and almost an acre;	High
ZONE 5 (SW)		
Fire Station # 11 / Kinney @ Collier	Large nice tract; significant trees;	High

ZONE 6 (South Central)		
Public Works Parking Lot #1	Site has a huge water retention feature and some open space;	High/ Medium
The Circle (Park)	Could be used for an park space; It is a linear strip near South Congress Ave.	Medium
Public Works Parking Lot #2	Long triangular site that sits on the frontage of IH-35	Medium
Garfield Substation	Beautiful site; area is slightly overgrown; off the beaten path but has high density residential nearby.	High

Appendix H: Council Resolution #20091119-68

RESOLUTION NO. 20091119-068

WHEREAS, providing parks within walking distance is an important amenity for a family-friendly city, and the City of Austin Families and Children Task Force has recommended that the City of Austin adopt a 1/4-mile parks goal in the urban core and a 1/2-mile goal for all other parts of the City; and

WHEREAS, in a recent city-wide survey, Austin families identified lack of access to child-friendly neighborhood parks as one of their top concerns with the City; and

WHEREAS, a national benchmark for cities is to create park access within a 1/4-mile to 1/2-mile walking distance of every resident; and

WHEREAS, the Parks and Recreation Board adopted a resolution recommending that the City Council adopt an urban parks goal and to create a working group to develop an implementation plan to reach new urban parks goals; **NOW, THEREFORE,**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Council adopts the following policy goals for urban parks:

1. Urban parks should be provided so that all residents in the urban core (as depicted by Exhibit A) will live within 1/4-mile walking distance of a publicly-accessible and child-friendly park or green space; and

2. Parks should be provided so that all residents outside the urban core will live within 1/2-mile walking distance of a publicly-accessible and child-friendly park or green space.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to create a working group of stakeholders, including but not limited to the Parks and Recreation Department, Parks and Recreation Board, the Early Childhood Council, the Families and Children Task Force, and the Austin Parks Foundation to develop an implementation plan to reach the new urban parks goals. The plan should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. An analysis of where new urban pocket parks are needed and which existing parks are in need of improvements;

2. Strategies to incorporate more innovative and diverse play opportunities for children in parks;

3. Projections of costs to implement the plan; and

4. An examination of resources and policies needed to facilitate the implementation of the plan and to meet national benchmarks for maintenance of parks, including an examination of funding mechanisms, land use planning tools, and the utilization of public-private partnerships.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The Austin City Council requests that the Joint Subcommittee of the City, Travis County, and AISD examine ways to facilitate shared-use

agreements for city, county, and school district properties and to consider methods to transform AISD schoolyards into public park spaces after school hours.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to investigate opportunities for the inclusion of small or innovative play spaces for children in public spaces utilized regularly by families with children such as city libraries and city-owned properties downtown.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the City Manager is directed to ensure that development of the parks plan is coordinated with development of the comprehensive plan, and that the needs assessment and goals of the parks plan are integrated into the comprehensive plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to provide an update to the City Council before September 1, 2010 on the ongoing status of the tasks outlined above.

ADOPTED: November 19, 2009 **ATTEST:** Shirley A. Gentry
Shirley A. Gentry
City Clerk

End Notes

[i] Austin has 13.6% parkland as per city area. This compares with San Francisco (19.8%), San Diego (18.8%), Portland (15.1%), El Paso (16.5%), Albuquerque (15.4%) and Phoenix (12.2%). Data taken from Harnik, Peter. "The Excellent City Park System: What Makes It Great and How to Get There." The Trust for Public Land, 2003.

[ii] PARD GIS analysis for Austin; *Parks: How Far is Too Far*, Planning Magazine (December 2004) (Minneapolis, Chicago and Denver), available at http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe_Planning_mag_article12_2004.pdf; Trust for Public Land, "Comparative Analysis of Park Access in 7 Major Cities," http://www.8-80cities.org/Articles/Trust%20for%20Public%20Land%20No%20Place%20To%20Play.pdf (New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Boston)

[iii] Trust for Public Land, *City Park Facts 2010: Facilities*, available at http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe_Facts_Facilities_Reports_2010.pdf

[iv] Trust for Public Land, *City Park Facts 2010: Spending*, available at http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe_Spending_Reports_2010.pdf

[v] Trust for Public Land, *City Park Facts 2010: Acreage and Employees*, available at http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe_Acreage_and_Employees_Data_2010.pdf

[vi] The "urban core" includes the area bordered by Highway 71 on the south, Highway 1 (Mopac Expressway) to the west, and Highway 183 on the east and north, along with the neighborhoods between Lake Austin and west of Mopac.

[vii] Within the report the term "accessibility" is taken to mean the degree to which parks space is available during daylight hours to as many people as possible.

[viii] Austin City Council Resolution No. 20090423-053.

[ix] "City Parks Forum: Briefing Papers." Chicago, IL: American Planning Association, 2002.

[x] Peter Harnik, "The excellent city park system: what makes it great and how to get there," Parks and Recreation Magazine (April 2003), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1145/is_4_38/ai_100960614/pg_2/?tag=mantle_skin;content

[xi] "Community Survey," ETC Institute (April 2010).

[xii] "City of Austin Families and Children Task Force, Report Recommendations," (July 24, 2008), at 6-7, available at, www.ci.austin.tx.us/council/downloads/factf_report.pdf.

[xiii] http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/no_place_to_play.pdf.

[xiv] Derrick Z. Jackson, Austin-American Statesman (9-15-10), "Obesity packs a punch to the gut – and the budget," quoting a 2009 report from the American Public Health Association, United Health Foundation, and Partnership for Prevention.

[xv] National Institutes of Health, available at http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/mar2005/nia-16.htm

[xvi] http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/no_place_to_play.pdf.

[xvii] Crompton, John L. "The Impact of Parks on Property Values: A Review of the Empirical Evidence." *Journal of Leisure Research* 33, no. 1 (2001): 1-31.

[xviii] http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/ccpe_Distance_from_a_Park.pdf.

[xix] http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/no_place_to_play.pdf.

[xx] One caution with tax levies: The use of these levies for parks funding, especially sale taxes, can have a regressive impact on low-income families unless exemptions or other policies are adopted to minimize the impact on these families.

[xxi] Loukaitou-Sideris, Anastasia, and Athanasios Sideris. "What Brings Children to the Park? Analysis and Measurement of the Variables Affecting Children's Use of Parks." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 76, no. 1 (2010): 89-107.

[xxii] Studies show that different populations use parks and are attracted to (or wary of) parks for different reasons.

[xxiii] Connecting Children with Nature in Kalamazoo, Michigan, available at http://www.tpl.org/tier3_print.cfm?folder_id=3130&content_item_id=23253&mod_type=1

[xxiv] http://www.designtrust.org/publications/publication_11hplg.html

[xxv] http://ccts.uth.tmc.edu/ccts-services/can-do-houston

[xxvi] 2010 City Park Facts (The Trust for Public Land), available at http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/CityParkFacts_2010.pdf.

[xxvii] Center for Park Excellence, "Park-Related Total Expenditure per Resident, by City (FY 2008), http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/citypark_facts/ccpe_Spending_Reports_2010.pdf.

[xxviii] Special thanks to Randy Scott and Allison Hardy in the City's Parks and Recreation Department for their hard work on developing the GIS analysis in this report.

[xxix] This number more than doubles the number of existing neighborhood and pocket parks which total 96 (75 neighborhood parks and 21 pocket parks).

[xxx] (2010). Childhood Obesity by Neighborhood and Middle School. Austin, TX, Children's Optimal Health.

[xxxi] The national average is 1 FTE per 75 acres, the national recommended ration is 1 FTE per 15 acres. *National Recreation and Parks Association.*

[xxxii] Center for Park Excellence, "Park-Related Total Expenditure per Resident, by City (FY 2008), http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/citypark_facts/ccpe_Spending_Reports_2010.pdf.

[xxxiii] FY 2010. This budget figure excludes capital costs covered by bond funding.

[xxxiv] FY 2010, using a population of 783,000 population for 2010.

[xxxv] Since 2007, when the City's parkland dedication ordinance was modified to cover a charge "per door" of each residential development, the ordinance has generated an average of $1.4 million a year in fees for parkland acquisition and development. These fees must be spent on a park located within a mile of the development generating the fee.

[xxxvi] The 6% figure has stayed fairly static over the past 10 years.

[xxxvii] Maintenance includes routine maintenance and does not include capital expenses such as improvements or upgrades to parks.

[xxxviii] Center for Park Excellence, "Park-Related Operating Expenditure per Resident, by City (FY 2008), http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/citypark_facts/ccpe_Spending_Reports_2010.pdf.

[xxxix] "Summary of Deferred Maintenance for City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department (May 2010); Trust for Public Land, "Deferred Capital Infrastructure or Maintenance Costs" (FY 2009), www.tpl.org/ccpe.

[xl] Fjortoft, Ingunn. "The Natural Environment as a Playground for Children: The Impact of Outdoor Play Activities in Pre-Primary School Children." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29, no. 2 (2001).

[xli] *Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect, American Medical Association* Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

[xlii] A summary of research can be found at: http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Research/01C101B8-007EA7AB.0/Benefits_of_nature_Fact_Sheet_1_April_2007[1].pdf

[xliii] The *Denver Learning Landscapes* program has transformed the schoolyards at more than 25 inner-city schools to provide innovative outdoor learning and recreational environments for children. (http://www.learninglandscapes.org/)

[xliv] http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=1050&folder_id=825.

[xlv] http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=1114&folder_id=826;

[xlvi] *Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation, and Affect, American Medical Association* Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

[xlvii] Interactive playground product i.play set to revolutionize outdoor play. Press release: Loughborough University, Septemeber 19, 2007.

(http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/publicity/news-releases/2007/119_iplay.html)

[xlviii] A summary of research can be found at: http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Research/01C101B8-007EA7AB.0/Benefits_of_nature_Fact_Sheet_1_April_2007[1].pdf

[xlix] Imagination Playground Website: (http://www.imaginationplayground.org/)