



## Our Policy Platform

Austin Parks Foundation (APF) is working to build a community where the lives of all Austinites are enriched through equitable access to well-maintained public parks, trails and green spaces. These cherished local resources serve as economic drivers, provide countless environmental and ecological benefits, improve physical and mental health and build strong communities. We partner with local stakeholders to enhance people's lives by making Austin's outdoor spaces better through volunteerism, innovative programming, advocacy and financial support.

While APF has made tremendous progress since we were founded in 1992, we recognize that much remains to be done. This is why we work to improve the long-term sustainability of our public green spaces by advocating for the following key policy priorities before decision makers at Austin City Hall. We hope you will join us as we advocate in support of the protection, development, maintenance and use of these valuable city assets for all Austinites.

## Our Priorities

### **1) Increase Investments in Parks by Utilizing a Variety of Funding Sources**

City investments in Austin's green spaces are not keeping pace with the needs of a growing city. While Austin is typically at the top of many "best of" lists, our city ranks 42nd out of the 100 largest US cities on the Trust for Public Land's ParkScore Index, which is the gold standard for assessing urban parks. According to the report, Austin currently spends \$108 per resident on enhancing and maintaining its parks, while the top 10 ranked ParkScore cities spend an average of \$232 per resident.

Adopted by the city council, *Austin Strategic Direction 2023* outlines key outcomes for the Austin community and provides a framework for the City Council to utilize while allocating resources during the city's annual budget process. Health & Environment is one of the City Council's six key outcomes and prioritizes equitable access to quality parks, trails, open space and recreational opportunities.

Funding provided for these public spaces in the city's annual budget and periodic bond initiatives is critical, but falls well short of the estimated \$700 million needed for repairs and renovations to the city's aging parks infrastructure and \$125 million in annual deferred maintenance identified in PARD's most recent assessment.

APF applauds the Austin City Council for its recent efforts to increase investments in Austin parks through the *Parkland Dedication* and *Hotel Occupancy Tax* ordinances. **We believe the city should work to strengthen these ordinances, and ensure that the *Parkland Dedication* ordinance is not weakened during the *Land Development Code* update process. We also urge the city to explore other innovative funding models, including the expanded use of public-private partnerships, and the creation of dedicated funding streams in order to create and maintain the parks that every Austinite deserves.**

## **2) Provide Equal Access to Parks for Everyone in Austin**

Austin Parks Foundation believes that everyone should have equal access to safe, outdoor spaces in their local communities. While Austin has a number of iconic parks and trails - such as Zilker Park, Barton Springs Pool and the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail - our park resources are not equitably distributed throughout the city. According to ParkScore, 40% of Austinites do not live within a 10-minute walk (or a half mile) of a public park, which falls far short of the goal set out in the *Imagine Austin* plan.

Many local, community parks are not well-maintained due to inadequate funding, and lack the amenities found in the more popular parks in the urban-core. This especially impacts historically underserved parts of Austin that received inadequate attention and resources from previous City Councils.

Living close to a quality park is an essential element in building strong and healthy communities, and APF supports policies to provide greater access to all Austinites, particularly underserved neighborhoods in the eastern crescent. We appreciate the City Council's creation of the Equity Office in 2016 and its early work to address racial inequity and develop tools to help city departments tackle these issues. APF was encouraged to see the progress PARD has made as outlined in the June 2018 *Equity Assessment Tool Pilot Report*, and we are hopeful the City Council will support the department in addressing its challenges, particularly in the areas of demographic data collection, measurement and evaluation. **We urge the City to do all it can to make sure that all Austinites, regardless of race, class, gender or physical ability, can access and enjoy quality parks.**

Park connectivity is also an extremely important factor in bringing people together and improving access. **APF supports the completion of the 47 miles of Tier I urban trails identified in the City of Austin's 2014 *Urban Trail Master Plan*. We encourage the city to further study the Tier II trails.** Completing this essential transportation network will require complete coordination between Austin's Public Works, Transportation and Parks & Recreation Departments, as well as other state and federal agencies.

## **3) Prioritize the Environmental and Ecological Health of our Parks**

Austin Parks Foundation believes our city's natural resources are one of the most important reasons so many are drawn here to live, work and play. One of eight priorities of *Imagine Austin*, the city's comprehensive plan through 2040, calls for the use of green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city. One primary goal of this program is to manage Austin's urban and natural ecosystems in a coordinated and sustainable manner. The plan seeks to accomplish this by increasing protection of environmentally sensitive land, improving tree cover in every neighborhood, improving the health of watersheds, increasing access to parks and linking these resources throughout the city. **APF supports the *Imagine Austin* priorities and believes Austin can increase connections between people and the environment by implementing policies that allow the natural and built environments to coexist in a thoughtful way.**

As Austin's explosive growth continues, we need to ensure that development progresses in a way that complements our natural resources, and ensures the ecological health and safety of our city. Watershed protection and natural mitigation efforts are critical in a city with rapid development - particularly as Austin is so susceptible to flooding. **APF believes the city should continue to prioritize acquiring additional parkland to preserve open space and expand recreational opportunities before it's too late.**

**APF believes the City Council should support the following critical city initiatives:**

- *Austin Urban Forest Master Plan* to preserve and enlarge Austin's urban canopy
- *Invasive Plant Management Program* to protect natural resources and native biodiversity
- Riparian Restoration *Grow Zone* program to restore native vegetation and wildlife to our urban streams

**We additionally support expanding recycling and composting options in each of our public parks** to support waste diversion and Austin's *Zero Waste 2040* goals. These programs and policies promote a healthy ecosystem in our city which will lead to healthier Austinites.

## Our Ask

Austin Parks Foundation believes that parks are a big part of what makes Austin, Texas, the enviable city that it is. We call on every Austinite who cares about their parks to get involved and make sure their voice is heard at City Hall. Visit [austinparks.org/advocate](https://austinparks.org/advocate) to learn more, and sign-up for our regular advocacy updates and calls to action. As Austin continues its explosive growth, it is imperative that we protect and enhance our urban parks before it's too late. While the task ahead may not be easy, we simply can't afford to lose our parks.