



AUSTIN PARKS FOUNDATION

PEOPLE PLUS PARKS

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 the City of Austin and local stakeholders to enhance people's lives by making Austin's outdoor spaces better through volunteerism, innovative programming, advocacy and financial support.

Austin Strategic Direction 2023, adopted by City Council on March 8, 2018, 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 as one of the top 10 most important outcomes for the city to achieve.

We agree that equitable access to quality parks, trails, and green spaces is of paramount importance for Austinites quality of life, and applaud the City Council for recognizing as much. While APF has made tremendous progress towards achieving this goal 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 43rd 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 \$119.18 per resident on enhancing and maintaining its parks, while the top 10 ranked ParkScore cities spend an average of \$241.14 per resident.



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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 \$600 million needed for repairs, renovations, improvements, and planned expansions to the city's aging parks infrastructure. While 2018 bond funding will help, there is still a critical need for additional funding for operations, maintenance, and capital improvements.

Given revenue caps imposed by the Legislature, it is imperative that the City of Austin maintain a strong Parkland Dedication ordinance throughout the Land Development Code revision process and allocate the maximum Hotel Occupancy Tax possible towards historic preservation projects in parks. Parkland Dedication funds and Hotel Occupancy Tax funds are more crucial than ever, and it is imperative that their use by the Parks and Recreation Department continue to be authorized by City Council.

We also urge the city to explore other innovative funding models, including the expanded use of public-private partnerships, and the creation of new, dedicated funding streams such as a parks district in order to create and maintain the parks that every Austinite deserves.

2) Provide Equitable Access to Parks for Everyone in Austin

Austin Parks Foundation believes that everyone should have equitable 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 for all residents to be within a half-mile of park (and within a quarter mile for residents in the urban core).

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. However, only 59% of Austinites live within a 10-minute walk of a park, a national standard and a city goal as stated in *Imagine Austin*. **With the funding available through Proposition B passed by voters in 2018, it is imperative that the city move quickly to purchase parkland strategically in order to make progress on providing nearby access to parks for every resident.**



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PEOPLE PLUS PARKS

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 also 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. Parkland can serve as an important piece of infrastructure as cities adapt to changing climates and increased flooding, and other cities are leading in this regard. Parkland is additionally critical to resident's quality of life. **APF believes the city should continue to prioritize acquiring additional parkland to preserve open space and expand recreational opportunities before it's too late.**



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In order to achieve the goals set forth in the *Imagine Austin* plan and *Strategic Direction 2023*, APF believes it is imperative that the City Council support the following critical city initiatives:

- Staff and fund Austin's 2,200 acre preserve system, a critical resource for protecting endangered species, habitat, and mitigating the effects of climate change
- Development of a management strategy for Austin's preserve system
- *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

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 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 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.