

DRAFT UPDATE as November 19, 2021

ZILKER NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION: TOP TEN POINTS FOR THE ZILKER PARK VISION PLAN

SUMMARY OF TOP TEN POINTS

1. EMPHASIZE REWILDING FOR WATER/CLIMATE/BIODIVERSITY AND HEALTH
2. PROTECT BARTON SPRINGS
3. ELEVATE INCLUSIVITY
4. FREE NATURE PARK NOT AN EXPENSIVE COMMERCIAL EVENT VENUE; LIMIT ALCOHOL SALES
5. MOVE PARKING TO THE PERIPHERY/EXPAND NON-CAR OPTIONS/ CIRCULATORS
6. ESTABLISH CAPACITY LIMITS AND UPGRADE VISITOR FRIENDLY PUBLIC SAFETY EFFORTS
7. RE-THINK PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY
8. NO NEED FOR ONE LARGE VISITOR CENTER
9. BEST PRACTICES FOR ON/OFF LEASH DOGS
10. PROVIDE FULL IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING ESTIMATES

TOP TEN WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PROTECT THE WATER, MITIGATE CLIMATE IMPACTS, BOOST BIODIVERSITY AND PROVIDE MORE SHADE VIA REWILDING.

See ZNA's Rewilding Report for detailed recommendations

(<https://zilkerneighborhood.org/docs/zpmp/Rewilding%20Zilker%20Park%20Oct%2028%202021%20REDUCED.pdf>).

See the City of Austin's Climate and Equity Plan for ways to align with the city's overall vision (<https://austintexas.gov/page/austin-climate-equity-plan>).

Recommendations:

- *Estimate a carbon balance for each design option prior to February Community Meeting #4.*
- *Support "ecological uplift" efforts wherever possible.*
 - *Identify areas for recreational uses such as soccer and Frisbee golf and other activities; separate these activities with rewilding areas to provide a buffer for those seeking a "deep nature" experience while still giving ample space to recreational uses.*

2. PROTECT BARTON SPRINGS

The essential element of Zilker Park—what makes it different from any other park—is the systems of springs, the pool they create, and the watershed that makes them possible.

Recommendation:

- *All decisions for the final Vision Plan must be made with protection of the springs in mind.*

3. ELEVATE INCLUSIVITY

ZNA has always seen Zilker Park as a welcoming place for all of Austin and for visitors from around the world, but in these times of confronting systemic racism, all parties must be conscious of working harder than ever to be inclusive.

Recommendations:

- Engage with D5 for Black Lives <https://www.d5forblacklives.com/> and other social justice experts.
- Restore Park Rangers for visitor information and security and offer specialized training.
- Consider a more formalized connection between Zilker Park and Guerrero Park and other parks in order to enhance visitor flow east and west
https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/GIS/RoyGGuerreroCRPark_Kiosk.pdf
- Offer a cultural history of the nature of segregation in the Park and make sure the park achieves a truly multicultural educational component. See historical analysis such as <https://endofaustin.com/2020/11/21/bartons-slaves/>
- Make sure that Zilker is fully accessible.

4. PRIORITIZE A FREE NATURE PARK, NOT AN EXPENSIVE PRIVATE/COMMERCIAL EVENT VENUE

We envision Zilker Park as a peaceful, active, climate-mitigating, mental health stabilizing, restorative oasis; one that accommodates many activities and programming in a sustainable manner, but is not overrun by damaging events: a park that is first and foremost a nature park.

Recommendations:

- Limit Zilker as a venue for weddings, bars, restaurants, conferences or concerts.
- Limit alcohol sales.
- Limit advertising, including fly-over aircraft and the noise pollution it brings.
- Prioritize free multicultural events, history and ecological education.
- Reduce impervious cover wherever possible.

5. MOVE PARKING TO THE PERIPHERY AND MAXIMIZE CAR-FREE OPTIONS WHILE SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND THOSE WHO STILL MUST USE CARS

Car traffic and car parking in the park and in the surrounding neighborhood need to be substantially reduced, and investment in alternatives including shuttles from all quadrants of the city need to be significantly increased.

Recommendations:

- Shut down any plans to “expand Mopac” into or near the park.
- Heavily reduce the need for parking by creating a “climate corridor” that features alternatives including bike lanes, pedestrian lanes, shuttle services from all parts of Austin and greatly increased Cap Metro services.
- Move the need for parking to the periphery of the park and provide intra-park trails, walkways and other circulator systems, along with drop-off areas while reserving parking for mobility impaired and those with too many items to travel without a car.
 - Consult analytics for Barton Springs Road Bridge to understand to increase safety (currently it is a real danger), increase walk/bike protected lanes both on the road and alternatives around the bridge and to protect cultural and historic preservation elements.
 - Experiment with reducing through traffic on Barton Springs Road on holidays and weekends.
 - Provide storage lockers throughout the park.

6. ESTABLISH CAPACITY AND ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES

Capacity estimates and potential limits need to be discussed very early in the plan, along with fully resourced ways to enforce rules to protect water/soil and people.

Recommendations:

- *Estimate capacity limits and ways to ensure a peaceful and nature-based experience for visitors.*
- *Create a working group to design a new enforcement paradigm that makes Zilker a demonstration for excellence in public safety and environmental protection. ZNA has analyzed APD crime statistics from Zilker Park and it is clear more enforcement is needed. However, APD-response to serious crime could be supplemented with Park Rangers trained in de-escalation techniques and other visitor friendly teams to handle the vast majority of problems.*
- *Estimate the resources and funding required for PARD to fully enforce Zilker safety, parking and environmental protection.*
- *Include and formalize roles for volunteers to help with education (e.g. wayfinding), park activities, including monitoring and habitat restoration to complement Zilker Park enforcement staff/APD.*
- *Invest in other metropolitan parks so that visitors have more options.*

7. RETHINK PUBLIC/ PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

ZNA is concerned about public/private partnerships that prioritize revenue generation over all other needs, that lock in the City and that seem to be negotiated in “back room” deals. The lack of inclusivity should be tempered by full disclosure of all financial details and plans.

Recommendation:

- *Limit these types of partnerships. Create a template to apply to all partnerships based on a checklist created by the City Auditor for contracts and business plans for non-profits or others operating in the park to ensure consistency, alignment, and transparency with the Vision Plan.*
- *Create criteria to evaluate the costs and benefits of each proposed partnership.*
- *Create a standing “citizen review” for all public/private partnerships that include Zilker Park.*

8. SMALL, NATURE-BASED INFO CENTERS INSTEAD OF One LARGE VISITOR CENTER

Given the size of Zilker Park and the multiple entry points and key features, we do not see the need for one main visitor center.

Recommendation:

- *Establish small, nature-based information centers throughout the park.*

9. SET UP BEST PRACTICES FOR ON LEASH RULES

Austin residents love their pets, but there have been many incidents where dogs have hurt kids and adults because leash laws are not respected.

Recommendation:

- *Make it clear where on-leash areas and off-leash areas are, consider on-leash hours, and learn from Central Park Conservancy's successful efforts regarding best practices for leashing policies that work.*
- *Enforce these rules tightly for public safety.*

10. PROVIDE FULL IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING ESTIMATES

A “vision plan” without a comprehensive implementation plan and budget estimates is not sustainable. For example, traffic- and parking-related recommendations from the 2013-14 Long Term Vision Plan for Auditorium Shores (now Vic Matthias), created by Tur Partners with funding from C3 Presents and the Austin Parks Foundation, were never implemented due to lack of funding. This kind of empty gesture planning won't work for Zilker.

Zilker is a valuable resource in addition to being a park. It likely provides millions of dollars of “eco services” from watersheds and trees and incalculable benefits for mental and physical health. Investment in Zilker should recognize the tremendous city-wide benefits that accrue from it.

Recommendations:

- *Prepare – and share with the public for feedback – a full implementation and budget plan for review, including all necessary resources for public safety and environmental protection enforcement.*
- *Intensify efforts at public outreach and connection around the plan when it is drafted so that “buy-in” from all corners of Austin is high and sustainable. This buy-in will help elected leaders continue to invest in the ZPVP and PARD. ZNA is able and ready to help with outreach to meet this goal.*
- *Calculate the full economic impact of Zilker Park in terms of eco services.*
- *A larger degree of funding from program/event fees and “donations” from events in Zilker Park should be invested back into the Park.*

NOTE: This Top Ten List was developed by the ZNA Parks and Environment Committee during April/May, 2021 and last updated in November 2021. We expect to update it as the plan evolves. Our website contains a comprehensive archive of materials related to the ZPVP. Feel free to visit <https://zilkerneighborhood.org/zilkerpark-mp.shtml>

For further questions or comments contact ZNA VP of Parks and Environment Robin Rather robin@collectivestrength.com and ZNA President Bill Bunch bill@sosalliance.org or the full ZNA executive committee excom@zilkerneighborhood.com.