

Date: January 7, 2022

To: Claire Hempel, Design Workshop

Zilker Park Collective Comments on Interactive Map

In October, our organizations sent a letter (included below) which details our top priorities for the Zilker Vision Plan. Based on our review of the latest Zilker Interactive Map and the design alternatives presented at the Community Meeting #3, we are providing additional feedback on the design alternatives. With the Zilker Park organizations supporting this letter, parking access is a top priority that must be balanced with the objectives of prioritizing the natural environment at Zilker Park. Adequate parking (in addition to improvements for other transportation modes) will ensure that visitors from all over Austin feel included and welcome. We support a parking strategy in which a significant portion of the overall number of unpaved parking spaces that may be removed from the park are first replaced elsewhere in the park and/or immediately adjacent to the park. Additional details for parking-related feedback is set forth below in the “Parking” section.

We generally support the following:

- Balancing restoration and maintenance and enhancement of the natural environment with sustainable solutions for increased park visitation and parking needs.
- Efforts to protect water quality and ecological uplift opportunities, especially along waterways such as the banks of Barton Creek and Lady Bird Lake.
- Retaining the Great Lawn as a lawn (some ecological uplift without removing the opportunities for the current uses of the space).
- Converting the Polo Field to additional lawn space or sports fields IF alternative parking is found.
- Ecological uplift in the Nature Preserve Zone shown on the Interactive Map, which includes the Zilker Clubhouse and the Austin Nature and Science Center.
- Ecological uplift of landfill and Polo Field areas, either as mowed lawn area or natural area IF the parking spaces here are replicated somewhere nearby.
- One or more visitor hubs and gateways throughout the park. (This idea is an extension of the “education and welcome center” priority.)

We oppose the following:

- Any reference to repurposing the Girl Scout Cabin in any way that would reduce access by the historic and current users, the Girl Scouts of Central Texas.
- Reducing existing lawn areas, which are some of the most heavily utilized areas of the park.
- Introducing vehicular traffic through the Austin Nature and Science Center (ANSC). ANSC is an educational space within a sensitive riparian zone that is meant to be pedestrian-only. One proposed route bisects the birds of prey exhibits and cuts off Overlook Point from the rest of ANSC.

We believe the following is missing:

- The “visitor hub” design concept should be described as opportunities to integrate interpretive spaces and programming to educate visitors about the environment, culture, and history of Zilker Park and surrounding watershed areas.
- A plan for an upgraded playground near Barton Springs Pool that serves an interpretive purpose, and additional play features for children throughout the park.
- A design concept for the addition of a rest room on the south side of Barton Springs Pool, as recommended in the [2009 Barton Springs Master Plan](#).
- Active transportation paths (not just gateways), as described in Survey #4. Our letter states: “We support an improved pedestrian and bicycle trail system through the park that brings those that walk, bike, or roll from one destination to another through the park, as well as associated wayfinding signage.”
- Circulator options, including exploring the Zilker Eagle, as described in Survey #4. Our letter states: “We support prioritizing internal circulation of people within the park from parking, transit, or their point of entry to their destinations. We hope the consultant team will explore the possibility of an expansion of the Zilker Eagle train serving this purpose.”
- If realignment of the primary entry for ANSC is considered, school buses must have clear and easy access to the front of ANSC, and pedestrian safety must be a priority between parking and bus drop-off locations.

Parking:

In keeping with the 2019 Zilker Working Group findings, we generally support a parking strategy in which a significant portion of the overall number of unpaved parking spaces that may be removed from the park are first replaced elsewhere in the park and/or immediately adjacent to the park. This group also supports a multi-faceted parking strategy that differentiates user groups and provides a mix of parking options for weekday users, weekend users, special events, and large special events.

The Interactive Map concepts focus primarily on (1) consolidating existing lots within the park and removing parking from the Polo Field, (2) creating a parking garage under MoPac or parking on Barton Springs Road, and (3) exploring park-adjacent parking options outside of Zilker. Following below is our feedback on these strategies, along with additional recommendations.

In-Park Parking and Polo Field

As noted in the design concepts for the Polo Fields, “in recent years, City Council has directed the Parks and Recreation Department to remove parking from the Polo Field area.” To support this directive, we recommend a phased removal of Polo Field parking in the near term by reducing Polo Field overflow parking by thirds over the next four to six years, provided that convenient, affordable and accessible parking is funded and implemented to replace a significant number of the parking spaces removed. We recommend a social media education campaign to describe the benefits of these changes.

In addition, we recommend restricting Polo Fields parking uses to specific calendar dates or events (namely, Blues on the Green, Zilker Hillside Theater, Zilker Tree Lighting, Trail of Lights, Zilker Kite Festival, Zilker Botanical Garden Spring Event, Austin YMBL Sunshine Camps events), provided that event organizers are required to make reasonable remediation/repair measures (e.g., turf replacement, aeration, etc.) until such time as the Zilker parking plan is funded and implemented.

To meet the requirement of providing long-term convenient, affordable and accessible replacement parking spaces for the Polo Field, we recommend that the following “in park” parking solutions be evaluated for financial and environmental feasibility:

- Structured parking underneath MoPac
- An underground parking structure with a “green” roof in any suitable location (near MoPac at the Polo Field, Pistol Range, or Butler Landfill areas),
- Parking improvements at Azie Morton along the south side of Barton Springs Pool (to reduce impervious cover and improve water quality while meeting parking needs)
- Parking improvements to the Stratford/Butler Landfill area and Lou Neff Road, using landfill remediation and “green” landscaping to improve them ecologically and aesthetically
- An option for buried/structured/green roof parking along Barton Springs road on the west side of the park to help offload parking in unpaved areas of the park.
- Options for additional structured parking or lot(s) in or near the east end of the park closest to Lamar or along the south side of Barton Springs Road near MoPac.
- While we appreciate the idea of consolidating some of the small lots, we would also like to see scenarios for retaining some or all of the small lots on the north side of the Barton Springs Zone, using “green” landscaping to improve them ecologically and aesthetically. These lots provide reliable, easy access to popular amenities such as Zilker Rowing, the playground, Hillside Theater, and Barton Springs Pool.

Park-Adjacent Offsite Parking

To provide additional transportation options for park visitors, we agree with the idea of exploring “shared parking” opportunities with entities that own or operate parking structures near Zilker Park, such as Dougherty Arts Center or Barton Oaks Plaza Garage. These should connect with park circulators to get people where they need to go.

However, until negotiations occur, we recommend that privately owned offsite parking be viewed as a **supplemental** option rather than a primary long-term parking solution for Zilker Park. Privately owned garages are not a revenue source for the City, may be operated by third parties, and may be sold or redeveloped at any time. It is unknown whether parking costs would be controlled to ensure continuous affordable parking. Questions of maintenance and security would also need to be explored.

We appreciate your consideration of these issues and look forward to further discussion.

Sincerely,

ABC Kite Festival
Austin Parks Foundation
Austin YMBL Sunshine Camps
Barton Springs Conservancy
Explore Austin
Friends of the Austin Nature and
Science Center
Friends of Barton Springs Pool
Girl Scouts Zilker Cabin

Hill Country Conservancy
The Rowing Dock
The Trail Foundation
Trail of Lights Foundation
Umlauf Sculpture Museum & Garden
Waterloo Disc Golf
Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy
Zilker Park Boat Rentals
Zilker Theatre Productions