

June 28, 2017

The Honorable Mayor Steve Adler and Austin City Council Members
Austin City Hall
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767-1088

Dear Mayor Steve Adler and Austin City Council Members:

We are a broad alliance of residents, park adopters and organizations from across Austin that are united and speaking with one voice about the importance of investing in Austin's parks, trails and green spaces in the City of Austin's FY18 budget.

As you well know, Austin has an amazing park and trail system with 300 parks, 227 miles of trails and more than 20,000 acres of green spaces in the city. Our parklands provide vital green space and wildlife habitat, and keep our environment healthy. Parks and trails are not only a critical part of our urban infrastructure, but they also have tremendous economic, health, ecological, and educational benefits as well. Unfortunately, annual investments in Austin parks, trails and green spaces are not keeping pace with the needs of a growing city.

While Austin often appears at the top of almost every "best of" list, ParkScore, the Trust for Public Land's gold standard index for parks, ranked Austin 46 out of the 100 most populous U.S. cities for how well we meet our resident's needs for parks in 2017. Furthermore, the same index indicated that Austin currently only spends \$103 per resident every year toward maintaining and enhancing our parks. That's less than half the \$208 average the top 10 ranked cities on ParkScore spend per resident. Our peers know how important parks are for economic development, tourism, and the health of their citizens.

As you and your colleagues consider needs across the city during the FY18 budget process, we believe that greater investments in parks, trails and green spaces will be critical in advancing each of the six core outcomes that you have identified as priorities for the city of Austin moving forward:

- *Security* – Safe parks and trails lead to safe communities. According to the 2016 Austin community survey, 47% of Austin residents believe that safety in city parks and park facilities is the most important recreational and cultural service that the city should be providing.
- *Economic opportunity* – Parks increase property values and tourism dollars, and make our community more desirable for residents and businesses alike. Unfortunately, access to quality parks is not equitably distributed throughout the city currently.
- *Affordable and accessible transportation* – Austin's urban trails system has the potential to be a key component of the city's transportation network, connecting neighborhoods to workplaces, shopping and recreation. Austin PARD also provides transportation services to some residents who participate in some PARD activities, including summer camps and cultural programs.

- *Physical and mental health* – Greater investments in parks, trails and aquatics facilities provide more opportunities for physical activity, which keeps our community active, prevents chronic disease and obesity and improves mental health and well-being.
- *Cultural or civic enrichment* – The Austin parks system includes 11 museums and arts and cultural centers as well as 10 performing arts venues. For many residents in our city, PARD arts and cultural activities are one of the most affordable enrichment options.
- *Confidence in city government* -- We need to invest in a park system for our residents that is commensurate with our innovative, world-class city. Currently, Austin PARD has a backlog of \$700 million in needed aging infrastructure repairs and renovations.

Austin's park system can live up to its world-class potential by investing **\$5 million** in the following PARD needs that are aligned with the City of Austin's core outcomes. We respectfully encourage you to include the following investments in the FY18 budget:

Division and Description	Core Outcomes	Total Expense	Note
Aquatics Increase Aquatics Maintenance Funding	Confidence in City Govt. Security Physical and Mental Health	\$400,000	Deteriorating and failing infrastructure and mechanical systems severely impact the stability of PARD aquatics operations and the safety of aquatics facilities. Currently, aquatic repairs are done reactively instead of proactively just to make it through each swim season. Since 2013, PARD has exceeded their allocated maintenance funding by an average of \$400,000 annually.
Grounds Maintenance FTE's for Playground Safety and Maintenance Team	Security Physical and Mental Health Economic Opportunity	\$405,359	The Playground program was transferred to the Grounds Maintenance Division in 2014 and was found to be deficient in staffing, inspections and timely repair of the playground equipment. The Districts moved one personnel to this team to complete repairs and inspections. Districts are also performing High Frequency Inspections, due to the fact that there are not enough personnel on the Playground team to do this. The hiring of 3 FTEs to perform the maintenance and inspections should alleviate the Districts of this responsibility. Also, with the hiring of a Parks Grounds Supervisor, the playground team will finally have a supervisor dedicated solely to this function.
Nature Based Programs Park Rangers -- FTE Request	Security Confidence in City Govt. Economic Opportunity	\$850,679	Park Rangers currently only have sufficient staff to patrol from 8:00am-6:00pm. Because of this inadequate staffing, rangers are unable to provide service during all park operational hours. Rangers are also filling the dual role as dispatchers on a rotating basis - this is an inefficient use of funding, since ranger pay scales are higher than dispatcher pay scales. For FY18, PARD is requesting ten (10) FTEs to work as Park Ranger IIs. This

			would enable the Park Ranger Program to return to its proper operational hours of 5:00am-11:00pm to be able to address all needs during park hours and for one additional hour after closing to address curfew issues. The requested funding will also enable the hiring of dedicated dispatchers, thus freeing up Park Rangers currently assigned to that duty at this time for more complex and appropriate tasks. One-time costs include bicycles/gear, individual tools & accessories, electronic devices, etc.
Museums & Cultural Centers Aging Infrastructure	Confidence in City Govt. Cultural or Civic Enrichment Economic Opportunity Physical and Mental Health	\$2 million	While safety is a primary concern of PARD, aging and deteriorating infrastructure poses a hazard in a variety of ways ranging from trip hazards to indoor environmental pollution. PARD must manage and address the high cost of operating and maintaining this infrastructure. In order to provide management responsibilities and sustainability efforts for meeting building LEEDS standards, energy and water conservation, PARD is requesting additional resources for facilities and grounds improvement. While the cost to make all needed repairs is \$5.4 million, \$2 million would allow PARD to begin to address these issues at a number of the following facilities: O.Henry Museum, Facility, Fleet, Aquatics, Trails, Holly Shore, Festival Beach, Nash-Hernandez Building, Gus Garcia, Tennis Courts, Metz Park
Museums & Cultural Centers Facility and Program Restoration – Carver Programming Enhancement	Cultural or Civic Enrichment Economic Opportunity Physical and Mental Health	\$87,527	The George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center experienced unprecedented demand for child and youth programming beginning with spring camps, summer youth programming and year-round after school due to demographic changes near the Center. These programs are extremely popular and extremely needed in an area that has been historically underserved. Its current budget of \$16,150 for all temps for operations and programming cannot support the demand for programming.
Facilities and Programs ADA Compliance	Confidence in City Government Physical and Mental Health	\$1 million	PARD hired a contractor to independently complete an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) assessment of the Austin park system. The assessment results include \$140 million in built environment and programmatic recommendations that will allow PARD to employ current best practices with regards to program and service delivery and allow appropriate access for all individuals. \$1 million would allow PARD to begin addressing ADA issues to ensure Austin is moving towards compliance with federal law.

Nature Based Programs -- Cities Connecting Children to Nature Program Manager FTE Request	Physical and Mental Health Economic Opportunity	\$70,000	The Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) program emphasizes abundant and equitable access to nature for the children of Austin, with a specific focus on children in low-income communities and children of color. The Program Manager would be responsible for executing the CCCN Implementation Plan and managing the CCCN Leadership Team and all Sub-Committees to define long-term strategy and vision to ensure nature access and connection for all of Austin's children.
Centralized Programs Facility and Program Restoration – Youth Sports Organization Utility	Physical and Mental Health Economic Opportunity	\$77,821	PARD partners with non-profit organizations (Youth Sports Organizations or YSOs) to provide recreational youth sports opportunities for Austin youth on private or public land as provided for by Ordinance 20100204-309 and Administrative Rules: Section100 – Use of Athletic Fields by Youth Sports Organizations. PARD requests additional funding for this effort so that additional/new partnerships may be considered and approved for FY18 and beyond.
Community Programs Two 14 Passenger Buses	Affordable and Accessible Transportation Security Physical and Mental Health Economic Opportunity	\$130,000	Currently, community recreation center staff members drive 15 passenger vans to transport children under the age of 18. These vans do not conform to standards set forth by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. Buses are needed to transport participants to and from school and during Summer Camps and camp days. PARD requests additional funding to purchase two 14 passenger buses.
Total		\$5,021,386	

We understand that every annual budget process presents you with difficult choices as elected officials. We believe that parks, trails and green spaces are a resource to be enjoyed by all Austin residents and we look forward to visiting with each of you to discuss the importance of making strategic investments in this area in the FY18 budget.

Sincerely,

