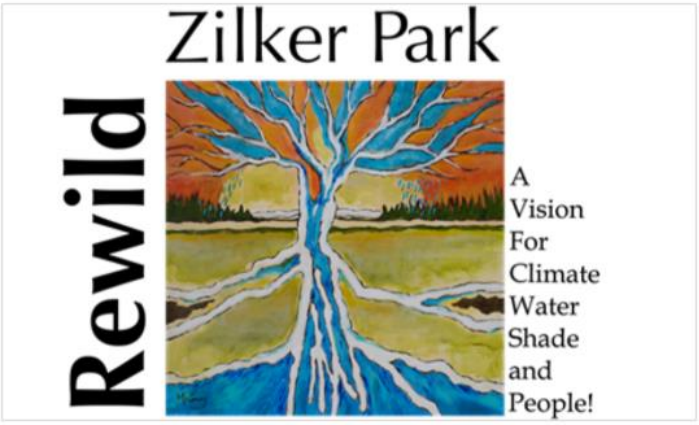

To: City of Austin PARD, ZPVP Consultants, City Council and Community Members

From: Zilker Neighborhood Association (ZNA) Parks + Environment Team including Members from Barton Hills NA, Bouldin Creek NA, Save Our Springs, Sierra Club and others.

Date: May 1, 2022 (Revision 01 of original sent March 31, 2022)

Re: Feedback on the Zilker Vision Plan "3 Concepts" (PDF Posted by City/ February 15, 2022)

DRAFT POSTED FOR COMMUNITY REVIEW AND DIALOG

OVERVIEW

The members of the ZNA Parks and Environment team has volunteered at least 315 man-hours since early 2021 focusing on attending meetings, offering ideas and analyzing various aspects of the Zilker Vision Plan. Why? Because we deeply love the park and also because we understand as the most adjacent neighborhoods and as leading environmental advocates, we have a responsibility to all the diverse neighborhoods and people in Austin to step up and help make sure the plan works for everyday residents who love it just as much as we do.

After detailed review, we find that the 3 Concepts framework simply does not hold together as a coherent narrative. At our recent quarterly neighborhood meeting, nearly all those attending said the survey was confusing and frustrating. Thus, we have deconstructed the concepts into discrete ideas grouped by category for easier comprehension. We have also added alternative ideas where needed. We will update this document based on community dialog and as more details emerge.

OVERALL VISION: REWILDING

On March 23rd, 2022, Austin Neighborhoods Council, representing over 80 neighborhoods in every quadrant of Austin unanimously voted to endorse the Rewilding Plan we funded and made public as part of our engagement with this process. See https://www.atxanc.org/agenda-

minutes-and-presentations and
https://zilkerneighborhood.org/docs/zpmp/rewilding_zilker_park%20(Jan%202022).pdf

Our vision is an inclusive, nature-based, recreational experience for the over one million annual visitors to the park and a showcase for climate, water quality and regenerative environmental stewardship. The 3 Concepts framework is based on a status quo mentality with a strong parking-centric focus. We agree that some parking is essential (the current legal 1,000 spaces) but do not believe that parking should form the driving basis for a long term "vision."

WE SUPPORT: We could potentially strongly support the following 5 ideas outlined in the 3 Concepts, at least in theory. Because few details have been given and literally no financial estimates exist, our support is at this stage merely conceptual and may change as details emerge.

- Rehabilitation of the Barton Creek riparian zone within and upstream of the park.
- Ecological uplift and rewilding throughout the park, especially on the Butler Landfill.
- Removal of parking on the Polo Field and rewilding at least 50% of this area.
- All of the creative in-park, non-car mobility options.
- Decentralized wayfinding/visitor information throughout the park.

WE SEE SIGNIFICANT OMMISIONS: Unfortunately, all 3 concepts are molded in the existing Zilker Park status quo and do not contain a bold vision for the future consistent with community needs or the innovation and inclusion Austin expects. This effort seems to only focus on very short term (~5 year) issues but not the envisioned 50 year plan that would take into account the views and needs of the next generation and plan for anticipated climate and other societal changes. While we are commenting on the short term issues in the 3 Concepts, we encourage the city and its consultants to take a much longer term view.

The following priorities are inexplicably missing from the current concepts. These omissions make it difficult for the "Vision Plan" to be seen as anywhere near complete and we hope they are addressed in detail before the next version is released.

- The plan should be aligned with the City's **Climate and Equity Report** to meaningfully address equity and inclusivity. It is clear that the small group meetings, the community "zoom" meetings, and the online surveys have missed the mark of even minimal inclusivity.

  The survey data are not representative and should not be used the foundation for significant decisions. And while PARD and the consultants have held an impressive number of pop-ups across the city to get input, there is no data beyond the date and place of the pop-ups. We find PARD's continued defense of its practices and continued use of biased data to be unacceptable. We offer some initial equity remedies in APPENDIX A, Page 11. Note: Saldana Public Relations volunteered their equity expertise on this section.

- Incredibly, in 2022, climate is ignored. All three concepts are too parking centric and too light on restoration/protection of the parkland itself. While the non-car mobility options are potentially exciting, the overall lack of emphasis on climate mitigation is problematic. Water quality and quantity protection issues are ignored, both in the protection of the watershed, and in the lack of even minimal detail on stormwater infrastructure, "green infrastructure" and a water budget. While there are some implied climate-related benefits embedded in the ecological uplift and mobility sections, we feel it is important to highlight, maximize and align with the bold climate goals the City of Austin has already committed to, not ignore them. These should form part of the very foundation of this plan.

- 21st Century Transit and Bike/Ped Infrastructure to the Park (and perhaps to/ from all Metro Parks) from each district in Austin, not just within the Park is missing. Lack of a free system, with plentiful storage for bikes, picnic baskets, strollers etc to move people from all over Austin to the park without a car is not consistent with the **Austin Strategic Mobility Plan** and should have formed the backbone of all 3 concepts. While such a system is mostly outside the boundaries of the park it just cannot be ignored in a truly visionary plan for the park. We are asking the planning team to include Cap Metro, ACL, transit advocates and others in adding this to the next version of the draft plan and to find the budget to catalyze it. Without this, investments for the mobility options offered in the Park are rendered almost meaningless.

- Few if any public safety components are embedded in these three concepts. No enforcement system for reigning in illegal parking, camping, ecological destruction, off-leash dogs or serious crime is offered. The next iteration of the plan must include a thoughtful plan together with an adequate budget for taking care of the park and the people in it. See APPENDIX B page 13 for more ideas on Public Safety.

- Significant attention to ADA access to all parts of the park is inexplicably missing.

- Significant drop-off/pick-up zones near programming areas (with options to park on periphery) and for families to bring their kids, coolers, and strollers are missing.

- Connection/incorporation/ linkage with on-going projects in or near Zilker Park (e.g. replacement of street bridge over Barton Creek, Violet Crown trailhead, Clubhouse rehabilitation, etc.) are ignored.

WE STRONGLY OPPOSE: The following ideas will likely greatly increase the impervious cover in the park, hurt water quality, exacerbate climate change and/ or provide unsafe and/ or overly expensive additions to the park.

- More than doubling legal parking spaces (from about 1,000 to 2,500)

- Parking garages
- Hillside Theater on Butler Landfill or on the Great Lawn
- Parking garages in center
- Barton Springs Road reduced to one lane of travel with on-street parking
- Tunnels and most bridges
- Visitor Center

Overall, we ask that the planning team to take a step back, strengthen the elements that preserve and protect the park, incorporate the essential, but missing elements, provide a budget for all of the large-ticket items, and then return with at least one detailed scenario that moves the park far beyond the status quo and includes free transit to/from the park.

DETAILED FEEDBACK

The three concepts do not provide a coherent framework and narrative ("Stitch, Edges, Regenerate") and make it difficult and/or confusing to comprehend the consultants' "vision." Because the consultants have indicated they may "cherry pick" the most popular pieces of each concept for the next iteration, we have not reviewed the three as concepts per se, but instead as a collection of specific ideas in a deconstructed framework for easier comprehension by us and by others.

We have grouped the key project ideas into 8 categories:

We have three Appendices:

Category 1. Ecological Uplift and Rewilding

Overall Comment: STRONGLY SUPPORT BUT NEEDS MORE FOREST AND REWILDING OF NEW NATURAL AREAS. NOTE: REWILDING IS DIFFERENT FROM ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT.

Key Point: Ecological uplift is less nature based, less regenerative and more expensive than Rewilding.

ITEM	COMMENT
Barton Creek Rehab (All)	***Support***
Green Stormwater (All)	***Unclear what is proposed***
Ecological Uplift (All)	***Support Uplift for Existing Natural Areas/ Rewild for New Areas***
Address Southern part of Park (All)	***Unclear what is proposed***
Water Budget (All)	***Unclear what is proposed***
Ecological Uplift on Landfill /Some Parking (A)	***Oppose parking except for strictly under the MoPac structure***
Ecological Uplift on Landfill adjacent to parking garage and Hillside Theater (B)	***Oppose garage and theater***
Ecological Uplift on Landfill – meadow & some tree planting (C)	***Replace with Rewilding and More Forest***
Erosion & Green Infrastructure Improvements at Butler Shores Hike & bike trail (A)	***Support***
Green Stormwater improved in Great Lawn (B)	***Unclear what is proposed***

We support using ecological uplift processes alone for existing natural areas (166 acres) since nature has already dictated what those areas should be. Many of these areas contain non-native invasive plants. Removing them involves ecological uplifting, not rewilding processes.

We support using ecological uplift for the proposed 81 to 91 acres to restore the soils and seed bank, mitigate overland flows, and remove soil leachate. However, we strongly recommend employing rewilding strategies from that point forward to allow natural systems to ecologically regenerate and to allow the regeneration of more forested habitats.

To better understand the differences between Ecological Uplift and Rewilding see Appendix C page 14.

Category 2. Circulators, Park Trains, ADA and Trails

Overall Comment: ***POTENTIALLY EXCITING BUT LACK OF A SHUTTLE <u>TO/FROM THE PARK</u> LIMITS REAL UTILITY.***

ITEM	COMMENT
Zilker Eagle (All)	***Possible Support***
Internal Shuttle Route A - Nature Preserve → Austin Nature & Science Center → Lady Bird Lake → Zilker Botanical Garden → Barton Springs Pool → Violet Crown Trail Head → Land Bridge	***Possible Support***
Internal Shuttle Route B - Girl Scout Cabin → McBeth Recreation Ctr → Nature Preserve → Austin Nature & Science Ctr → Lady Bird Lake → Sports Complex → Zilker Botanical Garden → Rugby Field → Sunshine Camp → Violet Crown Trail Head → Barton Springs pool	***Possible Support***
Internal Shuttle Route C - Girl Scout Cabin → McBeth Recreation Ctr → Disc Golf Area → Nature Preserve → Austin Nature & Science Center → Landfill Parking → Butler Hike & Bike Trail Head → Prairie Trail → Zilker Botanical Garden → Volleyball Court → Lady Bird Lake → Great Lawn → Lou Neff Point → Toomey Road → Barton Springs Road → Welcome Plaza → Barking Springs Pool → Barton Springs Pool → Violet Crown Trailhead	***Possible Support***
Universal ADA (All)	***Possible Support***
Addition of 5.8 miles of trails throughout park (A)	***Possible Support***
Loop Trail around Polo Field and Great Lawn (B)	***Possible Support***
New Trailhead on west side of MoPac in Zilker Preserve (B)	***Possible Support***
Separated Bike Trail from Butler Hike & Bike Trail along LB Lake (C)	***Impact Unclear***
Addition of 5.3 miles of trails throughout park (C)	***Possible Support***

Category 3. Parking *Overall Comment: NEED MORE PARK, NOT MORE PARKING.*

ITEM	COMMENT
Parking garage underground @ landbridge – 1,700 spaces (A)	***Oppose***
Parking Garages at Perimeter –3 garages, 2,190 spaces total. (B)	***Oppose***
Surface lot parking on Landfill – 170 spaces (A)	***May Support if Green/Under Mopac Structure/No Increase in total # legal spaces in the park as a whole.***
Surface lots @ MoPac—one @ Rollingwood, one @ Stratford—420 spaces total. (C)	***Support surface lots if Green/Under MoPac/No increase in total # legal spaces in the park.***
Surface lot on South side (off of Azie Morton) 160 spaces (A) (Note: currently 142 legal spaces on South side).	***Support surface lots if Green/ No increase in total # legal spaces in the park as a whole.***
Surface lots on South side (off of Azie Morton) 2 lots, 420 spaces total. (C) (Note: currently 142 legal spaces on South side)	***Support surface lots if Green/ recommend fewer spaces (250)/No increase in total # legal spaces in the park as a whole.***
Parking along Azie Morton Road (C)	***Oppose***
Barton Springs Road No on Street Parking (A)	***Support***
Barton Springs Road on street Parking (B and C)	***Oppose***
Removal of lot at East entrance	***Support + Rewilding***
Removal of Polo field parking (C)	***Support + Rewilding at least 50%***
Partial removal of vehicular travel on Andrew Zilker Rd (A)	***Possible Support***
Removal of vehicular travel on Andrew Zilker road (B, C)	***Possible Support***

The plan should retain the roughly 1,000 spaces in the park, removing illegal spaces as access to the same number are acquired adjacent/near the park**.** Currently there are about 2,500 parking "spaces" in the park; more than half are informal or illegal, in violation of city regulations on pollution prevention and impervious cover, potentially adversely affecting water quality for Barton Springs, Barton Creek and Lady Bird Lake. As social expectations, consumer preferences, and driving patterns change, a park with 1,000 spaces and diverse transit and circulator options can provide more, not less, access to the park.

Note: Need plan for consistent pricing for parking in the park. Any parking fees should be dedicated to Zilker. Need to FIRST establish free shuttle service to the park before making changes.

Category 4. Road Changes and Closings

Overall Comment: NOT NEARLY ENOUGH INFO TO ANALYZE.

Note: Possible support for either one or two lanes of car traffic on Barton Springs Road but we oppose on street parking so there is room for double tracked separated bike lanes.

ITEM	COMMENT
"Address" Azie Morton (All)	***Not enough information***
Azie Morton Road Improvements (C)	***Not enough information***
Lou Neff – remove cars (A)	***Possible Support***
Lou Neff – remove cars (B)	***Possible Support***
Andrew Zilker – remove cars (B)	***Possible Support***
Disconnect Columbus Drive (A)	***Unclear Impact***
Barton Springs Road 2 lanes (A)	***Support with no on street parking. Need double track bike lanes separated from car lanes w/ vegetated buffer/ trees.***
Barton Spring Road Improvements – one lane of travel & on street parking (C)	***Oppose on street parking. Possible support for one lane. Need double track bike lanes separated from car lanes w/ vegetated buffer/ trees.***
Stratford – Stays as is (C)	***Unclear purpose/ impact***
Stratford realignment EAST (A)	***Unclear purpose/ impact***
Stratford alignment to vehicular traffic (A)	***Unclear purpose/ impact***
Stratford alignment WEST/ and remove cars (B)	***Unclear purpose/impact***

Category 5. Tunnels, Bridges, Boardwalks and Boat Docks

Overall Comment: MANY ITEMS NOT WORTH THE INVESTMENT COMPARED TO OTHER PRIORITIES

ITEM	COMMENT
Land Bridge (A)	***Oppose***
Pedestrian Bridge off Toomey (A) and (B)	***Need More Specifics/ Possible Support***
Additional Ped/Bike Bridge Connections across Barton Creek(A)	***Need More Specifics/ Possible Oppose***
Pedestrian/Bike Bridge across Lady Bird Lake to Austin High (B)	***Oppose***
Tunnel Under Barton Springs Road (B)	***Oppose***
Board Walk on Lady Bird Lake (C)	***Oppose***
Lou Neff Point Pedestrian and Bike Bridge (C)	***Oppose***
Move Boat House and Dock East (C)	***Unclear Purpose & Impact***

Category 6. Water

Overall Comment: POTENTIALLY IMPORTANT BUT NOT ENOUGH INFO TO ANALYZE

ITEM	COMMENT
Water Budget (All)	***Purpose/ Impact is Unclear***
Green Stormwater Infrastructure (All)	***Purpose/ Impact is Unclear***
Improved Access Point into Water at Barton Creek outside BS Pool (C)	***Purpose /Impact is Unclear***
Sunken gardens restored (A)	***Support***
Sunken gardens restored (B)	***Support***

Category 7. Sports, Dogs and Playgrounds

Overall Comment: SHOULD BE THE EASIEST CATEGORY TO SUPPORT BUT ISN'T.

SPORTS COMPLEX NEEDS MORE CLARITY.

PLAYGROUNDS NEED MORE SPECIFICS – ALL SHOULD BE NATURE-BASED

OFF-LEASH DOGS AREAS NEED ENFORCEMENT

ITEM	COMMENT
Sports Complex at Rugby Field (A)	***Purpose/ Impact is Unclear***
Sports Complex at Polo Lawn (A)	***Purpose/ Impact is Unclear***
Sports complex at polo field (B)	***Purpose/Impact is Unclear***
Off Leash Area in Polo Field (A)	***Possible Support, needs education and enforcement***
Off Leash Area near Azie Morton/South part of Zilker (B)	***Oppose***
Off-leash area at polo field (B)	***Possible Support, needs education and enforcement***
Off leash area at polo field (A)	***Possible Support, needs education and enforcement***
Nature Playground on West side of MoPac in Zilker Preserve (B)	***Support***
Playground in the southern part of Zilker (B)	***Support if Green***
Playground near Sports Complex and Welcome Plaza (A)	***Oppose the Sports Complex and the Welcome Plaza, Support Playground if Green***
Addition of 7 new playgrounds throughout park (B)	***Possible Support if Green***
Disc Golf moved to polo field (B)	***Oppose***
4 types of playgrounds with restrooms (C)	***Possible Support if Green***

Note: Off Leash dog areas need budget for enforcement and education. See https://www.kvue.com/article/news/local/off-leash-laws-in-austin-parks-not-followed/269-15cacb16-de0b-4b66-949b-5eb728e670d1

Category 8. Visitor Center/ Cottage/Hut, Welcome Center/Welcome Plaza and Theater

Overall Comment: NONE OF THIS IS NECESSARY, FUNDS ARE NEEDED ELSEWHERE

ITEM	COMMENT
Visitors Center Repurposed Cottage and Quonset Hut (C)	***Opposed***
New Location for Hillside Theater (Great Lawn) (A)	***Opposed***
Welcome Center in land bridge area (A)	***Opposed***
Rugby field repurposed to welcome plaza (C)	***Opposed***

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A: Overview of Systemic Equity Problems and BIPOC Under- Representation in the Zilker Park Vision Plan

ZNA Parks team has been concerned about lack of representation in the ZPVP from the beginning of this effort because it has been clear that the small group meetings, community "zoom" meetings, and online surveys were visibly missing the mark of even minimal inclusivity. We appreciate the response we received from the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) to our concerns, but we do not think the problem has yet been remedied. Following is a list of seven key problem areas, with suggested remedies.

Seven Equity Problems and Alternative Solutions

1. There has been literally no data from communities of color in Austin in terms of their lived experience in the park – let alone hopes and needs. The survey has no questions that relate to culture, race or lived experience - except in the demographics section.

Remedy: Add questions that are specifically relevant to communities of color.

2. The pop-ups were done in many key areas of Austin. However, the PARD project staff has confirmed there is no data from those pop ups. No verbatim quotes, no survey results, not even a list of names and contact info. They appear to be a "check the box" type of engagement that looks good on paper but offers nothing of value to the plan.

Remedy: Re-do the pop-ups and actually get feedback and data per location, per District and per quadrant of the City.

3. The online surveys are not demographically representative of the City. The statistics from the survey should be considered invalid. The most recent survey was over 70% white. The zooms are even worse and have been over 90% white. This is inexcusable in a 21st century survey and should not be considered “valid” for a planning project of this magnitude.

Remedy: Recalibrate the data to US Census demographics or conduct an outbound poll that is designed to be statistically representative.

4. The survey questionnaires are long, overly complicated and dominated by “planner-speak” and other unintelligible jargon, making them arduous. The drop-off rate for questions appeared to be almost 50%, which is very high and indicated fatigue and frustration.

Remedy: Have a professional polling or communication team member make the questionnaire(s) understandable for a general public audience.

5. The zoom calls have been overwhelmingly white, older and central west Austin focused. The statistics from those calls should be considered invalid.

Remedy: Stop doing zooms unless they are demographically representative. Curate the invitations, the speakers and the topics and involve various community groups with close ties to communities of color so that they are of interest.

6. Using the questionable statistics from the systemically invalid community engagement to “push” the results to the community biases further engagement. The statistics should not be used to justify questions or plans in subsequent polls or on zooms.

Remedy: Stop “pushing” results to the community based on invalid survey results.

7. No demographic analysis has been done of users of Zilker Park. Informal observation indicates that Zilker is one of the most diverse gathering places in all of Austin, and its users deserve far better representation.

Remedy: Do a demographic study of Park users.

APPENDIX B: IDEAS for PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Safety should be a top priority for Zilker Park given the large number of visitors. We are aware that public safety reform in Austin is being discussed based on the need to eliminate systemic racism and we are monitoring those reforms closely. To our knowledge, there is no plan to keep Zilker Park safe at APD or at PARD and we hope to help spark a healthy dialog alongside future planning and investment in the Park.

ZNA Parks Committee has analyzed incident calls to APD over the past 5 years. Based on that analysis regarding the topic of support, monitoring and enforcement in Zilker Park, we see the need for a three-prong approach:

a. Dangerous incidents: includes assaults, vehicle break-ins, rape, murder, weapons, unhoused camping, drunk/disorderly calls, drug dealing and violent mental health calls. Handled by APD

b. Violations that require confronting the general public that are not typically dangerous such as parking violations, beverage container violations, unleashed pet violations and trash dumping in parks and streams contained in parks. Handled by an increased number of Park Rangers, dedicated to Zilker Park.

c. Ongoing environmental monitoring, “friendly presence” and visitor support services. Handled by “climate corps” or similar youth jobs program supported by volunteer “docents.”

We seek to have detailed conversations about the need for public safety and support innovative ways to involve APD, EMS, PARD Park Rangers and Austin Climate Corps and volunteers to take safety at Zilker Park to the next level.

APPENDIX C: UNDERSTANDING ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT AND REWILDING

Ecological uplift (as defined by the City's Parks and Recreation Department for the Zilker Park Vision Plan via email to ZNA) is the result of repairing and restoring natural systems based on human-led active management. Ecological uplift is typically more expensive than rewilding and often requires supplemental irrigation.

Rewilding (as defined by **Rewilding Zilker Park**) is the process of ecological regeneration in which nature takes the lead and is then guided by adaptive vegetation management. In the context of Zilker Park, the process is more specifically called 'Urban Rewilding' since it will enhance park user needs and accommodate infrastructure.

Since rewilding allows nature to dictate the most suitable vegetation cover, including when this means mostly forest, the resulting natural areas will be more sustainable and cost-efficient. These areas will be much less dependent on supplemental irrigation. The habitat needs of keystone species, such as Great Horned Owls Hawks, Monarchs, and native bees would drive vegetation management. In addition to habitat needs of keystone species, the core benefit for humans is more shade, less heat island effect and better climate mitigation that ecological uplift alone.

In short, ecological uplift is less nature based, less regenerative and more expensive than Rewilding. Both strategies can be used together and are not mutually exclusive. We advocate for maximum use of rewilding strategies in Zilker Park and do not just ecological uplift alone.

APPRECIATION

ZNA Parks and Environment Team appreciates the chance to offer this document to the City and to the community for further dialog. We plan to incorporate feedback and update this analysis as needed until the plan is completed, budgeted and approved.

ZNA Parks and Environment Team would like the thank the following people for their dedicated expertise as volunteers on this team:

Gail Rothe, Ben Livingston, Ben Thompson, Bill Bunch, Roy Waley, Lisa Audiffred, Ingrid Weigand, Melissa Hawthorne, Garrett Nick, Becky Taylor and Elizabeth McGreevey.

In addition to our volunteer team members, we asked for ongoing outside support. Paul Saldaña provided expert guidance on equity and inclusion issues. Hill Abel provided expert guidance on bike/ped issues. James Russell provided the initial idea for a free shuttle to Zilker. Alec Hoelscher served as our paid intern during the summer and fall of 2021 and offered guidance as a high school senior, former PARD lifeguard and keen observer.

We also want to thank all the other members of the Austin community who have also attended zooms, pop ups, taken surveys and engaged in dialog and worked to support PARD planning team and consultants. We look forward to completing this together.

For more information, visit https://zilkerneighborhood.org/zilkerpark-mp.shtml, email parks-env@zilkerneighborhood.org or call or text 512-632-0582.