

## Summary of Key Points from the 9/27/23 Meeting of PARD, Guests invited by PARD and Rewild Zilker

**FINAL 11/27/23**

The purpose of these notes is to create a record for moving forward for identifying process improvements and lessons learned, re-establishing trust and creating a more complete foundation of facts for Zilker Park planning in the future.

### Attendees:

For PARD Kimberly McNeeley, Ricardo Soliz, Justin Schneider

Guests of PARD:

Heidi Anderson, Trail Conservancy

Councilmember Ryan Alter and his staff Ben Leffler

Pedro Villalobos, Chair of PARB

For REWILD Robin Rather, Tanya Payne, Ana Aguirre, Mark May

### **POTENTIAL OUTCOMES**

Two of the three goals for the meeting per the agreed upon agenda were met.

### Status of Goals for this Meeting

1. Discuss the role of community feedback during PARD Planning at a high level.
  - Several process improvements were identified related to public engagement level, polling, and public information requests. Details below.
2. Clear the air on open questions with an emphasis on what we would do differently next time.
  - Created a list of process improvements below (includes topics from 9/20 meeting with McNeeley, Soliz, and May)
3. If possible, begin to rebuild trust and a clean “reset” between PARD staff and Rewild Zilker.
  - While the group agreed to “clean slate” restart for a new plan for Zilker Park instead of returning to the draft ZPVP that has been shelved, rebuilding trust and a clean reset are still pending and make take additional time to fully complete.

- *PARD emphasized the need to receive additional direction from Council regarding the timing and goals of a reset for ZPVP.*
- *A shared definition of “clean slate” as it relates to the ZPVP will need to be developed as some elements of the ZPVP may provide foundational material from which to reset- further emphasizing the importance of additional direction. Rewild Zilker’s definition of a clean slate is a complete and total do-over. PARD has not yet defined a clean slate but if and when it does, PARD will transparently share the position.*

## **TOTAL OF 14 AGREED UPON PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS**

Those present agreed upon a total of 14 Process Improvements/ “Lessons Learned” for the future of PARD Planning Efforts, including but not limited to Zilker Park. Appendix A lists those process improvements as agreed to by both sides. These process improvements are the one of the most significant outcomes of this meeting. Whether or not they implemented is a major test of the rebuilding process.

## **A TOTAL OF FOUR AGREED UPON NEXT STEPS**

1. PARD agreed to provide written answers to the “open questions” that remain formally unanswered (Note: full list of the open questions is in the following Appendix.)
  - PARD agreed to bundle up the qualitative BIPOC data it collected during the ZPVP and to present it to those present and later to post it in order to ground future planning efforts in equity. This will take PARD some substantial time and a timeline for the delivery will be developed and communicated. The Department will balance this work with other competing priorities.
  - PARD to share internal audit results from survey 6
  - Tree count will be shared with Rewild and posted.
  - Impervious cover methodology and analysis will be shared with PARD and Rewild and posted.
  - Carbon sequestration tool usage will be shared with PARD and Rewild and posted.

- PARD will provide at least at least a list of attendees who attended the 5 meetings with ACL listed on the city website and will provide summary notes if available.

PARD has provided the written list and it appears in Appendix B.

2. PARB/ Chair Villalobos agreed to contemplate the role of PARB in future PARD planning efforts from both a technical review standpoint and a “mediator” role standpoint.
  3. Concerns about how to fund future vision plan work and the future implementation of PARD plans were raised but not yet resolved
  4. Future meetings were contemplated and will be considered as needed.
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## APPENDIX A: 14 PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS AND CLARIFICATIONS

Note: These were initially provided to PARD via email correspondence on November 2, 2023, from Rewild volunteer Mark May to K. McNeeley. They are copied here in their entirety with no additional changes or comments.

1. The input from the public shall be upgraded to at least the same public engagement level as any consultant and non-profit input.

*The Parks and Recreation Department references the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to help identify the methods or ways to connect with the identified groups to gather input. Small group meetings are higher on the level of influence (involve) than surveys (consult). When the Department seeks higher levels, we typically seek to engage particular diverse stakeholder groups (communities of color, park patrons, amenity users, etc.). The Department acknowledges improvement is needed to show how feedback was incorporated into the plan, how survey responses influenced the plan and what changes were made as a result of engagement. The Parks and Recreation acknowledges and regrets the Rewild group did not perceive the engagement as inclusive of the Rewild group's input. The Department will continue to cultivate relationships to ensure all stakeholders are represented.*

*Upon receipt of additional direction regarding the future of the plan, should the direction include additional engagement, the Department will create an engagement plan that clearly outlines engagement activities specific to collecting community feedback and how feedback is incorporated.*

*The Department agrees data matters.*

2. Statistically representative quantitative polling shall be included in the budget, performed by a recognized, non-biased polling firm, and involve all citizens of Austin regardless of documentation status.

*It is important to note, all funds for the Zilker Park Vision Plan have been expended. Future engagements will consider sampling and distribution of surveys. However, due to the significant costs associated with these surveys, funding availability and allocation is a significant consideration. Assuming funding for a representative sampling is available, the Department will explore this method while also continuing to provide "opt-in" surveys to allow every community member an opportunity to share their thoughts. The Department believes no single method on its own is determinative. Multiple engagement methods will be used to understand needs, desires, and possible consensus through our processes. The Department continues to improve*

*relationships and outreach to communities that are often underrepresented in our citywide processes. We will continue to focus our efforts in these communities.*

3. Foundational data (numbers, information etc.) in a plan shall be reviewed by internal experts and those reviews documented in the plan.  
*Yes, the review will occur and documentation recorded.*
4. The project team shall identify and explain when meaningful changes are made to a plan. Redline / track changes in any updated versions to assist readers.  
*Yes, this is a process improvement the Parks and Recreation Department acknowledges and is committed to improving.*
5. Errors in the document shall be explained, corrected, and processes improved to minimize similar errors in the future.  
*Yes, this is a process improvement the Parks and Recreation Department acknowledges and is committed to improving.*
6. The project team shall maintain underlying documentation sufficient to support numbers or other foundational data presented in the plan.  
*Yes, the Parks and Recreation Department commits to maintaining documentation. It is important to acknowledge the definition of sufficient may differ and defining sufficient will be important for transparency moving forward.*
7. Summary presentations shall only include information from the full plan document.  
*Yes, the Department commits to providing information included in the full plan. Please provide more context to “only.”*
8. For CO2 analysis or other analysis assisted by a software product, the guidelines in the software/ calculator tool documentation shall be identified and followed.  
*Yes, this is a process improvement the Parks and Recreation Department is committed to improving. The Department now has an employee on the team with expertise in this emerging science.*
9. For CO2 analysis, results shall be reviewed by PARD, City staff and/or external experts that have experience in CO2 analysis before including in documentation.  
*Yes, this is a process improvement the Parks and Recreation Department is committed to improving. The Department now has an employee on the team with expertise in this emerging science.*

10. Clear contextualization of the budget for any specific park plan shall be given so that the financial implications can be compared to overall park plans and funding across the city.

*Most Metropolitan parks within the Park system require substantial investments to complete phased development. A vision plan provides estimate ranges as a matter of practice based on estimated costs at the time. Typically the design phase of implementation (when the materials and processes have been identified) is when a better cost estimate can be determined. The Department primarily relies upon voter approved bond programs to fund park development. In the developing any bond program, the Parks and Recreation Department utilizes the Department's Long Range Plan, city-wide plans, park/facility vision plans, feasibility studies, trends analysis, social determinant data, historical investment data and/or deferred maintenance documentation to prioritize future park development. The bond development process typically includes a stakeholder engagement process, a task force approval process and priorities set by City Council; ultimately voters approve a bond package. Bond development and approval information has been distributed via various public outlets.*

11. Park plans shall be centered around and grounded in the City's Climate and Equity Plan.

*Environmental sensitivity in development is important and the Department will continue to reference the Climate Equity Plan in its park planning. The Department is also obligated to also consider the various other city-wide guiding documents when planning within the park system. For any project, the planning team identifies the anchors for making decisions and the existing documents that are relevant to the park planning process (ImagineAustin, City Strategic Direction, Mobility Plan, Climate Equity Plan, etc.)*

12. The role of facilitator can help mediate diverse viewpoints. If this role is desired, it shall be clearly defined early in the planning process and should be independent of any other role in the process.

*The Parks and Recreation Department agrees a neutral facilitator can be helpful in guarding against absolutism and ensuring the expression of diverse opinions. It is not always possible to get to consensus. The City has trained staff to fill this role and, should the role be desired, will ensure it is independent of other roles within the process.*

13. Rewilding shall be considered as a form of ecological restoration and climate mitigation while not diminishing recreational opportunities or access to the park.

*It will be important to develop a shared understanding or definition of rewilding. The Parks and Recreation Department believes it sought to balance the varied recreational needs of park patrons with environmental restoration. The Department acknowledges this may not be*

*a shared sentiment. Having a shared understanding will increase the likelihood of building consensus to the extent possible.*

14. Formal Public Requests for Information should be publicly posted when requested, updated when answered, and the requestors' statement of satisfaction with the responsive documents included.

*Future Public Information Requests related to a future Zilker Planning process can and will be posted as permissible. The Public Information Request process does not require the City to produce or create documents that do not exist.*

## APPENDIX B:

RESPONSES TO “OPEN QUESTIONS“ Requested by Rewild Zilker in September, 2023 and answered by PARD in October, 2023.

Rewild is thankful to PARD for answering our questions and we appreciate your ongoing willingness to complete our additional requests so that the community can have “closure” on these remaining concerns regarding the factual record of the ZPVP. Rewild will review the answers from PARD and follow up with questions and comments before December 15, 2023 and as needed thereafter.

### REWILD LIST OF OPEN QUESTIONS AND SUBSEQUENT ANSWERS FROM PARD

*1. What survey data was collected from younger Austin residents and BIPOC community members and how was it analyzed? Please provide all available data and analysis if not already on the city website. What would we do differently in the future?*

The Department has posted all survey information on the website. Please know the Department is working to organize the specific engagement data where communities of color were engaged. The survey data can be explored online. Additionally, pop-ups and meetings where community input was gathered at events or locations that serve communities of color are available on the webpage. Demographic data was not collected at pop-up events. The Department will not be able to identify all data that came from people of color, since demographic information on surveys is always optional, and we do not collect demographic data at our pop-ups. To the extent possible, the Department continues to work to disaggregate the data.

One process improvement, by way of example, is changing the management of the input collected in more strategic ways. For much of the process, the input received at pop-ups, whether collected through surveys or additional feedback on sticky notes, was added to the overall survey results in the comments section. This made it more difficult to break out the qualitative data from the events in significant ways. Through the process, the Department learned about new tools and functions that continue to make the management of the large amount of input more manageable, so that the Department is better able to highlight voices across our community.



*2. What statistically representative community-wide survey data was collected? Please provide all available data and analysis if not already on the city website. What would we do differently in the future?*

There were 6 community surveys connected to the Zilker Park Vision Plan process. All the surveys were “opt-in” surveys rather than “statistically valid” surveys. The Department has posted all survey information on the website. During the September 27th meeting, the Department agreed representative polling can be beneficial to the process. As has been discussed, the City of Austin's engagement processes encompass varied engagement techniques because all engagement methods have inherent flaws. A future engagement, unless otherwise prohibited by Council direction, will include an engagement plan that incorporates multiple methods of engagement.

Future engagements will consider sampling and distribution of surveys. However, due to the significant costs associated with these surveys, funding availability and allocation is a significant consideration. Additionally, even if representative sampling takes place, the Department will continue to provide “opt-in” surveys to allow every community member an opportunity to share their thoughts. None of these methods on their own are determinative. Multiple engagement methods will be used to understand needs, desires, and possible consensus through our processes. The Department continues to improve relationships and outreach to communities that are often underrepresented in our citywide processes. We will continue to focus our efforts in these communities.

*3. What tree survey was conducted that identified the overall tree count, including which protected trees are vulnerable and recommended for destruction? Please provide all available data and analysis if not already in the draft ZPVP. What would we do differently in the future?*

The vision plan's tree data was sourced from the Siglo Natural Resource Inventory which includes a 2020 tree survey of all trees in the park. The survey cites 4086 trees as the overall total, 751 as protected trees, and 424 as heritage trees (pg. 59 of Natural Resource Inventory). There is a typo in a sidebar paragraph of the available draft vision plan (pg. 38) that cites the 2020 count of protected and heritage trees rather than the overall totals. This was to be amended in the final draft to Council in August, however, a revised draft was not published. City of Austin tree data was shared via a public information request. GIS data is publicly available on the Open Data Portal.

*4. What impervious cover data was collected? Please provide all available data and analysis. Why were there no impervious cover numbers calculated without the underground garage? What would we do differently in the future?*

Impervious data calculations follow criteria denoted in the City Code. Impervious cover data is included in the available draft plan (pg. 159). A graphic breakdown of the impervious cover including that of the underground garage was included in the presentation to the Parks and Recreation Board on May 22, 2023. This comprehensive breakdown with cited Code was provided in response to a public information request. This request will be added to the webpage.

*5. How was the information pertaining to an accurate carbon sequestration estimate collected and analyzed? Please provide any data and analysis that is not already in the draft ZPVP. What would we do differently in the future?*

The Department met with a community member and discussed the carbon sequestration tool used to produce the estimate. This meeting provided insights and additional understanding. The input values for this tool were sourced from the impervious cover data and were provided in multiple public information requests that will be posted to the webpage. The original objective of the carbon sequestration data was to show a comparison between the existing land cover conditions in the park and that in the draft plan layout. The tool was intended to emphasize the draft plan's recommendation to reduce impervious cover. The Department is aware carbon sequestration and carbon storage modeling is an emerging field. Many other factors would be accounted for in a more comprehensive model such as emissions from cars in the park and construction materials in future modeling. Typically, these details are not encompassed in a high-level vision plan and would be more typical in the design process; however, the level of specificity for a future draft has not yet been determined. The climate change mitigation analysis as it relates to land use was used as a tool. It did not dictate the draft recommendations but was intended as a good-faith effort to be forward-looking in the planning phase in addressing climate change and dynamic user needs. A new team member with carbon sequestration experience has joined the Department and can assist in guiding any future modeling efforts.

*6. Please provide all technical drawings shared with all groups but not yet posted. Why are these drawings withheld from the public although paid for with public dollars? Are you willing to release them now? If not, why not. What would we do differently in the future?*

All drawings pertaining to the vision plan have been uploaded to the project website and/or are included in the planning document. Public information requests that released GIS files and PDF maps will be available on the project website as feasible. The CAD file was deemed propriety to the consultant, Design Workshop, by the Texas Attorney General. The Department will continue to share files and maps and information via the website.

*7. Please provide all transcripts, meeting notes and/or videos from all meetings with all groups if not already on the city website and provide an explanation as to why this hasn't already been done. What would we do differently in the future?*

The Department strove to provide a transparent account of the community engagement process with available information on the project website. Staff notes pertaining to meetings with C3 Presents representatives were shared through public information requests that will be posted to the webpage. If there is a particular purpose or question that we can address, we are open to discussing further.