

**Austin Parks Foundation:**

**Town Lake Metropolitan Park  
Long-Term Redevelopment Study**



**Final Report**  
November 7, 2014

## **1. PROJECT OVERVIEW**

Over the past 22 months, the Austin Parks Foundation (“APF”) and Tur Partners LLC (“Tur”), a global advisory firm, in close connection with PARD and the City of Austin, completed a comprehensive analysis of city plans, policies and initiatives relating to Austin’s Public Park System, with a particular focus on long-term redevelopment plans for Town Lake Metropolitan Park (the “Long-Term Project”). The Long-Term Project aimed primarily to create a long-term vision and execution plan for developing Town Lake Metropolitan Park by coordinating among various key constituents and stakeholders. Additionally, the Long-Term Project gathered best practices from leading parks nationwide and incorporated insights from local experts, including architects and engineers, in order to create a suggested road map for the City of Austin in developing Town Lake Metropolitan Park into a best-in-class facility that serves as a parks centerpiece for the city as a whole. This final report serves as a written summary of results of the Long-Term Project, including specific recommendations around design and infrastructure, park finance, and management, as well as event policies.

The full scope of work for the Long-Term Project is attached to this report as Exhibit A. The key areas of focus of the Long-Term Project include (i) reviewing, evaluating and, where necessary, updating current plans for Town Lake Metropolitan Park; (ii) identifying key issues and potential solutions for dealing with parking and traffic in the area; (iii) evaluating current event policies and procedures with consideration for the overall impact on Austin, including quality of the parks, experience for Austin’s residents, and support for the Austin economy; and (iv) engaging the public, civic organizations, business leaders, and other key stakeholders to ensure project success and the long-term viability of Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

## **2. PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### ***2.1. Overview of Town Lake Metropolitan Park and Austin Parks***

PARD manages approximately 19,581 acres of parkland, equal to approximately 23.9 acres per thousand persons in the City of Austin. With 18.2 percent of the city’s overall land area covered by parkland, Austin ranks substantially above the national average of 9.6 percent.<sup>1</sup> PARD employs 597 full-time employees and approximately 1,000 seasonal employees.

Town Lake Metropolitan Park consists of 54 acres of parkland anchored by the Long Center for the Performing Arts and the Palmers Events Center, including the parks often referred to as Auditorium Shores and Butler Park. In the heart of downtown Austin and overlooking

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<sup>1</sup> According to 2011 data from the *Trust for Public Lands*.

Austin's Lady Bird Lake, Town Lake Metropolitan Park is the city's flagship park and has been the focus of a number of redevelopment efforts since completion of the original master plan in 1999. Various improvements were made to Town Lake Metropolitan Park during Phases I and II of the 1999 master plan, which included developing the great lawn, Doug Sahm Hill, and the Liz Carpenter Fountain. Construction of the Alliance Children's Garden, which was also planned as part of Phase II, is expected to begin in 2015.

Earlier this year, construction began on the Auditorium Shores Improvements Plan. This initiative, separate from the Long-Term Project, focused on physical improvements to Auditorium Shores that created a renovated event space and enhanced recreational opportunities, including a new off-leash dog area, realignment of the trail, and irrigation and new turfgrass for the event lawn and remaining landscape and shoreline. Construction is currently under way, with the park expected to reopen in its entirety in 2015.

A timeline of key events relating to development of Town Lake Metropolitan Park is as follows:

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|------|---|
| 1987 | Beginning in the 1980s, the Town Lake Alliance began accumulating park dedications throughout the City of Austin. The process culminated in 1987, when the alliance achieved the dedication of 54 acres of public lands south of Riverside Drive adjacent to Auditorium Shores (now Town Lake Metropolitan Park) as well as more than 300 acres of riverfront land. |
| 1998 | Parks and Recreation Board adopted a special-events policy limiting Auditorium Shores to 25 event days per year.<br><br>City of Austin voters approved a bond that included funding to construct the current Palmer Events Center and Long Center parking garage and to redevelop the surrounding parkland.   |
| 1999 | City Council adopted the master plan by EDAW for redevelopment of Town Lake Metropolitan Park.  |
| 2007 | Phase II construction was completed and the park opened to the public. Riverside Drive, adjacent to Town Lake Park was re-aligned and reduced to two lanes.   |
| 2007 | TBG Partners presented a proposal to complete the unfinished Phases III and IV of the 1999 EDAW master plan.  |
| 2012 | City Council approved design services provided by TBG Partners for the Auditorium Shores trailhead.   |

## **2.2. Scope of Project**

The Long-Term Project, which is being led by APF and Tur in close connection with PARD and the City of Austin, is a comprehensive analysis of city plans, policies, and initiatives relating to downtown parks, with a particular focus on long-term redevelopment plans for Town Lake Metropolitan Park. The central goal of the project is to create a long-term vision and execution plan for a redeveloped, world-class park. The full scope of the project can be found attached to this report as Exhibit A. The key areas of focus include (i) reviewing, evaluating and, where necessary, updating current plans for Town Lake Metropolitan Park; (ii) identifying key issues and potential solutions for dealing with parking and traffic in the area; (iii) evaluating current event policies and procedures with consideration for the overall impact on Austin, including quality of the parks, experience for Austin's residents, and support for the Austin economy; and (iv) engaging the public, civic organizations, business leaders and other key stakeholders to ensure project success and the long-term viability of Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

The genesis of the Long-Term Project is found in the commitment of a number of key stakeholders, including PARD, APF, and C3 Presents, to achieve a broader vision for development of the parkland into a world-class facility. The Austin City Council has also given direction on the implementation of this project through a series of resolutions, including the following:

Res. 20120823-072: *August 23, 2012.* City Manager to work with stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impacts from events at Auditorium Shores and Zilker Park and provide comprehensive analysis by March 31, 2013.

Res. 20121011-081: *October 11, 2012.* City Manager to fully integrate efforts under resolution 20120823-072 to ensure they are integrated into the planning process being led by the Austin Parks Foundation.

## **2.3. Project Team**

Austin Parks Foundation. APF is a non-profit organization devoted to building public/private partnerships to develop and maintain parks, trails, and open space in City of Austin and Travis County. Since 1992, Austin Parks Foundation has initiated, promoted, and facilitated physical improvements, new programming, and greater community involvement for Austin's 19,000+ acres of parkland. Each year, APF generates millions of dollars in volunteer time, in-kind donations, and financial support for city parks. APF currently has a team of five and is led by Executive Director Colin Wallis, who, prior to joining APF, served as Director of

Advancement at the Livestrong Foundation and the 2011–12 Board Chair of the Trail Foundation. APF will soon add an additional dedicated resource to support the Long-Term Project.

Tur Partners. Tur Partners LLC partners with leaders and innovators to drive growth within global urban markets. Tur, led by its Executive Chairman, Richard M. Daley, former Mayor of Chicago for 22 years, is built upon a strong belief in the importance of cities in the global economy. Tur has brought together a team of professionals with extensive private and public experience in order to help business, municipalities, and government agencies throughout North America develop and grow effectively, efficiently, and sustainably. Tur’s lead on the Long-Term Project is its Chief Executive Officer, Lori Healey, who has decades of experience across the public and private sectors, including serving as Principal in Charge of the Development Group at the John Buck Company, Director of the 2012 NATO Host Committee, President of Chicago’s 2016 Olympic bid, Chief of Staff for Chicago’s mayor, and Commissioner of Chicago’s Department of Planning and Development.

Other Outside Advisors. In addition to APF and Tur, a number of outside experts and advisors were engaged and/or consulted on a limited basis. Key outside advisors to the Long-Term Project include:

URS: URS is a leading provider of engineering, construction, and technical services for public agencies and private-sector companies around the world. URS, out of its Austin office, conducted the Riverside Drive traffic analysis, which is attached in its entirety hereto as Exhibit B.

TBG: TBG is a landscape architecture firm specializing in community development, corporate campuses, civic spaces, hotels, hospitals, and educational facilities. TBG’s Austin office has been deeply involved in various stages of Town Lake Metropolitan Park’s development and provided APF and Tur with institutional background thereof. TBG also assisted with the recommendations around design and infrastructure, including the illustration attached hereto as Exhibit C.

bKL: bKL is an internationally recognized design firm located in Chicago that brings an identifiable aesthetic to diverse building projects across a global market. bKL assisted with the recommendations around design and infrastructure, including the diagrams attached hereto as Exhibit D.

#### **2.4. Prior Studies**

Both the City of Austin and supporting organizations have generated a number of comprehensive studies that have useful recommendations and important implications for

the Long-Term Project. APF and Tur have reviewed and analyzed those studies. Key studies include:

Austin Town Lake Metropolitan Park Master Plan (EDAW July 1999). The 1999 EDAW Master Plan is the original Town Lake Metropolitan Park master plan adopted by the city council in 1999. Key focuses of the plan were (1) the ability to support cultural events in the park and adjacent event centers, (2) aesthetics of park space that highlight Austin and integrate with neighborhoods, (3) ergonomics of the park that allow many uses for Austin residents, (4) environmental sensitivity, and (5) security. Phases I and II of the project, completed between 1999 and 2007 (other than the Alliance Children's Garden), focused on the parkland south of Riverside Drive, generally referred to as Butler Park. A number of improvements the plan outlined for north of Riverside Drive were expected to be completed in connection with the Auditorium Shores Improvement Project.

Downtown Parks and Open Space Master Plan (ROMA Austin January 2010). The Downtown Parks and Open Space Master Plan was never formally adopted by City Council but was endorsed by the PARD Board. The plan articulated a community-supported vision for Austin's downtown parks and open-space system that guides public and private investment and management of individual parks and the system as a whole. The plan encouraged a number of policy and procedural changes, including allowing long-term concessions, increasing PARD's budget, making capital improvements, revising the parkland-dedication ordinance, expanding revenue sources, and enhancing partnerships with businesses and local organizations.

2011–2016 Long Range Plan for Land, Facilities and Programs (PARD November 2010). The 2011 Long Range Plan was developed by PARD as a guide for future growth and development of Austin's parks and recreation system and updated the prior 1998 long range plan. The plan includes various park standards, best management practices, national standards and PARD standards.

Urban Parks Workgroup (Volunteer Workgroup October 2011). A specially assembled workgroup of volunteers from the Austin community presented a report in 2011 to City Council with recommendations for acquiring, developing, and maintaining parks within the Austin neighborhood. The report focused on identifying where neighborhood parks are most needed and demonstrating how to integrate best practices from other cities to achieve those development goals.

Downtown Austin Plan (City of Austin/McCann-Adams Studio December 2011). The Downtown Austin Plan, which was adopted by City Council, is a development plan to guide a shared vision for downtown Austin that reinforces the city's fundamental goals of economic and environmental sustainability, affordability, livability, and diversity. The DAP was the product of a three-year dialogue with the general public and downtown community and

stakeholders. The plan addressed the importance of parks, including the importance of initiating a new generation of signature downtown parks. The study also emphasized the importance of investing in downtown infrastructure and revising the land-development ordinances to encourage vibrant development.

Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (City of Austin/Wallace Roberts & Todd June 2012). The Imagine Austin Plan, which was adopted by City Council, is a comprehensive umbrella plan to guide other master plans and small area plans. Completion of the plan involved an in-depth survey of the public with a large number of stakeholder meetings and interviews. The study provided a number of best practices relating to development of land and park spaces, including promoting coordinated planning efforts and developing community plans and regulations that create strong neighborhoods, integrate sustainable infrastructure, communicate with key constituents, and preserve historic landmarks and character. The plan also highlighted the need to increase park spaces and the opportunity for community activities within park spaces, and to protect natural resources and habitats.

### **3. STUDY/ANALYSIS COMPLETED TO DATE**

#### ***3.1. Review of Existing Plans and Policies***

To inform the analysis and recommendations involved in the Long-Term Project, Tur spent considerable time reviewing existing plans and policies relating to Town Lake Metropolitan Park. Some of the relevant plans and policies that were reviewed in connection with the Long-Term Project were: (i) prior master plans and Austin studies, including those described in Section 2.4 above, (ii) prior budget and financial data relating to the parks, (iii) existing City of Austin policies and regulations relating to the parks and events within the parks, including the proposed special-events ordinance, and (iv) plans related to new developments and park improvements in the greater downtown area.

#### ***3.2. Planning and Feedback Meetings with Key City Department Leaders***

Over the course of the Long-Term Project, Tur and APF have held a number of planning and feedback meetings with key city department leaders, including the departments of Transportation, Planning & Development, and Sustainability and the Austin Police Department. The focus of these planning meetings was to (1) develop a background of existing plans and policies around Austin's downtown park spaces and event policies, (2) identify key issues and challenges facing development and operation of park spaces, (3) generate ideas and recommendations for achieving the Long-Term Project's goals, and (4) review the recommendations of the Long-Term Project and discuss potential implementation. These meetings also included a visit by a delegation from Austin on January 14 and 15, 2013, to downtown Chicago parks and a discussion with Chicago

government and business leaders who were instrumental in the development of Chicago's flagship parks.

### ***3.3. Discussions with Neighborhood Leaders and Other Key Stakeholders***

Tur and APF held numerous discussions with stakeholders throughout Austin, including neighborhood leaders, community organizations, business leaders, and other key representatives of Austin's communities. The focus of these meetings was (1) identifying key issues and concerns affecting stakeholders and their constituents, (2) discussing potential recommendations on park design and city policies reflecting these issues and concerns, and (3) moving toward a unified long-term vision for Town Lake Metropolitan Park that has support throughout Austin and a strong base for moving recommendations forward. Tur and APF also held a number of "visioning sessions" whereby members and stakeholders throughout the community were invited to discuss the Long-Term Project. Among them:

- (i) A session on September 12, 2013, at the Long Center featuring a panel discussion by former mayors Richard M. Daley (Chicago), Manny Diaz (Miami), and Will Wynn (Austin) on a model for designing parks for the future
- (ii) A session on November 9, 2013, at the Boyd Vance Theater at the Carver Museum and Cultural Center
- (iii) A session on January 8, 2014, at the Elks Lodge discussing, among other items, the traffic study on Riverside Drive
- (iv) A session on May 6, 2014, at Fiesta Gardens discussing several immediately actionable recommendations provided to Austin City Council earlier this year
- (v) A session on July 28, 2014, at the Palmer Events Center discussing preliminary recommendations around long-term infrastructure and design
- (vi) A session on August 20, 2014, at the Palmer Events Center discussing park management and finances
- (vii) A discussion on October 27, 2014, at Fiesta Gardens discussing the final recommendations

### ***3.4. Review of National Best Practices***

Tur explored and reviewed national best practices on park development, maintenance, finance, and operations to inform the recommendations made as part of the Long-Term Project. Various parks are referenced within this final report, reflecting the importance of pulling experiences and innovation from leading parks around the country to determine an effective road map for Town Lake Metropolitan Park.



### ***3.5. Engagement of Subcontractors and Other Experts***

Tur engaged a number of subject-matter experts to support the Long-Term Project and provide insight on several of the specific recommendations therein. Subcontractors included URS (focused on the traffic study), TBG (focused on the prior history of Town Lake Metropolitan Park and design), and bKL (focused on design and infrastructure). In addition to subcontractors, Tur consulted on an informal basis with numerous professionals across the country who have expertise in design, finance, and management of leading park spaces.

### ***3.6. Prior Reports Submitted to Council***

Prior to this final report, two separate communications were presented to the city council and distributed to stakeholders. These included:

- (1) The Preliminary Findings Report and Status Update (May 8, 2013): This document introduced the scope and background of the Long-Term Project and introduced key issues to be addressed in this final report.
- (2) The Immediately Actionable Recommendations (July 28, 2014): This document provided a number of policies that Tur recommended the City of Austin implement on a near-term horizon to improve visitors' experience in and around the park. This included recommendations for a dedicated traffic management division, special event-day parking permit zones, and holding the number of major event days at 25 days, among others. A full list of these recommendations is attached hereto as Exhibit E.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the world of downtown parks, Town Lake Metropolitan Park boasts a number of clear advantages: an unbeatable, cinematic location, enviable trail and greenway connectivity, landmark venues, and an enthusiastic user base. Rather than alter that character, these recommendations seek to capitalize on the park's strengths, unify them, and coordinate them with plans for surrounding areas to create something stronger.

Austin's growth and popularity present particular challenges that a long-range plan must address. Traffic, parking, noise, competing uses, demand for new types of facilities and programming, and appropriate financing and management structures all must be resolved. At the same time, growth and popularity generate tremendous energy and open the door to new possibilities for Town Lake Metropolitan Park and the people who visit. The Long-Term Project responds to those challenges and explores opportunities to fashion a new and expanded green space that is uniquely Austin.

### ***4.1. Design and Infrastructure***

An effective long-term vision for Town Lake Metropolitan Park should reinforce local character, enhance operational flexibility of the park, and moderate the impact that some park activities have on surrounding neighborhoods.

#### **4.1.1. TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING: EXISTING CONDITIONS**

##### **4.1.1.1. Traffic Flow and Riverside Drive**

As part of the Long-Term Project, APF and Tur contracted the global engineering firm URS to complete a new traffic study (attached here as Exhibit B). The purpose of the new study was to examine the potential impact of closing Riverside Drive between Lamar Boulevard and South 1<sup>st</sup> Street and to reconcile differing results from three previous traffic studies of the area dating to the 1999 master plan. And, ultimately, to determine whether the permanent closure of Riverside Drive is both feasible and desirable in light of its current role in the broader traffic network of day-to-day commuting patterns.

It should further be noted that updated traffic counts were taken during a one-week period during which there were no major events in Town Lake Metropolitan Park. This was by design. Based on ongoing feedback from community members regarding major events in Town Lake Metropolitan Park (during most of which Riverside Drive is completely closed), it is clear that traffic in the region is a major concern and needs to be mitigated. This is a central assumption of the Long-Term Plan. The traffic study, however, is focused on the issue of current closure of Riverside Drive.

Under existing, normal conditions, URS found that several corridors and intersections perform unacceptably during peak periods, at an “E” or “F” level of service on an A–F scale:

- During the morning peak, two of five corridors studied rated an “E” or “F” in both directions of travel. The remaining three rated an “E” or “F” in one direction.
- During the afternoon peak, four of five corridors rated an “E” or “F” in both directions. The fifth rated an “E” in one direction.
- During the morning peak, two of eleven intersections rated an “E.” The remainder performed acceptably, though four rated a “D.”
- During the afternoon peak, two of eleven intersections rated an “F.” The remainder performed acceptably, though three rated a “D.”

Because these corridors and intersections are already over capacity and are growing more congested, major improvements would be necessary to reduce traffic congestion to an acceptable level.

##### **4.1.1.2. Parking**

Parking is the foremost challenge of many downtown parks. This is a special concern in Town Lake Metropolitan Park with its hosting of major events and the corresponding impact

for nearby residents and neighborhood streets. As with other park infrastructure, parking solutions should be flexible enough to accommodate the largest expected crowds while minimizing unused capacity. Wherever possible, new garage and lot spaces should pay their own way through parking fees or associated concessions.

On non-event days, there is little evidence of a genuine parking shortage. Existing parking within the park provides about 1,500 spaces:

- Long Center parking garage: 1,197 spaces (\$7 events; usually \$10 special events; otherwise free)
- Riverside Drive street parking: 80 spaces
- Dougherty Arts Center: 63 spaces (plus 25 staff)
- Auditorium Shores trailhead: 96 spaces
- Riverside Drive parking lots: 42 spaces

For certain major events outside of business hours, drivers have outside options nearby:

- 1 Texas Center: 915 spaces (weekends and after 6 p.m. weekdays; \$7 events; usually \$10 special events)
- *Austin American-Statesman* north/west parking lot (305 S. Congress): 167 spaces
- Austin Energy: 360 spaces (these are not generally publicly available, but staff and performers use them, freeing up on-site spaces)

Event operators could explore parking options at several other nearby garages:

- Hyatt Regency garage: 600 private spaces (up to 4 hours \$6; 4–7 hours \$13; more than 7 hours \$19)
- Embassy Suites: 450 spaces (\$20 overnight; guests only)
- Green Water Treatment Plant: 1,200 event spaces (not yet open)
- Seaholm Plaza: 550 spaces (not yet open)
- New Central Library: 200 spaces (not yet open)

#### **4.1.2. TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING: RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **4.1.2.1. Traffic Flow and Riverside Drive**

The URS study found that, across the area, closing Riverside Drive between Lamar Boulevard and South 1<sup>st</sup> Street would have the following impacts:

- The closing would degrade traffic flow from acceptable to unacceptable levels at three additional intersections over existing conditions.
- Corridors would experience a slight downgrade in conditions. One corridor in one direction would shift from “D” to “E” at morning peak, and one corridor in one

direction would shift from “E” to “F” at afternoon peak. Others would remain the same.

- The traffic report also concludes that anticipated increases to traffic due to projected population growth will exacerbate traffic problems and potential network failures.

One strategy could reduce congestion in the short term: converting Riverside Drive’s left-turn lanes onto Barton Springs Road into an additional northbound through lane, at a cost of approximately \$3 million. But with traffic volumes projected to rise 1 percent per year over the next 25 years, increased congestion would quickly erode gains made by reconfiguring the Riverside Drive/Barton Springs intersection. These streets would eventually require more costly or sophisticated measures to manage the higher traffic flows. The URS traffic study did not consider the impact of pedestrian or bicycle traffic, future development around the park, or future transit projects on road congestion.

Based on URS’s traffic study, closing Riverside Drive would be undesirable in light of the cumulative impact.

In the long term, one innovative and effective option is to move Riverside Drive below grade and add three broad pedestrian bridges above it for seamless connectivity between the Venue Zone (the area south of Riverside Drive) and Auditorium Shores at a cost of approximately \$31 million (in 2014 dollars). The project would not affect Riverside Drive’s existing traffic volume but, paired with a new underground garage with access via Riverside Drive, it would improve ingress and egress and separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic, benefiting both traffic flow and safety, particularly during events and other high-traffic periods.

#### **4.1.2.2. Parking**

##### *Underground Garage*

Underground parking has become increasingly popular for urban parks because it preserves parkland, increases usable space (especially important in small-footprint downtown parks), and improves optics for visitors, nearby residents, and workers. Other successful downtown parks with underground parking include Post Office Square in Boston, Massachusetts, Millennium Park in Chicago, Illinois, Washington Park in Cincinnati, Ohio, Columbus Commons in Columbus, Ohio, Simon and Helen Director Park in Portland, Oregon, and Ellis Square in Savannah, Georgia. In August 2014, Dallas asked for proposals to turn a downtown surface lot into a 3½-acre park, Pacific Plaza, with an underground garage.

Based on the above and on other considerations, it is recommended that a garage be constructed north of the Palmer Events Center and south of Riverside Drive. Doing so would separate pedestrians from drivers entering and exiting the park and eliminate the awkward

ingress and egress that the existing garage's ramps entail. A new garage would have the additional benefit of allowing for the design of a reconfigured underground entry directly into the Long Center and Palmer Center, reducing the time patrons spend walking between their cars and the performance spaces. A 1,200-space underground garage would cost approximately \$45 million in 2014 dollars. (Please see Exhibits C and D for an illustration and diagrams of this proposed design.)

Once maturity of bonds on the existing Long Center parking garage allow for it, it is recommended that the garage be demolished. The Long Center would be able to reconfigure and screen its existing service facilities and return the southeast corner of the park to green space, adding approximately 3.25 acres. This parcel could also eventually be used for a new building that better complements the park's aesthetics and design. Any new building in this space should emphasize public use and be consistent with the overall cultural vision for the park. One ideal use might be for a "jewel box" performance space, provided that programming needs at the time justify it. Additional uses could be many: for example, a museum or even an incubator or exhibition for music/art technology. Additionally, if traffic demand at the time of construction supports it, this lot could accommodate more underground parking. Prior to designing any new facility on this land, the City of Austin should re-engage stakeholders for input on optimal use.

Note that preliminary examination of this section of the park for future underground parking is subject to the city's review of the existing flood plain and future mitigation possibilities. A new underground garage should also include state-of-the-art rain-collection and flood-mitigation technologies.

#### *Dougherty Arts Center Parking*

The Dougherty Arts Center sits on landfill, and PARD has consultants studying the site's suitability for future development. If a new building or parking structure on the DAC site is not possible, the site could function as a surface lot for overflow parking in the mid-term and eventually be returned to green space if the land supports such use.

#### *Off-Site Coordination*

Major events in Town Lake Metropolitan Park rely on outside parking secured by event operators. There are at least 4,400 off-street spaces within a half-mile of Town Lake Metropolitan Park that are potentially available depending on an event's schedule. In the past, event producers have arranged for shuttles and off-site spaces ad hoc, sometimes resulting in unreliable service and confusion for regular patrons about where they should park. After-hours parkers already have the option of the One Texas Center garage's 915 spaces and, in the case of staff and performers, Austin Energy's 360 spaces.

After assessing maximum demand for major events beyond these parking resources, the city should establish a set of best practices, including guidelines to help event organizers

coordinate additional parking with nearby private operators, including hotels, garages, and surface lot owners. Having the city, rather than individual event producers, do this would allow it to uniformly guide and monitor the quality of the parking and shuttle services provided, while vendors would benefit from a more organized and open flow of information.

#### **4.1.3. ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC AND PARKING STRATEGIES**

##### **4.1.3.1. Public Transit**

The best alternative to expanded parking is excellent transit connectivity. Although voters did not approve bonds to extend Austin's urban rail network in 2014, a proximate and well-designed rail link would substantially support visitation at Town Lake Metropolitan Park, relieve nearby road congestion, and mitigate future parking needs in and around the park. Future rail proposals should integrate the park in those plans. Even without a station adjacent to the park, rail transit in the area would at a minimum enable greater density along the South Central Waterfront and indirectly benefit park visitation.

At present, several bus routes serve Town Lake Metropolitan Park, including the MetroRapid 801, which began service in early 2014, and the MetroRapid 803, which began service in summer 2014. The park has the added advantage of the Butler Hike & Bike Trail connecting on its north and east sides. The launch of Austin's B-cycle bike share program, with four stations in or near Town Lake Metropolitan Park, represents significant progress and further enhances the trail's utility.

Austin has found itself addressing the park-transit question in the reverse order of many other cities, which already had transit infrastructure and reclaimed underused or unused land nearby as parks: for example, Citygarden in St. Louis, Civic Space Park in Phoenix, Hinge Park in Vancouver (part of the Olympic Village site), and the Yards Park in Washington DC. Investing in more urban rail in Austin would introduce the opportunity to better serve the growing neighborhoods around Town Lake Metropolitan Park, especially important because rail has the greatest capacity to serve the crowds that attend major park events. PARD should continue to coordinate the Long-Term Project for Town Lake Metropolitan Park with Project Connect's rail initiatives.

Other cities have connected public transit, or are working to develop or expand public transit, to existing parks:

- Denver's ambitious transit-expansion program, called FasTracks, has 122 miles of new rail lines and 18 miles of bus rapid transit completed, under way, or planned. Three new rail lines totaling 45 miles and an 18-mile BRT line will open in 2016. Its West Rail Line opened in 2013 and capitalized on Denver's rejuvenated riverfront parks corridor along the South Platte River, where outdoor enthusiasts use the

designed kayak run. The corridor is less than a quarter mile from the renovated Union Station and a few blocks from Central Line and West Line stations. Primary funding comes from a .4-cent sales tax in the eight-county metro area, approved by voters in 2004.

- Cincinnati is developing a streetcar line, expected to open in 2016, that will cost \$148 million in its initial phase and run between downtown and the University of Cincinnati in a 3.6-mile loop. Upon leaving downtown, the line cuts four blocks west to flank the east and west sides of newly redeveloped Washington Park. The City of Cincinnati is contributing about \$100 million to the project, one-third paid for through a property-tax increase, 10 percent through TIF, and 25 percent through sale of a city-owned regional airport.
- The City of Santa Monica opened award-winning Tongva Park and Ken Geyser Square, former downtown parking lots, in 2013. California's Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority ("Expo"), a state entity, is constructing a light rail line from Los Angeles to downtown Santa Monica that will end one block from the park. Phase 1, between LA and Culver City, opened in 2012. Phase 2 will cost \$1.5 billion and extend the line 7 miles from Culver City to Santa Monica. Most Phase 2 funding comes from a half-cent Los Angeles County sales tax approved in 2008. It is set to open in 2015.

Rail affords greater passenger capacity to better accommodate spikes in visitation, is not subject to deteriorating traffic conditions around Town Lake Metropolitan Park, and likewise will not contribute to that deterioration. Rail also opens the possibility of offering dog-friendly cars on trains. (Dogs are not allowed on MetroRapid.) In the meantime, MetroRapid and bus service provide vital connections. Bus service between Town Lake Metropolitan Park and the planned Central Corridor line along Riverside Drive will make transit between the park and rail easy, and this service should be ramped up during major events. Other major cities routinely add extra buses along such routes for events.

#### **4.1.3.2. Event-Day Traffic Control**

Through observations of major events and discussion with stakeholders, it is clear that traffic problems during events are greatly exacerbated by ingress to and egress from the Long Center garage and by crowd control in and around the park. Additional traffic and parking improvements can be achieved through more robust traffic management and a dedicated traffic-management division, detailed in [Section 4.4.](#), Event Policies.

#### **4.1.3.3. Residential Permits**

A variety of stakeholders, in particular neighborhood organizations, cite parking as a major issue with events at Town Lake Metropolitan Park. During events, specifically those events that fall within the 25-day event limit, neighborhood residents have experienced a severe problem with event attendees parking in the surrounding neighborhoods. The result is (i)

residents have difficulty parking in their own neighborhoods, (ii) there is increased traffic on residential streets, and (iii) in some instances there is property damage resulting from event attendees within the neighborhoods. Many of the neighborhoods have implemented road blocks during events that allow only residents to pass, the cost of which is typically passed along to event organizers. Many neighborhood residents, however, have found this approach very inconvenient and at times still ineffective.

We recommend instituting a resident-only permit-parking zone in the areas immediately to the south and west of Town Lake Metropolitan Park that applies only to the 25 days scheduled for major events at Auditorium Shores. On those days, which will be publicly posted on the City of Austin's website, only residents possessing permits issued by the city for that zone will be permitted to park on the streets. Organizers of these events should also be required to post notices on their event websites that the no-parking zones are in effect. A policy for a limited number of guest permits can also be instituted. All violators will be ticketed. We also recommend substantially increasing the magnitude of the associated fine. The current fine for parking in a residential zone is \$40, or \$25 if paid early, which is not much of a deterrent when compared with prevailing parking rates. We recommend a fine of \$100 or greater, significant enough to alter behavior. These event-specific permitted parking zones will be distinct from the city's current Residential Permitted Parking zones, but implementation of the policy should be reflective of and coordinate with the existing zones. These zones could also be extended and applied to other areas that incur large traffic related to major events, if applicable.

#### **4.1.3.4. Wayfinding**

Beyond capacity, the challenge remains to alert drivers to the location and price of particular spaces. Often the issue is not so much the availability of parking but perception of the availability of parking. Effective wayfinding has the peripheral benefit of reducing traffic congestion because, at any given time, 10 to 30 percent of drivers in congested downtowns are looking for parking (depending on the difference between on-street and off-street parking costs). Wayfinding could include on-street signage, online parking information and guidance, printed maps, and mobile applications.

- *On-street signage:* Review frequency and clarity of on-street signage on roads approaching partner lots and garages with an emphasis on giving drivers time to read them and react. Where appropriate, temporary signs and banners could call attention to new or recently changed parking options.
- *Online information:* Aside from listing location and cost, the Town Lake Metropolitan Park/Auditorium Shores website can provide value by allowing users to purchase parking in advance and to check day-of space availability at specific garages. The City of Austin has used the parking-information aggregator and mobile app provider ParkMe since 2012 to give users real-time pricing and



occupancy data about downtown street parking and garages, but the service does not extend south of the river. Parkers can buy garage spots in Town Lake Metropolitan Park for certain event dates.

- *Printed maps:* The most effective parking-awareness campaigns reach drivers through multiple channels. Offering printed maps at the Long Center, Palmer Events Center, and elsewhere in Town Lake Metropolitan Park with locations, prices, and capacities for other nearby garages and lots would spread the word on the variety of options available.

#### **4.1.3.5. On-Site Garage Space**

Depending on the effectiveness of the city's off-site parking guidelines, Town Lake Metropolitan Park could take a broader look at its overall policy. For example, the park could stretch on-site capacity by restricting garage parking (or some percentage of garage parking) to multiple-occupant vehicles on event days, thereby reducing the overall number of vehicles. Some San Francisco garages offer a carpool rate to monthly parkers, and Seattle uses on-street carpool-only zones managed by permit. These privileges are enforced variously by the application process, random checks, and citizen reporting. Numerous universities also use carpool-permit systems for garage spaces, including the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Florida. Due to the one-time nature of special-events parking in Town Lake Metropolitan Park, carpool restrictions likely would necessitate an attendant on site to verify vehicles' carpool status upon entry.

#### **4.1.3.6. Better Bike and Non-Motorized Transportation Facilities**

Parks can induce more visitors to take alternative transit by offering facilities and conveniences that non-motorists need. Storage, showers, and restrooms are three key amenities. Chicago's Millennium Park has a major bicycle center, the McDonald's Cycle Center, that offers showers and storage lockers, bicycle lockers, rentals, and repairs, cyclist-education programs, and retail items. The center is also a hub for bicycle and Segway tours as well as bicycle- and Segway-sharing programs. Facilities need not be so expansive to start. Even a basic gear check could be self-funding and require little up-front investment. New York City's 14th Street Park, for example, offers a bag-check service during dance classes for a small fee.

Adding general-use restrooms either here or in a new Dougherty Arts Center facility would add substantial utility for all visitors. Improving the design of bike lanes would also make cycling more attractive. Renovated lanes would be wider, minimize conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians, and add new and better lighting. A revamped bike route could parallel Riverside Drive at park grade and allow emergency vehicles access to portions of the park otherwise unreachable by road.

#### **4.1.2. DESIGN PRIORITIES**

The vision for Town Lake Metropolitan Park is primarily that of a unified cultural campus. It is important to design a park that complements existing anchors, such as the Long Center, Palmer Events Center, Dougherty Arts Center, and the new dog park. Ultimately, the design priority should be open space with best-in-class public amenities. Additionally, the overall design and vision should emphasize human interaction and activation of the entire park.

#### **4.1.2.1. Dougherty Arts Center**

The Dougherty Arts Center (“DAC”) is currently an important component of Town Lake Metropolitan Park. It houses many important arts and other activities for both children and adults, and community feedback indicates they hold great value for the public and ought to be preserved. The building that currently houses the DAC is aging, however, and in the near to mid-term will need to be replaced. The DAC’s current site was formerly a landfill, raising questions of remediation and stability. Discussions with frequenters of the DAC as well as residents of the neighborhood reveal unified support for keeping the DAC within the Town Lake Metropolitan Park footprint.

One innovative approach to keeping the DAC within Town Lake Metropolitan Park is to design and build a new, state-of-the-art DAC facility in the open space located between the Long Center and Palmer Events Center. This site was originally designated for an additional building, and from a planning perspective is well situated for a new arts facility. There are many advantages to this approach. Foremost, the building can be better utilized by users of the Long Center during low-utilization hours of the day. The Long Center has expressed a need for additional practice space. There is also an opportunity to include a flagship exhibit space that can be used by either the DAC or coordinated with the Long Center and/or Palmer Center to host banquets, weddings, receptions, and other special events.

In addition, the basement level for this proposed DAC could house a kitchen and back-of-house facility for streamlined catering at the Palmer Center and expanded menu options at the Long Center, which would also improve revenues. (The Long Center currently directs patrons to El Alma, El Arroyo, Chez Zee, and Zax for dining.) Town Lake Metropolitan Park has long lacked sufficient food concessions, unusual for a park of its size and attendance, though the park does feature occasional service from several local food trucks, notably on “Trailer Food Tuesdays,” the last Tuesday of each month April to October.

It is understood that discussions between the Long Center, the Palmer Center, and PARD are currently in early stages around such a facility. There are many important considerations that must be weighed in ultimately determining whether or not such a facility would be both feasible and optimal. One such consideration is current restrictions on the \$6 million earmarked for the new DAC building as part of the City’s prior bond issue. Terms of the bonds restrict use of those funds outside of the Town Lake Metropolitan Park Venue Zone,

which is south of Riverside Drive. From a design and functionality perspective, however, this approach is desirable, and constituents should be urged to further examine its practicality.

#### **4.1.2.2. Use of Current DAC Land**

In the event the DAC is relocated, there is a question of what to do with the current facility's land. PARD is working with consultants to conduct a study of this land and determine what types of uses it will permit. There are complex questions surrounding suitable use for the land in light of the flood plain and the fact that the DAC currently sits on landfill. Any final plans or designs will need to take the results of that study into consideration.

There could, however, be an opportunity to develop a new building on that land, which could provide both exciting concessions for visitors to Town Lake Metropolitan Park and additional above-ground parking. The exact design of such a building would ultimately be led by a separate design process. The recommended design would accommodate limited concessions on the ground floor (e.g., bike rental, food stands), a few floors of above-ground parking, and potentially a restaurant/bar on the top level overlooking the park.

Exhibit D contains detailed diagrams depicting this proposed concept. Preliminary estimates suggest it would cost \$22 million (in 2014 dollars) to develop such a building, assuming the current condition of the land is suitable.

#### **4.1.2.3. Butler Park Pitch and Putt**

As of October 2014, the city has a renegotiated contract with the operators of the Pitch and Putt that mandates landscaping improvements and ADA accessibility. The five-year contract will also return more operating revenues to the city. The Pitch and Putt spans a very large portion of the broader footprint of Town Lake Metropolitan Park, and long-term investment in the land and maintenance of the land should remain a high priority.

It remains to be seen, however, what use would best serve the park and Austin residents in the long term. As part of the Long-Term Project, numerous discussions were held with stakeholders regarding current perceptions on the Pitch and Putt and views on long-term uses for the space. Feedback on this issue was mixed. There is a notable contingent that emphasizes the historical importance of the facility. Some also emphasize the importance of preserving public golf facilities within city limits. Others, however, look at the amenity as underutilized and a potentially valuable space upon which to provide additional public amenities.

It is recommended that PARD continue to monitor use of the Pitch and Putt and investment into its facilities by the operators. Over the long-term, it will be critical to view use of the space in relation to overall community priorities. If the city ever determines that it wants to explore additional uses for that land, it is encouraged to seek broad community and stakeholder feedback to assess best use. Ultimately, any designs for that space should

recognize that the land is an important part of Town Lake Metropolitan Park and should be preserved as a public amenity. If other operators are considered for any proposed use of the land, selection of such operators should be done by a competitive process.

In addition, Bouldin Creek, a natural divider between the Pitch and Putt and the main portion of Town Lake Metropolitan Park, is a key riparian corridor, and improvements to the creek should be included in final designs.

#### **4.1.2.4. Auditorium Shores**

Austin has developed an international reputation as a destination for music, festivals, and world-class events, and Auditorium Shores, home to the venue stage at Town Lake Metropolitan Park, is one of the city's most sought-after venues. It should be capable of handling not only large crowds and renowned headliners but also smaller, community-focused events. Town Lake Metropolitan Park's overall design and infrastructure should reflect both its current and anticipated event use and include design considerations that allow events to operate safely and efficiently.

One attractive way to do this is to design a natural amphitheater that blends into the landscape. Such a setup would enhance operational flexibility; when there were no events scheduled—the far majority of days—the amphitheater would be unobtrusive open space available for a variety of recreation. The elevation change from north to south over a depressed Riverside Drive would expand the audience area across the drive, taking advantage of the broad pedestrian bridges, and allow the integration of such a natural setting. The venue could incorporate a small, fixed stage if needed, but if so, it should be inconspicuous for both day-to-day activities and larger event setups.

Residents have stressed the importance of community-oriented, family-friendly programming, and the amphitheater could offer great value in this area. Any new performance infrastructure should emphasize public use for parkgoers rather than convenience for event organizers. Flexible venues and amphitheaters have become common in a number of urban parks. Duluth's Bayfront Festival Park features an outstanding natural amphitheater overlooking Lake Superior. In Nashville, the Woods at Fontanel amphitheater hosts a range of events without fixed seating.

As the park develops and grows a predictable audience base and schedule of events, the city could consider incorporating additional landscaped terraces to improve visibility and better accommodate lawn chairs and other portable seating options used by patrons of the park. If there were a need, a park concession could rent these seats.

#### **4.1.2.5. Sound Attenuation**

For the neighborhoods surrounding Town Lake Metropolitan Park, noise bleed from the park is a key concern, particularly within areas directly south of Auditorium Shores and

downtown directly across Lady Bird Lake. Although there are certain influences on sound propagation that cannot fully be controlled, such as wind direction, a number of best practices incorporated into Town Lake Metropolitan Park’s design could help mitigate disruption of its neighbors. Namely:

- **Direction of the stage:** Orienting the stage, in the park’s northeast corner, toward the southwest would provide the longest distance for sound to travel before leaving the park, as well as the most opportunities to mitigate it physically.
- **Underground parking garage:** A new underground parking garage should be designed in a manner that minimizes sound bleed and controls vibration.
- **Placement of hills:** Strategically placed hills and berms at the perimeter of the amphitheater would limit the amount of sound that escapes in the rest of the park and beyond. Shaggy and irregular grasses and shrubs on those hills would cut sound more effectively.
- **Placement of trees:** Hills can be graded only so high without detracting from the overall park landscape and functionality on non-event days. Dense, attractive tree lines near the perimeter of the amphitheater would serve as a backstop to hills and berms to further reduce sound leakage.
- **Sound engineering and sound-system technologies:** Much of how sound behaves depends on conditions at the time and sound engineer’s response to them. The City of Austin’s music division should work with engineers to establish appropriate standards for given conditions that reward audiences and limit outside disruption.

Another asset would be a permanent yet flexible, high-tech sound system that community groups could use for events and performances. The system would direct sound inward, minimizing noise bleed, and be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape. Millennium Park in Chicago has a formal, concert-style version of this in its Pritzker Pavilion.

## ***4.2. Features and Programming***

In a broad review of best practices, we have found a number of commonalities among exemplary parks in features and programming, including Town Lake Metropolitan Park and Austin at large.

### **4.2.1. PARK FEATURES**

The best park features are entertaining, interactive and independent—reflective of local identities, attitudes, or assets. Ideally, they also appeal to visitors of many ages and

backgrounds, are welcoming for families, and are economical to install and maintain. Many of the same features appear repeatedly in newer, well-designed downtown parks:

- Water features (especially interactive features)
- Performance venues
- Public art and sculpture
- Well-tended landscaping and gardens
- Food/concessions, including mobile
- Technology (e.g., broadcasts, Wi-Fi, power outlets, recorded music, laser shows)
- Fitness paths
- Non-anchored tables and chairs
- Formal entrances
- Defined spaces
- Markets/bazaars
- Game areas (e.g., croquet, bocce)
- Dramatic, safety-promoting lighting
- Bold colors
- Shade

There is no one right way to incorporate preferred features into a park. Those choices and their relationship to design, programming, and visitors themselves are what make each park unique. The South Central Waterfront Initiative’s interim draft vision framework report, completed in August 2014, articulates many of the ideals community members have for the district, and they apply to Town Lake Metropolitan Park as well. Among them:

- Green space connectivity, including waterfront access
- Walkability and transit connectivity
- Integration of public art

Town Lake Metropolitan Park already rates highly for walkability and connectivity, aside from the challenges posed by the current design of Riverside Drive. It is both an extension of the urban core *and* a green conduit to the city’s expansive web of corridor parks: Butler Shores, Zilker Park, Barton Creek Greenbelt, Lamar Beach, Sand Beach, and Waller Creek. Two of its great assets in that regard are the Ann and Roy Butler Hike & Bike Trail and the new off-leash dog park. Both factor prominently in the Long-Term Project.

#### **4.2.2.1. Ann and Roy Butler Hike & Bike Trail**

The Butler Hike & Bike Trail along Lady Bird Lake is a leading Austin attraction. Considerable effort has been made by the city, the Trail Foundation, and other organizations to create a first-rate trail. Long-term development of Town Lake Metropolitan Park should consider effects on the trail. The City of Austin and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department have already invested \$2 million in the Trailhead area at Auditorium Shores. Improvements included rerouting the trail to accommodate the new off-leash dog area, an expanded parking lot, new restrooms, a stretching and warm-up area, signage, landscaping, and trail connectivity.

#### **4.2.2.2. Dog Park**

Until 2014, all Auditorium Shores parkland north of Riverside Drive was an off-leash area and especially popular for its water access, yet that heavy use took its toll on the turf and presented conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists. A four-month redevelopment process, from October 2013 to February 2014, created the design for a new, fenced 4.7-acre dog park on the northwest side of Auditorium Shores with new signage, landscaping, turf, mulch or synthetic material in high-use areas, and extensive water access with improved drainage. The area was developed with input from the off-leash community through the Off-Leash Area Advisory Committee (OLAAC). As identified in the interim improvements plan, the Central Lawn is open to leashed dogs.

Access and amenities for dogs will continue to be a long-term priority in Town Lake Metropolitan Park, and the park will continue to implement best practices where possible to create dog-friendly spaces.

#### **4.2.2.3. Public Art**

Both community feedback and best practices indicate the importance of public art, and especially interactive public art, in Town Lake Metropolitan Park. Local interpretation is key and offers a chance to fashion something unique. Public art can be sculpture, memorials, landscaping, digital new media, murals, and much else. It also can include temporary art: exhibits, community art, performances, and festivals. Some examples:

1. In the Walled Garden of Pittsburgh's Mellon Park, 150 stone markers flicker from ground level at night to memorialize the late Wesleyan University sophomore Ann Katharine Seamans. The work is called *7:11AM 11.20.1979 79°55'W 40°27'N*, and the markers map the position of stars and planets on the day Seamans was born. An inscription on each marker identifies the star, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy invites the public to sponsor individual stars.
2. Seattle's Magnuson Park, site of a former naval station, features *The Fin Project*, 22 diving-plane fins from decommissioned submarines arrayed over 500 feet to resemble a pod of Orca whales. With support from the Navy, community organizations, and private donors, the installation cost the city nothing and is maintenance-free.
3. In Phoenix's Civic Space Park, sculptor Janet Echelman took inspiration from the city's monsoon-influenced cloud formations to create *Her Secret Is Patience*, using two 145-foot-high poles to mount funnel-shaped netting that casts similar shadows. LED lights turn on at night and react to visitors' movements.
4. The fanciful Grotto Wall at Sparky Park in Austin used locally quarried stone, petrified wood, and objects donated by residents to make over a cinderblock wall on the site of a former electrical substation. Supplemental arches and columns redefine the award-winning space, designed by Bertold Haas, who worked closely with neighborhood residents.

5. *Firefly* has quickly become one of San Francisco's most iconic public art installations. A latticework of hinged polycarbonate panels 22 feet wide and 12 stories high ripples in response to prevailing winds and at night uses LEDs mounted behind each panel to imitate fireflies. *Firefly* incorporates several power-generating wind turbines that return electricity to the building (the city's Public Utilities Commission) and power the lights, which in total use less energy than a 75-watt bulb.
6. Millennium Park's Crown Fountain combines three reliably popular elements into one park feature: fountains, interactivity (a splash pad), and art, in this case a rotating series of digital faces whose mouths seem to be generating the fountains' jets of water. Nearby, Anish Kapoor's *Cloudgate* sculpture reflects the Chicago skyline and endlessly distorts bystanders' perspectives and reflections.
7. Nashville has commissioned a 45-foot-tall ribbon-shaped sculpture of polished steel, to be completed in 2015, for its new West Riverfront Park. *River Concept*, designed by Laura Haddad and Tom Drugan, will take its shape from the path of the Cumberland River and include steel guitar picks in sections that act like wind chimes. LEDs that change color will light the sculpture at night.
8. In November and December 2013, the Yards on Washington DC's waterfront converted the façade of the former National-Geospatial Intelligence Agency building into Art Yards, a temporary public-art project. The park poured 200 gallons of paint down the side of the building at rush hour and commissioned five visual artists to use the surface consecutively over a few weeks. It launched a website and promoted a Twitter hashtag to chronicle the projects' transformations.

#### **4.2.2.4. Technology**

As dissonant as it seems, technology has become a fixture of downtown parks. Visitors want support for their mobile devices—Wi-Fi and power outlets or charging stations—and many of the interactive park features they have come to enjoy incorporate technology: LED displays and laser shows, recorded music, video screens for sports broadcasts or streaming of nearby arts performances, choreographed lighting, and children's play experiences. This area offers Austin and Town Lake Metropolitan Park a major opportunity to distinguish itself among downtown parks and reinforce its reputation as a cutting-edge tech center. Tech features at Town Lake Metropolitan Park could be used to make operations more efficient, incorporated into signage or public art (such as the fiber optic installation going in at Seaholm that depicts plants native to Austin), or showcased in kiosks around the park as interpretive centers, games, or demonstration stations.

#### **4.2.2. PARK PROGRAMMING**

Programming separates modern downtown parks from maintained natural spaces. As a metropolitan park, Town Lake Metropolitan Park is intended to serve a citywide population



and accommodate a wide variety of uses, including special events that draw from far outside the region. Culture, too, is an important element of metroparks.

Park programming in general is distinct from park features in that it requires staff or some outside resource to direct and occurs for a defined period of time, often on a weekly or monthly schedule. Programming reinforces the character of the park, can establish themes, boosts visitation, and improves visitors' experiences.

As with park features, the best programming reaches people across ages and backgrounds, including children and families. It should give structure and routine to the park's daily life and preferably occur year-round. (Even cold-weather cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and New York schedule winter programming like ice skating, winter markets, and Christmas-tree lighting.) Some popular examples of programming in downtown parks include:

- Live concerts and theater
- Fitness classes
- Food trucks
- Art shows and exhibits
- Fairs and festivals
- Storytelling/puppet shows
- Park or downtown tours
- Recreational and competitive games
- Market days
- Structured playtime

The right programs complement each other's schedules and fit naturally into the flow of a day. For example, fitness classes often take place first thing in the morning or after work. Food trucks arrive for the lunch hour, and storytelling and tours might take place in the afternoon or on weekends. Concerts and festivals commonly fill parks on nights and weekends.

While programming should give visitors the opportunity to engage, it need not—and in most cases should not—take over a park (except possibly concerts, festivals, and other occasional parkwide events). Typically there is plenty of room for visitors to enjoy the space in their own way during programmed events. Three parks with excellent program slates are Columbus Commons in Columbus, Ohio, Discovery Green in Houston, and Klyde Warren Park in Dallas. Sample schedules for a single week:

		Columbus Commons	Discovery Green	Klyde Warren
<b>Mon</b>	<i>Morn</i>		"Wings of the City" sculpture exhibit, free (until Feb 2015)	
	<i>Mid</i>			11-3: Food trucks 12:30-1: Skyline 360 Tour
	<i>Aft</i>			Food trucks, cont'd
	<i>Eve</i>	5:30-6:30: Boot camp class	6:30-7:30: Bum-ba toning class	6-7: Boot camp class
<b>Tues</b>	<i>Morn</i>	6:30-7:30: Crossfit class	10:30-12: Toddler Tuesdays (presented by Amerigroup RealSolutions)	9-12: Imagination playground 10-11: "Strollfit with Baby" boot camp class 11-3: Food trucks
	<i>Mid</i>	12-1: Runners ed class		Imagination playground, cont'd
	<i>Aft</i>			
	<i>Eve</i>		5:30-7: Circus arts class 6:30-7:30: Core yoga	
<b>Wed</b>	<i>Morn</i>			
	<i>Mid</i>			12-1: Lunchtime music
	<i>Aft</i>			
	<i>Eve</i>	5:30-6:30: Kickboxing class 5:45-8:45: Kickball league 6:30-7:30: Hip hop class	6:30-7:30 Kayak class Zumba class	6-7: Zumba class
<b>Thurs</b>	<i>Morn</i>			10-12: Imagination playground
	<i>Mid</i>	11-2: Food truck "food court" (8 food trucks)		11-10: Food trucks
	<i>Aft</i>			Food trucks, cont'd
	<i>Eve</i>	5:45-8:45: Kickball league	6:30-10: Sounds Like Houston! Thurs Concert (spons by Green Mountain Energy)	Food trucks, cont'd 5:30-6: Skyline 360 Tour
<b>Fri</b>	<i>Morn</i>	9-1: Commons for Kids (Stories, bounce play, carousel rides; spons by <i>Highlights for Children</i> )	All weekend: Dog Days (DockDogs jump competition, costume contest, talent show)	
	<i>Mid</i>	Commons for Kids, cont'd		11-3: Food trucks
	<i>Aft</i>			Food trucks, cont'd
	<i>Eve</i>	7-10:30: Free country-rock concert: McGuffey Lane	7-9: Chipotle Green Film Series	6-7: Swing dance class
<b>Sat</b>	<i>Morn</i>	9-10: Yoga class 10-11: Zumba class	All weekend: Dog Days 9-10: Blissful warrior yoga 10:30-11:30: Young writers wkshp	8-9: Tai chi class 9-10: Boot camp class 10-11: Family yoga class
	<i>Mid</i>	11-4: Ohio State-Navy football viewing party	11-2: Recycling Saturdays 11-5: Stand-up paddleboarding 12-4: Friends for Life pet adoption	
	<i>Aft</i>	OSU-Navy, cont'd	Stand-up paddleboarding, cont'd Friends for Life pet adoption, cont'd 3-8: Untapped Beer Festival	
	<i>Eve</i>		Untapped Beer Festival, cont'd 6-10: Flea by Night flea market (spons by Green Mountain Energy)	
<b>Sun</b>	<i>Morn</i>		All weekend: Dog Days	10-11: Yoga class

		10:30–11:30: Discovery Hoop Dance (hula fitness class)	
<i>Mid</i>			11–3: Food trucks 12–1: Bassoon quartet concert
<i>Aft</i>			Food trucks, cont'd
<i>Eve</i>			

**4.3. Park Finance and Management**

The Long-Term Project included a comprehensive analysis of revenue opportunities to determine potential sources of funding for redevelopment and to help PARD address ongoing maintenance. PARD has an operating budget of \$54 million, \$36 million of which comes from the City of Austin’s General Fund, \$8 million from grants, and \$10 million in enterprise funds collected from sports activities designed to make the activities cost-neutral to city. Key revenue opportunities analyzed and discussed by the Long-Term Project are discussed below.

**4.3.1. MAINTENANCE RESOURCES**

Beyond its efforts to renovate Town Lake Metropolitan Park, PARD faces the challenge of nearly \$1 billion in deferred maintenance systemwide, according to the Urban Park Workgroups—one of the highest totals in the country. With an annual operating budget of \$54 million, PARD spends less than \$6,700 per acre on upkeep of downtown parks, and \$3,000 per acre on its parks citywide. Without the ability to keep the revenues it generates (which instead go to the city’s General Fund), PARD is unlikely to get the resources needed to overcome maintenance backlogs and cultivate a world-class parks system. This applies doubly to downtown parks, which typically have more expensive infrastructure, receive more visitors, and require more upkeep acre for acre than outlying parks.

To overcome this, the City of Austin should consider making two key changes:

1. Over time, increase funding of PARD to a level consistent with other top parks systems: \$10,000–\$20,000/acre
2. Direct PARD-generated revenues (e.g., event fees, concessions, and user fees) to a PARD enterprise fund to support Town Lake Metropolitan Park renovation costs and, later, operations and programming.

**4.3.2. PARK FINANCE**

Preliminary costs for a renovation of Town Lake Metropolitan Park could potentially reach \$150 million (in 2014 dollars), depending on the final infrastructure and landscape design. The City of Austin has several financing options at its disposal and most likely will want to pursue a bundled approach.

**4.3.2.1. Event Fees**

With robust attendance for its events, Austin has a great deal of leeway to increase event fees and should do so. The fees PARD assesses generally fall below many comparable cities. While these fees should not be punitive, they should reflect market rates and the substantial time that city staff invests in coordinating with organizers of major events. As events have grown in size and complexity, the city should review the hours required of city staff to ensure event fees adequately cover those costs. Looking to event fees to cover increased costs also ensures that a greater proportion of funding comes from visitors with the heaviest footprint on Town Lake Metropolitan Park. (New York City's Bryant Park, for example, which is privately operated, receives a quarter to a third of its annual revenue from event fees.)

Permit fees would not necessarily need to increase for all park events (e.g., not-for-profit events, small community-focused events), but fees should take into account overall size and input of respective events. New fees or fee increases would apply to event permits themselves, ticket fees, and maintenance fees. Ticket fees perhaps have the greatest potential to increase revenues; they should be labeled with the specific park enhancements consumers will benefit from, such as new parking facilities or the proposed pedestrian bridges. It is recommended that PARD continue to evaluate its maintenance fees to more accurately reflect the actual maintenance burden generated by events on park spaces and to protect the new turf improvements made at Auditorium Shores. The structure of the maintenance fee should reflect the size of events and the actual impact of those events on the park space.

#### **4.3.2.2. Park Concessions**

Park concessions currently generate approximately \$3 million in on-site earned income toward the General Fund. Town Lake Metropolitan Park has long lacked sufficient concessions and does not directly benefit from the revenues derived from them. Additionally, many users of the park and residents of the neighborhood have identified a need for limited concessions within the park—a place that provides convenient food options during park visits. In addition to a casual and convenient food option, many other cities around the country have established a flagship restaurant that takes advantage of park vistas. Such a restaurant could prove both a great public amenity and an attractive source of revenue for the park. For example, Bryant Park in New York City generates about one-third of its annual revenues from restaurant rent and concessions. Within three years of opening its restaurant, the park was able to operate without any government support. If done thoughtfully, a restaurant would not encroach on existing green space or negatively affect the park or surrounding neighborhoods.

Residents are understandably cautious about increasing the commercial presence in Town Lake Metropolitan Park. The city and PARD should reach out to the public for feedback on the preferred nature, scale, and location of park concessions. Above all, any additional commerce in the park should be judicious, in the best interests of visitors, and relatively unobtrusive to surrounding neighborhoods. New or expanded commercial uses might be more acceptable under certain circumstances:

- Revenues generated by the concessions directly benefit PARD, and preferably Town Lake Metropolitan Park specifically.
- Any plan to expand concessions is coupled with a plan that defines which areas will allow it and protect key portions of the Town Lake Metropolitan Park from commercial encroachment.
- Taxpayers receive accurate communication about what expanded concessions would pay for and what alternative costs would be through bonds or tax levies.
- Some concessions are temporary and active only on major event days, when need is highest and the park already has a large commercial presence.

Other parks have enjoyed success with restaurants, game/equipment rentals, drink stands, candy and ice cream carts, market stalls, and classes (such as fitness classes, writing workshops, dance classes, juggling lessons). Not all such activities need take place in Town Lake Metropolitan Park, but each is worth consideration and would help offset the substantial cost of intensive park operations.

#### **4.3.2.3. Grants and Private Donations**

Currently \$8 million of PARD’s budget, about 15 percent, comes from grants. Regardless of the eventual level of private-sector involvement in operating or programming the park, PARD or a partner should vigorously pursue grants and donations to fund Town Lake Metropolitan Park’s renovation. It’s entirely possible to fund more than half of the renovation with private money or grants—a review of best practices shows that 9 of 11 model parks financed renovation or development with at least 50 percent private funding. Typically, this has stemmed primarily from local foundations and a handful of visionary leaders in the business community who have marshaled their network of resources to bring money into the project.

Among the parks constructed or redeveloped entirely or in large part from grants and private donations are Klyde Warren Park in Dallas (through the Woodall Rogers Park Foundation), Campus Martius Park in Detroit (through the Detroit 300 Conservancy), LeBauer City Park in Greensboro (through a bequest from Carolyn and Maurice LeBauer), and A Gathering Place for Tulsa (through the George Kaiser Family Foundation). In Austin, the Waller Creek Conservancy has a Joint Development Agreement with the City of Austin and is raising funds to improve the Waller Creek corridor as the city completes its work on a mile-long flood-control tunnel.

Other parks’ grants and non-local private funding have come from state economic-development agencies, HUD, DOT, EPA, Kresge Foundation, American Electric Power Foundation, and Humana Foundation. Cities have received technical assistance and support from the Project for Public Spaces, the Trust for Public Land, Global Green, USA, and Smart Growth America.

#### **4.3.2.4. Public Improvement District/Business Improvement District**

Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) and Business Improvement Districts are innovative strategies that allow cities to collect special tax assessments on properties within a PID/BID area to help fund infrastructure and other improvements. Austin has two PIDs, the Downtown Austin PID and the smaller East 6<sup>th</sup> Street PID, which runs between Congress and I-35. The Downtown Austin PID helps fund the Downtown Austin Alliance and is authorized through 2023. It assesses properties at 10 cents per \$100 in assessed value after the first \$500,000. The East 6<sup>th</sup> Street PID assesses properties at 15 cents per \$100 in assessed value up to \$500,000 and is authorized through 2019.

Before a PID can be created, at least 50 percent of property owners in a proposed district or the owners of at least 50 percent of the land area must approve, and the community must hold a public hearing. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are similar to PIDs and allow business owners in a defined area to vote on a special tax assessment that funds improvements within the district.

The August 2014 interim draft report of the South Central Waterfront Initiative raised the possibility of forming a PID just east of Town Lake Metropolitan Park to achieve its infrastructure goals. The park supports many of the values community members have identified as important to the South Central Waterfront: green space connectivity, waterfront access, walkability, transit connectivity, and integration of public art. Because of Town Lake Metropolitan Park's appeal and role in attracting development, it is important to include the park in any PID on the South Central Waterfront and in other future PIDs on the park's perimeter. Properties can belong to more than one PID or BID.

Some examples:

- Dallas created a PID for Klyde Warren Park, effective this year, to provide ongoing support for park operations and intensive programming. The city received more than 70 percent approval from property owners in the PID for a 2.5-cent assessment per \$100 in assessed value. The PID is estimated to generate \$600,000 in its first year and cover 20 percent of operating expenses.
- The Houston Downtown Management District, formerly the Houston Downtown Public Improvement District, takes in \$8 million annually from a 13.5-cent assessment per \$100 in assessed value. The organization spearheads all types of downtown investment, but based on the Discovery Green Conservancy's success in managing Houston's Discovery Green, the HDMD took up management of 1.6-acre Market Square Park in the Historic District and reopened it in fall 2010. HDMD uses \$130,000 of PID funds annually to manage the park.
- Formed in 1999, the Union Square BID, San Francisco's largest, operates a \$3.45 million annual budget and covers 3,000 parcels across 27 blocks. Its primary focus is the Clean & Safe program, 65 percent of its budget, which provides Community Service Ambassadors, a dedicated police officer, and litter removal 7 days a week. It

also performs marketing and advocacy. The BID does not solely operate the park but does sponsor key events.

**4.3.2.5. Bond Financing**

Austin voters have approved \$264 million in bonds for PARD projects since 1998, at least \$162 million of which has been spent. More important, the city currently has no excess bonding capacity and will need to increase property-tax rates to pay on \$1 billion in bonds issued for urban rail and highway improvements if voters approve urban rail in November 2014. (Phase one of light rail for the Central Corridor is estimated to cost \$1.4 billion, with \$600 million coming from City of Austin bonds and most of the rest funded by the state and federal governments.) Without tax increases, there is no additional borrowing capacity until Fiscal Year 2020, meaning voters could cast ballots on new bond issues as early as November 2018 for up to \$425 million. That total, however, would likely include funding for housing, roads, and other public infrastructure as well as parks.

Year Approved	Amt Approved	Amt Spent*	Description
2012	\$77.7 mil	\$8.2 mil	Improvements for nearly a dozen neighborhood, metropolitan, and district parks (not including Town Lake Metropolitan Park), as well as Dougherty Arts Center and other community buildings.
2006	\$84.7 mil	\$81.4 mil	Construction, renovation, and improvement of public parks, rec centers, natural areas, and related facilities, such as playgrounds and swimming pools. \$20 million for land acquisition.
2000	\$13.4 mil	\$13.4 mil	Purchase of additional parkland.
1998	\$75.9 mil	\$75.8 mil	Construction of Palmer Events Center and parking garage.

\* As of October 31, 2014

An ambitious redevelopment of Town Lake Metropolitan Park might require some GO bonds, but they should serve as a backstop for other funding mechanisms. The city could also look to revenue bonds, which are not backed by property taxes and do not require voter approval, for funding: about \$67 million of the projected \$124 million required to renovate Town Lake Metropolitan Park comes from the below-grade parking garage and DAC/restaurant concession/parking platform. Revenue bonds would be an efficient way to fund some improvements, but they will require an adequate, reliable revenue stream from parking and essential concessions. Additional financial analysis that takes into account prevailing market conditions will be required to determine expected availability for parking revenue bonds in any new garage or lot prior to design and construction. Credit enhancement and/or insurance are likely to be required as well.

Cities commonly use a variety of bonds to fund park capital improvements and land acquisitions. Two recent examples:

- For Atlanta's massive BeltLine project, the city created a 25-year Tax Allocation District (a TAD, similar to a TIF) covering 8 percent of the city, primarily in industrial areas and avoiding single-family homes to limit revenue losses to Atlanta Public Schools. Bonds sold on the TAD are estimated to generate \$1.7 billion, or 40 percent of the project's total cost. To date the BeltLine has used \$120 in TAD bonds.
- The City of St. Louis developed an innovative bond system for Forest Park with its partner 501(c)3, Forest Park Forever. To cover \$30 million in capital improvements, the city sold bonds directly to Forest Park Forever, which must sign off on the city's bond expenditures in advance. Money from each bond sale goes into a third-party trust account. Interest the city pays on the bonds ultimately helps fund the park through Forest Park Forever.

#### **4.3.2.6. Parkland Dedication Fees**

City of Austin ordinances require that developers must dedicate five acres of parkland per 1,000 new residents or pay \$650 per new residential unit in lieu of parkland for new developments. The ordinance further stipulates that the funds must be spent on capital projects within two miles of the project and cannot be used for operations or maintenance. Current dedication fees are not sufficient to expand park space at the current rate of development growth and are low relative to other cities' fees.

Funds from parkland dedication fees are apportioned according to the priorities laid out for recognized planning areas as defined by PARD's 2010 "Long-Range Plan for Land, Facilities, and Programs." Town Lake Metropolitan Park falls in planning area 17, which has more contributing projects, 21, than any other planning area in Austin and the third-most funds available, after downtown and the Lakeline area: \$663,000 as of April 2014. Yet PARD's priority for those funds are continued development of Del Curto Neighborhood Park, improvements to Barton Hills Park,



acquiring land along the West Bouldin Creek Greenway, Gillis and Little Stacy sports court improvements, Little Stacy tennis court lighting, and Norwood tract development.

Given the priority established for projects in the area and the opportunity for PARD to acquire land in the Bouldin Creek corridor, park dedication fees would probably play a small role in Town Lake Metropolitan Park improvements in the near term. Given the shortfall brought about by the level of current fees, PARD should evaluate the allocation of new dedication fees as development continues around and adjacent to Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

#### **4.3.2.7. Voter-Approved Tax Levies**

Voter approved tax levies have been approved in various other regions of the country in order to support park spaces. Cities such as Minneapolis and Seattle have successfully gone to voters to approve taxes directly earmarked for parks. The tax can be assessed to property, individuals or as a sales tax. In some municipalities, such as Chicago, the park district is authorized as a separate taxing authority with its own budget.

#### **4.3.3. PARK MANAGEMENT**

There is no single best solution for managing a park or park system. Most city parks have long been managed by their respective parks departments or city staff in some form, and that remains the most common model. Thirty or forty years ago, however, many cities found themselves overwhelmed by constrained budgets, large systems, deteriorating facilities, crime, visitor dissatisfaction, or some combination of these. For example, in 1980 volunteers concerned about New York City's Central Park formed a public-private partnership with the city as the Central Park Conservancy to direct private support to the park. Today the non-profit Conservancy provides 75 percent of Central Park's operating funding and handles park maintenance, capital improvements, and restorations.

Whether a downtown park is one acre or 800, it differs from a traditional, recreational park in the density of population it serves, level of infrastructure, number of out-of-town visitors, security requirements, surrounding property values, and relative scarcity of alternatives. Downtown parks have become a combination of cultural amenities and green space. Those demands can easily overwhelm even the best-run parks departments and healthiest budgets. Because of that, many cities with successful downtown parks have modified their approaches to management. General categories and benefits follow below. All the parks cited here are publicly owned and controlled by their respective cities, whether they are managed by city staff or outside organizations on contract.

##### **4.3.3.1. Public Management Only**

Public management is the standard model for city parks everywhere. A city, usually through a parks department or similar entity, maintains and manages the park using park revenues or budget allocations derived from tax revenues. Parks departments can avoid many of the pitfalls of understaffing and maintenance lags by forming a separate, dedicated staff for its flagship parks. In

the same vein, flagship parks may have a dedicated security force, which could be part of the police department, the parks department, or another department with non-sworn officers.

In terms of on-site presence, Austin has a built-in advantage with its Town Lake Metropolitan Park office. Having staff on site allows for more formal, active management, gives visitors a chance to ask questions, and aids programming coordination, event promotion, and photography for future marketing. Some publicly managed city parks systems are outstanding. Minneapolis has its own nine-member park and recreation board, individually elected every four years from park districts across the city. In 2013, Minneapolis won the Trust for Public Land's first "five park bench" rating ever, ranking first among U.S. cities, and did so again in 2014. The small city of Wheeling, West Virginia, is known for its high-quality parks, but it uniquely draws less than 1 percent of its annual budget from tax revenues, instead relying on use fees and concessions. Its Festival of Lights in Oglebay Park attracts more than 1 million visitors each year.

#### **4.3.3.2. Contributing Non-Profit**

The contributing non-profit model differs from public management only in that there is an outside group supporting the park. This can be in the form of regular financial support or labor, such as maintaining gardens or staffing events. Contributing non-profits are not operators; they do not make management decisions, and they take direction from city staff in carrying out their assigned duties.

The Esplanade Association is a contributing non-profit for the Charles River Esplanade in Boston. The association provides financial support, assistance, and advocacy at the direction of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. In Santa Fe, the Railyard Stewards care for Railyard Park + Plaza's ornamental gardens, oversee its gardening programs, and perform community outreach.

In Austin, the Waller Creek Conservancy partners with the City of Austin as the steward of Waller Creek and will maintain the corridor going forward. Austin Parks Foundation would be a natural contributing non-profit with the expertise and constituency to assist Town Lake Metropolitan Park. A first step would be further defining its role and setting funding goals.

#### **4.3.3.3. Hybrid Operation**

Hybrid operation can describe a broad range of relationships where an outside organization works under contract to manage some portion of park operations. It might specialize, caring for a defined portion of the park or handling specific services, such as security, sanitation, or restaurant operation. In cases where it manages a revenue-generating entity, the organization ideally retains some revenues to fund its efforts and limit costs to the public.

Public and private entities might also operate jointly, with equal or nearly equal responsibilities throughout the park. This especially makes sense when parks are large or operations complex. Responsibilities should reflect the nature and capability of the organization. The City of St. Louis

signed a Maintenance Cooperation Agreement in 2007 with its partner 501(c)3, Forest Park Forever, to manage 1,300-acre Forest Park. Forest Park Forever manages all unleased park land, and maintenance responsibilities and staff are split roughly 50-50. City staff work only in Forest Park.

The Atlanta Beltline is an emerging 22-mile-long greenway encircling Atlanta and uniting 45 disparate neighborhoods. The project connects more than a dozen parks and will take decades to complete. The City of Atlanta continues to manage the existing parks that the Beltline connects. In 2013 the Atlanta Police Department established a dedicated Path Force of 15 officers and 3 supervisors to patrol trails, access points, and adjacent parks. Atlanta BeltLine Inc. manages construction of the corridor, including defining the plan, securing funding, and engaging the community.

#### **4.3.3.4. Private Operation**

Fully private operators manage all aspects of a park after construction or renovation: sanitation, security, maintenance, capital planning and improvements, concessions, and programming. They rely on park revenue, grants, and private donations to operate and usually need additional revenue streams, such as sponsorships and PID/BID funds, to cover expenses. New York City's Bryant Park and San Francisco's Union Square, two well-regarded and privately operated parks, receive money from BIDs. Klyde Warren Park in Dallas initially planned to operate entirely with private money but created a PID less than two years after opening to fund about 20 percent of operating costs. Uncertainty over revenues year to year is the biggest liability of private operation. Some parks also receive support directly from the city's general fund.

Flagship downtown parks have been trending toward private operation for several years. Privately operated parks are unified in their budget priorities and service levels and have incentives to run efficiently. In addition, operators incorporated as 501(c)3 non-profits can accept contributions tax-free. Operating agreements that give the operator control of all revenue should require that revenue be reinvested in the park.

Fully private operators are most popular in downtown parks surrounded by dense populations (office or residential), that are relatively small (producing a higher proportion of revenue-generating space and parkland adjacent to developed properties), and that are heavily programmed (requiring more intensive management). Examples include Chicago's Millennium Park, managed by the non-profit Millennium Park Inc., Houston's Discovery Green, managed by the non-profit Discovery Green Conservancy, and Cincinnati's Washington Park, managed by the non-profit 3CDC.

## Park-Management Approaches

Type	How It Works	Pros	Cons
<b>Parks agency or city department</b>	City owns, operates, manages	Agency expertise	Limited funding and staffing
<b>Contributing non-profit</b>	Non-profit offers some financial support, may help in park (as with gardening) with city's direction	Relieves city of some budget, maintenance pressures	Unpredictable support levels for city, lack of control for non-profit. Funds can't be counted on for programming.
<b>Joint operation</b>	City and non-profit split duties (programming, security, maintenance). Funded by city, donations, endowments.	Predictability, mutual support	Potential control issues, public-side risk of overpaying and underpricing remains
<b>Private operation</b>	City owns, non-profit operates on contract. Funds might come from park revenue, city, donations, or a BID.	No public restrictions, competitive entity. City might share in revenue. Greatest potential for first-class parks.	Uncertain year-to-year revenue generation

### 4.3.3.5. A Model for Town Lake Metropolitan Park

A good first step for determining the optimal park-management model is to inventory what the community supports, what internal and external resources exist to help care for the park, what internal and external financial resources exist to run the park, and what level of infrastructure, investment, and programming civic leaders and the community expect for the park. Publicly run parks generally require more public money; privately run parks generally require less.

PARD and other stakeholders have expressed some willingness to consider a cooperative arrangement with a private or non-profit partner. Given city budget constraints, the considerable maintenance backlog within PARD, the expansive vision for a world-class park that serves the entire community, and the broad civic interest in seeing the park succeed, Town Lake Metropolitan Park could benefit from a hybrid model that recruits a private or non-profit partner to run aspects of the park and to coordinate private-sector support. Under this model, it's important that each entity have clearly defined roles and powers. Partnering with a community organization or operator can foster outstanding operations, but even under the most privatized scenario, PARD and the City of Austin should retain at least some limited authority and/or protections that ensure the park remains for the benefit of the public. These protections can be implemented a number of ways: for example, via contractual protections and/or city representation on any governing board.

It is recommended minimally that active measures are taken going forward to increase the extent to which funds intended for Town Lake Metropolitan Park or generated within the park stay within

the park. This could be accomplished through a special revenue fund. Once a final redevelopment approach is agreed to, it is further recommended that more extensive changes to the management structure are explored, including management by a not-for-profit, conservancy, or other entity. Ultimately, the financing structure will largely determine the precise structure. But in the event that the final plans rely heavily on grants, private donations, and other outside sources of funds, the ultimate structure will need to be one that protects the outside investment. Any such structure will also want to incorporate oversight of a board that includes representatives from major constituents, including any major donors or foundations, the neighborhood, and the business community.

The plan should be one that is not only suitable for accommodating today's Austin, but is also capable of withstanding and complementing the city's constant and dynamic growth.

#### **4.3.3.6. Committee Formation**

Should the city commit to making major capital improvements in the park and to exploring alternative management structures, it is recommended that a committee be formed to lead this process and to further direct the timeline, design elements, and capital campaign necessary for redevelopment of the park. This committee should assemble an executive committee, including naming a chairperson who will commit to donating or raising a significant amount of private funds for the park and will encourage others to do so.

The regular committee could meet on a quarterly basis, while the executive committee should meet more often. Both should work in conjunction with city officials to move the plan forward.

The regular committee could include:

- Elected officials
- Civic and philanthropic leaders
- Foundation leaders
- Business leaders
- Neighborhood organization leaders
- Representatives for new development  
In the area

**Example Neighborhood Organizations**

Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Association  
 Downtown Austin Alliance  
 South River City Citizens

**Example Institutions in or near the Park**

Austin Ballet  
 Dougherty Arts Center  
 Long Center for the Performing Arts  
 Palmer Events Center  
 ZACH Theatre

**4.4. Event Policies**

World-class events and festivals have become a large part of the Austin culture and have demonstrated themselves to be a huge driver to the Austin economy. Among the largest such festivals is South by Southwest (“SXSW”), which is an annual interactive, film, and music conference operated by SXSW Inc. In 2014 SXSW featured more than 2,300 performers playing across 111 venues and had an economic impact of \$315 million in the city.

The City of Austin has made great strides in managing the crowd, noise, and parking issues that arise during major festivals, including introducing a streamlined, unified permitting process. Even so, concerns and complaints are sufficient to warrant limiting further expansion of event days in Town Lake Metropolitan Park. A number of neighborhood residents and park goers have expressed concern with the number of large events that take place in Town Lake Metropolitan Park. These large events, they believe, impose a large burden on the surrounding neighborhoods and also hinder use of the park for recreational use. As such, there is no recommendation at this time to alter or amend PARD’s current policy limiting the number of event days to 25 on Auditorium Shores. As crowd control and compliance from event producers improves, the city might wish to continue growing the attendance of existing festivals and neighborhood cultural events.

**4.4.1. LONG CENTER/PALMER CENTER**

The Long Center for the Performing Arts and the Palmer Events Center are both important Austin establishments and pillars of Town Lake Metropolitan Park. Historically, they have had challenges fully coordinating the priorities of each center’s patrons with each other and with surrounding parkland, and considerable effort should be made to help all parties maintain a collaborative relationship in order to ensure successful and sustainable operation of Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

Essentially all major stakeholders point out that the current scheduling and management of events needs to be better coordinated across the venues. In those circumstances where all of the venues are simultaneously programmed, the infrastructure of the park and the surrounding neighborhoods bears a heavy burden, which affects attendees of those events as well as residents.

The city should create a standing committee composed of the chief executives of PARD, the Palmer Events Center, and the Long Center to coordinate schedules of events within Town Lake Metropolitan Park. Assuming the Dougherty Arts Center remains within the footprint of the park, it

should also have representation on the committee. Major events should be scheduled and contracted at least two years in advance. Moreover, the chief executives of each of the major venues (PARD, Convention Center Department, and Long Center) need to communicate continually to ensure that scheduling of major events considers full programming for Town Lake Metropolitan Park. The operators need to make sure that the traffic, crowds, sound, and other residual impacts are managed comprehensively. We recommend that a standing committee meet, at minimum, quarterly to discuss and agree upon scheduling. We also recommend that this committee create a shared calendar and implement a standard set of procedures for dealing with any alterations to that schedule.

#### **4.4.2. TRAFFIC CONTROL**

It is recommended that the City of Austin create and maintain a force of non-sworn, professionally trained city staff dedicated to managing traffic and crowds during events. We recommend establishing this division under and managed by the Austin Police Department. But we also recommend that the division is closely coordinated with and responsive to the Austin Department of Transportation, in particular with respect to training guidelines as well as policies and procedures around traffic management. Cost of this division can largely be offset by revenues from cultural institutions and event organizers who are currently required to incur the costs to APD for staffing Austin police at these events. The division can be staffed with a mix of full-time and seasonal employees. We believe that the specialized nature of this unit will create a more effective mechanism for traffic management and will yield positive impacts on the level of service during large events. This proposed structure should also prove economically preferable given the lower cost point of traffic management staff compared to sworn officers. This approach will also free up police officers from event management, allowing them to remain assigned to their neighborhoods focused on policing throughout the city.

#### **4.4.3. SPECIAL-EVENTS ORDINANCE**

Since 2012, the City of Austin has endeavored to streamline the planning and permitting of special events and manage competing uses of public space by issuing an updated, comprehensive ordinance for event planners to follow. Refining and passing the ordinance remains a work in progress. The draft proposal defines the role of the Austin Center for Events (ACE) and sets down integrated rules for amplified sound, security, street closures, waste disposal, temporary structures, and other impacts. Because of the remarkable range of events held in Austin, the draft raises questions about differences in management for smaller, less formal events and larger, highly complex events and how to distinguish them. Smaller events could see their fees reduced, while the largest events should contribute more in light of their outsized impact and related demands on city staff and facilities. (The proposed ordinance defines events in Tier 4, the highest tier, as those requiring more than \$100,000 in city services, staff time, and equipment.)

Approving the ordinance represents an important first step in shoring up both park funding and the operation of events. Revenues related to special-event fees and ticket sales, like other fees

generated by the parks, should be structured in such a way that the revenues stay within the park rather than flow back to the General Fund.

#### **4.5. Coordination with Other Austin Projects**

The same proximity to downtown and excellent location on Lady Bird Lake that Town Lake Metropolitan Park enjoys has catalyzed new development in surrounding neighborhoods and along the southern edge of downtown. Projects are moving quickly, and the Long-Term Project should assess the implications of these developments. For example, the historical density and level of commercial presence probably would not have supported a BID or PID around Town Lake Metropolitan Park. It represents an emerging possibility to help fund operations and services in and around the park, but any proposal to do so should explain why it's important, what it could do, and how it might work. Property owners within any proposed BID or PID would have to approve such a measure; BIDs and PIDs cannot be imposed externally.

Major projects recently completed or under way near Town Lake Metropolitan Park:

##### ***South of Lady Bird Lake***

- **422 at the Lake:** 207 apartments. Completion spring 2015. *422 W Riverside Dr*
- **Gibson Flats:** 200 apartments, 3,000 square feet of retail. Completed winter 2013. *1219 S Lamar Blvd*
- **Hanover South Lamar:** 340 apartments and 6,000 square feet of retail. Completion late 2014/early 2015. *809 S Lamar Blvd*
- **Hyatt parking garage and Zilker Ballroom:** 14,000 square foot ballroom, meeting rooms, and 600-space parking garage. Completed August 2014. *208 Barton Springs Rd*
- **Lamar Union:** 443 apartments, new Alamo Drafthouse, 86,000 square feet of retail. Open late 2014. *1100 S Lamar Blvd*
- 
- **The Catherine:** 300 apartments adjacent to Hyatt Regency Austin. Leasing begins fall 2014. *214 Barton Springs Rd*

##### ***Downtown***

- **Seaholm Plaza/Residences:** Mixed-use development with 280 condos, retail, office, and special-event space opposite Town Lake Metropolitan Park. 550 parking spaces. Ongoing. *800 W Cesar Chavez St*
- **Green Water Treatment Plant:** 200-room hotel, 836 apartments, and 456,000 square feet of office space. 2,700 parking spaces. Ongoing. *W Cesar Chavez St/San Antonio St*
- **Gables Park Plaza/Tower:** 185 units, office, and 10,000 square feet of ground-floor retail. Completed late 2013. *111/115 Sandra Muraida Way*



- **New Central Library:** 250,000 square feet and 200 parking spaces adjacent to Seaholm. Completion late 2015. *710 W Cesar Chavez St*

These projects testify to the innate appeal, convenience, and dynamism of the area, but a formalized structure and long-term vision will be needed to knit together what is effectively becoming an extension of downtown. Uniting Town Lake Metropolitan Park with downtown and the South Central Waterfront (which runs from South 1st Street on the west to Blunn Creek on the east and from Lady Bird Lake on the north to East Bouldin Creek and East Riverside Drive on the south) should be a central goal, particularly with respect to the Seaholm Redevelopment District downtown and the *Austin American-Statesman* property on the South Central Waterfront.

The old Seaholm Power Plant's transformation into an office-residential-retail EcoDistrict directly across Lady Bird Lake from Town Lake Metropolitan Park could invigorate and complement redevelopment plans within the park. Seaholm is emerging as an advanced green development on eight acres with 280 residential units, 140,000 square feet of office space, and nearly 50,000 square feet of retail. Town Lake Metropolitan Park could become a natural "front porch" for Seaholm residents in search of recreation, and Seaholm will provide a convenient retail core for park visitors. Seaholm's sustainability theme should resonate in the park's design, programming, and art as well. Art or park displays in Town Lake Metropolitan Park, for example, could highlight Seaholm's energy and water savings in real time as context for Austin's broader sustainability initiatives.

Efforts to connect the two places should focus on the physical separation that Lady Bird Lake creates. Trail connectivity helps overcome that, but in the long term, PARD should explore ways to creatively overcome this barrier. Strategies could include an additional pedestrian bridge or something more iconic, such as a water-taxi system, but whatever the solution, the approach Austin takes could influence the character of the park as much as the fact that it solved the problem.

The *Statesman* site has received attention for years as an attractive place for new construction, although there is no formal buyer and no timeline for redevelopment. Its 19 acres represent the largest single tract on the South Central Waterfront and include one-third of a mile of frontage on Lady Bird Lake. The South Central Waterfront Initiative has prioritized, among other things, more public open space, pedestrian-oriented environments, and connections to the waterfront, and harmonious redevelopment at Town Lake Metropolitan Park could assist with each of those aims. The *Statesman* site holds great potential to expand open space on the South Central Waterfront, and the Butler Hike & Bike Trail's route along the parcel's northern edge is a major opportunity to redesign the corridor as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century waterfront greenway. Developing it appropriately will be essential to enhancing Town Lake Metropolitan Park's waterfront connectivity.

Above all, as development continues, increasing population density both during the day and at night will increase day-to-day use of the park and inject a new vitality. In its programming choices, PARD should consider what will appeal to these incoming residents and workers, as they represent a new base for an ever more active and social Town Lake Metropolitan Park.

Austin has several other developments and park projects under way that warrant consideration under Town Lake Metropolitan Park's long-term strategy:

**Alliance Children's Garden:** Construction of the garden, which will be sited in the Venue Zone northeast of the Dougherty Arts Center, is projected to begin late 2015. Construction will take approximately seven months, during which this portion of the park will be closed. The design is being led by TBG Partners.

**Holly Shores:** The Holly Power Plant's closing in 2007 paved the way for an expanded parks corridor along Town Lake's north shore east of I-35. Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates completed a draft master plan for Holly Shores in July 2014 that the Austin City Council approved in August. A timeline for construction is pending. The park could cost \$100 million to build, and currently the city has only \$2 million available.

**Republic Square:** The master plan for Republic Square was completed in summer 2013. The \$4 million renovation plan includes a new small event venue, a promenade, concessions, and other amenities. Phase II construction is scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2015. Once fully redeveloped, the park will be able to accommodate larger events.

**Waller Creek:** The City of Austin established the Waller Creek corridor as a TIF District in 2007. The project will protect 28 acres from flooding and create an amenities-rich greenway between downtown Austin and Lady Bird Lake, connecting four green spaces en route: Waterloo Park, the Refuge, Palm Park, and the Lattice. Plans call for the \$149 million flood-control tunnel to be completed in December 2014. Waterloo Park, one of the city's key parks and events venues, is under construction as part of this process and is expected to reopen in 2015.

## 5. SUGGESTED LONG-TERM VISION TIMELINE

Numerous recommendations have been made to ensure that Town Lake Metropolitan Park continues to improve and becomes the flagship downtown cultural green space for the City of Austin. The interim improvements, which will be fully completed in 2015, will ensure that the green space north of Riverside Drive will be a healthy park asset for the next 10-15 years.

It is suggested that the recommendations outlined in this report be considered and acted upon in the order identified below:

1. Immediately actionable items should be considered and approved by Austin City Council. These include (1) the creation of event-day resident-only permitted parking zones for TLMP neighborhoods; (2) the creation of a dedicated traffic management unit within APD for

better coordination during all events in Austin, not just those in TLMP; (3) the formalization of a two-year event planning coordination committee made up of the chief executives of PARD, the Austin Convention Center and the Long Center; and (4) approving the proposed increase in maintenance fees assessed by PARD to event organizers in TLMP specifically and all parks generally.

2. Finalize the DAC study and proceed with the planning for a new building to be located between the Long Center and the Palmer Center to incorporate replacement DAC programming space. Additionally, as suggested, this building could include back-of-house facilities for the Palmer Center and the Long Center, additional Long Center practice facilities, and event space to generate revenue and complement on-going activities within TLMP and the venues. The Long Center should address future service needs which would need to be visually screened from Barton Springs Road if the existing parking garage is demolished in the future.
3. Upon the decision to relocate the DAC, and dependent on the recommendations regarding the condition and suggested uses for the land underneath the DAC, begin the planning process for a replacement facility on the site, consistent with the recommendations contained in this report. PARD should convene a community process to determine uses, including but not limited to limited above-grade parking, ground level bicycle facilities, and food and beverage concessions. Additionally, PARD and the City of Austin should examine alternate methods to complete and finance the facility, including a public-private partnership, or “fee” developer. There are several models in existence for such development alternatives, and it may be feasible if there are sufficient revenues generated within such a facility to assist in the financing.
4. As clarity is developed around the site of the existing DAC, PARD and the City of Austin Department of Transportation should begin the process of evaluating the proposed underground parking facility. Parking, engineering and financing alternatives should be updated to identify current parking needs and rates, construction costs and siting alternatives. Commensurate with this exercise, ADT should begin the engineering planning and construction cost estimating for depressing Riverside Drive. Ideally, these capital investments proceed along the same development path to conserve costs and ensure operational compatibility. Additionally, in planning for the underground parking garage, the Palmer Center and the Long Center should agree upon a process for designing a unified underground entrance to their facilities from the garage.
5. As decisions are made to move forward with the proposed capital investments in parking and the depression of Riverside Drive, PARD should begin the planning process around a master landscape and architectural design for the new park (the new “green roof”) over the parking garage and the proposed land bridges to connect the north lawns with the venue lawn south of a depressed Riverside Drive. As identified in the report, the RFP for the master design team should encourage elements in the park suggested herein – pedestrian and bike paths, public art, water features, concessions and cultural performance areas

among others. As designs are completed and cost estimates refined, PARD, the City of Austin and its private sector partners can move forward on the financial plan to complete the design, construction and ultimate unveiling of a “new” TLMP.

6. Upon completion of the “new” TLMP, with its improved infrastructure and world-class design, the existing Long Center Parking garage could be demolished (assuming repayment of outstanding bonds). Such demolition would bring back significant green space to TLMP and provide a site for future development of a world-class performance space if needed in the future by the Long Center.