

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: LAKE TRAVIS PARKS MASTER PLAN

Travis County posted the *Lake Travis Parks Master Plan* on-line and held three meetings so the public could review and comment on the plan. Meetings were held on May 18, 2010 at the West Service Center Town Hall, near Mansfield Dam; May 19, 2010 at K-Oaks Clubhouse in Lago Vista; and May 20, 2010 at the Commissioners Courtroom at the Ned Granger Building in downtown Austin. Seven people attended the first, 76 the second, and four the third. Thirty people submitted written comments (see below).

The master plan was well received overall, and there is particularly strong support in Lago Vista for the planned improvements of Arkansas Bend Park. Some residents living near this park, however, are concerned about how increased visitation at Arkansas Bend Park might negatively impact their neighborhood. As discussed below, staff feels that their concerns can be addressed through site design and construction.

A significant number people also objected to the proposed sale of Tom Hughes Park. In response, staff has dropped their recommendation to sell Tom Hughes Park.

A summary of all comments received from the public and Travis County Parks' responses to them are presented below.

A. OVERALL PLAN

Endangered Species Habitat: Is there endangered species habitat in any of the Lake Travis parks? If yes, the county should make sure they get all necessary permits before proceeding with construction and land management projects.

Travis County Response:

There is endangered species habitat at Hippie Hollow Park; and there may be endangered species habitat at Sandy Creek Park. Where there is habitat, no construction takes place during nesting season from March 1 to September 1. If habitat land were to be taken, Parks would get a permit from Travis County Natural Resources and Environmental Quality (NERQ), the department responsible for managing Travis County's portion of the Balcones Canyonland Preserve.

Need for Park Improvements: Several comments pertained to the condition of the Lake Travis Parks: 1) Travis County parks are in awful condition; they aren't family friendly or accessible; 2) allowing people to drive anywhere in the park needs to stop – they tear up the landscape; 3) provide more picnic areas close to the water and grass play areas; and 4) courtesy docks need to be provided at boat ramps.

Travis County Response: Proposed improvements will make the parks more family friendly and accessible. Playgrounds, picnic areas, and open play areas will be developed close to the water. Unchecked vehicular traffic will also be prohibited once roads, parking lots, and pedestrian/ bike

paths are constructed as part of park improvements. Courtesy docks on a lake with fluctuating levels are high maintenance but will be provided at parks that have suitable topography and are well-staffed parks and have high-volume boat launching.

Annual Pass Policy: An individual said he was told three different things at three different parks about purchasing annual passes for vehicular and/or walk-in access. The policy needs to be consistent. It should “reward” people biking or riding into a park to encourage healthy living; whereas a vehicle can have multiple passengers entering under one pass, walk-ins pay by the person.

Travis County Response: Vehicle annual passes are \$100.00 a year and walk-in passes are \$25.00. Both passes can be purchased at park entry gates.

Cost: How much will constructing improvements cost? How much do the bonds cost? What is the impact of proximity to parks on appraised property values?

Travis County Response: The cost of constructing specific improvements will be determined when potential funding sources are identified. As the highest priority project, a construction cost estimate for Arkansas Bend Park improvements will be completed prior to the next voter-approved bond election scheduled for 2011.

The impact of the \$150,875,000.00 bond package was estimated to be \$8.87 for an average homestead of \$222,600 over a four year period from 2007 to 2011. Since Travis County has an AAA bond rating, it qualifies for low interest rates.

Typically, a natural-resource based park, such as Arkansas Bend Park, has a positive impact on homes that are within 500’ of the park. But in this case, Arkansas Bend Park is an existing park that has already impacted those values. Although the impact of improvements at Arkansas Bend Park will have on appraised value of nearby residences can not be evaluated because there is no data for doing so, there is data showing that proximity to parks with active recreational facilities such as lighted sports fields (which Arkansas Bend will not have) negatively impacts appraised values of nearby home.

Schedule: What is the timeline for building improvements?

Travis County Response: Project scheduling is determined by the availability of funding for capital improvements. Travis County is planning for a 2011 bond election and will recommend that Arkansas Bend Park improvements be included in the bond package. Other capital improvement projects for Lake Travis Parks may also be recommended for inclusion.

Park Bond Package: Can you vote on individual projects in the park bond package?

Travis County Response: No. All park bond projects are included in one package that represents the park needs of the entire county.

B. ARKANSAS BEND PARK

Community Support: A majority of the people attending the meeting in Lago Vista expressed strong support for the proposed Arkansas Bend Park improvements. Elected officials, members of the business community, and residents spoke in favor of the project, citing the need to have more access to the lake for recreational use (existing parks are POA owned). They also appreciate that an improved park is economic development asset for the community. There is particular interest in improving the existing boat ramp and building the second campground ramp.

Travis County Response: Travis County welcomes the community of Lago Vista's support, which greatly improves the chances for this project to be included in the next parks bond program.

Historic Buildings: The Historic Society has historic structures they want to preserve in a place accessible to the public. Is there space in the park where historic buildings can be sited?

Travis County Response: Travis County wants to have this type of amenity at Arkansas Bend Park. The extent to which historic structures can be accommodated will be determined during site planning process and will be based on the size, historic significance, number of structure, and amount of space needed to site buildings. A possible location is shown on the master plan concept drawing.

Neighborhood Concerns: While people living near the park support improving the park they are also concerned about negative impacts park improvements and changing use patterns may have on their neighborhood. They request direct involvement with the detailed planning/implementation process. Their concerns are as follows:

Criminal activity and illicit use will persist and may increase as more people use the park: street lighting and boundary control is required along Lakeview Avenue. Street lighting is needed along Lakeview Avenue

Travis County Response: Travis County Parks has found that as visitation and staffing increases at a park, illicit use drops because of both self-policing by visitors and greater staff presence. The County does not have a program or budget for operating and maintaining street lights but licensing agreements have been executed with subdivisions that want to install, operate, and maintain streetlights.

Fencing and vegetative buffers are needed along Lakeview Avenue for several reasons: to prevent trespassing and minimize vandalism, block trash from the park, and screen views of the campground from the adjacent residences.

Travis County Response: Fencing and vegetative buffers will be provided along park boundaries.

There will be more trash outside the park that parks staff will need to pick it up.

Travis County Response: Trash outside of parks has not been a problem at other more heavily used parks.

The campground should be moved to the southern peninsula so it doesn't impact adjacent residents on Lakeview Avenue. The natural beauty of the northern peninsula will be spoiled less too if it's not developed for camping and opened to vehicular traffic and off road use (Note that neighbors adjacent to south peninsula objected to the campground being sited there).

Travis County Response: The campground is sited on the north peninsula because it has better topography and is adjacent to the larger, more scenic cove. The campground will be carefully designed and constructed with a "light touch on the land" so that the natural beauty that is the basis of the attraction to the park is not damaged. Vehicles will be confined to roads and parking areas, and there will be no off road use.

Noise from campers playing music, vehicles -- including ATVs and motorized recreational vehicles -- and generators will be a problem. Will there be an amphitheater in the campground? ATV use, loud music and generators should be prohibited.

Travis County Response: "Quiet Hours" are imposed at Travis County campgrounds after 10:00 P.M. The "amphitheater" is intended to be a "camp fire circle" used for small group gatherings. This will be noted on the concept plan.

Increased traffic will be a source of air pollution and will degrade the visual quality of the park, erode soil, and cause accidents.

Travis County Response: Traffic in more heavily used parks has not affected air quality, nor resulted in an unusual number of accidents. Confinement to paved roads and parking areas will eliminate erosion from uncontrolled traffic in the parks.

Odors from the septic system, camp fires, and cooking stoves will be a problem: off-road four-wheeled vehicles, motorcycles, and ATVs, large diesel engines and generators, and camp fires need to be prohibited. Roadways and septic facilities need to be sited away from neighbors, and septic need to aerobic with low waste storage time.

Travis County Response: Properly functioning septic systems do not emit odors (whereas pit toilets do). Although soil analysis will be completed prior to septic system design, Travis County has been using low pressure dose systems in its parks. Odors from campfires and cooking are not considered noxious.

Nearby wells may be depleted if wells are used to supply water in the park: use treated lake water instead of wells or complete a draw-down study to determine impact on nearest wells.

A hydro-geologist will be employed to study ground water conditions and determine what impacts, if any, park wells may have on adjacent wells.

Traffic will worsen on Cherry Lane as park use increases. It is narrow and winding and RVs and boat trailers can't travel the road without crossing lanes. People already speed on it and additional visitors to the park will make it worse. How will the County control the traffic? How much right-of-way will be needed if road is widened?

Travis County Response: There are currently no plans (or funds) to widen or otherwise improve Cherry Lane: it does not have a high accident rating and is not a substandard road. Appropriate signing can be used, however, to warn motorists of road conditions and inform them of speed limits. Requests can also be made for enforcing speed limits on Cherry to the Travis County's Sheriff's Department. The Sheriff's Department contact for this "Selective Enforcement" program is Kasben Harris at 512-854-9773.

Note: An alternative conceptual plan was submitted by Gregory Becker, P.E. on July 16, 2010 (Mr. Becker lives next to the north peninsula).

Travis County Response: Site plan changes recommended by Mr. Becker are addressed above.

Boat Ramps: Support for improving boat ramp facilities was expressed: people ask that the existing Arkansas Bend Park boat ramp be extended to a lower elevation, want to know how many boat trailer spaces will be provided at Arkansas Bend Park, and request that building the campground boat ramp be a priority.

Travis County Response: The feasibility of extending the boat ramp at Arkansas Bend Park – as well as its relocation -- will be considered during the site planning phase of this project. The number of boat trailer parking spaces will be determined at that time also. The campground boat ramp is a priority but may have to be constructed in a later phase for budgetary reasons.

C. HIPPIE HOLLOW PARK

Expansion of Swim Area: Several people who like to drop anchor off the shoreline at Hippie Hollow objected to extending the buoy lines that designate the swim area further along the shoreline because they can no longer drop anchor in the shallower depths. Anchoring off Hippie Hollow Park is a historic use of the park and needs to be continued. Extending the swim area has led to crowding because a user group wanting access to the boats has moved into another user groups' area near where boats now anchor. Conversely, a comment was made regarding the problem of boat exhaust blowing onshore from "sightseeing" boat traffic.

Travis County Response: LCRA permitted the swim buoy line from fence-line to fence-line (western boundary to eastern boundary of the park) to protect swimmers who are the historic users of this park. Travis County's primary objective is to serve this population and minimize

conflicts between swimmers and boaters. Travis County has shortened the swim area at the eastern end of the park, however, to accommodate boaters.

Stairs: Provide stairs to the waters edge.

Travis County Response: Stairs have been built to the 681' elevation beyond which it is difficult to construct because of fluctuating lake levels.

D. MANSFIELD DAM PARK

Boat Ramp Operations: An individual described conditions at the Mansfield Dam Park boat ramp that need to be addressed: people linger at the courtesy dock longer than permitted to load/unload boats, making other people wait; people swim in the boat launch area even though it's signed for no swimming; people fish off courtesy dock although prohibited. It was also noted how long it took to trailer his boat because of heavy traffic on the past July 4th, and that Parks staff left at 10:30 P.M., even though there was still heavy traffic on the ramp.

Travis County Response: Problems with overly-long use of the courtesy dock and fishing and swimming in prohibited areas are enforcement issue that parks staff will work to monitor better. Regarding the past 4th of July, staff was overwhelmed by the high level of visitation: Mansfield Dam was also one of the only public ramps open (and only 2 of its lanes were usable) because the lake level was so low.

E. PACE BEND PARK

Camping: A speaker stated that Mesquite Point is one of his favorite places to camp at Pace Bend Park and requested that it not be changed to day use only. He also questioned whether improved campsites (with water and electrical service) should be sited in the flood plain for maintenance reasons, and whether there is demand for the number of improved campsites that are proposed in the plan.

Travis County Response: The conceptual plan shows the area immediately north of Mesquite Point be developed for camping. Campers will still have immediate access to the water as well as more shade than found on Mesquite Point: it is an area equally, if not more, attractive for camping. Providing electrical and water service in floodplains is a standard practice and not a maintenance problem when properly designed and constructed. Based on the "Lake Travis System Wide Plan: Market Analysis" completed by Texas A&M University in 2007, there is demand in the area for improved campsites.

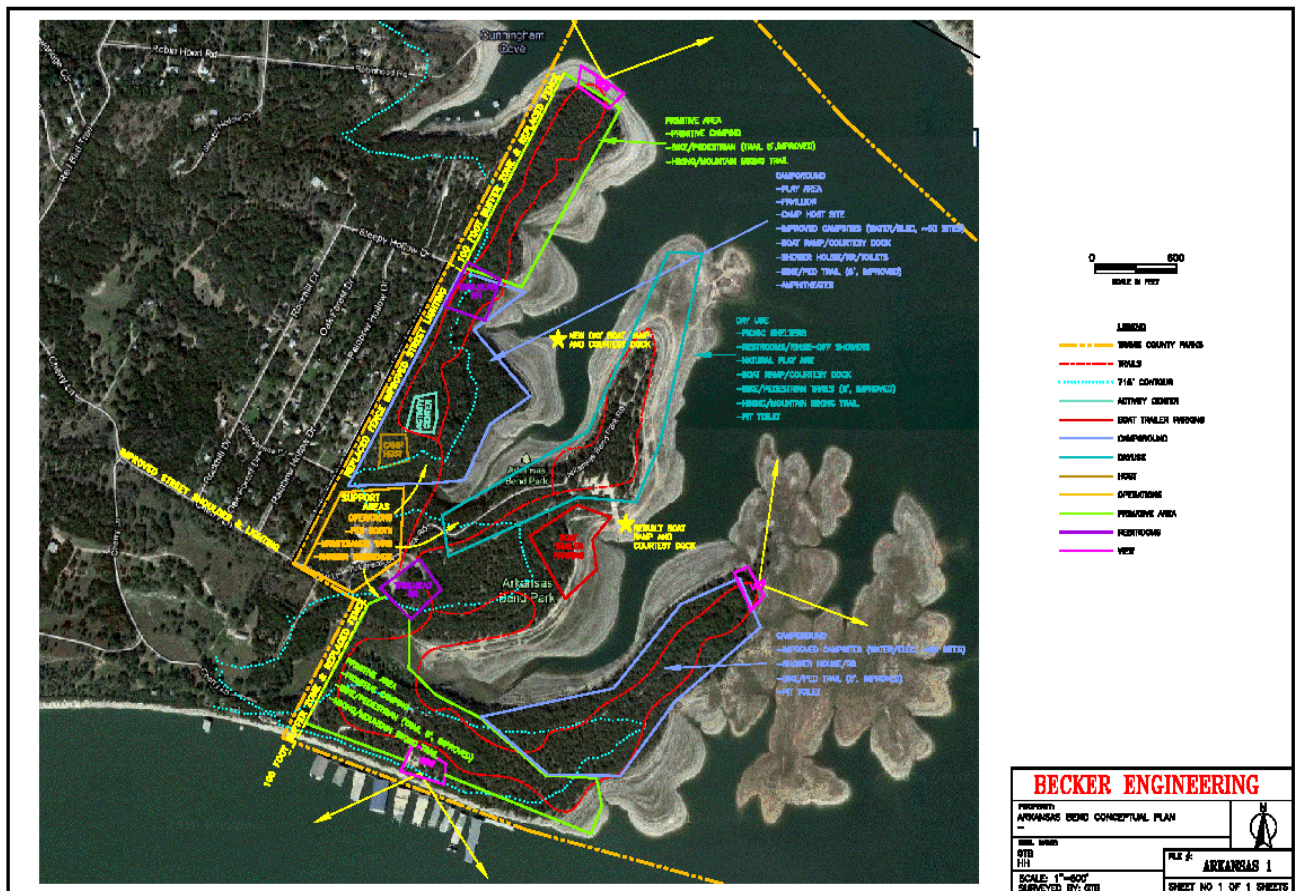
G. TOM HUGHES PARK

Sale of Park: Objections to sale of Tom Hughes Park were voiced by several people at meetings and documented in 25 emails sent to the County. In general, the sentiment is that parks are precious and we should not get rid of an existing one, particularly one that respondents feel is valuable for the following reasons:

- Has great natural character and scenic beauty -- including having the best sunset views on the lake.
- Quiet, peaceful place
- Doesn't have public nudity and "gawking" atmosphere of Hippie Hollow Park
- Provides habitat for wildlife
- Is close to population centers
- Provides opportunities to enjoy passive recreation because of it has "...natural trails with plenty of waterfront and spacious swimming area
- Doesn't require capital improvements and has low maintenance costs
- Has a protected swim area that blocks winds that carry fumes from boat traffic and make the water choppy
- Historic use as a park

Travis County Response: Because of objections to the proposed sale of Tom Hughes Parks, Travis County no longer recommends proceeding with the sale of this property.

Arkansas Bend Park Recommended Site Plan



SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Lake Travis Parks Master Plan

Agenda Item No. 12

September 14, 2010

Mr. Gregory Becker submitted email comments (see Attachment 1) on September 9, 2010 in response to the staff recommendations made in *Public Involvement: Lake Travis Parks Master Plan* (the document that was distributed to those people who reviewed the draft *Lake Travis Parks Master Plan*). A follow-up conference call was also held on September 13, 2010 with Mr. Becker, Mr. George Newton, and Mrs. Glenda Newton of Lago Vista, Texas. A summary of this discussion and staff recommendations follows:

Property Line Fencing, Vegetative Buffer, Minimum Buffer Width, and Posting of No Trespass Signs: Park neighbors are concerned about increased trespassing from the park onto adjacent private property as visitation increases at the park and request a 100' buffer adjacent to private properties. In response to these concerns, staff recommends the following:

- a) A sturdier fence than now exists will be constructed along the park boundary as part of park improvements. The specific type of fence to be used will be determined in the site master planning process. Costs for this will also be included in the park improvement budget that is prepared as part of the site master planning process (which includes public review process and court adoption phases).
- b) Large rocks will be placed along the property boundary adjacent to private property that is exposed when the lake level drops. No Trespass signs will be posted as water level drops.
- c) At a minimum, vegetative buffers will be preserved along the boundary so park improvements are not visible from adjacent private properties. It is staff's intention to strongly buffer the park from adjacent private properties for the benefit of park visitors as well as neighbors. There very well may be a 100' buffer but staff recommends setting the exact width of this buffer in the site master planning process¹ when more detailed topographic and survey information is available.

Criminal Activity: Park neighbors are concerned that criminal activity will increase as park visitation increases and request that the county install street lights along Lake

¹ The Lake Travis Master Plan includes conceptual master plans for each park that represent a high-altitude birds-eye view of the site. The site master plans that will subsequently be prepared for each individual park prior to them being designed will be completed in much greater detail. A requirement of this process is to present the preliminary master plans to the public for their review and – with public commentary – present the site master plan to the Travis County Commissioners Court for adoption.

View Drive (some park neighbors support dark skies being maintained, however). Staff recommends the following:

- a) Crime and illicit use typically drops as parks are developed and have increased legitimate visitation and greater park staff presence. In this case, staff expects it to actually drop because there will both a Park Ranger and Camp Host living on site.

For this reason, staff recommends deferring action on this item until improvements are made and the impact of increased visitation on criminal activity can be monitored and assessed. Staff reiterated that the County does not now have funds or programs installing or maintaining street lights.

Land Use of North and South Peninsula: The proposed conceptual master plan for Arkansas Bend Park shows the north peninsula being developed for improved camping and the south peninsula minimally developed for hiking, biking, and camping. Park neighbors adjacent to the north peninsula, however, recommend a different land use scheme in which only a portion of the north peninsula is used for improved camping; correspondingly, a portion of the south peninsula is used for improved camping, and parts of both peninsulas would be used for primitive camping. Their preferred scheme would eliminate impacts on the adjacent private property, and they maintain would result in a more cost effective septic system design. They also recommended designing the improved campsites so only parts of the campground would accommodate larger recreational vehicles (RVs). Staff recommends as follows.

- a) Staff developed the land use scheme proposed in the *Lake Travis Parks Master Plan* because they felt that the north peninsula has more suitable topography and provides access to the larger, more scenic cove which does not have the large public boat ramp that is on the other cove (note: the boat ramp proposed on the north peninsula will be built for small boat launching and use by campers only. It is sited in staff's conceptual master plan at the far end of the cove so boat traffic doesn't conflict with swimmers).

Park neighbors, however, raised points that need to be considered in the site master planning process. Staff recommends finalizing the land use scheme in the site master planning phase when more detailed topographic and survey data is available. Designing the campground so certain areas are not used by larger RVs will also be explored at that time.

Attachment: Mr. Gregory Becker Letter

ATTACHMENT 1

Dear Ms. Scaperotta,

Your final plan (unchanged original plan) and responses to public comments (pertaining to Arkansas Bend Park) have not addressed or resolved the following main concerns, all of which were specifically discussed in the Lago Vista public meeting related to impacts to neighbors from these proposed land improvements:

1. Proposed improvements to the north peninsula include roads to the new courtesy dock. However, to access this ramp/dock, roads will have to be near the private property fence line because the topography falls off toward the lake at this area. The concern specifically expressed in the public meeting and subsequent documents was that vehicular traffic will cause noise and air pollution next to this private property. As stated and included in the submitted Becker Plan (**reviewed and agreed to by the south and north peninsula adjacent neighbors**), you must integrate a 100 foot buffer to prevent noise and air pollution from this boat ramp vehicular traffic and RV accessible roads along the property boundary of the North peninsula. Vegetative barriers and fencing is not enough at private property boundaries without proper distance. This was specifically addressed in our plan submitted to your office months ago. In your response, Travis County states that "Fencing and vegetative barriers will be provided along the park boundaries." However, "buffer width" was purposely left out and distance is the only reliable buffer that protects against noise and vehicular exhaust gases/fumes. Specific minimum distances at private property boundaries were detailed in our plan submitted to you months ago. These were ignored because of the financial limitations from improved changes to the development of the north peninsula. Thus, [YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THIS PUBLIC IMPACT IN YOUR RESPONSE OR PLAN]. Roads installed near the private property boundaries at the north peninsula will prompt noise and air pollution that will impact adjacent users.
2. Street lighting and road improvement (along Lakeview) adjacent to the North park boundary. Your response is that "licensing agreements have been executed with subdivisions that want to install, operate and maintain streetlights. In other words, Travis County can afford the park improvements, but it cannot afford to address the problems caused by those improvements. There is no subdivision adjacent to the north park boundary that has responsibility for this. Thus, [YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THIS PUBLIC IMPACT IN YOUR RESPONSE OR PLAN]. Illicit use, accidents and criminal activity will increase along this unlit street. This is an impact that remains unaddressed by Travis County. Government funding must address project impacts as well as improvements in protecting public health and welfare.
3. Regarding the location of the campground on the north peninsula vs. the south peninsula: The response states that "the campground is better sited on the north peninsula because it has better topography and is adjacent to the larger, more scenic cove". The proposed north peninsula convenience dock and Traffic/RV accessible campgrounds further to the north will require roads. It is obvious that the topography on the northern peninsula is NOT better for park traffic roads beyond the extent of Lakeview unless the 100 foot buffer is compromised (to the detriment of the adjacent land owner). There are two constraint points (ravines) directly adjacent to the private property boundary that will not allow effective development of the roadway north of Lakeview in conjunction with a 100 foot buffer. Thus, there will not be room for an effective "buffer" as agreed to by the county with the roads that are proposed. Confining traffic to roads has little effect in eliminating noise and fume/emissions impacts if the roads are at the property boundary. Further, regarding the "better view" from the northern peninsula, as shown in the Becker detailed development plan (**reviewed and agreed to by the south and north peninsula adjacent neighbors**), the south peninsula has much more area and width to accommodate a traffic loop. In the Becker Plan, traffic is accommodated WITH a huge wilderness and buffer zone area because this peninsula is much larger. Additionally, the view is BETTER than the cove view since the whole lake can be observed on one side and cove on the other. Campers would have a choice of views (Lake expanse vs. cove) on the south peninsula. Accordingly, the argument of a better view to justify campground development of the narrow strip of land adjacent to private property on the north peninsula is ridiculous. Thus, [YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THIS PUBLIC IMPACT IN YOUR RESPONSE OR PLAN].

4. As stated at the public meeting, odors of concern include RV/vehicle emissions, and septic tank vents near property boundaries. Septic tanks are by definition anaerobic and will have bad odors from reduced species of degradation compounds. Thus, your statement “properly functioning septic systems do not emit odors” is in error. These odors are best addressed by buffer distances and were not resolved or addressed properly by your response. Thus, [YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED THIS PUBLIC IMPACT IN YOUR RESPONSE OR PLAN].
5. You have acknowledged the receipt of Site Plan Changes submitted by Becker and infer that the recommended changes in this plan are “addressed” in your responses. This is obviously not true as shown in your shallow and inadequate responses which simply say that either the improvements to protect public health and welfare as contained in this plan are not of concern to Travis County or are not addressed because they are not “funded”. There is no indication that Travis County has even remotely considered seriously the impacts to its neighbors as addressed by the Becker master plan. None of the improvements detailed in the Becker plan are included in the current master plan (identical to the original master plan that was commented on in our public meeting many months ago). Regarding the use of inadequate funding justifying the ignoring of impacts, lack of funding is not a reason to ignore these valid public concerns for the reasons stated above in this letter. Government funding must always cover project impacts as well as land improvements to adequately protect public health and welfare. If you don’t have the funds to fix your problems, then don’t do the project. At least put the solutions in the plan so that they are addressed as funding is available.

In the public meeting Travis County committed to seriously considering our input in working together for a better development plan for Arkansas Bend, however, as far as the items listed above, there was no specific response, review or consideration of the real impacts to neighbors nor were any of the solid ideas addressing these impacts (detailed in the Becker plan) included at all in your master plan. Adjacent land owners that supported this plan (NORTH AND SOUTH PENINSULA) formally request an audience with Travis County decisions makers to discuss concerns BEFORE commissioners meeting on Tuesday.

Please respond on a time tomorrow (Friday afternoon) since you have left inadequate time to meet otherwise in the two working days before this commissioners meeting.

Sincerely,

Gregory T. Becker, PE
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