

Appendix D: Public Comments and Responses

The public review phase of this plan was opened April 6, 2006 and closed May 3, 2006. The comments we received and our responses to each are presented below, in chronological order and by the media through which they were received.

Email Correspondence

1. **Kevin M. Anderson, Coordinator**
Austin Water Utility - Center for Environmental Research
2210 South FM 973, Austin, Texas 78725
at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Management Plant

An additional issue for bottomland/alluvium areas [could you work in the term "riparian"?] along the Colorado in eastern Travis is well water high in nitrates - water quality issues are big for folks on well water and so restoration can also help this aquifer water quality. [these are perch/shallow aquifers 40-50 feet down that have been impacted by agriculture and gravel mining]

This is a good point that has been incorporated into the relevant sections of the plan.

p. 5 should be the "Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project"

Corrected.

p. 20 Springs and Critical Environmental Features

- you skew this toward karst landscapes. Riparian areas are critical environmental features both east and west [you seem to equate "wetlands...found mostly along the river and creeks" with riparian areas]
- why not include riparian areas as a Critical Environmental Feature and define them as "wetlands, forest, and grasslands along Travis County waterways" since they are the most critical areas for protecting water quality in our waterways.

These are good points that have been incorporated into the relevant sections of the plan.

p. 21 Wildlife Habitat section

- perhaps add some other wildlife besides birds, there is the threatened fish species - the blue sucker in the Colorado <http://www.lcra.org/featurestory/2005/bluesucker.html>
- eastern box turtles are mainly east Travis County and being monitored by TPWD <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/easternbox/>
- Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory located at the Austin Water Utility's 1200 acre site on the Colorado in eastern Travis County. A popular birdwatching site since the 1950's and now

recognized as an IBA because of the over 370 species of migratory and resident birds at the site. Many rare species of birds have been seen at the Hornsby Bend - bald eagles are seen regularly and many aquatic bird species. It is also known for butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies. Similar bottomland sites along the Colorado hold the potential for this kind of biodiversity if properly protected and managed. The first bird survey of the stretch of the river...

- Ecotourism - perhaps reference the TPWD Heart of Texas Wildlife Trail http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails/heart/hot_east/ for East Travis County sites include Hornsby Bend, Big/Little Webberville, Lake Walter E. Long, Richard Moya

This is good information that has been incorporated into the relevant sections of the plan.

p. 27 Cultural Resources

- what about historic mill sites? [one in Del Valle off of Terry Lane]
- historic churches?
- issue - neglected cemeteries? Just visited McArthur Cemetery and it is in terrible shape.
- cotton gins?
- river crossings - Hergotz Hill just across from Hornsby Bend - others?

We have edited the relevant section to address these concerns as best we can at this time. We recognize that our data is very limited and much more study needs to be completed in this area. We hope to have additional cultural resource information in the update of this plan that is required in two years. Opportunities for public input and review will be part of the update process.

p. 32 Goal D Bottomland forests and wetlands - Objective 2 add Texas Riparian Association as a partner

Added to the plan.

p. 37 I am a little concerned with your area of interest oval for "working farms conservation district" only over NE Travis - there are working farms along the Colorado River bottom and uplands

We have revised our plan to address this concern as best we can at this time by using the best available information on undeveloped open space (COA land use data) to identify large swathes of rural, undeveloped areas in the four quadrants of the county. We agree that a more refined mapping of working farms and ranches and rural areas needs to be completed, but it's a task that can't be completed within the time frame of this plan, with existing County

resources. We will try to address this in the plan update that will be completed in two years, as required by TPWD.

Back notes - additional reference to check out - the online version of Noah Smithwick's Evolution of a State which focuses on Webberville, Hornsby Bend, Austin Chapters XVII-XX <http://www.oldcardboard.com/ljsj/olbooks/smithwic/otd.htm>

This is good information that has been incorporated in the plan.

2. **Brent Luck, RLA**
Public Sector Studio Leader
Land Design Partners
3345 Bee Caves Road, Suite 100
ph. 512.327.5900, Fx.: 512.328.1253
www.landdesignpartners.com

I just read through (the Plan) and particularly, I wanted to write that I appreciate you including the "Places of the Heart" section on Page 45 of the draft. We have not ever included that type of cultural resource designation in an OSMP that we have done for our municipal clients. I like what it represents to the community and what it may bring out in the plan. I can't wait to integrate that component in our next open space master plan.

That also captures a lot of the meaning of Reimers when you are on top of the bluff looking southwest over the Pedernales...

We're glad this concept is useful to you. We plan to do more work in this area, which we'll hopefully have completed for our update of this plan that is required by TPWD in 2 years from adoption.

3. **Charlie McCabe**
Executive Director
Austin Parks Foundation
701 Brazos, Ste 170
Austin TX 78701
cmccabe@austinparks.org

Overall, a lot of thought and input have gone into the plan and I applaud you and your contributors for the fine job that you have done. I think the overall direction, priorities and paths to improve and connect existing parks and greenbelts as well as focus on the priorities that you have identified are based on facts and surveys.

I do, further, want to offer to expand the role that the Austin Parks Foundation is playing with Travis Co. Parks. I would love to see us work with Travis Co to set up volunteer and adopt-a-park programs similar to those that we have with the city. I do know that you are more well funded (relatively speaking) but I know that at Reimer's there is a fair amount of collaboration

with volunteers from Central Texas Mountaineers and from the Ridge Riders and would love to help increase that. We had 45 park projects with over 1000 volunteers at Austin area parks this past Saturday, but not one at a Travis County park! We need to change this and I'm very interested in making this happen and will make a formal proposal to do so.

Travis County has worked with numerous volunteer groups over the years and the County would be glad to work with the Austin Parks Foundation on future projects.

Here are some specific comments on the plan:

1) Thanks for including the demographic info. It drives your principal points of focusing on areas that are underserved home. The greenprinting work going on via TPL should only amplify these facts.

Thank you for emphasizing how important demographic data is for planning our parks and natural areas system appropriately.

2) Part 2 - inventory - bullet point 2. You correctly (in bullet point #3) spell out that much of the BCP land is not publicly accessible, which is good. But terming in "park and open space land" is not a good thing. I would call it park and preserve land, as open space means open to the public to many folks. Having sat through the BCP public comment period on the citizens advisory committee, this is a hot button issue.

You make a good point with respect to classifying the BCP as "parks and open space land" because of confusion about exactly what "open space" means to many people. For this reason, we're changing the name of this plan and references to the type of lands this plan addresses to "parks and natural areas".

3) Part 2- inventory - flood plains are an untapped resource. Excellent. We need to push this harder as a multi-use / multi-wins proposition for sure.

Thank you for emphasizing the importance of flood plains as untapped resource. FYI, we moved this reference to our Needs Assessment section, where we think it more logically belongs.

4) PART 3 - PUBLIC input.

A) - bullet point one: manage volunteer services. Austin parks foundation does this for a living - we work to adopt and maintain parks with local volunteer groups and companies. Let us help you. Let's shoot for a number of projects at Travis County parks this year and especially for our next IT's My Park! Day in 2007.

Travis County has worked with numerous volunteer groups over the years and the County would be glad to work with the Austin Parks Foundation on future projects.

B) - bullet point: "develop metro parks, connect parks" - absolutely important - the city, county and others can really benefit from this synergy. I know that you are doing it, I want to strongly encourage you to do so.

Thank you for supporting these objectives.

C) - public input summary - bravo! for including the first and third bullet points on page 17. Excellent!

Thank you for supporting these points, that is, 1) the findings that walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity for which there is also latent demand -- a significant number of people don't walk more because there are no places nearby -- and 2) the demand on the part of both local experts and the general public for trails connecting parks and other community centers is great.

5) page 19 - Metro parks assessment.

Level of Service is 3.5 acres per 1000 residents. It says to see appendix D, but I cannot find appendix D. I'm wondering why that is the level. Does it factor in the 24 acres per 1000 residents that is the "gold standard" and that COA PARD has as its ratio and goal?

The appendix reference has been corrected to "Appendix A: Setting Park Level Of Service (Los)". The analysis that we completed in 2000 represents 1) a level of service (LOS) only for metropolitan and regional parks (smaller parks were not included, and the title should be changed to exclude "open space"), and 2) was only intended to determine the level of service that Travis County was contributing at that point in time to the overall LOS in the county so that the County could determine a reasonable LOS contribution to the overall inventory as the population of the county grew. Metro and regional parkland provided by the City of Austin, the State of Texas, and LCRA were included in this analysis.

6) Natural resources assessments and focuses are excellent - well done, pp 20-30.

Thank you for your kudos.

7) Part 5 - implementation.

Overall, this is solid - I agree with the priorities and plans and timeframes. I would only add, once again, that a volunteer component to maintain/clean-up/protection working the Austin Parks Foundation is a great element to add. We work to find local groups to adopt and maintain parks and I strongly urge Travis County to work with us in hopefully making your job a little easier as well as maintaining the ever growing land acreage that you have in place.

Travis County has worked with numerous volunteer groups over the years and the County would be glad to work with the Austin Parks Foundation on future projects.

4. Rod Reyna, Member, Travis County 2005 Citizen Bond Committee

Accelerate CIP timeline (e.g., so that NE Metro park start is not 2 two years out and completion 3 years out)

At least show development progress by doing minor subphase improvements to metro parks as opposed to waiting 2-3 years to do so (e.g., additional picnic areas in NE Metro)

The Commissioners Court reviews the County's CIP schedule for County projects every May, considering the need to change priorities and alter the 2005 bond implementation schedule. This request has been brought to the attention to the TNR Executive Manager, who is responsible for bringing matters like this to the Court for their consideration.

Get land sooner than later for additional NW Metro park and hold (to guarantee acquisition and keep commercial development from acquiring)

We agree that it is better to acquire land sooner rather than later, while it is more affordable and not yet developed. However, because funds for this project were not included in the 2005 bond program, another source of funds for this acquisition would have to be found.

Agree with plan to involve community volunteers such as Austin parks has

Thank you for your support on this objective.

Agree with plan to interconnect trails with Pflugerville trails

Thank you for your support on this objective.

Agree that SH 130 is an opportunity to have greenspace/trails included while it is being developed

Thank you for your support on this issue.

Individuals, at least in my area, heavily utilize trails and parks systems

Thank you for validating the findings of the recreation preference study, particularly as it relates to your community.

Look at need for a lower SW Metro park

We agree with your observation, from the geographic distribution perspective of where the metro parks are sited in the county, that this area may need a metro park. We did try to find a site for our new SW Metro Park closer to this area when we first began our search but market forces prevented us from doing so, forcing us to move further west in our search for a suitable and affordable site. Although not in the lower southwest corner of the county, the new Milton Reimers Ranch Park has a strong enough regional draw so it does serve this area in an important way.

5. Jackie Chuter

I just completed reading the draft Travis County Parks and Open Space Plan. In general, I like the concept plans, and I think the plan has many good proposed projects. However, I think that the Capital Improvements Program does not reflect the great demand for walking trails that was revealed in the community input portion of the planning process. The CIP focuses on developing metro parks despite the fact that walking, jogging, and biking have proved to be more popular than team sports and have more latent demand and the fact that sports fields are expensive to maintain and use a lot of water resources. In summary, I think the priorities for the use of CIP funds should be shifted more toward acquisition of land and/or easements for greenways along creeks and the development of multi-use trails.

Hopefully we've answered your concern -- which is an important one -- in our Executive Summary. The summary was not completed for the draft that was circulated for public review but is now included in the plan and is available for your review at www.co.travis.tx.us.

In the Executive Summary we explain that this is a transition plan, i.e., it is plan a that bridges our commitment to completing the metro parks program (addressing recreational needs in the developing parts of the county) to starting a greenway and riparian corridor development program. Also, the 2005 Citizens Bond Committee -- who held a series of meetings and hearings to receive public input--set the CIP priorities that are described in phase 1 of this plan. When the Commissioners Court approved their recommendations for the 2005 bond program, that voters approved in the 2005 bond elections, the County became legally obligated to complete the CIP projects included in the bond program.

Although sports facilities are a major component of our metro parks (and are expensive to maintain), our metro parks include natural areas, too. We also selected sites on creeks in the eastern part of the county, and the Pedernales River in the western part, so they will be important destinations along our soon-to-be developed greenway and riparian corridor system.

Meetings

6. SW Growth Dialogue Work Group Travis County Executive Office Building Austin, TX 78767

**Karen Huber
Robert Kleeman
Joe Lessard,
Tom Martine
Mary Sanger**

How is the SW Growth Dialogue goal of preserving 6,000 acres of open space in southwest Travis County addressed in the plan?

Travis County has not included this specific objective in its plan but the acquisition of approximately 2400 acres of the Reimers Ranch and Hogge tract with 2005 bond funds represents a significant contribution toward accomplishing this goal.

The Conservation Development Ordinance references the Parks and Open Space Plan as a document identifying "...desirable areas or features for conservation within protected open space and establishing criteria for identifying, configuring and acquiring open space within Travis County". Does this plan provide this type of guidance?

The Land Acquisition Criteria in the Implementation section of the plan identify those features and resources valued by the County for conservation. The Master Plan Concept figure also shows specific areas of concern.

Why are wildlife corridors desired?

Wildlife corridors are desired because they are both a source of enjoyment for those who enjoy nature and provide the large range that predators require, thereby keeping the wildlife population in check.

Wildlife corridors may be or become habitat for problem species such as feral hogs or deer. The type of species habitat desired for the corridors needs to be specified.

The draft plan being reviewed by the public identifies migratory bird and endangered species habitat as desired habitat. The plan has been revised, however, to include habitat for other species such as the blue sucker in the Colorado River and eastern box turtles found mainly in eastern Travis County. Additional work in this area will be completed for the plan update required in two years.

It would be helpful if links to other sites providing relevant information were provided in the plan.

Some additional links have been provided in the plan. We'll continue to develop this aspect of the plan in the update we'll be completing in two years to satisfy TPWD requirements.

7. Public Meeting, Satellite One Office

**Joelynn Barclay
Jayne Best
Trek & Wally English
Corey Fields
Dave & Joann Gunlock
Minnie Ingram
Roger Lewis
Melanie McAffe
Nan McRaven
Vernagene Mott
Marcia Purvis
Joel Schopp
Ian Thomas**

Doesn't believe the statistic from the telephone survey that walking is the outdoor recreational activity in which 81% of the population participates.

The question asked in the telephone survey was "...I'm going to read a list of outdoor and indoor recreation activities, and I'd like to know if you or anyone in your household has participated in each one in the past year in the Austin area. The first group of activities will be outdoor recreation activities". So the 81% participation rate represents households, not individuals and does not take into consideration how often one participates in this activity. Frequency of participation is one follow-up question asked in the survey, and some of these results may found in "Appendix C: Highlights of 'A Recreation Study for City of Austin and Travis County, Texas'".

The City owns about 3,000 acres east of Blake Manor Road that has ponds and is very nice, but not being used. It is located north of Webberville, in the area shown as a spring protection zone. They were planning to turn this area into a landfill.

The City of Austin originally bought this land to site an incinerator. They decided, however, not to do this when it was determined that the impact on air quality negated the benefits derived from incinerating instead of land filling waste.

As both development and focus on environmental quality move east, the question of how this large tract will eventually be used gains greater attention.

Explain getting TPWD approval for the plan, and what exactly is the County's involvement with the guidelines.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) provides guidelines for what a "locally prepared master plan" must contain in order for them to approve it. Once approved by TPWD, points are awarded in the grant review process for having one, which makes a grant submission more competitive. Those components that must be included in a "locally prepared master plan" are demographic information, public input, inventory, needs assessment, and an implementation plan.

Besides making Travis County more competitive in the grant review, the County also believes in following "best planning practices" , and having an adopted plan to guide decision-making relative to its park and natural areas system.

It looks like the Northeast area of the County is under-represented in a number of acres of parkland. What's the County's response?

Travis County has identified Gilleland Creek in the northeastern region as a creek targeted for greenway development. Assuming that land may be acquired along this creek (considering market forces), the level of service (acres of parkland /1,000 residents) will be improved for northeast Travis County.

When the County plans the larger parks, they need to be sure that they look at the roadways and access to the parks. This is a major problem with NE Metro Park where a lot of people come from outside Pflugerville to use this park (which is good for the local economy) are generating heavy traffic. It appears that the focus has been on their needs, and not on the needs of the local community. Natural areas, walking trails and other types of facilities, such as the covered basketball court, are needed for local users. A lot of times our cities and municipalities put in playgrounds for the kids and swimming pools that are limited in either the age of the users or the season they're available to use. With the obesity problem in the US, especially with the children about 8 and 9 years of age, we need to make sure that they all have ample opportunities to recreate. Central Texas doesn't do a good job in this area, relying too much on kids getting physical activities at schools and recreation centers.

The issues of NE Metro Park traffic impacting Pecan Street and access to the park are important concerns that the 2005 bond improvements to Pecan Street may alleviate. With respect to local versus regional interests, the initial priority for the park was development of a regional soccer complex. Later phases of development, however, have focused on local interests. Phase 3 improvements, funded by the 2005 bond program, will be providing picnic facilities, playground, restrooms, and a skateboard park. We agree that children, as well as adults, should have ample opportunities to recreate for healthy living.

The County needs to also look at Wilbarger Creek, the sister creek next to Gilleland, as another resource in northeastern Travis County. Wilbarger Creek runs from Pflugerville, all the way to Manor. It would be good to preserve this creek bottom. The floodplain would also be a good place to have practice sports fields. They wouldn't need to be intensely developed.

We agree that Wilbarger Creek is an important resource for both environmental and recreational reasons, and have decided to target it for greenway development, and potential land acquisition.

There are not many environmental advocates in eastern Travis County to stand up for these types of concerns. SOS and other groups are very active in the western part of the county. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to comment.

SOS and other environmental groups have focused on southwestern Travis County, but as the speaker below stated, they supported land acquisition throughout the entire county during the 2005 public hearings. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is also spearheading "Green Printing", a study of the entire county's green space priorities, and is demonstrating great interest in advocating eastern Travis County's needs.

Developers are coming out to the eastern part of the County because it's very economical for them to put up houses here. The community wants sidewalks in the new subdivisions so children can walk, bike, and skateboard to and from schools.

We agree that bike/pedestrian access between homes, schools and other community centers is an important component of a healthy lifestyle, and will work to help accomplish this objective.

It needs to be clarified that SOS and other environmental groups with interests in western Travis County supported, in the 2005 Bond public hearings, buying land throughout Travis County for open space.

You're correct, and thank you for reminding us of this fact.

Walnut Creek is not mentioned in the plan. Why? It is an area that requires the City of Austin and County to cooperate in providing parks. There are not enough places that have room for families to have picnics and other activities in this part of town.

The City of Austin has been acquiring land along Walnut Creek for a major greenway system so the County has not focused on this area. However, there are portions of Walnut Creek that are in unincorporated Travis County so the County does need to address park concerns in this area. The County will discuss this with the COA Parks and Recreation Department to determine how the needs in this corridor may be addressed.

Conversations

8. Jim Walker, Director, Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project

Likes level of service data (acres of parkland/1,000 residents) showing how the planning areas differ from one other in this aspect. Could trend data be provided showing how the level of service has progressed in each planning area?

This analysis has been completed and added to the plan.

9. Ted Siff, Principal, Creating Common Ground, LLC

Likes plan. Recommends that performance standards be specified for our objectives relative to trails, parkland, and time frame: quantify objectives as much as possible by designating, for example, miles of trail to be developed, acres to be acquired for parkland and natural areas, and set these quantitative performance standards per year for the life of the plan.

We agree that performance standards are an important aspect of any plan, and will pursue accomplishing this in the update of this plan that needs to be completed every two years. Opportunities for public input and review will be part of the update process.