



To: City Manager, City Council Members, PARD, Relevant Boards and Commissions and Residents of Austin

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

Date: March 20, 2023

Re: REWILD ZILKER COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ZILKER PARK VISION PLAN

Purpose of this Document and Qualifications

This document provides feedback following the format used by the February 2023 Draft Zilker Metropolitan Park Vision Plan (Vision Plan). The pages in the tables correspond with those used in the Vision Plan. This set of recommendations comes from a team—comprised of scientists, landscape ecologists, sustainability professionals, real estate experts, lawyers, educators and other professionals—that has spent more than 600 person-hours over the past two years trying to participate in the process, conducting research, and analyzing the plan.

Document Organization

TABLE 1: The executive summary highlights the core differences in approach between the Draft Plan and the Rewild Zilker vision for a nature and park user focused park.

TABLE 2: Major plan elements of the draft plan (from Chapter 5) are listed along with Rewild Zilker’s alternative proposals.

APPENDIX A: Parking alternatives to expensive and environmentally questionable garages.

APPENDIX B: A map of suggested areas for rewilding and a description of the differences between rewilding and ecological uplift and why it matters.

TABLE 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VISION PLAN PROPOSAL February 2023 DRAFT	Page	REWILD ZILKER PROPOSAL
The Elements of the proposed plan add up to more than \$200M in expenditures that appear to primarily benefit commercial (both for profit and non-profit) interests in the park including up to \$60 M in parking garages.	M	Rewild Zilker advocates for a less expensive, greener approach that focuses on water protection, climate mitigation, transit and rewilding while supporting everyday park users’ recreation. A less expensive Zilker Park plan means more funding for the entire park system. Our goal is equitable park funding not driven by commercial interests.
The Vision Plan calls for the creation of permanent formal parking spaces (2,450) equivalent to the sum of both the formal and informal (i.e., illegal) parking spaces that presently exist in the park.	K	The assumption that informal parking should be replaced by formal parking is driving many of the most controversial and expensive features in the plan. This assumption should be rejected and replaced by less expensive, more climate friendly solutions that create approximately 1,300 surface parking spaces in the park with many additional spaces nearby in existing garages (see Appendix A for more parking details).
All land and riparian restoration is proposed as Ecological Uplift.	K	Enhance 75% of the “ecological uplift” in the Vision Plan by applying the principles of “rewilding” in order to achieve more robust natural habitats that are better for water protection, erosion prevention, climate mitigation, shade, wildlife, and people, and is one-half to one-sixth the cost.
“the Vision Plan recommends a nonprofit partner that can act as a liaison between the Department and the many active organizations and interested stakeholders in Zilker Park. The unified nonprofit partner could also raise funds to pay for project managers, tools and supplies, and recognition programs for volunteers”	M	Fund PARD to a level that allows them to operate and maintain the park. Transparency and accountability to the public will be restored and privatization / commercialization kept in check. An outside non-profit would tilt the balance towards major donors and their whims instead of the needs of everyday park people.

TABLE 2: MAJOR PLAN ELEMENTS AND ALTERNATIVES		
VISION PLAN PROPOSAL February 2023 DRAFT	Page	REWILD ZILKER ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL
NORTHERN AREA		
Parking Garage under Mopac	124, 188	Remove garage from the plan (saves \$20 million).
Stratford Road Realignment	124	Leave original Stratford alignment (saves \$10 million).
Ecological Uplift on Butler Landfill	124, 168	Rewild and phyto-remediate where possible.
CENTRAL AREA		
Land Bridge	130	Remove land bridge from the plan (saves \$20 -\$30 million). Replace with pedestrian bridge over Barton Springs or improved pedestrian crosswalk at Stratford and at numerous additional locations.
Underground Parking Garage	130	Remove underground parking garage from the plan (saves \$20 million) and protect critical watershed elements.
Move existing sports like baseball, volleyball etc. to Polo field	130	Leave sports area at present location.
Hillside Theater moved to land bridge	130, 188	Leave Hillside Theater at present location (save \$10 million). Add continued improvements at current location.
Barton Springs Road reduced to one lane each direction	130, 165	Retain present road width unless/ until alternative traffic patterns are studied, identified and consensus reached. Seek other methods to reduce traffic hazards for pedestrians and bikers, e.g., lowered speed limit, reduce to 3 lanes with reverse center lane during rush hour, more pedestrian crossings, etc.
Parallel parking on Barton Springs Rd	130, 165	Remove parallel parking on Barton Springs Road from the plan as impractical and unnecessary.
EASTERN AREA		
Picnic Area with concessions and restroom near Great Lawn	138	Retain restrooms and picnic area in the plan. Remove concession area as it competes with nearby local business.
Bike bridge over Barton Creek realigned with Toomey Rd	138	Remove bridge from plan. Improve trail connection near Toomey and provide signage for crossing Barton Creek over current ped bridge. Updated bridge at Barton Springs Road should be designed to safely handle ped/bike traffic.

Unanimously Supported by Zilker Neighborhood Association March 20, 2023

VISION PLAN PROPOSAL February 2023 DRAFT	Page	REWILD ZILKER ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL
Lou Neff Rd is closed to cars	138	Leave Lou Neff Rd open to retain parking and accessible / emergency access to Great Lawn but upgrade to support bike/ ped. Add wooden post + cable barriers to prevent grass parking.
New Bridge across Lady Bird Lake	138	Remove Lady Bird Lake bridge from the plan; expensive duplicate of existing pedestrian bridges over the river (saves \$5 million).
SOUTHERN AREA		
Welcome Center	143, 186	Reduce Welcome Center footprint (saves \$5 million) and excessive impervious cover proposed.
		Change road near Caretaker Cottage to improve traffic flow, if needed.
		Retain surface lots near rugby fields.
Parking Garage on Azie Morton	143	Remove parking garage from the plan (saves \$20 million).
		Retain (but standardize with clear, enforceable rules) surface parking spots off Azie Morton, except where needed to address erosion issues (near Dog Beach as example) or create room for a single play scape. Upgrade surface parking to green parking.
New bridge from Azie Morton Garage to Welcome Center	143	Remove bridge from the plan.
		Updated bridge at Barton Springs Road should be designed to safely handle ped/bike traffic.
Caretaker Cottage and Quonset Hut repurposed	143	Support for enhanced education venue.
Two play-scapes on Azie Morton	143	Remove one play-scape from the plan.
		Keep open access to the main play-scape during ACL
Barton Creek rehabilitation with controlled water access and erosion treatments	143, 173	Support erosion treatments via rewilding in combination with water access points from north and south banks.
WESTERN AREA		
Part of Columbus Drive becomes nature trail	149	Support.
Andrew Zilker Rd closed to cars	149	Support.
		Add green parking under Mopac at Rollingwood Drive.
		Add pedestrian bridge over Barton Springs Road at Rollingwood Drive for access to parking lot under Mopac.
Pedestrian Bridge upstream of pool	149	Support for a low-impact, low profile crossing consistent with historical features and environmental concerns.

VISION PLAN PROPOSAL February 2023 DRAFT	Page	REWILD ZILKER ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL
TRANSPORTATION		
External shuttles to Zilker Park	157	Support free shuttles to/ from the park from all quadrants of Austin. Increase frequency of Cap Metro #30 on weekends March - Sept. Investigate new approaches to use of nearby existing parking structures (e.g., Barton Oaks garages, Butler shores). Add access from Barton Oaks garages to park
Pedestrian / Bike Loops	163	Support.
Internal Circulator	149	Support.
ECOLOGY		
West Butler Landfill to a woodland	168	Support w/ rewilding/ phytoremediation.
Drainage Enhancement	169	Support.
Remediate Pistol Range	169	Support via rewilding.
Tree Canopy Enhancement	171	Support via rewilding.
Barton Creek Shoreline Restoration	173	Support via rewilding in combination with water access points.

APPENDIX A

ALTERNATIVES TO EXPENSIVE GARAGES

The Draft Vision plan was created based on the assumption that sufficient access to the park necessitated replacing all **temporary informal** parking **in the park** with **permanent formal** parking **in the park**, and that parking garages were the only way to reduce impervious cover.

This is a false choice and is driving some of the most controversial and expensive features in the plan.

REWILD ZILKER proposes a significant redesign of the parking component that will:

1. Create approximately 1,300 formal, clearly marked and routinely enforced “green” surface parking spaces including under MOPAC. These spaces should be free and reservations should be available (see #7 below.)
2. Prioritize parking for special needs, elderly and families w/ children
3. Remove parking on the Polo Fields and Butler Landfill and implement active parking enforcement.
4. Remove parallel parking from Barton Springs Road. Consider additional parallel parking on internal roads.
5. Maximize the use of Route 30 and other bus routes on weekends and during the summer.
6. Support free transit/park circulator ideas; add free dog friendly, family friendly, local business friendly shuttle on weekends/ during the summer from all 4 quadrants of City, marketed similar to transit to Austin FC soccer games. Support large scale upgrade of additional free lockers and bike racks in the park.
7. Increase the use of off-site parking and support private-sector online/ app based reservation models for use of nearby private garages and for spaces in the park where appropriate.

The advantages of this approach are that it:

1. Pulls current parking away from riparian zones (and adds no new parking in these areas).
2. Uses green parking techniques for any new lots, and where possible, redo of current lots.
3. Seeks consistency with ped/biking community recommendations as much as possible.
4. Formalizes and enforces all parking on South Side, pulls lots back from Little Zilker Creek.
5. Adds any new parking to periphery and under MOPAC to maintain interior green-space, habitat, trails, pedestrian and biking safety.

APPENDIX B

UNDERSTANDING REWILDING VS ECOLOGICAL UPLIFT

Rewilding is a nature-led process that relies on passive and adaptive management to regenerate natural systems for people and wildlife. In the context of Zilker Park, the process is more specifically called 'Urban Rewilding' since it will enhance park user needs and accommodate infrastructure. The map (below) lays out our specific recommendations.

Ecological Uplift is an umbrella term that, in this plan, encompasses significant landscaping and active management. Ecological uplift is typically 2-6 times more expensive than rewilding and often requires supplemental irrigation and more intensive, long-term, continuous management.

