

# Austin Parks & Recreation Department Community PARKnerships Program | FY21 Year in Review



The Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARD) Community PARKnerships program coordinates the efforts of partners and volunteers. By leveraging resources and talent, we can enhance Austin's parks and help grow a sense of community and stewardship.

The PARD Community PARKnerships initiative encompasses the following programs:

- [PARD PARKners](#)
- [Community Activated Park Projects](#)
- [Adopt-A-Park](#)
- [Parkland Stewardship](#)
- [Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#)

## **PARD PARKners**

At PARD, we are committed to partnerships that align with our overall mission, vision, values, and provide benefit to the public and the Austin parks system. We actively seek partnerships with non-profit organizations, conservancies and businesses for park development, maintenance, operations, and programming.

In FY21, PARD, in collaboration with over 48 nonprofit partners and community groups, leveraged over 14 million dollars in private funds to go towards improvements and maintenance of parkland.

### **PARD PARKners Program | Accomplishments:**

- Developed organizational levels for PARD Partnerships that are transparent, equitable and supportive of the Department's mission and goals. The partnership levels provide a consistent guidebook and formal process for entering into partnership agreements with the Department.
- Revised the Department's Partnership Policy and Operating Procedures to reflect partnership levels A, B, C, D and the subsequent processes and procedures.
- Developed the *PARD PARKnership Naming and Recognition Guidelines*.

- City Council approved the negotiation and execution of a Programming, Operations, and Maintenance Agreement (Partnership Level A) with Pease Park Conservancy for Kingsbury Commons at Pease District Park.
- Reinstated the PARD PARKners Quarterly networking meetings.
- Collaborated with twenty-three non-profit organizations.

## **Community Activated Park Projects Program**



Falling under the PARD Community PARKnerships umbrella program, the [Community Activated Park Project \(CAPP\)](#) program provides a pathway for neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners to leverage resources and plan and implement park improvements projects that are in alignment with PARD goals and meet community priorities. The CAPP program streamlines the proposal and implementation process for our nonprofit partners and community member's seeking to initiate, engage, plan, design and implement improvements on parkland.

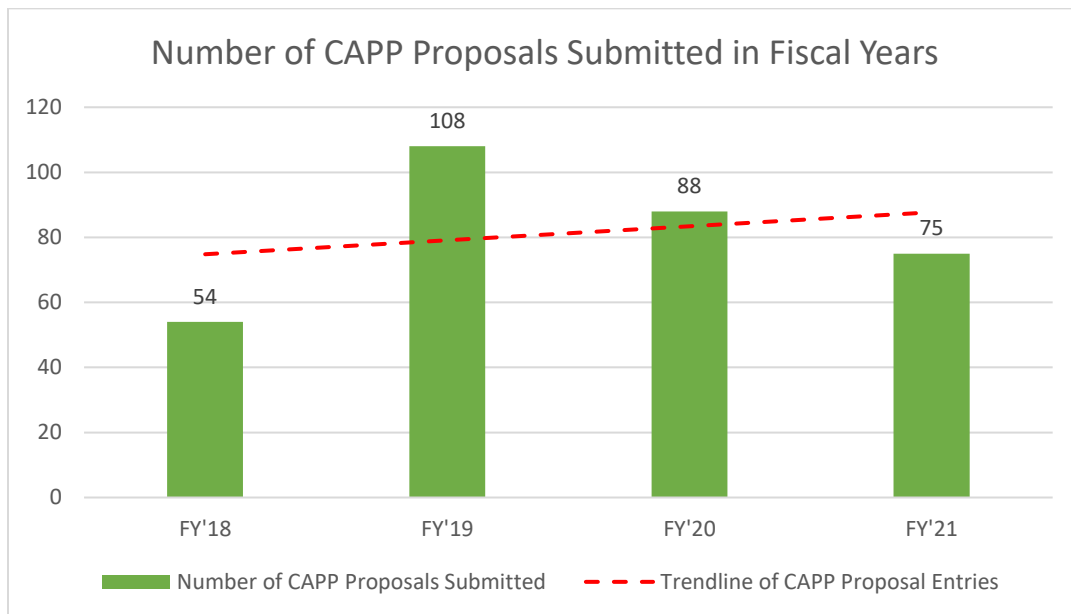


## CAPP Program Overview | Proposals Received

- **FY'18:** 54 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2017- September 30, 2018)
- **FY'19:** 108 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2018- September 30, 2019)
- **FY'20:** 88 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2019- September 30, 2020)
- **FY'21: 75 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2020- September 30, 2021)**
- 322 CAPP proposals received to date (total received since the program started in 2018)
- 125 CAPP proposals received since City modified telework operations due to COVID-19 health concerns (established March 15, 2020)

Percent growth over past year:

- **FY'18 - FY'19:** +100%, in other words, CAPP submissions doubled in FY'19 compared to FY'18
- **FY'19 - FY'20:** -18.5%, in other words, CAPP submissions decreased by nearly 1/5<sup>th</sup> (18.5%) in FY'20 compared to FY'19
- **FY'20 - FY'21:** -14.8%, in other words, CAPP submissions decreased by nearly 3/20<sup>th</sup> (14.7%) in FY'21 compared to FY'20
- Graph below displays:
  - Amount of CAPPs submitted in each FY (green bar)
  - Rate of change (aka trendline) from the start of the CAPP program to the end of FY'21 (red dashed line)
    - The trendline displays a positive rate of change aka CAPP proposals are increasing from the start of the program.



PARD has collaborated with 47 different neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners (23 non-profit groups and 24 Adopt-a-Park/Friend groups/Park Stakeholders).

In FY'21, PARD has collaborated with 60 different neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners.

**FY21 - Non-profit and community partner groups: 23**

- Austin FC/4 ATX
- Austin Parks Foundation
- Bureau of Economic Geology
- Circle C Citizen Science
- Cities Connecting Children to Nature
- East Austin Conservancy
- Earth Native Wilderness School
- Ecology Action of Texas
- Festival Beach Food Forest
- EcoRise
- Equidad ATX
- Gensler
- Go Austin/Vamos Austin
- Keep Walnut Creek Wild
- MathHappens
- Muny Conservancy
- Pease Park Conservancy
- Red, White and Blues 512
- Shoal Creek Conservancy
- South River City Citizens
- Studio Metric
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- The Trail Foundation
- TreeFolks
- U.S. Soccer Foundation

## **FY21 - Adopt-a-Park/Friend groups/Park Stakeholder groups: 24**

- Agave Neighborhood Association
- Cunningham School Park Adopters
- Friends of Armadillo Park
- Friends of Copperfield Nature Trails
- Friends of Dellana Lane
- Friends of Mayfield
- Friends of Sanchez Green School Park
- Friends of Wooldridge Square
- Galindo Elementary Neighborhood Association
- Gullett Parent Teacher Association
- Greater Austin Pickleball
- Hancock Neighborhood Association
- Homewood Heights Community Garden
- Johnson Creek Trail Project Team
- Lamplight Community Garden
- Montopolis Community Development Corporation
- North Lamar/Georgian Acres Neighborhood Team
- North Oaks Community Garden Planning Committee
- Onion Creek Park Adopters
- Ridge Oak Triangle Adopters
- Springdale-Airport Neighborhood Association
- St. Elmo Elementary Park Adopters
- Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

In a broad scope, CAPP projects are predominantly in the form of ecological remediation, education, enhancement installations, or infrastructure development. A common example of ecological projects are tree plantings for several uses such as increased shade, soil runoff remediation, and aesthetics. Alternatively, infrastructure projects are often in the form of short-term enhancements to increase sense of safety, education/interpretive signage, additional seating, nature play amenities, and court enhancements.

- **Number of ecological projects in progress, approved, or completed: 27**
- **Number of infrastructure projects in progress, approved, or completed: 44**
- **Number of projects approved, completed, in progress:**
  - Approved (all CAPPs that are post-site visit and/or pre-completion): 35
  - In progress (all CAPPs that are "under review", including site visits): 30
  - Not Feasible: 8

## **PARKner Projects**

### **The Trail Foundation | Boardwalk Benches**

The second phase of The Trail Foundation's Boardwalk Bench Program features ten new benches installed in Fall 2021. These benches provide spaces for rest, contemplation and remembrance along the 1.2-mile boardwalk on the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike trail. There are two bench designs, one backed and one backless with bicycle racks, fabricated from reclaimed cypress wood from the devastating 2015 Memorial Day Flood in Wimberley, TX. This project is in partnership with PARD and Urban Trails | PW.



### **The Trail Foundation | territories.**

The Trail Foundation proposed the temporary relocation of the Fortlandia installation “territories.” from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to Lakeshore on the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike trail. The concept behind “territories.” is derived from the game “pickup sticks.” The fort establishes a series of shelters, or territories, which can be continually redefined by its occupants. The layered materials that comprise the installation are meant to expose infinite ways to tunnel, crawl, claim, and discover space.



## **Bureau of Economic Geology at UT Austin | Mt. Bonnell Interpretive Signage**



The Bureau of Economic Geology at UT Austin proposed and funded the installation of interpretive signage at Mt. Bonnell as part of the Texas GeoSign Project, a network of geologic information signs designed to enhance public understanding of the geoheritage and natural resources of the state.

Completed in Summer 2021, the signage illustrates the geological processes that shaped Mt. Bonnell over millions of years.

## **Austin FC | Wooldridge School Park Mini-pitch**

In partnership with PARD and Austin Independent School District (AISD), Austin FC, 4ATX and U.S. Soccer Foundation installed a soccer mini-pitch and lighting at Wooldridge School Park. The soccer mini-pitch replaced one of the underutilized tennis courts at the site. Austin FC continues to partner with the community by offering free programming at the site.



## **Austin Ed Fund & Highland Neighborhood Association | Reilly School Park Social Emotional Learning Garden**

St. David's Foundation awarded the Austin Ed Fund \$130,320 in January 2020 to create a comprehensive Social Emotional Learning (SEL) garden on joint use City of Austin/Austin ISD property at Reilly Elementary School. The project was a collaboration with the Parks & Recreation Dept, Highland Neighborhood Association, Reilly Elementary School, Austin ISD, Austin Parks Foundation, and the Austin Ed Fund. The garden will be a sustainable, meditative space and wildlife habitat that encourages healthy self-esteem, curiosity, cooperation and mental well-being through gardening and gardening programs. Constructed on a joint-use site between Austin ISD and the City of Austin, the gardens will be accessible to students during school hours and to the community outside of school hours.



## **Austin Parks Foundation | Little Walnut Creek Greenbelt Trailhead**

In 2018, Walnut Creek Greenbelt went through a significant community-led vision planning process with the final plan approved in early 2019. Through that process, priority projects were identified, with trails and play space being high on the list of community-desired amenities. Austin Parks Foundation (APF) partnered with PARD, with funding support by St. David's Foundation, to develop a trailhead on Springdale Road to provide community access and make trail improvements.



## Pease Park Conservancy | Kingsbury Commons at Pease District Park

The revitalization project at Kingsbury Commons within Pease District Park was completed and opened to the public this past summer. The Kingsbury Commons Project, led by Pease Park Conservancy, is the first of the capital improvement projects laid out in the [Pease Park Vision Plan](#), unanimously approved by the Austin City Council in 2014. Kingsbury Commons is the southernmost 7 acres of the park where most of the infrastructure of the park, including restrooms and playground



equipment, has existed. New amenities include state-of-the-art play equipment, increased plantings, improved restrooms, a new basketball court, and a one-of-a-kind water play feature. Additional improvements include the restoration of historical features, such as the Tudor Cottage and the New Deal era picnic tables. The project was awarded Gold under the Sustainable SITES Initiative, the first park within the Austin Park system. Pease Park Conservancy is partnering with the

Department on a partnership agreement to program, operate and maintain the site. The project was awarded Gold under the Sustainable SITES Initiative, the first development within the Austin park system to achieve this recognition.



## Adopt-A-Park Program

# ADOPT - A - PARK



The success of our parks system depends on the support, assistance, advocacy, and enthusiasm of the public as stewards of their parks. The Adopt-A-Park Program assists park stewards through a collaborative partnership between PARD and Austin Parks Foundation (APF). The goal of this program is to build community pride and ownership around every neighborhood park in Austin.

An annual audit was performed in the first quarter of PARD FY21, starting the year off with **100 adopted parks (district, neighborhood, and pocket parks), 25 park stewards (metro parks, greenbelts, and preserves) and 53 unadopted.**

- In FY21, the Adopt-a-Park program grew from **100 groups to 111 groups**, an **11 % increase in growth from the previous year.**
- The park stewards grew from **25 groups to 29 groups**, a **16% increase in growth from the previous year.**
- Adopted school parks increased from **13 groups to 17 groups**, a **30% increase in growth from the previous year.**

## Stewardship

In FY21 PARD leveraged thousands of volunteers to assist in the maintenance and operations of our parks and recreation system. This included a three-month halt of all volunteerism due to ongoing issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

FY21:

- Total Volunteers: **8,515**
- Hours Contributed: **24,065.08**
- Trees Planted: **3,502**
- Pounds of Trash Collected: **12,612.09**



## **Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN)**

CCCN seeks to create more equitable and abundant access to nature for children throughout Austin. FY21 achievements include:

- Story map created for the initiative, highlighting each of the five CCCN strategies (Green School Parks, Nature Play, OLE! Austin, Youth Leadership & Nature Smart Libraries), the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBOR), and research efforts
- 108 new COBOR signature numbers received, bringing the total to 1544
- Leveraged \$217,826 in funding for CCCN efforts

### **Green School Parks**

Vision: Create a network of school parks that provide schools and the surrounding community the opportunity to learn from, steward, and play in nature.

- Two map tools were created: one showing all Green School Park locations and the other showing nearby walkable nature spaces for AISD campuses as a COVID-19 response effort.
- Outdoor classrooms were installed at six joint use campuses (Pickle, Odom, Cook, Andrews, Pecan Springs and Oak Springs Elementary Schools) in partnership with APF and AISD as a COVID-19 response effort.
- Based on community engagement conducted for Sanchez Green School Park a preliminary design was created.
- A Green Administrator Cohort was developed in partnership with EcoRise and AISD to support green campus initiatives. This 19-campus cohort is providing networking opportunities, guidance and support in what it means to be a supportive administrator leading a green school.
- We have completed year two of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) grant, which has been granted a one-year, no-cost extension to be a three-year grant. New conclusions include:
  - The COVID-19 pandemic was associated with a 46% and 62% decrease in the number of girls and boys at joint-use parks
  - During the COVID-19 pandemic, 60.6% of girls and 73.6% of boys were not social distancing, and 91.8% of the time no children wore masks
  - Interventions should be considered to safely reintroduce children to parks for health benefits during pandemics.
- Leveraged \$18,000 in funding towards Green School Park efforts

## Nature Play

Vision: Activate greenspaces through nature play programming and installation of nature play spaces across the city.



- PARD's first official Nature Play Space opened at Walnut Creek Metro Park and include the iconic Fairy Pavilion structure, re-homed from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's Fortlandia exhibit, as its signature feature. Site activation is taking place with partner Earth Native Wilderness School hosting four free public nature programming events on Sept 11, Oct 31, Nov 18 and Dec 28. Long-term maintenance and management planning for the site is underway with the creation of a maintenance checklist, wood degradation tracking list, and loose parts nature play inventory. This nature play expansion and programming is supported by a Parks with Purpose grant from the St. David's Foundation.
- A procurement process was developed between City staff and partners for securing and storing large logs and tree pieces for nature play installations and programming.
- Nature Play Guidelines were created to assist the City and its Partners in the design, installation, maintenance, and management of nature play spaces.
- A final design was developed for the MLK Station nature play space based on community engagement efforts.
- A map was created to display all existing, planned, and temporary nature play spaces.
- Leveraged \$79,826 in funding towards Nature Play efforts.

## OLE! (Outdoor Learning Environments) Austin

Vision: Improve outdoor spaces at childcare centers to enable zero-to-five-year-olds to be active, learn in nature, and develop motor skills.



- Austin Public Health Bergstrom-Tech childcare center was designed to meet OLE! principles.
- A map was created to display all existing and planned OLE! Austin sites.
- Research was conducted by a University of Texas undergraduate student on the effectiveness of Growing Up WILD workshops.
- Created a child friendly native plants of Texas flyer that details what qualifies a plant to be a child friendly plant, shows photos of some common examples, and provides a chart with names and sensory qualities of each common plant found in Texas.
- Leveraged \$15,000 in funding towards OLE! Austin efforts.

## Youth Leadership

Vision: Collaborating to build an Austin in which young people can easily access careers in outdoors, nature, and the environment, are fairly compensated for their contributions, and that the field, and leadership within, represents the communities we serve.

- Newest tri-chair member is a youth
- Continued co-facilitation of meetings with youth
- Youth members were accepted to present at the Texas Children in Nature Summit in Fort Worth. They will be creating a youth driven presentation & supporting as many youth as possible to attend & present at the event.
- Awarded \$10,000 through Children & Nature Network as a part of the Youth Development Cohort; most of the funding will go towards compensating youth to participate in monthly meetings, events & other opportunities.

### Nature Smart Libraries

Vision: Foster connections to nature through stories, experiences, and resources to promote curiosity and environmental literacy.

- Completed Natureness Intersectionality Inventory across the System to identify nature-readiness and needs to support nature-based programming.
- Used demographic data and community assessments to identify priority neighborhoods in which to focus initial Nature Smart Library efforts.
- Introduced nature-based programming content for youth.
- Implemented Seed Library Program across the System.
- Piloted Story Walks installation at select libraries.
- Leveraged \$95,000 in funding towards Nature Smart Libraries efforts.