

Barton Hills News

BARTON HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

About That Plan to “Pave” 7 Acres of Zilker Park How a Bad Plan Turned Into a Great Opportunity

By Mark Gentle, BHNA President

On Thursday, June 28th, the City Council adopted a Resolution directing the City Manager to do the following:

1. Form a Working Group that specifically includes members of the Environmental and Parks Commissions, City Staff from several departments, and surrounding neighborhood leaders to undertake a study of several pressing issues relating to the operation of and access to Zilker Park;
2. Identify funding for a Zilker Park Master Plan;
3. Begin immediate implementation of transportation and parking improvements, including shuttle services, as identified by the Working Group; and,
4. Conduct a detailed traffic study of Zilker Park with the involvement of the Working Group.

This Resolution was sponsored by Council Member Ann Kitchen and reflects many of the concerns and recommendations expressed by Barton Hills Neighborhood Association, Zilker Neighborhood Association and the Environmental Commission relating to the multiple flaws found in the proposal of City Staff to place large crushed stone over nearly 7 acres of Zilker Park near MoPac.



Zilker Park Landfill, Photo courtesy of Jay Janner, Austin American Statesman

It is difficult to comprehend, but Zilker Park, the destination park in Austin that has become internationally known, does not have a Master Plan. Roughly translated, this means that it is operated largely as the City Staff sees fit. Totally inappropriate, and this latest “paving” project, stopped by the Environmental Commission as a practical matter, is a classic example of why there needs to be a real plan established for the long term.

The first public announcement of the “paving” plan was made in the Austin American Statesman in late April of this year. Basically a fluff piece, the headline of that article was “Zilker Park to get up to \$2 million from ACL Fest promoter for upgrade.”

Wow. Great news. The details of the plan were presented before the Parks and Recreation Board on May 22, 2018, at which time the City Staff was referring to the plan as the “Stratford Drive Redevelopment Project.” Really? Hiding your cards in poker is fine, but not so much in a legally required public notice of an agenda item before the Parks Board.

Turns out that the preliminary site plan shown to the Parks Board called for nearly 7 acres of Zilker Park to be covered with 6 inches of the kind of rock they use to build railroad tracks. This is ballast rock, used to hold very heavy loads. This plan sounded preposterous, even outrageous. Clearly, this was intended to be a permanent staging area for the use of special event trailers, big trucks and heavy machinery. The Parks Board asked some good questions and sent it to the Environmental Commission for a recommendation.



NEXT MEETING

JULY 24, 2018

• 6-9pm •

Please join us at
St. Mark's Church

(Corner of Barton Hills Dr. & Barton Skyway)

AGENDA:

- BHNA Committee reports
- Austin Classical Guitar
- Austin Police Department
- KXAN reporter re TxDOT dumping in watershed

Dinner 6pm

Torchy's Tacos \$10

**Neighborhood Meeting
7-9pm**

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Barton Hills News

The Barton Hills Neighborhood Association newsletter is published quarterly and supported by sponsorships. It's distributed to homes in the Barton Hills neighborhood of Austin, Texas. For more about membership and neighborhood affairs, contact the appropriate person below.

2018 Executive Committee

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Paving Zilker Park *continued from front cover*

At the Parks Board, the City's Project Manager said the goal was for rutting and dust control, reducing costs of maintenance and allowing the site to be used regardless of weather - because without the rock it would either be a mud hole or a dust bowl. But Staff and its consulting engineer could not get on the same page about the ultimate purpose; the consultant said it is for a staging area, but the Staff insisted it was to create 700 overflow parking spots.

But at the end of the Staff presentation, the Acting Parks Director told the Parks Board that if Staff got thumbs up from the Environmental Commission, Staff would start the project without coming back to the Parks Board for any kind of permission or recommendation, and that being privately funded, no City Council Action was required or sought for the project. Ok, pause the story right here, this is what happens without a Master Plan. Staff will make these big decisions, and private money is all they need.

Using a public information request, I found out that the plans for revising this area of Zilker Park started many years ago, and a detailed report was presented by the city's "consultant" Atkins Engineering back in May of 2016. The report outlined 3 different options for parking and a separate area for trucks and equipment. This report even highlighted that Barton Hills Neighborhood would be an interested party in this plan. But City Staff never got our input, never even mentioned the Atkins options to the Parks Board. The plan presented by Staff bears no resemblance to the options created by its consulting engineer. What happened? It remains a mystery.

Based on the details of the plan presented at the Parks Board, I conferred with the other members of our Barton Hills Neighborhood Association Executive Committee and we determined that we should ask the City Manager to halt the project pending further study, and asked Zilker Neighborhood Association to join us in this request, and Zilker joined in that request. We got a carefully worded rejection letter from a staffer of the City Manager. Disappointing to say the least.

On June 6th, the Environmental Commission (EC) met to review the plan, and it got messy in a hurry. The City Staff had modified its pitch, stating that the project was temporary, that they got a lot of input from various groups, and that the basic goals of the project included solving an environmental problem caused by damage to the landfill cap. Staff focused on the concept that the project would allow the Zilker Polo Fields to be repurposed, away from being a parking lot. The EC basically said not so fast, and set up a second meeting for June 22nd.

The Environmental Commissioners, including our neighbor Mary Ann Neely, asked razor sharp questions and made similarly sharp comments about the project, including the recitation of environmental guidelines that recommend against placing this type of rock over a clay-capped landfill, and asking why the Parks Department would continue to allow heavy machinery and equipment to be placed on that landfill cap given the risk of further damage. And, importantly, the EC Chair fully understood that many elements of the plan were in fact permanent. After the June 6th EC meeting, it was pretty clear that the project was not going to get a favorable recommendation out of that Commission because there were no good answers to their questions.

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And so it was not all that surprising when on June 22nd the EC recommended against the project by a unanimous vote. But their action, and that of Council Member Kitchen in formalizing the concerns and expediting action by the City Manager, reflect their commitment to protecting the natural environment and are greatly appreciated. These public officials set the groundwork for community involvement in the very important process of study and planning to help protect Zilker Park and Barton Springs for the future, without a massive 7 acre stone staging area that could never be used for parking by persons with any kind of mobility limitation, young or old.

The EC's final Motion of record and the City Council's Resolution are posted on the BHNA website for your review.

The Barton Hills Neighborhood Association will be on the appointed Zilker Park Working Group and we will be working with our members to get feedback, identify issues and solutions, and work hard to find common ground with all other interested parties to preserve and protect our most precious park resources and our quality of life, in accordance with the purposes established in our Association's By-Laws.

Respectfully,

Mark Gentle



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2018 Barton Hills 4th

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Austin Original, Global Impact: Austin Classical Guitar *By Kerry Price*

Classical Guitar has been an important part of my world for decades. It has woven in and out of the fabric of my life, beginning with my college years as a close companion and then through starting my family and building my career. In recent years I discovered Austin Classical Guitar, a nonprofit organization started in 1990. ACG hosts amazing concerts of all types and sizes, but their main service has been to build nearly 60 Central Texas education programs, including one at Austin High School. Their classes reach thousands of diverse kids each year.

I'm proud to report that I joined the ACG board this year, and I'm excited to share a little bit about the organization with my Barton Hills community. ACG is the largest arts organization of its kind in the U.S. With six major concert series annually, free performances in local schools and libraries, community ensembles for youth and adults, innovative social service programs offered in shelters and hospitals, as well as the education programming I mentioned above, ACG reaches people throughout the city, across the country, and increasingly, around the world.

ACG believes that music makes people's lives better. We believe music is one of the oldest, wisest, and most patient teachers, and a universal means of expression for humankind. These beliefs are reinforced whenever we bring music to places like a juvenile detention center, a community clinic, or the county jail. Time and time again, we witness firsthand the unique power of music to be welcoming and open to all people, instilling a sense of belonging and connection.

So I'd like to invite my friends and neighbors to join me for ACG's next major event: **dream**.



dream is our follow-up to last summer's production called **i/we**, which just won the Austin Critics Table Award for Best Original Composition. **i/we** was a compassion project that explored themes of home, struggle, commonality, and perseverance through interviews with refugees settling in Central Texas.

For **dream**, the ACG artistic team will create a multimedia arts experience based on interviews with diverse young people from the Austin community. We're asking them to tell us about their hopes and dreams, fears and perspectives on the world they will inherit, and we're surrounding their words with original

music and images. The production will include voice, violin, cello, percussion, and guitar, and the work will premiere alongside original art and projections.

dream will take place on August 3rd, 4th, and 5th at the Blanton Museum Auditorium on the UT campus.

We would like to invite members of the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association to join us for **dream** and enjoy a 25% discount. Call ACG at 512-300-2247 and mention you are with BHNA or visit us online at austinclassicalguitar.org/dream and use the coupon code bhna. I would love to share this moving evening of music and art with my fellow BHNA members as a welcome to this wonderful Austin organization working to make our community better through music.



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Barton Hills Community Park Update *By Melanie Gantt*

Over the last several years, there has been a transformation taking place at the Barton Hills Community Park, including playground and track improvements, the fabulous mural, limestone block amphitheater hillside seating, and improved erosion control and run-off drainage. But there is more to come!

The park continues to benefit from over \$320,000 in City of Austin Park Land Dedication (PLD) funds from two separate South Lamar projects. We also received three Austin Parks Foundation (APF) grants and a Neighborhood Partnering grant, and Council Member Ann Kitchen was instrumental in securing a portion of the 1/4 cent funds for the sidewalk around the school. Neighbors also hosted a very successful community fundraiser in March 2013. Led by Barton Hills resident and BHE parent Tina Donahoo, that event raised around \$30,000 and established our ability to provide matching funds for those APF grants. We have leveraged parents and neighbors' sweat equity at times as our in-kind contribution to grants, and have benefitted greatly from AISD material contributions and maintenance commitments to the park.

In our last update we detailed the construction of the beautiful new stair entryway from Barton Hills Drive into the park, up a slope previously the site of an ankle-turning rockslide. This project was completed in the Spring, and provides a beautiful and friendly park entrance.

We need to raise funds for planting gardens around the stairs, as well as the rain garden that is prepped on the slope below the school's music room. The school PTA recently generously approved \$2,500 toward those plantings, and community neighbors have contributed over \$9,000 so far. We need more contributions to our Barton Hills Community Park 501(c)(3) account under the Austin Parks Foundation. We have projected a cost of \$51,000 to establish durable, low maintenance native plants in these areas (\$42,000 for the park entrance gardens and \$9,000 for the rain garden), so we need your support.

If you would like to make a donation, our fund account can be found online at: <https://www.austinparks.org/sfaform/support-barton-hills-community-park/> or you can send a check to the Austin Parks Foundation, 1023 Springdale Rd #4B, Austin, TX 78721. Be sure to write Barton Hills Community Park in the memo line.

This beautiful rendering, provided by Stefan Pharis of Pharis Design, who has contributed so much fine work to the park, shows how the proposed plant design will adorn the park entrance, making it a showcase along Barton Hills Drive.

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This summer the final big project from our original master plan is the one that was the number one big dream from the beginning of this entire re-design of the park. Work is beginning to realign the track and establish a large multipurpose field on the upper park. Here, neighbors will be able to gather for pick-up ball games and fun family and neighbor activities. The idea of a maintained grass field is possible because of the remaining Parkland Dedication funds and the generous agreement from AISD to maintain the grounds.

And there is more to come! In addition to the previously mentioned rain garden plantings for the hillside below the school music room and plantings for the planters by the stairs, we would like to eventually replace and enhance the exercise equipment on the west side of the park and install nice fencing around the perimeter of the park to replace the current chain link.

Please consider a financial donation to these future efforts. Our current PLD funds will be depleted with the multipurpose field, and we still have more to do to fulfill the master plan vision. If you would like to volunteer for this project, Roy Smithers, chair of the Friends of Barton Hills Park committee would be happy to talk to you. Reach Roy at rorsmith@yahoo.com. And thank you to our neighbors for your past and continued support.

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Greenbelt Guardians *By Stan Ostrum*

We held our last big workday on March 3rd, the Austin Parks Foundation's It's My Park Day - Spring event. 63 neighborhood and community volunteers put in a total of 185 hours of labor at the Homedale entrance. Major accomplishments included the removal of lots of invasive nandina and ligustrum, some runoff management and trail repairs, and the usual trimming, weeding, graffiti removal, and trash pickup in the area. I didn't take a single photo that day, so if anyone has any pictures to share, please send them to stan@greenbeltguardians.org and we'll put them up on our website.

In April, our leadership team finally got together when we weren't working to celebrate the 15th anniversary of our first workday back in 2003. We usually end up hot, tired, dirty, and hungry when we see each other, so it was nice to just hang out, relax, eat, drink, and enjoy each other's company for a change.

On June 2nd, National Trails Day, 5 of us spent a hot and humid morning working at the Gus Fruh access. We got an amazing amount done including building a new set of rock steps to connect the Gus Fruh access trail to the Violet Crown/ main greenbelt trail on the far side of the creek bed, and closing off the dirt/mud hillside next to it that was previously being used. We moved a lot of flood debris, gravel, rock, and brush that day, and it really looks good and works well. Please get down there and check it out when you have a chance. Many thanks to Rosalie Russell, Mark Stachew, Nathan Wilkins, and Mark Salinas with Parks and Rec - you guys rock!



National Trails Day at Gus Fruh

We plan to lay low again this summer during the worst of the heat, but hope to organize another mini-workday or two at Gus Fruh to build a few more steps on this side of the creek with some more of the donated stone that we have stockpiled.

Our next major workday will be on Saturday September 29th, National Public Lands Day. Then on Saturday November 3rd, we'll do another big project for It's My Park Day - Fall. Stay tuned for upcoming information on locations, times, and sign up.

Visit our website at www.greenbeltguardians.org for more information or to sign up for our mailing list.



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<http://www.roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest>.



photo courtesy of klobfm.com

Crime Statistics

- 1 AGGRAVATED KIDNAPPING
- 1 ASSAULT WITH INJURY
- 3 AUTO THEFT
- 1 BURGLARY OF NON RESIDENCE
- 1 BURGLARY OF RESIDENCE
- 3 BURGLARY OF VEHICLE
- 2 CRIMINAL MISCHIEF
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Once you're a BHNA member, you can join the Barton Hills listserv.
Visit groups.yahoo.com/group/barton_hills/ for more information about how to sign up.

2018 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Fill out this form to join or renew your membership in the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association. Annual dues are \$10 per household, payable when you join (for a new membership) or every January (for renewal).

Your Name: _____

Other 18+ members of your household: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please send this form along with your annual dues to:

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