HEALTHY PARKS PLAN
FOR TRAVIS, BASTROP & CALDWELL COUNTIES

St. David's Foundation
TBG
Sakura Robinson
The Trust for Public Land
Agenda

- Introduction to the Healthy Parks Plan
- Community Engagement Results
- GIS Mapping Results
- Decision-Support Tool Demonstration
- Healthy Parks Plan Design Guidelines
- Questions and Discussion
Background

- The Trust for Public Land
- Asakura Robinson
- TBG Partners
- Spring 2018-Spring 2019
OUR MISSION

The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.
How we do it

WE PLAN

WE FUND

WE PROTECT

WE CREATE

Balboa Park
THE TRUST OF PUBLIC LAND
CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE
Increasing access to parks can benefit all residents

• **Providing opportunities for physical activity**—one of the most important ways people can improve their health

• Creating welcoming green spaces where residents can relax and spend time outdoors, **reducing stress and risk of chronic disease** and increasing overall well-being

• Increasing **social connections** and community cohesion—combatting the serious health impacts of social isolation and loneliness

• Improving **local air and water quality** and mitigating climate impacts, such as **flooding** and **rising temperatures**
Objectives

• Identify the park investments that will maximize community health and equity
• Engage local community members in identifying park priorities and obstacles to using parks for physical activity
• Empower community groups to be active stewards of local parks and encourage health-focused park programming
• Develop a web-based decision-support tool that combines park and health data with community perspectives to help local partners identify opportunities for community investment
• Raise awareness about the connections between park access, equity, and community health
Methods

• Geographic Information Systems
• Community Engagement
  – 2,000+ community members engaged
  – Both local experts and community members
• Research
  – Healthy Parks Design Guidelines
  – Science-backed recommendations on how to make parks healthier
• Design
  – 3 Conceptual park designs
  – Used GIS results to locate high need areas
  – Used design guidelines and community engagement to inform design
Deliverables

• Decision-Support Tool
  – GIS analysis results and input data
  – Measure the impact of potential park projects
  – Identify gaps in service
  – Query parcels to identify sites with certain characteristics

• Written Report
  – Mapping Results
  – Community Engagement Results
  – Healthy Parks Design Guidelines
  – High Priority Projects
  – 3 Conceptual Park Designs

• Story Map
  – Interactive, online version of the report
Community Engagement
Community Engagement

Community workshops → (5)
Speak-outs → (20)
Intercept Surveys → (12)
Telephone survey → (800 participants)
Online survey (866 participants)
Focus groups → (5)
Interviews → (28)

Over 2,000 community members engaged!
What are the greatest barriers to using parks for physical activity?

Amenities

- Lack of restrooms
- Lack of active amenities
- Lack of water fountains

“There needs to be a diversity of opportunities in a park for all of the things you might be interested in, not just grassy lots.”
What are the top requested active amenities?

- Splash pads
- Walking paths
- Playgrounds/play structures
- Community gardens
- Fitness equipment
- Swimming pools
What are the top requested supporting amenities?

- Park restrooms
- Park drinking fountains
- Picnic shelters

“If you want to do exercise, you also need water fountains and bathrooms.”

– Intercept Survey Participant, Mexican Consulate office, Austin Texas
What would make parks better places for relaxing?

Shade

“I don’t go to the park because it’s too hot. I work in the heat all day, why would I want to spend more time in the sun?” Intercept survey participant, Lockhart HEB
What would make parks better for socializing?

Beautification

- Trees/Plants
- Art
What types of programming would bring people to the parks?

- More events and activities
  - Second highest recommendation for improving parks (behind only requests to build new parks)
- Special events (e.g., movie in the park, fairs, concerts, etc.)
- Fitness classes
- Environmental education
How could parks be healthier for people with disabilities?

- Basic Maintenance
- Accessible Amenities
  - Trails
  - Pools
  - Adaptive Sports Facilities
  - Playgrounds
  - Fitness equipment
- Locating these amenities in a way that is visible and inclusive.
  - “You’re part of the community. It would combat stereotypes about people with disabilities not being active. Once you remove those barriers, people will start to realize this is part of our society.”
- Online database of accessible park amenities
How could park design encourage physical activity?

Multigenerational Parks

• “It would be nice to do an exercise class at the park if someone were able to watch my kids”
  - Intercept Survey Participant, Lockhart Walmart

• Locate exercise opportunities for parents (e.g. tracks and fitness equipment) near activities for children (e.g. playgrounds and sports fields).
How could artwork in parks support community cohesions?

• Celebrate local culture and diversity
• “I feel like I belong to my neighborhood”
  • 9% of white respondents disagreed
  • 29% of Hispanic respondents disagreed
• “There is a profound disconnection between arts-based programming and public parks. The most vibrant art scene are the murals in East Austin. It has nothing to do with parks.” Interview Participant
• “The trails are not culturally neutral. People feel like, ‘Those are not our trails’. A bunch of white guys on the trail sends a signal.” Interview Participant
How can stakeholders increase park access in areas with low capacity to build new parks?

- “The place we go for exercise is my daughter’s high school. We live in suburbia and that place is very safe, belongs to the community, is fenced and there is only one entrance. You feel in control.” Intercept Survey Participant, Austin Texas, Mexican Consulate office

- “Community activities revolve around the schools. This is an opportunity.” Interview Participant
Geographic Priorities
Geographic Information Systems Approach

- Use GIS to identify areas with the greatest park need
- Guided by 79 local experts serving on a Technical Advisory Team
  - Dr. Pritesh Ghandi, People’s Community Clinic
  - Dr. Philip Huang, Austin Mayor’s Office
  - Jennifer Bristol, Texas Parks and Wildlife
  - Amy Belaire, The Nature Conservancy
  - Julia Cleary, Bastrop County
  - Jack Page, Smithville Parks
  - Trey Bailey, Luling Economic Development Corporation
Parks can play a critical role in supporting community health, providing residents with a free, close-to-home opportunity for physical activity. Parks also help relieve stress and combat social isolation. The health analysis for The Healthy Parks Plan examined health inequities by mapping and combining thirteen health indicators:

Among children: asthma, obesity, and poor mental health
Among adults: asthma, cancer, COPD, diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, kidney disease, poor mental health, obesity, and stroke

Community health
HEALTHY PARKS PLAN FOR TRAVIS, BASTROP, AND CALDWELL COUNTIES

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Socioeconomic vulnerability has broad implications for a community's park access and need. Communities facing high socioeconomic vulnerability may have the greatest need for the services provided by parks, and the most limited ability to travel long distances to access these services or to pay to use private recreational facilities. Eleven indicators were combined and weighted based on the input of the Technical Advisory Team to create this Socioeconomic Vulnerability Map. The indicators are: low income households, population with less than a high school education, people over 64 years old, children under 5 years old, people of color, linguistic isolation, disabled population, households without cars, children 18 and under, refugee population, and economically disadvantaged students.
Water-smart parks and playgrounds can help absorb rainfall before it makes its way downstream, deteriorating water quality and contributing to flooding. Opportunities for parks to be a part of a mitigation strategy were mapped by including these five indicators:

1. FEMA Flood Zones (30%): These official flood zones provide park and open space opportunities.
2. Stream and wetland buffers (20%): These locations are important to preserve for water quality.
3. Road and highway runoff (10%): Buffers around roads can improve water quality by absorbing polluted stormwater runoff.
4. Erosion potential (10%): An increase in sediment input can cause water quality problems in streams and rivers. A park or natural area can help retain sediment in areas with high erosion potential.
5. Priority watersheds (30%): Priority is given to watersheds with poor water quality.

Flooding and water quality

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Green infrastructure and parks can cool surrounding neighborhoods by providing shade and creating a gap in hot surfaces like pavement. Trees and urban canopy also filter air pollutants, which can cause respiratory diseases such as asthma. This map indicates where parks, trees, and green infrastructure can help mitigate heat and poor air quality. Areas where heat and poor air quality are most intense were located by mapping three indicators, listed below. These indicators were weighted equally and stacked:

1. Heat islands
2. Lack of tree canopy in urban areas
3. Poor air quality

Urban heat islands and poor air quality

HEALTHY PARKS PLAN FOR TRAVIS, BASTROP, AND CALDWELL COUNTIES
Where are the populations that currently do not have access to a close-to-home park? For this analysis, we used the ParkServe® methodology to prioritize all parts of the study area with housing density greater than 6 homes per square kilometer. Within this urban to semi-rural gradient, areas outside of a ten-minute walk of a park are given priority based on three demographic profile results: population density (50%), density of population age 19 and younger (25%), and density of households with low income (25%). Visit the Healthy Parks Plan decision-support tool to see other park need results broken down by five different park types and seven different amenities.
This map combines the analysis results from the five map topics: park access, community health, flooding and water quality, heat islands and poor air quality, and socioeconomic vulnerability. By incorporating data from such varied topics into a single analysis, the map accounts for the broad spectrum of benefits parks provide, offering the most holistic view of park need in Travis, Bastrop, and Caldwell Counties.
The Healthy Parks Decision-Support Tool
“We already used the tool this morning to make a decision on a playground replacement project. It was easy!”

Ladye Anne Wofford, Austin Parks Foundation

“I am already using it to look for new park sites.”

Michael Gonzalez, Elgin Parks and Recreation

“You could use this for a lot more than just parks.”

Priscilla Estrada, Community Health Center of Central Texas
Prioritizing Healthy Parks Sites
Healthy Parks Priority Sites

- List of highest priority sites for ‘Healthy Park’ Improvements
- Utilized GIS to identify parks in high need areas
- Other considerations:
  - Parks with most potential for improvement regarding health
    - “Just grassy lots.”
  - Parks that do not already have major upgrades scheduled
- Schoolyards
- Areas without parks or school yards
  - Creative solution?
Healthy Parks Priority Sites

Austin’s Colony Neighborhood Park, Austin’s Colony
Blanche Square, Luling
Boggy Creek Greenbelt, Austin
Brownie Neighborhood Park, Austin
Buttermilk Neighborhood Park, Austin
Camp Swift Park, Camp Swift
Cedar Creek Park, Cedar Creek
City Park, Lockhart
Civitan Neighborhood Park, Austin
Delgado Park, Bastrop
Earl J. Pomerleau Pocket Park, Austin
Edgar B. Davis Northside Park, Luling
Givens District Park, Austin
Houston School Park, Austin
Longer Park, Luling

McDade Elementary School, McDade
McDade High School, McDade
MLK Park, Smithville
Montopolis Recreation Center, Austin
Patton Park, Luling
Prairie Lea School, Prairie Lea
Sanchez School Park, Austin
South Austin Neighborhood Park, Austin
St. Elmo School Park, Austin
Stony Point Park, Stony Point
T.A. Brown Neighborhood Park, Austin
Thomas Memorial Park, Elgin
Town Branch Trail System, Lockhart
Williams School Park, Austin
Wooldridge School Park, Austin
Wooten Neighborhood Park, Austin
## High Potential Schoolyard Parks

### Table 8: Potential Schoolyard Parks Ranked by Number of New People with Park Access (Bastrop County)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>New Population Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smithville Junior High</td>
<td>Smithville ISD</td>
<td>Bastrop</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>1,202</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
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<td>Cedar Creek Intermediate School</td>
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<td>Bastrop</td>
<td>5-6</td>
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<td>Bastrop Middle School</td>
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<td>Elgin ISD</td>
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<td>6-8</td>
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<td>7-8</td>
<td>204</td>
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<td>Booker T. Washington Elementary School</td>
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<td>Brown Primary School</td>
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<td>Pre K - 2</td>
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<td>Emile Elementary School</td>
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<td>Bastrop</td>
<td>Pre K - 4</td>
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## High Potential Schoolyard Parks

### Table 7: Potential Schoolyard Parks Ranked by Number of New People with Park Access (Travis County)

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>Grade Range</th>
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<td>Pre K-5</td>
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<td>Galindo Elementary School</td>
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<td>Reagan Early College High School</td>
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<td>9-12</td>
<td>4,409</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baty Elementary School</td>
<td>Del Valle ISD</td>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>Pre K-5</td>
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<td>Settlement Home</td>
<td>University of Texas University Charter School</td>
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<td>6-12</td>
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<td>Harris Elementary School</td>
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<td>Pre K-6</td>
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<td>Burnet Middle School</td>
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<td>Bedichek Middle School</td>
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<td>Dawson Elementary School</td>
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<td>Travis</td>
<td>Pre K-5</td>
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<td>Pickle Elementary School</td>
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<td>Pre K-5</td>
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<td>Walnut Creek Elementary School</td>
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<td>Pre K-6</td>
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<td>T.A. Brown Elementary School</td>
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<td>Dobie Middle School</td>
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# High Potential Schoolyard Parks

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<th>Grade Range</th>
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<td>Lockhart High School</td>
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<td>Bluebonnet Elementary School</td>
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<td>Lockhart Junior High School</td>
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<td>Luling Primary School</td>
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<td>Leonard Shanklin Elementary School</td>
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<td>Gilbert Gerdes Junior High School</td>
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<td>Luling High School</td>
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<td>9-12</td>
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<td>Pride High School</td>
<td>Lockhart ISD</td>
<td>Caldwell</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>204</td>
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Healthy Parks Design Guidelines
What is a Healthy Park?

A healthy park provides a range of amenities that enhance each facet of community health - **physical**, **mental**, and **environmental**.
Guiding Design Principles

1. Use community engagement strategies throughout the design process to determine local park needs and preferences.

2. Parks should have a mix of physical health, mental health, and environmental health opportunities for all age groups.

3. Parks should tie-in to existing trail networks and be accessible by bicycle, public transit, and pedestrian access.

4. Safety features like lighting and visibility should be prioritized. Parks should have a planned maintenance schedule to keep all amenities functional for visitors.

5. All park amenities and areas should be designed using Universal Design principals and accessible to all regardless of age, gender, and ability.
Healthy Park Toolkits

Physical Health Toolkit

- Benefits: Increases physical activity, improves mental health.
- Intensity: High
- Cost: $5

Mental Health Toolkit

- Benefits: Supports mental health.
- Intensity: Moderate
- Cost: $5

Environmental Health Toolkit

- Benefits: Improves air quality, reduces noise pollution.
- Intensity: Low
- Cost: $5

Further details and specific benefits are listed within each section of the toolkits.
**Tool Example: Physical Health**

**Benefits**
Tool benefits detail the ways in which the tool improves health.

- Prevents Obesity
- Lowers Blood Pressure
- Strengthens Muscles

Adolescents who play sports have a lower body mass index and are less likely to have smoked cigarettes or used drugs.

- **Intensity:**
  - 😊
- **Cost:** $$$

**Citation**
The research that supports this tool.

- **Park Type**
  - Indicates whether this tool is appropriate for a Pocket Park, Neighborhood Park, Community Park, District Park, or Metropolitan Park.

- **Research**
  - Research or supporting evidence for why this tool is considered a healthy park amenity.

- **Relative Cost**
  - Relative cost of the amenity. Ranges from $ - $$$.

- **Intensity**
  - In the Physical Health Toolkit, Intensity indicates the level of cardiovascular activity or strength the amenity requires.
What does a healthy park look like?

- Accessible by Active Transportation + Physical Health
- Multiuse Trails + Physical Health
- Shaded Pavilion + Mental Health + Environmental Health
- Mature Trees + Mental Health + Environmental Health
- Basketball Court + Physical Health
- Yoga in the Park + Mental Health + Physical Health
- Bioswale + Mental Health + Environmental Health
Conceptual Park Designs
Cedar Creek Park
E.B. Davis North Side Park

- entrances with upgraded landscaping (a)
- possible splash pad zone (visible from road) (p) (m)
- added parking areas
- updated protected play area (p)
- upgraded baseball fields (p)
- upgraded batting cages with added screening (a)
- sloped event lawn for movies/performances (m)
- dog park zone (m)
- updated community event space with access to restrooms/event lawn/picnic areas/food truck zone (m)
- upgraded basketball court (improve restrooms, remodel walls, repave court, new goals) (p)
- upgraded pavilion (possible 2nd) with new seating (m)
- paved minor loop trail (p)
- major loop trail with exercise nodes (p)
- secondary recreation area/bmx trail system (p)
- slightly re-oriented park drive with some on-street parking
- added soccer field (p)
- exercise/fitness node (p)

- physical tool
- mental tool
- environmental tool
Camp Swift Park
Thank you!

Matt.Moffa@tpl.org
katie@asakurarobinson.com