

Galindo *Neighborhood Association*

E l e m e n t a r y

www.main.org/gena/

March 1, 2005

Re: SPC-04-0046C; CIP 5767.002

GALINDO ELEMENTARY NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

OPPOSES SATC EXPANSION AND REQUESTS A REVIEW OF CURRENT FUNDS APPROPRIATION

As residents of the Galindo neighborhood and neighbors of South Austin Park (1100 Cumberland Rd at South 5th St), we are vehemently opposed to any expansion of South Austin Tennis Center (SATC). Our neighborhood and the whole of Austin are on the verge of losing, unnecessarily, a much-used and well-loved inner city green space. SATC, housed within South Austin Park, is slated for an eight-court expansion and new parking lot that will add over 86,000 square feet of impervious cover and destroy precious wooded parkland. Members of the Galindo Elementary Neighborhood Association (GENA) oppose the SATC expansion because we oppose the destruction of South Austin Park.

GENA represents 3900 residents living in the area between Oltorf and Ben White and between South 1st Street and the MoPac rail line. At our July 2004 meeting, members voted to oppose the tennis center expansion. We also have the support of the South Central Coalition, the Austin Neighborhood Council, and the Austin Sierra Club.

Addressing tennis league requests for more publicly-funded courts, and in particular, for a public tournament-scale venue in Austin, need never have conflicted with preserving a small, central-city neighborhood park. A visionary tennis plan developed in alignment with Parks and Recreation Department policies and the City's fitness and Smart Growth initiatives, and which incorporated private and corporate funding, would have already created a tournament facility at one of Austin's four destination parks, for instance, or included it as a component of the Mueller redevelopment plan.

Instead, we now face a plan that

1. shoehorns an additional 8 courts and parking lot into a 10-court tennis center that was inappropriately sited into a neighborhood park twenty-five years ago;
2. opposes the objectives and policies specified in PARD Master Plans and Implementation Plans and in Smart Growth's Neighborhood Planning, Open Space Preservation, and Sustainable Communities programs;
3. utilizes only tax-payer funding for a single-use sports facility perfectly suited to leverage private and corporate support.

Acting on an "ACTION PRIORITY" listed in PARD's 1980 Master Plan, GENA calls for the "reevaluat[ion of] plans for tennis center [expansion] at South Austin [Park] in light of other recreation needs in this area."¹ Examined below are four compelling reasons to stop the SATC expansion:

1. South Austin Park is not a suitable location for an expanded tennis center:
 - a. The addition will diminish neighborhood quality of life.
 - b. The neighborhood lacks the necessary roadway infrastructure to support a large tennis center.
 - c. Adding eight courts, a parking lot, and extensive grading and drainage structures will destroy multi-purpose parkland and open green space.
 - d. Reducing green space and increasing impervious cover will have a negative impact on the environment.

2. Some of the best arguments against the SATC expansion are PARD's own development and implementation principles and Austin's design and development codes. These principles and codes demand the preservation of South Austin Park and prioritize investment in expanding and creating public access to open green space.
3. Investing in existing facilities is a more responsible stewardship of public money than is building new courts. PARD can respond to tennis leagues' demand for additional low-fee, publicly-funded tennis courts during the peak periods of their league seasons by:
 - a. Repairing and maintaining the quality courts already paid for by Austin taxpayers.
 - b. Implementing simple scheduling adjustments to the tennis centers' vendor contracts.
4. The SATC expansion project has neither the appropriate features nor the additional funding mechanisms necessary for a tennis tournament facility. The tennis community itself has demonstrated that construction of a tennis tournament facility requires:
 - a. A destination-park environment with large acreage for many courts, sufficient parking, ample spectator seating, and future growth;
 - b. Easy accessibility from major traffic arteries;
 - c. Significant use of alternative, non-public funding sources.

The SATC expansion plan is a "lose-lose" proposition. Even with an additional 8 courts, SATC will not be the metropolitan tournament-scale facility that the tennis leagues say must be built in Austin. Meanwhile, the Galindo neighborhood, and the general public, will have lost an irreplaceable green space at a time when all of South Austin is becoming more densely developed.

In the following, we expand these points and present alternative uses of bond monies that fulfill Proposition 2 intentions and serve the greater Austin community.

The Galindo Neighborhood and South Austin Park

Galindo is a densely populated residential neighborhood that extends north-south from Oltorf to Ben White and east-west from S. 1st Street to the MoPac rail line (see Figure 1). With West Bouldin Creek flowing through the neighborhood north to Town Lake, Galindo is designated as an "Inside Urban Watershed" area according to the City of Austin Smart Growth Initiative.

South Austin Park, lying north and west of the intersection of Cumberland Rd and South 5th St, is the **only park** in the Galindo neighborhood and in the larger area south of Oltorf, north of Ben White, east of Lamar, and west of South First. The park is nestled inside a traditional neighborhood and has only minimal vehicle access via Cumberland and South Fifth, both single lane streets lined with residential dwellings. Single-family residences abut the park's perimeter. Several blocks of subsidized housing are located immediately south of the park.

The twenty-four acre site houses both the SATC and the South Austin Recreation Center; the remaining area consists of a public multi-sport concrete slab, a small playground, a few picnic tables, a modest area of open and wooded green space, and an open field for community-programmed sport activities such as adult and junior soccer, flag football, softball, and lacrosse. The open wooded area, Rec. Center, and sports field are heavily utilized by neighborhood residents.

1. South Austin Park is not a suitable location for an expanded tennis center.

1a. The SATC expansion will diminish the quality of life for people living in the surrounding residential areas.

Locating a larger number of courts significantly closer to the park perimeter diminishes the quality of life for the park's neighbors. The existing wooded parkland provides a moderate noise and light

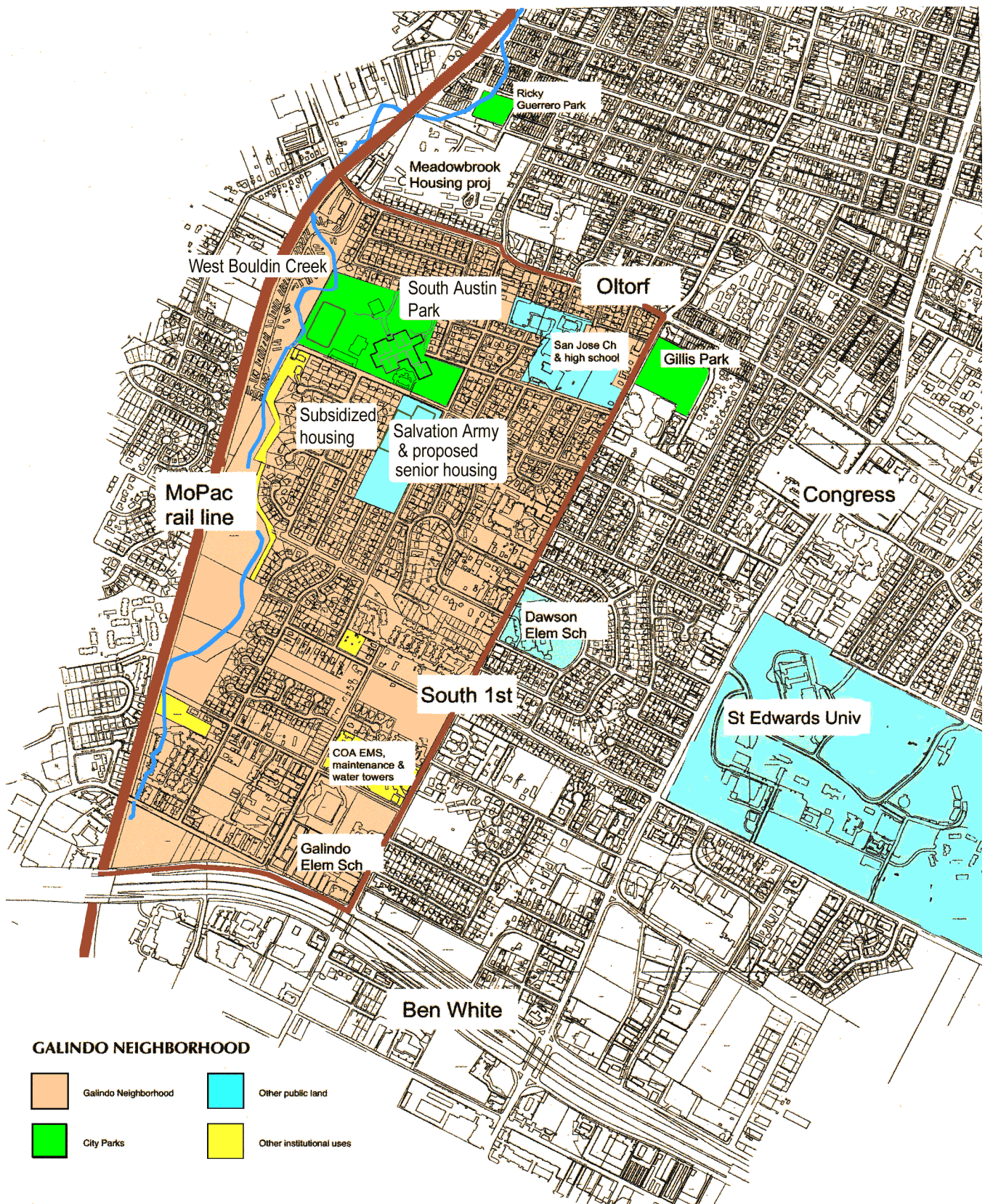


Figure 1. Map of the Galindo neighborhood and surrounding area.

buffer for the surrounding residential areas. Removing that buffer zone and locating additional courts even closer to neighborhood homes will exacerbate sound and light pollution from the SATC.

The SATC's 1980 "Preliminary Detailed Development Plan" recommended "sensitivi[ty] to the functions of the adjacent park and surrounding residential areas."² The architects emphasized the importance of "preservation of open area at the intersection of 5th and Cumberland[,] ...[r]etention of existing Juniper groves in Tennis Center area as buffering elements to adjacent residential areas[,] ...[l]andforms to screen the tennis courts from the neighborhood, [and] ...a primary consideration ...lights should be carefully aimed to eliminate light pollution of the neighborhood."³ The architects also noted that "[s]torm runoff must be directed ...to avoid overburdening surrounding residential areas."⁴

Unfortunately, in spite of the observations made in 1980, SATC produces tremendous light pollution and drainage run-off. Houses around the existing tennis courts endure stadium-intense light pouring through their windows at night, often until well after 10:00 p.m., and homes along the north and east perimeter of the park often experience flooding from SATC runoff. Incredibly, these serious issues are not effectively addressed in the SATC expansion plans.

In The Arizpe Group's Engineers Report for site plan approval, they documented that "[they] would be responsible **only for the additional** runoff due to the impervious cover added by this project ...and that water quality treatment will not have to include the other existing site features even though **there is not any treatment for water quality on the site at the time** (*emph. added*)."⁵ Although PARD claims that light shielding will be added to both the existing and new courts, the ambient reflected light and sheer volume of additional light will create an undesirable "glow" effect in the neighborhood. This light trespass is contrary to LEED sustainability guidelines used by the City of Austin to improve night sky access and reduce development impact on nocturnal environments.

In terms of visual and design-related impacts, we note that the form of the tennis courts turns its back on the community. The courts present a 16 foot high chain link fence with shade cloth. This fence forms a definite visual barrier to the community—not unlike the big box developments that present a blank wall to the surrounding area. These blank walls are contrary to the current efforts of the Austin design guidelines which seek to create more humane public space in the city. The tennis center's discontinuity with the park and community are further exacerbated by the inclusion of surface parking and roadways in front of the blank fence walls, again repeating the undesirable forms of big box commercial development that the City is trying to change.

The expansion of SATC not only accentuates its existing offenses to the neighborhood, but it also obliterates the value of South Austin Park in context of a "sustainable community".

"A sustainable community strives for a regional open space system consisting of parks, greenways, woodlands, streams and a working rural landscape which would be woven into the urban fabric of neighborhoods."⁶

1b. The area has insufficient traffic infrastructure.

The SATC is only accessible via South Fifth Street and/or Cumberland Road, both narrow residential streets; the additional traffic and parking congestion resulting from the expansion will overwhelm the area's roadway infrastructure. As documented in a recent report on FOX 7 News, our neighborhood has an existing traffic problem on S. Fifth Street and on Garden Villa, caused by cut-through commuters. GENA has already approached the city for assistance in dealing with traffic calming needs throughout the neighborhood. City staff found that the speeding problem on S. Fifth Street in particular exceeded the threshold required in the traffic calming guidelines.

GENA is concerned not only for the safety of our children and other neighborhood residents but also for the incoming population of senior citizens slated to move into the Salvation Army Elderly Housing Project to be built on the lot bordered by S. Fifth Street and Cumberland. The project's entrance will be on Cumberland across the street from the SATC entrance and parking lot.

With the addition of AISD funding to the expansion, SATC would also be used for high school tournaments, creating the need for a much larger parking lot than is possible within S. Austin Park boundaries. The park is the only neighborhood space for adults and children to play and explore in a natural setting, and expanding SATC creates significant concerns for child safety due to increased traffic as outlined by the SATC manager.

A conservative estimate based on the number of new courts and their projected usage shows a minimum increase of 336 vehicle trips per day. This figure is derived directly from the use estimates PARD provided to GENA representatives at the December 14, 2004 PARD Land and Facilities committee meeting. PARD solicited these figures from the local tennis organizations in response to GENA's argument that—given the documented average of only 50% court utilization during peak periods at SATC—building additional courts was not warranted. As quoted from this estimate:

I would estimate that 3/8 of the courts are group lessons. So, if we figure 3 courts for group lessons (6 players), 3 courts of doubles (4 players), and 2 courts of singles for two 1.5 hour sessions, that's 6 group lessons, 6 doubles matches, and 4 singles matches. That's 68 additional players.

With the center open from 9am to 10pm, there are at least eight 1.5 hour session times. 68 players for 2 sessions multiplies to 272 players for 8 sessions. The director of the South Austin Tennis Center assured the Parks board that with the addition of 8 courts, more league players would utilize the original 10 courts and therefore bring the 50% court-use rate to 100%. As she stated at the January 25th, 2005 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Board of Directors: "large masses of people will come." An extremely conservative scenario involving only 3 courts (that is, an increase from 50% to 80% usage) adds 64 more trips per day—one court with doubles play and two courts with singles play adds 8 more players times the 8 session slots.

PARD and tennis organizations have demonstrated that the projected number of trips generated by the project exceeds the vehicle trips per day by the existing uses by at least 336 vehicle trips per day (272 plus 64). This projection does not even take into account the league and high-school tournaments planned by the center which will include not only players but numerous spectators coming and going through the neighborhood. The number required to trigger a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) is 300 additional trips per day.

At the January 25th PARD board meeting, the Land and Facilities committee chair Jeb Boyt stated he was extremely concerned about the traffic issues related to the SATC project. Board member Clint Small also expressed that he was disturbed by the influx of "large masses of people [that] will come" and wanted more time to study the issue.

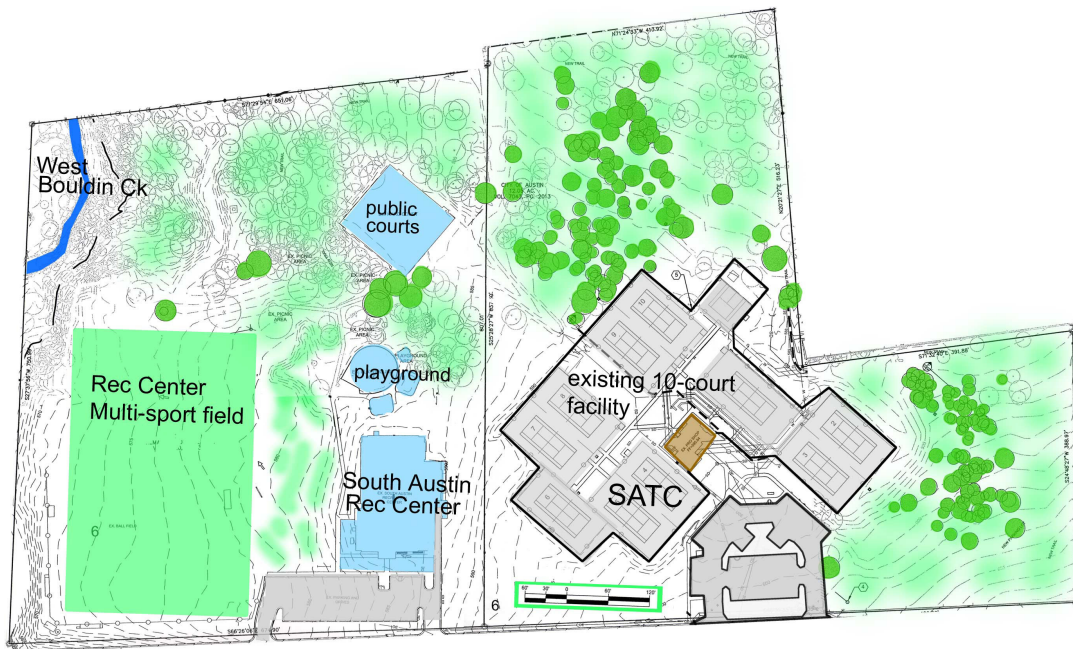
1c. Collective multi-purpose parkland and open green space will be destroyed.

Central city green spaces are rapidly diminishing in Austin. The Smart Growth Initiative recognizes that the "preservation of open space is essential for the preservation of our quality of life in central Texas." Moreover, "open spaces serve our neighborhoods and greater community by promoting social and physical activity, as well as lending identity to our city."⁷ GENA strongly concurs. The proposed expansion violates not only the principles of the City of Austin's Neighborhood Planning, Open Space Preservation, and Sustainable Communities programs; it also negates the original planned impact of the tennis center to "[p]reserve a sense of open space, in a park-related capacity, for the land use."⁸

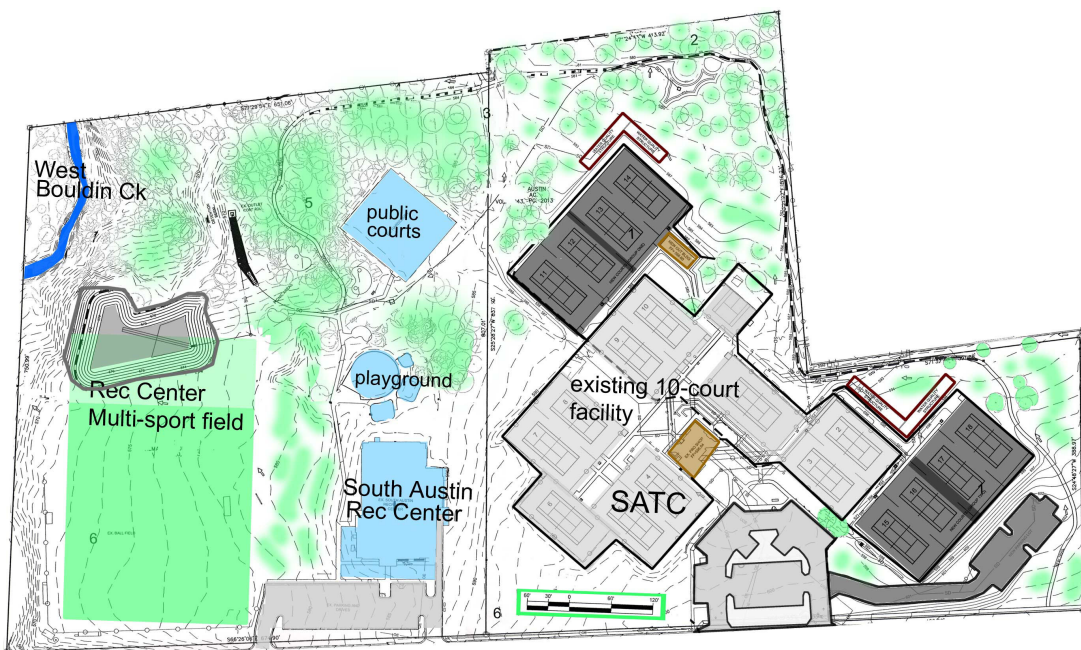
South Austin Park is a multi-purpose collective public space that provides a diverse array of enjoyable, health-promoting activities for the community. It is a pleasant atmosphere for walking and running; playing Frisbee, baseball, basketball, soccer, football, or kickball; walking your dog; having a picnic or birthday party; flying a kite; bird watching; learning about local ecology; exploring; relaxing; reading; writing; playing music; and many other activities. **South Austin Park is truly the neighborhood's backyard.**

Currently, we have a balance in the South Austin Park—a mixture of green space and 10 tennis courts. The proposed SATC expansion would disrupt this balance by converting multi-use community parkland to a single-use, fee-driven facility with limited hours and accessibility. The South Austin Tennis Center is already a large fixture in the park; its expansion would add 86,000 sq. ft. of impervious cover, nearly doubling its current footprint.

The following graphics make this point clear.⁹ North and east of the current SATC are unstructured wooded and open green spaces. The 8 courts and expanded parking lot with driveway will project into these areas and remove these two significant wooded green parcels from the community.



Current Layout of South Austin Park and the adjoining South Austin Recreation Center



Layout after removing over 200 trees and constructing 2 four-court segments and parking lot (over 86,000 sq ft) and drainage retention pond (30,000 sq ft)

1d.Reducing open green space and expanding impervious cover will have a negative environmental impact.

The Galindo Elementary Neighborhood is in the area designated as an "Inside Urban Watershed". South Austin Park drains directly both into West Bouldin Creek and into the residential areas north and east of the park. The addition of more than 86,000 sq. ft. of impervious cover to South Austin Park necessitates extensive engineering and landscaping to manage the increased runoff; localized flooding from runoff, as mentioned earlier, is already a serious problem for nearby residents and is not slated for correction. The site plan specifies

- cutting down mature and protected trees, as well as a grove of young Bur Oaks planted in the park by TreeFolks in 1998;
- extensive grading of the green space remaining outside the new structures to direct water runoff;
- converting over 30,000 sq. ft. of the sports field into drainage retention.

These plans to deal with the additional run-off caused by expanded impervious cover further increase the area of parkland impacted by the SATC addition. We stand to lose the ecological benefits of the existing open and wooded park space: watershed protection, natural infiltration to reduce run-off and improve water quality, providing shade to help ameliorate heat island effect, improving air quality, and providing wildlife habitat.

Removing trees and increasing impervious cover will magnify the summer heat, reduce natural infiltration, and could increase flooding and aggravate ongoing run-off and drainage problems for residents to the north of the park and downstream of West Bouldin Creek. The addition will have a negative ripple effect felt throughout the entire West Bouldin Creek Watershed.

Corresponding viable alternative use of funds:

Although SATC was designed "to be Austin's foremost Tennis Center"¹⁰ in 1980, it is clear that the inside-urban-watershed, neighborhood-park site is inappropriate for court expansion in light of increased-density-open-space demands of our urban population in 2005. Given that acceptable strategies for parkland development in the urban core include acquiring "small open space areas and pedestrian pathways"¹¹, providing "adequate open space"—and acknowledgement of the increasing difficulty of doing so¹²—and considering that "few opportunities exist for passive, social or cultural recreation (sitting, observing, reading, meeting with neighbors),"¹³ there are better uses for funds earmarked for parkland improvements than to destroy a rare neighborhood park in an increasingly dense urban area.

Stewart Strong, staff manager with PARD, stated at the January 25, 2005 PARD Board meeting that the original 1980 PARD recommendation for reconsideration of placement of a tennis center in S. Austin Park was dismissed (by PARD) because there simply was no other parkland in the area in which to locate the facility. The rationale that we should consume a unique neighborhood park with a large tennis tournament center because there was no other park in 1980 in which to place it is a serious violation of PARD and City values and policies. The 1980 Master Plan indicated that the Galindo neighborhood area had "the second lowest ratio of parkland to population among zones ...[and] a shortage of passive recreation opportunities[.]"¹⁴ To allow the expansion of SATC is to consciously ignore this information and renounce City policy that "Austin's neighborhoods are considered the city's primary resource, with neighborhood planning and improvement viewed as essential plan implementation strategies."¹⁵

It is also City policy to "coordinate park planning activities with neighborhood[s],"¹⁶ to "[a]ssess community needs in the planning of all park and open space resources,"¹⁷ and to "provide attractive parks and recreation facilities that complement surrounding neighborhoods."¹⁸ It makes sense, therefore, to use funds to renovate South Austin Park and the facilities within its

boundaries. This alternative would truly serve the neighborhood and the entire parks system as well as fulfill Proposition 2 intents by addressing parkland and tennis facility improvements.

In addition to renovating the existing pro shop and courts at SATC, the following items should be addressed:

- repair damaged roof at South Austin Recreation Center,
- replace and add to older components of the existing playscape,
- update lighting in sports field area of park to mitigate light pollution,
- add crushed-granite path around the entire park,
- add landscaping/xeriscaping around the existing courts to create a more integrated park setting, and
- address drainage issues for residents that border the north side of the park, since flooding is a recurring problem due to poorly designed drainage at the existing SATC. Drainage to the north of the existing courts should be reengineered to accommodate runoff and to ensure that no more flooding will occur in those homes.

For all the reasons discussed above—diminished quality-of-life, unsuitable area infrastructure and access, destruction of neighborhood parkland, and safety and environmental concerns—South Austin Park is not an appropriate location to house an expanded tennis center. It wasn't a good choice in the early 1980s, when SATC was proposed and its 10 courts were built; it's an even worse candidate now for expansion.

The proposal to expand an already inappropriately-sited facility violates so many planning principles and highly-publicized land-use objectives that, in retrospect, it is difficult to understand why PARD elevated this option above all others to satisfy tennis proponents.

2. PARD's own development and implementation principles and the City of Austin's design and development codes demand preservation of South Austin Park.

The Galindo Neighborhood lies within an area where PARD has found the "most needed recreational facilities" to be playgrounds, swimming pools, and trails, and where PARD found "favorite **outdoor** recreation pursuits" to be "walking/hiking, running/jogging, and bicycling;"¹⁹ it is socially insensitive and irresponsible to plan a large tennis facility that consumes most of the open space in the **only** neighborhood park. Instead, effort should be made to improve, expand or create infrastructure, such as greenbelt parkland (or swimming pools, existing unmaintained tennis courts, or even just more open green space parkland), that supports these other more desirable activities.

Potential cost-effective neighborhood- and commuter-friendly greenbelt-related alternative uses of funding include:

- e. connect trail along creek to South Austin Park and beyond,
- f. build pedestrian bridges across creek at three locations,
- g. add crossing signals and fencing at railroad tracks in two locations,
- h. add public picnic areas,
- i. add a 9-hole disc golf course, and/or
- build a skate park.

Of the \$100 million raised in 1998, not one cent went to improvements on the Town Lake Greenbelt, one of the most heavily used recreation sites in Austin. Use-density at Town Lake would be mitigated by connecting an expanded greenbelt corridor along W. Bouldin Creek to the Town Lake trail. This is not only a very cost effective use of dollars per capita/user, but it also

protects the creek area both up and downstream through active preservation and management. As stated by PARD, "using floodplains as greenbelts aids in water absorption and drainage control as well as avoiding potential flood damage."²⁰ The City also asserts that it is a main environmental goal to "maintain creek environments and floodplains in a natural condition."²¹

Other evidence that money would be well-spent on a W. Bouldin Creek Greenbelt instead of on SATC expansion is that "[r]ecreational usage of greenbelts has emerged as one of the most popular activities in Austin,"²² and that "[p]ublic parks, greenbelts and open spaces are viewed as essential to urban residents for recreation and relief from an intense urban environment."²³ Greenbelts have thus become an Austin icon, part of our city's identity, and something that PARD is entrusted to protect.

Since it is a City planning policy to "[d]esign and develop a system of greenbelts that preserve the city's natural character and serve as linkages throughout the urban area,"²⁴ it makes sense to accomplish this initiative of Proposition 2 and open the jewel of W. Bouldin Creek to citizens from all parts of the city; the completion of this one trail would add a spur to the system approximately 3 miles long and open another route for residents of South Austin to exercise and commute, reducing congestion and pollution along the increasingly used corridor of South 5th Street

The importance of acquisition of land along, specifically, W. Bouldin Creek has been emphasized in numerous PARD, City, and land-use organization documents since even before the conception of the SATC; the evident inaction, along with the ironic support by PARD employees of a project like SATC and its expansion, can be interpreted as staff reluctance to break the status quo of acquiescing to private interest groups instead of to the will or good of the majority, the People. It also reflects the extent to which Galindo neighborhood residents have been excluded during project planning and during the creation of bond initiatives that fund these sorts of projects.

In fact, neighborhood residents recall no effort on behalf of the city to involve or inform them of the proposed addition of courts. The language of Proposition 2 on the 1998 bond election ballot stated that the overall purpose was to equip "*public parks..., recreation centers, natural areas, and other related facilities*" for the benefit of Austin residents. The ballot language that citizens read in the voting booth referenced tennis only in general terms, including it in a list of "related facilities, such as soccer fields, playgrounds, ballfields, and tennis courts" that would be improved and equipped. The **bond brochure** was more specific, stating the monies were to be used for "*renovation of older playground equipment throughout Austin,*" as well as "*acquisition of land along Austin creeks for future greenways and trails, including... West Bouldin... creek,*" and simply that "[*an unidentified number of*] courts would be constructed at South Austin Tennis Center." It has been documented, however, that the public was informed that SATC was to be **renovated**, not expanded, under this proposition. One resident was told by the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee that the item to be included in Proposition 2 was "renovation of the existing SATC", not expansion or construction of new courts. This is confirmed by a Chronicle article entitled "Bond Cliff Notes" from October of 1998, which also states "renovation (not construction) of courts at SATC" as a project under Proposition 2.²⁵

PARD representatives have suggested that the neighborhood could recoup some of the green space lost to courts and parking by the potential addition to the park system of Austin Energy owned land and a privately owned parcel in the West Bouldin Creek flood plain. We reject the equation that this potential added parcel minus the 86,000 square feet of pavement and extensive grading and drainage structure in our park equals a good deal for the Galindo neighborhood. The need is for a net gain in green space, not a possible trade-off. This is the call voiced by Mayor Wynn on Friday, January 14. As reported by KVUE's Lee McGuire, "*Mayor Wynn is asking the Austin City Council to create a proposal calling for a city bond election in 2006. The key issues are **open space acquisition and urban infrastructure.***"

Voters may be wary of requests for additional open and green space when public funds were used to destroy the very resource for which they are now being asked to pay. Thoughtful and far-sighted

preservation of existing green space will be a much stronger platform from which to lobby for further investment.

There are already numerous efforts in Austin to combat the lack of public parkland and open green space as well as to create a web of green spaces linked by trails. The surge of membership in local organizations that carry out these efforts illustrates the motivation of Austinites to preserve our access to nature and to increase our access options. GENA is one among many organizations that is working to remove Texas from the "number one [state] rank in the amount of open space lost to development."²⁶

3. Address existing unmaintained courts for use by individuals and restructure use of courts to accommodate league play during peak hours.

The legitimacy of SATC expansion is also challenged by the existence of many dilapidated courts around town—those that people would be able to use if properly maintained. If PARD is to apply the goal to "ensure that all park lands and recreation facilities are maintained in an appropriate manner,"²⁷ these courts must be maintained for use by all residents. And, if they are maintained, not as many individuals would have to go to larger tennis centers, which would free up courts that league players could use. **Proper maintenance of existing tennis court facilities is another viable alternative use of Proposition 2 funding.**

Rather than expand the number of courts, we urge the city to repair and maintain the courts that Austin taxpayers have already paid for. In just two examples, there are 12 courts (8 at the Austin High Center and 4 at the Austin Recreation Center) where the conditions are so deteriorated that they are unusable. The following photographs document the cracked courts at the Austin Rec Center and the dire condition of the restroom at the Austin High Center. The recent layoffs of some 1000 city park and library staff make it imperative that the most basic levels of upkeep be maintained to preserve and keep usable Austin's existing public facilities.



Photos taken 12/10/2004 documenting the condition of the four tennis courts at the Austin Recreation Center at 12th and Lamar.

PARD director Warren Struss has stressed that PARD does not have funds to maintain the public tennis facilities that are not in one of the four tennis centers (Austin High, Caswell, Pharr, SATC). However, these photos of the restroom at the Austin High Tennis Center demonstrate that major maintenance is being neglected at even the prioritized tennis centers.

Photos taken on Dec 10, 2004 documenting the deteriorated restroom conditions at the Austin High School Tennis Center. The facility has only one men's and one women's stall.



There are also usable public courts that remain unused during PARD-described peak-use-hours due to an apparent lack of creativity regarding use agreements between leagues, AISD, and private entities. GENA was approached by league players who found ample courts for use at a local high school. They, too, oppose destruction of a neighborhood park for an unnecessary expansion of an ill-placed tennis center.

GENA maintains that more courts are not needed at SATC; careful review of peak-hour SATC court counts performed by neighborhood residents over a one-week period in June 2004 and a one-week period in October 2004 and of peak-hour court use documentation by SATC operators is enlightening. Average peak-hour court use of those two weeks was 54.5% by GENA's count and 53.4% by facility documentation. This proves that the courts are *not* filled to capacity during the "peak-hour periods" (Monday-Friday: 4:30-close, Saturday: all day, and Sunday: all day). It should also be noted that there is **ample** opportunity for AISD or other youth-oriented programs to use SATC for play before 5:30, should the demand ever arise, countering PARD's previous argument that more courts are needed for AISD after-school programs.

SATC currently operates at only 50-60% average capacity during peak-use hours and at a much lower rate during the rest of the day; court availability for peak-use periods could be improved if existing city courts were properly maintained. Also, creative use of other existing facilities around the city by tennis leagues would negate irresponsible use of scarce bond funding for an unnecessary expansion.

GENA therefore urges the City to fully *assess community needs*, what should be "the beginning point for all park and recreation planning,"²⁸ before proceeding. All of the included alternatives would allow the City to fulfill the goal of "work[ing] closely with neighborhood organizations targeted for park planning and design projects,"²⁹ something not done regarding plans for SATC and its expansion.

4. The SATC expansion and South Austin Park demonstrate none of the features necessary for a successful metropolitan tournament-scale facility.

At the November and December 2004 meetings of the Land and Facility Committee of the Parks and Recreation Board, proponents for more courts cited the WACO REGIONAL TENNIS CENTER and the HEB MUNICIPAL TENNIS CENTER in Corpus Christi as examples of the kind of tennis venue that Austin needs.

Featuring 18 lighted courts and a 1,500-seat championship court, the Waco Regional Tennis Center is located on the Brazos River in a 156-acre park complex surrounded by countryside. Located across the Brazos River from the Waco Art Center and McLennan Community College, the Park includes the Waco Water Park and the 8-field River Bend Ballpark.



As noted on the map at the left, (2) Waco Regional Tennis Ctr is immediately adjacent to (3) Riverbend Ballpark.

The clustering of the tennis center with other sports and cultural facilities in a large, open, and accessible natural area is a lovely example of the destination-park concept.

The aerial view of the ballpark available from the Waco Parks website www.waco-texas.com/city_depts/parks/



The Waco Tennis Center website actively solicits financial support: "In order to make the Waco Regional Tennis Center the finest in Texas, we need your support. For more information on how to contribute, please contact Mike Doty at (254) 753-7675." Annual facility passes are offered; the court rental fee is \$2.50 per person per 1.5 hours.

www.wacotennis.com

Developing the capital to fund a multi-million dollar sports facility presents challenges for all cities. The director of the HEB Municipal Tennis Center in Corpus Christi adopted an inventive and high-profile approach by holding an annual "Living Legends" exhibition match to fund expansions and renovations to the Center. The first match, in 1998, featured tennis legends John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors. The March 1999 Benefit Challenge brought in Lindsay Davenport and Monica Seles.³⁰ With ongoing and proactive funding mechanisms that include benefit matches and corporate support, the HEB tennis center is one of the largest municipal tennis facilities in Texas.

The HEB Municipal Tennis Center has 24 lighted, laykold courts, a pro shop, lounge, and full locker room facilities. It also includes \$1.4 million covered 3-court facility and an above-court viewing area. A municipal venue with these kinds of facilities must recruit funding beyond tax-payer support only. The center is located near major traffic arteries and is approximately two blocks from the Del Mar College East Campus.

The 22-court McFarlin Tennis Center in San Antonio was also mentioned as the kind of facility Austin lacked. Like Corpus Christi's center, McFarlin is both easily accessible from major roadways and is located adjacent to San Antonio College.

A final example is the 12-court tennis center in Round Rock's Old Settlers Park. Located on a "generous 480 acres of rolling countryside," the Old Settlers Park also includes 15 baseball fields, 2 football fields, 9 practice soccer fields, 22 practice softball fields, 5 full size championship soccer fields, 2 half size soccer fields, 5 softball fields, and 2 sand volleyball courts.

This tennis center is the home of the Round Rock Tennis Association. The RRTA has developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the city to truly leverage tax-payer funding of a public sports facility. As quoted from the RRTA web site www.rrtennis.com:

The RRTA has obtained an arrangement with the city which allows us to use these courts for our league doubles play in exchange for a seasonal fee based on the number of hours we use the lights. We contributed about \$10,000 to the city toward the purchase of wind screens and have offered funds to partially offset the expense of the newly installed benches.

This point echoes the PARD priority that "The roles of the private sector and other providers of recreation must be evaluated to maximize public expenditures for recreation"³¹ GENA is aware of no fund-raising by the Austin tennis leagues—from within their membership, in the form of benefits, or via soliciting corporate support—to contribute toward construction or maintenance of the expensive tennis facilities they want financed from taxpayer funds.

On the matter of what constitutes a good tennis center, GENA agrees with the tennis community's citations:

- 1. A destination-park that clusters the center with other sports facilities and/or near cultural and educational institutions.**
- 2. Easy accessibility from major traffic arteries.**
- 3. Proactive development of alternative funding streams to reduce the financial burden placed on taxpayers.**

PARD representatives claim that demand for additional low-fee, publicly-funded tennis courts is high among league players who wish to have team-access to numerous courts at the same time during peak periods (Monday through Thursday mornings for women's team tennis, Tuesday through Thursday evenings, and Saturdays). PARD has argued that meeting this demand by expanding an existing facility, rather than building a new center, makes the best use of tax-payers' money. However, this reasoning can not be applied without considering the surrounding context—the context here is South Austin Park.

South Austin Park does not have a single feature in common with the exemplary tennis centers we just examined. This is a 12 acre park (24 acres if the adjoining Rec Center site is included) that serves a densely residential area deficit in public green space. It is surrounded by homes; it is accessed by neighborhood streets; it drains directly into West Bouldin Creek, which in turn empties into Town Lake; a lot of kids, adults, and other critters run, walk, and play among its trees. Concrete can always be poured for tennis courts, but once this park is paved, the park is destroyed.

Alternatives: The monetary advantages of expanding an existing facility can be realized at locations other than South Austin Park.

Not expanding SATC does not mean that no new courts can be built. We reject the equation that Proposition 2 minus the SATC expansion equals zero new public tennis courts. One solution lies in the "joint-use" facilities component in Proposition 4 of the September 2004 AISD bond package. Proposition 4 requested funds for athletics and physical education via "efficient utilization of taxpayers' dollars through sharing facilities among governmental entities." A component of this proposition provides \$2,220,000 for "joint-use facilities with [the] city/county."³² Some \$400,000 of that amount is earmarked to contribute toward a joint-use tennis tournament facility that provides spectator seating and can field at least 16 matches at a time.

PARD staff has recommended that AISD apply these funds to the SATC. To qualify as a joint-use site, SATC would need at least 6 new courts, but even as many as four new courts would overwhelm the park. There are 4 AISD high schools that have 8-court tennis facilities: Akins, Austin High, Bowie, and LBJ. The city and AISD are already developing a joint-use management strategy; an AISD/tennis vendor relationship already exists at the Austin High School Tennis Center. **Rather than squeeze a tournament-sized venue into an already existing public facility, use the same leveraging action on an existing AISD facility.**

Although there may not be room to expand the Austin High Center, Bowie High School, for instance, has both ample acreage and a desirable south location. An institution with the features of Bowie High School is much more aligned than is South Austin Park with the destination-park-like clustering of facilities in an easily accessible area with sufficient space.

Using the Proposition 2 tennis funds to expand in a different location is within the realm of possibility. New construction could include security features that may be deemed appropriate for a high-school based joint-use facility. Moreover, a league-use relationship such as the RRTA has with Old Settlers Park could provide the tennis leagues with the seasonal, peak-usage access they want along with the additional benefit of continual maintenance support for the facility. With regard to financial support from tennis organizations, we note that **the Capital Area Tennis Association (CATA) has twice tried to privately fund the construction a tennis center within a public park** – namely, Walnut Creek Park and Patterson Park. The first attempt was not approved by the Parks Board because of environmental concerns at Walnut Creek; the Patterson Park attempt was rejected by the neighborhood association because of the loss of green space.

A second, very attainable, option is to pursue a recent observation made by City Council member Betty Dunkerley. She pointed out that the City of Austin owns a great deal of land in far South Austin which it plans to develop with a soccer complex. **GENA supports a transfer of bond funds to build a 24 court tennis tournament center in the same area as this new soccer facility. Additional funds would be provided by CATA, which, as referenced above, has twice offered to privately fund a complete tennis center at no cost to the city.** The leveraging action of shared infrastructure and facilities could be fully realized in this destination-park scenario. Combined with tennis organization funds to provide the level of capital needed to create and support a single-use tennis tournament facility, Austin would then, and only then, have the requisite components for a successful large tennis center.

The City's willingness to accommodate league schedules could be immediately implemented by adjusting the tennis centers' contracts and restoring public courts to a usable condition. The requirement to keep a percentage of courts open for public, non-league play could be suspended or relaxed during league high-demand periods. The SATC director has stated that this requirement to set courts aside is why so often only 50% of the courts are in use. Given that the Austin High School courts are already part of the PARD tennis centers, league play could be appropriately scheduled to not conflict with Austin High's tennis schedule.

Viable alternatives do exist. We reiterate our opening statement that addressing tennis league requests for more publicly-funded courts need never have conflicted with preserving a small neighborhood park. We urge PARD, the Zoning and Platting Commission, City Manager, and City Council along with the tennis-league community to develop an alternative site and incorporate alternative funding streams, especially including private and corporate funding, for a truly world class center that will achieve the tennis community's goals, answer AISD's need for a tournament facility, and preserve South Austin Park. Turn this issue into a win-win!

Conclusion

The crucial perspective to apply in this matter is to see South Austin Park as just that, a park. For many years, this green space we've spent so many hours and words on has been thought of only as the waiting receptacle for future tennis courts. The situation is like the well-known perception exercise in which what initially appears as a goblet can also be perceived as two faces in profile.



If you've only seen the area outside the SATC as a place holder for tennis courts, it requires a perceptual shift to experience that ground as having a shape and meaning of its own, as being a simple oasis of green in a dense network of structures, fences, concrete, and cars. The fundamental inappropriateness of paving over 86,000 square feet of this little park may only be apparent when one can truly see the **face of South Austin Park.**



Neighborhood resident Maya enjoys a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the park.

If the Tennis Center expansion is allowed to proceed, the entire area behind Maya would be destroyed to make way for additional courts and parking.

We have demonstrated how the SATC addition is not in alignment with the City's stated objectives and policies. The design from the early 1980s—as the SATC was originally proposed and its 10 courts were built—can and should be updated to reflect our community's goals then and now. GENA urges the City of Austin to exercise good societal and budgetary judgment by making a course correction that will implement, not work against, the excellent ideas of "smart growth."

GENA asserts that relocating the addition planned for SATC and preserving the wooded and open green space of South Austin Park will

- Enhance the community's livability;
- Define and enhance the character of the neighborhood by keeping the SATC in scale with the neighborhood;
- Contribute to intelligent traffic management;
- Implement environmental protection and preservation of open space;
- Protect and further establish Galindo's *Traditional Neighborhood Pattern* with its "variety of residential housing types, neighborhood commercial uses that are located nearby and are in scale with the neighborhood, a network of narrow, interconnected streets that provide a safe and enjoyable walking environment, and ***open space that serves as both an organizing feature and gathering place for the neighborhood*** (emphasis added)."³²

The Galindo Elementary Neighborhood Association strongly opposes the expansion of the South Austin Tennis Center and urges the City of Austin relocate this tournament-scale project and preserve South Austin Park, an invaluable and irreplaceable asset to the quality of life in our neighborhood and in the greater Austin community.

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This lovely image is a pale approximation of experiencing an afternoon in South Austin Park. This grove would be among the 200+ trees destroyed by the SATC expansion.

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- ¹ Parks and Recreation Department. Master Plan. 1980. p 109.
- ² John Robinson & Associates, Architects for COA. "A Tennis Center Facility: Preliminary Detailed Development Plan, Schematics, and Environmental Conditions –Phase 'B'." p1.
- ³ Ibid. p1, p12, p22.
- ⁴ Ibid. 3.
- ⁵ The Arizpe Group, Inc. "Engineers Report: South Austin Tennis Center –Facility Additions and Improvements." November 02, 2004.
- ⁶ City of Austin. "Parks, Greenways and Neighborhoods." 1998.
- ⁷ City of Austin --Smart Growth Programs: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/smartgrowth/programs.htm>.
- ⁸ John Robinson & Associates. p6.
- ⁹ Graphics prepared by scanning and adding color to the "Demolition" and "Improvements" pages of the site plan documents created by the project engineers, The Arizpe Group (TAG), and filed with the City of Austin Development Assistance Center. All scales are as depicted in the original documents.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Planning and Growth Management Department. Plan for Implementation: Recreation and Open Space. 1987. p 19.
- ¹² PGMD. Plan for Implementation: Environment. 1988. p 6.
- ¹³ PARD. 1980. p 30.
- ¹⁴ PARD. 1980. p 106.
- ¹⁵ City of Austin, Austin Tomorrow Plan in PARD, 1980, p 7.
- ¹⁶ PGMD. 1987.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. p 9.
- ¹⁹ PARD. "Long Range Plan for Land and Facilities." 1998.
- ²⁰ PARD. Action Plan. 1982.
- ²¹ PGMD. 1988. p 9.
- ²² PGMD. 1987. p 27.
- ²³ PARD. 1980. p 5.
- ²⁴ PGMD. 1987. p 9.
- ²⁵ Mike Clark-Madison for The Chronicle. "Bond Cliffnotes". 28 October 1998.
- ²⁶ Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club. "Texas' Wide Open Spaces are Disappearing": <http://www.texas.sierraclub.org/spaces/disappear.asp> .
- ²⁷ PGMD. 1987. p 11.
- ²⁸ PGMD. 1987. p 17.
- ²⁹ PARD. 1982.
- ³⁰ Corpus Christi Caller Times, www.caller2.com. Articles dated Dec 11, 1998 "Seles, Davenport coming to town"; March 5, 2000 "Courier entertains, winning exhibition"
- ³¹ PARD. 1982.
- ³² AISD 2004 School Bond Election Program, www.austinisd.org
- ³² Smart Growth Programs, Traditional Neighborhood Development: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/smartgrowth/programs.htm#eight>