

Town Lake Trail Foundation

Progress Report

September 8, 2003

Background

The Town Lake Trail is much more than a tourist attraction. It is Central Texas' link between north and south and east and west. The Trail is the central meeting point for recreation, concerts, fairs, the arts, and family gatherings. The park is a critical ingredient to what makes Austin a "livable" city and is a key element of what makes Austinites proud to call this city home.

Central Texans and those who visit our part of the country recognize that the Town Lake Trail is an environmental and recreational treasure the likes of which cannot be found in any other city in Texas, much less the United States. It is our special paradise. To lose the trail or to let it decay would be a tragedy.

Nonetheless, at a time when the trail is in dire need of clean-up, rebuilding and infrastructure restoration, our city faces a severe budget crisis. Here's why the trail is in trouble:

- In 1985, Austin had roughly 600 acres of parkland and 240 Parks employees. Today, Austin has 16,000 acres of parkland and just 120 employees.
- We now have three to five times as many people living, working and exercising in Central Austin as we did just 10 years ago.
- Parks improvements have historically been funded by voter-approved bond elections, the last one approved in 1998. Of the \$100 million that was raised then, not one cent was dedicated to improvements along the Town Lake Trail. According to Mayor Wynn, due to the city's existing debt-load, the next time the city might be able to hold such a bond election is 2006 or 2007.
- On July 31, 2003, the City Manager presented a budget to City Council that contains deep cuts in programs that are critical to our community. How it will affect the Parks Department:
 - Parks will lose another 28 positions this year; they lost 78 positions last year.
 - \$3.4 million in planned spending was taken away.
 - Parks police budget was cut 13%, eliminating 4 officers.

The result is a Town Lake Trail system that's begging for help.

Mission and Vision

Recognizing the plight of the trail, runners, walkers, hikers, bikers and friends of the Trail formed the Town Lake Trail Foundation (TLTF) in 2003 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation (application pending) to expand, restore, improve, beautify and maintain the scenic network of hike and bike trails that shadow the lush Colorado River that flows through Austin, Texas.



The *Town Lake Trail Foundation* (TLTF) is committed to serving the Town Lake Trail. Our mission is to ensure that The Trail remains the most beautiful, natural, fitness-friendly hike and bike path in the United States. We believe private individuals and companies who benefit from the trail, particularly runners, walkers and bikers, have a strong sense of responsibility for assuring it remains a public treasure.

What We Do

The *Town Lake Trail Foundation* (TLTF) was formed to expand, restore, improve, beautify and maintain the scenic network of hike and bike trails that shadow the lush Colorado River. The activities we plan to undertake include:

- Restoration
- Conservation
- Beautification
- Erosion prevention
- Improved safety and security
- Clean-up
- Preservation
- Expansion
- Superior construction
- Improved facilities
- Maintenance

Organizational Structure

The TLTF is comprised of 10 volunteer committees responsible for: parks improvement projects (restrooms, water stops, infrastructure improvements, showers, erosion, safety and security, and trail culture), development (public and private grants), fundraising, regulatory affairs, Keeping Austin Weird, environmental concerns, family activities, events (races and runs), marketing, and administration. Each committee is chaired by one or more volunteer chairpersons who recruit their own volunteer team. At present our volunteers number roughly 350.

The TLTF has no paid staff or paid employees. Our Director serves the Foundation voluntarily. We have a temporary 3-person volunteer board of directors, each serving one-year terms. A few invitations to join an expanded board in June 2004 have been extended to a number of distinguished Central Texans; however, until they fully agree to serve the Foundation we are not at liberty to release their names.

Process

We have recently secured a letter of agreement with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. As we understand this agreement, we raise funds for trail improvements and any operating and maintenance expenses. When we are ready to move forward with a project, we submit a Parks Improvement Proposal to the Parks Department for consideration and authorization. The Parks Department can either approve the proposal or request changes. Once the proposal is deemed satisfactory, we then decide whether the project in question can be immediately authorized, must go before the Parks Board for approval, or is significant enough to require City Council approval.



This process, though appropriate for the level of activity we have underway, is bureaucratic, slow and cumbersome. As we complete projects, establish a track record, gain momentum, and secure more funding for our work, we intend to seek a more efficient operating agreement with the City that will enable us to be more effective.

The Foundation is currently in the project planning stage for more than 3-dozen Town Lake Trail improvements. This provides an overview of the projects that are currently our top priority:

Status of The Brackenridge Trail

In the spring of 2003, we approached the University of Texas about extending the Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail from where it currently ends at Deep Eddy Pool all the way to Red Bud Island, near Tom Miller Dam and Hula Hut. Our objective is to create a plan that creates a useful, enjoyable trail but also respects the ownership rights, activities, privacy and security of the numerous UT constituents who would be affected, and preserves the natural ecology of the land.



Working alongside the Parks and Recreation Department, we have had three meetings with the University of Texas about this issue and each has seemed more positive. The most recent presentation was to Dr. Patricia Clubb, vice president for employee and campus services, Jim Wilson (system Real estate director) and Kathy Libersat (system Real estate office). Dr. Clubb represents the University's facilities and spaces council that has responsibility for land and facilities issues, and we're told, will have the final decision making authority about the trail extension.

Dr. Clubb has agreed to present our proposal to the council at their October meeting. *WooooHoooo!!!!*

We want everyone to be aware that the University has been excellent about working with us; is listening intently to our ideas, and is seriously considering this project. Please do not contact anyone at the University about this proposal. We promise to keep you informed.



Priority Projects

The Foundation is currently in the project planning stage for more than 3-dozen Town Lake Trail improvements. This provides an overview of the projects that are currently our top priority:

New restroom facilities. From the Colorado River Trail in east Austin to the Mopac pedestrian bridge near Austin High School, there are more than a dozen freestanding restroom facilities. We intend to replace every one with a new, cleaner, healthier facility. Working from APARD's restroom design specifications, we are currently in the architectural design phase for two new facilities. Those in the worst shape and those that are not functional at all will be replaced first.



Water fountains. Working from specifications provided by APARD, the TLTF is currently analyzing a variety of water fountain and container-style water stops to assure that those Central Texans attempting to maintain their health and fitness out on the trail are never in danger of dehydration.



Maps and Directional Signage. One of the most common complaints we hear from hotel managers, hotel concierges and tourists visiting Austin is that the Town Lake Trail is a tangled, confusing mass of trails and it is next to impossible to find one's way around. Working from specifications provided by APARD, the TLTF intends to create graphic standards for Town Lake Trail corridor signage, install master Town Lake Trail corridor maps at key entryways, and produce and install directional signage at trail intersections.





Erosion solutions/Retaining walls. At many points along the trail, the Colorado River is dangerously close to eroding away commemorative benches, landscaped gardens and painstakingly manicured memorials that have been graciously donated and painstakingly cared for by Central Texans. We want to build retaining walls and fortified embankments to keep these treasures from disappearing forever.



Project Costs

Taken together, we estimate it will be necessary for us to raise \$9 to \$12 million to complete all of the projects our supporters have requested by 2007. Already, more than 4-dozen projects, ranging in cost from \$4,000 to \$9.9 million, have been recommended by trail users. Many of these projects are in the planning stages now; others are wait-listed.

In all cases, we seek donated materials and services before any funding is allocated. Thus far, we have been very successful. We already have architectural design underway for two new restroom facilities and have received generous commitments from owners of building materials companies, landscape engineers and architecture firms -- all of whom happen to be trail runners -- to do these at their expense.

Nevertheless, our objective is to establish a permanent fund that will assure that whenever the city faces budget shortfalls, the Town Lake Trail will be immune to its suffering. As such, we are currently seeking funds from individuals, corporations and foundations, as well as public grant making entities such as Texas Parks and Wildlife, LCRA and the Texas Department of Transportation, and private foundations dedicated to parks, the environment, trails, recreation and families.



A Preliminary Strategic Plan (Phased Approach)

We are currently finalizing the first draft of a strategic plan for the Town Lake Trail Foundation. The plan separates the Foundation's operations between operating costs and capital improvement costs, and outlines Foundation priorities through 2008. The plan consists of 4 phases and lists the foundation's tentative project priorities in each phase.

Phase 1 - Basic Infrastructure (June 2003 – June 2004)	Phase 2 – Infrastructure/Brackenridge Trail (July 2004 – June 2005)
▪ Two new restroom facilities	▪ Finish construction of the Brackenridge Trail
▪ Water fountain replacements and testing new solutions	▪ Introduce the Town Lake Trail Rangers
▪ Signage standards and construction	▪ Five new adoptable restroom facilities
▪ Erosion and drainage controls	▪ Five new adoptable water facilities
▪ Brackenridge Trail authorization and funding	▪ Begin construction of the Red Bud Bridge
▪ Create and successfully host major fundraising event	▪ Monthly trail clean-ups
▪ Begin construction of the Brackenridge Trail	▪ Basic signage and maps

Phase 3 - Infrastructure/Beautification (July 2005 – Dec. 2006)	Phase 4 – Amenities and Expansion (Jan. 2006 – Dec. 2008)
▪ Adopt A Stretch Implementation	▪ Landscape lighting exploratory in test areas
▪ Native tree and foliage planting with Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center	▪ Finalize funding and construction plans for Southside boardwalk
▪ Identify retaining wall solution/plan for south of Mopac pedestrian bridge	▪ Health and fitness amenities
▪ Directional signage throughout trail	▪ Southside boardwalk construction
▪ LCRA/Oyster Landing extensions	

Success Measurement

A restored and improved Town Lake Trail Corridor has far reaching ramifications for Central Texas. Potential results include:

- improved awareness of the importance of the trail to Austin's past and future;
- an increasing abundance of native trees and plants;
- increased safety and security for trail users;
- improved tourism and tourism tax revenues for the city;
- improved ability to attract work force and educational talent;
- superior ability to attract exciting new industries and employers to Austin;
- higher real estate property values near the trail;
- decreasing erosion problems;
- less pollution in our waterways;
- lower crime rates on and near the trail;
- an improved attitude and pride among trail users and those of us who appreciate the trail; and
- national and international recognition as a healthy and environmentally conscious city.



Our benchmarks for success include completion of new amenities, restoration of existing facilities (such as restrooms, water fountains, signage and showers, for example), and greater appreciation for the Trail from Austinites and those who visit our city.

But perhaps the most important outcome of improving the Town Lake Trail as a recreation and fitness facility is the improved health of the Austin population. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, two-thirds of American adults are overweight and 27% of those are obese. Resultantly, juvenile diabetes rates are soaring.

A safe and fitness-friendly Town Lake hike and bike trail could become the incentive thousands of central Texans need to embrace a healthy lifestyle. With the government currently spending \$300 billion a year on the effects of obesity and diabetes, if we can convince even more Americans to get out and go for a run, get fit and healthy and reduce their obesity, that's a lot of money that could be used elsewhere. We believe Austin could become the fittest city in America, an example for cities across the country.

Supporters

Primarily from hosting Gatorade stops and information booth at the MOPAC pedestrian bridge, we have built a supporter list with approximately 1,000 names in just 10 weeks. Approximately 65% of these individuals have made financial pledges ranging from \$5 to \$1,000. Two hundred of those who have filled out pledge cards have stated that they will make a donation once we have officially secured our 501c3 from the IRS.

Approximately 750 individuals have asked for us to keep sending them more information. Finally, we have amassed a list of 350 volunteers who have asked to come help out with trash clean-ups fundraising and organizing events. We are in the process of organizing all these volunteers into effective committees.

We are just getting started! We're in the planning stages of races, runs, events and fundraising parties that will occur throughout the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004.

Fundraising and Expenses

Since many of our donations to date are pledges or in-kind gifts, it is difficult for us to total the amount of funding we have raised. Until we have received final IRS 501C3 approval as a non-profit corporation (anticipated any day now), we are unable to collect many of the pledges that have been made.

However, demonstrating the remarkable support we have received from those who love the trail, more than \$35,000 in cash pledges has been received in just our first 10 weeks of existence. In addition, we have received verbal commitments exceeding \$250,000 in value for materials, services and supplies from more than a dozen central Texas companies. (Contacts and references are available upon request.)

This fall, we hope to present a funding request to the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation. Also this fall, we hope to present our preliminary plans to the Moody Foundation as well, but are unable to do so without official IRS approval. We are also seeking meetings with the Meadows Foundation, The RGK Foundation and The Lola B. Wright Foundation. Other foundations have also expressed support for our efforts.



As we are an all-volunteer organization, 100% of all donations have been dedicated to fundraising, trail improvements and project planning. We've accumulated roughly \$500 in foundation administrative expenses to date and we anticipate that administrative expenses will not exceed 1% of estimated pledges for the years 2003 and 2004.

Activities Already Underway

- Working with Pfluger & Associates and Elgin Butler Brick Company, we have begun architectural planning for new restroom and water facilities all along the trail, and are also looking at installing retaining walls at points along the river's edge where erosion is encroaching on park benches and landscaped memorial gardens. Austin Parks and Recreation is providing project specifications and guidance.
- We have applied to the *Austin American-Statesman* to be the beneficiary of the 2004 Capitol 10000. We hope for a decision on this issue by November 1.
- We have submitted a request to the Internal Revenue Service for expedited approval of our non-profit application given that we are facing a financial hardship, since we cannot collect the thousands of dollars that have been already pledged. We anticipate that this request will be approved by October 1, 2003.
- We are currently gathering detailed trail route and trail user information for the entire Town Lake Trail Corridor so that we can identify those areas where large information maps and directional signage should be situated.
- We are slated to present a proposal to the City Council in September or October for the first ever Town Lake Trials, an individual time trials race benefiting the Town Lake Trail, which would be held this spring.

Other Accomplishments:

Since our founding in June 2003, we have:

- Formed a working partnership agreement with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.
- Enlisted the support of more than 350 volunteers and formed 10 working committees with volunteer staff.
- Created a mailing list of supporters that has more roughly 1,000 names.
- Received 10 substantial corporate donations and raised more than \$35,000 in individual cash pledges.
- Received verbal commitments exceeding \$250,000 in value for materials, services and supplies from more than a dozen central Texas companies.
- Presented our plans to the Austin Runners Club and Austin Triathletes.
- Received recognition in *Tribeza magazine*, *the Austin Business Journal*, *the Austin Chronicle*, on KXAN television, and in numerous neighborhood and association group newsletters
- Finally, the editor of the *Austin Business Journal* Rickie Windle wrote one of the nicest editorials about us that I've ever read about any cause, anywhere. Sincerest thanks to Rickie for seeing past the politics.
See: <http://austin.bizjournals.com/austin/stories/2003/07/28/editorial1.html>.

All this has occurred in just 10 weeks.



How You Can Help:

1. Introduce the Foundation to your friends who might be able to make a contribution (The Foundations we are approaching are not going to go this alone.) Please forward this to your friends.
2. Show your support by sending us a letter, preferably with an accompanying donation, that states your support for the Town Lake Trail Foundation and the restoration of the Town Lake Trail.
3. Send us your ideas: How can we make the Town Lake Trail the most beautiful, fitness-friendly urban hike and bike trail in the United States?

Thanks to everyone for your continued support.

As always, if you don't want these updates, please tell us so. Your email address will be removed immediately.

Now go run!

