

# Town Lake Trail Foundation

## Progress Report - January 14, 2004

If you've been to our website, you probably have a pretty good idea what we're all about. We are a group of volunteers, runners, bikers, walkers, and hikers, who love the Town Lake Trail. We feel strongly that Austin would not be such a great city without the Town Lake Trail. The Trail helps make Austin one of the most physically fit cities in the United States, one of the best U.S. cities for business and recreation, and plays a significant role in the health and happiness of everyone who lives here.

Due to a rapidly growing population and the city's financial woes, the trail is starting to deteriorate.

This is Austin. We can do better. So, we'd like to try to do something about it.

The Town Lake Trail Foundation (TLTF) was formed in 2003 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation to expand, restore, improve, beautify and maintain the network of hike and bike trails that shadow the Colorado River. Our mission is to ensure that The Trail remains the most beautiful, fitness-friendly, urban hike and bike path in the United States. We believe individuals and companies who benefit from the trail, particularly runners, walkers and bikers, have a 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 undertake include:

- Restoration
- Conservation
- Beautification
- Erosion prevention
- Improved safety and security
- Preservation
- Expansion
- Clean-up
- Facilities restoration
- Maintenance

### Organizational Structure

The Foundation is comprised of volunteers 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, environmental concerns, family activities, events (races and runs), marketing, and administration. We are currently forming committees to address these activities. Volunteer chairpersons who recruit their own team direct each committee. At present our volunteers number roughly 500. We need many more.

### Process

We have secured a letter of agreement with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department that governs projects we initiate. According to the agreement, when we move forward with a project, we submit a Parks Improvement





We have recently submitted architectural plans to the Austin Parks and Recreation Department for a new restroom facility that would replace the existing restroom located between Cesar Chavez and Town Lake, directly across from the Seaholm Power Plant. This location is where the Shoal Creek Hike and Bike Trail joins the Town Lake Trail.

We chose this site for the first facility because the existing “one-holer” at this location is believed to be in the poorest condition of the any of the trail restrooms. Additionally, thousands of new apartments and condominiums are being constructed along 5<sup>th</sup> Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Street and North Lamar. When these new residences become occupied, it is highly likely that pedestrian traffic along this section of the trail will increase dramatically.

Our intent is to build this facility at no cost to the taxpayers of Austin using 100% donated materials, labor and cash. Already, the following companies have stepped up to offer building materials and services:

- Architects - Pfluger Associates, L.P.**
- Materials Suppliers - Elgin Butler Brick Company, Central Texas Masonry Council, Calcasieu, Montebella Homes**
- Engineering Services - Murfee Engineering**
- Site Survey – Ralph Harris Surveyors**
- Landscape Design – Pearson Landscape Services**
- General Contractor – Browning Construction**

We have raised more than \$30,000 in funding for this project already. The City has granted us a site plan permit exemption since we’ll be bringing the existing facility up to ADA code.

As of today’s date, we are awaiting critical information from the city about electrical lines and meters running to the existing facility. Once we have this information, we will be submitting our building permit application. We hope to break ground in January and complete the project early this spring.

## ***2. Trail Maps, Directional Signage and Mile Markers***



Those of us who use the trail frequently know it well. We never get lost, even when exploring a path we may not have taken before. But that's not the case for new Austinites or visitors from elsewhere. Many come to Austin to run, having read about the legendary Town Lake Trail. Once they arrive, they find the trail system to be a confusing tangle of unmarked trails. An additional concern is that many of Austin's most interesting attractions, Barton Springs, Zilker Park, Deep Eddy Pool, the Stevie Ray Vaughn Memorial, and Auditorium Shores, are located along the trail but there's no signage anywhere to direct downtown guests in the right direction. Finally, there are the mile markers. For serious athletes, the mile markers are a blessed amenity, enabling one to monitor his or her splits, judge distances, and fine-tune training efforts. Unfortunately, most people don't know where they begin and end, some of the distances are slightly off, and they're simply not very attractive.

Two Austin companies have stepped up to help us put together a simple, systematic "way finding" solution to these problems. **Pentagram** has agreed to help create architectural signage and **Bosse, Turner and Compton** has agreed to work with Pentagram to develop a comprehensive trail system and signage requirements plan.

We have raised \$12,000 for this project. Already many of our volunteers have started mapping every turn, feature and attraction along the trail, starting at Pleasant Valley Road and heading west to the Emmitt Shelton Bridge. We hope to present our recommendations to the Parks Department early this spring and complete sign construction and installation by summer.

#### **Additional Projects Planned for 2004**

##### ***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 original trail route followed the river's edge all the way to Red Bud Island where a pedestrian bridge took trail users over the northeast fork of the river. After numerous meetings with the University, it was determined that there was no way to build such a trail without adversely impacting the important insect and mammal research underway at the Brackenridge Biology Field Lab.

Nevertheless, UT officials are continuing to work with us and have asked us to consider other route options. We plan to present a proposal with alternative routes to UT officials in February 2004. 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 our ideas. Please do not contact anyone at the University about this proposal. We promise to keep you informed.

##### **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.





***New Restroom Facilities***

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



**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.



## Regular Trash Cleanups

This fall, unfortunately just prior to the Trail of Lights, more than 100 Town Lake Trail Foundation volunteers meticulously combed the banks of the Colorado River removing every last inch of trash along the trail. For a few weeks, the trail looked fantastic. Unfortunately, soon thereafter, trash started falling from Mopac and I-35 and began blowing in from Barton Springs and Cesar Chavez. Not long after that, hundreds of thousands of Austinites, paper bags of fast food in hand, descended on Zilker Park for the annual Trail of Lights. Fortunately, the Parks Department moved in and cleaned the place up in January. It looks great right now.

Our next trail clean-up is scheduled for April 2004. This will be a very special scavenger hunt type of event with truly valuable prizes for participants. Don't miss it!

## Austin High Fitness Facility



We estimate that there are more than 4,000 people a day entering the Town Lake Trail from the Austin High School parking lot and the roads surrounding Austin High. At present, there is just one restroom facility located within the Austin High Tennis Center. In the evenings after work, there are lines three and four deep in front of the men's and women's restroom.

The existing restroom facility is in terrible shape. Toilets, sinks and plumbing all leak. There are holes in the walls and ceilings. The exterior siding and paint has deteriorated. Doors do not close correctly or lock. Additionally, much of the space is unused. The tennis center on the high school side is only open seasonally.

We propose to tear down this structure and build a first class restroom and changing center, preliminarily named the Town Lake Trail Fitness Facility. This facility would have an indoor/outdoor pool-house style design, similar to the Barton Springs and Deep Eddy Pool Bathhouses, with walls and floors of rock or tile that can be easily power-sprayed each evening. The doors to the restrooms would be locked 30 minutes after curfew and opened each morning 30



minutes before the trail opens. The side of the building facing the Austin High Tennis courts would be a wall of stadium style seats so students can watch tennis tournaments. The building would feature the following amenities:

- A men's changing area with benches and with 4 spacious 4' x 8' men's toilet rooms
- A women's changing area with 7 even more spacious 5' x 9' women's toilet rooms with changing benches
- 100 short-term lockers for running clothes and shoes (roughly 12"x12"x 36")
- Five outdoor showers in each changing area
- Two water fountains
- A durable clock visible from the trail
- A 20' x 30' deck/stretching area, with partial tree shade, which would face the parking lot and trail
- A 20' x 20' retail store that could sell running and tennis equipment and apparel
- A 15' x 15' juice bar/café that would sell drinks and healthy snacks
- Bench seating (10) around the edges of the deck that doubles as stretching equipment

The city would offer concession licenses to operators to run the retail store and the juice/coffee bar with the understanding that applicants would rebate a portion of the revenues to the Town Lake Trail Foundation or the Parks Departments, and the resulting revenue would be used exclusively for operating and maintenance costs of the facility. Any incremental revenues would be dedicated to trail upkeep.

### Tree Health Study



The trees and fauna along various sections of the Town Lake Trail are treated differently. Along Auditorium Shores, a carefully planned planting and pruning program assures that the trees in this area are healthy. There are very few vines and bushes do not grow much. Other sections, such as the wooded area near Austin High School, have been consciously left primitive by the Parks Department. The reasons are numerous:

- Many Austinites prefer the more heavily wooded sections.
- The Parks department budget is not adequate for maintaining trees along the entire 10.2-mile section of trail.
- Due to frequent flooding, there were very few trees along some sections of the trail to begin with.

Unfortunately, today, there are large sections of wooded land along the trail that have become overgrown with invasive plants. Along the southern edge of Zilker Park for example, many of the older trees are so completely covered with Mustang Grapevine, that they do not get any light and cannot photosynthesize. In other sections, the banks have eroded in such a way that some of the most beautiful and ancient cypress trees are in danger of falling over. The aforementioned area near Austin High has also become a haven for the homeless and the woods are littered with bottles, trash and drug paraphernalia.

We believe it is time to engage in an ongoing Tree Health Assessment study that will meticulously analyze the trees along the Town Lake Trail to assure that large stands of trees are not killed off in one fell swoop. Each section would be prioritized based on most critical need. For each section, we would develop tree and fauna management guidelines. Additionally, we would tag and record data about all the trees believed to be landmark trees, meaning the older, tallest and most beautiful. Individual estimates for pruning and clearing each section in accordance with the guidelines would then be requested from qualified tree care professionals.

### **Establishing a Town Lake Beautification/Gardening Competition – Adopt-A-Garden**

All along the trail, there are gardens and memorials that have not been maintained. We recently secured permission from the Parks Department to establish a gardening and beautification program, wherein we will auction off ten Town Lake Trail gardens to gardening clubs and gardeners who would like to help us beautify the trail.

In the spring of 2004, ten gardens will be put up for adoption. This summer, we will have a competition consisting of cash prizes and awards for those who have created the most beautiful gardens. We are currently seeking a project director to organize this event and sponsors to donate prizes.

### **Other Projects and Getting Involved**

In addition to these trail improvement projects, other ideas are being considered. If you'd like to learn more, or perhaps become involved, please try to attend one of our monthly volunteer meetings. The meeting schedule for 2004 is as follows:

- Wednesday, February 18, 2004 from 6 to 8:30
- Wednesday, March 24, 2004 from 6 to 8:30
- Wednesday, April 14, 2004 from 6 to 8:30



These meetings typically take place at one of our volunteer's homes. Everyone brings part of the meal or drinks and we are pretty relaxed. If you'd like to attend, please send an email to [dan@townlaketrail.org](mailto:dan@townlaketrail.org).

### **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 500 volunteers and formed working committees with volunteer staff.
- Created a mailing list of supporters that has more roughly 1,000 names.
- Received 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 central Texas companies.
- Were selected as the beneficiary of the Austin Runner's Club's Decker Challenge. Thanks to ARC and Decker runners, we received \$3,850 that can be applied to trail improvements.
- Presented our plans to the Austin Runners Club, Hill Country Trail Runners, and Austin Triathletes.
- Organized a Trail Trash Clean Up, *Keep The Trash Off The Trail*, which resulted in the removal of more than 210 bags of trash from the shores of Town Lake.
- Received recognition in *Austin Business Journal*, *Tribes magazine*, *the Austin Business Journal*, *the Austin Chronicle*, on KXAN television, and in numerous neighborhood and association group newsletters

### **How You Can Help:**

1. Introduce the Foundation to your friends who might be able to make a contribution.
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!**

