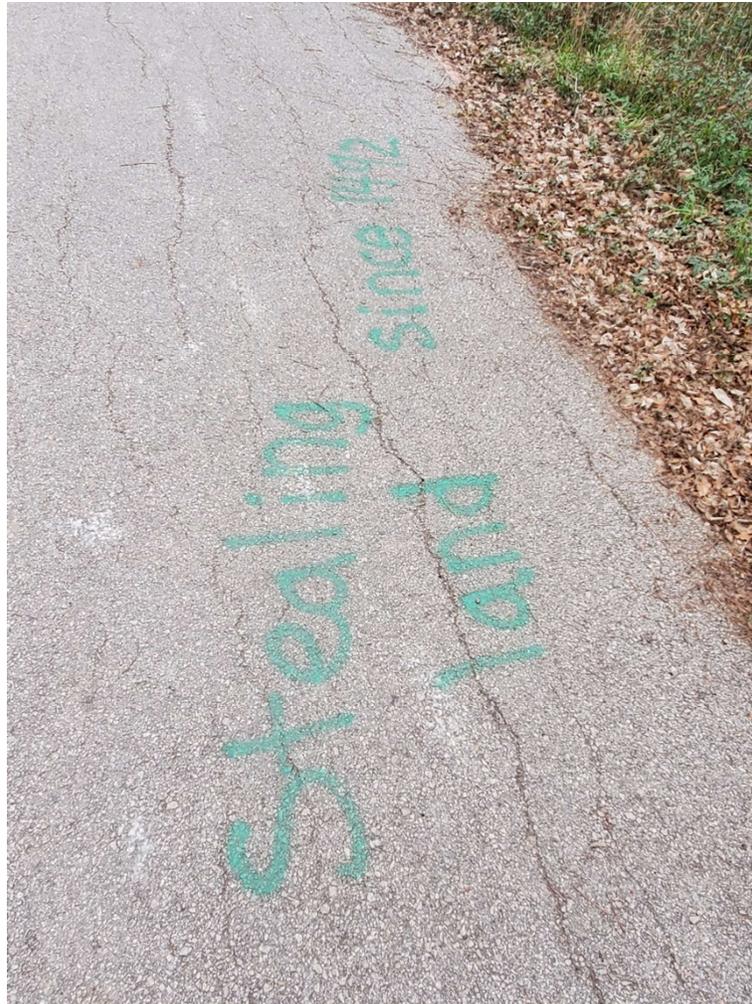


# Same River, Different Trail: Resource Distribution in Recreational Infrastructure



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
History of Infrastructure Development in Austin .....	3
Image to Preserve .....	4
Roy G. Guerrero Trail.....	6
The Trail Foundation .....	12
History of The Trail Foundation and the City of Austin .....	36
Ecology Action of Texas .....	44
History of Ecology Action and the City of Austin .....	53
Conclusion .....	57

## Introduction

To review how different communities are treated, there is no barometer better than the built environment. Any onlooker or visitor can tell which parts of a neighborhood are valued versus those languishing in negligence. However, because housing is such a fundamental human right, many people ignore how recreational infrastructure projects indicate what communities are heard and respected. Leisure space is considered a luxury to some areas while being seen as a natural right in others. Retaliation from the government to its citizenry is very difficult to perceive, but the Roy G. Guerrero Urban Trail is a key example of how public and private entities can collude to punish those who fail to catch the attention of those in power.

## History of Infrastructure Development in Austin

Until 2014, all local elections were at-large, as opposed to geographically representative districts, which is one of the most important elements of decision-making for a local government. Many West Austin residents were opposed to switching the elections to geographically representative districts when the idea was first introduced on December 3, 1970, and despite advocacy, a lawsuit in 1984, and a special election in 1985, West Austin was given majority influence over the entire city. That indifference was effective until 2012, when the citizenry could no longer ignore the rapidly rising cost of living and the displacement of people of color, especially when displacement was a heated discussion throughout the nation. Essentially, citizenry of color was forced to endure municipally-sanctioned oppression through urban planning from 1839 until 2014.

East Austin had already suffered a tremendous blow to its autonomy with the damage done by the designation of the “desired development zone” on September 5, 1997. Unfortunately, the most significant urban renewal plan for Austin was not approved during the 1960s, but in 1999, called the “New Vision for East Austin.” Until that point, there was still a visible presence of BIPOCQ communities in Austin, but West Austinites who were greedy to acquire income properties based on the expanding housing bubble used their influence to eject thousands of BIPOCQ out of the city. Even with outrage from the community and several advocacy groups of color pleading with council, the city approved an urban renewal plan that put Austin on its current tract.

Suddenly, community infrastructure was relevant to municipal leadership again. Sidewalks that had been viewed as perfectly acceptable for non-white citizenry was suddenly inadequate and blighted, and it became essential for bicycle infrastructure to be developed. The same people who refused to acknowledge the voices of residents were the same people claiming to advocate for public safety and outdoor space. Instead of neighborhood associations having to beg for meetings, there were large, white-led organizations who were able to attract hundreds of thousands of dollars for their efforts despite never engaging with communities of color. Moreover, these “leaders” had the advantage of proximity to decision-makers, since there was no requirement that councilmembers live near people affected by certain policies.

The city seamlessly accepted strangers taking over communities where their children were not enrolled and where they deemed “dangerous,” and the residents who had advocated for decades had no funds to combat such collaboration based on the increased cost of living.

Sinisterly, the city gave large, white-led organizations two things that communities of color rarely received: legitimation and money. The advocacy groups of color were commonly stalled with studies and indecision, while white-led organizations received ordinances and contracts on a regular basis. In a city where money is the only thing that matters and the humanity of BIPOCQ is worthless, there was nothing that advocacy groups of color could do but vote, and none could convince councilmembers that it was in the best interests to support policies that would stabilize neighborhoods of color.

In particular, the downtown area was seen as a delicacy where council’s decisions started clearing the way to never see a person of color again thanks to images portrayed by several planning organizations—as well as mainstream media’s portrayal of urban spaces with all white people. When white-led organizations approached the city, both parties acted as if nobody had ever approached the city for infrastructure improvements because in the minds of the city, “nobody” had. Outdoor amenities began to spring up left and right, and overlay districts and TIF zones were established to encourage luxury development which raised property taxes and further depleted funds of already exhausted neighborhoods.

## Image to Preserve

Racism and wage stagnation are critical tools to suppress BIPOCQ communities because they aid in the portrayal that BIPOCQ residents do not care about their community. In the 1960s, activists might have had homes to post bail and fund legal efforts, but the first wave of urban renewal destroyed that wealth. In the current era, many other residents are able to acquire income properties and quit their jobs to work full-time against any policy which might inconvenience them, while BIPOCQ residents often work multiple jobs and sustain multiple-generation households. Changing infrastructure in a community is a monumental task for underfunded neighborhoods, whereas some other resident could sell one of their many houses to build a public bathroom or fund a study that affirms a need for further luxurious development. Too frequently, the city only hears money and status, so communities of color are disregarded even when gathered at public forums due to lacking funds and prestige.

Likewise, environmentalism has often been depicted as white people living in the “environment,” whereas BIPOCQ people are said to live “somewhere else.” Throughout my research, I have noticed a number of groups which were ignored, unfunded, and who spoke multiple times to the city only to be told that the larger groups were more “professional.” Instead of recognizing that there were several communities seeking better outdoor infrastructure and recreation facilities, the city focuses on those who have enough resources and enough time to capture its attention. This competition is artificially created by the relentless socioeconomic discrimination of BIPOCQ people, who are forced to compete for attention with less resources, less access to power structures, and who are then treated as if we should have better learned the system to properly engage.

Calm, white people speaking to calm, white people is how slavery and exploitation are justified, and if those are the only voices the city magnifies on a regular basis, there is nothing that BIPOCQ can accomplish, even if we remain calm. This city has been in existence for over 175 years, and there has *never* been a point when the municipal government has substantively told white Austinites to leave the communities of color alone. Private financing receives legitimation because there is less public scrutiny, and underpaid community engagement will never be able to compete.

To explain these issues, nothing is more powerful than seeing the discrepancy between different portions of trails around Town Lake, the story that public signage tells. I covered the area from the Montopolis Bridge to the Congress Avenue Bridge, using Longhorn Dam as a boundary. While the areas are slightly unequal, it was important to capture the whole of Boardwalk trail because it offers a completely different experience from any part of the Butler Trail. Also, both the Congress Avenue Bridge and Roy Guerrero are viewed as natural habitats under protection by the city, so I traveled between purportedly protected areas to demonstrate how the city informs residents to enjoy recreation while protecting the environment.

## Roy G. Guerrero Trail

Very few examples exist where discrepancies in park development can be seen around a single point, so this trail offers insight into all the history and information that I have previously provided. Zoned as a natural area, this is the only large outdoor recreational space that East Austin residents have been able to save from development. On June 25, 1984, the Montopolis citizenry began its advocacy for a large outdoor space resembling Zilker Park based on not having significant recreational spaces or funding to acquire them. The citizens had one image, but it became clear that the city was eager to create another higher-income community, and began planning amenities as such.

On January 26, 1989, Council approved an ordinance adopting the Town Lake Park Comprehensive Plan, and Town Lake was defined between the boundaries of Tom Miller Dam and Longhorn Dam. At the time, the Holly Power Plant was still in operation and there were several advocates of color fighting that plant, but the city was looking to enhance the Colorado River's presence in the middle of town. The area east of Longhorn Dam was defined as the "Colorado River" portion of Town Lake Park, but was anticipated to be a natural area. While other parts of Town Lake Park had extensive attention and details, there were only a few elements to the planning of Colorado River Park—mostly vague and related to "development." Specifically, the city stated that it would 1) begin development of the East Preserve in Colorado River Park; 2) Extend S. Lakeshore Boulevard to Montopolis; 3) Develop a performance pavilion in Colorado River Park; and 4) Complete development of Colorado River Park.

When terminology is deliberately vague, many opportunists take advantage of defining how "development" looks for some communities versus others. When this park planning began, the area was full of working-class Latinx families spilling between the north and south shores of Town Lake. Longhorn Dam itself was built with funding that was initially used to maintain a municipal market, but the flooding was too severe, so the city built a dam. The area existed without extensive flooding with a majority Latinx population for almost thirty years, even though real estate development was the first consideration once the city decided to build Longhorn Dam. However, the creation of the Town Lake Park Comprehensive Plan instigated lake development that spurred the real estate economy. In 2011, multiple organizations begged Council not to change zoning to preserve the park, and Council changed it regardless.

Roy Guerrero Trail and the park surrounding it are also indicative of two elements. First, naming infrastructure after a person of color does little to elevate the community surrounding the area. Secondly, neglecting the infrastructure tells the community that residents can only expect nominal, performative efforts from the city instead of substantive maintenance and care. Despite the planning to mirror areas from MoPac to Red Bud Isle, little about the area resembles the cultivation of areas west of MoPac. Planning included recreational facilities for fishing, and even though there is a healthy population which fishes in the area, no infrastructure exists to accommodate them. The performance pavilion that was assured in the ordinance of 1989 has never been built after thirty years, and only with the arrival of luxury developments is the area receiving substantial attention.

As the population transitioned around Roy Guerrero Park, most of the regulations were concerned with views of the capitol and the downtown area, although the community was able to successfully relocate a greenwater treatment plant. There was no real discussion about safe access to the river, which was consistent with the acceptable industrial zoning permitted around the Colorado River portion of the Town Lake Park Comprehensive Plan. Neighborhood associations requested that the city stop targeting the East Austin communities around Town Lake while building up parks and facilities, but without funding, they were unable to garner sufficient support. Essentially, the squeaky wheel gets the grease only if someone wants the wheel to turn.



There are no other urban trails or parks that store equipment that serves no purpose.



Privatized entrances communicate that wealthy populations have the right to exclude access to the outdoors for BIPOCQ and the working class.



Racial justice advocates resisting the neglect



Water crossing without safe railing despite connectivity with trail network



The lack of bridge connecting an established sidewalk demonstrates that this area was allowed to deteriorate, and that the surrounding populations were insignificant enough to the city to address a need for recreational space.



Community understands the city's disinvestment and works to inspire community engagement.



One of two signs about plans for the park.

### Signage for the Colorado River Park Wildlife Sanctuary



## The Trail Foundation

Once East Austin was zoned as the “desired development zone” (hereafter “DDZ”), many people other than developers were looking to take advantage of the city’s attention towards previously “blighted” areas. All of a sudden, people realized that Town Lake Trail was a continuous loop in the center of town, and could be a major amenity and tourist attraction, especially for the rising tech presence. City officials easily excused such behavior as private resources being used for public goods, believing that “the ends justify the means.” In turn, the private organizations cultivated an expectation of leadership among both city leaders and other private entities, and the private entities could engage with each other under the cover of “community engagement” as much or as little as they preferred.

The Trail Foundation began as the Town Lake Trail Foundation, but really only developed in 2003. Timing matters, and it speaks very poorly of the organization that it came into existence at that time for many reasons. First and foremost, this was after the designation of DDZ, meaning that whatever their interest, it was tied to the ability to influence development. Many of the ordinances and resolutions that control development around Town Lake include a member of the Trail Foundation, similar to the “Save Our Springs” ordinance, but to a much larger extent. Developers could make donations to and/or meet with The Trail Foundation and consider that to be “community engagement,” even though they never spoke a resident who would actually be affected by their site plans.

Secondly, organizations of color have never had the funding enjoyed by the leadership of The Trail Foundation. The Latinx community has had to make multiple concessions to apathetic city leadership, but The Trail Foundation got to be recognized for including Tejano education with an organization holding three out of seventeen members being people of color. Because The Trail Foundation could obtain so much funding, the push for public/private partnerships exploded, and the East Austin communities around the Butler Trail had no chance of maintaining the attention of their city leaders. Latinx activists were able to shut down multiple environmentally degrading facilities, and the real estate monsters expelled them after their efforts.

Furthermore, voting in the city meant an at-large council until 2014, so between 2003 and 2014, The Trail Foundation had a chance to do whatever it wanted, and it never had to listen to the Latinx communities that had lived in the area for decades. Community activists were still fighting the closure of the Holly Power Plant and struggling to receive and spend funding for mitigation efforts, not to mention the displacement that had ramped up beginning with the DDZ. The Trail Foundation was full of people who never had to engage with either of these issues either because they lived elsewhere in the city or because they were part of the displacement, owning income properties or being heavily involved with development or the tech communities receiving tax breaks.

Finally, because of the size and legitimacy of The Trail Foundation, the private entity serves as a gatekeeper to funding, planning, and community engagement. The city’s first denial of the organization happened in 2013, so The Trail Foundation enjoyed a decade of unquestioned authority simply because it was full of the “right” people. Otherwise, the same

council that complained about funding the Juneteenth celebrations was falling over itself to offer fee waivers to The Trail Foundation for the Maudi's Midnight Margarita Run. The Trail Foundation even fought an ordinance for developers to dedicate areas for parkland *despite supporting a trail*. Council constantly praises and commends the organization for its effort while refusing to acknowledge that it was the only one whose efforts were consistently recognized and *funded*. When using the Butler trail, even the signage indicates that it belongs mostly to The Trail Foundation, not the general public of Austin.

### Signage on Trail Usage

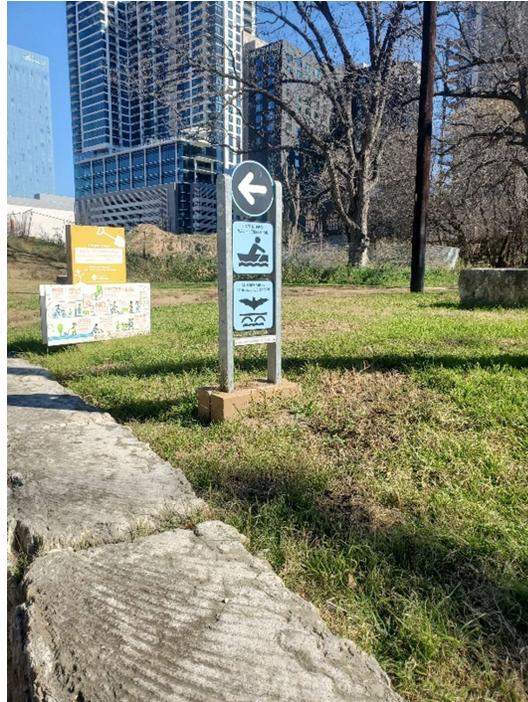
These are instructional signs that direct people on proper trail usage.





*Directional Signage*

These municipal signs allow people to go through the 10.5 miles of the Butler Trail without getting lost. There are no such signs along the Roy Guerrero Trail.







## Biodiversity Signage

Despite the designation as “natural areas,” Colorado River Wildlife Sanctuary and Roy Guerrero Colorado River Metropolitan Park have a total of two signs indicating that those areas support wildlife. Meanwhile, the following are ecosystem signs on the Butler Trail.













*Community Engagement Signage*

These were signs that invite and encourage public engagement with the trail and activities related to the trail.





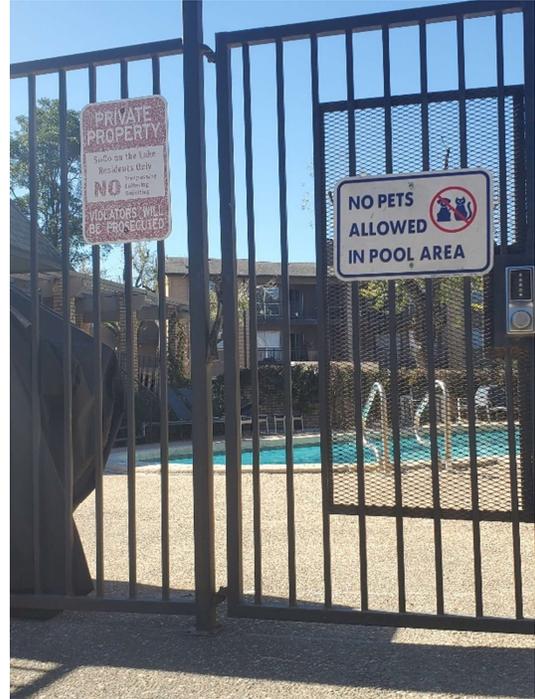






## Residential Signage

Several planned unit developments have made their presence known. Thus, citizenry is informed that those who can afford it have the privilege of excluding the public.





This is further private engagement being permitted to maintain public influence.



## The Congress Avenue Bridge Roost



Bats have lived in Austin for many years, but they did not arrive in great numbers under the Congress Avenue Bridge until a major deck reconstruction in 1980. This new construction created crevices 16 inches deep running the length of the bridge. Bats live primarily in those that are three quarters to one-and-a-half inches wide. Temperature and humidity conditions within these spaces are ideal for raising young.

This bat observation area is provided by the *Austin American-Statesman*  
*Austin American-Statesman Bat Hotline* for updated flight times, on Inside Line, 416-5700, and enter 3636. Also enjoy the bats featured on [www.austin360.com](http://www.austin360.com).

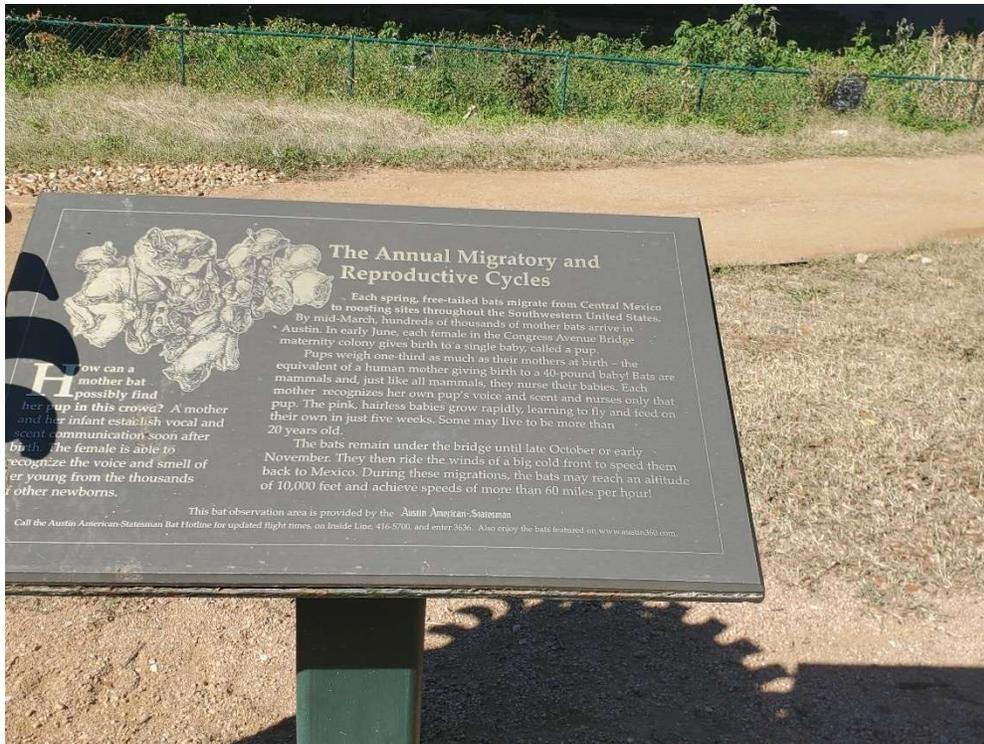
## Voracious Appetites Year-round

Nursing mothers consume their body weight in insects nightly, including vast numbers of yard and garden pests, from moths to mosquitoes. Depending on season and colony size, these bats consume between 10,000 and 30,000 pounds of insects nightly! They play a key role in maintaining the balance of nature and greatly reduce the need for toxic pesticides.



Most bats navigate and hunt prey using echolocation. They can detect items as fine as a needle in total darkness. Bats are the major predators of night-flying insects. Just one bat can catch more than 600 mosquitoes in an hour.

This bat observation area is provided by the *Austin American-Statesman*  
 Call the *Austin American-Statesman Bat Hotline* for updated flight times, on Inside Line, 416-5700, and enter 3636. Also enjoy the bats featured on [www.austin360.com](http://www.austin360.com).



**H**ow can a mother bat possibly find her pup in this crowd? A mother and her infant establish vocal and scent communication soon after birth. The female is able to recognize the voice and smell of her young from the thousands of other newborns.



### The Annual Migratory and Reproductive Cycles

Each spring, free-tailed bats migrate from Central Mexico to roosting sites throughout the Southwestern United States. By mid-March, hundreds of thousands of mother bats arrive in Austin. In early June, each female in the Congress Avenue Bridge maternity colony gives birth to a single baby, called a pup. Pups weigh one-third as much as their mothers at birth – the equivalent of a human mother giving birth to a 40-pound baby! Bats are mammals and, just like all mammals, they nurse their babies. Each mother recognizes her own pup's voice and scent and nurses only that pup. The pink, hairless babies grow rapidly, learning to fly and feed on their own in just five weeks. Some may live to be more than 20 years old.

The bats remain under the bridge until late October or early November. They then ride the winds of a big, cold front to speed them back to Mexico. During these migrations, the bats may reach an altitude of 10,000 feet and achieve speeds of more than 60 miles per hour!

This bat observation area is provided by the **Austin American-Statesman**. Call the Austin American-Statesman Bat Hotline for updated flight times, on Inside Line 416-5700, and enter 3636. Also enjoy the bats featured on [www.austinc60.com](http://www.austinc60.com).



### Austin's Famous Bats

Between mid-March and early November, the Congress Avenue Bridge houses the largest urban bat colony in North America. More than one million Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) call the bridge "home." While in residence each year, these bats provide a valuable service to Central Texas by consuming more than four million pounds of insects. Each night at dusk, this colony emerges from beneath the bridge and flies east across the horizon to forage. The bat exodus has become one of the most spectacular and unusual tourist attractions in the United States.



**B**ats fly with their hands! The bones in a bat's wings are like the bones in your arm and hand – except that bats have long fingers. A bat's wing membrane is formed by two thin layers of skin stretched out between its fingers.

This bat observation area is provided by the **Austin American-Statesman**. Call the Austin American-Statesman Bat Hotline for updated flight times, on Inside Line 416-5700, and enter 3636. Also enjoy the bats featured on [www.austinc60.com](http://www.austinc60.com).



### Bat-Watching Suggestions

By far the most spectacular bat flights are seen in August. The young pups are just beginning to fly then. Also, the hot and dry August weather causes the bats to be hungrier while the insects tend to be less plentiful. Therefore, the mother bats must emerge to hunt earlier. During the best emergences, up to five columns of bats can be seen for miles, as much as 45 minutes before sunset. Conditional on relatively warm, dry weather, impressive emergences may also be seen in March and early April as well as in September and October. During these months, most bat flights are within 20 minutes of sundown.

In the spring rainy season, typically lasting from mid-April through May or early June, the bats normally emerge well after sundown and are often difficult to see.

This bat observation area is provided by the Austin American-Statesman  
Call the Austin American-Statesman Bat Hotline for updated flight times, on Inside Line, 481-2318-5310. Also enjoy the bats featured on [www.austin360.com](http://www.austin360.com).

*Negation of Activism*

Because of funding and legitimacy, institutional entities can dismiss decades of activism and maintain a wholesome image.



## History of The Trail Foundation and the City of Austin

August 10, 2004: Planning Commission approves amending the Land Development Code to allow construction of unoccupied buildings on floodplains based on the Town Lake Trail Foundation's request to build a bathroom

September 30, 2004: Council approves executing parkland improvement agreement with the Town Lake Trail Foundation to construct and donate Town Lake Park improvements on an ongoing basis

February 17, 2005: Consultant presents plans for Seaholm District to Council, emphasizing contact with Town Lake Trail Foundation to confirm community alignment

April 6, 2006: Council offers appreciation certificate to Town Lake Trail Foundation

April 20, 2006: Council adopts resolution to request funding for Town Lake Trail parking lot repairs, as endorsed by the Town Lake Trail Foundation

May 4, 2006: Council approves funding for the Town Lake Trail Foundation Holly Shores Park

May 25, 2006: Council discusses creation of the Trail of Tejano Legends, including collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

June 22, 2006: Council discusses engagement with the Town Lake Trail Foundation to develop a boardwalk to connect east and west sides of Town Lake

July 27, 2006: Council hears update on Town Lake Trail improvements from the Town Lake Trail Foundation

August 31, 2006: Town Lake Trail Foundation member comments on the need to maintain "Austin" culture

September 11, 2006: Council approves funding for Town Lake Trail lighting based on the advocacy of the Town Lake Trail Foundation

January 23, 2007: Developer justifies Star Riverside Project zoning variance with a donation to The Trail Foundation, and the Parks and Recreation Department Parks Board approves variance despite opposition from the South River Citizen Coalition

January 25, 2007: Council tentatively approves ordinance for zoning changes on Barton Springs Road, with an Environmental Board approval of funds to The Trail Foundation for Town Lake Trail improvements

March 8, 2007: Citizen applauds collaboration with The Trail Foundation and Council on Town Lake Trail conditions

May 24, 2007: Council approves funding for trail work in the Holly Street Neighborhood, involving collaboration with The Trail Foundation

June 7, 2007: Council praises private collaboration, acknowledging funding from The Trail Foundation in work on the Town Lake Trail

July 26, 2007: Johnson family acknowledges The Trail Foundation efforts during the renaming of Town Lake

August 9, 2007: Council acknowledges collaboration with The Trail Foundation in an impact study of the boardwalk trail

August 23, 2007: The Trail Foundation supports proposed budget for the Parks and Recreation department

August 28, 2007: Parks and Recreation Department Parks Board discusses collaboration with The Trail Foundation on the expansion of the dock for Texas Rowing Center

November 29, 2007: Council adopts resolution to collaborate with The Trail Foundation to develop a Hike and Bike Trail Enhancement Plan

March 27, 2008: Council approves ordinance for the Waterfront Overlay Task Force, which stipulates one required member from The Trail Foundation

April 24, 2008: Council appoints member of The Trail Foundation to the Waterfront Overlay Task Force

June 18, 2008: Council sets public hearing to discuss planning the Waller Creek Tunnel project, including collaboration with Town Lake Trail Foundation

July 24, 2008: Council adopts resolution to execute the Waller Creek Tunnel project, including collaboration with Town Lake Trail Foundation

December 18, 2008: Council hears presentation from the Waterfront Overlay Task Force and a report on Town Lake trail enhancements, both involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

January 29, 2009: Council adopts resolution to implement Town Lake trail enhancements based on collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

February 12, 2009: Council adopts resolution to develop Town Lake Trail Boardwalk, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

March 5, 2009: Council adopts resolution approving the design of the Town Lake Trail Boardwalk, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

April 30, 2009: Council tentatively approves ordinance allowing zoning changes for the Waterfront Overlay Combining District, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

October 15, 2009: Council approves design contract for the Town Lake Trail Boardwalk, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

November 19, 2009: Citizen commends Town Lake Trail Foundation for its efforts

February 25, 2010: Council approves ordinance allowing zoning changes for the East Riverside Corridor Master Plan, which includes input from The Trail Foundation

May 13, 2010: Council approves construction contract for the Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail bridge improvements, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

May 27, 2010: Council approves lighting contract for the Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail improvements, involving collaboration with the Town Lake Trail Foundation

June 24, 2010: Council approves ordinance allowing zoning changes for the Waller Creek District Master Plan, which includes input from The Trail Foundation

July 29, 2010: Council hears briefing on proposed bond package, which involves a pledge from The Trail Foundation

August 5, 2010: Council discusses contribution to the Town Lake Trail Boardwalk from The Trail Foundation

May 26, 2011: Council approves an agreement for contribution to the Town Lake Trail Boardwalk from The Trail Foundation

June 21, 2011: Council hears Parks and Recreation department presentation which recognizes the efforts of The Trail Foundation

August 24, 2011: Council refers to park recommendations, including input from The Trail Foundation

November 3, 2011: Council tentatively approves ordinance allowing zoning changes for the Downtown Austin Plan, which recognizes the efforts of The Trail Foundation

December 8, 2011: Council approves ordinance allowing zoning changes for the Downtown Austin Plan, which recognizes the efforts of The Trail Foundation

March 1, 2012: Council adopts resolution engaging The Trail Foundation for improvements to the Johnson Creek Trailhead

March 22, 2012: Council approves artwork contract on Town Lake Trail as advised by The Trail Foundation

June 28, 2012: Council approves construction contract for the Boardwalk Trail, involving collaboration with The Trail Foundation; Council approves ordinance accepting funds for the Boardwalk Trail from The Trail Foundation

August 2, 2012: The Trail Foundation affirms the budget allotted for a bond related to parks and open space

October 9, 2012: In a discussion on public/private partnership, Council recognizes the involvement of The Trail Foundation

October 11, 2012: Council approves management agreement with the Downtown Austin Alliance, who discusses collaboration with The Trail Foundation

March 7, 2013: Council sets public hearing on construction around Barton Springs, which involved public comment disparaging The Trail Foundation

August 22, 2013: In a budget discussion on park funding, advocacy group refers to endorsement by The Trail Foundation

August 27, 2013: Council discusses collaboration on the Ann and Roy Butler Trail Public Art Master Plan with The Trail Foundation

August 29, 2013: Council adopts resolution to determine the cost of the Ann and Roy Butler Trail Public Art Master Plan with The Trail Foundation

September 9, 2013: Council denied funding for the Ann and Roy Butler Trail Public Art Master Plan with The Trail Foundation, despite anticipated matching funds

November 21, 2013: Council adopts resolution to work with the Urban Land Institute on the Seaholm District, with a design chosen by the help of The Trail Foundation

December 12, 2013: Austin Parks Foundation affirms Auditorium Shores Improvement Project plan that was chosen with input from The Trail Foundation, and Council approves plan despite neighborhood opposition

March 6, 2014: Council adopts resolution implementing the Austin Urban Forest Plan, which notes The Trail Foundation as a “community-based group”

May 1, 2014: Council hears briefing on Seaholm District project, which recognized input from The Trail Foundation

May 22, 2014: In a discussion on the renaming of Auditorium Shores, citizens reference endorsement from The Trail Foundation

June 12, 2014: Council adopts resolution to work with The Trail Foundation to develop a Butler Trail Public Art Plan Overlay

June 26, 2014: Council sets public hearing to discuss the Ann and Roy Butler Trail at the Southeast Shore Master Plan, which includes a contract sponsored by The Trail Foundation

August 19, 2014: Council discusses a bathroom installation on Town Lake Trail supported by The Trail Foundation

August 28, 2014: Council approves the Ann and Roy Butler Trail at the Southeast Shore Master Plan, which includes a contract sponsored by The Trail Foundation; Council approves the Master Plan for Holly Shores/Edward Rendon Sr. Park at Festival Beach, Fiesta Gardens, which includes funding from The Trail Foundation

September 25, 2014: Council approves ordinance to implement the Urban Trails Master Plan, which includes collaboration with The Trail Foundation

November 20, 2014: Council adopts resolution suspending the receipt of artwork for the Butler Trail, recognizing the efforts of The Trail Foundation

February 17, 2015: Council discusses public/private partnerships, including those with The Trail Foundation

February 24, 2015: Council discusses stakeholder communication, including The Trail Foundation

March 12, 2015: Council discusses collaboration between the Parks and Recreation department and The Trail Foundation involving improvements to the Town Lake Trail

March 25, 2015: Committee on Open Space, Environment, and Sustainability recognizes the work of The Trail Foundation

March 30, 2015: A donation to a project initiated by The Trail Foundation is recognized as an investment in mental health

May 27, 2015: The Trail Foundation offers a presentation for the Trailwide Urban Forestry and Ecological Restoration Plan

June 4, 2015: Council approves fee waiver for The Trail Foundation's run on the Town Lake Trail

September 23, 2015: Committee on Open Space, Environment, and Sustainability discusses funding for the Seaholm District, recognizing the efforts of The Trail Foundation

October 12, 2015: Austin Convention Center Long Range Master Plan recognizes The Trail Foundation as the stewards of the Butler Trail

November 12, 2015: Council adopts resolution implementing the Austin Convention Center Long Range Master Plan, which recognizes The Trail Foundation as the stewards of the Butler Trail

December 3, 2015: Citizen expresses frustration at the influence of The Trail Foundation over funding for parks

December 15, 2015: Citizen discusses how groups like The Trail Foundation spoke against the parkland dedication fees

January 13, 2016: Council refers to The Trail Foundation's experience in providing public restroom facilities

January 27, 2016: Council discusses ordinance requiring parkland dedication fees for developers, referring to opposition from The Trail Foundation

March 3, 2016: Council adopts resolution directing the City Manager to review the music and creative ecosystem, including philanthropy from groups like The Trail Foundation

June 9, 2016: Council approves fee waiver for The Trail Foundation's run on the Town Lake Trail

June 16, 2016: Council approves ordinance implementing the South Central Waterfront Vision Framework Plan, which includes engagement with The Trail Foundation

October 26, 2016: Committee on Open Space, Environment, and Sustainability discusses Lamar Beach Park Master Plan, which includes The Trail Foundation as a key stakeholder

November 3, 2016: Council approves construction contract for the Boardwalk Trail improvements, involving an investment study from The Trail Foundation

December 8, 2016: Council approves Lamar Beach Park Master Plan, which includes The Trail Foundation as a key stakeholder

February 16, 2017: Council approves ordinance establishing the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board, one member of which must be from The Trail Foundation

April 6, 2017: Council approves The Trail Foundation's nomination for the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board

August 3, 2017: Council approves fee waiver for The Trail Foundation's run on the Town Lake Trail

August 17, 2017: In budget considerations, The Trail Foundation's contribution to parks is discussed

September 28, 2017: The Trail Foundation endorses budget expenditures for the Austin Housing Finance Corporation

November 9, 2017: Council adopts resolution to designate sites for a soccer stadium, including The Trail Foundation

February 1, 2018: In a bond discussion, a Parks Board member offers conservancy finance options for pools, similar to how The Trails Foundation and others assist in park financing

April 26, 2018: The Trail Foundation is mentioned as a stakeholder invited to discuss the dockless mobility process

May 24, 2018: Council approves the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Master Plan, with The Trail Foundation mentioned for targeted engagement; Council discusses financing planning for Waller Creek Tax Incremental Financing Reinvestment Zone, with endorsement from The Trail Foundation

June 14, 2018: Council adopts resolution to create a Parks and Recreation Recycling Task Force, which includes collaboration with nonprofits such as The Trail Foundation

June 28, 2018: Council adopts resolution to solicit designs for development near Burnet Road, including input from The Trail Foundation

August 7, 2018: The Trail Foundation assists in Council presentation on the Seaholm Waterfront Project

August 21, 2018: Council discusses recommendations for the Seaholm Waterfront Project, including input from The Trail Foundation

August 23, 2018: Council approves recommendations for the Seaholm Waterfront Project, including input from The Trail Foundation

August 29, 2018: The Trail Foundation endorses budget recommendations for the 2018-2019 fiscal year

August 30, 2018: Council approves ordinance creating a Parking and Transportation Management District in the Colorado River Area, including applicants from The Trail Foundation

October 18, 2018: Citizen opposes parking meters around Butler Trail while commending the efforts of The Trail Foundation

February 7, 2019: Council approves The Trail Foundation's nomination for the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board

May 2, 2019: In a special meeting, Council discusses Land Development Code revision, with input from The Trail Foundation

May 21, 2019: Councilmember discusses signage by The Trail Foundation regarding scooters on the Butler Trail

May 23, 2019: Council adopts resolution to implement Palm District Master Plan and Waller Creek District Master Plan, to include input from The Trail Foundation

August 8, 2019: Council adopts resolution to designate locations for water fountains, including input from The Trail Foundation as a stakeholder; Council approves ordinance expanding the Convention Center Facility, to include input from The Trail Foundation; Council adopts resolution to prioritize the Cypress and Shoal Creek Project, to include input from The Trail Foundation

October 29, 2019: Council hears presentation on Parks and Recreation Department Long Range Plan, including input from The Trail Foundation

November 14, 2019: Council adopts resolution to engage with the Red Line Parkway Initiative, including input from The Trail Foundation; Council approves ordinance adopting the Parks and Recreation Department Long Range Plan for Land, Facilities, and Programs, including input from The Trail Foundation

December 7, 2019: In a special meeting, Council discusses Land Development Code revision, with input from The Trail Foundation

February 20, 2020: Council adopts resolution to develop an urban trails stakeholder group, with input from The Trail Foundation

March 10, 2020: Council commends efforts of The Trail Foundation

March 12, 2020: Council approves consent agreement on the Onion Creek Metro Park District, including work from The Trail Foundation as an example for improvements; Council adopts resolution to establish more public/private partnerships, including collaboration with The Trail Foundation

April 21, 2020: Council commends The Trail Foundation on signage efforts

June 11, 2020: Council approves contract for safety and mobility study with The Trail Foundation

August 19, 2020: Council mentions The Trail Foundation as a successful example of nonprofit collaboration

October 29, 2020: Council approves agreement for land acquisition which references planning collaborations with The Trail Foundation

November 12, 2020: Council adopts resolution for concession stand agreement with The Trail Foundation

## Ecology Action of Texas

This organization has a longer history in the city, but has done work to repair its equally problematic presence. Environmental justice has long been linked towards individuals despite the fact that major players have far greater influence, such as higher income earners and larger companies. Rather than assist any of the neighborhood organizations in the struggle to shut down the Holly Power Plant or reduce industrial zoning around Town Lake, Ecology Action focused on developing a recycling program. Many companies in and around Austin produce a high level of waste, but there was never an ostensible push for any of the larger entities to develop more efficient methods of recycling. Instead, Ecology Action continued to push the onus on the already taxed individual.

Frequently, environmental work has prioritized certain behavior especially when it takes negative attention away from major players and highlights how individuals can “help.” There were no efforts to curb any of the commercial or industrial zoning, which was disproportionate to the communities, nor was there any outreach to the groups who were fighting such battles. The first mention of Ecology Action was related to a concert, typical for organizations in Austin but not for groups who were working towards environmental justice. With the exception of opposing a tax incentive for developers in the 1970s, the main focus of Ecology Action was on families sorting their recyclables and urging the city to continue funding and codifying a robust recycling program. The organization is even listed on urban renewal plans as educators to the residents about environmental issues, even though neighborhood groups protested against the recycling center site in East Austin.

Circle Acres could be seen as a monument to hypocrisy because of two things. First, there was never any recorded outcry from Ecology Action when the brownfield was being created, and there were plenty of neighborhood organizations that protested against waste being dumped in their communities while other areas of Austin were free from such burdens. Second, they are depicted as “saviors” regardless of their inability to advocate for the neighborhood before receiving federal funds to clean up the former waste site. Environmental activism often involves denigrating colleagues of color while elevating white-led organizations, so being able to acquire and maintain Circle Acres is an example of privilege, not necessarily a neighborhood victory.

Moreover, waste management often involves questionable labor practices, often exploiting the use of prison labor and volunteers. Ecology Action is no different as it was used to justify the expansion of the jurisdiction for Downtown Community Court, which was a slap in the face to residents opposed to its placement and the unequal influence of the judicial system towards people of color. This information is difficult to find, but there is no shortage of positive reputation in a rapidly displaced population on an entity that once used “criminal” labor to sustain itself.

However, the story of Ecology Action diverges from that of The Trail Foundation in that it *drastically changed* once the recycling center was closed. While it opposed the parkland dedication ordinance in 2015, the organization began making steps to develop a trail between Roy Guerrero Metropolitan Park and the Montopolis School, two significant spaces for people

of color. The board transitioned to being almost completely composed of people of color, many of whom previously or currently resided in the neighborhood, and the staff was greatly reduced. While having a worker cooperative can be a positive aspect, the organization recognized that there was not only more to environmental justice than recycling, but that the onus was on more than an individual.

There is a turning point during the lifespan of an organization where it transitions to being an agent of change, or a proponent of the dominant narrative. Environmental justice and recreational equity are bigger issues than blue boxes, and it takes individuals with self-awareness to reach such conclusions. It is vital to recognize how little trust exists between Austin BIPOCQ residents and large nonprofit organizations, so being able to repair that relationship after decades demonstrated true leadership. More importantly, the organization made immediate changes instead of “phasing-out” and “planning” how to do better, proving that the will is more important than the timeline.

## Signage on Trail Usage

These are instructional signs that direct people on proper trail usage.









## Biodiversity Signage

The following are ecosystem signs within Circle Acres.





*Community Engagement Signage*

These were signs that invite and encourage public engagement with the trail and activities related to the trail.



## History of Ecology Action and the City of Austin

September 16, 1971: Ecology Action co-sponsors effort to hold a rock music concert in Zilker Park, and Council grants the request

March 9, 1972: Ecology Action approaches Council to discuss recycling program, and Council agrees to a 30-day assessment of such a program before reconsideration; Ecology Action opposes the construction of a convention center

April 27, 1972: Ecology Action requests that the city continue the recycling program, and Council agrees to a 60-day assessment of the program before reconsideration

May 11, 1972: Ecology Action requests that the city direct customers to separate materials for the recycling program, and Council directs the Environmental Resources department to administrate that process

June 22, 1972: Ecology Action acknowledges that the city has assumed responsibility for the recycling program, and Council agrees to a year-long assessment of the program before reconsideration

March 28, 1973: Ecology Actions requests that the city make an environmental impact statement before considering any further street closure plans

June 21, 1973: After acknowledging the success of the city's recycling plan, Ecology Action requests an extension of the program, and Council agrees to another year-long assessment of the program before reconsideration

April 11, 1974: In a hearing on development, Ecology Action opposes the tax incentive for developers

January 2, 1975: Aumla suggests that Council meet with Ecology Action to determine income streams to continue recycling program

December 2, 1976: Ecology Action requests that the city consider more staff to sort recycled materials

February 10, 1977: In a discussion about solid waste, Ecology Action asks Council not to make the recycling program contingent on economic growth

September 13, 1978: In a special meeting, Ecology Action requests that Council fund a community recycling program

December 7, 1978: Council agrees to fund a community service project requested by Ecology Action

July 19, 1979: Ecology Action requests that Council fund a study on the feasibility of a recycling program

July 26, 1979: Citizens support Ecology Action's request for a recycling program

September 4, 1979: Ecology Action requests funding the study of a recycling program

September 13, 1979: Council discusses a Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) public employment service project with Ecology Action

September 20, 1979: Council agrees to fund a feasibility study of a city recycling program, allowing Ecology Action to choose the consultant

April 17, 1980: Council adopts resolution to establish a city recycling program as encouraged by Ecology Action

December 4, 1980: Council adopts resolution to establish a Citizen Advisory Task Force for Resources Recovery, including a member of Ecology Action

December 2, 1981: Council adopts resolution recognizing Ecology Action for its paper recycling program

January 27, 1982: Council adopts resolution awarding contract to Ecology Action to administer a recycling program

January 12, 1984: Council adopts resolution allowing lease agreement with Ecology Action for a recycling information center

June 7, 1984: Council allows recycling centers in multiple zoning classifications as endorsed by Ecology Action

September 27, 1984: Council adopts resolution awarding contract to Ecology Action to administer a recycling program

April 5, 1990: Council adopts resolution direction City Manager to develop a recycling/municipal solid waste program with a solid waste advisory commission, including moving the Ecology Action recycling center near the landfill facility

September 13, 1990: Council approves ordinance establishing garbage collection rates with no charges for a recycling drop-off station operated by Ecology Action

April 23, 1992: Council adopts resolution establishing a multifamily residential recycling plan, endorsed by Ecology Action

May 13, 1999: Ecology Action is incorporated into the East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Plan to help reduce trash in the neighborhood and educate neighbors about environmental issues such as recycling, composting, and water conservation

January 27, 2000: Council adopts resolution executing an agreement with Ecology Action for a recycling drop-off facility; Council approves ordinance accepting federal funds for brownfield cleanup, which incorporates the recycling drop-off facility run by Ecology Action

May 18, 2000: Council adopts resolution executing equipment leasing contract for a co-mingling sorting system and a horizontal baler system for the material recycling facility

November 1, 2000: Council declares Ecology Action Day thanking the organization for 30 years of service

October 20, 2002: Council adopts resolution executing an agreement with Ecology Action for a recycling drop-off facility

March 6, 2003: Council discusses justification for expanding the boundaries of Downtown Community Court, including sorting recyclables with Ecology Action as sentencing

October 27, 2005: Long-Range Solid Waste Planning Task Force includes Ecology Action staff as members

February 2, 2006: Council approves executing an agreement with Ecology Action for a recycling drop-off facility

June 18, 2008: Council sets public hearing to discuss planning the Waller Creek Tunnel project, including an Ecology Action recycling drop-off center

July 24, 2008: Council adopts resolution approving Waller Creek Tunnel project, including an Ecology Action recycling drop-off center

December 11, 2008: Council hears briefing on Zero Waste Strategic Plan, which includes Ecology Action

January 15, 2009: Council adopts resolution to implement Zero Waste Strategic Plan, which includes collaboration with Ecology Action

May 14, 2009: Council approves executing an agreement with Ecology Action for a recycling drop-off facility

August 6, 2009: Citizen requests a variance on an energy audit based on previous advocacy with Ecology Action

April 8, 2010: Council thanks Ecology Action for 40 years of service

June 24, 2010: Council approves ordinance implementing the Waller Creek District Master Plan, including an Ecology Action recycling drop-off center

November 4, 2010: Council approves ordinance regulating recycling, which was endorsed by Ecology Action; Council adopts resolution outlining tools to implement the universal recycling regulations

November 10, 2011: Council hears briefing on Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan, which includes collaboration with Ecology Action

March 8, 2012: Council approves executing an agreement for a food recycling pilot project with Ecology Action

April 26, 2012: Council approves executing an education agreement for recycling, which includes collaboration with Ecology Action

October 17, 2013: Council declares the first Annual Reuse Day, recognizing Ecology Action

December 12, 2013: Council adopts resolution directing City Manager to negotiate future facility needs and possible leasing of city property

March 20, 2014: Council denies zoning change request which included an Ecology Action site

August 7, 2014: Council adopts resolution executing career training agreement, involving collaboration with Ecology Action

October 20, 2014: Council declares second Annual Reuse Day, recognizing Ecology Action

March 2, 2015: Austin Resource Recovery discusses composting stipulations, involving collaboration with Ecology Action

November 12, 2015: Ecology Action opposes parkland dedication ordinance stipulating that developers would have an undue burden either dedicating parkland or paying a fee, but Council approves ordinance

October 20, 2016: Council declares Annual Reuse Day, recognizing Ecology Action

October 29, 2019: Council hears presentation on long-range planning for the Parks and Recreation department, which involves Ecology Action creating a trail between Roy Guerrero and Montopolis School

November 14, 2019: Council approves ordinance implementing long-range planning for the Parks and Recreation department, which involves Ecology Action creating a trail between Roy Guerrero and Montopolis School

July 30, 2020: Ecology Action speaks against a zoning change near its facilities

August 27, 2020: Ecology Action speaks against a zoning change near its facilities

October 29, 2020: Ecology Action speaks against a zoning change near its facilities, and Council denies zoning request

## Conclusion

To be clear, Roy Guerrero Trail could have served as a commute for people who live in the nearby apartments after work. It is the only way to avoid Riverside Drive and get to the ACC Riverside and the Montopolis Recreation Center. Instead, people are forced to get on Riverside, and get flat tires because of the cracks and become dehydrated due to the lack of shade. Roy Guerrero Trail is bordered by two major nonprofit organizations, so its realization as an educational natural area is left in the hands of people who demonstrate no care. Based on the lack of connecting infrastructure, the sports complex treats hiking as if hiking is not a sport, or that the youth would be disinterested in participating in such a sport. The areas downstream of Longhorn Dam are seen as appropriate for development despite an entire drinking water protection zone in West Austin. For years, the city has seen *nothing wrong* with this behavior, and based on its policy execution, still justifies it.

Most cruelly of all, this carelessness tells the residents of this neighborhood that this kind of neglect is *their* fault because of a lack of voting, a lack of engagement, and a failure to “professionally” state their case. The planning for the park that the city had codified by ordinance was deemed irrelevant as residents with more money and prestige were able to enforce their will upon the community. Even if all of the repairs and updates were completed tomorrow, many people have already been forced out due to a lack of affordable housing and Larry Ellison’s desire to avoid seeing poor people. Unhoused encampments are in park because the unhoused know that they can retain some sense of community and avoid the police scrutiny highlighted on Riverside Drive; they know they will be forced to move when more development comes to the area. Nobody cares that people are just now “interested” in equity because they have seen a tacit disinterest in talking to anyone but rich, white people, that the city will only validate the attention of such—the working class has no resources to combat that mindset.

At this point in time, people have gotten so sick and tired of being bulldozed out of sight that many organizations of color have closed, and/or refuse to work with the city or any of the other “chosen” organizations. We exhausted ourselves from chasing people down who treated us like garbage and offered gaslighting, ghosting, and breadcrumbs; now, we merely brace for impact. We know that there will be no protection from the moneyed classes and after the community destruction, there are not enough of us to fight the powers of expulsion. People with resources have the luxury of feeling secure (housing, income, relaxation) while people without resources have to do extra emotional labor to avoid upsetting people with our reality.

Unfortunately, it is too late to “restore” the neighborhood—none of the previous communities of color will ever be restored because the area is unaffordable and is in the process of becoming even less so. To at least protect the land, more educational signage needs to be posted and the bridge needs to be built so that people can at least move freely through the park. Perhaps in the future, the city will be able to decide that even if white-led organizations with money show up with PDFs and funding, it is necessary to represent the *entire* city. There has been too much irreparable, tacit municipal legitimation of ignoring BIPOCQ advocates, so maybe

there can be education about the BIPOCQ advocates who struggled to close power plants and secure outdoor space for their families.

While completing the pictures for this project, I came across an older White Male cyclist who was observing an encampment that was close to the water. He indignantly said, “Oh, come on, now, that’s disgusting!” and rode away while shaking his head. Though I rarely say anything and swallow my inner thoughts on a regular basis, I have seen months of relentless antagonization of the unhoused—antagonized by the very people who created the conditions to unhouse people—and I loudly said, “You judgmental rich guy!” Because Butler Trail is full of rich people, I was being passed by another older White Male runner, to which I affirmed, “Not you.” When the city makes it possible to disrespect those of low means in favor of those with many resources, such is the environment created.

*Note: I never refer to Town Lake as “Lady Bird Lake” because Lady Bird Johnson was coerced into agreeing to such a naming. Several mayors approached her, and she refused all of their efforts. Finally on her deathbed, she relented, and many people saw the event as cause for celebration. It seems that people who like attention convince themselves that everyone wants attention despite being told otherwise, but I will not validate people’s refusal to hear a woman’s “No.”*