

Kronkosky Charitable Foundation

Roundtable Discussion

Topic: Parks
Date: Thursday, April 30, 1998
Attended by: Michael Bacon
Prepared by: Liz Ostendorf

Participants

Invited Representatives

Steve Whitesell	Executive Director	San Antonio Missions
Wade Oldham	Facilities Manager	Bexar County Parks
Dale Bransford	Project Manager	San Antonio City Parks
Kevin Good	Volunteer Coordinator	Texas Department of Parks

Foundation Staff and Trustees

Palmer Moe	Executive Director
Megan Kromer	Director of Program and Evaluation
Michael Bacon	Grants Manager
Mark Carmona	Grants Manager

Overview

General Information

- Many parks now see year-round attendance rather than seasonal, as is traditional. Largely this is because of the shift to year-round schooling. This influences staffing needs because former part-time staff members must now work full time to deal with the increased traffic.
- There is tension between new park acquisition and current park maintenance. Legislators are beginning to support park maintenance, as well as acquisition. For example, the state legislature allocated \$60 million specifically for maintenance.
- Security is a large issue at parks of all types. If citizens are fearful of their safety, they will not visit parks. Park rangers and SAPD officers work together to patrol the parks.

San Antonio Missions

- Receive 1.3 million visitors per year. Steve Whitesell's department manages four of the five missions. This is one of three sites in the US of this type. The Missions were created in 1978 and established in 1983.
- The Missions Trails project is estimated to cost \$32 million and will improve access to and pathways between the missions. The project includes road improvement, street lighting, signage, and hiking/biking trails. The largest trail will be from the Alamo to Espada Dam. Further, the security and safety of the park areas will be upgraded.
- The Missions currently own 824 acres of land, but there are 190 acres that are yet to be acquired. Acquisition funds are competitive, and there are many hurdles to securing them. An estimated \$3.5 million are needed to acquire this land.

Bexar County Parks

- 500,000 people visit the 254 acres of county parks annually. Included are Mission Park (South Side), Comanche Park (East Side), Ray Russell, McArthur, and Orsinger Parks.
- County parks include picnic areas and playgrounds, but not golf courses or other municipal facilities.
- The growth in this area is on the north side of the city. The city is working on an overall survey to determine the needs of citizens.
- Matching grants are available from the state to set up county parks.
- There is property currently owned by San Antonio Water System (SAWS), formerly known as the Applewhite reservoir, now called the Medina River Preserve, which would make an excellent park site. SAWS is exploring ways to donate the land for this purpose. User groups and interested citizens recently held a planning charrette to identify a plan for its use.

San Antonio City Parks

- There are 153 parks in the city covering a total of 7,420 acres. Included are 6 golf courses, 2 driving ranges, and city owned areas like LaVillita, Hemisfair Park, and the Riverwalk. City owned cemeteries and historic properties are also included.
- Brackenridge Park receives an estimated 1 million visitors every year, more than the zoo. This is due to the convenient location and recreation opportunities. Park facilities need improvement, and there is bond money

designated for Brackenridge. Park officials would like to strengthen the relationship with the San Antonio Botanical Gardens.

- The master plan for the city, with reference to parks, proposes an ordinance to set aside money for park acquisitions. The push behind this is that positive park activities will help to reduce crime via well-maintained fitness trails and park staff presence.
- The City Parks program offers after-school and summer programs for children at 100 sites, including 27 city recreation centers. These include recreational, arts and crafts, music lessons, etc. There are also programs for people with mental and physical disabilities. These programs are in high demand during the summer and the number of participants is limited by the availability of instructors.

Texas Department of Parks

- There are 123 state parks in all of Texas, 5 in the four county area. Included are Casa Navarro at Market and Nueva Laredo, Government Canyon in Bexar County, Guadalupe River/Honey Creek in Comal County, and Hill Country Natural Area and Lost Maples in Bandera County. People tend to use state parks located within 100 miles of their homes.
- Over 60 non-profit groups support the state parks in this area by donating money and time. Mr. Good actively encourages the development of support groups for state parks.
- A statewide recreational plan is developed every five years. Sites are acquired following specific guidelines, and then the needed resources are determined and incorporated into a master plan. Currently, there are no potential state park sites identified. However, there are a number of historic sites being evaluated.
- Legislators say that no additional sites will be taken on until the current ones are properly maintained. To provide for future maintenance, the state is encouraging the establishment of endowments. The legislature requested a report on the status of all Texas State Parks. It expects to have the data in six months.
- There is pressure for state parks to be more revenue-based. State parks now charge per person rather than per car. There is tension between the public's perception of tax dollars supporting state parks and the need for further revenue at each park. Currently, state parks receive a percentage of the sales tax on sporting goods sales. The system is trying to determine price elasticity of customers. Some parks with high visitor traffic may use a higher entry fee as a way to limit visits.

Combined Efforts

- The county and city are looking to work together on future parks. Walker Ranch, near Salado Creek, was mentioned as a possible location for a joint venture.
- City and state parks are also a great combination because the city has ready access to children. The Community Outdoor Outreach Program brings kids from the inner city out to state parks. The statewide budget, however, is only \$250,000.
- Education and curriculum development should be undertaken by all entities together so that they are seamless and complimentary to one another. Each type of park should have a specific educational focus so as to provide children with a well-rounded view of the historical, ecological, and recreational value of the park system in our area. For example, national parks such as the San Antonio Missions focus on historical and cultural education, whereas county and state parks provide an ecological focus. City parks focus on neighborhood development, resources, and opportunities.