

Austin Parks & Recreation Department

Community PARKnerships Program | FY22 Year in Review



The City of Austin's Parks & Recreation Department (PAR) Community PARKnerships program mobilizes the efforts of partners and volunteers to facilitate community-initiated parkland improvements. PARKnerships engage community leaders to co-create projects that reflect neighborhood priorities. By connecting talent with resources, PARKnerships encourage long term stewardship and place-led change.

To advance equitable outcomes, the City of Austin (COA) is leading with a lens of racial equity and healing. Racial equity is the condition when race no longer predicts a person's quality of life outcomes in our community. The City recognizes that race is the primary determinant of social equity and therefore we begin the journey toward social equity with this definition. The City of Austin also recognizes historical and structural disparities and a need for alleviation of the wrongs by critically transforming its institutions and creating a culture of equity. This shows up in the PARKnership programs commitment to prioritize efforts in historically disinvested communities and seeks to rebalance power and ownership black and brown community members have in their local parks.

The PAR Community PARKnerships initiative encompasses the following programs:

- [PAR PARKners](#)
- [Community Activated Park Projects](#)
- [Adopt-A-Park](#)
- [Parkland Stewardship](#)
- [Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#)

PAR PARKners

At PAR, we are committed to partnerships that align with our overall mission, vision, values, and provide benefit to the public and the Austin parks system. We actively seek partnerships with non-profit organizations, conservancies and businesses for park development, maintenance, operations and programming.

PAR has spent the last fiscal year refocusing departmental goals and objectives with an equity frameset. In order to accomplish this, PAR has held team trainings and site visits to under-resourced parks in order to better understand the diverse and unique needs at each park site, created a Community Services position to activate underserved sites while coordinating with the surrounding communities and neighborhoods, started new data report focusing on partner equity practices, began the Urban Land Institute (ULI) cohort for the Adopt-A-Park program to analyze and provide solutions to unintentional barriers to participation in the program within historically underserved communities, and more.

In FY22, PAR, in collaboration with 32 nonprofit partners and community groups, leveraged over 13 million dollars in private funds to go towards improvements and maintenance of parkland.

PARD PARKner Program FY22 Accomplishments:

- Published the *Nature Play Guidelines*;
- Installed PARD's second official nature play space at MLK Station Neighborhood Park;
- Joined the Urban Land Institute (ULI) cohort for the Adopt-A-Park program;
- Activated Walnut Creek Metro Park's nature play area in partnership with Earth Native Wilderness School through free public programming;
- Enacted PARD's first Council-approved Park Operations & Maintenance Agreement with The Trail Conservancy for shared management of the Butler Trail at Town Lake;
- Developed Green School Park Stewardship Document;
- Awarded the Innovation in Development award for Walnut Creek Metro Playscape and Nature Play project by the Texas Recreation and Park Society (TRAPS);
- Hosted three shared learning and training sessions with PARD PARKners;
- Collaborated with thirty-two non-profit organizations;
- Led informational sessions at both the Texas Children in Nature Network Summit and the National League of Cities/Children in Nature Conference;
- Received 57 signatures for the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, for a total of over 1,600;
- Created Parks Operations and Maintenance Agreement (POMA) with The Trail Conservancy (TTC), formalizing the partnership;
- June 2022, completed negotiations and acquired City leadership approval for Park Operations & Maintenance Agreement (POMA) with The Trail Conservancy. This plan covers phased maintenance and operations of the Butler Trail at Town Lake Metro Park as well as yearly programming plans for activation of the space. The terms outlined in this POMA will be used to structure similar agreements with other partner organizations and ensure operational consistency for partner-managed projects on parkland;
- Hosted 3 PARKner Lunch and Learn Sessions featuring PARD experts. Discussion topics included: PARD's Historic Tourism & Preservation program, PARD's land management plan, and SITES & LEED certification processes;
- Organized a safety training series for PARKner operational partners in partnership with the PARD Safety Management team. Training sessions promoted consistent operations across partner and PARD-managed park spaces and included: incident reporting, safety hazards of the urban environment, de-escalation, and active shooter awareness;
- Presented PARKnership Program to a national audience at the National Recreation & Park Association Conference.

Community Activated Park Projects Program

Falling under the PARD Community PARKnerships umbrella program, the [Community Activated Park Project \(CAPP\)](#) program provides a pathway for neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners to leverage resources and plan and implement park improvements projects that are in alignment with PARD goals and meet community priorities. The CAPP program streamlines the proposal process for neighbors, community groups, and Partners seeking to initiate improvements on city-owned parkland.

CAPP Program Overview | Proposals Received

- **FY'18:** 54 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2017- September 30, 2018)
- **FY'19:** 108 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2018- September 30, 2019)
- **FY'20:** 88 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2019- September 30, 2020)
- **FY'21:** 75 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2020- September 30, 2021)
- **FY'22:** 91 CAPPs submitted (October 1, 2021- September 30, 2022)
- 414 CAPP proposals received to date (total received since the program started in 2018)
- 217 CAPP proposals received since City modified telework operations due to COVID-19 health concerns (established March 15, 2020)

COMMUNITY ACTIVATED PARK PROJECT STAGES



Stage 1

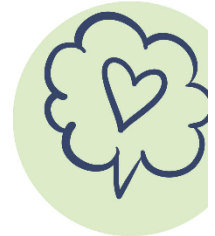
Submit a Proposal

Review FAQ section on CAPP Webpage and submit a proposal online to the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD).

Stage 2

Internal Review

Survey by PARD and other relevant agencies (e.g. Public Works, Watershed Protection).
Review of city code for site constraints and considerations.



Stage 3

Site Visit

PARD staff coordinates site visit. Discussion of proposal feasibility, maintenance implications, and how project meets community and city goals. Determine next steps.

Stage 4

Project Development

PARD assigns a project manager to support as proposer gathers community feedback, seeks funding, defines maintenance roles & responsibilities, and finalizes design.



Stage 5

Implementation

Once funding is secured, PARD supports implementation and proposer submits wrap-up report.

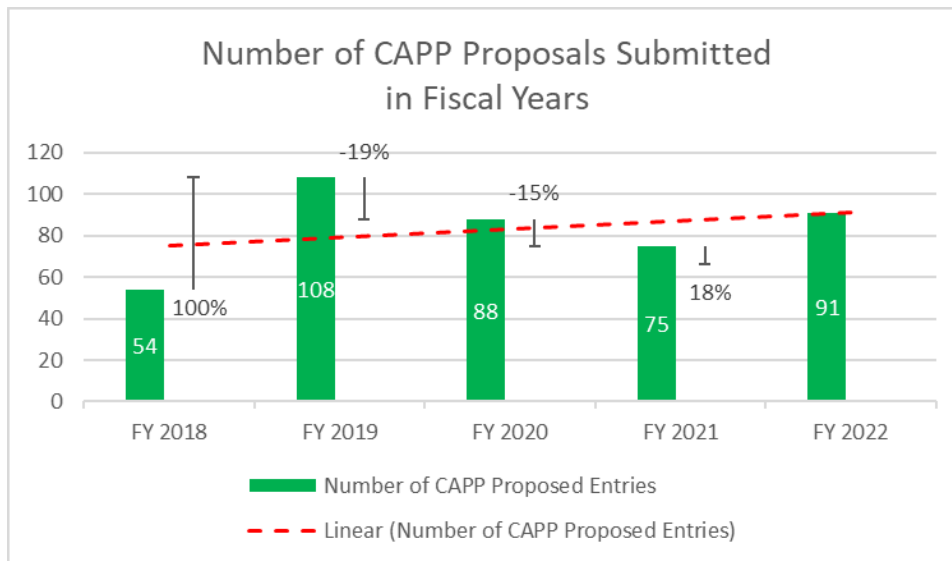
Enjoy new park improvements!

Questions?
Contact Christine Canul
christine.canul@austintexas.gov
512-974-9515



Percent growth over past year:

- **FY'18 - FY'19:** +100%, in other words, CAPP submissions doubled in FY'19 compared to FY'18
- **FY'19 - FY'20:** -18.5%, in other words, CAPP submissions decreased by nearly 1/5th (18.5%) in FY'20 compared to FY'19
- **FY'20 - FY'21:** -14.8%, in other words, CAPP submissions decreased by nearly 3/20th (14.8%) in FY'21 compared to FY'20
- **FY'21 - FY'22:** +17.6%, in other words, CAPP submissions increased by nearly 9/50th (17.6%) in FY'22 compared to FY'21
- Graph below displays:
 - Amount of CAPPs submitted in each FY (green bar)
 - Rate of change (aka trendline) from the start of the CAPP program to the end of FY'21 (red dashed line)
 - The trendline displays a positive rate of change aka CAPP proposals are increasing from the start of the program.



PARD has collaborated with 56 different neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners (31 non-profit groups and 25 Adopt-a-Park/Friend groups/Park Stakeholders).

In FY'22, PARD has collaborated with 58 different neighbors, non-profits, community groups and partners. There has been a 7.94% decrease in partner, non-profit, neighbor and community groups.

FY22 - Non-profit and community partner groups: 32

- 512 Beach Volleyball
- Alvéole
- Austin Anarchy Roller Derby
- Austin High Baseball Booster Club
- Austin Independent School District
- Austin Parks Foundation
- Sunshine Camp
- Austin Sports and Social Club
- Boy Scouts Trop 9
- Capital Area Tennis Association
- Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation
- Ecology Action of Texas
- Festival Beach Food Forest - Fruitful Commons
- Full Court Peace
- Gullett Elementary School/Parent Teacher Association
- Ion Art, Inc.
- Katherine A. Cook Elementary School
- Keep Austin Beautiful
- Longhorn Sports Properties
- Mendez Recreation Center
- Munny Conservancy
- National Junior Tennis and Learning
- Northwest Softball League
- Overton EcoRise Innovators
- Pease Park Conservancy
- Shoal Creek Conservancy
- The Trail Conservancy
- Travis Audubon Society
- United States Tennis Association
- Verde Leaders
- Violet Crown Community Works
- Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy

FY22 - Adopt-a-Park/Friend groups/Park Stakeholder groups: 26

- Austin Ridge Riders Mountain Bike Club
- Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Association
- Dove Springs Proud
- Friends of Alderbrook Park
- Friends of Bartholomew Disc Golf Course
- Friends of Brentwood Park
- Friends of Central Williamson Creek
- Friends of Copperfield Nature Trails
- Friends of Grand Meadow Park
- Friends of House Skatepark
- Friends of Mountain View Park
- Friends of Reed Park
- Friends of Rosewood Neighborhood Park
- Friends of Springwoods Park
- Friends of the Austin Nature and Science Center
- Friends of the Elisabet Ney Museum
- Friends of Tom Lassetter Park
- Georgian Acres Neighborhood Association
- Great Hills Park Committee
- Hancock Neighborhood Association
- Highland Neighborhood Association
- Keep Walnut Creek Wild
- Northeast Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association
- Northwest Austin Civic Association
- Onion Creek – Legends Way Neighborhood Association
- South River City Citizens Neighborhood Association

In a broad scope, CAPP projects are predominantly in the form of ecological remediation, education, enhancement installations, or infrastructure development. A common example of ecological projects are tree plantings for several uses such as increased shade, soil runoff remediation, and aesthetics. Alternatively, infrastructure projects are often in the form of short-term enhancements to increase sense of safety, education/interpretive signage, additional seating, nature play amenities, and court enhancements.

- **Number of ecological projects in progress, approved, or completed: 35**
- **Number of infrastructure projects in progress, approved, or completed: 60**
- **Number of “other” improvement type projects in progress, approved, or completed: 1**
- **Number of projects approved, completed, in progress:**
 - Approved (all CAPPs that are post-site visit and/or pre-completion): 47
 - In progress (all CAPPs that are "under review", including site visits): 32
 - Not Feasible: 12

PARKner Projects

Katherine A. Cook School Park | Monarch Butterfly Habitats

Cook Elementary School Park proposed the installation of garden beds to create a habitat for Monarch butterflies and create a space for all students to engage with nature, an effort that contributes to the Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) initiative. With the help of PARD and Austin Independent School District (AISD), and funding from National Wildlife Federation’s Monarch Heroes Program, three gardens were installed at Cook School Park in spring 2022. Students and teachers alike continue to use these gardens as a space to connect with nature and further hands-on education.



Copperfield Neighborhood Park | Receptacle Replacements

With the help of City staff, the Friends of Copperfield Nature Trails, and Austin Parks Foundation, Copperfield Park has undergone a replacement of trash and recycling receptacles this past March. This proposal was submitted by the Friends of Copperfield Nature Trails and funded Austin Parks and Recreation to improve amenities on parkland and further the advancement of Copperfield Park.



Mary Moore Searight Metro Park | Trail Enhancements

Following a nearly 25-year legacy of trail stewardship in the Austin area, the Austin Ridge Riders proposed strategic ecological trail improvements to Mary Moore Searight Park in South Austin. Improvements included vegetation trimming, improving drainage, and re-covering tree roots exposed in heavy traffic areas.



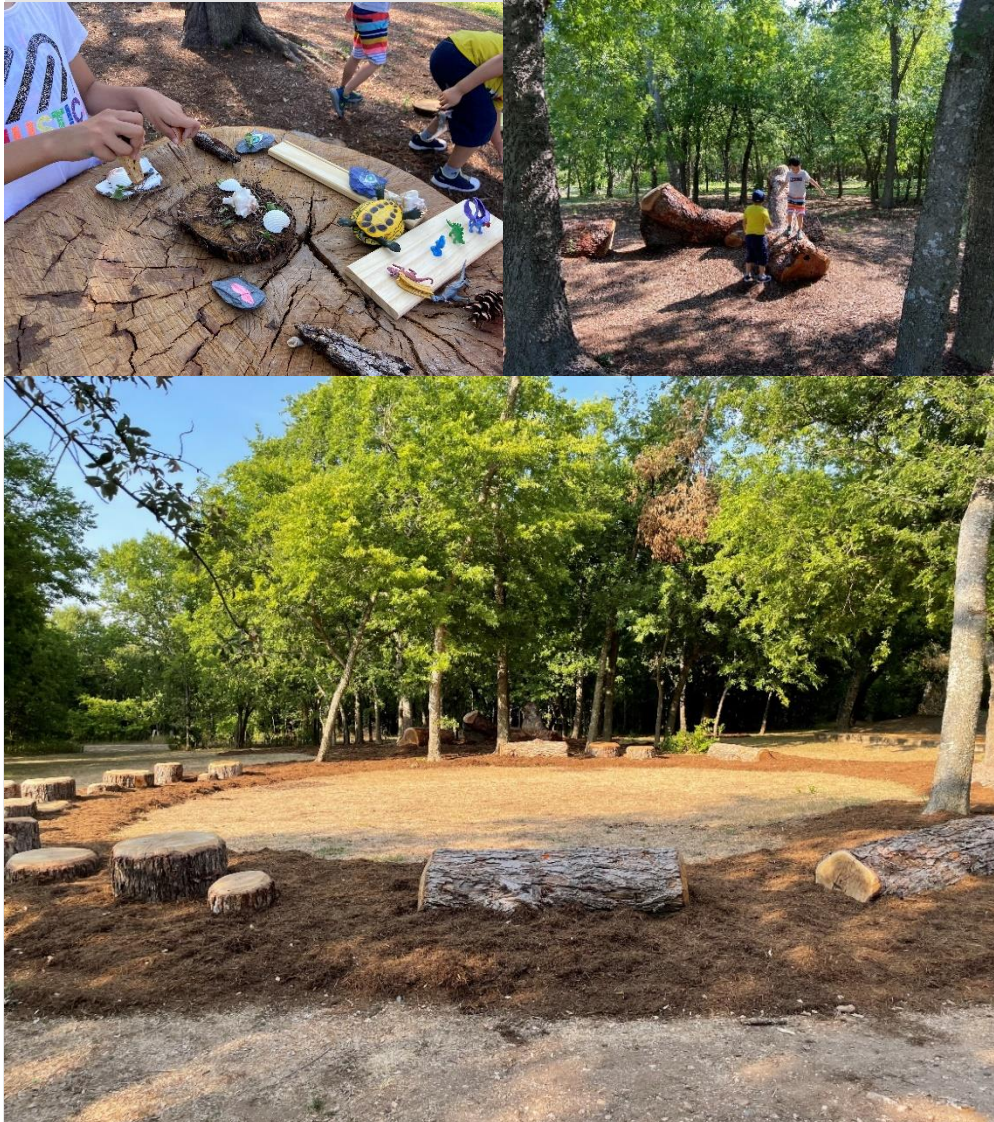
Williamson Creek Greenbelt | Donde Corre El Agua | Where the Water Runs

This project began when three long-time residents adopted a section of Williamson Creek in the Dove Springs neighborhood. Community members reached out to Go Austin, Vamos Austin (GAVA), Urban Roots, and the Community and Regional Planning program at the University of Texas at Austin. Together they initiated a vision planning process for the Williamson Creek Greenbelt parkland area designated in an old floodplain. When deciding what to propose for the park, community members of Dove Springs mapped the area, documented residents' perspectives on the park, engaged in multi-generational dialogue, and designed prototypes for murals and interpretive signs. To read more about the community proposed project visit the [plan webpage](#).



Kendra Page Neighborhood Park | Nature Play Installation

Early in 2020, the Friends of Kendra Page Neighborhood Park group submitted a proposal improve their park's walking loop and bring a nature play space to their community. Many children walk through the park on their way to school, and the nature trail would be a helpful guide. The nature play space is one of the first of its kind in Austin and encourages children of all ages to engage in imaginative and creative play. The trail and nature play space opened summer 2022.



Civitan Neighborhood Park | Civitan Mini-Pitch

In partnership with Austin FC and the U.S. Soccer Foundation, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) created a new soccer mini-pitch for the Austin community at Civitan Neighborhood Park. This project is through the U.S. Soccer Foundation's [Safe Places to Play](#) program, which focuses on creating safe plays for children to play soccer in their neighborhoods by transforming underutilized facilities into mini-pitches. The Civitan mini-pitch was completed in fall 2021 and continues to be a place for community members to gather and play soccer.



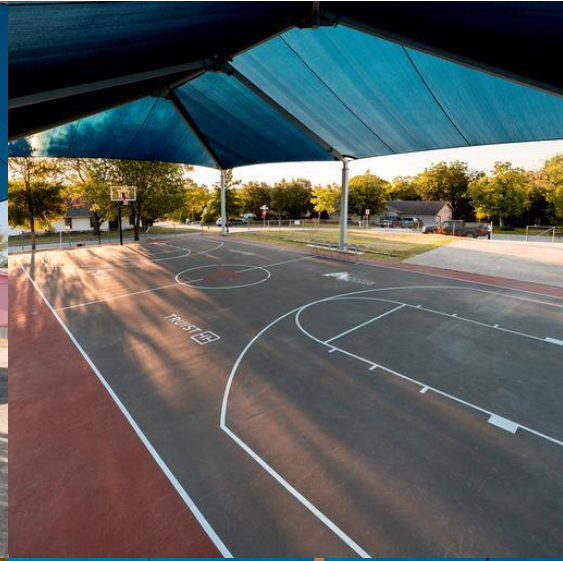
Andrews School Park | Court Resurfacing

This CAPP proposal was submitted by Longhorn Sports Properties with the goal of resurfacing the basketball court and replacing basketball court goals at Andrews School Park, modeled after the Moody Center. Andrews School Park was identified as a site of high need through the Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) - Green School Park assessment. The court resurfacing was completed on August 19th, 2022, with the help of the AISD, PARD staff, and external partners.

Before:



After:



Adopt-A-Park Program

ADOPT - A - PARK



The success of our parks system depends on the support, volunteerism, advocacy, and enthusiasm of the public as stewards and agents of their parks. The Adopt-A-Park program helps community members become those stewards through a collaborative partnership between the Austin Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Parks Foundation (APF). The goal of this program is to build community agency and ownership around every neighborhood park in Austin. Park Adopters serve as key community representatives for their park by organizing a community-based group and making an ongoing commitment to improving their neighborhood park. Through this program, adopters are empowered to engage neighbors and park users, fostering a sense of possibility and momentum for change that can galvanize others, resulting in a more innovative, creative, and dynamic park system.

An annual audit was performed in the first quarter of PARD FY22, starting the year off with **111 adopted parks (district, neighborhood, and pocket parks), 29 park stewards (metro parks, greenbelts, and preserves) and 48 unadopted.**

- In FY22, the Adopt-a-Park program stayed the same with **111 groups**, a **0% increase in growth from the previous year.**
- The park stewards stayed the same with **29 groups**, a **0% increase in growth from the previous year.**
- Adopted school parks stayed the same with **17 groups**, a **0% increase in growth from the previous year.**

Activating Our Parks

Community PARKnerships “Pop Up” Programming Pilot:

The [Community PARKnerships Program](#) is exploring the role of programming to serve as an outreach tool and activate park spaces with free programming opportunities. The PARKnerships “Pop Up” pilot centers around new nature play features initiated by community groups within historically under resourced neighborhoods. The goal is to provide support to Adopt-A-Park and partner groups in Districts 1-3 and connect communities to opportunities presented by nature play features. Each site has corresponding stewardship and partner groups set to join for at least one of the upcoming activations. By demonstrating a template for low-barrier activities as "Pop-Ups", our team encourages PARKners to replicate programming and insert opportunities relevant to their neighborhood needs.

Since the pilot program began in August 2022, the pop-ups have attracted **over 60 participants and 6 non-profit or Adopt-A-Park groups to collaborate** and share information on Pop-Ups. Participation continues to grow each month.

Nature Days at Walnut Creek with Earth Native Wilderness School:

The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department, in partnership with [Earth Native Wilderness School](#), previously held free nature programming at Walnut Creek Metropolitan Park in order to activate the nature play areas on site. With **over 140 pre-registrations**, nature programming was held in both English and Spanish during September, October, November, and December to promote nature connectivity within children around Austin. Nature Day stations included a bones table, an edible and medicinal plant walk, making art with locally sourced mineral and plant based natural paints and pigments, the ancient art of making rope using loose plants fibers, and nature-based games. This programming was funded by the St. David's Foundation Parks with Purpose grant.

Loose Parts Lending Kits:

Loose parts nature play promotes creativity and imagination, cooperation and communication, and fosters connection to nature and stewardship values. The [Loose Parts Lending Kits](#) are a collection of items that can be used to build, create, and foster nature connections in an unstructured environment. Each kit can be checked out from PARD and contains an assortment of natural materials, animal figurines, string, fabric and so much more.

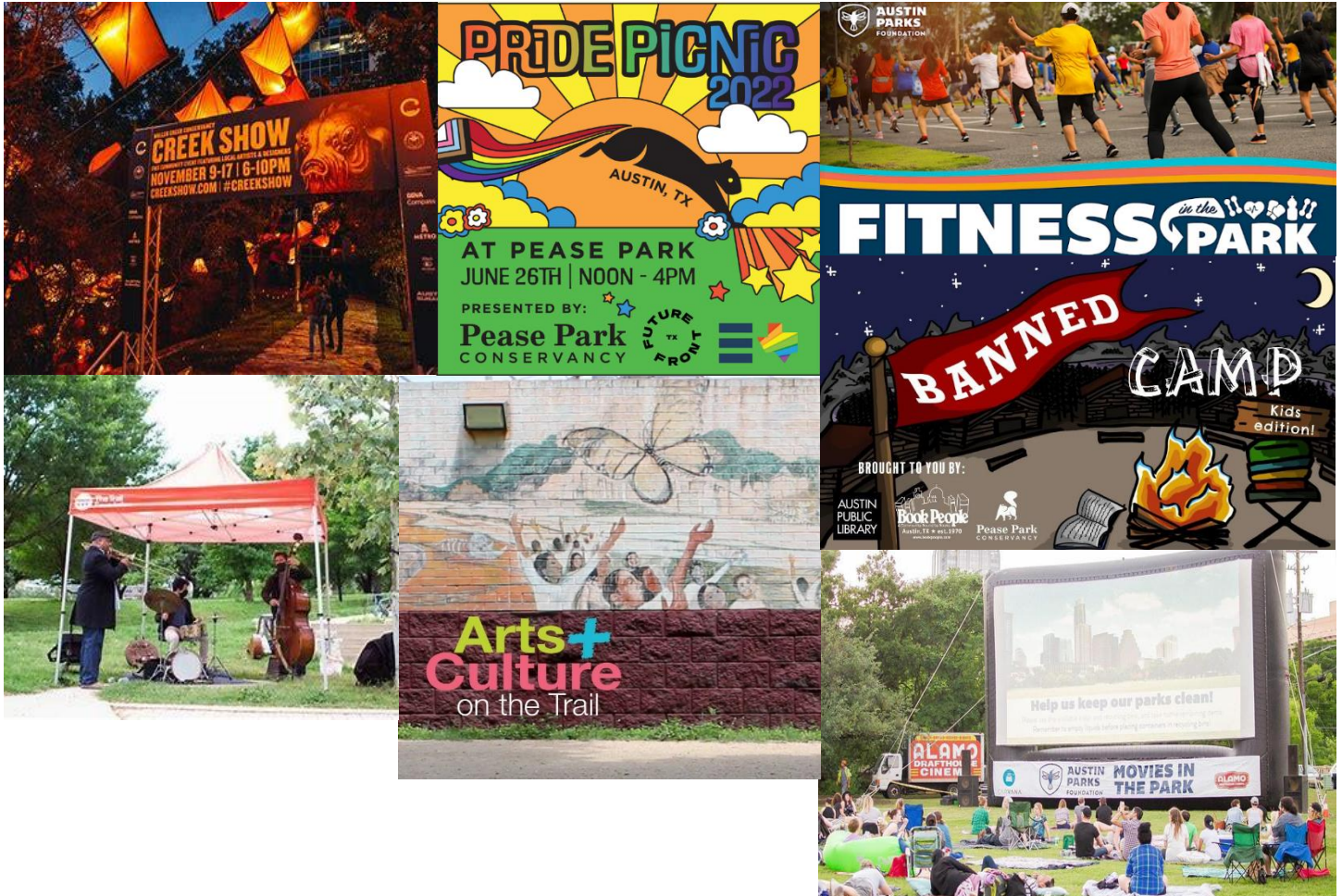
This past fiscal year, PARD re-opened the loose parts lending kits program and checked out kits over 20 times with **150+ participants ranging from 2-15 years old**. To help activate sites, PARD staff visited various parks including MLK Station Neighborhood Park, Mueller Lake Park, Pease District Park, Parque Zaragoza, and more around Austin to help promote creativity, connection to nature, and risky play. Additionally, PARD staff attended community events around Austin such as Waterloo Green Day, Nature Day at the Elisabet Ney Museum, Mendez Recreation Center Dog Extravaganza, Spring into Fun Day at Cunningham School Park and Nature Days at Walnut Creek Metro Park.



PARKner Activation and Programming:

The City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department works with various partner organizations, such as Shoal Creek Conservancy, Pease Park Conservancy, Keep Austin Beautiful, The Trail Conservancy, and more to activate parkland around Austin. Activation includes, culturally relevant arts and community programming, free family programs, wellness programs and classes and more. Previous highlights of activation in FY22 include movies in the park, Music on the Trail, Creek Show, Pride Picnic, farmer's markets, Austin-wide parkland volunteer days, and more!

Benefits of parkland activation include increased civic trust and engagement, community-building, improved mental health, increase in positive health outcomes, exposure to nature, free community-based programming and activation of parkland!



Stewardship of Parkland

In FY22 PARC leveraged thousands of volunteers to assist in the maintenance and operations of our parks and recreation system.

FY22:

- Total Volunteers: **16,707**
- Hours Contributed: **62,608.25**
- Trees and Saplings Planted: **9,053**
- Pounds of Trash Collected: **52,429**
- Total Value of Volunteer Time: **\$1,875,117.09**



Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN)

CCCN seeks to create more equitable and abundant access to nature for children throughout Austin. FY22 achievements include:

- Published the *Nature Play Guidelines*;
- Installed PARD's second official nature play space at MLK Station Neighborhood Park;
- Activated Walnut Creek Metro Park's nature play area in partnership with Earth Native Wilderness School through free public programming;
- Developed Green School Park Stewardship Document;
- Led informational sessions at both the Texas Children in Nature Network Summit and the National League of Cities/Children in Nature Conference;
- Received 57 signatures for the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, for a total of just over 1,600;
- Leveraged \$364,394 in funding for CCCN efforts.



Green School Parks

Vision: Create a network of school parks that provide schools and the surrounding community the opportunity to learn from, steward, and play in nature.

- Green Administrator Cohort conducted in partnership with EcoRise and Austin ISD to support green campus initiatives
- Joint Use Agreement content finalized
- Coordinating between PARD + AISD on upcoming AISD Bond, which will impact about 6 joint use school parks
- GSP Designation process and form created
- APF volunteer days to maintain GSP gardens, trees, trails, etc.
- Purchased new park amenities and finalized placement for 21 joint use sites
- Principal Q+A started during GSP Committee meetings, with at least 2 Principals attending every meeting
- Completed all data analysis for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, studying the impact of green infrastructure installed as part of the GSP program. Final conclusions include:
 - As temperatures rise, children decrease physical activity and seek shade
 - Children's connection to nature had a significant positive effect on their overall SEL skills, self-management, self-awareness, relationship skills



Welcome to your **GREEN School Park!**

This schoolyard supports nature and encourages outdoor learning with features like gardens, an outdoor classroom, rain water collection, and more!

As a Green School Park, this space is open and accessible to the public outside of school hours. When school is out, come enjoy this area as a place to play, learn, and gather!

Bienvenidos a su **Parque de la Escuela VERDE!**

Este patio escolar apoya la naturaleza y fomenta el aprendizaje al aire libre con características como jardines, aulas al aire libre, captura de agua de lluvia y más.

Como Parque de la Escuela Verde, este espacio está abierto y accesible al público fuera del horario escolar. Cuando la escuela esté cerrada, vengan y disfruten de esta área como un lugar para jugar, reunir, y aprender.

Nature Play

Vision: Activate parks and greenspaces through nature play programming and installation of nature play spaces across the city

- Published Nature Play Guidelines to assist City staff and partners in the design, installation, maintenance, and management of nature play spaces
- Installed 3 nature play space, in partnership with Austin Parks Foundation, at MLK Station, Kendra Page, and Grand Meadow Neighborhood Parks
- Added nature play into PARD Standard Amenity Guide for all staff and park adopters to reference
- Developed Maintenance Checklist, observation criteria, and wood degradation process for all new nature play spaces
- Loose parts lending kits re-started, with kits checked out 22 times
- Secured PARD Mitigation funds to cover the cost of moving logs
- Initiated Infrastructure Subcommittee quarterly meetings, providing space for staff and partners to discuss best practices for nature play



Youth Leadership

Vision: Collaborating to build an Austin in which young people can easily access careers in outdoors, nature, and the environment, are fairly compensated for their contributions, and that the field, and leadership within, represents the communities we serve.

- Participants:
 - 45 participants from 16 org.
 - 41 zip codes
 - > 55% ages 16-24
 - 44% non-White (Black/African-American, Asian-American and Pacific Islander, and Latinx/Hispanic)
- Continued co-facilitation of meetings with youth
- Normalize talking about race & racism with stakeholders, partners, participants, leadership
- Hosted 2 trainings on equitable hiring practices, with 42 total participants
- Creating pathways into nature-based jobs with target organizations ([Austin Civilian Conservation Corp.](#), Youth Forest Council, Austin Youth River Watch):
 - ACCC (Internal Pathways): 38 summer temp jobs at COA, 13 continued/still employed
 - YFC: hired 13 interns
 - AYRW: hired 10 interns (5 returning interns + 5 new interns); half of our current intern cohort are former Riverwatch students