

**State of Texas  
County of Bexar  
City of San Antonio**



**Meeting Minutes  
City Council Budget Work Session**

Council Briefing Room  
City Hall  
100 Military Plaza  
San Antonio, Texas 78205

**2023 – 2025 Council Members**

Mayor Ron Nirenberg  
Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2  
Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3 | Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4  
Teri Castillo, Dist. 5 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6  
Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7 | Manny Pelaez, Dist. 8  
John Courage, Dist. 9 | Marc Whyte, Dist. 10

**Tuesday, September 10, 2024**

**2:00 PM**

**Council Briefing Room**

The City Council convened a Budget Work Session meeting in the Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:11 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

**PRESENT: 10** – Nirenberg, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Castillo, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

**ABSENT: 1** - Rocha Garcia

**ITEMS**

1. Staff presentation on the FY 2025 Proposed Budget focusing on, but not limited to, the following City Departments or Initiatives: [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Justina Tate, Management & Budget]

A. Parks and Recreation  
B. Office of Sustainability

Homer Garcia III, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department (Parks) opened the presentation by declaring the department's vision to be equitable access for all by 2050. Garcia stated that by connecting people, nature, recreation, and resources, the department would inspire and nourish the well-being of all with a commitment to a culture and system that would drive excellence, equity, empowerment, and engagement.

Garcia reported that the department was the second-largest in the City to receive national accreditation as a park agency in September 2022. He indicated that accreditation measured the overall quality of operation, management, and service to the community; demonstrated compliance against 154 standards, and could expect reaccreditation every five years. He mentioned that additionally, Parks was the fourth City department to achieve ISO 45001 Safety Management System Standards Certification.

Garcia stated that the department offered recreation services, managed capital projects, performed maintenance and operations, and community engagement, with a goal of maintaining tree canopy, all while managing the administration.

The department's \$117.5 million Proposed FY 2025 Budget included nine new staff but showed a 5.6% decrease from the prior year due to the completion of capital projects, according to Garcia. He listed several performance measures including an 85% timely completion rate of service requests. Garcia reported that San Antonio went from 53 to a 52 annual overall ParkScore Ranking by the Trust for Public Lands (Out of 100 Cities).

Garcia highlighted budget improvements such as: \$1 million for operations and maintenance of completed capital projects which included nine new positions to support improvements at 40 Parks including Jupe Manor, Pickwell, Benavides, Rosedale, Cathedral Rock, OP Schnabel, and Bonnie Conner Parks. He reported that the Proposed Budget also included \$275,000 for contractual services to augment existing department efforts with Waterway Cleaning Services at Woodlawn Lake, Elmendorf Lake, Brackenridge Park, Miller's Pond, and Southside Lions. Additionally, Garcia proposed \$250,000 for the Historic City Cemeteries Master Plan which included a review of the existing 1990 Master Plan and recommendations for improvements to enhance City's Historic Cemeteries.

FY 2025 capital improvements included \$550,000 for restroom, area lighting, and related infrastructure at Monterrey Park and a New Restroom Prototype – Pilot in FY 2024 at Jimmy Flores Park and Benavides Parks, \$3.8 million for playground shade structures which was in year two of a five-year plan that included 61 playgrounds for a total cost of \$19 million; the FY 2025 Proposed Budget included 12 playgrounds in 12 different parks.

Garcia estimated that improvements at Mendoza Park, Beacon Hill Park, and Jimmy Flores Park would be completed in May of 2025. Garcia recommended a \$220,000 reduction for FY 2025 by discontinuing the School Park Program which was a partnership with SA Sports and school districts. Garcia cited reduced support and interest from school districts as they were prioritizing campus safety and utilizing limited funding for school activities. Moving forward, no new school parks would be built but existing school parks would remain open commensurate with school district interest.

Garcia stated that The Tree Canopy Preservation & Mitigation Fund had \$13.8 million to plant residential trees, host tree adoptions and planting of new trees in public areas, provide educational programming and outreach, in City capital projects (2022 Bond/Linear Trail projects, right of way projects) and fund partnerships including \$500,000 for the San Antonio Zoo and \$200,000 for the Arboretum. He added that the FY 2025 target was to install 14,086 new trees, an increase of 475 trees over FY 2024.

Garcia reported that the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP) had protected 156 total properties since its inception through 132 conservation easements and 24 fee simple purchases under the former funding model that was a one-quarter cent sales tax. He indicated that the new funding model created a Municipal Facilities Corporation and was anticipated to have \$100 million over 10 Years with \$10 million in the FY 2025 Proposed Budget.

Garcia reported that 102 trail miles had been completed in the Greenway Trails System, 32 trail miles were under design or construction for \$103.5 million with 25 trail miles included in the FY 2022 Bond Program. He noted that additionally, 24 trail miles were being funded by Bexar County/San Antonio River Authority over 10 years at a cost of \$83.4 million. Garcia reported that an estimated 19 trail miles remained to potentially be funded through the 2027 Bond Program.

Garcia outlined growth of the park system including Berkley V. and Vincent M. Dawson (BVVD) Park and the Heritage Community Center which were 2022 Bond Projects. He noted that the Parks Department strived to be responsive to community needs through programming and connecting local residents to trees. Garcia proposed a Senior Swim Pilot Program and Community Club Hubs. He pledged to continue efforts to maintain accreditation with a work plan for national reaccreditation in FY 2027 and focused efforts on ISO 45001 SMS Safety Certification.

Doug Melnick, Chief Sustainability Officer provided background on the 2017 City Council Resolution to meet objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) approved by City Council in October 2019 which was the City's roadmap for community and municipal sustainability. He indicated that the Plan aimed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and adapt to current and future climate impacts.

Melnick listed the five Sustainability Programs: Climate Adaptation, Community Sustainability, Energy Management, Sustainable Transportation, and Municipal Sustainability. He stated that the Municipal Climate Strategy Implementation included an Employee Climate Training Series, United States Department of Energy (USDOE) Energy Efficiency Block Grant, publicly-accessible electric vehicle (EV) charging, transportation alternatives, an Energy Efficiency Fund, municipal onsite solar, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program titled "Solar for All," Bond Program sustainable design review, the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, Communications, Engagement, and Education, Urban Heat Island Mitigation, SA Climate Ready Community Action Fund, and Community Resilience Programs.

Melnick stated that the Office of Sustainability's overall Proposed FY 2025 Budget was \$21.7 million which was a 156.4% increase mostly due to grants. Melnick outlined heat island targeted investment projects through the REES Fund which included \$5.8 million for 22.3 miles of cool pavement overlay, \$1.2 million for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) replacement

at four Resiliency Hubs, \$1 million for low-income residential weatherization, \$1 million for the Under One Roof Program for white roofs and \$1 million for bus shade structures in partnership with VIA Metropolitan Transit.

Melnick listed performance metrics that included outreach to the public, trainings, and solar megawatts installed. Funding was available to Update the SA Climate Ready Plan in FY 2025 from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) with no match requirement, according to Melnick. He indicated that updates to the SA Climate Ready Plan would be led by the Office of Sustainability. Melnick also mentioned the development of 13-County Regional Climate Action Plan called the Alamo Area Climate Plan which was also funded with the CPRG Grant being led by the Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) with support from the Office of Sustainability and WSP environmental consultants.

Melnick reported that The Urban Heat Island Program was being rebranded as the Cool Neighborhoods Program. He noted that the current implementation strategy focused on four target areas in Council Districts 2, 3, and 5 that would deploy diverse reduction measures in target areas including trees, green infrastructure, shade structures, water features, weatherization, solar installations, and cool materials implementation strategy supported by community engagement with a continued research partnership with the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA).

Melnick stated that the \$1 million Bus Stop Shade Structure Program would begin with site selection in collaboration with VIA including evaluation of ridership, bus stop, and route location with an initial focus on four Cool Neighborhood Program target areas. He added that the bus stop and shade structure design would prioritize heat mitigation and rider comfort and have the potential to incorporate public art.

Melnick reported that the \$20.8 million Solar for All Grant from the EPA was proposed to target Cool Neighborhood Program areas and low-income resiliency program areas and leveraged the Under One Roof Program. He noted that the Program was intended to provide an economic benefit to our most energy-burdened residents by providing low-income solar, battery storage, and workforce training.

Melnick outlined three community-based climate resilience programs. He stated that the first was Climate Ready Neighborhoods which was to assist 22 inaugural organizations with management and technical support and pursue external funding. Melnick added that the \$125,000 SA Climate Ready Community Action Fund provided 126 awards in FY 2024 and would evaluate and quantify for impact reports for small businesses.

The \$825,000 Low Income Neighborhood Resilience Program included a FY 2024 plan for Quintana/South San Neighborhood and an FY 2025 plan for implementation and monitoring of energy efficiency projects, according to Melnick. He indicated that the FY 2025 Proposed Budget included \$1.2 million for lighting retrofit projects: \$1.2 million for Ron Darner, Semmes Library, Maverick Library, and Guerra Library. Melnick added that since 2011, 424 projects had been completed helping the City to avoid approximately \$1.7 million in annual utility expenses.

Melnick proposed combining the two SA Climate Ready Advisory Committees into one to increase efficiency, collaboration, and more effective climate equity integration. He noted that the new

restructured Board would include 17 members: 10 City Council-appointed members, two members appointed by the Mayor, and five ex-officio organizational members. He indicated that the Board Members would be expected to regularly check-in with City Council offices. Melnick stated that the proposed restructure plan would need City Council approval by Ordinance and a list of board applicants per council district for appointment was available through the Office of the City Clerk.

## DISCUSSION:

Both Items were discussed simultaneously.

Councilmember Aldrete Gavito supported the work of the Parks Department, the improvements at Woodlawn Lake Park including a tree-planting event, and dedicated waterway cleaning. She asked what the nine new staff would do. Garcia stated that these were gardeners, carpenters, painters, welders, and a crew leader to support the new parks. Councilmember Aldrete Gavito asked why capital project funding was decreased. Garcia indicated that the reduction was mainly due to the transition of funding for the EAPP from sales tax as well as completion of projects.

Councilmember Aldrete Gavito requested information on metrics related to Fitness in the Park and supported the swim classes. She asked which parks were ranked first in the nation. Garcia stated that Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota scored very high but scoring could be subjected to the differences in data collection as this was a self-reporting program.

Councilmember Aldrete Gavito supported the upgraded HVAC at Garza Community Center and asked when that would happen. Garcia stated that if the project was funded, it would be completed before next summer. She asked when the Solar Program would be completed as it seemed to be behind schedule. City Manager Erik Walsh noted that when the Program started, staff had higher expectations than could be delivered but the projects would be completed in FY 2025.

Councilmember Castillo recommended more lighting in Farias Park and asked what the coordination would be with Bexar County and San Antonio River Authority (SARA) along the Westside Creeks Greenway Trails. Garcia stated that the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) had jurisdiction over the Westside Creeks and the Parks Department was evaluating lighting needs and seeking approvals by the USACE and Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) which was restricted due to flight paths. Councilmember Castillo supported maintenance and at Normoyle Park and restrooms at Monterrey Park.

Councilmember Castillo recommended purchasing fertilizer for the trees that were offered to the public. Garcia stated that an outreach team provided education and resources such as gator bags to help keep trees alive. Councilmember Castillo asked if the SPARK Program had installed playgrounds at any of the schools that were closing through SAISD's downsizing and whether those playgrounds could be refurbished or relocated. Garcia stated that they needed to check the agreement timeline and determine what would happen with the playground before allocating any funding. City Manager Walsh stated that staff would look to relocate any equipment that was not being used by the community.

Councilmember Castillo asked how many shade structures could be funded with \$1 million and

suggested pairing with Councilmember Pelaez' Art As Shade/Shade As Art Council Consideration Request (CCR 2023-0026). Melnick stated that the estimate was 20 bus shelters and there was an opportunity for public art. Councilmember Castillo recommended continuation of the Small Business Sustainability Grants that were piloted. Melnick reported that new grants were not budgeted in FY 2025 and the intent was to issue an impact report and potentially pursue outside funding for this type of project in the future. Councilmember Castillo was pleased with the Solar Program at the Southwest Service Center and supported those Federal grant applications.

Councilmember Kaur supported the work of the Parks Department and asked about the types of service requests included on the performance metrics and which ones could not be completed quickly. Garcia stated that graffiti abatement, leaking plumbing, carpentry, electric, downed trees/limbs were the most common service requests, and most were fulfilled quickly but sometimes if a licensed plumber or electrician was needed, it might take longer due to the difficulty in filling those positions.

Councilmember Kaur requested clarification on ParkScore and park accreditation metrics and suggested using these to develop future park plans. Melinda Cerda, Assistant Parks Director explained that the ParkScore included an evaluation of equity, access, investment, amenities, and total park acreage. Councilmember Kaur requested an update on the projects, greenway trails, and plans to add park land, and neighborhood access to trails. City Manager Walsh noted that the Transportation Plan was evaluating trail connectivity. Garcia indicated that the 2027 Bond Program would be the best opportunity to acquire more park land, however, the Parks Department also collaborated with the Public Works Department to convert right-of-way or drainage areas as appropriate.

Councilmember Kaur asked about the Office of Sustainability's goal of measuring online engagement impressions. Melnick stated that this was to measure effectiveness. Councilmember Kaur recommended an outcome measure related to training. Melnick stated that the commitment to take personal action to improving the climate which was 94%. Councilmember Kaur asked if there was an evaluation of other needs for shade such as sidewalks and not just bus stops. Melnick noted that this would likely be evaluated through the Cool Neighborhood Program.

Councilmember Kaur recommended a five-year plan for ballfield upgrades potentially with artificial turf. Councilmember Kaur asked how Parks worked with the Park Police and asked if they had to go through SAPD. Garcia indicated that his office had a direct line to the Parks Police leadership.

Councilmember Whyte asked whether parks were safe. Garcia asserted that parks were safe, and when users reported issues, they were evaluated for lighting and other infrastructure needs; he added that Park Police were very responsive.

Councilmember Whyte requested information on mowing schedules and if there was more need for mowing. Garcia stated that the mowing vendor had a frequency schedule but sometimes the grass would get tall if there was a rain event and the parks could be mowed an additional time which was included in the contract, but his team was in constant dialogue with the contractor.

Councilmember Whyte asked about the new positions. Garcia stated that the new positions were

front line trade staff to keep the parks running. Councilmember Whyte asked about the restrictions on the use of the Tree Canopy Fund. Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Justina Tate stated that the funds were restricted to tree planting and three-year tree maintenance. Councilmember Whyte asked which parks would receive shade structures. Garcia reported that the department had a five-year work plan to add playground shade and the \$3.8 million listed in the Plan did not include Bond Projects.

Councilmember Whyte asked whether the City had all the data from the Cool Pavement Program. Melnick stated that UTSA reported temperature reductions from 3 of the 5 materials tested and all 3 met safety requirements so those would be utilized through existing pavement projects scheduled by Public Works in the targeted Cool Neighborhood areas. Councilmember Whyte requested the cost differential between the cool pavement streets and regular pavement. City Manager Walsh stated that it was an overlay application that added less than 10% to the project but Public Works could provide an exact cost.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked about the 189,000 acres targeted for protection by the EAPP and requested information on the process for getting land into the Program. Garcia indicated that 70% of San Antonio's drinking water came from the Edwards Aquifer which flowed from west to east. He reported that the department worked with the Land Acquisition Team to identify voluntary property owners, they ranked properties based upon a scientific scoring model and recommended land based on those models.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked how we would get to Carbon Neutrality by 2050. Melnick stated that it was a lofty goal and the main metric was the greenhouse gas inventory that was completed every two years and the last one was performed in 2023. He noted that to get to the overall goal, we would need to reduce carbon emissions by at least 4% per year and transportation was the biggest challenge as buildings were getting more efficient. Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that she was on the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board and they received regular briefings on non-attainment.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked if the City was collecting data on keeping City building thermostats within range and supported the 29 solar sites. Melnick stated that the Office of Sustainability worked with the Building and Equipment Services Department to reduce the load and ensure that thermostats were monitored. Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked how the revolving loan fund for energy efficiency was managed. Melnick explained that American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Federal Funding and CPS Energy Rebates were placed into the fund as seed money in 2011 to help reduce the department's cost and the increment of savings would go into the Energy Efficiency Fund which was audited in 2017. Councilmember Cabello Havrda suggested a new audit of the fund.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended evaluating the parks system in advance of the 2027 Bond Program to ensure proper investment. He referenced his CCR 2023-0021 which requested an updated Cemeteries Master Plan and supported the new parks such as BVVD at the Hayes Street Bridge as well as the need for new green space on the northern portion of Council District 2 which was becoming more industrial. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested acceleration of adding shade to playgrounds and noted that Council District 2 had the most unshaded playgrounds and requested a plan for playgrounds for FY 2025.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez expressed concern that tree canopy funding had been used to purchase vehicles and suggested that those funds should only be spent on direct planting of trees which should be prioritized including the preservation of large trees. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez stated that New York City was interested in replicating the Cool Pavement Program, and he supported more shade for bus stops. He noted that with \$1 million we should be able to get 40 bus shelters as they cost about \$25,000 each. Melnick noted that he would discuss this with VIA and get a revised number of bus shelters; however, some needed more investment in infrastructure and easement access. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested using Tree Mitigation Funds to plant trees on private property near bus stops.

The 2027 Bond Program was the next big opportunity for parks and recommended that all new projects have aspirational sustainability goals as well, commented Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez. He asked for the biggest sustainability need. Melnick indicated that battery storage was a resiliency factor that was needed. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested a resiliency hub in Council District 2 to ensure access to vulnerable communities.

Councilmember Courage commented that 625,000 people participated in recreational programs and requested an age breakdown and an unduplicated count. Garcia reported that most were youth but there were some programs specifically for seniors, however, for ball fields it might be difficult to get an unduplicated number. Assistant Parks Director Nikki Ramos stated that this year the department operated 50 summer youth programs, some were City sites, and some were in partnerships with schools.

Councilmember Courage expressed concern that trees were dying along City streets that were not planted through our project but through new development. Garcia noted that the Tree Mitigation Fund supported public or private planting of trees, not removal of trees and replacement, however trees in the public rights of way should be maintained by the Public Works Department and could be a partnership with Parks.

Councilmember Courage asked about Trail Stewards versus volunteers. Garcia stated that there were 50 part-time Trail Stewards that were paid staff hired to care for the Greenway Trails and there were some volunteers also but they were not Trail Stewards.

Councilmember Courage asked whether emissions from commercial buildings were being targeted for carbon emission reduction. Melnick stated that the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD) had the Re-Works Program that incorporated recycling and sustainability with technical support, however, the Office of Sustainability was developing a voluntary program to connect building owners with sustainability experts and low interest loan programs through Federal Funding.

Councilmember Courage asked how much money the business community spent on the voluntary reduction program.

Councilmember Pelaez asked how many square feet of solar panels would be installed and where were the panels sourced. Melnick stated that it was 13 megawatts and they did not come from Mission Solar here locally because the company did not have their commercial sales set up.



Councilmember Pelaez requested a breakdown of the 589 park positions by function and asked where the new trees planted were grown. Burkett Arbor Care was the vendor that provided the trees, according to Garcia, they were not grown in-house by the Parks Department. Councilmember Pelaez requested a demographic breakdown by council district of volunteers with Parks. He supported the \$200,000 for the Arboretum and requested a presentation specifically on the Arboretum.

Councilmember Viagran recommended adding more lighting in South Side park spaces so they would be more rentable and added that artificial turf was often desired by the teams. Garcia noted that the Wheatley Heights Sports Complex had artificial turf and they could evaluate that site.

Councilmember Viagran requested an update on the EAPP at the Community Health Committee. She supported the Senior Swim Pilot Program noting that a Council District 3 resident had requested that Program. Councilmember Viagran recommended a review of amenities in each park, information on the improvements made to golf courses, and identification of volunteers in the parks.

Councilmember Viagran supported increasing awareness and education related to sustainability for the community. She supported the plan to seek more grants and recommended an update to the climate dashboard to ensure it kept up with trends, programs, and scientific research. Councilmember Viagran supported more shade at VIA bus stops but agreed with Melnick that they should not be a one-size-fits-all as each site might have different needs. She supported adding solar to the South Side Lions Senior Center.

Councilmember Kaur recommended a feasibility study on a complete overhaul of our pool system to keep them open year-round. Garcia mentioned that two years ago, the summer swim season and hours were extended and noted that the demographic for lifeguards was a challenge as they were mostly high school students.

Councilmember Pelaez asked about the San Antonio Gun Club which he stated was the oldest trap and skeet club in the nation and was on City property and might need upgrades and improvements. Garcia stated that this was a long-term lease and the operator was responsible for maintenance and upkeep so nothing was budgeted for the Gun Club.

Councilmember Courage asked about the major components that were targets of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. Melnick stated that the first step was to conduct an inventory to determine the source of emissions of which 85% was from commercial and residential buildings and the majority of the rest was from transportation with very little from industrial sources; then a plan of action could be developed. Councilmember Courage recommended a better partnership with the community.

Councilmember Courage encouraged the Office of Sustainability to make recommendations on the uses of the REES Fund. City Manager Walsh commented that there were some limitations on the REES Fund and mentioned that the financial policy was that if the City received more than 10% over budgeted amounts from CPS Energy, a portion would go into the REES fund.

Mayor Nirenberg recommended seeking to use REES Fund dollars in areas that could be

leveraged such as Federal grants from the EPA. Mayor Nirenberg supported a presentation from the Arboretum and the EAPP and asked staff to develop a map including water quality and protection impacts. He commented that the growth expected was outpacing the water supply faster than anticipated and it was critical to safeguard the Edwards Aquifer which might mean considering more money for the EAPP and more property protection.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Executive Session was not held.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:52 p.m.

**Approved**

**Ron Nirenberg**  
**Mayor**

**Debbie Racca-Sittre**  
**City Clerk**