

**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

**Thursday, August 31, 2023**

**1:00 PM**

**Council Briefing Room**

The City Council convened a Budget Work Session in the Council Briefing Room beginning at 1:08 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Council Members present:

**PRESENT: 11** – Nirenberg, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Viagran, Rocha Garcia, Castillo, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito, Pelaez, Courage, Whyte

**ABSENT:** None

**ITEMS**

1. Staff presentation on the FY 2024 Proposed Budget focusing on, but not limited to, the following City Departments or Initiatives: [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Justina Tate, Director, Management & Budget]

A. Parks and Recreation

B. Resiliency, Energy Efficiency, and Sustainability

City Manager Erik Walsh introduced the Items and stated that both departments would be presented

sequentially with discussion to occur afterward for all topics simultaneously.

Homer Garcia, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department (Parks), provided an overview of the FY2024 Proposed Budget as well as FY2023 accomplishments. Garcia stated that the department's vision was equitable access to all by 2050 and service delivery. Garcia stated that the total FY2024 Budget was proposed at a total of \$124.2 million which was a 9.2% increase and added 19 total new positions.

Garcia reported that as a result of the completion of capital projects such as Hemisfair Civic Park, Alamo Plaza, Piazza Italia, Berkley V. & Vincent M Dawson (BVD), Pearsall Park, Monterrey Park, Smith Park, \$1.03 million for 11 new positions was added. He stated that \$714,095 was included to provide five positions and operational/maintenance costs for Wheatley Heights Sports Complex. Garcia stated that the Proposed Budget included \$150,000 for green space activation of vacant lots in collaboration with Public Works and the Neighborhood and Housing Services Department (NHSD) and encouraged the establishment of neighborhood partnerships for future maintenance.

Garcia reported that \$2.3 Million in capital improvements was proposed for a cricket field at OP Schnabel Park (\$350K), little league fields at Stinson & McAllister Parks (\$700K), perimeter fencing at the SA Zoo (\$1.25 Million) and scheduled maintenance of \$2.45 million at Herrera Park, Millers Pond, and Smith Park, SA Natatorium and the Urban Ecology Center as well as \$228,000 to maintain and mow historic City cemeteries as well as fence repair and paint along the main travel corridors of Commerce St. and N. New Braunfels Ave.

Garcia proposed a \$19 million five-year plan for the installation of 61 playground shade structures at \$3.8 million per year. Garcia stated that the FY2024 Proposed Budget included funding for 13 playgrounds and 12 parks selected based on usage, site conditions and existing requests. He added that the Proposed Budget also included \$400,000 in Tree Preservation and Mitigation Funding for the San Antonio Arboretum.

Garcia stated that since 2000, the sales tax fund protected 178,000 total acres and as planned, the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program was moving to a Municipal Facilities Corporation Funding Model including \$100 million over 10 years or \$19.2 million in FY2024. Garcia reported that 101 trail miles had been completed on the Greenway Trail with 12 trail miles under design or construction; 19 miles were planned to be built using \$103.5 million from the 2022 Bond Program and another 24 miles was planned to be funded by Bexar County and San Antonio River Authority (SARA) at a cost of \$83.7 million. He noted that an estimated 20 trail miles remained to be funded.

Assistant City Manager David McCary presented the \$14.5 million FY2024 Proposed Budget for the Resiliency, Energy Efficiency, & Sustainability (REES) Fund. He noted that City Council established the REES Fund in FY2023, funded with a portion of City's payment from CPS Energy on STEP Recovery to support SA Climate Ready implementation and sustainability/resiliency initiatives and reduced San Antonio's contribution to the cause of climate change and adapting to current and future impacts.

The REES Fund provided \$2.5 million for community grants such as the Eco Scholars School

Grant Program, \$3 million for the Cool Pavement Program and low-income home weatherization, \$1.5 million in business incentives and \$3 million to leverage grant opportunities. Assistant City Manager McCary listed the objectives and process for additional sustainability initiatives such as municipal solar, seeking of grant funding, and funding increased access to electric vehicle (EV) charging stations.

## DISCUSSION:

Mayor Nirenberg commented that the REES Fund was brand new for this year but would be a long-term investment in our climate so we could build and program in a more sustainable way for the future of San Antonio. He requested an update on the Cool Pavement Program and requested a plan to move forward with proven innovation and improvements in the annual Infrastructure Maintenance Program (IMP). McCary stated now that the 10 locations were identified for the pilot, UTSA was beginning to study the results on the heat island effect. City Manager Walsh added that analysis of the pavement condition and durability was also included in the study. Mayor Nirenberg suggested a pilot to test self-healing pavement.

Mayor Nirenberg supported the new Green Shade Program and hoped more aggregate canopy in San Antonio would be achieved over time and supported more food bearing trees as an urban farming opportunity. Mayor Nirenberg spoke in support of the strength of going to a decade-long funding commitment which allowed the City to be more flexible in its funding of acquisition of conservation easements to support the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program. City Manager Walsh agreed and reported that the first debt issuance was \$30 million.

Mayor Nirenberg lauded the progress on the Howard W. Peak Greenway Trail System (Greenway Trails) and was pleased that only 20 miles were left to be funded, however, he cautioned that it would never be completed because expansion of the system could connect even more population centers and forever change the landscape and transportation options for San Antonio.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda commented that parks and green spaces were a high priority for our community as we had a strong parks culture in San Antonio. She mentioned that protecting the city's main water source (Edwards Aquifer) and providing shade was critical to the health of our residents. Councilmember Cabello Havrda also supported the Greenway Trails.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda noted that resiliency and sustainability were top of mind these days and encouraged the City to continue to look for ways to improve our quality of life, however, she requested clear performance metrics for the REES Fund to measure its success and evaluate the strategies to determine future program investments.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked which parks were the most utilized and recommended more maintenance to some of the larger parks including the water. Garcia stated that Regional Parks such as McAllister Park, Southside Lions and Woodlawn Lake were the most heavily utilized. Councilmember Alderete Gavito recommended prioritization of bike paths and facilities in the parks, not just the greenway trails and supported the cricket courts and other improvements. She asked about the funding structure for the San Antonio Zoo. Garcia stated that the San Antonio

Zoo funded its own operations but had requested an improvement to the old perimeter fencing as it was too costly for them and also benefitted Brackenridge Park.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito supported the addition of shade structures in parks as well as more trees, particularly for Woodlawn Lake Park. Garcia noted that a position was proposed in the FY2024 Budget to connect projects and owners to trees and related resources. She asked how the department determined the budget for a park. Garcia explained that the resources through staffing and service contracts were based on function such as maintenance, janitorial and recreation system-wide.

Councilmember Castillo mentioned that she had attended the Grand Reopening of the Roosevelt Park Pool and supported investment in trees and shade. She was excited to see funding for the green space initiative and cited studies that activations in vacant lots in other cities had reduced crime in the area and requested council district office input on site selection. Councilmember Castillo requested a partnership with the Food Policy Council and expansion of the community Tool Shed managed by the Development Services Department and Public Works Stormwater Fund to manage drainage and mowing at or near parks.

Councilmember Castillo asked McCary how funding for non-service alleyways would run parallel to the REES Fund. Assistant City Manager McCary explained that collaboration between the departments was critical similar to the Urban Heat Island Initiative. Councilmember Castillo supported the e-bike Pilot Program for disabled persons. She requested an increase in the IMP to include parks improvements.

Councilmember Kaur thanked the Parks Department for keeping San Pedro Springs open later this year. She asked how and when parks were maintained such as how often grass was replaced. Garcia replied that service crews visited parks daily or every other day but facility or turf replacement would be included within a capital project. Councilmember Kaur suggested that there might not be enough money in the Proposed Budget for the Outdoor Spaces Grant Program and offered to share a list of vacant lots in her council district. City Manager Walsh clarified that a plan for the vacant lots was needed and could include a plan with other partners and property owners including a consideration on activation and crime reduction which could leverage property forfeitures.

Councilmember Kaur supported the creation of urban forests and the Tree Giveaway Program but recommended education and other resources for care of the tree as well as an analysis of whether the trees were still alive after a period. Councilmember Kaur asked why the Flyway Trail and Camino La Vaca Trails were not on the Greenway Trails map. Garcia clarified that the map only included the original vision of an emerald necklace around the city.

Councilmember Kaur supported the REES grants, but recommended asking the business community what incentives might work for them and suggested flexibility. Doug Melnick, Chief Sustainability Officer, stated that they planned to build on the very successful ReWorxSA Program managed by the Solid Waste Management Department.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked about the uses of the restricted funds in the Parks Budget.

Garcia stated that restricted funds were utilized for the Tree Preservation and Mitigation Fund, Cemetery Fund and the Environmental Fund for parks sanitation. Freddie Martinez, Assistant Budget Director, added that there were two positions funded through the Capital Project Fund.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia expressed concern that some of the residents had gone to Pearsall Park to view the blue moon and asked how regularly someone patrolled the parks at night and asked what happened when a resident called about high grass. Garcia stated that if there was a call that came in, staff could go out of cycle to mow or maintain an area if a resident called 3-1-1. Councilmember Rocha Garcia suggested the creation of more Pickleball courts, particularly on the south side. She supported more community tree giveaways and shade structures but wanted to ensure that Council District 4 parks and playgrounds received some shade structures. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that the final 20 miles of Greenway Trails were in Council District 4.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia recommended more community dialogue with various neighborhoods including the Quintana Community Neighborhood Association because they were always championing sustainable initiatives.

Councilmember Whyte asked how much money Bexar County was putting toward the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP) and how much they participated in the Greenway Trails. Garcia stated that Bexar County did not participate in the EAPP but committed to funding for the Greenway Trails in 2021. Councilmember Whyte asked how many acres were planned to be acquired under EAPP. Garcia stated that the goal was to maximize the investment but no acreage goal had been established. Councilmember Whyte asked whether Park Police were being added. Deputy City Manager Maria Villagomez explained that the 30 positions were vacancies but there were no new Park Police positions proposed.

Councilmember Whyte asked about the goal of the SA Climate Ready Plan and the two new positions. Melnick stated that the Plan had an objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Justina Tate, stated that the position was for a Federal Lobbyist and Chief Resiliency Officer. Councilmember Whyte suggested that the funding should be used to improve the city properties, streets and alleys. Assistant City Manager McCary stated that the funding would help prepare homes for weatherization for the benefit of a residential customer. Melnick offered a one-on-one review of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and its goals, objectives and metrics.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez supported the Parks Proposed Budget which included the completion of several new parks in Council District 3 and investment and care of the cemeteries. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested that the selection criteria for playground shade structures might not be rooted in equity and recommended more funding for the Green Shade Program to be able to serve more areas.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested for the council district offices to be engaged in discussions related to vacant lots in their council district and potential uses of those green spaces.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended more trees. He commented that the City had

moved to moderate non-attainment status and recommended looking at innovative solutions to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended prioritizing small businesses for grants and requested a timeline, metrics and the results of the Cool Pavement Pilot Program. Melnick stated that some results of the Cool Pavement Pilot Program were in for some of the products and a survey was underway. Assistant City Manager McCary stated that there were five different cool pavement products and not all had been evaluated. City Manager Walsh stated that there would be a report to City Council at the end of the year (December or January).

Councilmember Pelaez commented that the trails were nicer in San Antonio than in Central Park but there were not enough seats in our parks or on our trails. Councilmember Pelaez suggested that Parks could offer mental health respite, senior and youth programming and could be considered anchor institutions for community and community wellness hubs.

Councilmember Courage requested an update on the School Parks (SPARKS) Program. Garcia stated that schools that were interested in having a park on their campus coordinated through San Antonio Sports Foundation on the program, but it had slowed down since the pandemic. Councilmember Courage noted the goal of all residents was to be within a 10 minute walk of a park and suggested more SPARKS might help.

Councilmember Courage asked how much money was in the Tree Preservation and Mitigation Fund. Tate stated that there was a \$1.4 million fund balance currently and the rest of the \$11 million was from projected revenues. Councilmember Courage requested clarification on the Equitree Program. Garcia stated that under the Equitree Program, the Parks Department installed shade trees for residents of census tracts with a high equity score and where there was not sufficient tree canopy.

Councilmember Courage commented that there were no shade structures programmed to be installed in FY2024 under the Program. Garcia stated that those parks had sufficient shade. Councilmember Courage expressed concern that some areas of the Greenway Trails were too narrow to accommodate bikers and walkers at the same time. Garcia replied that currently planned trails included wider designs and those existing trails in highly trafficked areas would be considered for widening.

Councilmember Courage requested a more detailed review of the REES Fund and suggested more money needed to be allocated to help homes become more energy efficient and create more green space and tree canopies. Councilmember Courage asked why Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) was the institution selected for the \$250,000 climate research educational partnership.

Councilmember Viagran commented that parks were very important to Council District 3 and suggested that more funding for neighborhood partnerships could be utilized in the council district and recommended collaborations with the school districts. Councilmember Viagran acknowledged the efforts of the community organizations to care for the parks. She appreciated the efforts to educate and provide outreach regarding preservation of trees but noted that the cost to maintain large trees in older neighborhoods might be a barrier to some residents, particularly for senior citizens. Garcia offered to help connect residents to resources such as pro-bono Arborists.

Councilmember Viagran recommended a partnership with CPS Energy to assist with tree trimming on private property to protect the power lines.

Councilmember Viagran supported investment in the Arboretum and wanted to ensure all commitments by both the City and the County were met and expressed concern that the trail portion next to the Arboretum was not City property. Garcia stated that easements were obtained for that trail and Bexar County was planning to fund this section. City Manager Walsh committed to discussing this with Bexar County.

Councilmember Viagran requested a strategy for seeking Federal sustainability grants. Assistant City Manager McCary stated that staff was constantly watching for the Notices of Funding Opportunities. Melnick added that some grants were only for non-profits and his team was supporting San Antonio non-profits agencies' applications. Councilmember Viagran commended the residents of San Antonio for being successful in conserving energy.

Councilmember Castillo supported lighting for Kennedy Park and asked how much money was budgeted for the SPARKS Program. Garcia reported that there was waning interest from the schools even though he had \$200,000 budgeted annually for SPARKS. She recommended shifting from fabric shade structures to planting trees in areas such as Escobar Park.

Mayor Nirenberg noted that there was a group playing handball at Escobar Park that needed maintenance and shade on the court. Assistant Parks Director Melinda Cerda stated that there was a plan to install a shade structure in that location.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Executive Session was not held.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:34 p.m.

**Approved**

**Ron Nirenberg  
Mayor**

**Debbie Racca-Sittre  
City Clerk**