



(512) 236-9655
P.O. Box 685286
Austin, Texas 78768
www.friendsofbartonspringspool.org

Press Release

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Contact: **Robin Cravey, President of FBSP**
236-9655
president@friendsofbartonspringspool.org

Tom Weber, Advocacy Chair of FBSP
965-8014
advocacy@friendsofbartonspringspool.org

Chasity Keen Larios, Communications Chair of FBSP
communications@friendsofbartonspringspool.org

Friends of Barton Springs Pool Mobilizes Support for the Trees

The Friends of Barton Springs Pool (FBSP), a local group that organizes volunteers to provide direct support for the maintenance of Barton Springs, has been mobilizing efforts to save the trees. FBSP congratulated Parks Director Sarah Hensley for hiring a local arborist to perform yet another assessment of the two dozen or so trees recently recommended for removal.

The recently released report commissioned by the City of Austin as part of the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan recommends the removal of many trees from the Barton Springs pool and surrounding. Many large, old trees might face the ax, shocking local environmentalists and swimmers.

FBSP requested and supports the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan mandating the tree study. In fact, FBSP requested that study and care of the trees be included in the master plan. Also, FBSP supports the City of Austin Parks Department decision to make a careful and more comprehensive study of trees where consensus on their removal doesn't exist. However, with regards to public safety, some of the trees will clearly have to go.

"We want to save and preserve every tree we can," declared FBSP President Robin Cravey. "However, we understand that a few trees are too far gone to save. Trees that pose a significant danger to the public will have to be sacrificed."

Volunteers on the FBSP board pointed out that the trees were not slated for removal to allow for improvements to the bathhouse and other facilities as some people have alleged. These improvements were meant to incorporate the footprint of the existing trees, not to chop them down. In fact, some facility improvements will benefit the trees, including moving the bath house entrance back to the center of the building and burying the electrical lines now strung through treetops along the sides of the Pool.

FBSP plans to reap the benefit of publicity surrounding the trees to bring about new stewardship programs for the trees, water quality, and other amenities associated with the famous pool. They announced their intention to:

- Solicit volunteers to re-plant trees and assist on grounds maintenance.
- Obtain donations and matching funds with the Austin Parks Foundation.
- Coordinate with the city for tree purchases.

The FBSP also proposes the implementation of a Tree Action Plan to maximize tree care and minimize tree removal. Aggressive tree re-planting efforts are needed to replace older trees before it is too late. Other elements of the plan include:

- Evaluation of current mowing practices and care of the ground surface under tree “drip lines.”
- Consideration of modifying improved ground surfaces near bathhouse and inside pool area.
- Use of cost and feasibility as a principal rationale for deciding if tree preservation is worthwhile (less emotional and more focused on reasonable budgets)
- Where currently ill trees are preserved or nursed back to health, evaluate pool management practices to keep public safety risks low (windy, stormy conditions).

“When we began advocating for a master plan for the Pool several years ago, some people said we should just let well enough alone,” Cravey recalled. “Then study of the bypass tunnel brought about by the master plan showed major problems. Now this new tree study shows that serious change is urgently needed on that front. The master plan will continue to uncover and address deficiencies at the Pool. Our challenge is to turn them into opportunities.”

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